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# The Mockingjay Phenomena: A Study on the Position of Young Adult Women in Dystopia

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THE MOCKINGJAY PHENOMENA: A STUDY ON THE POSITION OF YOUNG ADULT  
WOMEN IN DYSTOPIA

by  
Hannah Mary Hultman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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Approved by

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## ABSTRACT

HANNAH MARY HULTMAN: *The Mockingjay Phenomena: A Study on the Position of Young Adult Women in Dystopia*  
(Under the direction of Dr. Karen Raber)

The purpose of this research is to explore the messages and impact of three young adult dystopian trilogies, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and *The Uglies*. In particular, the role of the American female teenager in political, economic and social spheres is discussed through examining the three female teenaged protagonists of these novels. For comparative purposes, George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* function as counterpoints to the young adult novels; the analysis of these different novels will prove that young adult dystopian novels show young adult women that their choices and actions can be integral to their societies on a political, economic and social level.

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## Introduction

Since *The Hunger Games* film premiered in 2012, America has seen the popularity of young adult dystopia explode. The genre, both in film and literature, has since become so popular that many bookstores have their own “Teenage Dystopia” sections. The first *Hunger Games* film grossed \$408,010,692 domestically, and post-apocalyptic teen shows such as *The 100* have found success, both commercially and critically. People of differing genders, race, socioeconomic class, political backgrounds and age all consume these books, films, and television programs, catapulting young adult dystopian heroes into our culture conscious.

Where did this boom in popularity come from? Dystopia itself is not a new concept. Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) coins utopia, the antithesis of dystopia, and explores a *perfect* society that is, ultimately, unreachable. Since 1516, there have been many different types of dystopia. Between drug dystopias such as Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931) and Karin Boye’s *Kalloscain* (1940) and more strictly oppressive dystopian governments as seen in George Orwell’s *1984* (1949) and Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), the dystopian genre has proven itself to be vast, transitive and, importantly, flexible. This genre trickled down to a young adult level as early as 1954, through William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*, which found popularity in American middle schools. The young adult dystopia remained a small field until the early 2000s, when a large number of dystopias marketed toward the American youth entered book fairs and Scholastic catalogues.

Through large numbers of popular pieces of YA dystopia, three trilogies stand out, both in quality and in effect on popular culture. Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (*The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, *Mockingjay*), whose film adaptation opened the door for the rise in dystopian popularity, Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* (*Divergent*, *Insurgent*, *Allegiant*), whose equally

popular film adaptations swiftly followed *The Hunger Games*, and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (*Uglies*, *Pretties*, *Specials*), which is in advanced negotiations for a television adaptation. These novels are unique in their focus, their societies, as well as in their protagonist. However, their messages and goals are quite similar, as are their effects on the genre and American popular culture.

Of these three series, Westerfeld's *Uglies* is both the oldest and the least recognized. The first novel, published in 2005, placed sixteen year old Tally Youngblood's conflict with loyalty, beauty, and friendship in the middle of a society which emphasizes beauty as the peacekeeper. Westerfeld's narrative imagines a world in which each citizen undergoes government-mandated plastic surgery at age sixteen and explores Tally's relationship to her own beauty as well as her loyalties to her society when she's forced to seek out rebels living outside its borders. Over the course of the trilogy, Westerfeld shows Tally's changing identity and how those she associates with shapes her character and experiences.

Suzanne Collins's Katniss Everdeen resides in District 12 of Panem, the society that took America's place far before the beginning of the series (published in 2008). The country is split into thirteen regions, twelve districts and the Capitol, where the wealthy and elite reside. Seventy-four years before the novel began, the districts, feeling oppressed and downtrodden, attempted to rebel against the Capitol. The rebellion was quickly squashed and the titular Hunger Games were put into place in order to keep the population subdued. Katniss Everdeen volunteers to be one of the twenty-four children sent into an arena to kill each other for the Capitol's entertainment so that her younger sister, Prim, will be spared the torture. From there, Collins explores Katniss's political actions, her personal choices and the effect these have on Panem during the rebellion.

Roth's *Divergent* (2011) explores the effects of social categorization upon all members of society, although it focuses on the effect this has on his sixteen year old protagonist, Tris Prior. Tris's society remains unnamed until the end of the second novel, *Insurgent* (2012), reveals that her society is an experiment designed to reduce the violence that's widespread in this reimagined version of America. As the final novel explains, her society and a number of others were set up in hopes of raising enough Divergent individuals to correct genetic damage America suffered after the "Purity War" which was fought because of a belief that all evil comes from bad genes. Roth explores how sacrifice and rebellions interact, and the consequences of choice.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to find the similarities and differences within these worlds. I argue that, while their differences are stark and important, their similarities provide a positive message for their intended audience. Collins, Roth and Westerfeld provide narratives that show young women the importance of political activism, the potential dangers of a capitalist society, the pitfalls of strict social categories and how crucial choice is. Are Katniss, Tris and Tally role models? Does anyone live happily ever after? How do these novels reflect the position of their audience? What overarching message do teenagers walk away with when they've completed this novels?

I argue that these novels provide a framework for young American girls that shows how their choices and actions are important and valid on a political, economic, social and individual level. Katniss, Tally and Tris all have the power to change their societies, a power we do not see adults in dystopia holding. First, let's assess the young female position in American politics and how YA dystopia challenges or changes this position.

## I. The YA Political

At the center of every dystopian world, whether written for adults or young adults, there is a political structure that the main characters strive to undermine throughout the course of the narrative. Importantly, the popular young adult (YA) novels have societies that are not dictatorial; instead, the political systems are either community-based or at least mimicking democracy. *The Hunger Games*'s Panem is led by President Snow, though each district has its own mayor; while the terms "mayor" and "president" imply elections, it's unknown in the context of the trilogy whether or not Panem's leaders are elected or merely chosen by those already in power, although it's unlikely that elections as we know them, where the common citizen's voice matters, exist in Panem. Both *The Uglies* and *Divergent* have community-based societies without one clear leader. Scott Westerfeld's society does have an underground police force, Special Circumstances, led by Dr. Cable who becomes the de facto voice of the government in *The Uglies* series. *Divergent* does make many references to the society's government, council of 50 Abnegation faction members, as that faction is known for their selflessness. Furthermore, each of the five factions (Dauntless, Abnegation, Erudite, Amity and Candor) have a leader who both oversees initiation and meets with representatives of the other factions.

Young American adults, particularly those under the voting age, interact with politics only on the periphery. Women in particular face roadblocks when entering the political sphere, no matter their age, but young women are, according to a 2013 study conducted by American University, actually "less likely than young men to even consider running for political office, to express interest in a candidacy at some point in the future, or to consider elective office a desirable position" (Lawless and Fox ii). This gap becomes crucial when we examine these three trilogies,

arguably the most successful young adult dystopian novels, because at the core of the novels are female protagonists who, though they aren't expressing interest in holding office, they are directly influencing the political structures of their societies. Because they have both no control and no representation in the American political system, young adults often take to social media to express either their support or disapproval of politicians and policies. In YA dystopian novels, it's easy to see a parallel particularly when discussing disapproval of politicians and policies; however, what becomes so interesting is that, while these novels are written *for* teens, they are not written *by* teens. I believe authors are touching upon the way young adult identities can, and increasingly often do, intersect with their interest in politics, whether or not that interest goes beyond internet discussion. By giving young adults a reality in which the political efforts or interventions of the young (and overwhelmingly of young adult women) make a difference, authors of YA dystopia provide their readers, who are largely young women, with a potentially hopeful interaction with politics, rather than the hopelessly negative one offered by many more "adult" dystopias. In this chapter, I will discuss the way that the political actions of the characters in these novels inform their identities, as well as how gender and familial structures or roles play into these political identities.

The protagonist of each of these three young-adult trilogies is a young (16 as the novels are beginning) woman. Because the novels are mostly marketed to American girls aged 12-18, the choice in main character is natural. However, as the novels progress and the protagonists interact with their society's government, we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. Katniss, Tris and Tally would all be excluded from American politics, as are many of the audience for the novel, but they prove to be essential to the political systems of their society, suggesting that young adult women are more important to politics than their exclusion would imply. By allowing

these young women to ultimately control the outcome of their society's political futures, Collins, Roth and Westerfeld ultimately show that young adult women are able to play a more full role in government than typically thought. All three of those women are instrumental in the downfall of their societies and because of this, it's easy to think of them as empowered, strong young women. The novels have been hailed in the media and by online bloggers for their portrayal of empowered young girls. However, though these women are certainly strong characters that can be role models for young women, they are overwhelmingly not empowered.

According to Jessica Taft, "empowerment is limited to building girls' individual strengths, psychological well-being, and personal efficacy. The empowered girl, in this view, is the girl who is able to have power over herself, the power to be whoever she wants to be, a figure that Anita Harris refers to as the 'can-do girl'" (Taft 29). In short, empowerment is a focus on the individual and, in the case of much modern feminist thinking, a focus on the betterment of the empowered young individual girl. While it's difficult to deny that this is positive thinking (particularly when we as a society hope to empower women or minorities), when we think of empowerment in terms of governments and politics, empowerment actually *could* become something negative. A society built of those focused only on their own individual advancement leads to either a stagnant society or a corrupt society. Because of this focus on individual identity, Taft writes about young girls who are not looking for empowerment, but for social change, arguably what Katniss, Tris and, to an extent, Tally are fighting for. Instead of empowered, in the framework of the political sphere, they are activists. However, particularly for Katniss and Tally, their foray into activism isn't self-prompted, but forced, which calls into question both labels of "empowerment" and "activism." Because both *empowered* and *activist* require a sense of self-

motivation, the need for an external force to propel Katniss and Tally to rebellion makes us unable to call them empowered or activists.

