Identity Formation in the Dystopias of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*

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Contents

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Introduction

Recently in America, there has been a surge in dystopian literature aimed at young adults (YA), with series appropriating huge fan bases invested in the development of 'their' novels and trading their thoughts on social media. In literary terms, bad societies are currently big business. With *The Hunger Games* (2008), American author and screenwriter Suzanne Collins amassed huge popularity with an audience larger than she had ever imagined. The result was a trilogy (*Catching Fire* was published in 2009 and *Mockingjay* in 2010) which opened the gates for many more YA dystopian trilogies, all figuring young people fighting against an adult's world. The film industry, too, has recognized the the profitability of the YA (dystopian) boom, with the film rights to Collins's trilogy being sold within months of the first book's original publication. One notable author following in Collins's footsteps is Veronica Roth, who wrote the first novel of a trilogy, *Divergent* (2011, followed by *Insurgent* in 2012 and *Allegiant* in 2013), while still at university. With the "Divergent" trilogy the young Roth amassed popularity almost equal to that of Collins. Part of their great popularity is that both Roth and Collins use their dystopias to comment subtly on contemporary issues and problems.

Following in the recent popularity of YA dystopian trilogies, this thesis explores Collins's "Hunger Games" trilogy, with which it all started, and Roth's "Divergent" trilogy, a work which is perhaps even more dystopian than its predecessor. The focus will fall on how the pressures (and perhaps the possibilities) of a dystopian society form the identity aspects of the trilogies' protagonists, respectively Katniss Everdeen and Beatrice Prior – later nicknamed Tris. The socio-political organization of Collins's Panem and Roth's future Chicago prove fundamental to how they develop. This is because both societies force their sixteen-year-old protagonists into particular roles or categories approved of by the system (or the public,

depending on 'who's watching'). However, subverting society's attempt to mould them, these constricting conditions also enable the two young women to try out different identities, to practice contrary performances, and in these ways to reconcile their different identity elements into one self. Rather than remaining passive and suppressed, these female heroines find agency in a world of limitations and oppression. The trilogies offer hope by having the girls reject the dominant codes. By standing up against their respective governments, they take their fate and that of their societies in their own hands. Thus, the books demonstrate that although society and culture form identity, the possibility of an oppositional way presents itself in the form of active rebellion, revolution or a similar upheaval of the dominant code. It is even possible to argue that such societies cannot stifle the contradictions that will in the end unmake them. In the end, Katniss and Tris actively subvert authority in order to improve it.

i. Genre and Definition

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the Greek word 'utopia' – coined by Thomas More – means 'no place,' and thus describes an imaginary, non-existent world. It is often confused with 'eutopia,' which means 'good place,' and which is thus the correct opposite to 'dystopia,' literally meaning 'bad place.' For convenience's sake, this thesis will employ the word 'utopia' to define an imagined and *idealized* society. In contrast, the word 'dystopia' defines a place, or a society, which ought to be shunned because there is something very wrong with it. What exactly constitutes a dystopia is of course subjective, John Joseph Adams writes in an introduction to a collection of dystopian stories ("Introduction"). Moreover, in order for a society to even appear utopian, society's structure must be altered, and for instance personal liberties and civil rights may have to be restricted. Thus, it is eventually regarded as a dystopia again ("Introduction"). In a weblog, Phoebe North classifies Roth's "Divergent" trilogy as classically dystopian, but is not as eager to put Collins's trilogy in the same

category. *The Hunger Games*, she argues, is perhaps more post-apocalyptic than dystopian, because unlike the latter genre, Panem is not "presented like an ideal world" and was not "founded out of some misguided attempt to create one" ("Defining Genre"). However, as Keith Booker writes, "mostly natural and environmental disasters have created a crisis that is made even more severe by the human response to the crisis" (xxiii), and an oppressive dictatorship terrorizes Panem's twelve districts, which makes it rather dystopian after all. In a chart (Appendix 1) composed by author Erin Bowman, too, *Divergent* is defined as a dystopia in the tradition of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), whereas *The Hunger Games* is labelled post-apocalyptic fiction. However, Bowman does not apply those dystopia-markers such as surveillance, conformity and restricted freedoms to Collins's series, where these are indeed very much present.

In *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (1994), Keith Booker calls attention to the alienating power of science fiction, in particular dystopian fiction. Recalling Darko Suvin's definition of "cognitive estrangement" (19; 175), Booker argues that dystopian literature estranges readers by disclosing evils already present in contemporary society "through shocks of recognition in a different context" (176). For instance, the "Hunger Games" trilogy draws upon our own fears of total governmental control, universal surveillance and the danger of mass media, exaggerating them so that readers are forced to think critically about how and to what extent these themes are present in their own societies. Similarly, Roth's "Divergent" trilogy deals with the dangers of categorizing people according to specific virtues, rather than acknowledging the strength in being multifaceted. Booker moreover writes that dystopias serve "as a healthy opposing voice that helps prevent utopian thought from going stale" (176), challenging utopian ideals to keep them fresh and to "[prevent] them from degenerating into dogma" (177). This point is particularly relevant for Roth's trilogy, which is based on the utopian desire to categorize people in order to ensure

social stability and security. Unfortunately, however, this premise remains merely an ideal because, as Karen Springen writes in an article on the appeal of current YA dystopias, people cannot be controlled; the attempt to control will only end in dystopia, and this is untenable, thus people will revolt.

In a more recent collection of essays, Booker continues his argument for the defamiliarizing power of dystopian literature. He argues that this genre rejects simple escapism in favour of a "strong potential for political critique and the suggestion of utopian alternatives to the status quo" (vii). Moreover, "[t]hese works, with their exploration of worlds other than our own, clearly respond to the air of crisis and anxiety that pervades our contemporary world, while at the same time suggesting the potential for a better world ahead if we respond properly to this crisis" (xiii). This is exactly what Katniss and Tris do: they respond to crises and act in order to improve their societies. As the symbolic head of a rebellion, Katniss leads the districts out of their enslavement and helps to establish a new, more democratic government. Similarly, Tris fights to save the factions from destroying each other and is crucial in taking down the faction system and ending her society's position as the object of a social experiment controlled by outside forces.

Significantly, the presence of hope distinguishes the YA dystopias from many (classic) adult dystopias (Springen 23-24). This optimism teaches adolescents that they have something to hold onto and urges them to actively improve their situation, if necessary, just like the protagonists do (23). Both Collins and Roth end their trilogy on a hopeful, albeit ambiguous, note, signifying that their societies have undergone permanent change. In contrast, classics such as Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's *1984* do not offer such an optimistic conclusion, or if they do so it is very subtle and easily overlooked. Unlike such dystopias which are often pessimistic about human nature, dystopias for children and YAs focus on heroism and the power to survive (Sambell 249). They offer a sense of hope, "often viewed as

essential for young readers" (251), which makes these stories function somewhat like cautionary tales. They exaggerate aspects of the contemporary world in order to make the audience think critically (Springen 22). In short, the YA dystopian genre estranges readers by "making the familiar strange" (qtd. in Sambell 248), thus making readers more aware and critical of social issues.

ii. Appeal of YA Dystopian Literature

These dystopian trilogies, like many other YA works, have the ability to appeal to a large audience, ranging from adolescents to adults (Booker xviii; Springen 24). Not surprisingly, contemporary teens growing up under "nearly continuous adult supervision" (Miller 3), of parents, institutions and entire governments, are attracted to books which magnify socio-political issues of their time and in which protagonists rebel against authority. Karen Springen writes that an important reason for the appeal of dystopias with adolescents is because such books present them with 'what if?'-scenarios (22) about their own uncertain future (21). Similarly, in a Q&A Veronica Roth tells her interviewer that dystopian literature is particularly appealing for those who "want to see their 'what if?' questions played out in a world that has the same rules as our own" (5). Dystopias aim to show by "exaggerat[ing] current concerns over reality TV, global warming, ... technology" or "the erosion of civil liberties" (Springen 23) that the world could look very different in the future if such issues are taken to extremes. Moreover, author Philip Reeve speculates that the appeal of YA dystopias lies in themes such as rebelling against tyranny or adult control, or even the theme of leaving home and entering adult society ("The Worst"). This focus on coming-of-age aspects and identity quests appeals to a generation familiar with the importance of self-branding through social media and the emphasis on "individual initiative" (Berger 48) in contemporary western (capitalist) culture.

Another important reason for the massive appeal of the "Hunger Games" and "Divergent" trilogies is the first-person present-tense narration, something which has become a trend in contemporary YA books. As Laura Miller writes, "it's about what's happening, right this minute, in the stormy psyche of the adolescent reader" (2). Similarly, Deirdre Baker argues that this kind of narration has become so popular because it is all about being in the present of an adolescent's mind, and the constant action of one movement after another "builds the suspense" (54). It is thus a conscious choice to appeal to a generation which lives increasingly in the present as a result of social media. Both Collins's and Roth's trilogies read like episodes of reality television in which events are "happening right before your very eyes" (54). Furthermore, the present tense ensures that the story will be happening in "the eternal present" (Baker 55), never fading into the past for any reader even though taking place in an imagined future.

Significantly, the result is that both trilogies feel as if they were written specifically for the screen. April Spisak, for instance, calls *Divergent* "a movie-ready example" of new must-read YA dystopias. With the current trend of film adaptations of popular (YA) novels it is not difficult to imagine that both Collins and Roth would have been writing with the visual counterpart of their story in mind, perhaps even consciously shaping their narrative. Collins even has experience working as a television screenwriter thus she likely had conventions of theatre and film in mind while writing. The film rights to *Divergent* were sold before the first book had even been officially published, and producers were already in talks regarding making a film adaptation of *The Hunger Games* only a few months after its publication in the fall of 2008 (source: Wikipedia).

iii. Collins and Roth: Inspirations and Influences

Collins has said to be influenced by classic mythology and history, and she combines current issues such as surveillance with mankind's hunger for violence and entertainment, visible in contemporary reality television as well as the ancient Roman gladiator games. The name of Collins's imagined post-apocalyptic dystopian nation, Panem, reflects the Latin phrase *panem et circenses* (literally, 'bread and circuses'), a metonymy for keeping the public appeased and distracted with food and entertainment in return for their "political responsibilities and therefore their power" (*Mockingjay* 223). Moreover, the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur is clearly reflected in the annual reaping which requires the sacrifice of twelve boys and twelve girls, one of each from every district (Margolis). The reason for children being both victims and "gladiators" is because Collins wanted young people, who are the intended audience, "to be the active participants" in her story (Margolis). Moreover, as Susan Dominus explains, the trilogy represents the young tributes as "for the most part innocents, creations of adults' cruelty or victims of adult weakness in the face of power" (2). Pitting children against "a powerful adult regime" (Sambell 250) is actually typical of children's dystopian fiction, Kay Sambell argues, because children serve "as an antidote to corrupt adulthood" (252). The deaths of children in such stories are statements which emphasize the "negligence and corruption" of the adult world (Sambell 250).

Moreover, Katniss's role in the rebellion as the Mockingjay summons up memories of Spartacus's gladiator-slave insurrection. And although the Roman gladiator games clearly inspired the Hunger Games and its arena, the message is that the Capitol public displays the same disturbing thirst for blood and violence as the Roman citizens, raising the question as to whether we are ultimately any different. Perhaps we would not condone *real* violence, particularly not on children, on live television, but we are nonetheless intrigued by extreme violence in films, or by the staged and stereotyped realities which reality TV shows depict. It

is likely the emotional and physical distance which makes many viewers virtually insensitive to suffering as depicted by television. In a way, Collins's trilogy holds up a mirror to her audience, showing that we may actually be on a similar path and urging us to be critical of the world around us – of politics and, more specifically, of the influence of (mass) media – and, consequently, to be critical of ourselves. She worries that current television – reality television shows and war reporting – desensitizes people to reality and the potential real horrors behind popular programming (Margolis).

Roth claims to have been inspired by a psychology course on the treatment of phobias by exposure therapy. This was the direct inspiration for her creation of Dauntless, a "subculture" ("Q&A" 6) all about eradicating their fears by facing them. Interestingly, Orwell's *1984* is one of her favourite novels, as well as a number of other, more contemporary dystopian books ("Q&A" 10), thus she was likely directly inspired by a large dystopian tradition.

iv. Methodology

What role does the organization of society play in the identity formation and individual journeys of Katniss and Tris? In what way do these dystopian societies force certain roles on them? How do such roles force Katniss and Tris to consider their identities? Such questions have guided my analysis of the identity formation of the protagonists of the two trilogies under discussion. This thesis will discuss how Katniss and Tris are apparently formed by the limitations of their dystopian societies, while arguing that both heroines do not sit by passively and *let* their identities be moulded according to the status quo. The books appeal to the YA reader by demonstrating that the formation of adult identity is an active process; against all the compulsion inflicted by a strict society, the protagonists are able to 'make'

themselves. They grasp at the possibility for change with both hands and vigorously influence the outcome of their respective rebellions and of their own fates.

I will approach this thesis by a historically and culturally-informed formalist close reading of the texts, focusing on in particular the first instalments of each trilogy – *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. In addition, I will draw upon critical ideas from an eclectic array of subjects, ranging from Foucault's ideas of the panopticon and self-regulating discipline, Judith Butler's ideas on gender performance, to various theories of adolescent identity development. Both Foucault and Butler argue that societies have a moulding function, and share the thought that identity is something constructed within the artifice of culture, thus both are useful as they key into my own argument regarding identity formation in these trilogies. The individual, whether as inmate incarcerated in the panopticon or as female heroine trapped in a dystopian society, exists in relation to dominant power structures. Butler's theory of gender as a cultural performance is for instance applicable to Katniss's situation: she is forced to act according to the Capitol's traditional gender roles or she will be punished for nonconformity. Similarly, Tris's society is strictly divided into five factions, and one who does not fit in is punished, again, for nonconformity. The way both heroines struggle to overcome their society's limitations is significant with regard to their identity formation.

