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ANATOMIC DYSTOPIA: GENDERED EMBODIMENT IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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Anatomic Dystopia: Gendered Embodiment in Young Adult Literature examines the representation of non-normative bodies in young adult dystopian literature. Despite the genre's prevalence in pop culture and its attention to identity as an element of young adult literature, marginalized identities remain marginalized in the literature. I draw on feminist theory, queer theory, and disability theory to illuminate the societal devaluation of people based on their physical bodies within the young adult dystopian genre. The dissertation applies the work of Gayle Rubin, Susan Brownmiller, Anne Koedt, Alison Kafer, and Donna Haraway as a foundation through which to understand gender, sexuality, and disability. Despite the intended message of dystopian novels – their effort to reveal systems of injustice – they in fact reproduce many of the rankings and marginalizations that structure our social world.

The central texts of the dissertation include *Matched* by Ally Condie, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld, and *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline. While these texts in some ways differ significantly, they each offer contradictory messages about the institutions they attempt to critique. On the topics of gender and sexuality, sexual violence, disability, and cyborg embodiment, the novels studied in the chapters to follow both resist and reinforce marginalization based on bodily normativity. Young adult dystopian literature has the unique ability to provide speculation on potential futures for contemporary society to an audience of readers who are in the process of finding their own identification within their social worlds. *Anatomic Dystopia* concludes with the assertion that the genre can

present readers with the opportunity to reimagine human embodiment as a collective politics that allows for the radical inclusion of all bodies.

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Introduction

From its inception, speculative fiction has served as a lens through which to view social injustices. From the era of Wells's *The Time Machine* to today's popularization of dystopian media in works such as Hulu's adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale,* writers and artists envision worlds in which social and political issues find their most horrifying potentialities. These works force audiences to reevaluate the worlds in which they live and allow them to reimagine steps towards a better future. Because dystopian literature claims to focus its attention on social and political injustices, it is important to be critical of its lapses in promoting social justice.

Young adult dystopian literature is important due to its immense popularity, as well as its influence among the young adult population for which it is targeted. The young adult audience is particularly attuned to issues of identity; due to their own grappling with maturation and identification within their peers and larger social identities, they take notice of similar issues in literature. The literature that young adults read therefore has an effect on young adults' perceptions of themselves, their peers, and the world at large. Combining young adult literature with the dystopian genre results in a genre that highlights identity within worlds that are full of injustice.

Young adult dystopian literature often claims to focus its attention on social and institutional injustices. My dissertation finds that the genre largely fails to come through on its promise of centering marginalized individuals and it instead replicates the social structures it attempts to critique. The young adult genre has, in recent years, begun to make strides towards inclusion. Authors such as David Levithan and Becky Albertalli have published immensely popular works that have revolutionized the genre's inclusion

of LGBTQ+ characters; likewise, authors such as Sherman Alexie and Ned Vizzini sparked increased incorporation of disability in the genre. While popular young adult literature continually expands its representation of marginal identities, young adult dystopian literature has yet to fulfill its potential for inclusion. *Anatomic Dystopia: Gendered Embodiment in Young Adult Literature* calls attention to marginalized bodies in the genre and how they are represented in relation to their exclusions in our society. I argue that despite its normalizing tendency to set limitations upon alternative forms of embodiment, young adult dystopian literature challenges social conventions, which signals the potential of the genre to reimagine inclusion for all forms of embodiment. Throughout the dissertation, I analyze many examples of marginalized bodies in literature through the influence of scholarship in feminist, queer, and disability theory. While countless works have influenced my writing, my dissertation primarily focuses on Gayle Rubin, Susan Brownmiller, Anne Koedt, Alison Kafer, and Donna Haraway. I draw on the long history of contemporary feminists, from the second wave to the present, to explore the social hierarchy based on lived embodiment in my primary texts.

With few exceptions, the fictional texts to be examined in this dissertation are widely read and popularized works of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. The popularity of these works, especially within an extensively prominent genre, is a critical component of their discussion in this context; their popularity emphasizes their reflection of dominant ideology about normative embodiment. In other words, the marginalization of non-normative bodies in these texts indicates their marginalization in contemporary society; both forms of subordination underscore the need for increased inclusion.

Much of young adult literature examines protagonists' coming of age in terms of social identifiers such as gender and sexuality. Scholars such as Kafer and Haraway have shown embodiment to be a vast category that challenges formerly rigid and binary identity. My dissertation embraces the hybridity indicated by these theorists. My first chapter studies the normative role of gender and sexuality in Ally Condie's *Matched* series. The trilogy, following protagonist Cassia as she struggles against a government that mandates sexuality through arranged marriages, serves as a representation of dystopian literature that contradicts its own convictions. The series attempts to highlight limitations upon women's agency; in its patriarchal objectification of citizens in marital exchange, it nods to Gayle Rubin, Susan Brownmiller, and Anne Koedt. However, it also fails to provide agency to its protagonist and obscures LGBTQ+ sexualities. Rubin, Brownmiller, and Koedt discuss historical and continuous systemic objectification and commodification of women's bodies. Because *Matched* presents readers with a society that mandates sexuality, it evokes the criticism of these theorists. While the series positions Cassia as an agent of rebellion against institutional regulation of sexuality, her normative identity as white, heterosexual, and privileged does little to disrupt the institutions of her society. Despite the series's supposed celebration of non-normative sexuality, non-normative sexual and gender identities remain marginal to the narrative.

For the young adult population, a group that experiences a high percentage of sexual violence, it is critical that exposure to representations of sexual violence be consistent and accurate as they navigate real experiences of sexual violence through peers or through personal experience. In my second chapter, I read sexual violence in the *Divergent* series through Susan Brownmiller's work in order to highlight the lasting

impact of sexual trauma. The *Divergent* series portrays a world in which people are divided into factions based on personality traits and follows Tris as she grapples with her identity as an individual who does not easily fit into one category. As an outsider, she is socially rejected in various ways, including through sexual harassment and sexual violence. Susan Brownmiller's work is prominent in this chapter for her understanding of sexual violence as a historical and systemic enforcement of patriarchal oppression. Her work examines sexual violence as a means of patriarchal power and control; through her work, I read Tris's sexual assault as one instance of her social rejection. Although *Divergent* highlights Tris's trauma surrounding her sexual assault, the remainder of the series is inconsistent in its representation of her trauma as the plot follows other avenues. Despite the series's criticism of societal institutions, it fails to adequately represent the impact of sexual violence, which it acknowledges as a product of the toxic masculinity prevalent in Tris's chosen faction. The inconsistency of Tris's personal experience with sexual violence has damaging implications that sexual trauma is something fleeting and unimportant.

When considering marginalized bodies in young adult dystopian literature, it is critical to center the marginalization of disability. The third chapter of my dissertation attempts to do this through examining representations of disability in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Hunger Games* series. I read these works through Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* which questions traditional societal notions that marginalize and devalue disabled lives. In many ways, *Woman on the Edge of Time* stands apart from the other works of the dissertation. However, I assert that the novel is essential to a conversation about the representation of disability in the genre and serves a point of

reference and comparison to *The Hunger Games,* a popular, contemporary young adult novel that is more characteristic of the other novels examined throughout this dissertation. *Woman on the Edge of Time* centers its narrative on disability through the institutionalization of its protagonist, Connie, and the many debasements she endures as a result. However, in its imagining of the future within Connie's ability to time travel, disability is eliminated through its social erasure with emphasis on "cure" and return to a version of normalcy that is predicated on able-bodiedness. Although *The Hunger Games* does not attempt to center its narrative on disability, it depicts a world dependent on ableism in its socially endorsed ritual sacrifice of children who are forced to fight to the death. While the series critiques its society's norms, it likewise celebrates the physical strength and resilience of its protagonist and frequently kills stereotypically "weaker" characters. In addition, the society in *The Hunger Games* continually disables characters through starvation, trauma, violence, and punishment, yet these characters struggle to remain prominent in the narrative. Through the lens of Kafer's work, this chapter critiques the devaluation of disability as something to be "cured" in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and to be "overcome" in *The Hunger Games.*

The first three chapters of my dissertation examine representations of marginalized bodies; however, the final chapter questions human identification with embodiment through the examination of cyborg bodies. This chapter studiess the body's role as it changes alongside development and integration with technology. Both the *Uglies* and *Ready Player One* series introduce the concept of cyborg embodiment, though they express differing messages about the effects that could have on human identity. While *Uglies* views cyborg technology as a corruption of the natural human body, *Ready*

Player One embraces multiplicity in highlighting both the immense opportunities and dangers introduced by cyborg embodiment. This chapter applies Kafer's work on diverse forms of embodiment within disability, as well as Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto." When discussing the cyborg, Kafer and Haraway agree on the importance of multiplicity; they understand the cyborg through hybrid identity, and they view hybridity as a way to embrace different identities. Viewing *Uglies* and *Ready Player One* through their work allows the dissertation to imagine cyborg identity within the context of an inclusive future in which no body is marginal.

My study of young adult dystopian literature centers marginalized bodies as a link between feminist, queer, and disability theory. Although young adult dystopian literature continues to exclude marginalized bodies based on divergence from norms based on gender, sexuality, and ability, their persistence in the literature speaks to the prevalence of diverse embodiment. True inclusion can be achieved only with understanding, which begins with representation in media that centers marginalized people and accurately and holistically portrays marginalized communities. In highlighting their marginalization in young adult dystopian literature, *Anatomic Dystopia: Gendered Embodiment in Young Adult Literature* focuses on non-normative bodies as one step towards such an inclusive future.

Chapter One: Continuous Conventions of Gender and Sexuality

The first chapter of my dissertation studies the perpetuation of normative understandings of gender and sexuality in young adult dystopian fiction. Despite the critical nature of dystopian fiction, many novels replicate stereotypes in their haste to critique the institutions that create social conventions. While many dystopian works sustain contradictions, some of which will be addressed within this dissertation, I center this chapter on *Matched,* by Ally Condie, for its contradictory representation of gender and sexuality. *Matched,* a novel about a teen girl who struggles against a society that dictates romantic partners, focuses its attention on mandated sexuality. The plot of the novel follows protagonist Cassia, a white, privileged, heterosexual girl, as she chooses between safety and conformity or deviance. This choice is signaled in Cassia's decision between boys Xander, her designated Match, and Ky, who she is forbidden from loving. *Matched* attempts to concentrate on oppression based on sexuality, however, in its narrow portrayal of what a rebellion against this society could look like, it displays a normative representation of femininity and sexuality. Not only is the rebellious vision of *Matched* limited by the absence of Cassia's volition, but it also only imagines a white heterosexual rebellion, which hardly deviates from a government that encourages white heterosexual Matching.

Young adult literature takes on a unique role in the lives of its readers; many young adults use fiction as a tool through which to learn and grow in their own lives. However, young adult literature still has a long way to go in inclusively representing LGBTQ+ identity. In an article on female sexuality in young adult literature, Davin Helkenberg explains that the fictional representation of sexuality impacts young people's

understandings of gender and sexuality (98-99). While Helkenberg's article focuses on the opportunities that young adult literature provides for readers to explore sexuality, it also acknowledges the limited representation of queer sexuality. Young adult literature continues to lack diverse and positive LGBTQ+ stories that adequately meet readers' needs (Helkenberg 106). Corrine Wickens agrees, explaining that most novels that address LGBTQ+ identity position homophobia as the central issue of the text (153). While novels that portray a struggle between a LGBTQ+ character in opposition to homophobia intend to challenge homophobia, they also "position homosexuality negatively through homophobic assertions and innuendo about gay and lesbian individuals to serve as catalyst points to which the protagonists, and the reader, may respond and resist" (Wickens 155). In other words, texts that use non-normative sexuality as a counter to homophobia perpetuate the link between the two. This representation of LGBTQ+ sexuality maintains the perspective that to be queer is to suffer, a negative trope that is repeated throughout much literature (Bittner 361). Taking into account the understanding that young adults learn about sexuality through fiction, the largely negative view of LGBTQ+ identity in YA novels limits young adult readers. Thomas Crisp argues that both novels that portray homophobic responses to LGBTQ+ characters and those that erase homophobia from their narratives perpetuate normativity, "Any book that seeks to educate readers about homophobia and intolerance by presenting a world in which homophobia and intolerance are 'the norm' on some level, ultimately reinforces these as inevitabilities. Unfortunately, texts that seek to imagine a brighter future or a better world ultimately feed the normative social order as well" (344). While he repeats Helkenberg and Wickens's critique of narratives that center homophobia, Crisp likewise argues that

novels that create a "magical realism" in which LGBTQ+ identity is "normal" simply hide queerness within normalcy. Crisp instead urges for "depictions that feel 'affirmatively' queer" (346). A representation that satisfies Crisp's requirements would embrace queer identity, and as queerness is by nature unconventional, this depiction would resist normativity. While YA fiction continues to lack LGBTQ+ narratives, *Matched* actively removes itself from the conversation; even as it focuses on sexuality, it fails to engage with queerness in its narrative.

Although *Matched* focuses on the negative consequences of government interference with sexuality, it portrays this struggle through a white, privileged, heterosexual girl with minimal agency, which thereby erases the many marginalized groups that would likely suffer enormously under this government. While the novel presents protagonist Cassia as a champion of the right to choose one's own romantic partner, she remains enmeshed in manipulation from those around her; she chooses between two boys presented to her by her government and takes on very little agency of her own. When discussing *Matched,* my analysis will focus on the novel's limited representation of the protagonist's rebellion because these shortcomings translate to readers' limited understanding of their own agency. *Matched* additionally reinforces stereotypes of women's passivity in its limited understanding of sexual transgression.

This chapter prefaces its discussion of *Matched* with theoretical contributions from Gayle Rubin, Susan Brownmiller, and Anne Koedt. Second-wave feminist theory provides a comprehensive background of the issues that *Matched* attempts to critique, from the origins of gender roles and gender-based violence to bodily agency today. They additionally provide a lens through which to critique the novel itself, as well as the

effectiveness of its portrayal of gender and sexuality. Beginning with second-wave feminist arguments for women's bodily autonomy allows us to perceive the longstanding gender disparities inherited by YA fiction. Foregrounding women's embodied experiences, they additionally provide evidence that these social problems still have not been solved by young adult fiction that imagines a different future for gender.

Women's Bodily Agency

Matched, by Ally Condie, tells the story of a girl named Cassia, who lives in a society in which the government dictates love, sexuality, and marriage. Cassia's narrative centers on marriage and sexuality, and the state's limitations upon each, as does second-wave feminism, which calls into question modern practices of marriage and sexuality. I therefore begin this section of the chapter with background from Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women," Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will,* and Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm." These theorists work to understand patriarchal society's limitations on the agency of women, and so establish the transhistorical persistence of a patriarchal order that works at the expense of women's well-being. This systemic issue is integral as well to the society of *Matched* and Cassia's questionable placement as an agent of rebellion. From the history of marriage as an exchange of women to the limits upon understandings of female sexuality, Cassia's world commits similar injustices upon her by dictating her sexuality: what she should do with her body and with whom. In *Matched,* the government tells its citizens who to form attraction to and who to marry in order to control them; the structure of this society reflects the patriarchal oppression and regulation examined by the second wave feminists in this chapter.

Second wave feminism explores the subjugation and objectification of women through marriage, much as we see in *Matched.* Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" systematically examines the oppression of women, exemplified primarily through the history of exchanging women through marriage. While this classic essay dates to the second wave, the marriage practices it studies endure, and so it is useful for tracing back the oppression inherent in the fictive arranged marriages in Cassia's society to the origins of marriage itself. Rubin's essay explains that when marriage began, women were traded by their fathers to their husbands. The human exchanges made through marriages were agreed upon as social contracts "'between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners'" (Rubin 45). Marriage encouraged a sense of ownership by men over women, and removed women's ownership and agency over themselves. The essay therefore suggests that gender-based oppression began through this objectification and trading of women as "gifts" (Rubin 42). Decades later, Judith Butler confirms that women remain "object[s] of exchange" in marriage (38). The continual description of women as "objects" by different theorists emphasizes that not only did the women lack agency in marriage, but they lacked personhood entirely. Marriage, then, began with relationships between men, and women served merely as property within those relationships.

The objectification of women through marriage resulted in a society in which women's lives and bodies were exchanged between men, a system which bears relevance to sexual violence today. Brownmiller expands on the history of ownership of women in outlining the history of sexual abuse; like Rubin and Butler, she highlights the objectification of women's bodies. While Rubin discusses marriage as exchange,

Brownmiller connects marriage to thievery when men saw bride capture as an acceptable means of obtaining a wife (Brownmiller 17). Like a marriage of exchange, bride capture indicates that women are objects to be owned, and can therefore also be stolen. To protect against this disrespect of property, rules were written to instead set up women as exchangeable.[1] Organized laws against theft of women and rape of women were intended merely to protect the business interests of men rather than the safety of women. It is telling that this exchange, equating women to goods, was defined as "civilized" in comparison to bride capture (Brownmiller 18); for the women involved, this legislation change did not change their rights over their bodies, it simply changed which men controlled their bodies. Not only were the prevalent crimes of rape and bride capture infringements upon women's bodies, but these laws that concretized them as the property of men infringed upon their bodies as well. As rape was then defined by male ownership of the violated woman's body, marital rape was by definition an impossibility. According to Brownmiller, "there could be no such crime as rape by a husband since a wife's 'consent' to her husband was a permanent part of the marriage vows and could not be withdrawn" (29). Marital rape was inconceivable because a marriage indicated ownership of the woman's body by her husband, therefore, the man could not transgress upon his own property.

Feminist theory additionally showed that a normative, inflexible view of women's sexuality stemmed from this system of objectification and exchange. Brownmiller examines this effect on women's sexuality as she explains that views of women's

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[1] "Written law in its origin was a solemn compact among men of property, designed to protect their own male interests by a civilized exchange of goods or silver *in place of force* wherever possible. … Criminal rape, as a patriarchal father saw it, was a violation of the new way of doing business. It was, in a phrase, the theft of virginity, an embezzlement of his daughter's fair price on the market" (Brownmiller 18).

passivity are so pervasive that many excuse rape as an acceptable expression of male sexuality. "There is good reason for men to hold tenaciously to the notion that 'All women want to be raped.' … it is a belief in the supreme rightness of male power" (312). According to Brownmiller, men perpetuate the idea that men should be dominant and women should be passive because this viewpoint encourages men's sexual ownership over women. Additionally, Brownmiller suggests that many women have grown to believe in these "myths of rape," which only further contributes to women's oppression. That these myths are so culturally sedimented is evident in young adult fiction which, I argue, both challenges and replicates them. Novels like *Matched* neglect the opportunity to commit to the more revolutionary view of women's agency and empowerment that the second wave had imagined.

Rubin and Brownmiller outline the background of men's continual control over women and their bodies and Koedt expands upon the continual prevalence of that control in women's understanding of sexuality. "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," by Anne Koedt, builds upon the history explored by Rubin and Brownmiller in its discussion of women's confusion about and ostracization from their own sexual bodies. Koedt's discussion of sexuality brings together patriarchal oppression of female identity, sexuality, and bodies. As previously explained, women have long experienced lack of control over their own bodies, instead experiencing themselves as the objects of men. Men thus earned primary control over narratives about women's bodies as well. Koedt explains that the issue of women's sexual confusion stems from societal organization through which women are improperly taught about their own bodies by men. Freud, who believed strongly in women's subordination to men, established the widely accepted idea

that women should seek vaginal over clitoral orgasms, reinforcing a penetrative model of heterosex that situates the penis as the dominant feature. Koedt additionally argues that Freud's endorsement of penetrative sex ignores evidence against women's difficulty in achieving vaginal orgasm, "it is important to emphasize that Freud did not base his theory upon a study of woman's anatomy, but rather upon his assumptions of woman as an inferior appendage to man." Although the contradiction between fact and belief quickly arose, Freud explained this away in his claim that women who could not achieve vaginal orgasm were "frigid" and so required "psychiatric assistance" or surgery (Koedt). This harmful perception of supposedly "normal" female sexuality has caused many women to believe that their bodies are defective when they are not.

From the beginning of her essay, Koedt claims that women have always "been defined sexually in terms of what pleases men." This idea comes into play as she questions why the "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" has been perpetuated despite its falsehood. Koedt claims that men simply do not wish to change their perceptions of sex because penetrative sex contributes to men's sense of superiority as well as their sexual pleasure. First and foremost, penetrative sex is preferable for men because it allows them to easily achieve orgasm (Koedt). The truth that penetrative sex does not equally benefit women's opportunity to achieve orgasm is therefore seen by men as a detrimental idea. This willful ignorance of women's sexual needs leads into the second reason for the perpetuation of the "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," a concept Koedt titles, "The Invisible Woman." Koedt ties women's sexual invisibility to the history explained by Rubin and Brownmiller as she explains, "men have chosen to define women only in terms of how they benefited men's lives. Sexually, a woman was not seen as an individual

wanting to share equally in the sexual act, any more than she was seen as a person with independent desires when she did anything else in society" (Koedt). Women's continual subjection to men, including the objectification of women in sex and marriage, has over time contributed to the perception of women as non-entities. The "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" perpetuates men's privileges in sexuality that have always reigned in society as a whole. Overall, it does not benefit patriarchal society to spread knowledge about women's anatomy that would challenge these privileges. Many women still lack access to knowledge about the sexual functionality of their own bodies. Young adult literature could play a role in working against this limitation in empowering young readers to better understand sexuality.

Second wave theorists like Brownmiller depend on binary gender for their criticism; she identifies femininity through its social perception as weakness, but does not imagine gender identity that exceeds the binary. Brownmiller mentions acts of defiance of gender norms, such as rejecting passivity, as factors that can lead to sexual violence in the name of social punishment (255), yet does not expand to the rejection of gender entirely. The LGBTQ+ community experiences gender-based patriarchal violence not just for deviating from traditional gender norms, but for their rejection of traditional views of what gender is. As patriarchal society depends on binary gender to validate the superiority of masculinity, deviations from traditional gender and sexuality are often punished severely. Adrienne Rich explains that societal understanding of homosexuality ranges from "deviant to abhorrent" (632). Rich takes second wave critique of patriarchy even further by arguing that the "lesbian continuum" challenged patriarchy at its core by elevating the bonds between women and thereby rendering men powerless over them.

However, challenging patriarchal norms often comes with social rejection and violence. Violence committed against queer people, especially those who are gender nonconforming, reflects the violence committed against women as "punishment" for deviation from gender stereotypes. Doug Meyer's *Violence Against Queer People* shares many examples of violence experienced by the LGBTQ+ community. In examining the intersections between the experiences of individuals, likenesses seem to suggest that gender nonconformity becomes a marker of "queerness" to the public (Meyer 85). In these cases, violence serves as social punishment for the ways in which LGBTQ+ people physically express themselves; gender nonconformity is a visible and, therefore, public expression of queer identity, and violence upon a queer body is a public rejection of the queerness it represents. Unlike previously mentioned violence against women, which attempts to reinstate feminine gender norms, these attacks commit the additional violence of attempting to delegitimize the identity of the victim.

While many of the theorists referenced in this section speak of historical sexism and homophobia, we continue to see systemic oppression based on gender and sexuality today. Gayle Rubin, Susan Brownmiller, and Anne Koedt wrote the works discussed in this chapter in 1975 to call attention to the widespread abuses women have historically and continued to suffer due to lack of bodily agency, yet women still fail to maintain full legal dominion over their own bodies. In the United States alone, women frequently encounter nearly insurmountable barriers to make decisions about their bodies among increasingly restrictive abortion laws and requirements to have husbands' consent over reproductive decisions (Arora, et al.). Adrienne Rich wrote "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in 1980 to call attention to assumptions that normalcy is

exclusive to heterosexuality, yet society still privileges cisgender and heterosexual identities as the only "'true'" mode of existence (Pollitt, et al.). Transgender people continue to suffer legalized discrimination, from lack of access to public bathrooms to exclusion from sports teams. Many still struggle for full agency over their own bodies, and it is critical both to understand the historical origins of this battle and to call for different futures in real and fictional examples today.

Matched and the Dictation of Sexuality

From the history of men's exchange and ownership of women through marriage to miseducation about women's sexuality, women have continually lacked agency over their own bodies and sexuality in deference to men. Patriarchal society continues to look to men to make decision about women's bodies and sexualities. *Matched,* by Ally Condie, attempts to call attention to this issue through a government that makes sexual decisions for its citizens. However, the narrative reinforces stereotypical absence of agency for Cassia and for other marginalized sexual bodies.

In dictating who its citizens should marry, the government in *Matched* takes on the controlling role over its citizens that fathers historically held over daughters. In *Matched,* the government determines who will marry one another, and this "Match" is the only person that citizens are allowed to direct sexual attention towards. They are told who to desire and who to love. As marriage historically began as an exchange of ownership of a woman from father to husband (Rubin 44), the requirement for Cassia and others to marry an individual chosen for them connects back to this objectification. While Cassia is initially pleased to be Matched with her best friend, Xander, a small error in her

Matching inspires her curiosity and attraction to Ky, a boy deemed unworthy of being

Matched at all. At first, Cassia pursues her prescribed relationship with Xander, but

experiences passion, connection, and even understanding of herself when she nurtures a

secret relationship with Ky.