Throughout the second book, *Catching Fire*, Katniss attempts to resist becoming the face of the rebellion. Katniss herself explains that her rebellious act during the Hunger Games, the act that kept both her and Peeta alive, did not stem from empowerment nor an attempt to rebel:

“All I was trying to do was keep Peeta and myself alive. Any rebellion was purely accidental. But when the Capitol decrees that only one tribute can live and you have the audacity to challenge it, I guess that’s rebellion in itself”

(*Catching* 18).

Katniss does not commit her rebellious act out of desire for social change or in an attempt to build her individual strength, and is therefore neither an activist or an empowered woman in this instance. Katniss, actually, struggles against defining herself in terms of power and often feels powerless in various situations against the Capitol and President Snow. It isn’t until *Mockingjay* that she makes a clear choice and accepts how the rebellion defined her. How the rebellion defines Katniss is integral to her struggle with both empowerment and activism. She doesn’t accept that she’ll fight against the Capitol or, even simpler than that, end the Hunger Games. Instead, she declares “I’m going to be the Mockingjay” (*Mockingjay* 31). Here, the rebellion works through interpellation as defined by Louis Althusser. Althusser explains “the individual is interpolated as a (free) subject in order that he should submit freely to the commandments of the Subject” (Althusser 128). By frequently calling Katniss (the subject/individual) “Mockingjay,” the rebellion is *technically* allowing her to use free will to accept or reject that title, but, as Althusser explains, Katniss is ultimately without the power to reject her designation.

Katniss's choice to accept her role in the rebellion wasn't prompted by a desire to enact social change, nor a feeling of responsibility for the oppressed in her society, again questioning whether or not she can be called an activist. Katniss's decisions stem from a desire to protect Peeta, but critic Katherine Broad goes one step further and argues that Katniss's involvement in the uprising "is fueled by her wish to realize the normative family life embodied by Peeta's future children effectively circumscribes the impact of her rebellion, making his safety her primary concern" (Broad 122). There's ample evidence throughout the trilogy that Katniss's actions and decisions stem from her desire to protect Peeta and give him the nuclear life she envisions for him. The Third Quarter Quell, the special 75th anniversary version of the Hunger Games, dictates that tributes will be chosen from the previous victors; after Katniss works out that these rules mean either Haymitch or Peeta will reenter the arena, she rushes to Haymitch's home, only for Haymitch to tell her Peeta has already visited:

"I'll admit, it was easier for the boy. He was here before I could snap the seal on a bottle. Begging me for another chance to go in. But what can you say?" He mimics my voice. " 'Take his place, Haymitch, because all things being equal, I'd rather Peeta had a crack at the rest of his life than you?' " (*Catching* 177).

Katniss realizes this is what she wants and, as she and Haymitch drink, the two agree that they will keep Peeta alive, whether he's in the games or not. While this is not the first time Katniss has acted out of a desire to protect Peeta, it is the first time the reader begins to see her rebellion framed this way. When Katniss, drunk and determined, returns home to her family, Gale recants a previous argument and affirms that they can take their families into the woods to save Katniss's life. However, she believes that it is too late and, as she notes, she's "got Peeta to protect" (179). Here, Katniss is neither empowered, working for the betterment of her strengths, nor activist,

working for social change. Rather, her intersection with politics is informing her identity; Katniss frequently and repeatedly acts as protector, whether it's to protect Peeta, Rue, or her family. It's this identity that ultimately leads to her choice to accept her interpellated role as Mockingjay.

Identity, particularly political identity, plays an extremely important part in YA dystopia because the intended audience are themselves in the process of developing their identities. This is perhaps best represented in *Uglies* series by Scott Westerfeld, by the main character, Tally Youngblood. *Uglies* overwhelmingly focuses on a girl's introduction to revolutionary politics and the transformation of her identity through these politics. At the beginning of the first novel, Tally Youngblood is on the cusp of sixteen and hinges her identity on her future self, which she will become when she undergoes the "prettifying" operation required in her unnamed society. At this point, she thinks nothing of politics or the overarching powers that control her, but only of what her identity will be once she gets the operation. Tally has no sense of the political agenda that surrounds her until Shay, a girl she befriends, challenges the notions Tally has held her whole life: that she is ugly, and that there are inherent traits that makeup a person's beauty:

"You don't believe all that crap, do you--that there's one way to look, and everyone's programmed to agree on it?.... But it's a trick, Tally. You've only seen pretty faces your whole life. Your parents, your teachers, everyone over sixteen. But you weren't born expecting that kind of beauty in everyone, all the time. You just got programmed into thinking anything else is ugly" (*Uglies* 82).

Before this, Tally has never heard anything to challenge the political fabric of her society; to her understanding, peace exists because no one in a position of power, that is to say no adult, is "ugly." There are no presidents, no mayors, no leaders to blame for any of the society's problems and, from Tally's point of view, there are no problems to complain about. Anything a person

(especially a pretty person) could need— food, alcohol, clothes, parties—are at their fingertips. There are no wars or enemies to fear. There is peace. Tally believes the society's explanation of peace that, as Mary Jeannette Moran argues, "giving all citizens the same degree of beauty averts judgments based on appearance and related problems, including racial tension and war" (Moran 126). Beauty, therefore, becomes an integral part of not only individual identity, but also in order to keep society functioning. Tally's political identity, in the beginning of the novel, is entirely manipulated by her society's ideals. In the unnamed society of the novel, everyone's identity is supposedly stripped of any politics and merely reduced to their stage in life which is inherently linked to their appearance; the politics of *Uglies* comes from the large difference between pretty and ugly stages of life, and the fear of remaining ugly forever. Tally, in the "ugly" phase of her life, has internalized the political rhetoric of beauty, often lecturing Shay on the benefits of "pretty-fication" and what happened when humanity was naturally either pretty or ugly.

When Shay runs away pre-surgery, everything Tally expected for her own future (and her own identity) comes to a screeching halt. Informed on her sixteenth birthday of a problem, Tally is led to her first meeting with Dr. Cable, who comes to speak for the society's government over the course of the series. When Tally refuses to follow Shay into the Smoke, Dr. Cable delivers a crushing blow to everything Tally had imagined for herself:

Dr. Cable bared her teeth. This time, it wasn't even a mockery of a smile. The woman became nothing but a monster, vengeful and inhuman. "Then I'll make you a promisee too, Tally Youngblood. Until you do help us, to the very best of your ability, you will never be pretty." Dr. Cable turned away. "You can die ugly, for all I care" (*Uglies* 110).

This moment highlights that, for this society, the individual's identity and wants mean nothing unless it furthers the political agenda. This society, unlike the rebellion in *The Hunger Games*, won't even pretend interpellation isn't integral to their government. Following their initial conversation, Dr. Cable uses masterful manipulation to show Tally she truly has no choice but to help Special Circumstances. Tally is forced to return to her old room in the "uglies" dormitory, where she finds that anything that made her individual has been recycled. The dorm itself has been cleared when Tally returns, making it immediately clear that Tally's choice will leave her out of place until she changes her mind. Her parents come in an attempt to comfort her and convince her to help Special Circumstances. Her mother's closing remarks in particular— "'Sweetheart,' Ellie said, patting her leg, 'what other choice do you have?'"—highlight how, in this political structure, free will doesn't necessarily exist (*Uglies* 119).

When Tally finds Shay in the Smoke and meets David, a teenager born and raised in the Smoke, her political identity again begins to change. However, the Smoke is not immune to interpellation. In her first few moments with the Smokies, David tells Tally that she is one them, making it clear that she belongs with the Smokies whether she wants to or not. Furthermore, Tally begins to assume the role of *smokie* quickly; over the course of her first day she considers activating the tracker in her pendant several times, but hesitates. She starts to question the consequences of doing so— she starts to assume the identity David assigned her earlier that day. As Tally learns more and more about the revolutionary thinking of the Smoke, she begins to accept their thinking quickly. David takes Tally to meet his parents, two doctors who ran from Tally's own city. During this meeting, Az and Maddy tell Tally that the pretty operation leaves lesions in the brain that they believe the society uses in order to make their population easier to manage. Tally considers this carefully; "was becoming pretty just the bait to get everyone under the

knife? Or were the lesions merely a finishing touch on being pretty? Perhaps the logical conclusion of everyone looking the same was everyone thinking the same” (273).