This thesis will start with outlining how the societies created by Collins and Roth can be considered dystopian, and will then move on to analyses of the identity formations of their protagonist in these dystopian environments. The second chapter on the "Hunger Games" trilogy will focus on Katniss's various (gender) performances and how she subverts authority by appearing to conform, and her eventual development into the Mockingjay. The next chapter will focus on Tris's development in the "Divergent" trilogy, moving from being unable of seeing a world without the faction system to recognizing that this categorization is ultimately an obstacle.

1. The Dystopias of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*: The Oppressive Power of (Social) Division

Introduction

Like George Orwell's classic dystopian novel *1984*, Suzanne Collins's future society Panem is ruled by the Capitol, a government which enforces total control and suppression. Her trilogy incorporates typically dystopian tropes such as government surveillance, cruel punishments, social inequalities, and of course a tyrannical leader. The nation of Panem – from the Latin phrase *panem et circenses* – is divided into twelve – formerly thirteen – districts ruled with an iron fist by President Snow. The Capitol's main purpose is to keep the districts divided, oppressed, and thus to prevent uprisings. As Anthony Pavlik argues, the Capitol's "force relies upon the ultimate weakness of the population it hierarchically rules over" (33). The opening section of this chapter will first discuss the general socio-political situation of oppression in Panem and, second, will focus on some of the particularly dystopian aspects of Collins's trilogy to provide a background for how Katniss and Tris's identity development is influenced by their societies.

This same chapter will also discuss the dystopian aspects of Veronica Roth's trilogy. Interestingly, this society is often presented as having ideal potential, rather unlike Panem. Besides being relatively undemocratic, this urban society is divided according to five factions, which limits people considerably. This system hampers identity formation and the development of individuality, and demands complete loyalty to the faction over the 'natural' bonds of family. Although this future Chicago, too, is relatively oppressive, most inhabitants approve of the system, and even Tris cannot completely abandon her notions concerning factions and faction identity. The second section of this chapter will thus discuss the dystopian

elements of Roth's trilogy and argue that the utopian ideal which is subtly endorsed throughout the story cannot be upheld.

1.1. Panem's Panopticons, Division, and the Hunger Games

Panem, Collins's vision of a future dystopian North America, follows in a tradition of classic dystopias, resembling in particular Orwell's *1984* in several aspects. Much like Oceania, Panem is ruled by an authoritarian regime, and, although Panem's ruthless dictator Coriolanus Snow is not as enigmatic as Orwell's Big Brother – Snow is physically present, for example – its political structure reflects that of Oceania. At the top of each social hierarchy sits an elite group or a dictator, followed by the privileged people, and finally followed by the poor masses who form the lowest and largest tier of society. In Collins's trilogy, neither the districts nor the privileged Capitol citizens have any political influence, but the latter are considerably better off. Among the districts there is a slight hierarchical division according to production specialization. Districts one and two, for instance, are relatively privileged because they provide the Capitol with luxury items and trained Peacekeepers. In contrast, districts 11 and 12 "battle starvation" (*Hunger* 19) every day because the Capitol keeps firm control of the food supplies, enforcing artificial scarcity to keep them subdued. The ultimate aim of the Capitol's total control and this artificially created gap between rich and poor is to reinforce its own power.

As Kelley Wezner argues, the Capitol's location in the Rockies symbolically reflects its power position. She compares its central position in the country, surrounded and protected by rocks, to that of the warden in Jeremy Bentham's panopticon (149-150). The panopticon represents an ideal prison whose warden can, theoretically, watch all inmates simultaneously without their knowledge from his watchtower in the middle of all cells. Because they cannot "verify the presence of the watcher" (Downing 82), they will behave as if indeed watched

continually, even though this is technically impossible. According to Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's idea, power should be visible – the inmates can see the tower from which the warden observes them, but cannot see the warden – and unverifiable – the inmates do not know *when* they are being watched (Foucault 201). In his *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault argues that "the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). Thus, because of the threat of constant surveillance "discipline becomes self-regulatory" (Downing 83). The inmate himself guarantees discipline and "becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 203). The Capitol's symbolic location and its use and threat of constant surveillance ensures repression and subordination of its subjects, and thus ensures social order and political stability.

Surveillance as in the panopticon is used extensively in all of Panem, and this has a decisive impact on both Katniss and the reader. Because Katniss knows that the Capitol is always watching, the reader shares her suspicion, even paranoia. At the beginning of the first novel, Collins already stresses Panem's universal surveillance: while hunting in the woods beyond the fence, Katniss and her friend Gale frequently ponder about their situation. Katniss, however, is afraid to voice much criticism because "[e]ven here, even in the middle of nowhere, you worry someone might overhear you" (*Hunger* 6). Panem's panopticons (Wezner 148) range from listening devices in the Training Center and Capitol trains to phone-tapping of private residences, resulting in a surveillance culture which blurs the line between the public and private sphere (Connors and Shepard 125). Although Katniss's old home in the Seam is probably safe from surveillance, her comfortable villa in the Victor's Village – the village of specially constructed homes meant for the district's victors – most likely is not. She does not dare talk about her rebellious plans over her phone because it is "surely tapped" (*Catching* 126). In all, public places related to the Capitol are more likely of being under

surveillance. The inevitable result of all this is "the loss of individual freedoms" (Connors and Shepard 122) because the constant threat of being watched constrains people in their behaviour and expression.

Of course each arena of the Hunger Games is packed with invisible cameras so that the audience will not miss a thing. They are essentially "designed for public consumption" (Wezner 152) and it is the Gamemakers' intention and duty to ensure maximum entertainment value for the Capitol. Therefore, external manipulation of the Games or arena to create violent, and thus more interesting, confrontations, is hardly uncommon. Although surveillance within the arena reflects Panem's panopticons, the purpose is rather different. Instead of sewing terror and enforcing obedience, the arena's ubiquitous surveillance is meant wholly for entertainment purposes. Though unseen, cameras are numerous in order to catch everything important and record it as realistically as possible. Again, Katniss is very conscious of how the Games and Gamemakers work. She knows that the audience prefers to see blood and therefore she is certain that this year's arena will not be a frozen landscape, because the "quiet, bloodless deaths" of tributes freezing to death were "considered very anti-climactic" (*Hunger* 39). Katniss's expectations help her prepare for and survive the Games. Moreover, she is aware of the cameras and knows that her feeling of solitude is only "an illusion" (152): she can trust the cameras not to miss anything important happening to her or in her vicinity. Like Bentham's inmates, she even alters her behaviour according to the arena's surveillance. Instead of cowering in fear, however, she manipulates the audience and Gamemakers by consciously adapting her behaviour, trying to entertain them and convince them of her merit as a potential victor.

Although Katniss adapts her behaviour because of Panem's universal surveillance, her home in the Seam is probably quite safe. Being the "least prestigious, poorest, most ridiculed district in the country" (203) is district 12's greatest advantage because they are "being

largely ignored by the Capitol" (203). The Capitol does not bother to check up on district 12 much because there is so little chance of rebellion, just as the Party does not bother much with the Proles in *1984* for as long as they work, obey and keep to themselves, they do not pose a real threat. However, the Proles perhaps resemble the Capitol citizens more since both are uninterested in their society's political situation while they are kept well-fed and distracted. Clearly, the "Hunger Games" trilogy belongs in a tradition of dystopian texts – such as *1984*, *Battle Royale* (Takami, 1999), and *Brave New World* – in which oppressive governments use 'panem et circenses' or variations thereof to appease the public, maintain public favour, and prevent uprisings.

The deployment of Peacekeepers and the use of public punishment is another important means of the Capitol to retain its firm hold on the districts. Ironically, these Peacekeepers are not actually meant to maintain peace, but rather to enforce oppression and discipline in case of disobedience. Their naming is reminiscent of Orwell's doublespeak, a language which uses ambiguous, even contradictory words to disguise the real meanings. Generally, Peacekeepers keep strict control over the districts, but in district 12 they are relatively lenient. Katniss recounts how they "turn a blind eye to the few of us who hunt" because they, too, are "hungry for fresh meat" and live in relative discomfort (*Hunger* 5). Moreover, Katniss has built something of a working relationship with the friendlier Peacekeepers, and even engages in some banter with a young Peacekeeper named Darius, who is "one of [her] favorites ... [and] usually good for a joke" (*Catching* 11). In *Catching Fire*, however, the Capitol sends reinforcements to Katniss's district. Public punishments return for the most diminutive crimes, and suddenly Katniss finds it easier to imagine that the "far less obliging" (*Hunger* 211) Peacekeepers in district 11 were capable of murdering a boy for petty theft. The Capitol thus "ensures compliance ... with frequent theatrical reminders of the districts' powerlessness

and the potential punishments for disobedience" (Wezner 149), tactics which require

Peacekeepers and the threat of constant surveillance to enforce discipline and maintain order.

Maintaining social stability might prevent revolution, and the Capitol ensures this by

completely separating the districts from each other, prohibiting all communication and thus

creating isolated areas that are relatively harmless. This reflects Foucault's argument that it is

essential to the panopticon's success that each inmate "is the object of information, [but]

never a subject in communication" (200). Similarly, the separation of the districts reflects the

separation of inmates in the panopticon, which "effectively prevent[s] plotting,

insubordination or insurrection, since these are *communal* strategies of resistance" (Downing

82). Because the districts are strategically divided from each other there is no means of

communication and therefore no chance of "the emergence of solidarity and community

which would be detrimental to order" (Downing 79).

One of the Capitol's ways of enforcing this division is by prohibiting all movement.

Katniss says that "travel between the districts is forbidden except for officially sanctioned

duties" (*Hunger* 41), and people will spend their lives in the districts in which they were born.

Walls and electrified fences separate the districts from the wilderness beyond, and thus from

other districts. Katniss tells us that "[s]eparating the Meadow from the woods, in fact

enclosing all of District 12, is a high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops"

(*Hunger* 4). This fence is supposed to be electrified continuously, but because electricity here

is rather unreliable Katniss can generally pass safely underneath to reach her hunting grounds.

In contrast, district 11's fence "[t]ower[s] at least thirty-five feet in the air" (*Catching* 55) and

is continually guarded by watchtowers and armed patrols. Undoubtedly, this makes the

district 12 fence "look childish" (55). Clearly, the Capitol is more concerned with uprisings in

this large agricultural district than with Katniss's thinly populated coal miners' district. Of

course, the Capitol's complete separation of the districts serves to prevent them from unifying

in their displeasure and inciting a large-scale rebellion which could overthrow the government.

Further division is caused by pitting the districts against each other in the Hunger Games and dividing them amongst themselves. Wezner's illustration of the Games' mentality of "distrust, suspicion, and paranoia" (150) perfectly reflects the national mentality of Panem. The distribution of tesserae is a particularly good example of the Capitol's attempt to sew inner turmoil because it disadvantages the poor even more. The poorest children can enter their names multiple times in the lottery for the Hunger Games in return for tesserae, each of which is "worth a meager year's supply of grain and oil for one person" (*Hunger* 13). Poverty and starvation are not "uncommon" (28) in district 12, and neither is signing up for tesserae. The tesserae only increase tension and disparity between the poor and the merchant class. Katniss presents us with one of Gale's angry outbursts over the system's unfairness and, although she herself is not yet interested much in rebelling, Gale's take on tesserae hits the mark:

> I've listened to him rant about how the tesserae are just another tool to cause misery in our district. A way to plant hatred between the starving workers of the Seam and those who can generally count on supper and thereby ensure we will never trust one another. "It's to the Capitol's advantage to have us divided among ourselves," he might say if there were no ears to hear but mine. (*Hunger* 14)

The Capitol actively uses the negative mentality caused by for example the distribution of tesserae to ensure division, even competition, between the districts. Significantly, Katniss herself reflects this as well: she has internalized the mentality of distrust and paranoia just as

she has internalized the threat of constant surveillance, and this knowledge and suspicion of the Capitol essentially prepares her for surviving the Games.

The annual Hunger Games are probably the best example of the Capitol's total control as well as of their politics of completely dividing the districts, and therefore it is a fundamentally dystopian element of the trilogy. Panem literally "demands children as sacrifice for entertainment" (Tan 55) and even forces the districts' inhabitants to celebrate it as "a festivity, a sporting event" (*Hunger* 16). The use of children as objects of sacrifice immediately reminds of Takami's *Battle Royale* and the subsequent film adaptation (Fukasaku, 2000), the premise of which involves high school children being forced to compete to the death in the eponymous annual televised spectacle. Like the Games, this Battle turns out to be the government's means of controlling the public with terror – just as, according to Hannah Arendt, a typical totalitarian movement would (39, 42) – and thus preventing rebellion. Introduced as punishment for the districts' rebellion some seventy-five years ago, Collins's Games serve "to remind everyone of their inherited guilt" (Clemente 24) and force the people to celebrate it together with the Capitol audience and watch their children die on live television:

> Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we
> watch – this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their
> mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. (*Hunger*
> 18)

The Games are clearly meant as an immediate deterrent for another potential rebellion because citizens are kept in constant fear for their children. The Capitol uses the competition

to ensure repression of and division amongst the districts, instead of letting them communicate, consolidate and eventually unite against the regime.