 Matched attempts to critique institutional control over marriage and sexuality

through Cassia's struggle to choose who to love. The narrative situates Cassia as a

rebellious figure in her decision to romantically pursue Ky, who is not her dictated

Match, despite the many ways the narrative itself limits her agency to make independent

choices. *Matched* indicates Cassia's role as a rebel through her emphasis on choice as

well as her eventual decision to choose against societal rules and expectations. However,

I argue that despite her placement as a figure of rebellion throughout the novel, Cassia

does not fulfill this role. While *Matched* presents Cassia as a decision-maker, most of her

choices are preemptively arranged by the government, Ky, or a rebel group, which

reveals an absence of agency that establishes her character in stereotypical ideas of

female passivity. In addition, she and Ky are a heterosexual, white, privileged couple, and

therefore embody normative identities. Cassia's normativity further contradicts her

textual positioning as a representation of rebellion.

 At the start of the novel, Cassia is completely indoctrinated in the belief that the

government reserves the right to instruct citizens' romantic relationships; in fact, she is

enthusiastic about receiving instructions regarding her own match (8). This eagerness

establishes Cassia from the beginning as a conformist rather than a rebel. She does not for

a moment question her society's views regarding Matching, unlike others who remain

concerned about the randomness of the selections (16). Cassia likewise does not hesitate

when she receives her Match, her best friend, Xander. Upon the announcement, both Cassia and Xander respond with joy; Cassia notes, "It doesn't feel real until Xander smiles at me. I think, *I know that smile,* and suddenly I'm smiling, too" (15). Upon being Matched with her best friend, Cassia responds with joy alone and describes them as "lucky" for the coincidence of their pairing (18). In every way that Cassia responds to her Match with Xander, she appears to express happiness, as well as romantic interest, such as when she examines his face in a picture and comments on his attractiveness (34). At the start, Cassia is a conformist, eager to follow the government's sexual directions; her enthusiasm for the rules establishes her normative identity.

Things begin to change for Cassia when an apparent technical error reveals an alternate Match for her. This alternate Match, a boy named Ky, is someone who Cassia already knew, but hadn't paid particular attention to until she sees this glitch. Upon seeing Ky's face as her Match where she was supposed to see Xander's, Cassia expresses distress not because of conflicting feelings regarding either boy, but because there was an inexplicable error, something she has been told is impossible. She thinks immediately, "*I don't understand. The Society doesn't make mistakes*" (36). While she goes about her normal activities, Cassia remains concerned about the apparent mistake and worries about what action she should take. All of her fears vanish when an Official intercepts her and confirms that Xander is in fact her true Match and that her Matching with Ky must have been a "prank" (43). The Official proceeds to tell Cassia that her Matching with Ky is an impossibility because Ky has been titled an Aberration, a punitive status of mandated celibacy (46). As Matching is so central to this society, this is seen as a particularly severe punishment. It additionally reinforces the reality of the government's complete

control over the bodies of its citizens; not only does it have the power to dictate their Matches, it also has the power to revoke the ability to be Matched at all, and therefore to procreate. The government's power in *Matched* to dictate marriage and sexuality reflects historical paternal exchange of women examined in second wave feminism. Both Rubin and Brownmiller study the institutional exchange of women's sexual bodies, including the sexual ownership established in marriage (Brownmiller 29). The institutional and patriarchal ownership of women's bodies parallels governmental control over sexuality indicated by restrictions upon procreation in *Matched.* Although she feels sympathy for Ky based on his status, once she returns to her usual activities, Cassia thinks, "Everything is back to normal. Better than normal – now I can again enjoy the fact that I've been Matched with Xander" (49). Despite learning the details of the mistake with her Matching and Ky's status as an Aberration, Cassia leaves the conversation feeling relief; the ultimate authority of her society and her Match has been restored. While the circumstances of the error in which she saw Ky's face distress Cassia, her immediate satisfaction after being reassured of her Match reinforces her complete faith in her society; the source of her discomfort was in the impossibility of her government's fallibility. In her relief and willful ignorance, Cassia participates enthusiastically in her own trafficking, as Rubin would define it.

When Cassia finally does begin to question the validity of her Match with Xander, this line of thought remains limited based on the assumption that the government's Matching system will always produce perfect pairings of people. As the Matching system is run through the government, her assumption also takes for granted the government's

ultimate and rightful power over its citizens.[2] When she and Ky begin to spend more time together in leisure activities, she asks herself a series of questions about him and concludes with, "*Are* you *supposed to be my Match?*" (Condie 104). Each time Ky arises in her thoughts, her primary instinct is not to think about him as a person, her attraction to him, or their connection, but rather whether they were meant to be together based on the same institutional system that paired her with someone else. Time and again, when circumstances arise that could spark Cassia's revolutionary curiosity, she instead continues to think solely within the terms dictated by governmental programming.

While Cassia's world is clearly written as an oppressive dystopia, the absence of choice in marriage is rooted in the institution of marriage itself. As established by Rubin and Brownmiller, marriage originated in men's ownership and exchange of women. Although Cassia's world restricts the individual agency of all its citizens rather than women alone, it reflects back on a pattern of objectification in marriage. Both historically and in present day, many patriarchal structures have restricted individual agency through marriage. Women have historically lacked agency from bride capture to legalized marital rape. Marriage additionally perpetuates other societal oppressions through limitations based on statuses such as racial identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation that continue to be topics of strife in many places. Current and historical restrictions upon sexuality and marriage offer reflection on the limitations placed upon the characters in

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[2] When Cassia tells her grandfather about the unusual circumstance of seeing Ky's face in place of Xander's, he urges Cassia to wonder on behalf of her grandmother. Although his wording suggests questioning the government as a whole, Cassia continues to think within the Matching system as she reflects, "*My grandmother would want to know if I wondered if it wasn't a mistake after all. If Ky were meant to be my Match*" (Condie 68). Even when encouraged by her grandfather to think beyond her circumstances, Cassia remains unable to do so. While she remains curious and thoughtful about Ky, she continues to think within the system.

Matched; the novel's focus on the right to freely love evokes real circumstances in which choosing love has been limited.

The United States has a history of limiting institutionally legitimized relationships, such as interracial and same-sex marriages. "50 Years of *Loving,*" by Nicholas Mirkay, celebrates the anniversary of Loving v. Virginia, the historic case which introduced legal interracial marriage in the United States, and connects it to Obergefell v. Hodges, the case which introduced the legalization of same-sex marriage. In comparing these two cases, both of which made huge changes to the country in recent history, Mirkay adds, "Both cases involve the marital rights of two individuals who society viewed as non-traditional and, thus, inappropriate marital partners" (686). In limiting marriage in both cases, society rejected both the validity of the pairing of the partners to be married as well as the validity of the individuals themselves. While the United States has legalized both interracial and same-sex marriages, many individuals still hold discriminatory views towards these couples, and many countries worldwide still restrict marriages based on racial identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Considering the problematic history and continued limitations of marriage today, the oppression of Cassia's world isn't so far from modern legal realities. The oppressive nature of marriage in the novel despite the removal of men as the oppressors suggests that any implementation of involuntary marriage is objectifying, and therefore, violent.

Cassia's connection to Ky becomes textually linked to a spirit of rebellion; as Xander is her prescribed Match, her continued interest in Ky is presented as a rejection of her society. Ky is an Aberration, a status he acquired only due to his father's criminal status (Condie 46). Cassia learns this information when an Official attempts to deter her

from continued interest in Ky. Ky's status as an Aberration alone is indicative of a relationship with disobedience, even if his disobedience is only secondhand. In addition, the conversation, apparently intended to push Cassia from Ky, reinforces Ky as something forbidden. The illicit activities that she and Ky share, including memorizing prohibited poetry and practicing writing, further cements the link between Ky and transgression. The two bond over these transgressions; in secret, Cassia shares illegal poetry with Ky and Ky teaches Cassia how to write (Condie 173-176, 213-215, 256-7, 275). As the two continue their pining for one another, Cassia is warned by an Official, who instructs her to stop pursuing Ky. During this conversation, the Official again states that a relationship with Ky is forbidden, and threatens the security of Cassia's future career, Ky's safety, and her relationship with Xander to dissuade Cassia from her "'rebellious'" spirit (Condie 245-246). This prohibition encourages Cassia's viewpoint that her relationship with Ky is in itself a way to act out against the agenda of her government.

A transgressive relationship as an act of resistance against the government, like the one between Cassia and Ky, is a common feature of dystopian novels, including *1984, Brave New World, WE, Fahrenheit 451, The Handmaid's Tale,* and many others. In many of these novels, the relationships are transformative for the protagonist, turning a formerly complacent individual into a rebel, who then questions the nature of their oppressive societies. In "Revolutions from the Waist Downwards," Thomas Horan argues that sexuality stands out in dystopian literature as something irrevocable and essential to the human experience. Therefore, sexuality has a powerful ability to work against a dystopian state; "the major authors of dystopian fiction present sexual desire as an aspect

of the self that can never be fully appropriated, and therefore as a potential force for political and spiritual regeneration from within the totalitarian state" (Horan 314). Horan further explains that within this trope, a character who believes in the dystopian state is transformed by political awareness brought on by illicit sexual relationships (316). In each of these novels, the governments recognize sexuality as a threat to the order and power they hold over their citizens, so they eliminate or restrict sexuality in order to ensure obedience. However, sexuality prevails despite these precautions and sparks further revolutionary beliefs and actions in protagonists. This reflects as well on the relationship between Cassia and Ky; their forbidden sexual attraction begets other forbidden behaviors of writing and poetry. In an article about the transgressive relationship between Winston and Julia in *1984,* Aşkın Çelikkol quotes Winston's reflection, "'The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thoughtcrime'" (198). Çelikkol explains that Winston externalizes his rebellion through his relationship with Julia, and forms their relationship through this lens. While Winston's interaction with Julia is the manifestation of already existent disobedient tendencies, for many young adult heroines, their relationships themselves are the transformative agent.

Literary critics problematize the portrayal of women's connection to rebellion solely through their male romantic partners. "Docile Bodies, Dangerous Bodies: Sexual Awakening and Social Resistance in Young Adult Dystopian Novels," by Sara Day, questions the trope of female protagonists' awakenings through romantic relationships. Day argues that the eventual rebelliousness of these protagonists is "undermined, at least partially, by the fact that these young women might never have joined such movements

had they not pursued traditional romantic relationships and accepted their male partners'

goals as their own" (90). The placement of a relationship as an agent of change within the

protagonist limits perception that the character is able to take independent action. In

"Disciplining Dystopia," Sara Buggy likewise agrees that this trope makes characters like

Cassia into "passive followers" who have "little understanding or interest in the true state

of their society until their prince charming requires them to do so" (158). These critics

show that sexual coupling restricts characters' transformative power in dystopian fiction.

Matched bears out this limitation, depicting Cassia's rebellion only in terms of her

heterosexual relationship with Ky. I argue that this limitation indicates the absence of

Cassia's capacity for resistance. Literary critics who examine sexuality in young adult

literature criticize novels' portrayal of young women without sexual agency; this trope

reinforces stereotypes about female passivity for young readers. In "Beyond *Forever*,"

McKinley quotes Michael Cart, "'in ... earlier YA fiction, it is the issue of sex that drives

the action and motivates the character, not vice versa. The characters, in fact, are little

more than cardboard conveniences, bodies like [Forever's] Sybil's that can be

manipulated by the author to perform the obligatory acts'" (39). Cart highlights female

characters' absence of sexual agency in young adult fiction. Even when engaging in

sexual activity, he argues that they behave in texts as puppets, influenced by male desire

rather than their own. McKinley compares female figures of sexuality as described in this

quote to works like Judy Blume's *Forever,* texts that engage with female desire, self-

esteem, and decisions about sexual activity. From the beginning of the article, McKinley

emphasizes the importance of representing young women's sexual engagement in a way

that "mirror[s] reality" (38). However, in applying McKinley's understanding of

sexuality in YA literature as a lens to Cassia's sexuality throughout *Matched,* it is clear that Cassia has no sexual agency. Like Cart's "'cardboard conveniences,'" Cassia is influenced by the circumstances and people around her in her sexual decision-making. And, as previously mentioned, she struggles to choose between two boys who are presented to her as perfect Matches by her government.

Although *Matched* indicates that Ky, as well as Cassia's relationship with him, are entangled with the spirit of revolution, it is evident that all of Cassia's supposedly radical thoughts and actions originate in her connection to Ky. *Matched* signals Cassia's role as a rebel through scenes such as the one in which Cassia departs her city with grand ideas about revolution. However, even in this scene, her interests are focused solely on Ky. By the close of the novel, Cassia has converted completely and champions the right to choose who to love; she determines to leave her society to find Ky, who has been mysteriously taken away by Officials. When she talks to Xander about her mission, she claims that her relationship with Ky led her to the realization that everyone should have the right to choose in their relationships and in their lives. In response, Xander asks if they have to seek the end of the world in order for things to improve. Cassia responds, "'Not the end of the world. For the beginning of a better one. … One where we can get Ky back'" (Condie 355). While on the following page, Cassia claims, "'This is bigger than us now'" (Condie 356), it is clear that her thoughts and motivations remain centered on her desire for Ky. Her revolutionary spirit does not originate in her desire for a better and more equal world for all, but rather for a better setting for her relationship with Ky. This conversation with Xander is positioned within the novel to confirm for readers that the relationship between Cassia and Ky has transformed Cassia from a full believer in her

society to one who wishes to dismantle it at all costs. *Matched* continually situates Cassia as the figure of the rebel in her grappling with what she wants, such as in the statement she makes above, in opposition with her society's rules. However, through my analysis of the source of her thoughts and actions, it is clear that the transformative agent is not Cassia's "rebellious" spirit, but simply her closeness to Ky, who in many ways represents rebellion more than Cassia does.

Cassia has insufficient agency over her own sexuality in a manner that evokes Koedt's commentary on institutional influences over women's sexual knowledge. Cassia's lack of rebellious agency reflects on her sexual agency; the government maintains a critical role in her sexuality through her Matching, and because Ky serves as Cassia's motivation towards disobedient behavior within their romantic relationship, his dominance informs their sexual relationship as well. The absence of Cassia's agency reinforces the passive norms that Brownmiller critiques throughout her work. Brownmiller indicates that women are instructed to be passive both in their sexuality and generally in their lives; Cassia's dependence on her government and Ky to determine her sexual and transgressive behaviors sustains the conventions that Brownmiller contests. Koedt likewise examines the systemic means through which women are improperly taught about their own bodies and sexualities through a lens that prioritizes heterosexual men. Cassia is a victim of a heterosexual matrix that dictates her sexuality even as she believes that she resists it.

Matched reveals that Cassia and Ky's interest in one another originated in the Matching system; this reality shows that both Cassia and Ky lack sexual and rebellious agency despite their narrative placement as symbols of resistance. While Cassia claims

strong feelings for Ky in spite of her Match with Xander, her particular attention to him only occurs after she believes that the government has manipulated the results of her Matching. A similar circumstance occurs for Ky as well. Cassia's continual pursuit of her "true" Match reveals her desire for connection to the institutional Matching of her society; she therefore remains implicated in the heterosexual beliefs second-wave feminists had tried to challenge. As the novel progresses, Cassia questions the validity of her own feelings for Ky and ponders whether the strength of her attraction to him is due only to his forbidden status. In one example of this, Ky has asked Cassia when she first began to see him as more than a friend. Despite their growing closeness, she lies. "I can't tell him that it was his face on the screen the morning after my Match Banquet – the mistake – that made me first begin to think of him this way. I can't tell him that I didn't see him until they told me to look" (Condie 266). Although by this scene, Cassia claims to be confident in the strength of her feelings for Ky, she acknowledges that even as their relationship is forbidden, it originated in the Matching system and her faith in the system. While this scene provides one example of Cassia's doubts, this issue is revisited numerous times. [3]

Additionally, Cassia is not the only one who experiences government interference in their relationship; Ky reveals that he too was attracted to Cassia due to government interference. As he admits later in the novel, during the same period of time in which Cassia witnessed the error of seeing Ky's face where Xander's was supposed to be, an

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[3] Shortly after the two begin to spend time together in leisure activities, they run into one another on the train. As they exchange meaningful looks, Cassia reflects, "I think we have done more seeing the last two days than in all the years we have known each other" (Condie 124). Although Cassia likely notes this change to indicate the apparent shift in their relationship, it also reveals that they have known one another as friends for many years and never sought anything beyond friendship until they were shown that they were a forbidden Match.

Official approached Ky and revealed that Cassia would have been his Match had he not

been classified as an Aberration. Cassia responds to this disclosure with horror and again

questions the legitimacy of their relationship, "Ky's love for me, which I thought was

pure and unblemished by any Officials or data or Matching pools, is not. They have

touched even this. I feel like something is dying, ruined beyond repair. *If the Officials*

orchestrated our whole love affair, the one thing in my life I thought happened in spite *of*

them- I can't finish the thought" (Condie 303). Cassia's train of thought in this quote is

complex; while she has come to terms with the truth that her own interest in Ky

originated from the Matching system, she still clings to the idea that their relationship is a

rebellion. In her seeking for something in life untouched by her government, the narrative

signals Cassia's revolutionary attitude.

Examples such as this one emphasize the novel's intent to position Cassia as a

rebel, but only within its own framework, which is fundamentally oppressive and

heteronormative, and the only way to see her resistance is to accept the authority of those

institutions. Ky's revelation that he was also influenced by the Matching system in his

attraction to Cassia uproots the pretension that their relationship is truly disobedient.

Cassia employs strongly negative language about their relationship in this quote in her

use of words such as "dying" and "ruined." She comes to the conclusion that the Officials

had a significant role in their relationship and never finishes the train of thought, leaving

the implication that this understanding has entirely soiled the relationship. However, the

next time she meets with Ky, the two reconcile with very little discussion about their

previous conversation, and so, despite their supposed strong relationship, disregard what

appears to be a deeply rooted issue (Condie 312-313). Although the issue is central to

their connection throughout *Matched,* Cassia and Ky continue to pursue their relationship in subsequent novels without any further contention about the Matching system's role in finding one another.

Based on the repeated mention of Cassia's doubts about Ky, had the government's Matching system simply matched her with either Xander or Ky, she never would have questioned the legitimacy of the system. This limitation on Cassia's critical faculties suggests, by my reading, that the novel builds a model of resistance that can only be actualized within and under governmental authority itself. Before the "mistake" in the system that presented both boys to her as potential Matches, Cassia adheres to government regulation without question; after this incident, she questions rules only in the context of her exclusion from society if she chooses Ky. Therefore, *Matched* presents Cassia's relationship with Ky as her only path towards rebellion and criticism. Not only is the transgressive nature of her relationship with Ky threatened by its integration in the Matching system, but it is also continually challenged by Cassia's own doubts about her own choice of Ky over Xander. If Ky represents rebellion, Xander, the prescribed choice in maintaining societal norms and rules, represents conformity to the status quo. After Cassia's mother urges her to choose the safer path and remain with Xander, Cassia thinks about how easy it would have been to be paired with Xander without interference. She even admits, "If there hadn't been a mistake, if I'd just seen his face and everything had been normal, none of this would have happened. I wouldn't have fallen in love with Ky… Everything would have been fine. Everything can still be fine. … The biggest piece, my Match with Xander, would not be hard to shape a life around. I could love him. I *do* love him" (Condie 299). This quote again acknowledges that Cassia would never

have noticed Ky in the first place without the error in the Matching system and adds the idea that she would have lived a contented life with Xander as her Match. Her sentiment that "everything would have been fine" if her Matching had been "normal" establishes her instinctual desire to maintain the status quo, and to perform her own role within that status quo. Cassia's use of the word "normal" suggests a nostalgia for her positive perception of her society before it was unsettled by the "abnormal" circumstances of her simultaneous pairing with Xander and Ky. She clings to this sense of normalcy as something that she can still have for herself if only she follows the rules. Cassia's imagining of a possible future with Xander that she still categorizes as attainable is also a betrayal of her relationship with Ky; she has already told him that she loves him (Condie 275), yet here she contemplates leaving him for Xander.

Cassia's continual and open admission that she would have been happy to be paired with Xander is rooted in the beginning of the novel. As previously explained, Cassia's first reaction to her Match with Xander is joy unblemished by doubt or hesitation, until the idea that Ky may have been her true Match disrupts her and causes her to change course. Therefore, Cassia's own experiences both as Xander's friend and as his Match contribute to her understanding that she and Xander could truly be happy together. Cassia's continual expressions of doubt, manifested in her debates about choosing Xander over Ky, detract from the love that she claims to feel for Ky, and therefore from the rebellion inherent in choosing to love him. The novel presents the government as oppressive and violent in its restrictions, yet no Matched pair in the narrative seems dissatisfied with their Match, Cassia and Xander included, which therefore calls into question whether this system is even worth fighting against. The

limitations on Cassia's love for Ky reveal the shallow nature of the novel's imagining of rebelliousness; *Matched's* depiction of rebellion depends upon the institutional systems it intends to critique. The novel is entrenched in normative marriage, which reflects back to Rubin's study of pervasive norms surrounding marriage; even *Matched,* which sets out to critique these norms, reinforces them.

The essential link that *Matched* creates between Cassia's relationship with Ky and her desire for resistance is problematic for a few reasons. Firstly, it is a significant limitation to Cassia's character that her rebellious spirit hinges not on the encouragement of her friends or loved ones, or simply for a more just world, but on a brief romantic relationship. Additionally, Cassia only notices and develops a relationship with Ky due to the Matching system which is central to the society's functioning; her Match with Ky was in fact prescribed by the Matching system, and had it not appeared to them as such, they never would have become romantically interested in one another. Although the two claim to seek the end of the Matching system, they owe their relationship to it. Therefore, the problems Cassia faces are not due to a malfunction of the Matching system itself- it successfully pairs her with both Xander and Ky. As a further contradiction, while Cassia champions the right to choose as her driving force as she pursues revolution, the unexpected choice between two potential romantic partners was the factor that forced confusion and conflict into her life. Even after Cassia forms a relationship with Ky, her persistent doubts additionally detract from her supposed surety about revolution and the right to choose. Cassia's confusion is finally called into question at the end of the novel when Xander asks if she ever would have chosen him over Ky, and she says yes. In response, Xander questions why she bothers to rebel at all, and Cassia asserts that the

right to choose is important, regardless of who she would choose (Condie 356). In this conversation, the novel suggests that Cassia's confusion is part of the privilege of free will. While this offers an explanation for Cassia's continual doubts throughout the novel, it does not increase her agency to independently take disobedient action nor does it expand upon the novel's representation of rebellion as dependent upon and existing within societal institutions.

Although the narrative portrays Cassia as transgressive due to her proximity to Ky, who is continually highlighted as a figure of radicalism, this chapter proves that she has only a tenuous link to disobedience. Cassia's rebelliousness continues to be limited by her lack of agency. At the end of *Matched,* a government Official tells Cassia that the government monitored and planned every aspect of the supposedly transgressive relationship (Condie 342). As Cassia associates rebellion with her attraction to Ky, she finds this revelation disturbing. Still, she clings to the few pieces of their relationship that signal defiance of the government, including information that they do not know or is out of their control (Condie 345). This degree of government interference further emphasizes Cassia's powerlessness. As previously mentioned, Cassia continually questions the role of a technical error in her relationship with Ky. While *Matched* ends with Cassia's faith in her relationship's independence from government interference, the origin of the mistake in the system remains an unsolved mystery until the close of the third book of the trilogy. Cassia discovers over time that she, in fact, was the one who put Ky into the Matching system. She slowly remembers that one day before her Matching ceremony, she was approached by a rebel group who ordered her to interfere with the programming of a data sort that she was scheduled to complete. If she refused to undertake this task, the

rebel group threatened to turn her grandfather in to the authorities for crimes committed in his youth. When Cassia entered the data sort, she realized that she was contributing information to her own Matching ceremony. She interfered with the programming as instructed, but received a memory loss drug as she exited the sort (Condie *Reached,* 461-467).

While this circumstance in the plot introduces an opportunity for Cassia to perform a radical act of her own volition, she only did so because her grandfather's wellbeing was threatened. Not only is she unable to take independent action, her inability to even remember her participation in disobedience further distances her from a rebellious identity. There is some suggestion of her agency when she remembers the thought, "*I'm doing it for Grandfather, but I'm also doing it for me. I want to have my* real *Match, with* all *the possibilities included"* (Condie *Reached,* 465). While this idea attempts to position Cassia as an active agent in her decision to carry out the interference in the data sort, her decision-making still exists within the boundaries of rules created for her by the government and by the rebel group. The government's rules suggest that their system will, without a doubt, pair each individual with their perfect match, and Cassia abides by this ideology throughout the *Matched* series and in this example as well. The rebel group has provided Cassia with the means and motivation for acting against the government. Overall, despite taking the action herself, Cassia remains a pawn in the larger plans of others. Perhaps this circumstance raises the question of whether rebellion is possible in any context; just as Cassia remains enmeshed in the ideology with which she was raised, it is impossible for anyone to fully disentangle themselves from societal influence. However, it is possible to work to disrupt the status quo. Cassia does not truly

commit acts of disobedience because she acts to maintain normalcy rather than to dismantle it. She acts in order to keep her grandfather safe and to produce the best Match for herself, goals that reinforce the status quo. The plot presents an opportunity for Cassia to prove the authenticity of her rebellious spirit, but the narrative does not take the route that would allow her to take ownership over her own actions.