Tally’s political outlook changes drastically from this revelation. It’s that night, after kissing David and realizing that she did truly believe in the ideas, that Tally destroys the pendant that would lead Special Circumstances to the Smoke. However, destroying the pendant ultimately backfires and leads to a raid. The rest of the novel shows Tally actively working against the society, finally accepting her role as political activist. After rescuing Maddy and Shay from Special Circumstances, Tally agrees to undergo the pretty operation in order to take Maddy’s experimental cure. The transformation in Tally’s identity and actions is astounding; instead of wanting to be pretty to fit in, as she did at the beginning of the novel, Tally now agrees to the operation in the hopes of finding a cure for it. Sonya Fritz notes that

With the same political awareness espoused by the girl power rhetoric of the Riot Grrls, Tally refuses to internalize the machinations of her society’s governing bodies as a matter of her personal choice... Doing so enables Tally to accept and own her role as a social actor by assuming responsibility for rebuilding the Smoke as a political dissident movement and working to educate other adolescents in her city about the ways their government deceives and controls them” (20).

Tally’s focus on educating others in *Pretties* about the dangers of their government mirrors the place of the non-voting adolescents in America. Those interested in politics are unable to enact change by means of voting or working in government. Jessica Taft finds in her research of girl activism that, within the United States in particular, “many girls’ direct experience with government attempts at including them have not been particularly positive” (38). Therefore, Tally’s efforts at education and her frustration with her society’s attempts to placate their population

could speak to young activists. Tally and David, like real-life adolescent advocacy, empowers others their age to activism; while Tally is attempting to educate and free her friend group in New Pretty Town, David is away scouting other cities for more people to join their cause. Their political identities have moved from the manipulated to activist and educator. Both Tally and David are at least attempting to buck the role they've been assigned by the society. They are trying, like many young adults reading the novels, to form their own identities.

Tris Prior, of all three heroines, is the most of an activist right off the bat. Raised an Abnegation, Tris understands the necessity of sacrifice and humility. Therefore, Tris' rebellions mark not only rebellion against her government but also against a lot of her upbringing. Her first rebellion, in fact, is not an unusual one in her society, but rather encouraged. After a series of aptitude tests, at the Choosing Ceremony Tris chooses to join another faction. In the aftermath of her decision, her family's reactions make clear why this rebellion is so important; "I look over my shoulder at the last second before I pass them, and immediately wish I hadn't. My father's eyes burn into mine with a look of accusation. At first, when I feel the heat behind my eyes I think he's found a way to set me on fire to punish me for what I've done..." (*Divergent* 48). Tris' first rebellion seems selfish at first; she's leaving her parents alone, as both children switched factions. Furthermore, in this moment she seems an empowered young woman by Taft's standard. She chooses Dauntless not because it is the most helpful faction; in fact, it's more the opposite. Tris chooses Dauntless because she feels it is where she belongs; she's trying to enact power over herself to be who she wants to be as an individual. As the story progresses, her micro-rebellions turn from selfish to extremely selfless; she protects other initiates, stands up to bullies within Dauntless, and ultimately puts herself in extreme danger in order to protect her society. Tris acts with overwhelming desire to further benefit her society, rather than with

desire to better herself. Tris is an activist, much like Katniss and Tally, but unlike both of those heroines, as Miranda Green-Barteet notes, "...Tris never makes a conscious decision to become a rebel, nor does a single decision or act solidify her position as a subject" (46). Tris refuses to contemplate any other way of living throughout the series. In the closing chapters of the novel, Tris sacrifices her life without thinking twice in order to save those that she loves as well as her society, broken though it is. In her final conversation with David, the leader of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, Tris speaks about sacrifice, about what it truly means and how it operates within the confines of a society:

"... That it's not sacrifice if it's someone *else's* life you're giving away, it's just evil.... That [sacrifice] should be done for love, not misplaced disgust for another person's genetics. That it should be done from necessity, not without exhausting other options. That it should be done for people who need your strength because they don't have enough of their own" (*Allegiant* 338).

This, more than any of her selfless actions, shows how Tris views rebellion. She sees rebellion and activism in its purest form; that is, she fundamentally believes that her sacrifice is necessary for the good of her society.

Family politics and actions play a role in the political choices Katniss, Tris and Tally make. For Katniss in particular, many of her political actions revolve around her family; she volunteers for the Hunger Games in her younger sister's place almost without thought. However, it marks the first time in her life that Katniss has the ability to make an *active* choice. It's important that her first active choice revolves around the "protector" role I mentioned earlier. Since the death of her father when she was eleven, Katniss has been the provider, protector, and, largely, parent for both her mother and Prim. This informs the way she acts within the arena of the Hun-

ger Games and, later on, within the rebellion. However, Katniss's scope of protection falls short, in particular, at the end of the battle for the Capitol. After an attack on innocent Capitol children, Prim goes in with fellow rebel medics to aid those injured and dies in the second wave of the attack. Katniss understands the ploy as soon as Prim rushes toward the injured:

I have the same reaction I did the day Effie Trinket called her name at the reaping.

At least, I must go limp, because I find myself at the base of the flagpole, unable to account for the last few seconds. Then I am pushing through the crowd, just as I did before (*Mockingjay* 347).

Katniss wants desperately to protect her sister just as she did years prior, but Prim's death serves to show the limitations of protection within the context of family and rebellion. Rebellion comes with an inherent human sacrifice, as seen both in real history and within the history of the trilogy. The Hunger Games itself was born because of rebellion and the politics work within this framework to keep revolutionary acts squashed. Guy Andre Risko links this fundamental component of pre-revolution Panem to post-9/11 America, relying heavily on Giorgio Ambagen's worry of a future where spaces in which law is eliminated will become the norm. Risko notes that Panem subjects "can be killed without being murdered, without juridicial recognition of the act of killing. In order to function, Panem's political organization *demand*s their death as symbols of national history" (Risko 82). Risko's point stands within the framework of Katniss's own character development; just as the victims of the Hunger Games are necessary for the political framework of Panem, Prim's death is necessary for Katniss's own political evolution. She realizes that the deaths were likely orchestrated by President Coin and the rebellion, which prompts her to eliminate Coin. Katniss's desire, and failure, to protect her family informs this action.

While she ultimately couldn't save Prim's life, she's determined to stop another political system that demands death as a symbol.

Tris, in contrast to Katniss, begins her active choice out of a desire to separate herself from her family. Her family represents her past, her lack of choice, and her failures to be as selfless as her mother and father. *Divergent* is a novel about a young girl whose political interactions derive from a want to create her own family. However, at the end of the novel, Tris realizes the family she chose and the family she was born into aren't *extremely* different; trapped by Jeanine, the leader of the Erudite faction, in a tank of rising water, her mother comes to save Tris. Tris reacts in surprise to the woman in front of her, a woman in direct defiance with the humble, selflessness from Tris's upbringing. As they move away from the heart of the conflict, Tris notices "the corner of a tattoo under her armpit" and makes the declaration: "Mom... You were Dauntless" (*Divergent* 441-442). Although the context of familial protection is *different* from Katniss's experiences, Tris still acts out of a desire to protect her family, both natural and chosen. Tobias comments on this desire when he learns of Tris's death: "Of course Tris would go into the Weapons Lab instead of Caleb. Of course she would" (*Allegiant* 349). It doesn't surprise him, that Tris would sacrifice her life to protect her brother's life.

Tally Youngblood has little ties to her own natural family. Her mother and father make a brief appearance in the first book, as I noted earlier, but other than that Tally largely surrounds herself and connects to a family she creates. Out in the Smoke, Tally begins to see the ties between parents and children as we recognize them (and as we see them in both *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies). However, it's not until *Pretties* that Tally herself truly starts to feel the bond of family; she falls in with a group of new pretties called the Crims (an abbreviation for Criminals). The politics of the Crims is vaguely democratic, as each new member must

be unanimously voted in and impress the current members by acting “bubbly” (a “New Pretty” word for attention-grabbing). Tally becomes a Crim early in *Pretties* and quickly begins dating Zane, their leader. During the course of *Pretties*, she and Zane take a cure sent to them by Maddy, David’s mother. They subsequently attempt to pull the rest of their de-facto family out of the haze Maddy believes the pretty-fication causes. Tally and Zane both act in a quasi-rebellion in order to, in a way, save the rest of the Crims. In the end, much like Katniss and Tris, Tally ultimately makes choices in order to protect Zane, who she considers the closest family she has. While David, Maddy, the rest of the Smokies and the Crims flee Special Circumstances, Tally remains with Zane, unwilling to leave her family behind.

All three women serve, in some capacity, as “protector” for their families which ultimately informs their actions in rebellion. *Mockingjay*’s epilogue finds Katniss wishing she could protect her children from the nightmare of her past. Tris dies to protect her cause. Tally remains special, remains scarred, certain it’s the only way to enforce a future vastly different from the society she grew up in. Because these three women, especially Katniss, have experience in the familial protector role, their transition into political protector makes sense. The undercurrent of family politics allows Katniss, Tris and Tally to grow into crucial figures in the political spheres of their respective societies.