Although the Games are a ruthless power show under the guise of punishment, the complete absence of moral conscience from much of the Capitol audience is perhaps even more disturbing. Capitol citizens look forward to the grand entertainment of "gory spectacle" (Tan 62) and fail to see the Games as being mediated and produced by Gamemakers who aspire to "evoke particular responses" (Wright 101). Ultimately, the Games are merely a fabricated narrative with identifiable, familiar characters which only appears to be reality (Wright 100-102). Tan argues that because television's function is to entertain, the "images lose meaning" (66) and, as a result, people become desensitized to real violence (Henthorne 95). What is already a problem in our contemporary culture because of reality TV and mass media participation has become an abominable reality in Panem, where the line between television and real tragedy has blurred so much that Capitol citizens are incapable of discriminating between the two. Possibly, they (un)consciously choose not to let the pain of the Games and within the districts concern them because they are, after all, kept well-fed and entertained. Using entertainment to distract the masses, the Capitol maintains the favour of its own people while simultaneously keeping them (wilfully) ignorant of the harsh reality.

Furthermore, as a result of being caught up in "the artificial drama" (Henthorne 105), Capitol citizens fail to realize that their president is a dictator who uses violence on children to retain his position (105). The Games are therefore symbolic because they not only serve to remind the districts of the government's ultimate power both within and outside of the games (Henthorne 98) but also to affirm "the idea that ruthlessness is not only acceptable as a means of acquiring power but even necessary" (Henthorne 105). The absence of moral criticism of the Games signifies that the audience has, albeit unconsciously, accepted this idea. Writing on totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt explains that the "masses have to be won by propaganda"

(39). The spectacle of the Games serves not only as entertainment but as propaganda to convince the Capitol citizens that they are superior to those in the districts. They fail to see that the tributes are specifically *presented* as stereotypes, capable of ruthless killing, instead of just "frightened children" who have suffered deprivation their whole lives (Pulliam 176). The Capitol audience, like the masses in a totalitarian state, believes in the fiction presented by propaganda such as the Games, because it ostensibly explains their privileged reality better than anything else could (Arendt 50). In short, accepting the status quo is easier and more comfortable than questioning it and endangering one's own privileged position.

At the same time, the public is encouraged to participate in the Games by becoming sponsors and by engaging in votes. The reality television of the Games gives the audience an interactive power which could be problematic for the Capitol because it cannot control all minds and opinions (Henthorne 103-104). As a result of Katniss's popularity, for instance, her mockingjay symbol becomes a merchandise item as well as "a symbol of the resistance" for the districts (104). These districts, too, cannot be wholly controlled if they are simultaneously expected to participate in the entertainment. The Games actually have the potential of uniting the districts in common grief and anger. Tan writes that "[a]ll are united by the viewing event of the Games" (67), something which is applicable not only to the Capitol viewers, but also to the suppressed districts for whom the event is mandatory viewing. This way, there is a danger that the Games will actually unanimously provoke the districts into rebellion. Their children are slaughtered, their privacy is invaded, and the culprit of it all rejects its duty of providing for its subjects.

1.2. Division, Divergence, and Simulations: Roth's Utopia or Dystopia?

Although Roth's urban society is sometimes presented as having utopian potential, the faction system actually makes it very much dystopian. Society is sharply divided into five factions,

the names of which – Abnegation, Amity, Candor, Dauntless and Erudite – immediately tell us that each faction was based on the aspiration to attain a particular virtue – selflessness, kindness, honesty, courage, intelligence – and on rejection of the corresponding vice. Teenagers are allowed to choose their future faction, but this decision is irreversible. Thus there is free choice, but there are only five choices, and movement between factions is limited. Moreover, nonconformity is dangerous because it can potentially upset order. Thus, the faction system is this society's main dystopian quality because it limits people to categorizations which inevitably cause prejudice and conflict. Julia Karr argues that, although it can be "empowering and affirming" to be part of a similar-minded group, the danger is that people will differentiate according to being 'in' or 'out' of such a group (140-141). Nevertheless, *Divergent*'s categorization is comforting to both readers and the city's inhabitants because it implies belonging and communal identity. Therefore, *Divergent* recalls Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* where people are divided at birth into hierarchical castes according to mental and physical capacity. Both populations are generally unaware of the limitations of their social organization. The Alphas and Betas in Huxley and most citizens in Roth's Chicago are unwilling to change their society's comforting categorization and predetermined paths of life.

Roth frequently paints her society as inherently good even if it is limited and undemocratic. It is described as a flawed, yet potentially ideal way of forming communities of like-minded people who all collaborate towards peace, stability and reasonable prosperity. Murder has long since been eradicated and Tris recalls that "[i]t has been a long time since I last read that word, but even its shape fills me with dread" (*Divergent* 17). The government is formed by only Abnegation members, something which is perhaps undemocratic but which, fortunately, does not resemble Panem's political oppression. Governmental power is given "to those who do not want it" rather than to those who will always "live in terror of losing it"

(68). Furthermore, Roth's society does not have a currency and the Abnegation government equally divides all goods among the factions, thus there is relatively little inequality or dissatisfaction among the factions. Moreover, the city is surrounded by a conspicuous fence, something which no one seems very much bothered about but which clearly recalls the districts' division in Panem. The dystopian elements are subtle but nonetheless there, and, clearly, the faction system ultimately suppresses its inhabitants by limiting them in self-expression and free movement.

Those relatively few people who are 'Divergent,' for instance, are stealthily persecuted in the trilogy because they cannot adhere to one standard. Like Foucault's explanation that "those who escape a system of norms" are often incarcerated (Downing 82), the Divergent are hunted down because they elude categorizations and are thus potentially dangerous. With other important characters, protagonist Tris is one of these Divergent, and it is essential for her safety that she keep this knowledge a secret. Nonconformity, whether as a result of being Divergent or of being banished from one's faction, results in factionlessness – a life without community – or even death.

As in *The Hunger Games* there is surveillance in Roth's dystopia, although it is not as prevalent a theme. Tris, for instance, is not very conscious of this surveillance and only inadvertently mentions the "house log" (*Divergent* 23) of the Abnegation homes. Even this small measure influences Tris's behaviour: she prefers to wait outside until her brother comes home, or her father will discover that she returned home early after her aptitude test and will ask questions which she cannot afford to answer. Surveillance goes further than this, though. There are for example numerous hints that cameras or microphones are hidden in the Dauntless hallways. Both Tobias and Tris's mother for example carefully sweep the place before they discuss Tris's Divergence. Tris herself notices their caution but, naively, never suspects that she is being watched until she sees the Intelligence office of Dauntless from the

inside. Interestingly, a character from the outside world remarks in *Allegiant* that "[t]here aren't any microphones" (394) in the compound of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare because "[t]hey don't really do that here" (394). This bureau is the organization behind the social experiment of Tris's Chicago, and implicit in this comment is that there *is* surveillance *within* the city, monitored first by Dauntless security and, without anyone's knowledge, by the Bureau which thus acts like an omniscient entity which exercises total control over its experiment. Evidently, surveillance in Roth's trilogy is present, but it is not a problem of which the inhabitants are conscious and which decidedly affects their conduct.

Particularly dystopian and pervasive throughout the trilogy are the various simulations and the non-reality which they represent. In *Divergent*, Tris is immediately confronted with a simulation serum, "a vial of clear liquid" (13), which is used during the aptitude test. Unlike most, Tris is aware during these simulations which test her choices; she realizes that her fears are "irrational" because it is "just a test" (17). These simulations are only a meek version, however, and it is the orange, "more advanced version of the simulation" (231) used during Dauntless training which enables the simulation that turns all Dauntless members – except the Divergent – into sleepwalking soldiers for Erudite. Although the Dauntless simulations are actual imitations of real-world situations in which the participants must confront their fears, the exaggerated aspect to it makes it seem like a nightmare, realistically impossible or at least illogical. In a way, therefore, the Dauntless simulations bring to mind Baudrillard's second-order simulations, representations which, unlike third-order simulations, still bear relation to reality (Lane 86). Moreover, the simulations misrepresent and distort reality like those representations in the second stage of straying into emptiness (Barry 84). The crows in one of Tris's fear simulations, for instance, are too manifold and carnivorous to represent any real-life situation. Moreover, in real-life Tris would not have been stuck to the ground, although running away would have been un-Dauntless. Significantly, such simulations can only be

manipulated and altered by the Divergent, because only they can accurately discern between reality and the mere appearance of reality.

Besides the simulation serum, there are other serums which are used for faction-specific purposes:

"Every faction has a serum," Johanna says. "The Dauntless serum gives hallucinated realities, Candor's gives the truth, Amity's gives peace, Erudite's gives death—" At this, Tris visibly shudders, but Johanna continues as if it didn't happen. "And Abnegation's resets memory." (*Allegiant* 99-100)

Amity's "bright green" (*Insurgent* 59) serum is clearly the most innocent and is used to induce a happy and peaceful state of mind in people who "have trouble keeping the peace" (57), something which is clearly reminiscent of the tranquilizing drug *soma* used in *Brave New World*. Candor's truth serum is already more invasive, forcing the truth and even one's deepest secrets to the surface for all to see. Tris initially views Candor's use of it as "cruel" (137) because it takes away the freedom to decide whether to divulge or not; Tris wants "to be in control of [her] own mind" (*Divergent* 371). Ultimately, both the Amity and Candor serums are used to influence people's minds and wills in order to generate certain behavioral patterns which accord with faction characteristics. More dangerous and invasive still are the serums occasionally used by Abnegation and Erudite. The memory serum is not technically used by Abnegation but is appropriated to them because they control the government and thus the population's (lack of) knowledge of the outside world. Instead, Amity uses it on "anyone who goes out past the limit" (*Allegiant* 100) or the overarching Bureau of Genetic Welfare employ it for a "mass reset" (376) of the urban experiments if they are threatened by too much conflict, thus erasing everyone's identities. In Tris's attempt to stop the Bureau from

"trad[ing] thousands of [Genetically Damaged] memories – lives – for control of the experiments" (378), she must confront Erudite's death serum, which is "practically unstoppable" (395) in aerosol form. Tris manages to conquer it, though, powered by sheer determination to live and succeed. Clearly, these final serums are the most dangerous because both enable the powerful to play God by distributing death and altering identities at will.

Ultimately, however, everything that marks Roth's trilogy as dystopian comes back to the faction system, which divides society and limits identity formation. Nevertheless, the trilogy never truly denounces the faction system as something inherently negative. It remains unclear if Roth really wants to condemn this categorization – which is not particularly fruitful for individuality and identity formation. Rather, she appears to allow its potential. Balaka Basu, in one of the few critical essays on *Divergent*, argues that the benefits of categorizing people into easily defined, "pre-existing identity type[s]" is "subtly endorsed" throughout Roth's trilogy (Basu 20). She writes that "Roth appears to want to indicate that ... classification into categories is itself problematic," but both the narrative and the marketing of the trilogy "continue to offer the promise of categorization to the novel's readers, a promise that they render eminently desirable" (Basu 24). True, the heroes of the story – the Divergent – are those who are above categorization, but even they do not all want to abolish the faction system altogether. Tris in particular fears that her identity will become even more muddled if there was no longer any faction to which she can belong. Moreover, there is a continual sense that this society used to be functional and, once the "correctable corruption" (Basu 20) has been addressed, could prosper again.

However, as Julia Karr argues, the factions divide rather than unite society and create prejudice and conflict. For example, Dauntless's initiation ritual intensifies competition and violence because "[t]he desperation" to become Dauntless rather than risk factionlessness drives some of Tris's fellow initiates to ruthlessness instead of courage (Karr 143). Moreover,

the lack of empathy and the common failure to "[respect] the strengths and differences" of other factions prove that the faction system, and therefore the entire Chicago experiment, has failed (Karr 147). The factions have relied too much on their own values, and have created conflict because they treat other values as inferior. Interestingly, *Allegiant* presents us with an equally divided outside world. The Genetically Damaged are clearly inferior to the Genetically Pure, who resemble the Divergent in the experiment (Karr 144). Thus the outside world society consists of a superior group's suppression of an inferior group, much like the suppression of the Divergent within the experiment. Without integration, inclusion and compassion for all, Karr argues, a society sharply divided into groups will inevitably fail (147). Thus, even though Roth's society appears to have utopian potential, its strict categorization makes it dystopian. The only way to make such a society manageable is when absolute faction allegiance and the permanence of one's decision are abolished and freedom of movement between factions is reinstated.

Conclusion

Collins's trilogy is clearly dystopian because it enhances and distorts current social, cultural and political issues. First, Panem is ruled by dictator Snow, who maintains his absolute control over the districts by constant surveillance, public punishments, and social division. In this society, people are stripped of rights which most readers will perhaps take for granted, such as freedom of movement, free speech, and democracy. The right to privacy, threatened even in our time because of public surveillance cameras and the internet, is almost completely eliminated in Panem. Panem's omnipresent surveillance, as in Bentham's panopticon, serves to maintain order and discipline in the districts. The trilogy even evokes worldwide social issues such as poverty, starvation, and inequality. Finally, with the Hunger Games themselves Collins critiques the negative influence of media and mass culture; not only do reality

television shows desensitize people to real-life suffering, but they also shift value to a constructed reality. Capitol citizens have become desensitized to the real violence inflicted on children in the Games and to the deprivations in the districts, although they likely do not even know what happens there. Unlike the district's population, they are not aware of their own oppression.