Conclusion: The Invisibility of Non-Normative Gender and Sexuality

Although Cassia's story is framed as a narrative of fighting against an oppressive system for true love, *Matched* in many ways fails to truly provide the reader with this story. Cassia's love for Ky is inconsistent from the problematic origin of their relationship to the doubts that she maintains throughout. The plot continually presents Cassia with opportunities to earn agency, including her nonconformist thoughts, her attraction to Ky despite his being forbidden, and her interference in the Matching data sort. However, in each instance, *Matched* takes power from Cassia: her nonconformist thoughts connect to her selfish motivation to be with Ky, her attraction to Ky originates from the Matching system, and her interference is due primarily to the threat of endangering her grandfather.

In discourse regarding young adult literature, it is widely agreed that the agency of characters is of great importance; these representations have the power either to work against or to replicate societal oppressions. *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* urges critique of characters' rebellions, and whether they reinforce societal oppression (Day 11). Day praises the creation of female protagonists who are able to take action that redefines themselves and the world around them. In writing such characters,

authors suggest that "adolescents are those most capable of rejecting these oppressive controls and defining themselves according to their own terms" (Green-Barteet 48). In *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today,* Hayn agrees that novels can redefine readers' self-perception (75). She highlights active protagonists in dystopian literature and ponders the reflection that they can spark in young adult readers when she explains, "These novels suggest to readers that ordinary teenagers such as Jonas, Tally, and Katniss 'can take power into their own hands and create better worlds for themselves'" (113). In other words, the agency of fictional characters has the power to bolster the agency of readers. However, in *Matched*'s representation of its protagonist as a young woman who lacks agency, the novel reinforces stereotypical and oppressive views of female passivity instead.

Matched perpetuates binary gender, heteronormativity, and presumptive whiteness in its creation of a society in which even rebellion cannot imagine beyond these restrictions. In doing so, it neglects key identities in a world like Cassia's, including LGBTQ+ and racially diverse individuals. Despite *Matched*'s intended message that it is absurd for the government to dictate sexuality, the book fails to portray this message in many respects. As already explained, both of Cassia's dictated Matches would have made her happy; it was the choice between two perfect Matches that resulted in conflict in her life. In addition, the Matching system by design pairs boys with girls, an instance of heteronormativity that the narrative replicates in its erasure of the LGBTQ+ community within the story. By framing sexuality and society in straight terms, it misses the kind of critique leveled by Adrienne Rich 40 years ago, wherein same-sex relations posed a serious and political challenge to heterosexual patriarchy. In Cassia's society, Matching

occurs at age seventeen. While citizens can choose to be Matched or to remain a "Single," these are the only two options provided for romance (Condie 46). As Cassia later explains, "Until we're Matched, we all have crushes and flirt and play kissing games. But that's all they are – games – because we know we'll be Matched someday. Or we'll stay Single and the games will never end" (Condie 146). As this quote indicates, any experience of sexuality beyond what is dictated by society is deemed irrelevant "games," feelings and experiences not to be taken seriously. Thus, a non-heterosexual Single cannot earn a legitimized relationship through any means. Further, as the primary goal of Matching is to produce "*the healthiest possible future citizens for our Society*" (Condie 44), Singles are forbidden from producing children (Condie 46). This legislative restriction on reproduction is an attempt to further delegitimize any non-Matched heterosexual romances among Singles. In this rule's focus on reproduction as a signal of a legitimate relationship, it also further erases the relevance of LGBTQ+ relationships in which biological reproduction is impossible. The complete absence of their mention in the rules of society, the characters, and the central conflict over sexuality produces a narrative that never considers the possibility of someone who is LGBTQ+. *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today* highlights the importance of providing young adults with literature that includes the LGBTQ+ community. As young adults commonly experience heteronormativity in their everyday environments, it is important to challenge harmful views in the literature they consume (Hayn 123). Further, texts have the power to create visibility for LGBTQ+ young adults who are "not seen" in their heteronormative surroundings (Hayn 132). However, the invisibility of the LGBTQ+ community in

Matched instead perpetuates heteronormativity in its refusal to include homosexuality in a narrative that centralizes forbidden sexuality.

In addition to the absence of any LGBTQ+ individuals in *Matched,* the novel also lacks racial diversity, instead describing all characters as presumptively white. Due to the novel's central focus on sexuality, characters commonly describe attractive traits in others, and these descriptions always center on stereotypically white features. While racial identity goes unacknowledged, the novel portrays each of the three main characters, Cassia, Xander, and Ky, as beautiful. However, *Matched* attributes the characters' attractiveness to features that indicate whiteness.[4] The novel describes even minor characters in similar ways, such as "the beautiful blond girl" who is paired with "a boy, blond and handsome" (Condie 11-12) at the start of the novel. The continual link between whiteness and beauty, in addition to the complete absence of other races, both erases other races and reinforces the superiority of whiteness. "Straight Talk on Race," by Mitali Perkins, explains that young people more frequently see white characters in literature over other races, and are furthermore encouraged to view nondescript characters as white because non-white characters are primarily described through racial identifiers while white characters are not (Perkins 30-31). Perkins questions this labeling of race in stories, explaining that many stories do not overtly mention race but describe characters with stereotypically white features (30-31). Narratives that neglect to mention race

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[4] In the first scene of the novel, Cassia notes Xander for "his bright blue eyes and blond hair above his dark suit and white shirt. He's always been handsome…" (Condie 6). Likewise, Cassia details her own appearance, mentioning her green eyes and light hair (Condie 7). While Ky is initially described by his "tanned skin, dark hair" (Condie 52), Cassia continually thinks about the reflective quality of his blue eyes (Condie 238).

alongside physical descriptions that indicate whiteness erase race, and *Matched* is a novel that contributes to this problem.

While *Matched* intends to use its narrative to highlight the oppressive nature of the absence of choice, the manner in which it attempts to complete this task is problematic and therefore limits the effectiveness of this message. The oppressive institution of marriage in Cassia's society does provide a reflection upon the historical and continual limitations of agency that women and people of other marginalized gender and sexual identities experience. Cassia's rigidly white, heterosexual society, surroundings, and normative identity leave her incapable of independent action. The readers of novels like *Matched* are young adults who themselves are growing into their own varied relationships and identities within the spectrum of sexuality. Young adult dystopian fiction aimed at this population often intends to criticize oppressive qualities of the real world in order to allow them to question their own surroundings. However, the failure of these novels to holistically represent gender and sexuality reproduces violent perspectives that continue to reinforce these oppressions.

Matched is the perfect text through which to examine many layers of discussion in this chapter because it generates many contradictions. It is a novel in the young adult dystopian genre, which is known for its societal criticism and the formative age of its readers. Young adult readers, learning to understand and question the world around them, are particularly susceptible to the questioning inherent in dystopian fiction. Critics such as Day and Hayn argue that young adults learn about their own agency through fiction, therefore, it is especially important that novels of the genre take care to adequately represent marginalized issues and communities. However, *Matched* puts forth the issue of

mandated sexuality with Cassia, a white, heterosexual, passive protagonist, to champion the cause of the right to choose. Cassia's ability to choose her own sexual relationship is marred by interference from the government, Ky, and the society around them. Cassia lacks agency even in her own thoughts, through which she continues to depend on the people and institutions around her to make choices for her. Earlier in this chapter, I explained Michael Cart's criticism of young adult fiction's "'cardboard conveniences'" (McKinley 39), young women who lack sexual agency, who act as puppets to the plot and male characters in their narratives. I have shown that Cassia falls into this category, and therefore lacks the ability to effectively act as a figure of sexual rebellion.

While this chapter has examined the representations and limitations on characters' gender and sexual identities, the following chapter, "Scars of Sexual Violence," focuses on the lasting impact of sexual trauma in *Divergent*. There is a violence inherent in the loss of agency over one's own body and identity examined in this chapter that invites further exploration; the following chapter therefore builds off of the theoretical and literary examinations of this chapter.

Chapter Two: Scars of Sexual Violence

Chapter Two, "Scars of Sexual Violence," builds upon the examination of normative gender and sexuality of the previous chapter; it studies the lasting impact of sexual violence on characters in YA dystopia. Because dystopian fiction tries to diagnose social issues, sexual violence is an essential part of the genre; these representations of sexual violence in YA dystopia juxtapose private trauma with public criticism. In this chapter, I apply examples from *Divergent,* by Veronica Roth, to demonstrate the fundamental ways in which experiences of sexual violence influence identity. As survivors of sexual violence are already marginalized and silenced in society, it is of vital importance to tell narratives involving sexual violence with care and respect. The fictional representation of sexual violence experienced by the characters of these novels allows authors and readers to question and grapple with the structural inequality that perpetuates gender inequality and sexual violence.

While Chapter One's *Matched* highlights the violence of mandated sexuality, *Divergent,* by Veronica Roth, tells the story of a teenage girl who experiences many violent circumstances as she rebels against any individual or organization that attempts to hold her back. Unlike *Matched,* the narrative does not focus primarily on sexuality. However, *Divergent'*s representation of sexual violence includes problematic inconsistencies that are harmful both to its character's experience and to its readers. While the protagonist suffers from traumatic experiences of sexual violence in the first of the series, in subsequent novels, small signs of her continued trauma are juxtaposed with her seeking out sexual experiences. My analysis will highlight these contradictions in order to center the impact of sexual trauma, both in the fictional work and in reality.

Divergent, a novel in which society is divided into factions that designate everything from personality to social norms, focuses its dystopia on the divisions between people and the consequences of defying the social order. The novel additionally explores patriarchal oppression in the form of violent social norms, especially evident within the setting of the violent Dauntless faction. Dystopian fiction necessarily engages with critique; *Divergent'*s criticism focuses on patriarchal society, including the gender binary and gender-based violence. However, the novel doesn't consistently portray the impact of sexual violence, a key product of patriarchal structure. Chapter One's discussion of patriarchal structure examines social and institutional restrictions based on gender and sexuality; in this chapter, these boundaries manifest in physical violence committed upon individual bodies. These acts of violence cannot be discussed in isolation as they are all encompassed by patriarchal systemic violence. Even novels that address sexual violence maintain inconsistencies and limitations that reproduce harmful ideas about sexual violence. *Divergent* reproduces societal erasure of trauma in its contradictory representation of sexual trauma.

Theory of Heterosexual Violence

Educators and literary critics commonly question how best to portray and discuss the topic of sexual violence in young adult literature. In "'But She Didn't Scream,'" educators examine students' misconceptions about sexual violence, and how literature can interact with limitations in their knowledge. As young adults as a population experience high percentages of sexual violence, many agree that it is important that YA literature address and educate readers about sexual violence (Colantonio-Yurko, et al. 2).

Critics likewise highlight the importance of young adult exposure to texts that deal with sexual violence; in "Hero, Victim, or Monster?," Carolyn Lehman offers questions to ask about the portrayal of sexual violence in texts, including whether they represent realism and agency in victims' experiences, as well as what support and information they offer readers as they engage with the narrative (36-37). For young adults, who experience sexual violence directly or through peers, addressing sexual violence in narratives provides vital opportunities to grapple with and better understand the issue (Colantonio-Yurko, et al. 9). Therefore, it is critical that these representations of sexual violence be realistic and of central focus. Placing my own criticism of *Divergent* within this context, the narrative's failure to consistently and realistically represent Tris's trauma is a disservice not only to her character development, but to young adult readers who will experience secondhand the erasure of her trauma.

Stephanie Palmieri examines sexual violence in young adult dystopian fiction in "Assessing Industry Ideologies." In this study, Palmieri begins by explaining the damaging effect of media representations in which women are defined "only in terms of sexuality, equating their agency with commodified beauty… [which] confuses issues of consent" (239). In other words, female sexualization in media contributes to the patriarchal objectification of and systemic violence against women. Palmieri focuses on ways in which young adult dystopian novels attempt to work against patriarchal ideals in their realistic representations of sexual assault. She uses *Divergent* as an example of realism through Tris's experiences, such as her PTSD, her previous friendship with an attacker, and her victimization based on power dynamics (Palmieri 247-249). These textual experiences work against pervasive myths about sexual violence. Palmieri

likewise comments on the film adaptation of *Divergent'*s sexual assault and the ways in which it detracts from the novel's attention to realism. Not only does the film eliminate the sexual aspect of the violence that Tris experiences, but it additionally portrays Tris as a helpless victim and focuses its attention on the heroism of her male savior (Palmieri 266). Palmieri considers the variations between the novel and film versions of *Divergent,* as well as other young adult dystopian works, in order to highlight the ways in which both forms of media maintain and dismantle social expectations. While she concludes that the novels she examined appeared to "contest dominant ideologies" (Palmieri 272), young adult dystopian fiction still has a long way to go in its representation of sexual violence.

Although much of this chapter focuses on examples from *Divergent*, it is important to first outline the theoretical frameworks through which I view the literature. As this chapter intends to thoughtfully discuss sexual violations, I turn to second wave feminism for its extensive theorization of systematic sexual violence. Susan Brownmiller is well known for her pivotal discussion of rape and the structural nature of sexual violence in *Against Our Will;* I apply her work to this chapter as a background in order to rethink the sexual violence detailed in *Divergent.* Therefore, I will spend time here establishing the theoretical background that Brownmiller provides, as well as critiques of limitations that her work perpetuates.

In *Against Our Will,* Brownmiller defines sexual assault through power relations between genders. From the introduction of her book, she claims that rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear" (Brownmiller 15). Brownmiller's focus on widespread intimidation based

on gender illuminates the institutional sexism and sexual violence prevalent in today's young adult dystopian fiction. Throughout the book, *Against Our Will* builds on the concept that sexual violence boils down to institutional gender-based violence. Brownmiller outlines different periods of time in history and the ways in which rape has continued to symbolize dominance and ownership. From the ownership of women through the institution of marriage since the Stone Age (Brownmiller 17) to systematic wartime rape of the conquered by conquerors such as the historic rapes in Nanking (Brownmiller 75-76) to the rapes of Native Americans and enslaved Africans in the United States (Brownmiller 153), sexual violence has been a consistent operation of heterosexual institutions. I previously examined this long-term institutional gendered superiority in Chapter One in the work of second wave theorists, including Brownmiller, who critique the structure of a rigid and violent patriarchal society. In this chapter, their work comes into play in personal experiences of sexual violence that are upheld by this structure.

Brownmiller builds upon the idea of institutional violence when she discusses the role of violence in racial politics in the United States. While she does not equate rape and lynching, she describes both as violence meant to keep all Black people and all women in continual fear. Brownmiller adds that these acts are committed "as group punishment for being uppity, for getting out of line, for failing to recognize 'one's place,' for assuming sexual freedoms, or for behavior no more provocative than walking down the wrong road at night in the wrong part of town and presenting a convenient, isolated target for group hatred and rage" (Brownmiller 254-255). In other words, Brownmiller suggests that both rape and lynching have been used as supposed "punishment" for the crime of self-

ownership, when people of color or women dare to live their lives outside of the submissive social norms expected of them, or simply dare to live their lives at all. Following this focus on sexual and racial violence, Brownmiller again establishes the same conclusion that she addresses in her introduction: that the violence of rape and lynching represents a social "control mechanism" (255). While Brownmiller discusses violence based on social identities of race and gender, she describes womanhood and Blackness as two distinct identities and ignores the intersectionality of violence committed against Black women. Although in this exclusion, Brownmiller fails to identify the way violence is racialized for non-white women, I want to emphasize her point that oppressed groups are often punished with violence for asserting their identities and self-possession.[5]

After examining the history of sexual violence and the ways in which it reinforces violent social structures, *Against Our Will* focuses in on how our culture was founded on and perpetuates sexual violence. Brownmiller does not shy away from how sexual violence affects girls and women through their lives. She states simply, "Women are trained to be rape victims" (Brownmiller 309). From this statement forward, Brownmiller details cultural signals that women are expected to be passive at all times, even in dangerous situations. From the beauty of female inaction detailed by fairy tales to the expectation that women secretly desire the ultimate passive experience of being raped (Brownmiller 310-312), the social norm of female passivity sustains sexual violence.

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[5] Although Brownmiller's arguments about sexual violence remain important to the discussion of this chapter, many of her arguments throughout her book are based in racist ideas, as emphasized by feminist theorists such as Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class.* Davis explains that many of Brownmiller's arguments are founded in racism, such as Brownmiller's example of Emmett Till in which she discusses Till's whistle and the violence of his brutal murder as two comparable sexist acts (Davis 104). While Davis strongly objects to such examples of racism in Brownmiller's work, she still acknowledges Brownmiller as a "pioneer" of theorizing sexual violence (104).

As Brownmiller published *Against Our Will* during the period of second wave feminism, her ideas regarding rape have been expanded upon over time. Other theorists, such as Carisa Showden and Rachel Fraser, have built upon the ideas Brownmiller cultivates in *Against Our Will.* Showden criticizes the sweeping ideas made by second wave feminists like Brownmiller. She addresses the damage caused by the homogenizing view of feminism when she claims that second wave feminists "failed to acknowledge women's own sexual agency, turning all women into victims in the eyes of the law and then, often, themselves" (Showden 170). While Brownmiller claims that the prevalence of sexual violence traumatizes all women, Showden suggests that this homogenization of women's identities through the lens of victimhood is instead the traumatizing agent.

Rachel Fraser likewise advocates against focusing on trauma as the central impact of rape, which she argues is a limited perspective of its effect on women's lives. Fraser differs from Brownmiller in that she reinterprets the aftermath of rape as "labor," which is more "open-ended;"[6] the labor of rape can be painful and difficult and can simultaneously provide opportunities for growth and community. Fraser acknowledges this viewpoint as a more holistic and open perspective on the effects of sexual violence over Brownmiller's understanding of sexual violence primarily through trauma. However, she additionally admits that there is not one perfect method through which to perceive it as she adds, "No single model will say all there is to say" (Fraser).

Although there are many areas that need updating in Brownmiller's work when discussing her ideas today, she delves into the topic of sexual violence in such a way that

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[6] "It might, for example, prove useful to think of the *labor* extracted by sexual violence—the labor of caring and recovery, of managing fear, of checking the backseat—rather than of the trauma it inflicts" (Fraser).

provides a format through which to examine patriarchal oppression, even the oppression that her work takes part in. Brownmiller's work is essential for this chapter because it studies the physical, mental, and emotional trauma of sexual violence as well as the patriarchal systems that sustain sexual violence. While the rigid binary of Brownmiller's gender system is outdated, her systematic and expansive examination of the countless manifestations of institutional sexual violence is useful for examining the systemic means by which real and fictional sexual violence is perpetuated. In addition, the work's own reproduction of institutional sexual violence in the form of insistence upon heteronormativity and binary gender allows for critical thinking that can be applied to any discussion of sexual violence. Despite additions to and debates about concepts in Brownmiller's work, *Against Our Will* continues to serve as a foundation for understanding rape and its impact and so remains relevant to today and vital for examining *Divergent* in this chapter.

In contrast with Brownmiller's analysis of feminine passivity as an entrenched social reality, Sara Ahmed studies the consequences of women who reject passivity. In *Living a Feminist Life,* Ahmed redefines the term "willfulness," given to girls who think for themselves. She explains that independent girls are punished with this term because "girls are not supposed to have a will of their own" (Ahmed 68). Her convergence with Brownmiller is apparent when she adds that for women, "to exist is disobedient" (Ahmed 84). In other words, when women take up the space of being human, simply existing, this is seen as aggressive and threatening due to the pervasiveness of expectations of female passivity. Ahmed further explores the social criticism of women when she describes social perceptions of the female body as either negligible or spectacle. While Ahmed uses

an example of queer women who are either ignored or objectified in public, she describes a largely universal experience for women when she says, "as if without a man present at a table, or a body visible as man, you do not appear" (Ahmed 215). In terms of social norms, identity, and sexuality, women who follow passive norms earn invisibility, while those who reject these expectations experience rejection for the crime of ownership over oneself. Ahmed's work provides a model through which to reimagine the possibilities of female characters in young adult literature; just as she encourages girls to embrace "willfulness," or rejecting social rules, YA literature has the potential to introduce young readers to characters who do so.

The Trauma of Sexual Violence in *Divergent*

In *Divergent,* Tris endures traumatic experiences of sexual violence that greatly affect her in spite of her enormous personal growth. However, Roth marginalizes these traumas in contradictory descriptions of Tris's response to them. While the novel in some ways highlights the systemic and personal impacts of sexual violence, its inconsistency creates a problematic narrative of trauma. *Divergent* takes place in a dystopian world in which society is broken up into different factions, organized communities known for different qualities and social expectations. Tris is raised in the faction called Abnegation, a community known for generosity to the extreme of negation of self; members are encouraged to make any individualities socially invisible and prioritize others' needs over their own. As a result of this denial of self, Tris grows up in the violence of sexual repression; she is told throughout her upbringing that even observation of her own body is improper. The violence of self-denial to this extreme informs Tris's identity for the

remainder of the *Divergent* series, despite the fact that most of *Divergent* details her transition to a different faction called Dauntless, which instead values bravery.

Through Tris's journey from her origins in Abengation to her integration in Dauntless, readers can see Tris battle for agency over her own body. When Tris introduces the reader to herself and her life in Abnegation, it is clear that she is expected to live without agency. She explains, "The gray clothes, the plain hairstyle, and the unassuming demeanor of my faction are supposed to make it easier for me to forget myself, and easier for everyone else to forget me too" (Roth 6). Even in the dressing of the body, Abnegation encourages appearances that suggest invisibility. Roth emphasizes the importance of these restrictions upon the body from the beginning of the novel; Tris begins her narration during the rare period of time in which she is permitted to view her reflection in the mirror, which occurs only once every three months when her mother cuts her hair (Roth 1). The decision to begin Tris's narrative at this moment centralizes the restrictions of Abnegation upon her body as well as her identity. In seemingly small moments, like wearing a fitted T-shirt (Roth 58), wearing makeup for the first time (Roth 87), and deciding to get a tattoo (Roth 90), Tris reclaims ownership over her own body, and in doing so, struggles against the norms expected of her in Abnegation.

Each of these moments is so powerful that they serve to be transformative. Following her shedding of her oversized clothing, Tris takes a leap of faith off a roof and renames herself from Beatrice, her given Abnegation name, to Tris (Roth 60). Likewise, following her small shift into wearing makeup, she looks at her reflection and feels fundamentally changed (Roth 87). Finally, although tattoos are forbidden in Abnegation, when Tris decides to get a tattoo in Dauntless, the image of three birds as a symbol of her

family serves as "a way to honor my old life as I embrace my new one" (Roth 90). Each of these moments, defined by somewhat mundane activities in the real world, provides Tris with agency over her body, which translates for her to agency over her identity. Despite these acts of self-ownership, the repressive violence that Tris experienced in Abnegation has lasting effects on how she and her peers treat her body. As Ahmed argues, social expectations force women into complicit invisibility or rejection for disobedience. In Abnegation, Tris experiences similar social expectations firsthand; she is not allowed to have a notable appearance or opinion. These restrictions force her to remain constantly passive even as she craves freedom. She finally breaks free in ownership over herself and her choices, an act of self-care that Ahmed categorizes as an act of rebellion (Ahmed 237). As is often the case for defiant women, according to Brownmiller and Ahmed, Tris's social rebellion comes with violent consequences, which culminates in her sexual assault.

In contrast with the restrictions of Abnegation, Dauntless prioritizes bravery as the principle by which its citizens live. However, while the faction was founded on the courage of pursuing justice (Roth 206), Tris and her friends note the corrosion of this virtue into simple cruelty. The dissolution from courage to cruelty in Dauntless continually arises, such as when authorities force initiates to fight one another to unconsciousness and inflict violent punishments for disobeying small rules (Roth 204-205). In a society premised on stereotypically masculine values of strength and dominance, toxic masculinity thrives in its malice and violence. The characteristics of the environment cultivated in Dauntless reflect Brownmiller's work when she describes violence as a means of social control; the prevalent violence and toxic masculinity serve

as environmental factors that contribute to the embodied, physical sexual violence that Tris ultimately experiences in the text. Tris's distrust in the Dauntless authorities is emphasized by her insistence that she not report her assault; she and her friends quickly learn that nothing will be done to provide justice for acts of violence (Roth 205-206, 284). The absence of justice for the assault demonstrates the perpetuation of violence within violent institutions.