In all three novels, the young women face adulthood rapidly and quickly as the political oppression grows and changes. Green-Barteet discusses the role young adults play in YA dystopian novels: “They are not meant to to develop into independent subjects. In fact, I contend that the dystopian governments of these novels need their citizens to remain in an extended state of childhood if the governments are to maintain absolute control” (36). Because all three heroines begin their trilogies aged sixteen, Collins, Roth and Westerfeld are able to explore this idea more

fully. As the characters age and grow into their rebellion, out of the forced childhood their government mandates, they show what adulthood in a dystopian world looks like even though they are still extremely young. Furthermore, when we compare their adolescent adulthood to *1984*'s Winston Smith's adulthood, it's clear that Green-Barteet's hypothesis rings true. Katniss from the beginning pages of the *Hunger Games* seems more adult than the adults in her life; her mother is in a near-catatonic state and leaves Katniss to do much of the providing for the family. Effie Trinket, the representative from the Capitol, worries about things that are extremely shallow when compared with problems such as poverty and hunger that Katniss has faced. Haymitch, her mentor, is entirely dependent upon alcohol to survive his memories of the games.

Despite all of these people Katniss must deal with, she doesn't start to grow into the adulthood that's dangerous for Panem until she begins to participate in the rebellion; with her, others begin to grow out of the mandated childhood of oppression. During their victor tour, Katniss and Peeta witness the beginnings of a nation growing up. In District 11, an old man in the crowd begins whistling a work-tune, a gesture that is laced with disobedience. Although they were not supposed to see the aftermath of his rebellion, Katniss and Peeta see a government official shoot the man. At this moment, the government is still fully in control although it's clear that control is beginning to slip. Panem officials at this moment may begin to see how a fully adult (and therefore free-thinking, less able to be manipulated) population would lead to their downfall. Similarly, *1984*'s Oceania squashes any hint of true adulthood in its population. After capture by his government, Winston undergoes torture to train any independent thinking out of him. Over and over again, O'Brien, his torturer, holds up four fingers and asks Winston to see five. Each time Winston says he only sees four, pain goes through his entire body. O'Brien chides Winston for his inability to conform to what the government says, effectively punishing him for

his adult thinking. In this moment, Winston begins to revert back to childhood, as he is retrained into accepting Big Brother's word as law. He says he "accepted everything. The past was alterable. The past never had been altered. .... He hardly knew why he had ever rebelled" (248).

As Winston begins to move away from both activism and empowerment, it's clear that he is not ready for adulthood, in stark contrast to female protagonists of *The Hunger Games*, *The Uglies* and *Divergent*. At the end of Orwell's novel, the government still remains in total control, because they've kept their subjects in a state of childhood. Katniss, Tris and Tally all use their newfound maturity and independent thinking to bring their oppressive governments down. They all three succeed to varying degrees. Panem and President Snow no longer rule, and Katniss works to ensure that the archaic Hunger Games never come back. Tally exposes Dr. Cable's unauthorized experiments on teenagers, and dedicates herself to protecting nature from humanity. Tris dies in order to protect her society and we learn in the epilogue that she didn't die in vain as Chicago enters a state of peace. Ultimately, they are activists with an overwhelming sense of maturity that allows them to expose the wrongdoings of their society. Because they are able to see the problems of government without being bogged down with involvement, the message their stories tell is one of fate. Young women in these novels are the key to a successful rebellion.

In American politics, young adults of nonvoting age are often overlooked, but these books send a very clear message of importance. While the intended audience is unable to vote, YA dystopian novels give those readers a world in which they have the power to change injustice that they perceive. Paired with the right kinds of conversation on activism, *The Hunger Games*, *Uglies*, *Divergent* and other dystopian novels have the potential to inspire young women into activism.

## II. The SocioEconomic YA

The economy of dystopia runs in the background of *The Hunger Games*, *The Uglies* and *Divergent*. Of these three societies, Panem rings most familiar to an American audience; this is the dreaded communism, where one wealthy center (The Capitol) benefits off the backs of 12 impoverished working districts. The economies of the unnamed *Divergent* and *Uglies* societies are less explicit, but still form an undercurrent for the novels. They both operate on a socialist concept; food, shelter, and medical benefits are provided at no cost to the citizens in exchange for work. In the *Uglies*, each person goes through a period of their life in which they focus entirely on pleasure. When they are “New Pretties,” they are able to request anything— food, champagne, costumes for various parties— from the requisition in their walls and it materializes. As they age, their purpose shifts from mindless partying to serving the community, as doctors, parents, and teachers. In *Divergent*, the economy is strictly utilitarian; each faction serves a specific purpose for the community, whether that be the Dauntless security force or the Erudite scientific community. Each of these communities links the economics closely to their social function. In this chapter, I will discuss how the economies of these novels function alongside societal issues and pressures to inform and shape the nature of these societies. I’ll examine how the eco-

conomic and social issues ring familiar to a teenaged audience and inform why these novels became popular to a young American audience. Furthermore, I'll question the contradictions and messages of these societies as well as the effect the economic and social organizations have on young adult readers.

### **Economic Forces and Effects**

District 12 represents the ugly side of the communist system. The people of this district (along with several others in Panem) are overworked, underpaid and underfed; the work available in District 12 is coal mining, a dangerous and volatile field that leaves many workers, including Katniss's father, dead. However, this is of little concern to the Capitol, as Panem sees its population as expendable, a fact most easily seen through the Hunger Games themselves. Despite the communist-esque setup of Panem itself, when we move to the center of this world, to the Capitol, it all feels much more like the American economic system the audiences of Collins's book grew up with. In the Capitol, people are concerned solely with entertainment and consumption, much like the American ideals young readers would be familiar with. The citizens of Panem's Capitol are concerned with fluctuating trends, with the pageantry and drama of the Hunger Games and completely ignore the suffering not only of the citizen's of Panem's districts, but also of the 24 children forced to kill each other every year for the Capitol's entertainment. Collins's choice to set the ages for potential Hunger Games competitors as young as twelve underscores the horror for the readers; for this society, this economy to prevail, the Capitol is exploiting children presumably as young or younger than the reader is herself. The commodification of the Hunger Games within the Capitol underscores the way a capitalist market commodifies and distances itself from tragedy. To the people in the Capitol, the children dying are of no consequence. They aren't *people*, they're characters in a grotesque play. The Games serve not

only as entertainment for the people of the Capitol, but they help sustain their economy. Shannon R. Mortimore-Smith compares the Capitol's consumption of the Hunger Games to America's reality TV obsession:

Like many young adult viewers today, the futuristic Capitol citizens who reside in the pages of Collins's cautionary tale are intentionally oblivious to the power of their gaze... Furthermore, lavish lifestyles isolate Capitol viewers from any real empathy for the district's poverty... For Capitol residents, tuning in to watch the Hunger Games is nothing short of Pauly shouting "It's T-shirt time!" on *Jersey Shore*. The Games are merely one more party to be enjoyed (164).

Because of the way the Capitol relates to the rest of the population of Panem, Collins's book can easily be read as a warning about the pitfalls of a capitalist society. I'd argue, in fact, that *The Hunger Games* highlights how remarkably similar the problems with capitalism are to the problems of communism. In particular, Panem's structure shows that both of these economic structures can lead to extreme income inequality. Critics of communism point toward the Soviet Union to highlight the reasons the economic system cannot work in practice; the Soviet Union was plagued with vast disparities in income and status, as much of the wealth went to the high-ranking and powerful within the economy. It's important to remember that the majority of these readers of Collins's trilogy were born post-Cold War and, thus, are more likely to recognize the similarities between the two oft-opposed economic systems. In practice, America's wealth distribution is remarkably similar to that of the Soviet Union, with the "1%" holding most of the wealth in the country. For the YA American reader, income inequality likely affects them; depending on the family size, the poverty thresholds for United States citizens ranges from \$19,078

(for a three person household, two adults and one child) to \$31,078 (six person household, one adult and five children)<sup>1</sup>. According to a 2014 U.S. Census report on income and poverty, around 11.4% of 30,000 surveyed had income within this range. There were 46.7 million United States citizens in poverty and the 2014 poverty rate for children under the age of 18 was 20.7 percent (for children under the age of 6, this percent jumped slightly to 23.5 percent) and for families with a female head of household (a single mother, in other words), 46.5 percent were in poverty. These statistics only account for children under the official poverty rate, not children whose households, while technically above the poverty thresholds, are struggling to make ends meet.

It's safe to assume, then, that many readers of *The Hunger Games* would recognize Katniss's amazement at the opulent lifestyle those in the Capitol lead. In particular, soon after arriving at the Capitol, Katniss is presented with a table laden with foods she either recognizes are too expensive for her to have ever eaten, or that she is completely unfamiliar with. She considers how she would build the meal at home, through substitutions and trades, recognizing the final product would take "days of hunting for this one meal and even then it would be a poor substitution for the Capitol version" (*HG* 65). Finally, she wonders about how different her life would be if she had grown up in a world like this:

How would I spend the hours I now commit to combing the woods for sustenance if it were so easy to come by? What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment?  
*(Hunger Games 65).*

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<sup>1</sup>Information gathered from the 2014 U.S. Census Report on Poverty and Inequality.

Cinna, her Capitol-Assigned stylist, puts a word to Katniss's feelings, admitting she must think them despicable, to which she internally agrees. This paired with a scene in *Catching Fire* where Katniss and Peeta learn that the mega-rich Capitol citizens take medication to help them eat (and enjoy) parties sum up the impoverished view on opulence. Katniss thinks about the starving children her mother helps medically and is enraged at the vast disparity between the two situations:

All I can think of is the emaciated bodies of the children on our kitchen table as my mother prescribes what the parents can't give. More food.... And here in the Capitol they're vomiting for the pleasure of filling their bellies again and again. Not from some illness of body or mind, not from spoiled food. It's what everyone does at a party. Expected. Part of the fun (*Catching Fire* 80).