Similarly, the citizens in the Chicago experiment are completely unaware of being oppressed, or being limited by the dystopian faction system. Even to Tris, the faction system is so familiar that it is initially inconceivable to her to try and change it. Most people are not Divergent and thus do not struggle with trying to belong somewhere as much as she does, and hardly anyone even questions the principle of 'faction before blood.' To be fair, this society is not as corrupted as Panem, and most citizens are reasonably well-off. Although *Divergent* sees a cry for democracy – or rather for more luxury – everyone is taken care of by the Abnegation government and even the factionless get their (meagre) share. Most dystopian are the extreme limitations resulting from the faction system, both regarding identity development and freedom of speech and movement, as well as the invasive simulations used throughout the books. Nevertheless, ambiguous feelings remain because the faction system, with its categorization and communal identity, appeals, even comforts. Ultimately, it is probably easier to follow predetermined paths in life than follow one's own conflicted hopes and dreams.

2. Real or Not Real? Katniss's Gender Performances and the Deception of Appearances in *The Hunger Games*

Introduction

One of the descriptors Pharr and Clark give *The Hunger Games* in their introduction to an essay collection on Collins's trilogy is that it is "an identity novel that is compellingly ambivalent about gender roles" (9). Certainly, Collins's protagonist Katniss Everdeen defies traditional gender norms: she is "a contemporary female protagonist" (Pharr and Clark 12) who is unwilling to play the role of feminine celebrity for the Capitol's sake, and feels more comfortable with the role of survivor and provider of her family. In district 12, one of the (poorest) districts of Panem, gender is virtually erased because it is of little importance. Similarly, in the arena of the annual Hunger Games in which Katniss must participate after volunteering in place of her twelve-year-old sister Prim, gender is erased because it is ultimately all about survival. In the Capitol, however, gender performance is very important, and during her time in front of the cameras, Katniss must perform both femininity and heterosexuality, two roles she is unfamiliar with but which are essential to her survival. As a result of performing these acts, Katniss has difficulty negotiating her own identity of "expertise and skill" with the Capitol's expectations of femininity. This chapter will argue that Katniss's various performances, forced upon her by the Capitol's expectations of traditional femininity and heterosexuality, help her sort out the various parts of her and how these performances allow her to subvert authority by pretending to conform but in reality defying all such norms. In the end, Katniss even transcends such roles by agreeing to be the Mockingjay, a gender-less symbol of the rebellion and a creature which is not supposed to exist at all.

2.1. Katniss in a Dystopian Society

In the books everything is written from sixteen-year-old Katniss's perspective; we see only what she sees, and we know only what little Katniss herself knows. As a result, we see only her take on Panem's socio-political situation. Katniss is very aware of the Capitol's threat of constant surveillance, something which Collins emphasizes in the beginning of the first book. Feeling continuously watched, the people in the districts, like the inmates in the panopticon, alter their behaviour and will be less likely of disobedience. Although district 12, particularly Katniss's neighbourhood the Seam, is much less subject to the Capitol's scrutiny than larger districts, Katniss nevertheless always fears being overheard. Interestingly, she is indeed watched and overheard by readers, something which emphasizes our own delight in voyeurism and the sinister aspects of this gaze. For this reason, Katniss and Gale only voice dissent while they are beyond the fence, but even here safety is an illusion: President Snow reveals in *Catching Fire* to even have eyes even beyond the electrified fence. This revelation deeply disturbs Katniss, only making her more suspicious and paranoid: how long has surveillance been there? Where will surveillance – and thus the Capitol's hold – end? Such questions are important to Katniss's characterization as well as her decision to become the symbolic Mockingjay and lead the districts into a rebellion.

As a result of the Capitol's regime, Katniss has internalized the national mentality of distrust and suspicion. Growing up under the threat of constant surveillance, Katniss learned to keep her thoughts to herself, fearing for her own safety and that of her family if her criticism were to be overheard. She "learned to hold [her] tongue and to turn [her] features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read [her] thoughts" (*Hunger* 6), making her mind the only safe place left untouched by the Capitol. Furthermore, she is naturally suspicious of others and does not easily let her guard down. For this reason, she has only one friend, Gale Hawthorne, who is simultaneously a love interest. She has trouble trusting her

fellow tribute Peeta Mellark until they find themselves dependent on each other in the arena, and she does not trust their allies in the arena of the second Games until the rebel plot - which plans to extract Katniss and Peeta from the arena – is revealed. Unlike Peeta, Katniss tends to assume the worst rather than best in people. However, Katniss develops from being primarily motivated by self-preservation to being increasingly motivated by a greater purpose. Her initial self-interest and distrust, as well as her independence and survival skills, however, prove that Katniss has internalized the districts' mentality of distrust and suspicion, something which both makes her a strong survivor, but which also makes it difficult for her to trust and form relationships with other people.

2.2. Games of Pretend and Performance

2.2.1. Katniss's Gender Identity

In a number of ways, Katniss's gender is androgynous (Lem and Hassel 122, Pulliam 176) because she performs both traditional masculine and feminine roles. Katniss, Green-Barteet argues, actually represents the gender norms of masculinity more than those of femininity (37). As a female protagonist, her masculine qualities make her both a strong, identifiable character as well a potential victor of the Games. Most importantly, she is the provider of the family, illegally hunting for game in the woods beyond her district's fence, and she is even a semi-parent to her sister Prim. Prim's wellbeing and survival are Katniss's "single most powerful motivating force" (Mitchell 131). Not only does Katniss show maternal instinct towards her sister, as evident from her offer to volunteer as tribute instead of Prim, but she "becomes both mother and father to Prim," essentially filling both voids which her father's death and "her mother's disengagement with life" left in the family (131). Because she is the main provider, Katniss's greatest concern while competing in the Hunger Games is about her family's survival:

> What are they doing now, my mother and Prim? Were they able to eat supper? ...
>
> Is my mother holding up, being strong for Prim? Or has she already started to slip
>
> away, leaving the weight of the world on my sister's fragile shoulders? (*Hunger*
>
> 53)

Katniss frequently wonders how her mother and Prim are getting on without her, especially in the beginning of the Games when the instinct for self-preservation has not yet taken over.

During the Games, too, Katniss's fluidity of gender is her strength. Her admiration for weapons, especially bows, illustrate that self-preservation is one of her primary concerns: "I've been itching to get my hands on them for days" (*Hunger* 101), Katniss thinks as she spots the weapons in the Capitol's archery station. Not only is she very attached to her father's old bow at home, but she is also impressed by the craftsmanship and advanced technology of those provided in the Training Center. Furthermore, typical of Katniss is her emotionlessness and unwillingness to publicly show vulnerability (Lem and Hassel 122). For this reason, she refrains from crying after having volunteered as tribute because tears will make her "an easy target. A weakling" (*Hunger* 23). She furthermore "remains emotionally detached throughout much of the narrative" and, whenever emotion does seep through, it is generally anger instead of sadness (Lem and Hassel 122-123). Moreover, she frequently looks at herself critically as if she is watching from an outsider's perspective, clearly the result of her awareness of surveillance. In sum, her ability to perform various genders and her blurring of the gender boundaries is Katniss's power (Mitchell 129) because it enables her to survive in the wilderness of the first arena, and to become a potential victor by playing along with the "showmance" (Henthorne 101) between her and Peeta.

According to Jennifer Mitchell, Katniss is probably the most fluid character in the trilogy, "constantly shifting gender identity" between playing various roles (128), but Peeta's

gender is similarly complicated. As the baker's son who decorates the cakes, he is not as good a survivor as Katniss and cannot exactly provide for himself, but at the same time he is physically able. Moreover, he presents himself as "identifiably male" and, consequently, Katniss as "identifiably female" when he openly reveals his crush on her (Mitchell 133). Although Katniss initially looks after a wounded Peeta in the arena, they just as easily change roles when Katniss is hurt (133). A significant difference between the two is that Peeta is concerned with preserving his identity and morals, whereas Katniss's main instinct is one of self-preservation, something which returns in the final moments of the Game. After the Gamemakers revoke their rule change of allowing two victors, Katniss's first instinct is to kill Peeta in order to win: "[b]efore I am even aware of my actions, my bow is loaded with the arrow pointed straight at his heart" (*Hunger* 343). In contrast, Peeta has already dropped his knife, "illustrating his purpose as the book's moral center" (Lem and Hassel 123). Nevertheless, Katniss's self-preservation is crucial because it enables her and Peeta to survive two Games. Furthermore, because Collins "defies gender segregation in her story" (Lem and Hassel 121), her trilogy appeals to both a female and a male audience, something which Lem and Hassel remark is significant because so many things, from toys to books, have been traditionally gendered from childhood (118-121). Similarly, her trilogy defies genre norms, combining coming-of-age elements with traditionally gendered themes such as romance, war, and adventure. Katniss's muddled gender is thus an asset to the trilogy, making her a strong protagonist identifiable to a varied audience.

As Simone de Beauvoir once wrote, "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (273), and femininity is something taught and learnt during childhood and puberty. It is like a "vocation" (274), a full-time job which requires study and education provided by society. Katniss, too, was not born *feminine*, and instead learned the tricks while under dire circumstances. Her gender performance during the Games is crucial to her survival, but it is

not something that comes naturally to her. Judith Butler is famous for considering gender

(roles) only a performance, rather than something inherent to woman. She argues that those

performances occur according to enigmatic but collective agreements on what the construct of

gender constitutes, and those who "fail to do their gender right" are punished for their

nonconformity (190). Katniss is transformed to look more feminine, and is encouraged to act

this part during pre-Games interviews because the Capitol audience expects femininity from

her and will not identify with her if she rejects this performance. She must act according to "a

set of meanings already socially established" (Butler 191). The Katniss loved so much by the

public is only a performance of her identity. She must perform proper gender roles to appeal

to the public and prevent being punished for nonconformity.

2.2.2. Role-Playing Gender, Performing Femininity

This performance of femininity, of romance, and of an altogether different identity becomes

Katniss's greatest challenge as well as asset throughout the trilogy. She already knows how to

be a survivor and provider, but she is not yet skilled at making herself likeable and

identifiable for an audience which expects a stereotypical character embodying both

femininity and strength. For this reason, Katniss is encouraged by her stylist Cinna and her

mentor Haymitch to take on a persona, an artificial identity. This kind of 'self-branding'

strategically uses images and performances to project a "desired impression which will be

consumed and affected by external others" (Chen 334-335), something which is doubtlessly

familiar to the 'facebook generation' to which most of Collins's readers belong. Katniss's

constructed public persona will be consumed by the audience, and is a marketing technique

(334) which will make her identifiable and which will win her public support and sponsors.

Before they are publicly presented for the first time, the tributes are sent to the Remake

Center for a thorough makeover. Katniss is subjected to a bodily transformation which makes

her feel "like a plucked bird, ready for roasting" (*Hunger* 61) and, as a result, "intensely vulnerable" (62). Her body is transformed to what is sardonically called 'Beauty Base Zero,' an idealized feminine look which comforts an audience not used to rough bodies. Lem and Hassel argue that the makeover is "a critical part of making Katniss into a compliant participant" (124) in the Games. She must be re-made into "a feminine character both physically and behavorially" (124) in order to be identifiable for the audience. The makeovers serve to both repress Katniss's true self, making her appear "compliant and yielding rather than tough and implacable" (Pulliam 175), and to make each tribute "legible" for an audience (Mitchell 136) which responds to traditional gender performances. For this reason, too, the Gamemakers "attempt to surgically alter Katniss with breast implants" because she has become "far too thin and angular to be palatable to audiences" after the Games (Mitchell 136). Naturally, the Games have left their mark on Katniss's body. She is only reprieved from having it permanently altered without her consent because Haymitch negotiated for her to wear padding instead. Ultimately, after all, the "charade of femininity is for the benefit of the audience" (Mitchell 137), and without permanent alterations Katniss can theoretically walk away from the whole performance once she is done with the Games. Katniss is allowed, even forced by circumstances, to be strong and masculine in her own district and within the masculine area of the arena, but during interviews and other public appearances Katniss must present herself as "normatively feminine" (Pulliam 174).

In a way, the shocking make-over(s) can be viewed as a rite of passage which forces Katniss into a role without her being capable of rejecting this role. She is forced to act her part – a mixed identity of survivor, feminine tribute and heterosexual lover – in the adult's world which will decide whether she lives or dies. However, although the make-overs and Katniss's entry into the manipulative world of the Capitol force her to perform adulthood, the Capitol does not want its subjects to become truly autonomous individuals. As Green-Barteet writes,

they "need their citizens to remain in an extended state of childhood" if they want to maintain their level of absolute control (36). By forcing children to compete in the Games, though, the Capitol simultaneously forces these children to take on adult roles. In contrast to contemporary Western culture, children in Panem's districts are not granted a moratorium (Kroger 13) which allows them to prepare for adulthood without immediately having to shoulder the responsibilities that accompany it. Poverty and participation in the Games force children into adult roles from an early age without having a chance to freely develop their identities. At the age of twelve, circumstances compel Katniss into the role of breadwinner, including breaking the law by crossing the fence and illegally hunting for game. The make-overs similarly force Katniss into a role of femininity which she cannot reject because her own survival depends on it. Besides participating in the killings of the Games, she must participate in the Capitol's expectations of normative gender performances, thus she, like the inmates, essentially becomes the tool of her own subjection (Pulliam 173).