Now enmeshed in the Dauntless community, Tris experiences sexual violence through sexualized taunting as well as an attack in which she is sexually assaulted. Although she transfers to Dauntless, stereotypes about the members of her former faction follow her there. Her minority status is magnified by her isolation; although there are transfers from other factions, Tris is the only one from Abnegation. From the beginning of her time in Dauntless, the word "Stiff" follows her every move; it is a slur to reference the restricted and prudish lifestyle of Abnegation. The slur, as well as its continual use, serves to represent the stereotypes that Tris continues to suffer from in Dauntless. From her first day in Dauntless, fellow initiates Peter, Molly, and Drew target Tris in an escalation of sexual violence that includes taunting, threats, and involuntary exposure of her body, culminating in a sexual assault. On her first day in Dauntless, Tris falls and rolls up her sleeve to check her elbow. Peter responds mockingly, "'Ooh. *Scandalous!* A Stiff's flashing some skin!'" (Roth 56). This snide comment highlights sexualized stereotypes about Tris based on her background alone. Peter, Molly, and Drew continue to escalate sexualized violence towards Tris. In another instance of escalation, they spray paint the word "Stiff" all over Tris's possessions (Roth 105). The group takes another opportunity to torment Tris when she comes out of the shower in a towel. They block her

path as she attempts to find privacy, mocking her body, "'Look at her,' says Molly, crossing her arms. She smirks at me. 'She's practically a child.' 'Oh, I don't know,' says Drew. 'She could be hiding something under that towel. Why don't we look and see?'" (Roth 169). After these taunts, they grab Tris's towel, and she is forced to run to safety. The involuntary exposure of her body is an additional transgression, a physically violent manifestation of their social rejection of Tris. In each of these instances, the group targets Tris for her femininity as well as her outsider status due to her Abnegation background. Palmieri's "Assessing Industry Ideologies" asserts that each faction represents stereotypically masculine or feminine traits; she suggests that while Dauntless represents masculinity in its focus on physical aggression, Abnegation represents femininity in its focus on self-sacrifice (156-157). In her transfer between these two factions and embodiment of both traits, Tris embodies a kind of queer identity (Palmieri 159) that contributes to her social rejection and sexual harassment in Dauntless.

Things change for the worse when Tris begins to succeed in Dauntless; as a misfit outsider, the idea of her accomplishment above others is deemed unacceptable. All of the new members of Dauntless compete for a permanent place in the faction, and when Tris is ranked first of all the Dauntless candidates, Peter and his friends respond with violence, but perhaps more tellingly, Tris's friends take the news poorly as well. Peter reacts immediately, shoving Tris violently against the wall, saying, "'I will not be outranked by a Stiff'" (Roth 267). Although her friends come to her aid upon seeing this attack, they do so with hesitation. When her friend, Will, fights Peter back, he says, "'Leave her alone… Only a coward bullies a little girl'" (Roth 268). While Will has come to Tris's defense, he does so on the pretense that Tris is defenseless and incapable, despite her being ranked

first of the group. After Peter leaves, Will questions Tris, asking if she is manipulating everyone. Even though he is her friend and defended her, even he can't seem to understand how a small girl from Abnegation has become so successful. After this incident, rather than celebrate Tris's accomplishments, they all leave Tris behind with tension in the air. This moment highlights the misogyny and stereotypes prevalent even among Tris's friends. They have no problem supporting her in her stereotypical weakness, but have difficulty supporting her in strength.

This altercation is not the final punishment Tris receives for her accomplishments. That evening, Tris becomes the victim of a violent assault. Three boys, Peter, Drew, and Tris's friend Al, attack her in the middle of the night, blindfold her, and dangle her over the railing of a huge waterfall. During this assault, the boys sexually violate her as well. "A heavy hand gropes along my chest. 'You sure you're sixteen, Stiff? Doesn't feel like you're more than twelve. … Wait, I think I found something!' His hand squeezes me. I bite my tongue to keep from screaming. More laughter" (Roth 279). The narration of this scene emphasizes the ultimate powerlessness and violation that Tris experiences. Blindfolded and overpowered, she remains unable to even attribute the violence to a specific boy as she describes an anonymous "heavy hand" as the origin of her assault. Throughout the scene, the boys' dialogue interrupts her thoughts as she processes the violence of the attack (Roth 277-281). This element of narration highlights the boys' assertion of power over her. During the assault prior to this quote, Tris focuses on survival and identifying her captors and location, however, her internal narration becomes fragmented following her sexual abuse. This fragmentation indicates the traumatic impact of the experience. The violation inherent in Tris's sexual assault is

further damaging to her because it was committed by a group of boys, one of whom was a close friend. This betrayal is one that affects her deeply because in this moment, Al transforms from someone that Tris trusted to someone who hurts her simply because of her defiance of expectations.

Tris's experience with sexual assault, including the events that led up to it, hearkens back to much of what Brownmiller and other theorists mean when they discuss acts of violence that serve as punishment for deviance from norms. Brownmiller describes sexual violence as an effect of institutionalized dominance throughout history as well as a "control mechanism" (255); this description serves as an explanation for the violence that Peter, Drew, and Al commit against Tris as a response to her unexpected achievement. The norms that Tris is expected to follow are clear: as a small girl from Abnegation, her peers expect her to be weak, incapable, and particularly timid and passive. Both her femininity and the stereotypes of her place of origin contribute to others' expectations for her. At the start of her time in Dauntless, Tris primarily adheres to these expectations; she struggles to escape the restrictive norms she followed in Abnegation and fails to succeed in training, resulting in her sixth place status in the first ranking (Roth 198). At the point of the first ranking, no one views Tris as a threat and her ranking confirms stereotypes already in place. However, in her placement as the first-ranked initiate into Dauntless, she defies all of these expectations. Unsurprisingly in the context of what we learn from Brownmiller and Ahmed, Peter and Drew respond to this change with violence; they had treated Tris with violence prior to her defiance of norms and her superior ranking to them. Molly, the only girl of Peter's friends, is not present for this final attack, and she is instead replaced by Al, a supposed friend of Tris's. This

replacement from a purported female enemy to a male friend suggests a rigid and violent gender binary that evokes Brownmiller's perspective on universal male dominance perpetuated through gender-based violence.

Even the friends who do not attack Tris respond to her success in a manner that reveals their distaste for her deviance from expectations. Rather than celebrating with Tris, they respond to the news with hostility. In order to regain their friendship and support following her attack, Tris is forced to feign weakness and vulnerability (Roth 289). This plan works; Tris exaggerates her pain and fear when recounting the story of her attack and her friends again assume the roles of her protectors (Roth 294). Despite the problematic nature of the conditional loyalty of Tris's friends, Tris chooses to forgive them and move on, partially because she needs the safety that they provide from potential future violence. However, although Tris internally questions the nature of their friendship in this moment, this issue is never mentioned in the text again. In *Girls on Fire*, Kathleen Lashley contributes to this discussion in her suggestion that Tris's deviance and social punishment is tied to her rejection of gender norms. Lashley posits that Tris's success in Dauntless represents masculinity, so Peter, Drew, and Al "feminize" her by physically overpowering and sexually assaulting her (102). Lashley's reading reflects and builds upon Brownmiller and Ahmed's ideas about violence against women who deviate from social norms. While Brownmiller and Ahmed imagine violence as social punishment, Lashley sees Tris's sexual violence as an enforcement of the gender binary that she resists. In order to exist in this violent patriarchal system, Tris is forced to perform femininity following her assault in her display of vulnerability. Tris is expected to appear to her attackers as "feminine and beaten by the males and to give them what they want: a

battered down female who has been put in her place and who will not act masculine again any time soon, and who would especially not challenge their masculinity again" (Lashley 103). Overall, it is telling that when Tris experiences a moment of strength and success, both her friends and her enemies respond negatively. Reading these events through Brownmiller and Ahmed's work, Tris's friends and enemies alike succumb to harmful institutional stereotypes about Tris based on her gender and upbringing. This kind of group oppression, in which both friends and enemies punish and ostracize Tris, corresponds to how Brownmiller and Ahmed think patriarchy functions: not just at the private level, but additionally in large-scale social patterns and hierarchies.

The aftermath of Tris's assault highlights the common ground between this fictional narrative and real trauma. Although Tris is characterized as a strong individual who is rarely fazed by her violent and frightening surroundings, she is rattled by her violent sexual assault. Directly following the incident, she talks about the situation with Four, a Dauntless trainer Tris has developed feelings for. While she has no difficulty explaining the physical violence she had undergone, she falters when she tries to explain why she doesn't want to show vulnerability to prevent further attacks. "'I don't think you *get* it.' Heat rises into my face. 'They touched me. …Not… in the way you're thinking.' I clear my throat. I didn't realize when I said it how awkward it would be to talk about. 'But… almost,'" (Roth 286). Despite her continual stoicism and determination throughout the traumatic incident and afterwards, this quote is the only time in the entire series that she clearly hints at what happened to her. She uses vague language that talks around her assault and never mentions it again; when she later describes the attack to her friends, she skips the sexual nature of the violence (Roth 291-292). This discomfort and

reluctance suggest shame regarding the assault, a common experience among those who have been sexually assaulted (Brownmiller 387). In addition to this link between Tris and survivors of sexual assault, she also exhibits signs of post-traumatic stress following the experience.

Much of *Divergent* follows Tris's journey as she attempts to succeed in the initiation to join Dauntless; in the final stage of training, the new members endure hallucinations in which they must face frightening scenarios and figure out how to get past their fears. In one of these simulations, Tris is assigned kidnapping as the fear that she must conquer. While she begins with confidence, the simulation brings back the memory of the attack that she survived, and she relives her trauma instead of the intended scenario:

> The image of myself falling into darkness flashes into my mind, the same image that I now carry with me in my nightmares. … I knew they would come back for me; I knew they would try again. The first time was not enough. I scream again- not for help, because no one will help me, but because that's what you do when you're about to die and you can't stop it. (Roth 344)

In this scene, Tris experiences a flashback to her traumatic memory, rendering her helpless and incapable of accomplishing the task to which she was assigned. Despite knowing that the simulation is unreal, she cannot logically process the scenario because she feels that she is again experiencing a life or death circumstance. Although she independently experiences this flashback, she continually uses the word "you." This second-person usage invites the reader to empathize with the desperation that Tris feels in this moment, universalizing her experience beyond the fictional plot of the text. Another

important detail to her description in this scene is her mention of "the image of myself falling into darkness… the same image that I now carry with me in my nightmares." This moment is clearly a reference to the trauma of being held by her attackers over the chasm, threatening a fall which would end her life. This comment indicates that this is not the first time she has relived the trauma of that night, despite the fact that the text does not reference these nightmares otherwise. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* a resource used by mental health professionals to diagnose mental disorders, highlights the prevalence of Tris's experiences. It explains that following a traumatic incident, such as the physical and sexual violence detailed in the narrative, "The traumatic event can be reexperienced in various ways. Commonly, the individual has recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive recollections of the event" ("Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" 275). Some examples of this described intrusion include nightmares and dissociative flashbacks in which the individual relives the trauma, much like the ones that Tris experiences. The examples from the narrative that connect Tris to real survivors of sexual assault are important to note within the larger narrative because they establish Tris as a sexual assault survivor.

While the novel offers key moments of documenting how the assault shapes Tris's perception and expression, it also has a habit of associating those responses with her personality, rather than seeing them as evidence of a depersonalized, systemic, widespread, and common feature of women's experience under violent patriarchy, as Brownmiller and Ahmed's work indicates. In other words, the novel tries to personalize, and therefore contain, an experience and set of effects that feminist theory teaches us to see as common and systematic to women. As the text moves forward, Tris's trauma is

made to be a marginal moment of the past; the narrative neglects to show the consistent

presence of or healing from this trauma. Tris's hesitation to speak about her assault and

her experience with a dissociative flashback are the only clear signs of her trauma; further

examples of Tris's discomfort with sexuality are described in a manner that portrays this

distaste as a personality trait rather than a response in context with her attack and her

sexually repressed upbringing, which produces an apparent erasure of her trauma. Further

signs of her responses to this trauma throughout the series are present, but are so sparsely

scattered as to render them marginal. Brownmiller and Ahmed explain sexual violence as

an element of patriarchy dependent on widespread, institutional violence, rather than

isolated and personalized, as Tris's experience in *Divergent* indicates.

While the signs of Tris's trauma disappear from the surface of her narrative, her

violent sexual experiences continue to haunt her in consensual sexual relationships as

well as unrelated circumstances. Following the direct consequences of Tris's assault, the

importance of the event fades from central view; the plot moves to focus on other events

and references to the assault are subtle and few, especially in successive novels to

Divergent. Although the narrative rarely outright mentions Tris's sexual assault, her

behavior continues to indicate trauma. Due to a combination of Tris's upbringing in a

sexually repressive environment, as well as the sexual violence she experiences in

Dauntless, she develops an aversion to intimacy. The first sign of this aversion appears as

she adjusts to the different social norms of her new faction. While Abnegation forbids

public displays of affection, Tris quickly witnesses that this is not the case in Dauntless,

and responds with distaste. When she witnesses two people publicly kiss, she expects that

they will be punished and responds negatively to her friends (Roth 81-82). Both her

expectation for negative consequences and her own disgust signal her internalization of the sexual repression of Abnegation. The continual impact of Tris's upbringing in Abnegation further emphasizes the trauma that she endures as a result of its environment of sexual repression. Tris responds with similar discomfort during other circumstances discouraged by Abnegation, including the friendly physical contact of handshakes (Roth 51) and hugs (Roth 126). She likewise is unsettled by mirrors (Roth 87), a discomfort that continues throughout the series. Near the end of the second of the series, *Insurgent,* Tris notes the differences in her own behavior when she says, "Everyone but the Abnegation takes mirrors for granted. I still feel a prickle of shock whenever I see one in the open" (Roth, *Insurgent* 439). The continual prevalence of the physical restrictions imparted by Abnegation in Tris's processing of the world around her indicates the lasting effect of the violence of self-denial. A developed fear of intimacy likewise suggests the significant impact of her sexual assault.

Following the sexual attack that Tris experiences, her discomfort with physical interaction morphs into a deep fear of sexual intimacy. In the aftermath of sexual violence, fear, confusion, and other negative responses towards intimacy are common among survivors, especially when linked with symptoms of PTSD (Martinson, et al. 1888-1889). Like with PTSD, individual experiences with intimacy following trauma differ, however Tris's relationship with intimacy is inconsistent with the lasting effect of her trauma. Tris encounters intimacy on a more personal level as her crush on Four, also known as Tobias, develops into a relationship between the two. Despite the comfort and desire between them, Tris continues to feel fear whenever they get physically close.[7] This

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[7] During a private moment in which they are kissing, Tris notes that she "need[s] bravery" as she moves closer to him (Roth 373). She adds, "He unzips my jacket a few inches, and I press my hands to my legs to

issue arises most prominently when she and other Dauntless initiates face their fears in simulations. As their final test, they must face all of their strongest fears in succession. After experiencing truly terrifying, life-threatening scenarios, Tris enters a simulation that includes only Tobias and a bed. While she endured confidently through the other simulations, this situation is what rattles her. "*This* is what I can't cope with? *This* is the fear I have no solutions for – a boy I like, who wants to… have sex with me?" (Roth 393). This is an important moment for Tris because it highlights the reality of her fear and, for the first time, she truly sees how much her violent past experiences with sexuality have impacted her. Not only is intimacy one of her primary fears, it is also the one that she finds the most difficult to overcome in the simulations. Although she successfully completes the simulation, Tris's fear of intimacy continues for the remainder of the novel. Near the end of the novel, she confronts Tobias, explaining her fear, and admits, "'I'm only… afraid of what I want'" (Roth 406). Again, this statement highlights her simultaneous fear and desire, and the inextricability of the two. While this is a central issue for her in *Divergent,* the other novels of the series contradict her struggle in the disappearance of this fear.

In subsequent books to *Divergent,* Tris's fear of intimacy disappears, as does much of the surface-level presence of her trauma. In "Surface Reading," Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus examine the distinctions between surface reading, or what is apparent in a text, and symptomatic reading, or interpretations of a text's hidden meaning. Best and Marcus focus on "surface reading," or what is clear and evident, "what is neither

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stop them from shaking. I should not be nervous. This is Tobias" (Roth 373). Although Tris comments that she logically has no reason to be afraid of him, the fear is clearly present in her body and mind throughout the scene alongside her desire and pleasure.

hidden nor hiding" in a text (9). They compare this approach to reading to what they define as "symptomatic reading," which involves "read[ing] a text's silences, gaps, style, tone, and imagery as symptoms… absent only apparently from its pages" (Best and Marcus 6). In the *Divergent* series, Tris's trauma fluctuates between the surface and depths of the text, therefore, I use a combination of surface reading and symptomatic reading in order to analyze Tris's behavior. *Divergent* highlights the traumatizing incident and its effects are apparent on the narrative surface throughout the novel, as evidenced by Tris's fear of intimacy and her responses to triggers; however, subsequent novels represent Tris's trauma inconsistently as her fear of intimacy inexplicably vanishes even while her responses to triggers remain. While Roth introduces sexual violence and trauma as central to *Divergent,* Tris's contrasting relationship with her trauma creates ambiguity about the text's overall representation of trauma.

Although *Divergent* devotes attention to Tris's experiences with sexual violence and her consequential trauma, subsequent novels in the series offer a troubling model of resolution in which Tris does not overcome her fear, but instead seeks out intimacy in the omission of fear. Not only is this erasure an insufficient way to represent Tris's trauma, it additionally suggests that sexual intimacy can itself be a healing agent of a sexual trauma, which is a dangerous message for vulnerable young adult readers. Despite the systemic nature of Tris's sexual trauma, emphasized by the institutional sexual repression of Abnegation and patriarchal violence of Dauntless, the *Divergent* series reduces her trauma to a problem solved simply within her personal relationship and intimacy with Tobias. The disappearance of Tris's fear of intimacy is an insufficient model for resolving her sexual trauma and perpetuates misinformation among a young adult

population who may view Tris's experiences as a model through which to understand

sexual violence.

Although Tris displays an extreme fear of intimacy throughout *Divergent,* to the

extent that it is one of her primary fears, this fear vanishes in subsequent books. In fact, in

the beginning of *Insurgent,* for example, Tris uses intimacy as an escape from grief and

other horrors that she experiences at the close of *Divergent.* After witnessing violence

and death at the end of *Divergent,* Tris spends time trying to recover. When Tobias enters

her room to ask how she's doing, she does not answer and instead distracts herself with

closeness to him. "I wrap my hands around his arm, holding him there as long as I can.

When he touches me, the hollowed-out feeling in my chest and stomach is not as

noticeable" (Roth, *Insurgent* 12). While she does occasionally mention "nervous energy"

(Roth, *Insurgent* 49) during moments of intimacy, there is a stark contrast between Tris's

intense fear in *Divergent* and its absence in the following novels. Not only is she no

longer afraid, she also continually seeks out as much intimacy as possible in order to

escape from more painful emotions (Roth, *Insurgent* 49, 312). It seems strange that

someone with a strong fear of intimacy due to a past of sexual violence would use it as a

source of distraction and escape. While *Divergent* on its own does appear to highlight the

functionality of institutional sexual violence, the sequels are inconsistent with

Divergent's insistence that sexual assault produces lasting effects.

Throughout the series, Tris's trauma continues to arise, by my reading, when

details of the attack appear. While this occurs a few times,[8] Tris reflects on the attack

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[8] One example occurs at the start of *Insurgent,* when Tris and a group of Dauntless members arrive at the faction called Amity. When Peter, one of her attackers during her sexual assault, appears in her room, she thinks back to his expression during the assault (Roth, *Insurgent 53).* Despite the new circumstances of

near the close of *Insurgent* when she finds herself back in Dauntless after a long time away. She passes by the place where she was attacked and struggles against the powerful memory, "I knew it was Al by the way he smelled- I can still call the scent of lemongrass to mind. Now I associate it not with my friend but with the powerlessness I felt as they dragged me to the chasm. I walk faster, keeping my eyes wide open so it will be harder to picture the attack in my mind" (Roth, *Insurgent 309).* Although time has passed since the incident, during which Tris experiences many different dangers and traumas, this is one that she continues to struggle with. Back in the same place as the assault, she begins to remember specific details down to the scent of one of her attackers, and she must actively fight against overpowering memories like the dissociative flashback she experienced soon after the attack. As previously mentioned, Tris seeks out intimacy with Tobias when she experiences strong emotions, and in this situation, she again looks for comfort in physical closeness with him (Roth, *Insurgent* 312). It is especially strange that in struggling with memories of her sexual assault, she would seek out sexual pleasure in this moment. In the narrative surface of this moment, Tris passes by the place of her attack after a long time away, and remembering the violence, seeks comfort with her boyfriend. In Tris's decision to find sexual pleasure with Tobias in this moment, the narrative invites readers to forget the depth and fears of her trauma from the previous novel. However, due to the strong and overpowering nature of the memory, I read this instead as a trigger to her trauma, a signal that her trauma is not neatly resolved.

Tris again recalls her assault near the start of *Allegiant,* and her uncharacteristic panic suggests again that she is triggered by trauma. The Allegiant, the group for which

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their presence in Amity, a place with rules against violence and conflict, she connects Peter with her trauma and struggles against her fear.

the novel is titled, are a secret organization who wish to recruit Tris for a rebellion. However, they go to great lengths to maintain their secrecy; they perform what appears to be an attack in their attempts to speak with her. We read in the novel, "Someone shoves a sack over my head while someone else pushes me against the wall. I thrash against them, struggling with the fabric covering my face, and all I can think is, *Not again not again not again*" (Roth, *Allegiant* 49). Tris's panicked response is entirely logical in this scenario; she has been captured and trapped by a group of people, a circumstance she has learned introduces danger. However, it is not consistent with her usual response to her endangerment. Throughout the series, Tris continually encounters countless dangerous situations during which her mind remains clear as her Dauntless training helps her persist, from near-death situations (Roth, *Divergent* 438, 446, *Insurgent* 82, 184, 493, *Allegiant* 93, 290, 474) to witnessing the deaths of loved ones (Roth, *Divergent* 444, 471, *Insurgent* 299, 473, 513, *Allegiant* 293).[9] Meanwhile, in this scene, her mind is filled with the words, "*Not again,*" a phrase which can only refer to the similar experience of being blindfolded and attacked during her sexual assault. Despite the intensive training she underwent and other dangers she faced, her response to this particular threat is still colored by her assault. This example brings her trauma to the surface of the text even while her fear of intimacy remains nonexistent, underscored by scenes both immediately before and after this incident in which Tris experiences sexual desire and closeness with Tobias (Roth, *Allegiant* 31-32, 57). It is telling that despite the fact that Tris suffers extreme violence throughout the series, the trauma of her sexual assault remains

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[9] Even when faced with death, Tris is consistently able to control her thoughts and actions. In her first near-death experience, Tris is locked in a tank of water and she is drowning, yet is able to relax her mind to the point where she faces death and thinks, "I am not afraid" (Roth, *Divergent* 438). This example and many others demonstrate her immense courage and self-control.

prominent. Overall, the narrative contradicts itself by centrally highlighting her trauma in *Divergent,* and then inconsistently portraying her trauma as both forgotten and present in its sequels.

This segment of the chapter has detailed the massive impact that Tris's experiences with sexual violence have on her life throughout the *Divergent* series, indicating that these experiences contribute to her fear of sexual intimacy. Although Tris's trauma is evident in her fears about closeness with Tobias as well as the triggers that continually remind her of the experience, the inconsistency of Tris's responses to trauma marginalize and discredit its significance. While *Divergent* attempts to acknowledge systemic sexual violence, the representation of Tris's trauma in *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* contradicts its own model of institutional sexual violence and the profound impact that it has on victims. The series' antithetical understanding of sexual trauma reproduces the damaging marginalization already experienced by survivors of sexual assault in reality.

Conclusion

Although dystopian fiction is known for its criticism of societal institutions, sexual violence is rarely the primary focus of dystopias, perhaps because it usually involves private moments of trauma, directly involving only the perpetrators and victims. Sexual violence is, however, essential to dystopian novels that center their criticism on the injustice of patriarchal societies; works such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Hillary Jordan's *When She Woke* explore societies founded on gender inequality and institutional sexual violence. Unlike *Divergent,* both of these novels portray sexual

violence as systemic, as integral to the structure of their oppressive societies. As evidenced by these novels and explained through Chapter One's examination of systemic sexism in addition to this chapter's examination of institutional sexual violence, apparently private moments of sexual violence rest upon structural inequality and historical violence. *Divergent* plays on these realities through its fictionalization of social and gender inequality that leads to Tris's sexual repression as well as her sexual assault; both of these instances are elements of systemic sexual violence that produce trauma for Tris.