Collins heightens the waste and luxury here; even the 1% in the United States would likely balk at such an excessive and wasteful practice. This scene touches on something integral to the income disparity in the United States, though.

A 2015 *Washington Post* article discusses the popular blog "Rich Kids of Instagram," where wealthy teens and young adults post pictures of their extravagant lifestyles. The blog has 238 thousand followers. Ana Swanson's article focuses on this blog within the context of the growing American inequality, which, the article notes, is the widest it's been since the Great Depression. She concludes her article on income inequality, the education gap, and the popularity of the blog with a discussion on the relationship between the wealthy and the poor noting, "[Rich Kids of Instagram] begs the question of how well the rich and the poor in the U.S. really understand one another" (Swanson). *The Hunger Games* trilogy suggests that, in a capitalist economy with a large income gap, it's impossible for the wealthy and poor to understand each

other, even though we see the two working together. Collins shows Capitol citizens working for the rebellion and these scenes heighten the way that rich and poor cannot understand the other. While Katniss is at District 13, she finds her prep team (Flavius, Octavia, and Venia) shackled to a wall and badly beaten for taking more than their allotted share of bread. The guard, a man who's always been accustomed to a certain, small amount of food, looked "puzzled at [Katniss, Gale and Plutarch's] density" when they were outraged at the punishment (*Mockingjay* 48). Not only does the Capitol prep team fail to understand the rationing the poor suffer through, the poor in this instance fail to understand the prep team's thought process. Even Plutarch, a former Gamemaker for the Capitol and leader of the rebellion, approaches the rebellion in a vastly different way from the District citizens. He orchestrates propaganda films in the same way he orchestrated arenas and challenges for *The Hunger Games*, bluntly and often without care for those he's manipulating for the sake of the entertainment value. As many of the former victors working for the rebellion prep to film in a Capitol neighborhood, Johanna suffers from a moment of PTSD and is deemed unable to join the rest of them. Haymitch remarks that he "better go tell Plutarch. He won't be happy... He wants as many victors as possible for the cameras to follow in the Capitol. Thinks it makes for better television" (*Mockingjay* 254). In this instance, Plutarch, the privileged, fails to understand the stress and trauma of Johanna, the marginalized. He'd never understand why Johanna was unable to continue, because he's never had to suffer torture like she has. His concerns are not for the person, but for the image, just as they were in the Capitol.

Westerfeld's first two novels warn against overindulgence, much in the same way Collins's Capitol functions within *The Hunger Games*. Collins' narrative relies upon the negatives of capitalism to form dystopia, and *The Uglies* series does as well, through Huxleyan economy

and the way it functions within society. The economy of the series is unfamiliar to readers; there's no currency, unlike in Panem, and there's no real sense of wealth distribution, simply because there's no real sense of wealth. Instead of working in order to support the economy of their society, the new pretties (and to an extent the older pretties) exist in a world that values pleasure over all else. Anything Tally and her friends desire- even back in the Ugly dorm, to an extent- can be ordered from a hole in the wall. In the beginning of *Uglies*, Tally and Shay spend their days planning pranks, riding their hoverboards, and dreaming about things to come. It's suggested they spend *some* time in class, although the focus of their lives remain centered around pleasure and fun. Their economy is functionally non-existent, though we know there must be someone or something creating the food, clothes, and drugs that the young adults in the novels focus on. When they get to the Smoke, we see a more familiar economic system, and do get to see a society that prioritizes work. The Smoke's economy is a simple barter system, the foundation of most modern economies. Shay takes Tally to the trade post, the central location for the Smoke's economy. Tally is amazed at the homemade products and how they are valued (in the barter system, at least) less than the city-made products. It's the classic law of supply and demand; because the city-made things are more difficult to come by, the Smokies place a higher value upon them. This economic system challenges Tally, as she must adjust to a system where everything isn't at her fingertips.

Early in her time at the Smoke, Tally begins to understand a capitalist ideal: deriving pleasure from work. Everyone in the Smoke is assigned a job in order to keep the society functioning; Tally is assigned to pull up railroad tracks left over from the "Rusties," or the reader's familiar America. It's hard work and leaves her hands blistered and in pain, but Tally comments that there's "something comforting about the exhaustion of hard work" (*Uglies* 229). There's

work for middle pretties in the society, but it's merely hinted at. Wardens are new pretties, as are medics, surgeons and security, but there's no real sense of accomplishment the way Tally experiences in the Smoke. The work they do merely enables the new pretties to live in ridiculous luxury, as it's suggested the middle pretties also live. The stark contrast between this joy through work and the overabundance of empty pleasure in *Pretties* suggests that one must be better not only for the sake of society, but for the sake of individuals within a society as well, who benefit in terms of self-worth and purpose. An economy like that in New Prettytown leaves citizens placated, much like the soma-dependent citizens in *Brave New World*. Perhaps on the surface, we could consider a world like New Prettytown Edenistic, a utopia; food, clothing and shelter are widely available, eliminating poverty and hunger. However, during *Pretties*, readers remember what Westerfeld revealed in *Uglies*, through David's parents: the pretty surgery and the overwhelming emphasis on pleasure are means of government control. In this way, the economy of New Prettytown functions to keep citizens occupied so that they won't notice the ways they're controlled. Westerfeld's two societies function together to show the negatives of a society where citizens have no real purpose.

The way these novels place emphasis on the type of economy present represents the YA female in today's American economy; Jessica Taft, during her study on young female activists, notes that "in the Global North, business magazines identify the importance of teenage and 'tween' girl consumption. Teenage girls represent the most highly sought after market segment in the United States" (5). That's unquestionably true, as novels, movies, clothing brands, books and music all tend to desire the teen girl seal of approval. Boy bands pander to a young female audience who will undoubtedly spend money on concert tickets, band shirts, boost album sales and overall drum up excitement for the music. In *Branded*, Alissa Quart discusses and questions

the increasingly branded and consumption-based life of American teenagers, both male and female. She discusses in particular the background of marketing media toward teenagers, claiming the success of youth-marketed films *Jaws* and *Star Wars* proved that “youth-oriented blockbusters, it turned out, could sell not just enormous numbers of tickets, but also a huge and varied assortment of ancillary branded products, everything from action figures to bed sheets” (Quart 7). With the onslaught of dystopian films, this has proven to be true, especially for young girls. As Collins and Roth’s societies come to life on screen, merchandising for these worlds have exploded, often in direct contrast to the anti-consumption message the dystopian novels send. *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* sought to market their films to both male and female, young and old audiences, but there were several aspects of the marketing campaigns directed solely toward young girls. Cosmetic lines, in particular, come to mind when we consider the way the adolescent girl spends pocket money. In 2013, CoverGirl released a “Capitol Collection” as part of

*Catching Fire*’s marketing campaign.<sup>2</sup> The campaign places value on different makeup looks inspired by each district, but with an undercurrent of the decadence that resembles the Capitol far more than it resembles life in the districts. By pairing two recognizable brands



together, there was little doubt of success for the cosmetics, particularly because they were

heavily advertised in popular teenage magazines such as *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue*. The cosmet-

<sup>2</sup> Image taken from *Huffington Post*’s 2013 article “Get the Look For Every Single Hunger Games District”

ic line highlights the way our consumption-driven economy leads to an emphasis on marketing directly to teen girls, but it also shows the way the social lives of young teenage girls is entangled within our economy. It's a circular relationship, as young women are bombarded with marketing campaigns that suggest they *need* certain things—a certain brand of jean, a style of makeup, the “correct” phone—in order to earn a spot in the “popular” crowd, which inspires the teenagers to buy those products.

### **Social Participation and Pressures**

While Westerfeld and Collins provide a clear economic message, Roth's *Divergent* series stands out because of its lack of economic message. The series, instead of looking at economic implications, looks at the way social categorization can lead to dystopia. Roth sets up the society to divide people into one of five categories based on certain traits; Dauntless are fearless, Candor honest, Abegnation selfless. Amity value kindness and the Euridte seek knowledge. Each of these factions functions to keep society in tight, neat boxes which, they posit, will prevent social disorder. The way the society sorts its citizens resembles the way that young adults sort their peers, by reducing people down to one singular aspect of their personality. The factions also function to provide certain jobs for the society, as Marcus, the head of Abegnation, explains at the choosing ceremony:

Abegnation has fulfilled our need for selfless leaders in government; Candor has provided us with trustworthy and sound leaders in law; Erudite has supplied us with intelligent teachers and researchers; Amity has given us understanding counselors and caretakers; and Dauntless provides us with protection from threats both within and without (*Divergent* 43).