Clearly, tributes are presented as commodities of the Capitol's consumer culture, with merchandise based on them and fans demanding more of them. The Capitol literally demands children as "consumer item[s]," defined by audience demand (Tan 61) and supplied by the suppressed districts. Because the audience's primary focus is on (the appearance of) their bodies, teenage children of both genders are sexualized. Their real identities do not matter, but their bodies and matching performances do. Female tributes in particular are sexualized; their femininity and body emphasized according to stereotypical gender norms. The female tribute from District 1, for instance, is dressed "provocative[ly] in a see-through gold gown" (*Hunger* 125) which emphasizes her curves and thus presents her as primarily a sexual object. This reminds of the Capitol's eagerness to feminize Katniss by removing excessive hair and even attempting to surgically alter her. Both examples show that the Capitol desires beauty above all, and Katniss recognizes that therefore beauty – thus the sexualization and objectification of

in particular female contestants – is a means of gaining sponsors. "[W]omen are debased and depicted as sexual objects" (Berger 56) in the Capitol's extreme consumer culture. Beauty and the appearance of beauty – whether deceptive or not – is extremely important, and so is the appearance of femininity in pre-Games presentations.

Katniss must adhere to the Capitol's expectations of femininity and (feminine) beauty, and moreover must negotiate her place in an environment all about spectacle, public performances and appearances. The costumes designed by Cinna are significant because they provide Katniss with various, consciously chosen images which she can quite literally *wear* in public. She will always be remembered as "the girl who was on fire" (*Hunger* 67), both literally because her dress was put ablaze with artificial fire during her first public appearance, and figuratively because her image and actions within the Games eventually spark the second rebellion. Cinna is very aware of the audience's expectations and uses his costumes to create "different feminine images" which Katniss "wear[s] before the crowd, each designed to excite, tease, or charm" (DeaVault 194), depending on the (political) situation. Moreover, the outfits, like fashion in contemporary culture, become "a vehicle through which Katniss can become a different person; they are, above all, costumes that reveal alternative Katnisses" (Mitchell 136), each masks behind which Katniss can hide. Her first dresses are for instance meant to make her stand out from the crowd of tributes and to make her appealing to the public. After Katniss's "stunt with the berries" (*Hunger* 372), however, Cinna's strategy changes to convincing the government that she was not being rebellious but acted out of desperation and love:

> I look, very simply, like a girl. A young one. Fourteen at the most. Innocent.
> Harmless. Yes, it is shocking that Cinna has pulled this off when you remember
> I've just won the Games. This is a very calculated look. Nothing Cinna designs is

arbitrary. ... Although I do not yet understand Cinna's design, it's a reminder the

Games are not quite finished. (*Hunger* 355)

Cinna has clearly very consciously picked this outfit for Katniss's post-Games interview. Its purpose is to emphasize Katniss's innocence instead of her defiance, and to continue the 'showmance' narrative. Katniss understands that Cinna's designs are never randomly chosen and realizes that although she and Peeta have won, the Games and their respective performances are far from finished. Katniss must continue to wear her femininity and the corresponding persona in order to maintain public support and keep herself, Peeta and their families safe.

Katniss's comprehension of the Games as a media spectacle all about appearances enables her to manipulate the Games by performing an act of conformity. Dereck Coatney compares Katniss to Rousseau's 'natural' person, someone who "hasn't been entirely tainted by civilization's fall into a state of corruption" (182), who has a clear sense of self-preservation (181), and who is ultimately authentic. For this reason, Katniss initially resents playing along with the Capitol's expectations, feeling that she betrays her true self and that, by giving the audience what they want, she becomes an accomplice to the Capitol's crimes. However, having watched the Games her whole life, Katniss understands very well that "what matters to those who come for the show isn't *being*, but *seeming*" (Coatney 179), and accepts that she must perform in order to survive. While she is in the Capitol, and while she is a tribute in the Games, she can never let her guard down. The only time when she feels somewhat like herself is when she is allowed to wear simple clothes without much ado in training: "I resemble myself" (*Hunger* 86), she thinks, which is significant because, as before, it shows her emotional detachment. It is as if she views herself from a distance, not really being present yet at the same time of course inhabiting her own body. Katniss's sense of self

is divided; all her different identity performances confuse her. This idea of 'resembling herself' moreover shows that Katniss feels that she is *performing* herself instead of *being* herself. Already, she is in danger of losing herself to the act, becoming the act, as it were. This quote indicates that Katniss consists of various layers. There are her various public faces, her private identity which is known only by those closest to her, and then there is apparently a layer in between which does not rely on active performance of a constructed identity but which Katniss does not consider her 'true' self either.

Although she resents her performances, Katniss temporarily loses herself in the persona which Cinna and Haymitch have created for her. Henthorne writes that "for a time Katniss herself gets caught up in the excitement of her transformation" (100), feeling not just beautiful but "as radiant as the sun" (*Hunger* 121) while wearing Cinna's dress "covered in reflective precious gems" (120). In this mirror-moment Katniss recognizes the potential of her mask, but at the same time knows that her sexualization is ultimately "oppressive rather than empowering since it reinforces a system that reserves agency for men" (Henthorne 100). It is therefore significant that this public mask was created *for* her, without her consent and agency. Haymitch and Peeta devise the 'showmance' strategy which makes Katniss an identifiable teenage girl loved by a boy, and Cinna and his team take care of Katniss's various public appearances. Thus, the men in her life are responsible for crafting this "feminine persona" (DeaVault 194) just as it is the 'heteronormative,' patriarchal gaze of the Capitol audience which requires Katniss to be feminine and beautiful if she expects to be sponsored.

2.2.3. Pretending the 'Showmance'

Besides acting femininity, Katniss must eventually play the part of lover in the strategic 'showmance' between her and Peeta. Already during pre-Games events, they are constantly presented as a team, a tactic which Katniss is initially wary of, but which is a novelty for the

Capitol. Therefore, Katniss and Peeta are instantly on the audience's radar. Holding hands during the opening ceremony and "[p]resenting ourselves not as adversaries but as friends has distinguished us as much as the fiery costumes," Katniss reasons (*Hunger* 79). Everything, from public appearances to behaviour in training is part of their Games-act. The Games are a stage, and each tribute and everyone related to them are actors. Haymitch instructs Katniss and Peeta to "play" (79) the training session as friends, wearing identical outfits and remaining "by each other's side every minute" (92). However, Katniss never entirely lets her guard down around Peeta. The whole act is "messing with my mind too much," she thinks just before she tells him she does not want to pretend "when there's no one around" (100). Public appearances and private feelings become increasingly muddled and Katniss has difficulty making sense of Peeta and her feelings toward him.

The romance is initially wholly strategic, an act to win the public's attention, sympathy, and support. Tom Henthorne aptly describes their relationship as a "showmance" (101), something that will make them popular because it is unique and dramatic. Peeta's declaration of love on live television is what really makes him and Katniss popular with the audience, and it furthermore makes Katniss an identifiable female tribute-character who can potentially win the narrative of the Games. Their tragic romance rather than the glamour or physical potential of other tributes wins the hearts of the Capitol viewers. Furthermore, it makes this year's Hunger Games extra dramatic: two young lovers whose relationship is doomed because only one can survive the Games is of course a very entertaining premise. Clearly, the showmance, the appearance and performance of true love, touches the Capitol audience so much that it becomes "the Games' primary narrative" (Henthorne 102).

Katniss, too, realizes the showmance's potential for her own survival. She finds that she gains more sympathy by playing the heterosexual lover than if she continues playing the cool survivor. This latter performance works well for her early in the Games because it shows

sponsors that she is self-sufficient and independent, qualities which make her a promising candidate. However, Katniss anticipates the audience's restlessness when the days run on and nothing happens between her and Peeta, and she manipulates them by trying to appear more knowledgeable of Peeta's involvement with the Career Tributes from districts one, two and four, than she actually is. She reflects that "I'd better at least act on top of things," and for this reason she gives a "knowing smile," giving the cameras enough time to "lock on [her]" (*Hunger* 164). Katniss is aware both of the audience's need to be entertained – their ignorance regarding her mysterious smile will keep them speculating and thus entertained – and of how the arena and its hidden cameras work. Being "Panem's sweetheart ... allows her to subvert authority more effectively than she could as the more masculine Katniss the Huntress" (Pulliam 178). Thus, Katniss rebels by only *appearing* to conform: that is, Katniss gains the necessary popularity to eventually lead the nation into rebellion by taking on roles in accordance with the Capitol's traditional gender norms.

The Capitol's extreme investment with this 'showmance' of course immediately brings up our own mass interest in Hollywood romances. Many people eagerly browse through (online) tabloids in search of the latest drama on celebrity couples. Like the Capitol citizens, many of us are equally complicit in the superficiality of mass media. What the viewing public demands is what they will get, whether this is artificial, exaggerated romance or realistic violence. As Collins seems to want to argue, we are as much at risk of becoming desensitized to real-life horror and violence as the Capitol citizens already are.

2.3. Becoming the Mockingjay

2.3.1. Acts of Defiance

As Green-Barteet argues, Katniss performs various rebellious acts in defiance of the Capitol, which underline her coming-of-age in an oppressive society (34). Having seen obligatory

Hunger Games broadcasts her entire life, Katniss knows how they work and how the

Gamemakers operate, and uses this knowledge to her advantage. She knows that the cameras

will be attracted to the most exciting scene, which will be broadcast live. A first act of

defiance is her covering her ally Rue, who had just been killed and who reminds her so much

of Prim, in wildflowers and using district 12's sign of solidarity – which has transcended its

original meaning – on live-camera. Her second act is the direct result of the Gamemakers'

own manipulation of the game. When the earlier rule change allowing two tributes from the

same district to win is revoked within minutes of its actual occurrence, Katniss defeats the

Gamemakers at their own game by threatening a double suicide. She can no longer kill Peeta

because she has grown to care about him, and she wants to protect him as she wants to protect

her family. The Gamemakers "have to have a victor" or "the whole thing would blow up in

the Gamemakers' faces" (*Hunger* 344) and she manipulates them into allowing them both to

live rather than having no victor at all. After all, "a double suicide would subvert the

ideological purpose of the Games, which is to dramatize the government's absolute power

over its citizens" (Henthorne 102). If they can walk away from this power and arrange their

own deaths, why could others not do the same?

Furthermore, her decision to save Peeta at all cost in the Quarter Quell in *Catching Fire*

constitutes a transition for Katniss. She moves away from her (naive) self-interest to a more

selfless concern for the lives of others – Peeta as well as the entire nation. According to

Green-Barteet, this decision "is the most consciously rebellious action she undertakes in the

first two books of the series" (42) because it is in *Catching Fire* that she starts to realize her

potential effect on the districts. Although her first reaction after the announcement that "the

male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors" (*Catching* 172)

concerns her own desperation, it is proof of her development that she forces herself to think of

Haymitch and Peeta. Moreover, she can now stop the acts and "live what remains of her life

on her own terms" (Green-Barteet 42). Saving Peeta and further inciting the rebellion become her focus points in her second Games, and both decisions form a starting point for her decision to become the symbolic Mockingjay and start the war with the Capitol.

2.3.2. Transcending Norms of Gender and Sexuality

Collins's entire trilogy, Henthorne argues, tends to "defamiliarize gender" by "call[ing] into question the very practice of identifying people as male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual" (54). Katniss never really belongs in any category at all, being neither feminine nor entirely masculine and resisting the patriarchally imposed heterosexuality – enforced by the audience's expectations of traditional gender roles – by refusing to choose between Gale and Peeta. She transcends categorizations, "becom[ing] post-gender, as it were" (Henthorne 55). Her characterization reflects a larger cultural trend in which everything regarding gender – and even biological sex – is contended. In a way, Katniss can be considered Divergent because she literally diverges from gender norms. Thus, Collins not only queers Katniss and Peeta by characterizing them as nonconforming, but through them also criticizes Panem's patriarchal heteronormativity. Katniss has resisted Panem's patriarchal oppression which forces her to publicly perform femininity and choose a partner. Although the conclusion may come across as somewhat traditional because Katniss does end up married with children, Collins emphasizes that this happened only because Katniss actively participated in changing her political situation and allow this future for herself.

Significantly, the trilogy's conclusion, with the establishment of a new regime, correlates almost exactly with Katniss accepting her place in this new society. Throughout *Mockingjay*, Katniss and her image have been used to further the rebel interests, just like she had previously been used by Snow to soothe the rallying districts. Her role as Mockingjay has

literally been laid out for her with costumes, scripts and entire film sets erected to show her in the midst of fictitious action without putting her in actual danger. She must once again perform an act, and this time not only her fate is at stake: the entire revolution and Panem's future "will rest on her ability to turn in a series of convincing, if not entirely genuine, performances" (Coatney 179). However, as her directors soon discover, Katniss performs best when she is out in the field, confronted with real danger, and "forgets that she is in costume" and on camera (Henthorne 55). Through her integrity she convinces the rebelling districts of their cause and helps them overthrow Snow and install a new government. She herself, however, remains a pawn, this time in the hands of district 13's President Coin, leader of the second rebellion who, as it turns out, will not be very different from Snow.