Divergent begins a discussion about sexual violence, first through Tris's experiences with sexual repression in Abnegation, as well as her resulting discomfort with her own body and the physical contact of others. The novel's focus on sexual violence continues through Tris's experiences in the changed environment of Dauntless, and despite its comparative sexual freedoms, its patriarchal structure contributes to her eventual sexual assault. Through Tris's experiences in Dauntless, it is clear that *Divergent'*s society maintains restrictive social gender roles even as it legally permits the inclusion of women in traditionally masculine roles. Dauntless, the faction founded on physical strength and mental fortitude, represents traditionally masculine gender roles. Although Tris and other women are permitted to join and earn spots in Dauntless, Tris's ultimate success in initiation leads to social punishment, including the sexual assault that leaves her with lasting trauma. Therefore, the hypermasculinity of Tris's world ultimately excludes and rejects her based on her gender and background of her upbringing in Abnegation. The sexual violence that she experiences in this rejection also objectifies her body as a site of sexual pleasure and bonding for men, as Brownmiller argues. Because

the novel introduces a sexual assault in the narrative, it builds a critical lens of systemic sexual violence through the circumstances of the attack. However, the series fails to represent Tris's sexual trauma in a consistent and thoughtful manner.

The removal of Tris's trauma from the narrative suggests that trauma is easily resolved. The only moment that could signal this shift occurs during the previously cited conversation in which Tris confesses to her fear of intimacy. After she and Tobias discuss their expectations and fears surrounding intimacy, they share a physically and emotionally close moment in which they hold one another and kiss, and then Tris says, "'Maybe you won't be in my fear landscape anymore'" (Roth 406). While their emotional closeness in this scene is reassuring for Tris and healthy for their relationship, it is not sufficient to serve as a resolution to Tris's trauma. In this quote, Tris herself indicates that she has somehow overcome what has been established in the narrative as one of her greatest fears, a fear that is simultaneously enmeshed with triggered responses to her sexual trauma. In the sequels to *Divergent,* Tris continues to display triggered responses to moments that remind her of the sexual violence she experienced, yet her fear of intimacy has vanished. The erasure of Tris's fear from the surface of the narrative suggests that a single moment of intimacy is enough to resolve sexual trauma.

As previously explained, young adults experience high percentages of sexual violence as they grow into their own identities and agency. The information that young adults receive, even from fictional narratives, contributes to their understanding of the world around them. Therefore, it is critical that young adult fiction accurately represent sexual trauma. While *Divergent* highlights Tris's trauma, its sequels diminish the impact of her experiences. Overall, *Divergent* takes the first step in centralizing sexual trauma by

marking it as systemic and personally significant in the first novel of the series. Moving forward, it is the responsibility of young adult dystopian literature to realistically portray sexual violence, in addition to its resulting traumas.

Much like the marginalization of sexual violence in young adult dystopian literature, disability often remains marginal to narratives, even those that concentrate on the ability of the physical body. In the following chapter, I will examine the devaluation of disability in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games.* Just as *Divergent* maintains inconsistencies and contradictions in its representation of sexual violence, these works highlight disabled characters, and yet mark them as deviant and lesser than the "normalcy" represented by abled characters and bodies.

Chapter Three: Disability in the Margins

The third chapter of the dissertation shifts gears to discuss the presence of disability in dystopian fiction; while the first two chapters represent violations of the state upon the body, society often treats disability as the body's violation upon itself. From contemporary society's marking of the disabled community as disabled, the community is marked as other based on their differences from an assumed norm. Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* questions the definitions of bodily "deviance" and "normalcy" as they are commonly understood to mean with or without disability (Kafer 15). The exclusion of disabled individuals from "normalcy" creates erasure of the disabled community from society at large, as well as the literature that reflects societal norms. Although dystopian literature aims to call attention to social inequalities and issues in its focus on the most horrible potentialities for the world, it maintains a notable exception in its replication of the marginalization of disability. Disability is not common in the genre, which both limits its examination in this chapter and emphasizes the necessity for its increased presence in literature. "Disability in the Margins" therefore highlights its unusual appearance in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games,* and I argue that the limitations we see in disability's representation expose the need for its increased and multivalent presence in literature.

Dystopian literature has dedicated itself to political commentary that questions social conventions, yet this criticism has only skimmed the surface on inclusion of marginalized identities. While many marginalized groups, such as the disabled community, remain unacknowledged in the genre, dystopian literature has historically used its criticism towards issues such as social inequality. Canonical works such as

Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* or George Orwell's *1984* call attention to issues of poverty in spite of the social marginalization that the impoverished have always experienced. Many vastly popular contemporary young adult works have begun to focus on marginalized communities, such as Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* or Becky Albertalli's *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda.* However, dystopian literature still often fails to center characters whose identities are not traditionally normative in regards to gender, disability, sexuality, or otherwise. Literary commitment to revaluing disability would indicate not only the normalization and inclusion of disabled individuals, but would be among the first of steps towards inclusion of the many diverse forms of marginalized identities that remain on the periphery of contemporary stories and contemporary society.

Although hardly any dystopian novels highlight disability as a central issue in the text, *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Hunger Games* feature disability and ableism in ways that are useful for discussion in this context. *Woman on the Edge of Time,* unlike many others of its genre, centers its narrative on neurodiversity. The novel tells the story of Connie, a poor, Mexican-American woman who is institutionalized, and the ways in which her identity is negated by her association with mental disability. While the narrative makes clear that Connie suffers unjust treatment at the hands of the institution, its message grows hazy when Connie travels into the future and sees a utopia which appears to lack mental disability. Although the novel highlights mental disability as a central issue, it reproduces literary and societal erasure in its envisionment of an ideal future that lacks neurodiversity. *The Hunger Games,* on the other hand, centers its narrative around a protagonist who, in many ways, embodies ableism. *The Hunger*

Games is a story of survival in which an impoverished girl is forced by her government to fight other children to the death in an annual tournament for the entertainment of the wealthy. While the novel does not attempt to highlight disability, its central focus on superiority through physical ability contrasts the importance of the Hunger Games, the disabling event for which the series is named. Katniss herself maintains ableism through her exclusion from disability as well as her sense of superiority over those she deems physically weak. In the novel's glorification of Katniss's physical strength, as well as its marginalization of existing disabled characters, *The Hunger Games* creates a narrative that encourages normative models of the body. Despite its ableism, *The Hunger Games* includes many moments of disability that exemplify the persistent importance of disability.

In many ways, *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Hunger Games* are very dissimilar; they were written 32 years apart, they cater to different audiences, and their intended messages regarding disability drastically deviate. *Woman on the Edge of Time* centralizes disability through Connie's institutional mistreatment and suggests a solution through its representation of a utopian future in which participation in mental institutions is voluntary and produces "cures" for disability. Piercy's effort to centralize disability in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is especially notable for the time period in which it was published. In the 1970s, mental disability was heavily pathologized, along with such "mental illnesses" as homosexuality (Kunzel 315). Its target audience of adult readers, therefore, may have been resistant to Piercy's radically unfavorable view of 1970s institutionalization and contrasting utopian vision for mental disability in Mattapoisett. *The Hunger Games,* on the other hand, decentralizes disability through its attention to

Katniss's physical ability, yet the Hunger Games and the government that enforces them produce disability through the suffering of oppressed citizens. Published in 2008, *The Hunger Games* does not introduce a radical view of disability in the way that *Woman on the Edge of Time* does. In fact, *The Hunger Games* presents ableist masculinity as an ideal for young adult women to aspire to in order to be seen as "strong" as Katniss is praised for being.

Despite their differences, both novels to be discussed in this chapter apply a normalizing perspective to the abled/disabled body; *Woman on the Edge of Time* endorses normalization through the disappearance of disability in utopia and *The Hunger Games* endorses normalization through its focus on physical ability in the face of dystopian government. Although it may be argued that *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Hunger Games* are too dissimilar to offer comparison or a collective takeaway about dystopian literature, I assert that their vast differences suggest a collective issue across the dystopian genre, across time period and target audience: while dystopian fiction prides itself on societal criticism, the genre fails to adequately represent the oppression of the disabled community, and instead reproduces ableism in its normative representations of disability. *Woman on the Edge of Time* deviates from the norm in its effort to center its narrative on disability, but even this representation replicates ableism. *The Hunger Games* is more typical of the genre as a whole in its celebration of ableist values, however, even this novel has the presence of disability in small moments. Although there are other dystopian novels that touch upon disability in different capacities, these two novels work well together in this chapter because despite their different narrative

intentions, they both apply a normative perspective to the body even while they demonstrate the undeniable presence of disability.

Theory of Disabled Futures

Before discussing the presence of disability in the dystopian genre, it is important to first examine the importance of disabled representation, especially when imagining a projection of the future. Therefore, I spend some time here in discussing Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* which highlights the many ways in which the world is designed against accessibility for disabled people based on an idea of normalcy that excludes them. The background that this work provides is vital for properly discussing the themes of this chapter.

From the beginning of *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* Kafer highlights the difficulties that disabled individuals face when imagining their futures. The introduction of the book begins with an examination of Kafer's personal experiences with being a disabled person and the limited expectations others project onto her future. Kafer lists a series of interactions with able-bodied people who mitigate her goals, suggest that she will be unable to achieve these goals, or urge her to "heal" from her disability. She describes these perspectives as "grim imagined futures, these suggestions that a better life would of necessity require the absence of impairment" (Kafer 2). In each of the situations Kafer describes, others force unsolicited ideas of what an acceptable life should be upon her. These views maintain the underlying assumption that an acceptable life requires the absence of disability; Kafer's own lived experience as a disabled person then is marked by others as unacceptable. Kafer reemphasizes this point as she states, "A better future, in

other words, is one that excludes disability and disabled bodies; indeed, it is the very

absence of disability that signals this better future" (Kafer 2). Not only does this ideology

devalue the lives lived by disabled individuals, it also suggests that their absence

indicates improvement. In other words, a world without disabled individuals is portrayed

as a better world. The encouragement of the eradication of a community, especially one

of marginalized individuals, is a harmful ideology. The positive depiction of a world

without disability is harmful to everyone; a world without disability would be a world

that lacks the unique perspectives and culture of disabled communities.

Kafer provides an alternate perspective to this view when she describes a different

narrative encouraged by the disabled community. Rather than accept the commonly held

ableist perspective that a disabled life is at best uncomfortable and at worst unworthy of

living, the disabled community is instead "positioning ableism – not disability – as the

obstacle to a good life" (Kafer 2). In other words, the "problem" of disability is

alternately defined not by the presence of disability itself, but by the obstacles faced by

disabled individuals in a world built primarily for able-bodied individuals. For example,

where others might define the inaccessibility of a building with stairs around a disabled

individual's inability to walk, Kafer and her critical peers would ask why the building

didn't have an elevator to meet the needs of people with diverse mobility. Kafer again

emphasizes this view when she questions the traditional ways of defining disability based

on medical differences. According to Kafer, the medical definitions commonly used to

describe disability frame the medical conditions of those with disabilities as the central

issue of the difficulties they face. The framing of disability thus focuses "solutions"

solely on individual medical treatments and projected recovery, rather than attempting to

remedy the countless everyday social and societal challenges faced by the disabled community. *Feminist, Queer, Crip* therefore instead urges for a social redefinition of disability relative to the social statuses of being "able-bodied" or "able-minded" (Kafer 5-6). This redefinition of disability in a social context both creates community among disabled individuals and highlights the need for social changes to improve the lives of the disabled community.

Throughout *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* Kafer highlights increased representation as of the utmost importance to the disabled community due to the prevailing marginalization that is experienced by individuals as well as the community at large. Her ambition of a reformed and accessible world can only be achieved with increased social presence and understanding in the able-bodied world. Kafer introduces a discussion of visibility through the debate about referring to disability with the label, "crip." While Kafer indicates that the term makes many "wince," she adds that perhaps this discomfort is an achievement of visibility. She explains, "This desire to make people wince suggests an urge to shake things up, to jolt people out of their everyday understandings of bodies and minds, of normalcy and deviance. It recognizes the common response of nondisabled people to disabled people, of the normative to the deviant – furtive yet relentless staring, aggressive questioning, and/or a turning away from difference, a refusal to see" (Kafer 15). In other words, the decision to use the term "crip" to refer to one's own disabled identity is an act of agency, a reclaiming of oneself not dissimilar to the reclaiming of the term "queer." The attention brought about by the discomfort of others in response to this word breaks from the widespread "refusal to see" disability, thus inducing a hypervisible identity. This quote emphasizes the importance of visibility to acceptance and

understanding of disability. In reclaiming the word "crip," Kafer strives to combat the invisibility of the disabled community.

Just as Kafer highlights the importance of the tangible presence of the disabled community, she additionally calls for embracing and celebrating disability and disabled individuals as they are. *Feminist, Queer, Crip* critiques the ableist viewpoint that it is possible to "overcome" one's disability. Kafer explains that able-bodied people often project a "cure" upon the futures of disabled people, an idea that contains the implication that disabled individuals must hope for and work towards overcoming their impairment, which in many cases is an impossibility (28). For disability, a "narrative of progress" creates an exclusive world in which disabled people are deemed unacceptable if they are not cured of their disability or working towards a cure. This perspective devalues the life of the disabled person as they exist in the present in its assumption that they must seek a life without their current disability. In other words, the removal of disability suggested in hopes for a "cure" both devalues a disabled life and rewrites it with a projected, ableist "normalcy" as a desirable alternative to reality. The absence of disability "as part of a desired present or desirable future" (Kafer 43) is its own form of invisibility. Although the able-bodied world largely assumes that a disabled life is a life of struggle, Kafer highlights the value of disability. She argues that "living with disability or illness 'creates valuable *ways of being* that give valuable perspectives on life and the world,' ways of being that would be lost through the elimination of illness and disability" (Kafer 83). Beyond simple acceptance of disability, Kafer urges readers to reconsider what it means to have a good, valuable life.

Overlap between the reevaluation of the value of disability and the projection of disabled futures comes into play in a chapter of *Feminist, Queer, Crip* that details the circumstances of a Deaf lesbian couple who seek a Deaf sperm donor in order to produce a Deaf child. Others involved in the case responded with disdain for the couple's desire for a Deaf child in a manner that suggests that the absence of disability is "a universally valued goal about which there can, and should, be no disagreement" (Kafer 84). The finality of this viewpoint leaves no space to even consider the value of a disabled life. However, Kafer sees the example of this couple as an indication that "not everyone craves an able-bodied/able-minded future, that there might be a place for bodies with limited, odd, or queer movements and orientations, and that disability and queerness can indeed be desirable both in the future as well as now" (84). Unlike the novels to be examined in this chapter, Kafer envisions a world that celebrates diverse disabilities.

The final chapter of *Feminist, Queer, Crip* is a call to action for active visibility for the disabled community. Kafer continually urges readers to "look for it" (149) in every field, and find the visibility or invisibility of disability, accessibility, and disabled individuals. This conclusion to the work is directed pointedly towards the future; it envisions how to create better, more accessible lives for disabled individuals. Kafer's call to action demands improvement from the world to create space and accessibility for disability. Beyond simply applying accessibility to normative institutions, Kafer emphasizes the inclusion of disabled individuals in creating an innovative and diverse future for everyone, "Disabled people have more than a dream of accessible futures: we continue to define and demand our place in political discourses, political visions, and political practice, even as we challenge those very questions and demands" (169). In the

context of this dissertation, Kafer's hope for an inclusive future highlights the dystopian genre's insistence on erasure of disability. In the case of *Woman on the Edge of Time,* Piercy crafts a future that eliminates disability despite its attention to the mistreatment of disabled characters in its narrative present. Meanwhile, *The Hunger Games* confirms that disability refuses to be eliminated, even as the narrative marginalizes its disabled characters in its ableist valuation of Katniss's physical ability. Even in fictional envisionment of the future, literature fails to create the space to discuss disability.

The Absence of Disabled Futures in *Woman on the Edge of Time*

While physically disabled characters are difficult to find in dystopian fiction, *Woman on the Edge of Time,* by Marge Piercy, deals with mental disability in complex ways. Although the novel does work to highlight injustices faced by those with mental disabilities, it fails to envision an inclusive future in its projection of a utopia without disability. In *Woman on the Edge of Time,* Connie is institutionalized against her will and experiences horrors due to the labeling of her identity as mentally disabled. These experiences indicate a clear message that society needs to improve its view and treatment of mentally disabled people. However, Connie is also a time traveler, and she visits a utopian future called Mattapoisett in which mental disability is handled like physical illness, something to be treated and cured. In addition, mental disability has been all but eradicated. This erasure, while clearly intended to suggest a better means of dealing socially with mental disability, is problematic for many reasons, especially when read through Kafer's work.

It is helpful to begin with the novel's intended message, and the accomplishments it makes in its representation of mental disability. *Woman on the Edge of Time* works to represent and criticize mistreatment of mentally disabled people by presenting Connie primarily as a neurotypical individual who suffers gross abuse and imprisonment in a mental institution solely for her social labeling as a schizophrenic child abuser. The abuse that Connie and her fellow patients suffer draws attention to the simultaneous exclusion and dehumanization of those with disabilities. Although her apparent status as neurotypical establishes Connie somewhat as an outsider, her clear and consistent perspective allows readers to empathize with the plight of the institutionalized. While the institution in the novel continually interprets Connie's behaviors as symptomatic of mental illness, I read her behavior as reasonable human responses to an inherently violent and abusive institution. However, Connie's normative mental health is questionable within the novel at times; even Connie questions at first whether her experiences with time travel are hallucinations (Piercy 58). Additionally, the close of the novel frames Connie's narrative within what appears to be hospital notes and documentation of her continued insanity and institutionalization (Piercy 365-369). While these qualities of the novel question Connie's mental capability, its message that mentally disabled individuals deserve basic human rights still stands, and perhaps gains more legitimacy if Connie is a member of the disabled community rather than an unfortunate outsider. Further, if Connie is in fact mentally disabled, her central role as the protagonist emphasizes her value regardless of her social and institutional labeling as disabled[10]. Despite Connie's

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[10] Although my reading of Connie is rooted in her role as a neurotypical time traveler, a reading of Connie as mentally disabled would situate *Woman on the Edge of Time* in a more radically inclusive context. For example, Flexer offers a reading that argues that Connie hallucinates Mattapoisett rather than truly traveling there, however, each of her visits empowers her (461). Therefore, rather than hindering her,

institutional abuse due to her social status as mentally ill, Piercy represents Connie's

thoughts and behavior as reasonable responses to her circumstances. Therefore, for the

purpose of this chapter, I will continue under the assumption that Connie is a

neurotypical time traveler trapped in mental institutionalization.

Regardless of Connie's labeling in disability, readers are made to sympathize with

the gross treatment she endures in her institutionalization. The novel jumps quickly into

Connie's mistreatment; after she gets in the middle of a violent altercation between her

niece, Dolly, and Dolly's boyfriend and pimp, Geraldo, the two vengefully leave Connie

at Bellevue Hospital, a mental institution where Connie had had a previous stay. From the

moment that Connie arrives, her circumstances scream of injustice and mistreatment; it is

clear that she is unjustly institutionalized, but she is trapped there by the assumption that

her claims to sanity are symptoms of her insanity[11]. Because she had had a previous stay

at the institution, hospital staff assume her insanity from the moment that she arrives.

Connie emphasizes this point as she describes the circumstances of her

institutionalization; she explains that the doctor did not even speak to her, referring only

to Geraldo and Dolly, and the subsequent impossibility to advocate for herself. "Did they

think you had to be crazy to protest being locked up? Yes, they did. They said reluctance

to be hospitalized was a sign of sickness, assuming you were sick, in one of these no-win

circles" (Piercy 11). Based on Connie's experience, even if the doctor had decided to

speak to her, nothing she said could have saved her from wrongful institutionalization.

Connie's disability provides her with escape, hope, and self-worth, a valuation of disability that hearkens back to Kafer's ideology. Flexer's perspective on Connie's disability additionally indicates a possibility of envisioning disability across time and projecting disability into the future, even as that projection of the future may exist only within Connie's mind.

[11] This specific experience has a long literary history in works that examine institutionalization, such as in *Girl, Interrupted.*

Bellevue's treatment of Connie as a nonentity is the first of many examples of dehumanization that situate institutions as inherently harmful and ableist. Sami Schalk's *Bodyminds Reimagined* discusses the oppression of mental institutions, especially towards individuals of marginalized racial groups. Schalk explains, "marginalized people's reactions toward institutions which have historically inflicted violence on them have not only been dismissed, but have also been used as indicators of mental disability" (66). Despite historical abuse suffered by marginalized people in medical and mental institutions, criticism of or reluctance towards the system is pathologized. This reality is reflected in Connie's circumstances, in which her resistance to be institutionalized is deemed "crazy" even while her previous abuses at Bellevue would indicate an understandable reluctance to repeat the experience.

Aside from the injustice of Connie's admittance to Bellevue, the suffering that she and others experience at the hands of the hospital staff is horrifically abusive. The hospital staff often ignores Connie's humanity, talking about her as though she is not there and neglecting her basic bodily needs and medical care. On the day that she arrives at Bellevue, Connie is drugged and tied to a bed in a locked room for hours; not only is she injured from her run-in with Geraldo, she is left so long that her muscles cramp and she must lay in her own urine as she waits for someone to come (Piercy 10-11). She becomes desperate in this situation and describes her desolation, "The smell of her own piss rose into her nostrils. She began to weep. Then she choked on her tears and stopped in panic. She could not wipe her nose. The tears ran into her mouth" (Piercy 12). Because Connie is restrained so significantly that she is unable to wipe her nose or eyes, even crying becomes a luxury that she cannot afford. When attendants finally do come to untie

and clean her, Connie tries to advocate for herself and tell them about her injuries, but they continue talking to one another as if she isn't there at all (Piercy 14-15). These violations committed against Connie represent the entirety of the loss of herself upon being admitted into Bellevue; the institution has attempted to remove all of her agency over the circumstances of her body and mind. From this first day, her body is submitted to pain and restriction, while her mind is submitted to involuntary manipulation through drugs. To hospital staff, her identity and her voice are nonexistent. Connie and the other patients at Bellevue must continue to endure these negations of self as well as others, and Connie's vivid descriptions of their treatment emphasizes the injustice of their experiences.

The hospital further violates the bodies of its patients when they submit unwilling patients to brain surgeries that manipulate their emotions and free will. First, the hospital submits patients to increasingly invasive treatments, from drugging (Piercy 53) to shock treatments (Piercy 74), that force them to relinquish more and more control over their own minds. The ultimate loss of mental agency arrives with an experimental brain implantation that allows for permanent manipulation of patients' minds, something the scientist involved refers to as a "cure" for patients' mental disabilities (Piercy 197). Following these experimental surgeries, patients lose control over their own minds and feelings, which can be externally adjusted at the will of the doctors that keep them captive. This is first horrifyingly demonstrated upon a patient named Alice, and the scientist manipulates and films his manipulation of her emotions, triggering violent rage and euphoria and pleasure, rendering her a mere puppet (Piercy 195-6). As the surgical procedure spreads through the ward, so does the patients' fear, but they are unable to

escape the procedure as their consent is not taken into account. When the time comes for

Connie to undergo this surgery, she reflects on all that she will lose, "She was the

experiment. They would rape her body, her brain, her self. After this she could not trust

her own feelings. She would not be her own. She would be their experimental monster.

Their plaything, like Alice. Their tool" (Piercy 270). Connie's awareness of the entirety

of her loss of self is devastating, and other patients feel likewise.

The patients' identification with monstrosity comes only from their forced

participation in the institution; Connie's experience suggests that the institution creates or

exacerbates disability through abuse. Following the operation, they struggle to adjust to

the knowledge that even their minds are not their own. While Alice begins to be confused

about the cause of her own actions (Piercy 253), another patient named Skip finds escape

in suicide (Piercy 277), and fellow patients refer to one another as "monster" (Piercy

276). Connie notes of Alice's behavior, "Alice seemed closer to being mad than she ever

had. She made up stories to account for what she did, because she literally did not know

what she would do next" (Piercy 253). Connie's commentary on Alice's apparent

insanity is notable for its differentiation from society's determination of Alice's insanity

previous to the operation; from Connie's viewpoint, the surgery is what caused Alice's

madness. Before Skip was hospitalized and operated on, he had attempted suicide.

Although the scientists claim to have "cured" him, when he returns home following his

surgery, he commits suicide. Connie thinks instead, "they had cured him of fumbling, of

indecision. They had taught him to act, they had taught him the value of a quick clean

death" (Piercy 277). While doctors claimed to have cured him, Skip's institutionalization

only plunged him further into desperation for escape from life. Although Connie is

portrayed as neurotypical, she finds community amongst neurodivergent patients who also suffer at the hands of the institution. The abusive nature of the institution to all of its patients, including but not limited to the normative protagonist, emphasizes its inherent cruelty.