Each faction is integral to the smooth operation of the society. By giving each faction a clear function, they are able to operate keep the society's macroeconomy functioning and allow for each citizen (or each citizen belonging to a faction, at least) fed, clothed, sheltered and safe. Within each faction, the system of acquiring necessities and luxuries varies, as Tris learns when she immerses herself in the Dauntless lifestyle, "At home [in Abegnation], my mother and I pick up nearly identical clothes every six months or so... everything is more varied at the Dauntless compound. Every Dauntless gets a certain amount of points to spend per month..." (*Divergent* 88). While the Abegnation focuses more on an equal allocation of resources, the Divergent allow for more flexibility and more choice; this speaks directly to the focus of each faction, as Abegnation seeks to equalize each citizen while Dauntless values individuality. It's interesting that the microeconomics differ from faction to faction, while still allowing for a centralized and controlled political structure, because that's starkly different from anything familiar, either in other dystopian novels or in economies familiar to the reader. *Divergent* suggests that— at least for awhile—this system has worked and could continue to work if not for the greediness and corruption of the Erudite leader.

Besides the problems of economy, agency and political identity they face, both Tally and Tris also face a recognizable teenage problem with feelings of belonging. Teenage feelings of belonging often stem from their place in a social group. These groups become a type of tribe; they can band together against problems at school, with their family and from external social groups. The range of traits that might define a social group is wide, but the parameters are strict for young adults. There's a definite sense of *in* or *out*. While Katniss struggles with her identity, with staying alive and with the cruelty of Panem, she doesn't question what box she fits into; Katniss from the onset *belongs* somewhere, whether its in the forest hunting with Gale, with her

family in District Twelve (and then District Thirteen) or as a leader for the Rebellion. Roth's *Divergent* series features the consequences of having no place to belong. There's discussion throughout the series about the factionless, or the outsiders who couldn't fit into their chosen factions. The factionless can have jobs within the society, we learn throughout the series, but they struggle with stable housing and food; factionless are recognizable as homeless to a modern audience. They are considered a project for Abnegation, and a nuisance to much of the society. The factionless represent the consequences of not fitting into predetermined boxes. This fear of outcast resonates greatly with the intended audience for the series. Young women, particularly those in high school, would navigate a space similar to the one Tris navigates. They run the risk of being sorted into boxes: mathlete or cheerleader, popular or outcast. High schoolers sort their peers by a number of different traits and the accepted traits can vary between different regions; despite the variation of popular traits, it's likely than many of Roth's readers recognize the fear of being outcast or "factionless." *Divergent* is built upon selecting the place where you might best belong; Tris's real conflict isn't that she's factionless. Instead, Tris learns that she's divergent. She can't be put into one of the neat boxes laid out by her society, which leads to problems with Jeanine, the leader of Erudite. Because those labeled *divergent* cannot be controlled by Jeanine's medical manipulation methods, she seeks to destroy them until she can control them for her own gain. At an individual level, Tris is given the first real choice of her life when she learns she's divergent. As Miranda Green-Bartet argues, "the act of choosing is key for several reasons. It reveals that Tris has never been encouraged to see herself as an independent individual, as is she is unprepared to *not* choose a faction" (Green-Bartet 44). Young adults aren't given agency over which "faction" or social group they're inducted into; instead, the threat of social

rejection (or becoming “factionless”) tends to keep young adults from breaking away from the status quo.

In contrast, Tally starts the book off longing to escape her current situation and stick closely to some form of status quo, by entering New Pretty Town and, thus, breaking into the in-crowd, the pretties. She spends the duration of *Uglies* working toward finding the place she fits in. Tally goes out in search of the place where she ultimately does fit (at least during *Uglies*) because of her fear of being left out of New Pretty Town; she doesn't make the decision to go after Shay until Peris, her former best friend, comes to her dorm in Uglyville to guilt her into doing whatever it takes to become pretty. “You promised me you wouldn't do anything stupid. That you'd be with me soon. That we'd be pretty together” (*Uglies* 126). It's unclear whether or not Dr. Cable sent Peris to put pressure on Tally, but it's extremely likely that the head of Special Circumstances did play a hand in this peer-pressure. For Tally, threats of remaining ugly forever, the humiliation of going back to her old dormitory, and her parents pleas don't convince her to comply with Dr. Cable's wishes. Instead, the desire to rejoin her social group controls the sixteen year old and it near-instantly convinces her to change her mind.

Tally eventually finds a place of belonging that she didn't anticipate when she begins to fall into patterns of life in the Smoke. She finds validation through work, through her friends and through her blossoming romantic relationship with David. However, she fears these things are going to be taken from her and she'll be back where she started: alone and without a sense of belonging. Before she inadvertently reveals the Smoke to Special Circumstances, Tally and David talk about the City, Shay and becoming Pretty. David quips that he almost told Shay not to come to the Smoke and Tally reflects on this, noting how “everything would have been so much easier if David had done exactly that. Tally would be pretty right now, high up in a party tower with

Peris and Shay and a bunch of new friends at this very moment. But the image in her mind didn't give Tally the thrill it usually did; it just fell flat like a song she'd heard too many times" (*Uglies* 250). Tally recognizes the importance of holding on to the sense of belonging she feels in the Smoke, and she's unwilling to jeopardize the place where she belongs.

Tally feels this again during *Pretties* when she's attempting to navigate the unfamiliar social spaces of New Pretty Town. Mirroring the beginning of *Uglies*, Tally is striving for acceptance from the Crims, a social group that Peris and Shay belong to. Tally must be voted into the Crims unanimously, which she is within the first few chapters. As a sixteen year old, Tally craves the validation and acceptance that comes with belonging to a group like the Crims. Once she's accepted, she still worries about the way people perceive her, worried about the way Zane looks at her. She shakes this off, reminding herself she's a "Crim now... all voted on and full-fledged.... It was time to stop worrying about being accepted and start enjoying herself" (*Pretties* 52). Tally feels secure in herself, now that she's part of a well-defined social group, and she fight to make sure she remains in that group, much like she did in *Uglies*. However, Shay throws her a curveball by ejecting herself from the Crims and forming her own new social group, the Cutters, where Tally and her boyfriend, leader of the Crims, are not welcome. Instead of shared past "criminal" behavior or a desire to create light-hearted trouble, Shay's Cutters are bonded together through ritual. Tally and Zane observe the new social group in the woods— a group of ten or so people, three of whom (including Shay) are former Crims. The couple is confused at first as to why a group so large are standing in a silent circle during a freezing rain. However, the point of the group becomes abundantly clear when Shay produces a thin knife from her pocket and is the first among them to cut a line from her wrist to her elbow. Tally watches in horror as the others follow, silently expecting one of them to break the cycle and run. However, as the nar-

rative notes “something—the bleak setting, the sprint-sapping rain, or maybe the crazed expression on Shay’s face— bound them to their spots” (*Pretties* 175-176). This social group represents one that’s different from the social groups seen before in both *The Uglies* and *Divergent* series. Bound together by self-harm, the Cutters represent the dangers of unchecked exclusivity. Shay creates this group (and begins to cut herself in the first place) in order to feel the cure that Zane and Tally have; she desires inclusion into the clear-mindedness she was denied when Tally split the cure with Zane instead of Shay. At the end of *Pretties*, Shay captures Tally and forces her to undergo the new Special “surge” (surgery) that she and all of the Cutters have undergone, convinced this will reunite the two former best friends. Dr. Cable of Special Circumstances does force this surgery upon Tally, and her experience in Special Circumstances makes up the final book and marks the final restricting social group she interacts with.

At the end of Tally’s narrative, she rebukes these social groups she’s worked so hard to become a part of. Like Tris, she realizes she cannot force herself into predetermined boxes— ugly, pretty, Crim, Cutter, *special*— anymore. She chooses to dictate her own life and her own circumstances. Instead of having her special surgery reversed, Tally escapes from her city. Before she does so, however, Westerfeld lets us know the status of Tally’s three old social groups— Crim, Smoke, and Cutter. The Cutters remain in Diego, the New Smoke city threatened by Dr. Cable from which the Crims fled. The Crims are seeking to recapture living off the land as the “pre-Rusties” did. The original Smokies have also left Diego, hoping to liberate the rest of the world from the pretty surgery. All three hope that Tally will join them. Tally, at the end of this series, chooses to contact David and to live in the wilderness with him; David, of course, stands out as the only character throughout the series not to see Tally as one of her monikers. He loves her when she’s ugly, saves her when she’s a prettified Crim, and he comes again to her when she

remains special. When they meet, the exchange between Tally and David proves that he's the only person who *can* see her without labeling her:

“Are you still...” She gazed at him. “What do you think, David?” He peered into her eyes, then sighed and shook his head. “You just look like Tally to me.”

She looked down, vision blurring.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, David.” She shook her head, “You just took on five million years of evolution again.”

“I *what?* Did I say something wrong?”

“No.” She smiled. “You said something right.” (*Specials* )

Tally recognizes that David is the only person will accept her just being Tally; because of this, she chooses not to return to any of her former groups, but instead she'll stay with David. They'll protect the fragile society as it is, and step in when necessary. Tally finally takes agency and defines herself, rather than let those around her fit her into a predetermined box.