In a way, Katniss is somewhat like a Marxist heroine "whose actions show how people are being exploited and how the masses are given a false consciousness of their state and possibilities by bourgeois ideology" (Berger 46-47). Volunteering to take her sister's place was her first sympathetic act, and her loyalty to Rue inspires district 11 to show her their support, an act of defiance itself because it opposes the Capitol's intention of keeping the districts completely divided. In *Catching Fire*, Katniss even inspires all twenty-four victor-tributes to hold and raise hands in "what must be the first public show of unity among the districts since the Dark Days" (258). Moreover, district 11 uses the district 12 gesture of respect when Katniss and Peeta visit them on their Victory Tour, thus further inciting the spark of rebellion. Finally, both her attempted double suicide and sending an arrow into the Quarter Quell arena's force field were open acts of defiance. It is Katniss who first reveals to the districts that they must unite and fight. Although Katniss does not exactly "overthrow the class system" (Berger 47), something which is perhaps more applicable to Tris Prior, she is nevertheless the instigator of the rebellion which eventually ends an oppressive government, and which leads to a hopefully better political situation for Panem.

Exactly like the genetically modified jabberjay species which survived in the wild against all odds and became the mockingjay, Katniss comes to represent "something that should not be – something that is able to resist where resistance is impossible" (Henthorne 55). Transcending traditional categorizations in her symbolic Mockingjay role, Katniss saves her world and "finally takes full ownership of her image and performance" (DeaVault 197). Like the current 'facebook generation' which uses social media to 'brand' themselves, Katniss has taken control of her image and performance, thus taking the American notion of self-made identity and success to a new level. She has changed her world for the better and, even after all her personal losses, she has emerged victorious. Throughout *Mockingjay*, Katniss has fought for her agency. After being used by Coin – who initially appeared to be Snow's opposite, in gender and in principles, but who turned out to be equally power-hungry – as pawn once more, she takes matters into her own hands by going on a covert mission to assassinate Snow. Although this fails, Katniss recognizes Coin as the next evil and killing *her* with one symbolic arrow instead of Snow was Katniss's own choice, her final move to permanently end governmental oppression. Although scarred for life, Katniss ends the trilogy as she began it, by being herself, still existing against all odds.

2.4. Real or Not Real? Appearance versus Reality

Panem's entire patriarchal, oppressive, and heteronormative society rests on various forms of manipulation and deception, hiding reality behind appearances which makes it difficult to know what is real and what is not. Panem's culture of providing the nation with "false appearances and duplicity" (Coatney 180) serves to keep them ignorant of living under total governmental control, constant surveillance, and suffering poverty and starvation in the districts.

Interestingly, the film adaptation of *Catching Fire* (Lawrence, 2013) shows the constructedness of the Games, in particular the cinematic aspect of the 'showmance.' Leaving their houses to go on their Victory Tour, Katniss and Peeta's every move is followed by an unmanned camera-vehicle. Their manager Effie Trinket acts as director and instructs them to wear their smiles and acts and counts down for the cameras to go live. Katniss and Peeta have some difficulty getting back into their act, having virtually ignored each other all those quiet months without publicity. All of it, from the lighting to the make-overs, is obviously meant to emphasize the artificiality of the act. It is acting as if in a film, where decor, lighting and presentation are fundamental. Of course, the entire trilogy is ultimately all about film. As a screenwriter, Collins is familiar with the conventions of television and film, thus the media's omnipresent role and influence is not surprising. Even the war between the districts and the Capitol is essentially a battle over control of the airwaves, with the rebels using the media for propaganda purposes just as the Capitol had done before them.

According to a 2009 interview on the website BookPage, Collins says that she hopes her books will "encourage debate and questions"; they encourage readers to ask questions and be critical of false appearances and of their own society, inviting readers to recognize the media's potentially manipulative power. Katniss, coming from a district relatively ignored in terms of security because of its size and reputation, has developed "a degree of independent thinking that is unusual in the districts" (Margolis). As a result of relatively little surveillance, lenient Peacekeepers who mix with the population, and a fence which is rarely electrified, Katniss has developed skills that help her survive in the arena, and which allow her to think differently. Like the actual mockingjay bird, the Capitol never meant for someone like Katniss to happen.

The game that Katniss and Peeta play during the second half of *Mockingjay* called 'real or not real' is a particularly interesting example of the difficulty experienced by both Peeta

and Katniss to, after all that they have been through, differentiate between appearance and reality. Peeta has been tortured by the Capitol, which has overturned all his previous feelings and assumptions. He has quite literally been hijacked: his old identity is lost, and with Katniss's help he must separate the manipulation from the truth of his memories. This game sums up one of the series' main problems, which is the difficulty of differentiating between the perhaps glamorous appearance of reality, and the true, often ugly reality beneath. From the costumes, make-overs, artificial (gendered) identities, to hiding the real intention of the Games behind spectacle and drama which quenches the audience's thirst for entertainment – all are ultimately examples of the deceptive but, simultaneously, alluring power of appearances.

This dichotomy between illusion and reality recalls Baudrillard's ideas on simulations. He posits that, in our postmodern culture, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish "between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth" (Barry 84). Contemporary representations tend to no longer bear any relation to reality; the real is no longer any "part of the equation" (Lane 87). Baudrillard calls this form of representation the 'hyperreal,' "the real that is no longer real" (*Simulations*), such as the impossibility of honest and uncorrupted politics in his example of the Watergate scandal, or the rationality we expect to find in the real world, away from Disneyland. Both examples emphasizes that there is no truth beneath the representation; the 'cover-up' is all there is. Similarly, the Hunger Games are set up to conceal the fact that everything is a (media) game in Panem – politics, gender, entertainment – and moreover that everyone, from those in the districts for whom things could apparently be so much worse, to those privileged Capitol citizens who are made to believe that the Games are justified, is in fact oppressed by the Capitol. All glamorous spectacle and all acted identities present only artificiality which is not at all necessarily based on reality.

As Haymitch tells Katniss in the first book, "[i]t's all a big show. It's all how you're perceived" (*Hunger* 135). Reality is irrelevant while there are more interesting fictitious appearances to disguise it. Katniss may in reality be rather masculine and reject heterosexuality and motherhood because of her social position in district 12, but none of this matters because the Capitol sees what they want to see, which is what they *will* see because the Gamemakers make sure that the narrative of "[t]he star-crossed lovers from District Twelve" (135) continues. It is all about entertainment, and because reality is often not particularly entertaining, the Gamemakers manipulate the audience into perceiving the Games as a dramatic narrative filled with action and interesting characters. "[W]hat matters to those who come for the show isn't *being*, but *seeming*" (179), Derek Coatney writes. Tributes who can present themselves as recognizable (gendered) types (Henthorne 52) will more easily gain sponsors than those who, like Katniss, have difficulty altering the public's perception in their favour. Thus, it is vital that Katniss play her part before, during, and even after the Games, right.

In a way, of course, Katniss does *become* her act, her performance. The epilogue tells us that she and Peeta have married and that she has finally accepted motherhood, thus she has done just what she always swore not to. This conclusion appears somewhat traditional concerning gender and sexuality and received very mixed reactions from fans. Ultimately, though, the ending proves Katniss's strength because she kept on living, perhaps without ever really feeling alive again. She has been literally and figuratively scarred for life, but with Peeta she has found the stability necessary to continue living, even find happiness together and bring new life into a better world. During her adolescence, Katniss has tried out two very different gender performances, that of family provider who illegally hunts and that of feminine celebrity in love. What the trilogy ultimately shows is that these different

performances, albeit forced, have enabled her to reconcile the different parts of herself: in the

end, she is still a survivor and still a girl who is protective of those she loves.

3. 'Faction before blood': Tris's Journey towards Individuality in the *Divergent*-trilogy

Introduction

A major influence on the identity formation of Roth's protagonist Tris Prior is the faction system of Chicago's future urban society that is the basis of the "Divergent" trilogy. This system requires each sixteen-year-old to make an irreversible choice between one of the five factions, and demands full allegiance to faction over family. Within this strict categorization and social division, Tris must find her own individuality. Importantly, Tris is one of the Divergent, which means that she does not easily conform to one faction. She has equal aptitude for her parents' faction Abnegation as for her chosen faction Dauntless, and her decision to transfer to the latter is significant: she literally leaves behind family, friends and past in order to find herself in an alien environment with new situations and experiences and thus to discover, acknowledge and value her own particular strengths. Interestingly, these strengths reflect a combination of Abnegation and Dauntless values. Over the course of the trilogy, Tris must therefore reconcile her various identity elements, and discover what self-sacrifice really means. These two journeys, that of leaving the comfortable for the alien, and that of uniting family values and identity with individual preferences, are the overarching theme of the trilogy as well as the basis of Tris's identity formation. This chapter will argue that Tris's identity is very much shaped by the complete social division as a result of the faction system, but that she eventually transcends this categorization when she accepts her Divergence as a strength and becomes an active participant in taking down the faction system and ending the Bureau of Genetic Welfare's outside control, thus enabling a better and less limited future for her city's inhabitants.

3.1. Social Division According to Factions

3.1.1. The Faction System: Being Divergent and Becoming Factionless

Divergent's society is divided into five factions which all have specific characteristics, values, and even jobs. The factions are completely divided; there is hardly any overlap – even at schools, children of different factions rarely mix – and every faction takes care of its own business in order to collaborate on a larger level with the others. There are 'only' five factions because Roth considered this to be the most manageable without creating too much overlap ("Video Interview"). Thus, the factions reflect her chosen virtues for an experimental society, and the little overlap results in that complete social division which is so pervasive throughout the books. Each year a Choosing Ceremony takes place which enables the sixteen-year-olds to freely choose their future faction, allowing them to either stay with their family or to transfer and wholly abandon their past. The categorization according to factions is clearly important to the identity formation of protagonist Tris, and therefore it is also the most important aspect of the trilogy. Categorization starts from early childhood because everyone is instructed to behave and think a certain way, but nothing is yet permanent until the Ceremony. There is even an aptitude test which determines which faction suits the candidate best via a simulation. This test does not pose an obligation to choose what is indicated, but serves to help adolescents know themselves. The freedom to choose is perhaps surprising in a dystopian novel, but, as Tris critically reflects during her Ceremony, one can only choose "one of the five predetermined ways" (*Divergent* 42). Everything depends on society's rigid categorization and there is no faction for those who do not fit in anywhere.

    Divergent's social organization is an extreme version of the "division, segregation and separation of populations (whether in schools, prisons or the army) into manageable units where their energy can be deployed most effectively and obediently for productive and conformist ends" (Downing 84) which Foucault spoke of in *Discipline and Punish*. The

factions enable the city's leaders from within, and the Bureau of Genetic Welfare from an omniscient position without, to keep society in complete order. This division serves both an aim of efficiency – each faction has its own focus – and of conformity, because faction allegiance is considered most important. Nonconformity means either death – although this fact is not widely known – or factionlessness, a fate which is everyone's "worst fear" (*Divergent* 43). The factions ensure order and discipline by grouping all like-minded people together, which reminds of disciplinary institutions in the real world: both are essentially "techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities" (Foucault 218).

Perhaps not surprising, Roth's YA novel praises those who do not conform to the rigid categorization. These Divergent, among them Tris, literally diverge from standards of thought and behaviour. They are more prone to critical thinking and are thus not as easily controlled as most others, who are conditioned "to think and act a certain way" according to their faction (*Divergent* 441-42). Interestingly, both the main antagonist of the first two installments Jeanine Matthews and Tris's mother Natalie Prior remark that most Divergent come from Abnegation. Rather than being "weak-willed, God-fearing nobodies" (429), however, it requires a strong will to always be selfless and to be capable of manipulating simulations which are specifically designed to maintain a state of unawareness. Divergence is thus a strength and an asset that Tris eventually comes to accept as an integral part of her identity.

Besides being Divergent, another way of being outside of the system is to be(come) factionless, a fate universally feared. Tris desperately wants to belong somewhere and worries, even before her aptitude test results come back "inconclusive" (20), that she may not be cut out for any faction at all. Being factionless not only means to "live in poverty and discomfort" but to "live divorced from society, separated from the most important thing in life: community" (20). Community and belonging are the two most important concepts in *Divergent*'s society because "[w]ithout a faction, [one has] no purpose and no reason to live"

(20). The factions determine everything about life and are therefore indispensable. Tris even proclaims that she had rather "be dead than empty, like the factionless" (54). Unknown to the government is that by the time of *Insurgent*, the factionless have in fact established their own community. Rather than being an empty, unconnected mass of people, they have formed a community of people from different backgrounds, all equally committed to improving their situation. They have a joint purpose in forming a rather primitive society based on solidarity, equality and diversity. In a way, their society is more realistic because it reflects actual life better than the faction system's rigid categorization.

3.1.2. Freedom of Choice and 'Faction before Blood'

An interesting aspect of Tris's society is the principle of 'faction before blood,' the belief which ensures complete loyalty to the faction instead of to the family, therefore devaluing natural human bonds in order to form a stronger community. Relationships within the faction are regarded as more important than those within the family, and once a sixteen-year-old transfers, family ties must preferably be permanently severed. Before her Ceremony, Tris frequently reflects that "choosing a different factions means I forsake my family. Permanently" (*Divergent* 24). Transfers, moreover, are "not really supposed to discuss their old factions once they become members" because it is "supposed to make it easier for them to change their allegiance from family to faction" (201). One's new, chosen faction becomes one's new family, ensuring that faction loyalty remains the primary concern.

All the same, transferring is regarded as a "betrayal" (35) of blood, and there is no middle way. Tris's brother Caleb's transfer, for instance, is regarded by the Abnegation faction as a betrayal of their customs in preference of another's. Tris does not trust him for a while, judging him a "good actor" (53) whose "Abnegation tendencies were just Erudite traits in disguise" (114). She thinks of him as having deceived them all those years, whether

consciously or not. Interestingly, Tris does not think of herself in similar terms, likely because she always already felt she was not Abnegation material, unlike Caleb. To Tris, the Erudite have now "become [our] enemy" (46), and she interprets the "easy smile" worn by another transfer as "an act of betrayal" (49), clearly still aligning herself with the Abnegation and thinking from their point-of-view.