Societal judgment that Connie and other patients experience is the dehumanizing agent that contributes to the abuse they experience at Bellevue. While their labeling through mental illness is what contributes to their social status as "monstrous," the patients truly only become distanced from their humanity after significant abuse within the institutional system. "The Monsters We Create," by Marcia Bundy Seabury, examines the question of Connie's and other patients' monstrosity. Seabury highlights the parallels between post-operation patients in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Frankenstein's monster to indicate their similar deviance from "normal" humanity (134). The article simultaneously argues that, in many ways, Connie was viewed by society as monstrous all along due to her many marginalized identities as female, Chicana, and poor, as well as the addition of her institutional labeling as a schizophrenic child abuser (Seabury 134). These social labels themselves reflect upon Connie's labeling as mentally ill; societal labeling of mental illness has historically been skewed based on racial and gender biases (Schalk 63-64). From the start of the novel, Connie's intentions are to help herself and those around her, but by the end, her desperation causes her to resort to violence and she attempts to poison and kill the doctors on her ward, an act which Seabury categorizes as monstrous. Seabury considers the alteration of Connie's good nature when she adds, "The echoes of *Frankenstein* in *Woman on the Edge of Time* remind us that Connie's acts are monstrous. And society has *created* its monsters" (137). In other words, Connie's acts of

violence come not from herself, but from the monstrous circumstances of her institutionalization. While she has been dehumanized all along by others, her distance from her own mind is what provokes her violent behavior. The adverse reactions of other patients to their surgeries reveals that Connie is not an outlier; as previously mentioned, both Alice and Skip lose themselves in different ways after their operations, also becoming "monstrous" products of their environments. Although Seabury argues that Connie and her peers are turned into institutional monsters, I read their behaviors as undoubtedly human acts of desperation. Having lost all semblance of agency over their lives, bodies, and finally their minds, they rebel in the only ways they can. After poisoning the doctors, Connie explains that she has done so, "'Because *they* are the violence-prone…Because it is war'" (Piercy 364). As she awaits punishment for her violent actions, she takes pride in her moment of agency, in her ability to fight back.

The horrors at Bellevue, including the patients' absolute loss of agency, serve as a representation of the real abuses suffered by people who are institutionalized. While the novel is fictional, Piercy depicts horrific mistreatment at Bellevue, a real, notoriously frightening hospital for psychiatric care in New York City. The choice of this real location further roots *Woman on the Edge of Time* in reality. Treatment of the mentally disabled has a history riddled with abuse, as does Bellevue itself. In a 1956 article entitled, "Behind Double-Locked Doors," a doctor at Bellevue discusses the environment in the mental ward. As a participant of the institution, the doctor has limited empathy for residents at Bellevue, as he describes with mundane neutrality such "treatments" as shock therapy and straitjackets. Meanwhile, he notes of the atmosphere, "I suppose visitors cannot avoid a sense of being trapped when they enter" (Cutolo 44). Cutolo's concern

about the feeling of entrapment for outsiders is notable; not only does the doctor's attention to outsiders provide a contrast to his lack of concern for the residents of the ward, but his description also highlights the magnitude of the isolation of permanent inhabitants of the facility. While its history of abuse is difficult to document, Bellevue's fearful notoriety has stood the test of time. As recently as 2016, for example, Buzzfeed News focuses in on the circumstances of the brutal beating of a patient at Bellevue by a staff member in an article entitled, "A Beating at Bellevue, Then Months of Silence." Despite the incident's documentation on video recording, there were significant delays and limitations on consequences for the guilty individual (Hattem). The article additionally uses this case as one example of many substantiated cases of abuse that were never prosecuted, and the pattern that countless cases of patient abuse never receive justice. This is perhaps best summarized in the article's byline, which reads, "Patients get beaten. Their assailants walk free" (Hattem). The information on Bellevue Hospital alone reveals a pattern of abuse that further colors the setting of *Woman on the Edge of Time*. The fictional abuse of characters in the novel reflects the real monstrosity of the dehumanization of patients in mental institutions. The reality that a dystopian rendering of institutional abuse bears a striking resemblance to its nonfictional setting forces readers to face the grimness of psychiatric institutionalization head-on.

The journalists and theorists cited in this chapter thus far, including Piercy herself, highlight the cruel mistreatment of the institutionalized in order to show the need for a redefinition of how mental disability is understood in society. However, in her conceptualization of the future, Piercy fails to do so. While the horrid portrayal of patients' treatment in the "real world" of Bellevue Hospital indicates the need for the

reimagining of mental health, Connie's mystical transportation into the future somewhat works against this message. Aside from Connie's depiction as neurotypical, she has a special gift. Connie is able to travel into the future to a place called Mattapoisett, a utopian society that acknowledges mental health in a manner similar to physical health. After witnessing Connie's circumstances at Bellevue, Luciente, a citizen of Mattapoisett, explains the vastly different way that mental disability is handled in the future. Luciente marvels at Connie's environment, believing it to be a prison or concentration camp, and states that mental institutions as she knows them are pleasant and beautiful, adding that many people regularly spend some time there (Piercy 58-59). When Connie tells Luciente that she was forced into institutionalization, Luciente further explains, "'Our madhouses are places where people retreat when they want to go down into themselves …We all lose parts of ourselves. We all make choices that go bad. … How can another person decide that it is time for me to disintegrate, reintegrate myself?'" (Piercy 60). According to Luciente, Mattapoisett citizens who are feeling mentally unwell simply go to a place to remove themselves from society and recover, just as they would do for a physical injury. The matter-of-fact fashion in which Luciente discusses mental illness suggests that citizens view mental disability without the shame and distaste of Connie's time. Luciente's description of mental illness overall indicates improvement upon the treatment of mental disability in Connie's time; patients have social support regardless of mental disability, agency in their treatment, comfortable living conditions, and are aimed towards reintegration into society. It is additionally notable that Piercy shows Mattapoisett's social norms redefining mental illness as it is understood in the 1970s, or Connie's present day. Piercy demonstrates this difference through parallel characters

Skip and Jackrabbit; while present day Skip is institutionalized and abused for his homosexuality, Mattapoisett's Jackrabbit thrives within a society that embraces his interests and sexuality. Although these changes support the novel's urging for normalization and improved treatment for mental disability, Mattapoisett's form of mental institutionalization still marginalizes disability.

Although Connie receives information about Mattapoisett's mental institutions through Luciente, mental disability remains marginal to everyday life in the future; during Connie's many visits to Mattapoisett, she never sees a hospital or anyone who is physically or mentally disabled in Mattapoisett. Further, Mattapoisett endorses a cure-oriented perspective of mental disability, suggesting that those with mental disabilities can spend short periods of time in institutions and then return as though "cured." Luciente describes this perspective in recounting her friend's experience with mental illness, "'Diana goes mad every couple of years. Has visions. Per earth quakes. Goes down. Emerges and sets to work again with harnessed passion'" (Piercy 59). Based on this description, Diana experiences periods of mental illness, and recuperates though Mattapoisett's mental institutions. Although Piercy's depiction of institutionalization intends to normalize neurodivergence, Luciente's anecdote about Diana's mental illness centers the discussion of mental disability around curability and productivity through working. The novel's focus on Diana's renewed passion for productivity as a signal of her status as "cured," as well as the idea that mental disability is curable to begin with, is problematic and is perpetuated through the treatment of mental disability in the novel.[12]

[12] The problematizing of Mattapoisett's supposed acceptance of mental disability can also be applied to the society's supposed racial and gender equality; disability, race, and gender only become neutral through invisibility in Mattapoisett. Connie learns that babies in the future are artificially made in a lab, eliminating biological motherhood and birth. Babies are created of different blends of races, as citizens of Mattapoisett

The concept of "curing" disability in order to achieve a "better" future hearkens back to Kafer's explanation that the valuation of a "cure" for disability devalues disabled lives in its suggestion that everyone should seek an able-bodied existence. The idealization of eradicating disability as an "undesirable" quality connects to a long and troubling history of eugenic thought in both utopian and dystopian fiction, such as in *Herland* and *Brave New World.* Piercy's celebration of this attitude through Mattapoisett's social norms is deeply problematic and works against her narrative intention to embrace disability.

As previously mentioned, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* advocates for disabled visibility in the present and in the future. While *Woman on the Edge of Time* centers Connie's story in her institutional status as mentally disabled, the novel also erases the presence of mental disability in Mattapoisett, thereby rendering a positive future for the mentally disabled impossible. Kafer speaks directly to the novel in Chapter 3, "Debating Feminist Futures." Kafer explains that while Mattapoisett claims to embrace diversity in treating everyone equally, "the community is actually founded on an *erasure* of difference. …Piercy removes the stigma of mental disability but only on the grounds that those who are unwell voluntarily remove themselves from the community, dropping out of society until they are back to 'normal'" (82). In other words, *Woman on the Edge of Time* reinforces traditional and exclusionary views of normalcy in its assumption that those with mental disabilities must "cure" themselves before they can return to "normal" society. Kafer's criticism of *Woman on the Edge of Time* again points to the absence of a

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claim to seek "diversity" (Piercy 97). However, these babies of different races are raised without the cultural contexts of their ancestors, thereby eliminating cultural diversity and replacing it with visible racial differences alone. In Mattapoisett, cisgender men and women also close the gender gap with similar physical androgyny and parenting roles (Piercy 99). Like Mattapoisett's format of racial equality, its gender equality comes from gender sameness, rather than an embracing of difference.

future that celebrates disability; in its projection of an ableist future in which disability is absent, it replicates the existing devaluation of disability. Although the novel presents Mattapoisett's format of mental institutionalization as transformative and utopian, it represents only slight variations upon conventional institutionalization and fails to reimagine existent normative perceptions of disability.

Literary criticism seems to be in agreement that literature should be inclusive to mental disability, but standards of proper inclusivity are subjective. According to Anastasia Wickham's article, "It Is All in Your Head: Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature," recent young adult novels are taking important steps toward portraying the pain experienced by mentally disabled characters who experience otherness, as well as what can be gained through community inclusion (10). Like Wickham, many literary critics focus on similar efforts towards inclusion, understanding, and accuracy when portraying mental disability in literature; for example, Corbett and Schmidt's "We're Not Crazy" urges for education about mental disability to dispel stigma, and Rozema's "The New Neurodiverse Canon" emphasizes the importance of accuracy and visibility for mentally disabled young adults. However, critics lack Kafer's urgency regarding normalizing mental disability and including mentally disabled characters within positive futures without "curing" them of their disability. Increasing inclusivity of mentally disabled characters in literature makes strides towards Kafer's vision of disabled social presence, but fails to fulfill her vision of positive and inclusive futures that have put an end to undervaluing disability.

Woman on the Edge of Time falls into this category as well; the novel's portrayal of dehumanization and suffering at Bellevue centralizes Connie and the other patients as

valuable and visible and deserving of the basic human rights they lack in their institutionalization. However, in its rendering of an improved future, the novel cannot envision a positive future that includes mental disability. The unattainability of Mattapoisett's utopia for Connie and her peers at Bellevue is emphasized by the truth that while Connie imagines a better life for herself and her family in Mattapoisett (Piercy 207), she is never able to stay long. By the end of the novel, Connie is no longer able to time travel at all (Piercy 364), which just reinforces the truth that the future is not meant for her. The scientists' "cure" robs Connie of the future that she had anticipated for herself, the future that Piercy believes she deserves. While Kafer highlights the exclusion of disability from Mattapoisett, I assert in addition that Connie herself remains excluded from the future as well simply for her proximity to disability. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* Kafer critiques social norms that result in marginalization and inaccessibility for the disabled community. While *Woman on the Edge of Time* makes strides in visibility, it envisions disability as a problem to be solved, reformed in Mattapoisett as an aberration that has been expunged. Piercy's exclusion of mental disability from her utopian future suggests confirmation of the already prevalent idea that "desirable future[s]" (Kafer 43) cannot include disability.

Theory of the Devaluation of Disability

In Piercy's imagining of the future in 1976, the treatment and curing of mental disability indicates that disability itself does not have value. Kafer, who emphasizes the value of disability, seeks positive disabled futures and therefore critiques representations of disability in projections of the future. Kafer's perspective on the portrayal of disability

is important to understanding disability through *The Hunger Games.* While moments in the novel introduce the opportunity to center disabled narratives, its negative and inconsistent portrayal of disability marginalizes and devalues disability. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* Kafer emphasizes the inherent value of disabled life; she argues that the disabled community has unique experiences and perspectives that contribute to the diversity of the world at large (Kafer 83). However, in contrast with Kafer's view, the able-bodied world commonly displays disabled lives in struggle and suffering. In one example of this, Kafer examines the responses of able-bodied individuals to motivational posters of successful disabled individuals. Many suggested that the posters taught them to "be grateful for what they have because things could be much worse, a 'much worse' best illustrated by the disabled body" (Kafer 93). In other words, the presentation of the disabled body is often used to suggest that able-bodied individuals should be "grateful," an ideology that attributes a lower quality of life to disabled bodies.

The ableist world often portrays disability through assumed suffering, and it additionally assumes the superiority of bodies without disability. This ideal is prominent in "compulsory nostalgia" for the abled body, a concept by which people who have acquired disabilities in their lives are attributed with a sense of "loss" for their previously abled bodies (Kafer 42-43). In other words, society assumes that disabled individuals would long for past able-bodied physical experiences, such as walking, but Kafer points out that this idea is never reversed to assume that someone who has recovered from an impairment might long for past disabled physical experiences, such as moving in a wheelchair. The presumption that only able-bodied physicality is desirable devalues the lives and experiences of those with disabilities. This ideology concentrates power and

value exclusively with able-bodied people. The prioritization of able-bodiedness is additionally apparent in definitions of other physical life experiences through standards based in ableism. For example, Kafer examines human interactions with nature in her chapter, "Bodies of Nature." She explains that nature, as it is commonly defined by isolation in "wilderness," is inaccessible to disabled people (Kafer 130). *Feminist, Queer, Crip* instead argues for the reinterpretation of nature based on community, interdependency, and in any form, from carving the wood of a tree to running your fingers under the faucet (Kafer 145). This changed understanding of nature legitimizes diverse experiences with nature, and is more inclusive to those with disabilities. Despite Kafer's work towards a more holistic and inclusive view of nature, existing societal norms still place more value on experiences with nature that are often inaccessible to the disabled community in their focus on social isolation, physical exertion, and distance from civilization. Such an exclusionary view of "legitimate" interactions with nature is just one example of how social norms confirm ableist valuation of able-bodied physicality over disabled physicality and reinforce disability as a state of deprivation.

The continual societal valuation of able-bodied lives and experiences over disabled lives and experiences suggests worthiness of humanity based on use value. *Feminist, Queer, Crip* questions the use and manipulation of disabled bodies through examination of the case of Ashley X, a girl born with permanent significant cognitive disabilities. As she aged and approached puberty, her parents and doctors decided to surgically and hormonally alter her body to force her body to remain small and developmentally childlike (Kafer 47-51). This physical alteration was reportedly performed in order to make easier her long-term care, and therefore, improve her quality

of life. However, Kafer questions the perception of Ashley's imagined adult body through its useful capability and its supposed "normal" adult functions for reproduction and independence. When defending the reasons for her surgery, doctors argued that Ashley was better off with the procedure as she would "'never be capable of holding a job, establishing a romantic relationship, or interacting as an adult.' … Disability, then, is defined as a lack of productivity" (Kafer 54). This quote highlights the rationale of performing unnecessary surgery upon a party that cannot consent; it defines people by their use value. As Ashley cannot be of use to capitalistic society in the traditional ways listed, her personhood is negated. This perspective on productivity as essential to humanity is problematic and detracts from the personhood of all disabled individuals, as many, like Ashley, are unable to take on traditional roles established by an able-bodied society. Kafer demonstrates that in a capitalist society, human value is determined by usefulness and productivity within capitalism. Kafer questions definitions of usefulness, quality of life, and value based on capitalistic productivity and instead imagines a future with space for people like Ashley X with experiences that neurotypical people don't understand (67). This line of questioning reflects back on the value of "curing" mental disability in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and will impact how I read the ableist valuation of the characters in *The Hunger Games*.

Feminist, Queer, Crip challenges the dehumanization of disabled individuals through the examination of social norms and capitalist practices that contribute to harmful views regarding disability. While *The Hunger Games* does not intend to participate in this conversation, its consistent glorification of physical strength, as well as

its neglect of characters that represent disabled identities, contributes to the ableist values that Kafer critiques.

The Invisibility of Disability in *The Hunger Games*

In *The Hunger Games,* by Suzanne Collins, the wealthy Capitol forces young people from the impoverished districts of the country to murder one another in a fight to the death in the annual televised Hunger Games. The society of the novel places value on physical ability through its enforcement of the Hunger Games and use of physical punishment; the cruelty of the Capitol therefore suggests Collins's critique of such values. However, the novel itself celebrates protagonist Katniss's physical prowess and ultimate victory in the Games throughout the narrative. This glorification of physical dominance situates Katniss's character as well as *The Hunger Games* itself in normative sexist and ableist values. The novel additionally marginalizes disabled characters, a pattern that further reinforces harmful views of disability. Despite the novel's pervasive ableism, the persistent presence of disabled characters who push against their own narrative marginalization in some ways resists the ableist values of *The Hunger Games.*

As the celebrated protagonist of *The Hunger Games,* Katniss's characterization in physical capability signals the novel's glorification of this quality, a position that links the narrative to sexist and ableist values. Katniss represents an idolization of physical strength, therefore creating a narrative of weakness for all who lack such ability. From the very beginning of the narrative, Katniss is deeply implicated in ableism. Even before she is a participant in the Games, Katniss is characterized as a protector, a role that she adopts due to her physical capability as a hunter. Katniss remembers the simultaneous

death of her father and immobilizing depression of her mother as the factors that introduced her role as "head of the family" from when she was only eleven years old (Collins, *THG* 27). As the impoverished family neared starvation, it was Katniss learning to hunt that was their ultimate salvation. While Katniss is vulnerable in her childhood and her poverty, she is forced to be the caretaker for her mother and her sister, Prim. This background sets up a pattern for Katniss's establishment in physical superiority and her role as defender of those who the novel portrays as mentally and physically "weak." *The Hunger Games* describes Prim as young and physically fragile (Collins, *THG* 27), while it describes their mother as emotionally fragile (Collins, *THG* 53). Although Katniss is herself only a child, she takes on a dominant role in the family, indicating her superior physical and emotional strength.

 The Hunger Games continually situates Katniss in physical dominance over others; in her background, she is the "head of the family," and in the action of the text, she takes on the role of protector at every opportunity. The division between protector and protected in these instances establishes a clear demarcation of superiority; Katniss is portrayed as the hero and the people she protects are portrayed as inferior, weak, and thus, textually disabled. Katniss's role as protector is the force that carries the entire plot of the novel; Katniss is only a participant in the Games because she volunteers to take the place of her sister (Collins, *THG* 22). Throughout the series, Katniss seeks to protect Prim above concern for her own life and safety. Prim is the reason that Katniss is in the Hunger Games, but she is also the reason that Katniss seeks to survive the Hunger Games; she continually worries that her sister will not survive without her and so resolves to be the victor (Collins, *THG* 35). Just as she feels a sense of superiority and

responsibility over her family, Katniss adopts a similar attitude towards a young girl also forced to participate in the Hunger Games. Although she pretends that her alliance with Rue stems from a desire for a clever ally (Collins, *THG* 200), Katniss truly helps Rue primarily out of sympathy born from a sense of superiority, a truth solidified by her continual notation of Rue's childlike similarities to Prim (Collins, *THG* 45, 98, 201, 234). Rue clearly has the capability to survive; during training, she receives an impressive ranking (Collins, *THG* 108), and proves her competence in surviving much of the Hunger Games, yet the narrative primarily characterizes her by her vulnerability.[13]

Katniss's tendency to help those with physical disadvantages, even when they are competing against her to survive, is a pattern that continues throughout the series. In the following book, *Catching Fire,* Katniss is forced to return to the arena and chooses as her allies an old woman and a harmless-looking middle aged pair, even though she knows that this choice can cost her her life (Collins, *Catching Fire* 272, 279). When contemplating this choice, Katniss thinks to herself of the other tributes, "A lot of them are so damaged that my natural instinct would be to protect them" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 281). This statement not only provides another example of Katniss as a protector, but also highlights Katniss's ableism and sense of superiority over those she classifies as weak and "damaged." Katniss's attitude about disability both establishes her character and the narrative itself as ableist.

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[13] Although she can jump from tree to tree to remain hidden (Collins, *THG* 189), knows how to heal poisonous stings (Collins, *THG* 200), gathers food to survive (Collins, *THG* 203), and can use birds to send signals (Collins, *THG* 212), Katniss's voice in the narrative continually describes her in vulnerability. In one scene, Katniss describes herself and Rue as "'strong… in a different way'" but when Rue asks how she is strong, Katniss simply says "'You can feed yourself'" (Collins, *THG* 206). Despite the many ways that Rue has proven herself, this is all Katniss can think of. In another scene, when Rue is ultimately trapped and killed, Katniss describes her as "smaller than ever, a baby animal curled up in a nest of netting" (Collins, *THG* 236).

While Katniss continually takes on the role of the defender of the weak, she gives voice to the novel's ableist outlook in her reaction to her mother's depression. When Katniss reflects on her past and how she kept her family alive with her hunting, she adds that after her mother surfaced from depression, Katniss struggled to trust her. She remembers, "some small gnarled place inside me hated her for her weakness, for her neglect… nothing was ever the same between us again" (Collins, *THG* 53). Although her mother's depression is an example of mental disability, Katniss's assessment of her depression as a sign of "weakness" and intentional "neglect" suggests that she places blame on her mother for her disability. This arises again after Katniss is selected for the Hunger Games; during her goodbyes to her family, Katniss yells harshly at her mother to fight against her mental disability to take proper care of Prim (Collins, *THG* 35). Although she maintains awareness that her mother was struggling with mental disability, Katniss blames her mother for her inaction following her father's death. Katniss's continual classification of disability as weakness is ableist, and the narrative's glorification of Katniss and her qualities of physical and emotional fortitude reinforce the novel's ableist viewpoint.

Not only does Katniss reject what she deems to be the physical and emotional inferiority of those around her, she rejects her own human capability for physical fallibility. In one notable moment, Katniss believes that Peeta is insulting her when he suggests that others will help her because of the "'effect she can have'" on those around her. Katniss responds with rage, "What effect do I have? That I'm weak and needy? Is he suggesting that I got good deals because people pitied me? … No one pitied me!" (Collins, *THG* 91). Despite her strength and will to survive, Katniss somehow believes

that receiving help from others is an indication of weakness, a quality that she rejects as beneath her, even though she tries to help everyone around her. To receive help is unthinkable to Katniss, therefore, everyone that she helps is, in her view, to some degree inferior and weak.

Just as Katniss angrily disputes her potential for weakness, the novel positions her as someone incapable of weakness as well. Whenever the narrative presents Katniss within the boundaries of potentially disabling scenarios, she recovers from injuries with a nearly magical inhumanity. For example, when Katniss encounters an explosion that leaves her bleeding and deaf in one ear, she believes this impairment to be permanent. However, she returns to the Capitol after the Hunger Games have concluded, and she awakens with the return of her hearing (Collins, *THG* 349). This "recovery" is something she doesn't take part in or witness; she simply awakens with her hearing restored. Although the other characters in the series are vulnerable to becoming disabled, Katniss remains impervious to disability. A notable exception to Katniss's invulnerability is her difficulty with mental illness, emphasized by her erratic behavior and classification as "mentally disoriented" in the final novel of the series (Collins, *Mockingjay* 352). The implications of Katniss's mental disability remain hazy; while her ability to suffer from trauma humanizes her, the invisibility and ultimate healing of her disability presents Katniss as externally un-disabled. According to "The Experiences of Microaggressions against Women with Visible and Invisible Disabilities," the "visual markers [of physical disability] only reinforced disabled stereotypes of inability and weakness" (Olkin, et al. 761). In other words, physical disability is often evident to the public, and so influences public perception of physically disabled individuals. For people like Katniss with hidden

disabilities, the apparent absence of disability makes them appear "normal." This is the language Katniss uses to describe herself when she comments on the invisible trauma on her physical body, "I can't believe how normal they've made me look on the outside when inwardly I'm such a wasteland" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 366). While this moment in the text highlights the contrast between her appearance of normalcy versus the mental trauma she experiences, Katniss's overall presentation as invulnerable works against her potential identification as disabled.

Katniss's portrayal in physical capability connects to Kafer's explanation of ableist prioritization of able-bodied physicality. As previously explained, the able-bodied world often values able-bodied lives and experiences over disabled lives and experiences. *The Hunger Games* falls into this pattern in its centralization and glorification of Katniss as physically invulnerable, and in highlighting her physical capability as a desirable trait, the novel suggests that physical disability is undesirable. Many literary critics agree that the YA genre plays an important role in young adults' understanding of disability. *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today* urges instructors to apply inclusive literature for young adults to their classrooms and indicates that exposure to diverse stories encourages students to be more accepting of diverse peers, and additionally highlights the benefit of marginalized students identifying with characters (Hayn 135). Likewise, Jen Scott Curwood's "Redefining Normal" questions the representation of disability in young adult literature, and whether texts challenge norms about what it means to be "normal." The article concludes that visible disability in YA literature allows young adults to "develop a richer understanding of what constitutes a disability and how it is often positioned in relation to the able-bodied norm" (Curwood 26). In this statement, Curwood agrees with

Hayn that reading about disabled experiences allows young adults to challenge norms and expand their viewpoints as they apply their understanding to their own lives. It is therefore critical that the genre include positive and visible representations of characters with disabilities. In *The Hunger Games,* Katniss fails to be a positive representation of disability; in fact, she vilifies disability in her continual indication that disability is akin to weakness. Other moments in the series introduce opportunities for highlighting disability, but fail to make disabled characters adequately visible.