While Tally rejects her labels, Katniss and Tris welcome them.. Katniss and Tris are labeled *symbols*; they are *girl on fire*, *mockingjay*, *divergent*. When we remember that the audience for these novels is overwhelmingly young adult women, these labels become something concrete that the intended audience can relate to. As I've argued before, young adults (and young adult women in particular) have labels lobbed at them from every direction. While young women see the benefits of rejecting these labels cold-turkey through Tally, they are also able to see the way agency can be found through accepting and excelling certain labels. Tris and Katniss are able to topple their regimes in large part because they accepted the labels thrust upon them. Without

Katniss's acceptance of *Mockingjay*, much of the rebellion would have failed. Tris, on the other hand, takes the label *Divergent* over *Dauntless* or *Abnegation*. Divergent is a representation of not fitting into her society's limiting factions. While Tris ultimately dies to protect the rights of choice in social group, Green-Barteet notes that "the realization that she cannot rely on others to define her prepares [Tris] to accept her Divergence, which then sets her on a path of rebellion she cannot stop" (45). Tris's acceptance of who she is allows her to fully explore this identity through the rebellion. It's during her time in rebellion that Tris grows, much like Katniss, out of her adolescence and into functional adulthood. By allowing herself to break out of these preset roles, she finds who she truly is.

### **Conclusions and Relations**

Though these novels have distinctly different economic and social messages, all three trilogies work together to reveal something about the YA audiences they found popularity with. They highlight how corruption and greed ruin a society that might otherwise be perfect. Between the Capitol's greed to be the trendiest or to pick the future victor, Dr. Cable's obsession with the Smokies that lead her to send a sixteen-year old into the wilderness alone or Jeanine's desire to control the Divergent, these novels push their readers to seek out corruption in their economic and social spheres. By placing strong women like Tris, Tally and Katniss at the center of these corrupt societies and, like I talked about in the previous chapter, allowing them to topple over said corruption, there's again a sense of hope and agency given to young adults through these narratives. Not only can there be success in changing political policy, but also in standing up for corrupt economic systems. There is success in rejecting social norms, as Tally and Tris show by refusing to remain in predetermined boxes and creating spaces for themselves on their own terms. These are encouraging messages for young adults and likely a partial reason for their pop-

ularity; by giving young adults a narrative in which their choices are important, Roth, Westerfeld and Collins show them the importance of agency and self-definition. Furthermore, the economic systems put into place by these societies (especially alongside the corrupt political systems at the forefront) encourage young adults to question the society they were born into. These two traits—unwillingness to accept social structures and to accept authority at face value—help to ensure that the generation reading these novels will not merely allow injustice to continue within their society.

### III. Dystopian Endings

The action over the course of *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Uglies* represents the changing identities of the three heroines; the endings of these novels inform the readers of the outcomes of such dense, harrowing, *adult* action during formative years for young adults. In this chapter, I'll compare the endings of these three trilogies not only to each other but also to the two dystopian novels that I've referenced in the last two chapters, *1984* and *Brave New World* in order to see if any of these narratives offer hope for the revolutionaries. During this comparison, I'll question if there are happy endings for dystopian heroes. I'll also consider what the eventual outcome of breakdowns of political, economic and social structures is in order to question whether or not audiences get any true resolution after rebellions.

#### What Makes a Happy Ending?

Audiences, particularly young audiences, are conditioned to expect a happy ending. Between romantic comedies, Disney films and teenage television shows, we expect a resolution which gives the protagonists happiness and fulfillment, often through romantic love and always through returning chaotic events to an equilibrium. For our three young adult dystopian heroines, we get three distinctly different resolutions. Tris dies for her cause. Katniss marries Peeta and we see her raising two children, questioning how to tell them about her horrifying past. Tally slips into the woods with David, still *special* and prepared to intervene if the three social groups she once occupied (Crim, Smokie, and Cutter) begin to regress into the oppressive society she helped disassemble. These three fates show what each woman grew to value most. Tris values her cause as well as sacrifice for the greater good. Katniss, once the rebellion ends (and perhaps all along), values stability and peace. Tally values seclusion and the ability to forge her own path outside of social structures.

The ability to claim individual power over circumstance binds these three conclusions together. Katniss, Tally and Tris all three *choose*, at least in some way, the way their stories end, which gives these young women a type of agency rarely seen in dystopian novels. The protagonists of adult dystopia have little to no choice in their endings. As I discussed before, Winston of *1984* succumbs to societal and political pressure quickly. As the agents of Big Brother torture him, he's given effectively one route if he wants to remain alive; he must break down his loyalties to Julia, the woman he worked with on an unsuccessful rebellion and whom he claims to love. Winston is not allowed to define himself outside of the wishes of Big Brother and, as we see in the ending of the novel, he doesn't.

Furthermore, every citizen of Huxley's society in *Brave New World* lacks agency over their lives. Classified at birth and conditioned for these classifications, most of the citizens accept this lack of choice and, in fact, don't even question this system. As the Director of Hatcheries explains, "[the society] predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future.. Directors of Hatcheries" (Huxley 8). It's not until John, a man raised outside of this caste, enters the novel that the question of agency truly comes up. John spends the course of the novel wading through this place devoid of choice and, ultimately, rejects it. However, he too is subject to the regime's method of making choices for its citizens. He too is classified, upon arrival in London, as "The Savage" and odd for his attachment to his mother. John attempts to display agency, by rejecting Barnard (the man who brought him off the reservation) and Barnard's social life, by attempting to court Lenina instead of having emotionless sex with her, and, ultimately by trying to seclude himself from the society he wanted so desperately to be apart of. In a conversation with The Controller, one of the higher ups in Huxley's dystopian London, John argues for the messiness of life as Huxley's

readers know it. The Controller responds that this no longer has place in this society, that they value comfort over the inconveniences of life. But John doesn't want comfort, as he claims "I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin" (163). The Controller allows John this delusion for awhile, secluded away in a lighthouse. However, the society takes this choice away from him too, when they find his residence. Quickly, his quiet choices are overtaken by drugged party-goers. John realizes that no matter where he runs and how he tries, he has no control over his own life. In the closing scene, partygoers arrive again at his home, where John's corpse hangs a rafter. John had shallow agency during his life off the reservation.

It's important that dystopian happy endings don't come easily to the protagonists. Katniss in particular struggles to find happiness following the rebellion's end. She returns to District Twelve by the new government's order, without her mother or Peeta. Collins does not turn away from the horrors Katniss witnesses in this immediate aftermath. The *Mockingjay* bears a number of emotional scars and spends several days in a near catatonic depressive state, with Greasy Sue, a neighbor ensuring she eats. Katniss describes this time before Peeta joins her in District Twelve, saying "she shows up twice every day. She cooks, I consume... Sometimes the phone rings and rings and rings, but I don't pick up. Haymitch never visits" (*Mockingjay* 381). It isn't until Peeta reappears that she slowly begins to rebuild her life. Katniss ventures back into the woods to hunt, she and Peeta plant primroses and work together on a book in remembrance of the dead. The last chapter before the epilogue overflows with imagery of regrowth; in the end Peeta and Katniss too "grow back together" (388). Despite the shaky Peeta-Katniss-Gale love triangle the series flirts with, Katniss knows Peeta would always be her choice:

I know this would have happened anyway. That what I need to survive is not Gale's fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that (388).

In this, Katniss defines her version of utopia. She doesn't want to follow Gale's footsteps and continue a life in the public eye. Rather, Katniss wants to find happiness in stability and normalcy, which is cemented in her normative, heterosexual, maternal epilogue. Katherine Broad takes issue with pieces of Collins's ending and the message it might convey to YA female readers. She criticizes the way the ending interacts with gender roles and expectations, arguing that the epilogues focus on Katniss's maternal feelings "reframes the way we read the rest of the novels as it redirects the energies of the narrative from social upheaval to the maintenance of a reproductive status quo and ensures that Katniss's rebellions serves to keep her an appropriately gendered, reproductive, and ultimately docile subject" (Broad 125). I agree with Broad to an extent; while Katniss's ending does focus around a heteronormative nuclear family, there's a victory in her ability to have just that. Katniss's entire life has been defined by chaos, between her father's death (and her mother's depression following his death), both times in the Hunger Games, and her constant struggle to stay on the same page as the rebellion she was manipulated into being a symbol for. Katniss does not choose to settle down and have a family and peace with Peeta because simply because he is "the one who pursued her back to the bombed out District 12 at the end of the war" (124). Rather, Katniss *chooses* stability. We see that she defines what her happy ending is as she becomes reacclimated to life without a rebellion or an oppressive regime. Katniss, as the Mockingjay, could easily have spent her life rebuilding Panem or even as a politician

in this new society, but that's never been what she wanted. Instead, Collins allows her hero a true happy ending in peace.

Tris does not struggle with her choice of ending; she makes the decision to sacrifice herself quickly and easily. In her final scene (Four dictates the rest of *Allegiant* following her death), Tris has a conversation with her dead mother, as the young woman accepts her death. During this brief exchange, Tris worries about Tobias, Caleb and the rest of her friends. As her mother reassures her Tris smiles, closes her eyes. It's clear that she finds joy in this choice of hers from the final piece of text she narrates:

I feel a thread tugging me again, but this time I know that it isn't some sinister force dragging me toward death.

This time I know it's my mother's hand, drawing me into her arms.

And I go gladly into her embrace.

Can I be forgiven for all I've done to get here?

I want to be.

I can (*Allegiant* 442).

She goes gladly because this type of sacrifice for the greater good denotes happiness for Tris.