Transferring is thus a permanent choice between family and faction, something which can easily be re-phrased to choosing between one's old identity (past) and one's new identity (future). Both Tris and Caleb chose to transfer not to abandon their family, but to follow their hearts. Caleb puts it as a choice between thinking "of our family" and thinking "of ourselves" (36), an option foreign to the selfless Abnegation but sometimes necessary for identity formation. Tris's decision to join Dauntless is not an escape from the selflessness and rigidity of Abnegation, but a conscious, though impulsive decision to follow her own path in order to find out who she is. This way, the Ceremony can be interpreted as a rite of passage which forces adolescents to know themselves and to leave home, if necessary, for identity formation. Transferring is sometimes a necessary change, marking a new phase; thus the choosing of a faction is immensely important for the formation of the adolescent's identity.

3.1.3. Complete Social Division and Communal Identity

Everything in Tris's society is divided according to the factions, from public behaviour and dress code to housing and career options. Each faction's costume, in particular the colours, reflects the values and characteristics of the faction, and simultaneously binds and divides the people even more. Amity and Erudite are relatively liberal with their dress codes, allowing for some individuality as long as members dress in accordance with the faction's colours. The Amity are "dressed comfortably, in red or yellow" which suits their "kind, loving, free" (*Divergent* 42) attitude. They believe that aggression was the main fault of previous

civilizations, and their costume of warm colours reflects their distaste for violence and preference for nurture. Similarly, the Candor's slightly formal black and white clothing reflects their belief that "the truth [is] black and white" (3) and that dishonesty and manipulation must be ruled out at whatever cost. Significantly, their Choosing Ceremony bowl is filled with glass, which on the one hand represents the clarity and transparency of honesty and truth, but which can on the other hand simultaneously be viewed as an illusion, because even clear glass can reflect images in a deceptive light. In a way, this is a metaphor for all the factions: everyone lives under the illusion that their society can be upheld if they stick to categorization. Finally, the Erudite "faction norms dictate that a faction member must wear at least one blue article of clothing at a time" (348). This sentence emphasizes that there are in fact norms and rules that command a particular dress code.

Less liberal are the dress codes of Abnegation and Dauntless, which results in a homogeneity of people who resemble parts of the mass more than individuals. The Abnegation always dress in self-effacing, basic grey, and Tris's robes disguise her figure to deflect desire and passion, both of which are viewed as self-indulgent. Abnegation's grey costume allows for little individuality and makes its members insignificant, never standing out of the crowd. Tris notes that, while walking up the stairs towards the Ceremony with her family, "the three of us are engulfed in a mass of gray fabric" (39). The people around them are no longer individuals, but part of an Abnegation *mass*, a "uniform" entity, a "homogeneity" of people (39) reduced to being "gray fabric" only. Similarly, the Dauntless generally dress in all-black. When Tris first enters the Pit, she only sees people "all dressed in black, all shouting and talking, expressive, gesturing" (64), a complete contrast with the calm and humble Abnegation. Although both factions often seem homogenous, the Dauntless are never reduced to just their dress colour. It is always still "a stream of black-clothed, pierced *people*" (214, my emphasis). Even when the Dauntless are under the simulation at the end of

Divergent they are not mindless black clothes moving to Abnegation quarters, but "[a] sea of black-clothed soldiers" (423) and "[b]lack-clothed men and women" (480). In short, their personhood is preserved. Moreover, there is room for individuality in Dauntless. Tris initially dislikes that all the Dauntless are pierced and tattooed but she eventually recognizes that these alterations have the purpose of individual expression while still in agreement with the faction's reputation. Although she "never intended to get pierced or tattooed" (90) and feels uncomfortable with tight clothing, it is not long before she, too, caves. In Dauntless, then, there are still ways of self-expression, unlike in Abnegation, where their homogeneity reflects their distaste for extravagance and distinction, thus for individuality.

Besides dress and colour, "[f]action customs dictate even idle behavior and supersede individual preference" (9). Thus, even one's behaviour during the idle hours is supposed to be in accordance with what is 'dictated' by the faction. For this reason, the Dauntless must always show their bravery, even if it amounts to idiocy, and the Abnegation must always completely remove themselves from the picture, thinking only of others. The Candor are always honest, and the Amity are always kind-hearted, and of course the Erudite must adhere to a high standard of intelligence. As a mark of this intelligence some members wear glasses probably more for the symbolic function than actual usefulness: Tris remarks that Caleb's vision is "perfect" (351) and silently agrees with her father that Jeanine "probably wears the glasses out of vanity rather than necessity, because she thinks they make her look smarter" (427).

Finally, there are specific "faction jobs" (125), something which limits every member to a specific path in life. There is no workspace in which people from different factions cooperate and socialize because each faction takes care of their own particular jobs. Thus, the Abnegation take care of the government because they are the ones "regarded as incorruptible" (33) and provide the city with ideally "selfless leaders" (43). Candor focuses on justice and

law because they believe that the truth will always come out – with a little help of truth serum, of course. Those from Erudite can become teachers or researchers because they are preoccupied with research and passing on knowledge. Amity members are society's nurturers and, as the sole faction living outside of the fence, provide the city with food grown on farms and with "understanding counselors and caretakers" (43). Dauntless members, Tris tells us, have "limited options" (125) and can only specialize in fields related to security within and outside of the fence. The guards are tasked to protect the city from whatever is outside the fence, although according to Tris's friend Will this is a recent development (122). As instructor Tobias tells his initiates, guards do not have much hope of improvement, which is why it is a career generally set aside for those lowest-ranking. Tobias himself works for intelligence within the compound. He has eyes on all parts of the city to ensure everyone's safety, a measure which ominously reminds of Panem's surveillance culture. Dauntless's few career prospects reflect the faction's narrow mindset as a result of the new leadership, which focuses only on strength and leaves little room for "ordinary acts of bravery" (206).

Each faction therefore has a particular common identity. In the case of Tris's old faction Abnegation this entails their homogeneity. Besides all wearing grey, all Abnegation houses are "the same size and shape" (27). "Everything," Tris remarks, "our houses, our clothes, our hairstyles—is meant to help us forget ourselves and to protect us from vanity, greed, and envy, which are just forms of selfishness. If we have little, and want for little, and we are all equal, we envy no one" (27). The only adornment allowed is a watch for practical reasons, and the single mirror in each house is hidden "behind a sliding panel in the hallway upstairs" (1) because vanity, like individuality, is considered self-indulgent. Tris even notes how she and her neighbour are probably indistinguishable from each other to their classmates because, next to their similar nondescript clothes, they wear their blonde hair exactly the same (11). Abnegation children are expected to always remain at the sidelines of any public situation, so

they are not very noticeable at school. The Abnegation's total control over themselves reminds somewhat of the "rigorous self-policing" (Downing 84) which, as we have seen, Foucault insists is the result of the threat of constant surveillance in the panopticon. Like the inmates, the Abnegation are continually observed, albeit only by the rest of their community. Although nonconformity in Abnegation can perhaps only lead to disapproval, other factions are capable of punishing nonconformity with expulsion.

With regard to identity, it is important to note that behaviour and identity are very much shaped by one's faction. According to Erikson, this idea of group identities very much appeals to people, more so than self-made, democratic identities because they are more stable and comprehensive (133). By creating a clearly marked off communal identity, the factions are divided from each other while members within one faction feel more tightly connected. Again, the principle of 'faction before blood' is taken to heart by all members: family is subordinated to the community, because community strengthens people and maintains the system. Therefore, authorities expect identities to be formed according to one's new, chosen faction. Transfers must adapt to a new community and an entirely new way of life, which is inextricably related to their identity formation. Choosing a faction requires self-knowledge, and acting on this self-knowledge, potentially leaving behind everything familiar, is an important step in Tris's own development.

If all factions are essentially based on one virtue and the rejection of the corresponding vice, then where do the bad people go? Is everyone inherently good in this society? The answer is certainly not, as the existence of 'villains' Eric and Jeanine Matthews proves. One's primary quality determines one's (chosen) faction, and this quality can develop into either a virtue or a vice. Thus, Jeanine will do anything – even kill innocent Abnegation members and make innocent Dauntless members into murderers – to protect the knowledge of the outside world and retain her own position of power. Similarly, the new Dauntless leadership to which

Eric belongs values strength and boastful courage rather than the ordinary acts of bravery, such as defending others in need, as advocated by Tobias. Ultimately, the strict division between the factions and the demand for unquestioning allegiance to faction over family unnecessarily complicates choosing a faction and thus choosing a (new) identity.

3.2. Tris's Identity Quest

3.2.1. Uniting Abnegation and Dauntless

Of course the question remains how Abnegation members form their identities, since individual expression is hardly allowed. Although Tris decides to leave her parents' faction for its complete opposite, Dauntless, she is frequently preoccupied with what they, her old faction, would have done or expected *her* to do. "Am I wired like the Abnegation, or the Dauntless?" (*Divergent* 313), Tris asks herself, and throughout *Divergent*, her main journey is uniting these two identities. For the most part of the novel, this constitutes her almost obsessive need of her parents' imagined approval because she always felt inadequate while still in Abnegation. She considers herself too "proud" (57) and "disgustingly selfish" (102), which is why she chose Dauntless. While the Abnegation "give without thinking and care without trying" (75), selflessness does not come effortlessly to Tris. Nevertheless, Abnegation values are so "instilled" (87) in her that she frequently, perhaps unconsciously, refers to them even in Dauntless. When handed a gun in training, Tris reflects that her "family would never approve of [her] firing a gun" because "guns are used for self-defense, if not violence, and therefore they are self-serving" (78). Everything in Tris's world makes sense through her Abnegation upbringing, but as she moves through Dauntless initiation she learns to appreciate the merits of her new Dauntless-self. Moreover, in Dauntless Tris learns what true selflessness means. Her training confronts her with "ordinary acts of bravery" (206) such as standing up

for others, something which comes naturally to Tris after all. As Tobias points out to her: "it's when [she's] acting selflessly that [she's] at [her] bravest" (311).

Earlier in the story, Tris already figuratively sheds her Abnegation side by taking off her shirt in front of all initiates, showing a tighter top and revealing her body as "no one has ever seen ... it before" (58), an act which signifies a first step in letting go of Abnegation's strict values concerning clothing, sexuality and behaviour. By revealing her skin she starts to reveal her true, mixed, colours. In Dauntless, she will finally have the freedom and opportunity to explore who she is and, consequently, where she really belongs. Her new faction is a place for rebirth, where she can be "remade" (60) complete with a new name and a new appearance. Similarly, her new friend Christina shows Tris a different side of herself with a subtle make-over. Although Tris has never felt pretty, it is in Dauntless that Tris learns to accept her appearance and identity. She finds herself enjoying her new reflection because it is "noticeable" (87). Christina even compliments her on looking "striking" (87), thus saying that Tris for once stands out amongst the crowd. This subtle transformation makes Tris realize that she is no longer the Abnegation Beatrice, "a girl [she] saw in stolen moments at the mirror" (87), but a new person with a new identity whom she has just witnessed coming to life for the first time. The make-over thus marks a first turning point: she starts to let go of her old identity, fully committed to exploring new experiences and possibilities; she will "become something else" (87), and the realization gives her hope.

Moreover, during initiation Tris is confronted with the harsh reality that it is not always simple and self-evident to be selfless and helpful like the Abnegation, especially not in this environment. When Christina must prove her courage to the cruel leader Eric by hanging from a railing above a chasm, Tris knows that she cannot simply save Christina if she slips. She realizes that she is "not [her] parents" (102), something which constitutes a further step to self-knowledge and illustrates her transition from being limited to faction values, whether of

Abnegation or Dauntless, to finding her own values apart from the system. As Roth tells her readers in her blog, Tris realizes that being Divergent already enables her to reconcile her different identities, "combining selflessness and bravery and love for her family and love for her faction all together under one umbrella" ("About the End of *Allegiant*"). She is not just ex-Abnegation, or currently Dauntless, but she is a complicated, autonomous individual made up of different identity elements.

The three parts of Roth's trilogy correspond almost exactly to three stages of adolescent identity development as outlined by Jane Kroger. She defines a three-level system about the "moral dilemmas involving issues of care" for girls in comparison with an earlier study concerning moral development in boys (75-76). In *Divergent*, Tris is not only preoccupied with finding her own place and identity in her factioned society, but she is also trying to ensure her "individual survival" (76) by making it through Dauntless initiation alive and surviving the simulation attack at the end of the book. Furthermore, throughout *Insurgent* Tris is preoccupied with her parents' sacrifice, and her own attempts to emulate this self-sacrifice reflect the second stage which involves the attempt to "meet the needs of the others" while the needs of the self are (temporarily) sacrificed (76). *Insurgent*, and most of *Allegiant*, too, are for a good part concerned with this stage of Tris's self-sacrifice. The third level is that of "nonviolence" (76), and it is in *Allegiant* where Tris finds this balance between the needs of others and those of her own. Tris realizes she is defined most by her family, and finally learns what it means to be truly self-sacrificial without being (unintentionally) self-destructive.