Just as Katniss's characterization in physical strength supports normative conceptions of ableism, it confirms normative valuation of gendered traits, what we might even call an ableist feminism. Although *The Hunger Games* is a novel that follows the contemporary trope of the "strong girl" in an attempt to break from stereotypical gender roles, Katniss's masculine characterization confirms gender roles instead, privileging also her superior physical strength (Lashley 14-15). As previously explained, Katniss takes on the role of "protector" to replace her father after he died (Collins, *THG* 27). From this moment forward, Katniss's character is steeped in masculinity, even down to wearing her father's old clothing (Collins, *THG* 28). Literary critics argue that Katniss's character is centralized in her status as a protector, and many agree that this establishes her as masculine. "Gender Rolls: Bread and Resistance in the 'Hunger Games' Trilogy" highlights the masculine role Katniss takes on as a hunter, especially in relation to the relatively stereotypically feminine role Peeta takes on as a baker (Gilbert-Hickey 100).

In contrast to Katniss's strength and success in taking on stereotypically masculine dominance and roles, Prim, continually described as vulnerable and in need of

protection, remains weak due to her adherence to traditionally feminine gender roles, as exemplified by her sensitivity and her capability in healing (Gilbert-Hickey, "Gender Rolls" 102). Katniss's mother likewise exudes stereotypical femininity in her career as a healer as well as in the emotional vulnerability emphasized by her depression. Prim and Katniss's mother adhere to a "gentle femininity" that translates to fragility, which then forces Katniss to take on a masculine and protective role over them (Gilbert-Hickey, *Reductive Reproduction* 109-110). In her article, "*The Hunger Games,* Queerness, and Paranoid Reading," Michelle Abate highlights Katniss's emotional stoicism as another instantiation of her establishment in masculinity. Abate highlights the moment in which Katniss becomes a tribute and forces herself not to cry as to not appear "weak" (411). Katniss's perspective in this moment again emphasizes stereotypical associations between masculinity, strength, and emotional invulnerability. Katniss presents herself as masculine and stoic because she believes that this exudes strength, and *The Hunger Games* confirms this viewpoint in its representation of other, more feminine, characters as weak. *Girls on Fire*, by Kathleen Lashley, explains the historical connection between disability and femininity and argues that Katniss's distancing herself from femininity is an effort to portray herself as strong in opposition to a status of disability (24).

Femininity and disability are both associated with weakness, and *The Hunger Games* distances Katniss from both of these categories in an effort to portray her as strong. Overall, literary criticism emphasizes that the particular category that Katniss's personality fills as masculine, strong, and able-bodied indicates a link between femininity, weakness, and disability. Despite Katniss's distancing from femininity and her continual assertion that she never wants children (Collins, *THG* 9), the series

ultimately forces Katniss into a narrative of gendered heteronormativity through the epilogue in which she marries Peeta, bears children, and enjoys the relative absence of her previous mental disability, roles that reinforce stereotypical gender roles as well as a stereotypical narrative of progress for her disability. While *The Hunger Games* attempts to portray Katniss as "strong" in response to stereotypical gendering of women as "weak," a normative feminism that focuses on Katniss's masculinity and physical strength is a feminism that rejects femininity and disability. The novel's attempt to establish itself in feminism by promoting a physically and emotionally strong female character instead establishes that femininity is weak and masculinity is strong, perpetuating an exclusionary and ableist feminism.

Throughout *The Hunger Games* series, the Capitol upholds an oppressive normative perspective that allows for the maintenance of the status quo. The viewpoint encouraged by the Capitol is ableist and perpetuates the textual disabling of the marginalized population of Panem. The cruelty inherent in the Capitol's endorsement of ableism presents the novel's critique of ableist values, however, the manner in which the novel portrays the Capitol's brutality often adheres to ableist values as well. First, and most clearly, the government that resides in the Capitol inflicts disabling punishment on the citizens of the districts, most evidently through the Hunger Games. The Hunger Games, first established in order to punish the districts for rebellion (Collins, *THG* 18), are a yearly ritual that regularly kills and disables countless children; in addition, the government regularly keeps all citizens in a disabling condition of need, poverty, and on the verge of starvation. This combination makes the people of the districts desperate in order to remind them of their powerlessness. The government uses similar disabling

means upon individuals to enforce its power; it uses torture and violence, including the creation of Avoxes, people who are enslaved and have their tongues removed as punishment for rebellious behavior. While the government enforces these practices, the citizens of the Capitol maintain norms that enable them. The Capitol wholeheartedly enjoys and participates in the Hunger Games, even placing bets and endorsing the tributes most likely to survive: the most physically abled (Collins, *THG* 126). Citizens are likewise entertained by the deaths and disabling of children (Collins, *THG* 354) and the Games cater to the bloodlust of the viewers. Capitol citizens also participate in and enjoy the hoarding of resources; while citizens in the districts starve, Capitol partygoers induce vomiting for the pleasure of eating excess food (Collins, *Catching Fire* 98). Similarly, while the districts struggle to find basic medical care, often dying of disease, injuries, and starvation, Capitol citizens enjoy excess, surgically altering themselves for style and aesthetics (Collins, *THG* 124). These surgical procedures additionally maintain unachievable bodily standards that contribute to ableist societal norms. Throughout the series, Collins uses the privilege, excess, and cruelty of the Capitol to highlight the oppression of the government and the ways in which Capitol citizens take part in it. The outwardly ableist values endorsed by the Capitol's horrific treatment of its citizens in some ways resists normativity. The novel critiques the ableist societal norms perpetuated by the Capitol, even while the novel marginalizes disability itself.

The Capitol, which Collins encourages readers to criticize, shows that ableism is among the corrupt values we're invited to question. With this insight, we can read minor characters' disabilities as significant and present, even while the narrative fails to centralize and legitimize disabled characters. Although the series marginalizes disability,

the presence of these characters simultaneously pushes against their own textual marginalization. Prim, Katniss's mother, and Rue, characters who in many ways represent disability in contrast to Katniss's superfluous physical ability, each reinterpret the meaning of strength and ability in unique ways. Prim and Katniss's mother, figures of defenselessness throughout the series, are capable healers; in this capacity, their gentleness contributes to their abilities. When Peeta falls ill and Katniss must care for him, she reflects on the "skill" and "courage" of her mother and sister in their healing, and understands that she is incapable of properly caring for him (Collins, *THG* 256). While in many moments throughout the series, Katniss highlights their feminine qualities to confirm their weaknesses, in this moment, these qualities contribute to their strengths. Similarly, Katniss views Rue through a lens of disability; Rue's youth and small stature put her at a great physical disadvantage in the Hunger Games, so Katniss becomes her protector. However, like Prim and Katniss's mother, Rue asserts her unique capabilities. Rue uses her smallness to benefit her; she climbs trees and jumps from one tree to another to avoid capture (Collins, *THG* 189) and climbs high into branches to sing messages to the birds (Collins, *THG* 212). Although the Capitol assumes that her physical smallness will be a hindrance, Rue makes it a source of clever strategy and survival. *The Hunger Games* marginalizes Prim, Katniss's mother, and Rue through their representation as disabled. Katniss models herself as their protectors, and yet Prim and Rue are both killed within the violence of the series, and Katniss's mother remains marginal and anonymous, as she is never named and her perspective and background remain unexplored. Despite their textual marginalization, they each push back on the

narrative in their unique inventiveness, will to survive, and perhaps most importantly, they each take the source of their "disabilities" and use them as a strength.

The presence of Avoxes in the text also instills into Panem the undeniable importance of disability, even when used as punishment. The first time Katniss meets an Avox, the girl is a rebel whose government capture she had witnessed long ago. Katniss's first response to the girl and her disability is one of shock and horror, reminding her of the terrible power of the government (Collins, *THG* 80). Katniss's initial fearful reaction to the girl is a reflection of her role in the text as a cautionary tale, a representation of the government's cruelty. Katniss reflects back on her own participation in the girl's current suffering when she remembers witnessing her struggle and doing nothing to help; she recalls this incident with immense guilt, and feels responsible for the girl's fate (Collins, *THG* 82-83). After a scene in which Katniss destructively rages against her own entrapment in the government, the Avox girl appears again to clean up after Katniss. In this moment, the two have a semblance of a conversation, during which Katniss apologizes for her past inaction and the girl responds in the only way she can, "She shakes her head. … She taps her lips with her fingers then points to my chest. I think she means that I would have just ended up an Avox, too" (Collins, *THG* 119). After this moment, the Avox girl comforts and serves as a caretaker to Katniss, tucking her into bed like a child. As exemplified in these scenes, each time the Avox girl arises in the text, her struggles are simultaneously magnified and marginalized. The only thing that readers know about her is her suffering through the horror of her inflicted disability in the loss of her tongue. Because readers are given no distinguishing information about the girl, including her name, she is identified only by her disability in the text's references to her

as "the Avox girl." When her struggles do arise in these scenes, she directs attention away from herself in her indication that Katniss was right not to help her. The Avox girl serves no narrative purpose other than to be the embodiment of the government's cruelty and a caretaker to Katniss. Textually, she is her disability alone, a role of suffering and anonymity, a narrative choice that places disabled individuals as both forever suffering and invisible. Readers finally learn that the Avox girl's name is Lavinia near the end of the final book of the series, when Peeta remembers the Capitol torturing her to death in order to torment him (Collins, *Mockingjay* 274). In this way, even her murder is committed for the sole purpose of manipulating someone else, and her name only arises after her death. The novel's representation of "the Avox girl" through suffering alone hearkens back to Kafer's explanation that the world understands disability primarily through suffering.

While Lavinia's textual presence makes her a representation of suffering due to her disability, the existence of Avoxes forces characters and readers to face the power of rebellion; if the Panem government did not deem the Avoxes to be a threat, they would not have been abused so cruelly. Pollux, an Avox introduced in *Mockingjay,* somewhat works against the kind of marginalization that Lavinia experiences throughout the series. Although other characters often speak for him and his background remains ambiguous, Pollux pushes against his textual marginalization. Unlike Lavinia's complete and utter silence and erasure, Pollux finds unique ways to communicate with those around him. He serves as a cameraman to promote the rebellion (Collins, *Mockingjay* 103), joyfully whistles to sing with the birds (Collins, *Mockingjay* 122), and has developed sign language to communicate with his brother (Collins, *Mockingjay* 284). Pollux also proves

to be incredibly clever; when Katniss's group of rebels are forced to navigate a maze of underground tunnels, he becomes their guide. When Pollux reveals the depth of his knowledge, obtained through his former underground imprisonment, Peeta replies, "'Well, then you just became our most valuable asset'" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 299). Although this valuation of Pollux remains focused on his use value, a problematic and ableist attribution of worth, this comment additionally acknowledges his skill and importance, which centers him more firmly in the narrative. It is notable that while the narrative silences Lavinia, Pollux asserts his character and perspective, which is yet another demonstration of the novel's privileging of masculinity. I highlight the contrast between Lavinia and Pollux in order to demonstrate the somewhat contradictory way that *The Hunger Games* portrays disability; both characters are literally silenced and are textually marginalized, however, Pollux's assertion of his own value complicates the novel's representation of disability.

Much like the difference between Lavinia and Pollux's disabilities, Peeta's disability contrasts the "feminine" disabilities of Katniss's mother, Prim, and Rue. At the close of the first novel of the series, Peeta's leg is amputated, and through this example, *The Hunger Games* again fails to adequately incorporate disability. Near the end of Katniss and Peeta's struggles throughout the novel to survive, Peeta is injured and Katniss ties a tourniquet around his leg (Collins, *THG* 338). However, it is not revealed to Katniss until later that Peeta loses his leg as a result, and instead has an artificial leg, a circumstance that, like the Avox girl's loss of tongue, Katniss feels immense guilt and responsibility for (Collins, *THG* 369). Again, the framing of the situation around Katniss's horror and regret over Peeta's disability both marginalizes Peeta and centers his

disability around suffering. Further, in sequels to *The Hunger Games,* Katniss and Peeta continue to face physically demanding life-threatening scenarios, yet Peeta's disability is rarely mentioned, as though his changed body never impedes him in an ableist world. The beginning of *Catching Fire,* the second of the series, mentions Peeta's disability in his adjustment to his altered embodiment. However, Katniss notes only that he looks healthy and well, "and you can barely even notice his limp now" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 17). Her attention to Peeta's disability in this moment marginalizes its permanent alteration of his body in her marking of his progress towards the unattainable normalcy of how he walked before he lost his leg. While *Catching Fire* contains some subtle references to Peeta's artificial leg (Collins, *Catching Fire* 51, 360), throughout most of the novel, Peeta's disability is all but invisible. Although Peeta is textually present for less of the final book, *Mockingjay,* his disability is not mentioned even once. Throughout the series, Peeta engages in all manner of physical activity in dangerous situations. Despite the amputation of his leg, Peeta's physical capability appears mostly unaltered in the text, a narrative choice that marginalizes the presence of his disability, rendering it a minor obstacle that he successfully "overcomes." The narrative of progress that Peeta undergoes in his disability ties to *The Hunger Games'*s endorsement of masculinity, strength, and physical ability as opposition to femininity, weakness, and disability.

While *The Hunger Games* works to portray societal oppressions, it reinforces ableism in its marginalization of disability. In some ways, the novel appears to critique ableist values through its portrayal of Capitol cruelty and how it manifests in disabling punishments upon the oppressed, as well as ableist cultural practices. However, the narrative prioritizes physical strength through Katniss and her attribution of weakness

and vulnerability to others. When disabled characters do arise in the text, they are marginalized as well. *The Hunger Games* sustains existing ableism that contributes to the able-bodied world's "refusal to see" disability (Kafer 15). Even in a series like *The Hunger Games* that attempts to critique oppressive social structures through the institution of the Capitol, the pervasive social hierarchy bleeds through the author's narrative intent, which is evident in the novel's sexist and ableist valuation of its characters. While the surface of the text remains ableist in its depiction of strength and disability, beneath the surface, the prominence of disability asserts its persistence, even in an overtly ableist novel. The prevalence of disability despite the ableism of the narrative indicates that just as sexism and ableism are essential to existent societal structure, so is disability; even an ableist narrative cannot fully erase the presence and importance of disability.

Conclusion

As established through Kafer's work in *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* there is much work to be done in improving the visibility of disability. This chapter applies Kafer's work to representations of disabled and able-bodied characters in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Hunger Games.* While *Woman on the Edge of Time* carefully portrays Connie's suffering as a consequence of her institutionalization at Bellevue, it fails to provide her with any hope for a more positive future, both in her own time and even in a utopian future. *The Hunger Games,* meanwhile, continually marginalizes disability through its glorification of strength in its protagonist, as well as its profoundly negative representation of disability as a form of weakness or suffering in other characters. The

two novels contrast significantly; *Woman on the Edge of Time* centralizes disability through its protagonist in a dystopian present and utopian future, while *The Hunger Games* imagines a dystopian future through an invulnerable young protagonist who is strong enough to survive anything. Although the novels approach disability from different angles, they have similar faults; they both ultimately fail to imagine disability beyond a state of suffering. Even while both novels marginalize disability, they simultaneously depend on disability and disabled characters, which illustrates the reality that disability is essential to both real and fictional societies.

In imagining disabled characters, both *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Hunger Games* turn disabled characters into monstrous and somewhat inhuman beings; for example, Piercy challenges patients' humanity by depicting their forced integration with technology, and Collins identifies the Avox girl solely through her surgical disability. The following chapter, "Hybridity of Cyborg Embodiment," will further examine transcendence from traditional human embodiment through its focus on identities that demand a post-human redefinition of how society defines humanity.

Chapter Four: Hybridity of Cyborg Embodiment

While the other chapters of this dissertation examine sources of marginalization that would be recognizable to young adult readers in their own lives, including heteronormativity and gender normativity, sexual violence, and disability, this final chapter studies the figure of the cyborg, both a real and symbolic representation of hybridized identity. The cyborg is fictionalized through Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* and Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One.* These different novels imagine the figure of the cyborg in vastly different capacities. In *Uglies,* cyborg identity is an embodied identity signaled by the mental and physical transformation evident in its society's mandated surgery. Meanwhile, *Ready Player One* imagines cyborg identity in the blurring of boundaries between the physical and virtual in terms of body, mind, and lived experience. Each of these novels features cyborg technology in ways that suggest drastically different messages; while *Uglies* points to the dangers of the figure of the cyborg and celebrates the pure, "natural" human body, *Ready Player One* highlights the boundless possibilities of the cyborg, suggesting that technology can outstrip human capacities to establish equity for members of a society. Perhaps the novels represent two sides of the same argument about what it means to be a cyborg; even in their differences, the novels depict the cyborg in a similar manner. Both novels suggest potential for improvement of the human condition as well as danger to humanity and the Earth. Notably, they focus on the brain as the center of potential alteration, a similarity that suggests a consensus that the brain, or perhaps consciousness, is the center of what makes us truly human. This perception of the brain as the humanizing organ provides a starting point through which to imagine cyborg identity, and question the integration of technology with the mind.

In discussing the perspectives of *Uglies* and *Ready Player One* alongside the concept of the cyborg, this chapter attempts to expose the ways in which cyborg identity can both reinforce and reinterpret traditional understandings of reality and human embodiment. While *Uglies* attempts to critique conformity in its representation of surgical alteration to fit norms, it simultaneously perpetuates conformity to traditional views of "natural" human embodiment that excludes disabled bodies. The novel therefore positions the cyborg as monstrous. On the other hand, the *Ready Player One* series explores the duality of beneficial and dangerous consequences of technological developments that alter human embodiment. Throughout the series, humans and technology grow ever closer to inextricable cyborg existence, which results in both greater opportunity and greater threats. The novels' expression of multiplicity through changing human identity and increasingly paramount consequences represents cyborg identity as one of many possibilities for the future of human embodiment. This chapter explores the figure of the cyborg in young adult dystopian novels as a model for the cyborg's ability to reinterpret humanity in order to imagine a more equitable and inclusive future. There is perhaps no better way to represent the cyborg than through hybridity, as will be demonstrated through Alison Kafer and Donna Haraway's theoretical lens.

Theory of the Cyborg

In the other chapters of this dissertation, I studied the manipulation of the body by oppressive individuals and institutions, but this chapter applies cyborg identity to indicate the potential for alteration of the body that allows for agency and possibility. The concept

of the cyborg in novels like *Uglies* highlights oppression and the potential for manipulation of cyborg bodies, but *Ready Player One* introduces the cyborg body as one full of possibility. In order to question the positionality of the cyborg in these texts, it is important to first establish what it means to be a cyborg, and the metaphorical social implications inherent in a cyborg identity. A key insight from Haraway is that the cyborg brings to the forefront the sociality of embodiment. Haraway explains that marginalized bodies become social agents through societal prioritization of the body's use value (17); the cyborg body therefore transforms social expectation for bodily appearance and functionality.

This section centers primarily on Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" as well as Alison Kafer's critique of Haraway in *Feminist, Queer, Crip.* Kafer's critique is not a reversal of Haraway's cyborg, but rather offers modification in the spirit of Haraway's original concept. Ultimately, both Haraway and Kafer describe cyborgs through hybridity; cyborg embodiment is largely defined by the integration of the human body with technology, while cyborg identity is described through blurred social boundaries. Haraway and Kafer's perceptions of the cyborg are key to understanding embodiment in these novels due to their attention to marginalized bodies as viewed through feminist, queer, and disability theory. Theorists of the cyborg unite disability studies and cyborg theory within the cyborg's opportunity to redefine the human body. This section explores theories of changeable bodies; these theories are critical to reading young adult dystopian fiction that includes cyborg embodiment in order to view these representations as opportunities to reimagine human identity.

According to Sami Schalk's *Bodyminds Reimagined*, fiction allows for defamiliarization that opens readers up to embracing unconventional deviations from humanity, such as vampires and werewolves. Not only do these beings call into question "recognizable" categories of what it means to be human, they question social categories that isolate people from each other, like race, gender, and disability (Schalk 115-116). In other words, fiction provides a reality where readers are more inclined to include non-normative perspectives than they would in the real world. The science fiction cyborg therefore has the potential to reinterpret intersectional social identities. While these fictional variations from humanity can allow for the questioning of social barriers, they can also reinforce marginalization in "representations of the racialized Other through the figure of the alien, robot, or cyborg" (Schalk 134). Schalk acknowledges that just as fictional characters can inspire exceptional inclusion, they can also reinforce readers' understandings of difference and otherness if fictionalized marginal identities are represented as inhuman. In *Black Madness : : Mad Blackness*, Therí Alyce Pickens likewise questions the ability of the cyborg to expand the boundaries of human embodiment; its traditional role as a "solution" for disability enmeshes the concept of the cyborg in a normalcy that suppresses disability. Pickens explains, "I question how much the cyborg can map a future of any kind when it relies on a past and path of erasure" (20). While the concept of the cyborg introduces unconventional understandings of embodiment, it is also important to acknowledge that traditional conceptions of embodiment limit the cyborg's ability to break from normativity.

Schalk and Pickens call attention to the fictional use of the cyborg as curative for disability, however, cyborg identity embraces hybridity and contradiction as represented

in "A Cyborg Manifesto." I examine the literature in this chapter in order to demonstrate the ways in which the cyborg can reinforce normativity as well as its potential for inclusivity. Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" is a critical essay for the content of this chapter for its systematic examination of what it means to be a cyborg. While the essay initially explains cyborg identity through its traditional anatomical definition in the transgression of the boundaries of humanity and animals or technology (3), Haraway ultimately defines the cyborg through crossed boundaries. Haraway explains that a world of cyborgs can be viewed as a harmful and oppressive world or as one of many possible identities. She explains of the latter, "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway 5). In other words, cyborg embodiment can be a frightening tool of abuse or a reinterpretation of what it means to be human at all. Ultimately, this vision of reinterpretation is Haraway's perception of the cyborg.

Although society encourages views of identity that suggest uniformity, "A Cyborg Manifesto" embraces hybridity. Haraway explains that the expectation for differences between people creates better unity through contradiction because the concept of homogeneity is limiting and even "imperialist" (21). Cyborg physicality through integration of animal and technological parts with the human body can teach people to be more inclusive to diverse bodies. Identification through cyborg physicality by design subverts normativity; cyborgs "rejoic[e] in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine" (Haraway 23), and therefore work against the oppressive binaries and hierarchies of power that society is founded on.

Much like Kafer's revaluation of disabled lives, Haraway urges readers to embrace the value and possibility of cyborg embodiment. On the combination of humanity and machinery, "A Cyborg Manifesto" celebrates ambiguity. The essay highlights the challenging of boundaries and identity in cyborg status and emphasizes the many benefits of a cyborg identity. According to Haraway, disabled individuals often have a head start when it comes to the embracing of a hybrid identity, "Perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices. ... Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (25). In this quote, Haraway suggests that disabled people who need accessibility devices must embrace technology into their lived bodily experiences, and so in a sense, must embrace a cyborg identity. Rather than suggest that such a cyborg life is detrimental, the essay indicates that being a cyborg introduces a sense of freedom to look beyond human skin. Cyborgs transcend the boundaries of lived experience and are not bound by any singular identity, which works against oppression based on gender, race, and class, but also embraces the blurring of all boundaries, including with technology (27). Ultimately, "A Cyborg Manifesto" champions cyborgs, and all of the boundless possibilities that a cyborg identity can introduce.

While common understandings of the cyborg often begin with crossed physical boundaries such as animal to human transplants (Haraway 14), the concept of the cyborg applies to social boundaries as well. Just as Haraway acknowledges disabled identification with cyborg embodiment through unification with assistive technology, she additionally devotes attention to "social cyborgs," or individuals who live outside of

traditional social boundaries. According to Haraway, even supposedly singular social

identities have many variations. Despite widespread "belief in 'essential' unity" between

members of like gender, race, and class, there are vast differences within these groups;

"There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even

such a state as 'being' female" (Haraway 6). Although people categorize themselves

within groupings that supposedly define identity, these manufactured categories

themselves have enormous variations within them. Rigid social expectations suggest

homogeneity within societal groupings such as gender, race, and class, and while

intended to introduce unity, this instead marginalizes any individual who does not fit the

suggested mold (8). Because of this essentialism, individuals who fit within more than

one marginalized group, such as Black women, become social cyborgs for fitting into the

hybrid identities of womanhood, which has historically excluded women of color, and

Blackness, which has historically excluded women (Haraway 6). Much like Haraway's

understanding of social cyborgs, intersectional identity includes the convergence of

multiple social identities. As defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectional identity is

one which does not conform to one exclusive category (1244). In explaining the concept

of intersectionality, Crenshaw applies the same example as Haraway; she explains that

Black women experience "conflicting political agendas" between feminist and Black

communities (Crenshaw 1252). Haraway's application of the concept of the cyborg to

social identity reinterprets the traditional cyborg in a manner that allows for a new

viewpoint on both cyborg bodies and marginalized people. While Haraway's "A Cyborg

Manifesto" introduces the concept of cyborg identity as lived hybridity through

embodiment and through social identification, Alison Kafer builds upon the cyborg

through modifications that expand upon the concept's ability to embrace ambiguity of identity.