Knowing her loved ones will take care of each other in a better world her sacrifice makes possible leaves Tris content, despite the sorrow her death comes with.

In my last chapter, I discussed the way in which Tally chooses none of the social groups she was once associated with. While this is a pivotal moment for Tally, this isn't the first time she exhibits agency within an oppressive regime. Tally accepts agency over her future at the end of the first novel, by signing a medical consent form to allow Maddy to experiment on her once she's undergone the pretty surgery. This causes a lot of argument between David, Maddy, and

Tally in which David attempts to convince Tally she's choosing the wrong path. The argument concludes with Maddy's statement "Tally's made her choice" (*Uglies* 418). Maddy recognizes the importance of this choice not only for her scientific work, but also for Tally herself, who feels guilt for Shay's pretty surgery. Before this declaration, the pretty surgery looms as a means of government control and as an *end* for Tally Youngblood; in *choosing* to undergo this surgery for the potential betterment of her society, Tally overtakes the power the surgery holds and manipulates it to mirror what she considers a happy ending. Tally, much like Tris, is willing to sacrifice herself in order to create a better future; happy endings for both of these young women include toppling their oppressive regimes, no matter the personal cost. Sonya Sawyer Fritz discusses Tally's resistance to outside forces, even on a biological level. Throughout the trilogy, Tally (and, more importantly, her peers) attempts to find a cure for the pretty and special surgeries. However, Tally doesn't need these cures. Fritz notes that "by the end of [*Specials*], Tally has resisted these efforts and proven once again that she does not need to be manipulated by others in order to find herself; without the intervention of others, she has been able to return her mind and her personality to their original, pre-operation forms" (Fritz 21). Tally's ability to reclaim her own personality despite powerful outside forces shows how intensely Westerfeld values agency. Westerfeld allows his protagonist to make careful choices throughout the series, giving Tally dominion over herself not only in ending, but also in middle.

### **Dystopian Resolutions**

Do the outcomes of *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and *The Uglies* provide a political, economic or social resolution? While each of the societies in these trilogies topples in some form or another, there's still many loose ends to tie up for the societies. On an individual level, Katniss, Tris and Tally all get different forms of an *ending*. The same is not true for their worlds.

Collins, Roth and Westerfeld give, at best, minimal descriptions of the consequences of rebellion in terms of the political, economic and social spheres. All we get of Panem are glimpses of the society's attempt to rebuild— Katniss's mother helps build hospitals in District 4, Gale has a high-ranking, unknown job in District 2. Other than these small references, Collins keeps the focus of her ending and epilogue tight around Katniss and Peeta, rather than on the society itself. Westerfeld gives no epilogue, no glimpse of how Tally's universe operates within the parameters she sets for them. Rather, *Specials* ends with Tally's carefully crafted warning: "Be careful with the world, or the next time we meet, it might get ugly" (). Of these three narratives, Roth's Chicago gets the most description of post-rebellion life, in an epilogue set two and a half years after Tris's death. Before this epilogue, Four explains how the society is going to shift itself:

The experiment is over. Johanna successfully negotiated with the government— David's superiors—to allow the former faction members to stay in the city, provided they are self-sufficient, submit to the government's authority, and allow outsiders to come in and join them, making Chicago just another metropolitan area... It will be the only metropolitan area in the country governed by people who don't believe in genetic damage. A kind of paradise (*Allegiant* 468-469).

From the *Divergent* series, this is all we get: a plan and minimal follow-up. In the epilogue, Four gives a "where-are-they-now" for the characters we've grown to know throughout the series. Most of them live in New Chicago and work in varied fields, as everyone able in the society must work. The epilogue, mostly centered around the scattering of Tris's ashes, does give one important piece of information, telling us "there are still GD rebels in the fringe who believe that war is the only way to get the change we want" (*Allegiant* 482). Roth makes it clear that a successful rebellion does not necessarily make war or conflict go away. While New Chicago has a

vaguely known, seemingly successful outcome, it is not entirely resolved. *Allegiant* acknowledges that endings are messy, that resolution and peace take time. Outside of these few references to the organization of New Chicago and the potential conflict in the future, *Allegiant* closes hyper focused around Four, who now narrates. The narrative center is, just like in *Mockingjay* and *Specials* the individual rather than the society.

The way these three novels value individual outcomes over societal consequences goes back to the question of whether we should value empowerment (defined as *individual* growth) more so than activism (in which people work toward the betterment of society). In my first chapter, I argued that Katniss, Tally and Tris are activists because of their actions that serve to better society at a personal cost. While this still stands true, the narrative ends suggest that after activism comes empowerment, whether for yourself or for the next generation. While the end choices Tris and Tally in particular make serve to further their communities, we don't get to see the definitive outcome of those choices. Katniss, on the other hand, leaves activism behind quickly. She's not interested in rebuilding her society, and with good reason. Katniss recognizes that it's time she rebuilds herself. The text itself does not criticize Katniss's decision; instead, Collins treats this decision as natural and, most importantly, *needed* for Katniss. While we could read Katniss's choice to leave Panem's rebuilding and development to others as selfish, Collins's narrative shows that selfishness is not necessarily negative. Rather, Katniss's "selfish" decision leads to her stability and her mental wellbeing which was tentative for much of the series. YA readers can see further the benefits of balance between empowerment and activism through Four and Tally's choices. Tally chooses both empowerment and activism by going into the woods with David, but keeping an eye on her society. Four makes choices, such as choosing to never hold a gun again, that benefit his mental wellbeing, but also chooses a job in the new govern-

ment. The resounding outcome of dedicating their youths to activism then becomes an emphasis on balance as well as individual happiness and health.

## Conclusion

*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and *Uglies* series, though different in plot, tone and message, are united through the framework and message they each provide to their intended audience, American teenage girls. At the beginning of this thesis, I asked several questions of the three novels and their ultimate effect on this audience. I'm now going to revisit these questions within the lens of the discussion above and evaluate the answers

Are Katniss, Tally and Tris role models for their YA female readers? While they commit many ethically and morally ambiguous acts—Katniss shoots President Coin, Tris holds her brother at gunpoint so that she can complete her mission, Tally initially agrees to show the location of the Smoke to Special Circumstances—, these acts all had purpose within the context of rebellion. Their actions serve to further a political purpose, to highlight the pitfalls of extreme income inequality and to show the benefits of creating an identity outside of the expected. Katniss, Tris and Tally are fundamental to the changes their societies undergo, unlike their adult counterparts whose societies remain unchanged; this gives young adult women the opportunity to see their importance in political, economic and social spheres as well as show them a narrative in which their actions create real change. These three narratives provide young women with clear examples of not only success in rebellion, but also its consequences. All of this adds together to make Katniss, Tally and Tris role models who, despite their flaws, give young teenage girls something to aspire to.

Does anyone live happily ever after? Resoundingly, the answer is yes, although dystopian happy endings don't come in the way we expect. Instead of the large weddings and sweeping romantic gestures we might expect in a happy ending, YA dystopia highlights choice as the means to a happy ending for each of the protagonists. As I discussed in my third chapter, these

novels show how Katniss, Tris and Tally's final scenes show what they value. By giving their protagonists control over their endings, Collins, Roth and Westerfeld challenge readers to consider what they value and how this might play into their own happy ending, dystopian landscape not required.

How do these novels reflect the position of their audience? When we presume that the primary audience is American teenaged girls, these novels adequately reflect the position *and* growth of their audience. Katniss, Tris and Tally all begin their adventures at age sixteen. They are excluded from (and oppressed by) their societies political systems, exploited by the economies, and sorted into rigid social boxes. For the American teenage girl, this is not unheard of, particularly when they come from a lower economic class. The American teenage girl are not of voting age and, thus, their voices are not heard in political spheres. While they are the most targeted marketing group, these girls are often victims of a consumption-based economy, forced into a cycle of buying and exclusion from social groups based on "incorrect" purchase choices. Young women face immense social pressure in the forms of labels, which often denote whether or not they fit into social groups. Through the heightened lens of dystopia, Collins, Roth and Westerfeld show how these realms interact and change as their protagonists age. While the stakes are higher for Katniss, Tris and Tally, they still face recognizable *teen girl* problems, which further connects them to their audience.

What is the message that teenage girls walk away from these trilogies with? At the end of everything, we see three young women whose lives have been altered entirely by their participation in rebelling against their societies. However, we see that their actions are resoundingly worth the consequences. The epilogue of *Allegiant* makes it clear that even Tris's extreme sacrifice is ultimately worth it, by showing a society progressing forward from its past. While Roth

certainly does not intend for her readers to sacrifice their lives for the good of society, Tris's death forces readers to consider their own actions within the context of their community, as does Katniss and Tally's continual sacrifice. These novels show the importance of sacrifice for family (Katniss volunteers for the Hunger Games to save her sister) as well as for society (Tally chooses to undergo the pretty surgery so that Maddy may test her cure). Readers of *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and *Uglies* walk away questioning their own societies, as we see the similarities particularly in economic and social realms. Furthermore, the importance of choice pushes readers to evaluate what they value; this becomes increasingly important as young girls age out of their teenage years and into fragile adulthood. Overall, Collins, Roth and Westerfeld give their readers the tools to move into this next stage. Their message is one of strength, activism and, overall, hope for the next generation.

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