The greater part of the trilogy is thus a kind of involuntary moratorium stage during which, because of her Divergence, Tris is confused about whether she belongs in Abnegation, Dauntless, or nowhere at all. Kroger, following Erikson, defines this moratorium as "the process of exploring various identity-defining values and commitments" (64). Many western societies and cultures frequently permit their adolescents such a moratorium, granting them a

temporary reprieve from making life-altering decisions (Kroger 13, 66-67). According to

Erikson, a moratorium is necessary for young people in order for them to integrate their

various identity elements into one self (128). Moreover, "optimal identity development

[necessarily] involves finding social roles and niches within the larger community that

provides a good 'fit' for one's biological and psychological capacities and interests" (Kroger

9). In *Divergent*, there is no moratorium, and therefore, by the time of the Choosing

Ceremony, adolescents are unlikely to have completed their identity formation. Tris expected

her aptitude test to tell her which choice to make because she is unsure herself. The film

adaptation (Burger, 2014) picks up on the most substantial part of Tris's struggle throughout

the trilogy, which is finding out "who I am, where I belong" (06:09). Her identity formation

is not complete until the final pages of *Allegiant*, when she realizes that her loved ones define

her the most. Only at this point, moments before she sacrifices herself to save her brother,

does Tris know who she is: she has made the identity-defining values and commitments

which Kroger and Erikson define as "identity achieved" (Kroger 64).

3.2.2. The End of a Journey: Learning the Truth about Self-Sacrifice

Throughout the trilogy, Tris' identity formation corresponds with her journey to emulate her

parents' ultimate sacrifice. At the close of *Divergent*, Tris has lost both her parents and, with

Dauntless and Abnegation being virtually disbanded, she is pretty much factionless after all.

In an explanation of *Allegiant*'s ending, Roth explains that the sacrifice of Tris's parents "was

in some ways the catalyst for the rest of the series" ("About"). From this moment until the end

of the series, Tris "tried to emulate her parents' sacrifice" but she did not yet understand that

this does not mean simply giving up life for someone else ("About"). Handing Tobias her gun

at the end of *Divergent* and thus essentially letting him kill her rather than the other way

around was perhaps "noble from a romantic perspective," Roth writes, but it was not enough

to save Dauntless from the simulation which made them kill members of Abnegation ("About"). Her death would not have saved either Tobias or anyone else.

Furthermore, Tris's actions in *Insurgent* border on recklessness more than anything else. Tris struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder after having impulsively killed her Dauntless friend Will who was under the simulation, and after witnessing both her parents' deaths. Throughout the second book, these traumatic experiences inspire Tris to be better, but most of all to be selfless. However, as Tobias correctly points out, her actions are self-destructive rather than selfless: "[i]t's not brave, ... [i]t's beyond stupid – it's suicidal. Don't you have any regard for your own life?" (*Insurgent* 211). She cannot defend herself with a gun because of the trauma of killing Will, and she does not value her own life enough to sensibly take risks. Moreover, a part of her actually "wants to be lost" (212) so that she can join her parents in death. When the Erudite threaten her with execution, however, her attitude finally starts to change. Initially she hesitatingly reasons that her parents would be proud to know that she, too, will "die like the Abnegation" (379). Just in time, however, Tris realizes that "[b]urning and boiling inside me is the desire to live" (384). She is "*not done here*" (384, emphasis original) and finally finds the will to live, realizing that her parents did not lay down their lives so that she could do the same; they died so that she could live.

This desire to live continues in *Allegiant*, but her time comes sooner than expected. Her self-sacrifice in *Allegiant* differs from earlier attempts because it allows her to both save the last remaining member of her family as well as the city's inhabitants. Right before she decides to take Caleb's place, Tris realizes that she *does* still love him, even after his betrayal, and she cannot just let him walk to his own execution if she can stop it. Caleb is her family and thus part of her identity, and her commitment to those she loves, more than the factions or anything else, defines her:

> He is a part of me, always will be, and I am a part of him, too. I don't belong to
>
> Abnegation, or Dauntless, or even the Divergent. ... I belong to the people I love,
>
> and they belong to me—they, and the love and loyalty I give them, form my
>
> identity far more than any word or group ever could. (*Allegiant* 455)

It is not until this point that Tris understands fully what her parents' sacrifice meant. They saved her because there was no other choice, and because they loved her even after she chose for Dauntless (Roth, "About"). Similarly, Tris cannot completely reject Caleb because he is her only family (Roth, "About"). In this final sacrifice, she saves not only him but also hundreds of others from losing their memories and identities if the memory serum reaches them. She must thus confront and conquer the death serum to get to the memory serum. She *must* succeed, and wants to "carry with [her] a good reason" (*Allegiant* 468) for her death, a reason of which her parents would be proud. Finally, she "did not want to leave [Tobias]" (497) or anyone else. She wanted to live, which makes her sacrifice all the more poignant.

Learning to value life even when nothing seems worth it establishes the final stage of Tris's identity quest. Throughout the trilogy, Tris's journey was habilitating the different sides of her. When she first accepts her Divergence as proof of her individuality, she feels like "someone breathed new air into [her] lungs," and no one can control her (*Divergent* 442) because she is not just a Dauntless transfer from Abnegation, but an empowered Divergent. In *Allegiant* Tris finally reaches "a strong sense of identity, [as well as] a keen understanding of what she (and her parents) believed about selflessness" (Roth, "About") which thus constitutes, literally, the end of a journey. This end is made the more definitive by the repetition of Tris's question at the end of *Divergent*, her initial, somewhat hesitant answer now replaced by a certainty and confidence which solidifies her sense of self:

Can I be forgiven for all I've done to get here? I don't know. I don't know.

Please. (*Divergent* 476)

Can I be forgiven for all I've done to get here? I want to be. I can. I believe it.

(*Allegiant* 476)

Whereas in *Divergent* she is clearly still uncertain of whether dying to save someone she loves will be enough to be forgiven for her selfishness and violence prior to this moment, she is determined that she *will* be forgiven just before she is really about to die in *Allegiant*. Her initial uncertainty reflects the uncertainty of a situation in which her death will not be very effectual, whereas her later confidence reflects the assurance of a better future for other people. Tris has literally fulfilled not only a journey to finding self and identity but also her destiny to be truly selfless and courageous. She is, ultimately, indeed the "instrument of [her] own destruction" (*Insurgent* 145), just as she always wanted to be.

Conclusion

Although the conclusion of both trilogies must have left some fans unhappy, they do show the difficulty of adolescent identity development in a limiting, even oppressive environment. Collins shows the hypocrisy of gender performances as well as the effect that war can have. According to Dominus, "the series makes warfare deeply personal, forcing readers to contemplate their own roles as desensitized voyeurs" (1). More specifically, readers are forced to consider every exaggerated aspect of Panem's dystopian society, from surveillance to poverty, as it occurs in their own world. Clearly, Collins invites readers to be critical as Katniss is critical. Similarly, Roth invites her readers to be critical of categorization and stereotyping, and to consider that, even though having had one's path in life determined by a communal mindset may be easy and comforting, it hampers the development of identity and individuality.

Regarding identity in the "Hunger Games" trilogy, Katniss has clearly struggled with having to perform according to the Capitol's traditional norms of gender and sexuality. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss moves from being primarily 'masculine' in environments which compel her to be so – district 12 and the arena – to accepting that she can use her performance of femininity to her own advantage, manipulating the audience and Gamemakers in order to ensure her own – and Peeta's – survival. She has recognized the potential of being a popular *feminine* tribute as well as a doomed lover. However, although her own survival – for the sake of her family – was her primary concern in the first book, her increasing involvement in Panem's politics teach Katniss that there are more important things to consider, especially overarching questions of right and wrong. In *Catching Fire*, Katniss relinquishes her earlier self-interest in order to save Peeta and perhaps instigate further dissent among the districts. Although she and her image are used, first by Snow and later by the rebels, she accepts that

her symbolic role in *Mockingjay* will be used to further purposes she is in agreement with. She accepts her complicity in the second rebellion and is willing to once again play her part – as Mockingjay – in the war in order to help build a better society. As the Mockingjay Katniss transcends norms of gender and sexuality by combining her various identity elements into one, becoming both survivor, rebel and a girl who protects those she loves at all cost. These performances have allowed her to try out different aspects of her own identity, thus in a way they have shown her her own potential instead of just limiting her to categories. Finally, she shakes of all appearance of conformity – whether of gender or diplomacy – when she kills President Coin, singlehandedly paving the way for a truly better society. A final quote by Amy Montz sums up Katniss's conclusion:

> Katniss ends the trilogy as she truly begins it: as an intelligent woman who
> understands the inequality of hunger and deprivation, the weight of sacrifice, and
> the importance of never underestimating the power of a girl spectacularized by
> fashion, costume, and a good performance. (Montz 147)

Katniss's ending may not be the happily-ever-after some readers might have hoped for, but she has nevertheless developed into a free individual by changing the world with her own hands, and, like the mockingjay species, she has kept on living against all odds.

With regard to the "Divergent" trilogy, the disbanding of the faction system, that ultimate dystopian quality and tragic flaw of Roth's society, must have come as a relief tinged with some regret. Each faction has its own purpose, its own residential and working areas, and even its own dress code, thus clearly demarcating the five communities and promoting prejudice between them. What it comes down to is that the faction system literally determines one's path in life because one's (job) options per faction are limited to what the faction
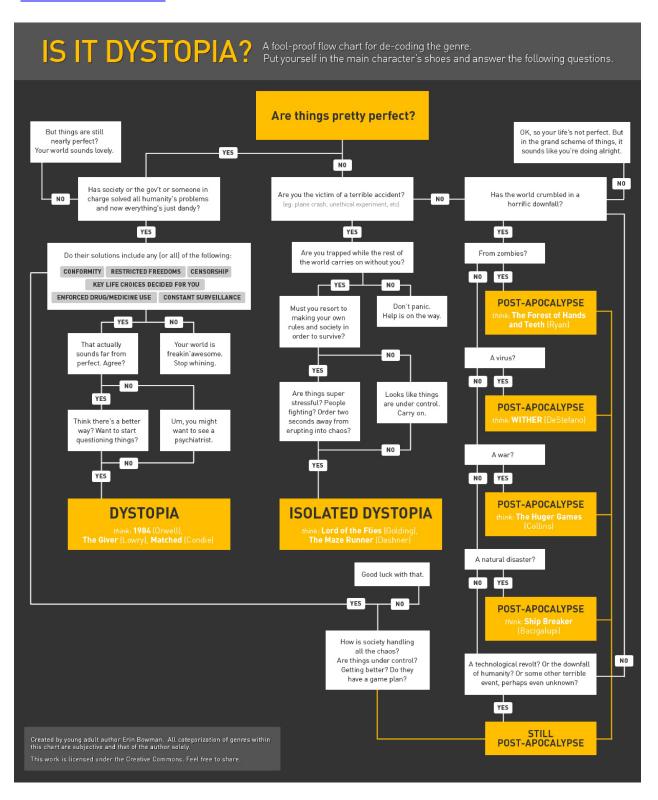
allows. Theoretically, there is freedom of choice, but because the choice of faction is irreversible, one had better choose the right one. The faction system limits Tris and the other Divergent in particular because they, like readers, are the complicated, autonomous individuals which the Bureau so desperately wants to reinstate in outside society. Because they cannot adhere to the strict categorization of the factions, they are persecuted and limited in their development. In contrast, the non-Divergent are unrealistic, stereotypical people who can only belong to one faction, thus they are constrained by their genetic predisposition. Tris is limited even more because she herself wants so desperately to belong to a faction. Belonging and being part of a community is a major theme of the trilogy, and intricately related to the faction system. In *Divergent*, Tris's journey is one of reconciling her Abnegation and Dauntless identities, and eventually accepting that her Divergence is an asset. Throughout the trilogy, she journeys from feeling defined – and confined – by the faction system to realizing that the people whom she is committed to ultimately define her most. Having experienced Abnegation and Dauntless up close, and having been manipulated by various (simulation) serums, Tris has realized that the faction system is fallible, that it limits and oppresses people in their choices and that categorization can ultimately only lead to conflict. Furthermore, it is an obstacle to her identity formation. At the end of the trilogy, Tris discovers agency and identity apart from the factions and, after having learned to value life, her self-sacrifice indicates that she is a heroine who knew what she wanted and for what, or whom, she fought and died.

In a way, both trilogies argue that identity formation emerges from trying out different appearances and performances. This way, the individual discovers which elements of the self are truly productive and creative, and which one would wish to discard. Collins's trilogy shows how patriarchal, heteronormative expectations of gender and sexuality can negatively influence identity. Yet it simultaneously allows Katniss to fight the status quo by her act of

conformity, defying the Capitol by pretending to be a stereotypically 'feminine' lover. Similarly, Roth's trilogy recommends the process of trying out different identities, which is why the faction system is presented as an enemy to free identity formation, even if the system's constrictions simultaneously offer a kind of security. An intriguing further thought is whether the character-forming aspects of these heroines have any effect on the reader and their identity formation. It is certainly likely that strong female protagonists such as these function as exemplary figures. Both Katniss and Tris develop from fighting primarily for their own survival to rebelling against the system and actively fighting for a *different kind of life*. The final message of both books thus appears to be that readers must fight hard for what they want, as Katniss and Tris did; we must fight for what we believe in and for what we desire out of life, for our hopes and dreams. It is one last paradox of these books that this assertion of the right to rebel should suggest a very American individualism that might please those on the left equally as those on the right, and that doubtlessly appeals to young people at the brink of entering adult society.

Appendix 1.

This chart by YA author Erin Bowman was taken from one of her blog entries, dated 14 July 2011 and is meant to help readers 'decode' the genre – whether dystopian or actually just post-apocalyptic – of the book they're reading. The original larger version can be found on www.embowman.com.

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