In *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* Kafer attempts to "crip[] the cyborg," a term she uses to reference the need for updating Haraway's cyborg in order to better include disabled individuals. Kafer claims that while Haraway's representation of cyborgs promotes the idea of hybridity, her concepts need further engagement with disability to function as a model for disabled individuals and communities (105). Overall, Kafer explains that the cyborg introduces new possibilities for disabled futures and suggests what it might look like to have cyborg theory that accounts for disability, or "a cripped cyborg politics" (106). While Kafer acknowledges some limitations of Haraway's cyborg, she indicates that its basis allows for more opportunity in disabled futurity. Despite Kafer's many critiques of Haraway, both theorists define the ideal cyborg in similar ways; both envision a cyborg defined by crossed boundaries and hybridity.

Kafer categorizes her adjustments to Haraway's cyborg theory as "cripping the cyborg," a term that calls attention to the importance of including disability and disabled people when considering the modification of the body, both in fiction and in reality. This chapter is my attempt to accomplish this: to take the cyborgs presented in *Uglies* and *Ready Player One* and explore them from the perspective of disability studies. On this concept, Kafer explains, "Cripping the cyborg, developing a non-ableist cyborg politics, requires understanding disabled people as cyborgs not because of our *bodies* (e.g., our use of prosthetics, ventilators, or attendants), but because of our *political practices. ...* our bodies are not separate from our political practices; neither assistive technologies nor our uses of them are ahistorical or apolitical" (120). In this quote, Kafer urges her readers

to think critically about assumptions regarding the cyborg nature of disabled bodies. She indicates that disabled people should not be defined by the nature of their bodies, which frequently lies outside of the individual's control, but rather with their active political engagement. She also explains that disabled embodiment is not separate from politicization. Kafer remains clear that it is not the body itself that is political, but the disabled individual's relationship with and choices about the body and its assistive technologies that are political. [14]

While acknowledging the opportunities that cyborg technology offers those with disability, Kafer explains the ableism inherent in viewing cyborg technology through a singularly positive lens. She therefore urges for the understanding and acknowledgement of discomfort around becoming a physical cyborg, including the bodily difficulties that come with the experience, the inaccessibility of cyborg technology to many disabled people, the harm that technology often brings to the disabled community, and the reality that many may not want to be "cured" of their disability (Kafer 118). Kafer agrees with Haraway's perception that contradiction and crossed boundaries are inherent to cyborg identity. She highlights that many disabled people already experience cyborg identity through "the boundary blurring that occurs between disabled people and our attendants, or between disabled people and our service animals, or among disabled people in community with each other and our allies: all experiences that point to a cyborgian understanding of interdependence, mutuality, and relationship" (Kafer 119). These

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[14] For example, Laura Hershey, an activist with muscular dystrophy who speaks out against organizations like the Muscular Dystrophy Association, has a complicated relationship with the technology she lives on. Kafer explains, "On the one hand, her very survival relies on this technology, a technology made possible by the medical industrial complex that supports and is supported by organizations like the MDA. On the other hand, she uses this technology to make her activism possible, activism that is often committed to interrogating the very system she relies on" (123). This example emphasizes Kafer's point that cripped cyborgs incorporate and embrace contradiction.

relationships question the common understandings of the division between individuals as solitary beings, thereby questioning widely accepted definitions of the human.

Kafer additionally warns that an inclusive cyborg must be one that resists normativity, and therefore resists a narrative of remediation. Kafer emphasizes the importance of cyborg futurity and its inclusion of the disabled community in a positive future outside of able-bodiedness (106). However, while the cyborg introduces positive disabled futurity, it also presents cyborg technology as a potential "solution" to the "problem" of disability (Kafer 107). In other words, the representation of cyborg technology as a solution to disability encourages the ableist perspective that disability itself is a problem. A curative view of cyborg technology, previously addressed by Schalk and Pickens, again establishes a normative understanding of physicality. This perspective assumes that the value of cyborg technology lies in its "ability to normalize the body and/or to restore its previous function" (Kafer 108). This view of the cyborg perpetuates the othering of disabled bodies in their marking as "abnormal" bodies to be fixed or cured. The valuation of bodily normalcy devalues disabled bodies and suggests that disabled individuals should devalue their own bodies and instead embrace the simulated normalcy of cyborg embodiment. Kafer's critique highlights the necessity for disabled people to be considered and represented in a holistic way that considers their value and agency. This critique also serves as a reminder of the pervasiveness of social convention in infiltrating the concept of the cyborg, which Haraway imagines as a radically inclusive understanding of embodiment.

Eva Hayward explores diverse bodily identity within transgender communities; she imagines the modification of the body as a possibility for personal growth. Much like

the cyborg of this chapter, Hayward's "More Lessons From a Starfish" examines transgender identity as an experience of transformation and of transcending expectation (68). The essay considers transsexual/transgender embodiment through the lyrics of a song called "The Cripple and the Starfish," in which the narrator of the song says that they will cut off their finger because, "I'll grow back like a Starfish" (Hayward 65). Hayward uses the message of growth in the song to question traditional understandings of gender-affirming surgery. While she covers boundaries between different bodily identities, Hayward focuses on the reinterpretation of surgery as healing; she explains, "Is not the 'cripple' of the song repairing him/herself through the act of cutting? Is transsexual transformation also regenerative? Am I not in part a transsexual through the re-working and re-folding of my own body, my tissue, and my skin?" (66-67). Although gender-affirming surgery is often thought of as an adding or subtracting to the body, Hayward argues that the focus should instead be on the body's transformation of itself in growth towards individualized wholeness and authenticity. The essay additionally addresses the connection between embodied experiences of transgender and disabled individuals when it states that both are forms of "queer embodiments, initiating a resignification of cutting and amputation as forms of becoming" (Hayward 71). Both transgender and disabled communities understand surgery as a process of transformation or "becoming," though Hayward clarifies that this connection is not intended to endorse a curative view of either transgender or disabled embodiment. Both Kafer and Hayward celebrate non-normative embodiment as an inclusive expression of desire and politics, and argue for growth that has nothing to do with arriving at normativity.

Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" and Kafer's adaptation of the essay establish the social and physical cyborg as deeply enmeshed in hybridity through expansion beyond traditional human embodiment. The figure of the cyborg, as presented by the theorists cited in this section, is the model for this chapter in its reinterpretation of human physicality, disabled embodiment, and the integration of the human body and technology. Cyborg identity reimagines normativity, whether through physical alteration or social intersectionality. I read the fictional texts to follow through this understanding of the cyborg, and question the ways in which their textual imaginings of cyborg embodiment resist and reinforce normativity.

Inhumanity of Cyborg Bodies in *Uglies*

In *Uglies,* by Scott Westerfeld, becoming a physical cyborg is a social and political requirement for "normal" life. In the world of this novel, the natural body is portrayed as "ugly," and young people long for the day that they are old enough to leave behind their supposedly grotesque bodies to receive the privileges and beauty of surgically becoming a "pretty." The society of *Uglies* reinterprets the natural human body as deviant, forcing citizens to reject their natural bodies in favor of a surgical procedure that distances them from their humanity. The external bodily marker of being a "pretty" indicates a simultaneously "pretty" brain that has been manipulated into conformity. The transformation evident in both the surgical intervention as well as the alteration of the brain establishes these bodies as cyborg bodies, however, the novel represents cyborg embodiment as profoundly perverse for its deviation from "natural" humanity.

While *Uglies* critiques conformity in its representation of bodily and mental alteration to fit social norms, the novel's nostalgic celebration of the natural body

reinforces current social norms about bodily normalcy. The chapter focuses on this contradiction; *Uglies* interprets the "pretty" cyborg body as something inherently corrupting, which suggests that the transformation of the natural body, or deviation from what is supposedly "natural," is inhuman. This ideology reproduces oppression against marginalized groups who experience bodily alteration, such as disabled and transgender communities.

  Uglies is a dystopian novel with a clear, cautionary message championing the purity of the natural body. The plot of the novel follows protagonist Tally as she navigates a society in which she and her peers are told that their natural bodies are shameful and "ugly," to be traded in through surgery at the earliest opportunity. The surgical procedure of the novel evokes the figure of the cyborg due to its language of transformation; even while citizens remain unaware of the brain manipulation included in the surgery, the drastic change of one's physical, mental, and social life is considered to be common knowledge. This understanding is emphasized by language of finality regarding the surgical change, such as one character anticipating the operation who says that the time until the procedure is "our last chance to do anything really cool. To be ourselves" (Westerfeld 49) or Tally's reference to the operation as "a clean start" (Westerfeld 25). Tally's viewpoint shifts through the events of the novel; though at the start, Tally fully embraces and looks forward to her own alteration in concurrence with social expectation, she rebels and fights against it by the end. This narrative progression clearly indicates the evil of the society and the surgical procedures that alter the bodies and minds of its citizens, turning them into monstrous cyborgs. *Uglies* critiques conformity to a singular viewpoint of what is "beautiful" through the violence of

compulsory operations. However, in the novel's vehement rejection of surgical alteration to fit a socially accepted mold, it rejects cyborg embodiment in its indication that bodily alteration is unnatural, frivolous, and dangerous. By rejecting surgical transformation, *Uglies* therefore rejects the personal and political possibilities Kafer and Haraway associate with cyborg identity.

When it comes to the alteration of the physical body, the message that *Uglies* sends to readers is clear: the body is best left in its natural state. The novel establishes this message in its representation of a society in which a singular understanding of beauty is the only acceptable one and all must conform to this standard. When Tally looks forward to her upcoming surgery, she refers to people without surgery, herself included, as "freaks." Her friend, Shay, responds, "'We're not freaks, Tally. *We're* normal. We may not be gorgeous, but at least we're not hyped-up Barbie dolls. …you weren't *born* expecting that kind of beauty in everyone, all the time. You just got programmed into thinking anything else is ugly'" (Westerfeld 82). In this quote, Shay acknowledges the way that their society manipulates its citizens into believing that the bodies they were born into are inadequate and require surgery to be viewed as normal. Shay tries to flip the script and explain that the necessity for surgery instead produces "freaks." Shay's opinions are the first that disrupt the accepted standards for beauty in the novel, and establish surgery as something to be feared rather than something to be desired. When Tally sees old magazines, presumably from our present day, she notes, "Some were grotesquely fat, or weirdly over-muscled, or uncomfortably thin, and almost all of them had wrong, ugly proportions. But instead of being ashamed of their deformities, the people were laughing and kissing and posing" (Westerfeld 198). Through Tally's

perspective, Westerfeld compares today's standards of beauty to those of Tally's time. In her view of people as "wrong," "ugly," and "deform[ed]," the novel indicates the innate violence of convincing a population that they are inherently ugly. This concept is emphasized time and again throughout the novel, and is best summarized when one character states, "That's the worst thing they do to you… the worst damage is done before they even pick up the knife: You're all brainwashed into believing you're ugly" (Westerfeld 276). Overall, the narrative suggests that becoming "pretty" signals a loss of self as well as conformity to social norms.

So long as embodiment is natural, *Uglies* celebrates individuality and diversity through its rejection of conformity to its society's operation. While the physical descriptions of characters in *Uglies* remain racially ambiguous, subtle cues suggest racial conformity in addition to conformity to beauty standards. The novel references "ugly nicknames" that highlight "flawed" features of uglies before they are surgically altered. Tally's nickname, "Squint" references her squinty eyes, while her friend Peris's nickname "Nose" references his formerly large nose (Westerfeld 17-18). Both of these qualities are racially charged, and the identification of these features as flaws indicates that the world of *Uglies* is a world in which race is made invisible in forced conformity to whiteness. Tally likewise references lightening Shay's "olive" skin to make it "closer to baseline" (Westerfeld 43), a description which indicates that light skin is the norm. A singular view of beauty as depicted in the novel highlights oppressive and exclusionary standards of beauty in reality as well as its application to race (Minh-ha 52). Such exclusionary standards of beauty based on racial difference connect as well to theorists who discuss race as a physical "marker of identity/difference" (Omi and Winant 1063).

Much like individuals who are marked by difference due to disability, racial minorities commonly experience bodily otherness and marginalization. Similarly, the operation itself is deeply embedded in ableism through its language of improvement of human embodiment. In one description of the benefits of the surgery, Tally explains that the mandated procedure replaces faces with plastic, alters eyes for "perfect" vision, trims muscles and fat, and replaces teeth with ceramic for durability (Westerfeld 97). This depiction of the cyborg as physical betterment devalues disability and hearkens back to reservations expressed by Kafer, Schalk, and Pickens that a curative vision of the cyborg cannot break from ableist normativity. As a whole, Westerfeld imagines the cyborg operation to racist and ableist ends, promoting conformity and standardization.

Uglies not only thematically shows that changing the body is wrong; it additionally demonstrates this concept through violent depictions of the surgery that the citizens undergo. The violence of the surgical procedure is what begins to steer the novel away from inclusivity; in representing the operation as inherently antagonistic, it villainizes physical alteration. Near the beginning of the novel, Tally and Shay argue about why people who have had the operation seem to have changed beyond the alteration of their physical features. While Tally suggests that they have simply grown up, Shay argues, "'Or maybe when they do the operation – when they grind and stretch your bones to the right shape, peel off your face and rub all your skin away, and stick in plastic cheekbones so you look like everybody else – maybe after going through all that you just aren't very interesting anymore" (Westerfeld 50). This description of the operation shocks Tally; she had been told her entire life that the operation was something wonderful to look forward to, and the unpleasant reality of the procedure never seemed

quite so violent to her. In anticipation of her surgery later, she envisions these details again and empathizes with Shay's decision to run away (Westerfeld 97). The violence inherent in the operation takes on new meaning when Tally discovers that the physical alteration accompanies mental alteration; the government uses the surgery as an opportunity to implant brain lesions that inhibit "undesirable" personality traits in citizens. Tally learns this truth about the operations after she follows Shay to a place outside the city called the Smoke, where escaped uglies live in a community (Westerfeld 265-268). Tally's newfound understanding about the nature of the procedure is what finally convinces her to avoid the society she grew up in and the operation she had so desired. When Shay is ultimately subjected to surgery against her will, Tally mourns the loss of her friend's personality, "How could Shay not understand that she'd been changed by the operation? Not just been given a pretty face, but also a … pretty mind. Nothing else could explain how quickly she'd changed" (Westerfeld 396). The non-consensual brain manipulation becomes the factor that instigates rebellion as Tally and her friends try to warn others about what it really means to become a pretty (Westerfeld 406). While the violence of the surgery informs the characters in *Uglies* to the degree of the government manipulation to which they have been subjected, it depicts physical alteration of the body through surgery in violence as well.

The novel emphasizes the cruelty of the operations through celebration of the natural body. While *Uglies* indicates that surgery is inherently corruptive, Hayward indicates instead that surgical transformation can indicate personal growth or "becoming" for transgender or disabled individuals (71). Westerfeld's fictional representation of surgery as violent and unnatural therefore excludes these communities and reinforces

normative perceptions of acceptable embodiment. *Uglies* encourages the purity of the natural body in scenes of nostalgic loss after someone has turned pretty, as well its representation of true beauty as exclusive to bodies without surgical intervention. From the very start of the novel, Tally mourns the loss of the matching scars that she and her former best friend, Peris, used to share (Westerfeld 18). Although Tally reasons with herself that "of course" the scar was removed during his operation, her reference to his "clean start" appears as a loss as it does not include her (Westerfeld 25). When Tally adjusts to a life outside the city, she adjusts as well to faces she formerly only saw through imperfections. Although this occurs slowly, she experiences moments where she learns to appreciate the beauty in others as well as in herself. She begins to develop romantic feelings for a boy named David, and as these feelings grow, her perspective about his features changes as well. "She could see that his forehead was too high, that a small scar cut a white stroke through his eyebrow. And his smile was pretty crooked, really. But it was if something had changed inside Tally's head, something that turned his face pretty to her" (Westerfeld 250). Through Tally's relationship with David, she learns to appreciate imperfections and alter her understanding of beauty. She notes the qualities that would usually qualify him as "ugly," and still concludes that his face is "pretty." David's attention to Tally and assertion that he sees her natural beauty changes her understanding of herself as well. She decides not to return to the city, and "remain an ugly for life. But somehow not ugly at all" (Westerfeld 281). This statement emphasizes Tally's growth; the whole reason she journeyed to the Smoke in the first place was as a spy for the government in order to avoid the punishment of remaining ugly, a fate that was previously unthinkable to Tally (Westerfeld 135). Yet, after time away, surrounded

by people who have kept their natural faces and bodies, she chooses this fate for herself. Near the end of the novel, Tally is forced by her society to leave her new home at the Smoke; she looks back at her friends there and realizes that "she no longer thought of them as ugly" (Westerfeld 300). This scene also demonstrates the profound change that Tally has undergone: she has a completely altered perception of beauty from the beginning of the novel. Each of the moments in which Tally appreciates beauty through imperfections is representative of the larger message of celebrating the body in its natural state.

Although the novel highlights themes about celebrating diverse bodies, its critique of a singular standard of beauty fails to be inclusive of bodies that require surgery: cyborg bodies. Where Hayward imagines surgery through enrichment and growth, *Uglies* portrays surgery as inherently perverse. Through the novel's positioning of surgery as evil, it additionally positions the pretty, cyborg body as a corruption of natural humanity. While the pretties included in the novel are presented as powerfully and tangibly beautiful (Westerfeld 16, 381), the operation itself still remains enmeshed in violence and fear, underscored by Tally's ultimate sacrifice to the procedure at the close of the novel in order to test a potential cure for the brain lesions (Westerfeld 415-419). The monstrosity of cyborg bodies is highlighted further by the presence of specials, pretties who have been surgically altered into additional strength and ability in order to perform roles as city officials. Tally responds to specials primarily with fear, describing them as "predatory," "monster, vengeful and inhuman," "unearthly," and other similar descriptions (Westerfeld 103, 110, 129). The specials' categorization in isolation from humanity further establishes their status as frightening, dangerous cyborgs. The novel's overall

representation of cyborg bodies through the powerless, vapid pretties and animalistic, monstrous specials distinguishes cyborg bodies as utterly inhuman.

In opposition to the exclusive acceptance of bodies represented through *Uglies,* theorists like Kafer work against binaries of bodily purity. As previously mentioned, Kafer explores the distinction between the representation of cyborg technology as assistive versus its representation as a cure for disability. She explains that many view becoming a cyborg as the loss of "an original purity that, thanks to assistive technology, has only now been mixed, hybridized, blurred. … when [a body] gets mixed with the prosthetic machine, it becomes impure, mixed, cyborg" (Kafer 108-109). In other words, much like cyborg representation in *Uglies,* many view the melding of the human body with technology as a loss of an essential, pure identity as human. This perspective distances those with disabilities from those without, and creates a binary between the differences of these lived experiences. Kafer urges for hybridization, for the blending of boundaries between people with diverse bodies and abilities. *Feminist, Queer, Crip* celebrates disabled bodies with and without assistive technology and surgery, and celebrates human experience in its many diverse forms. Kafer's radical acceptance of all bodies in all forms is what *Uglies* lacks; the novel encourages the binary distinction between the purity of the uglies and the inhumanity of the pretties and specials.

Demonstrated through Tally's experiences and development throughout the novel, *Uglies* encourages readers to fight against conformity to societal standards. However, this message is diluted by the novel's adherence to traditional standards that qualify bodily normalcy in opposition to cyborg bodies. The novel's opposition to cyborg bodies reflects back on Schalk's explanation that fictionalized inhuman bodies often represent

and reinforce otherness (134). Despite this exclusivity, Westerfeld's championing of individuality is a message to be encouraged alongside inclusivity. Sara Day's *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* asserts the overlap between Tally's journey in *Uglies* and social resistance. Day emphasizes Tally's loss of bodily autonomy through her changing circumstances, "Both before Tally realizes the corruption in her society and when she decides to take action against it, the promise—or threat—of prettiness locates her body as a space upon which social control has literally been mapped" (Day 80). When Tally's society wants her to obey their wishes, officials threaten to revoke or enforce its operation as a means of controlling her; in both circumstances, Tally loses agency over her own body and it therefore becomes a means of "social control." Her independent decisions about her body then are acts of social resistance. Similarly, Tally's journey towards self-love and self-acceptance are further acts of rebellion against the beauty standards with which she was indoctrinated. *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* highlights a moment in which Tally begins to embrace life outside the city, and appreciates nature for the first time: "Tally has accepted the true beauty of nature, but she is not yet convinced of her own natural worth" (McDonough and Wagner 161). This moment is significant for its role in Tally's understanding of her inherent worth, as well as the inherent worth of others. Over time, Tally learns to appreciate her identity independent of the pretty operation that she has been told is essential to her value and her future.

Throughout its narrative, *Uglies* asserts the importance of embracing individuality; however, the novel attempts to portray this message through a limited understanding of diverse bodies. *Uglies* attributes value to "pure," natural bodies, and

encourages the maintenance of this "purity" against the threat of the cyborg. Through

Tally's experiences and opposition to pretties and specials, physical alteration is

portrayed as violent and corruptive. The cyborg, as understood by Kafer and Haraway,

depends on the reinterpretation of human embodiment and identity; meanwhile, *Uglies*

reinforces traditional norms regarding the boundaries of acceptable humanity. While

Uglies provides one example of the ableism inherent in opposition to cyborg bodies,

many other novels do the same; in their haste to celebrate the natural world and natural

human body, many novels reject technology or hybrid identity as a whole. While *Uglies*

warns against the dangers of a cyborg identity, *Ready Player One* embraces its vision of

cyborg identity, bringing us closer to the collective politics Haraway and Kafer imagine

is possible through cyborg embodiment.

Multiplicity of Cyborg Identity in *Ready Player One*

In its representation of cyborgs, Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* portrays

humans, technology, and their combination as simultaneously beneficial and harmful,

thereby embracing the ambiguity of Haraway's understanding of the cyborg. In

incorporating hybridity and contradiction in its representation of cyborg identity, the

novel, in addition to its sequel, *Ready Player Two,* introduces a complex imagining of

what it could mean to expand upon humanity. Cyborg identity, as understood by

Haraway and Kafer, centers on the embodiment of multiplicity, embracing the apparently

opposing forces of humanity and technology or contradictory exclusions of different

social boundaries. Most importantly, cyborg identity is about lived hybridity. In this

segment of the chapter, I will begin with the development of cyborg embodiment through

virtual reality in *Ready Player One,* and will subsequently explore how *Ready Player Two* expands upon the hybridity of its predecessor. While the series builds upon human embodiment in a manner which attempts to provide agency to marginalized communities, its notable exception is the normalizing perspective through which it views disability. Overall, the *Ready Player One* series establishes a cyborgian reinterpretation of the possibilities of human life.

Characters in *Ready Player One* primarily live their lives in a virtual world while the real world is a wasteland. In fact, for many, like protagonist Wade, the prevalence of the virtual world, or the OASIS, blurs the boundaries of what is "real." The real challenges, dangers, and accomplishments of the OASIS that occur in the novels emphasize this cyborgian blurring of reality. While much of *Ready Player One* supports the idea that human integration with technology has incredible potential for improvement of humanity, it also indicates the dangers of continual, unchecked exposure to technology. The contradictory impression that the series leaves on cyborg existence suggests a complex understanding that cyborg identity necessitates multiplicity and contradiction. The concept of multiplicity is highlighted most clearly by the conclusion of *Ready Player Two,* in which people become able to live entirely virtual lives independent of their human bodies. The series' emphasis on contradiction as a necessary part of cyborg identity evokes Kafer's discussion about contradictory criticism in which those who use assistive technology are still politically empowered to critique its use (123). In embracing contradiction, *Ready Player One* holistically encounters the figure of the cyborg.

Throughout the narrative, *Ready Player One* represents the OASIS as a place of boundless possibility, with allowance for reinvention for individuals, the world at large, and widely accepted boundaries of reality. However, each opportunity for change offers inextricable desirable and undesirable consequences for the characters, a contradiction that speaks to Haraway and Kafer's understanding of the cyborg. Even before the plot of the novel builds on the potential of the OASIS, the virtual world functions much as the real one does; people in this world attend work, school, games, vacations, and social events within the OASIS. For many, like Wade, who lives in poverty and isolation in a towering pile of trailer homes, the virtual world acts as a true oasis, an escape from the painful conditions of the real world. And while Wade acknowledges the worldwide benefits of shared knowledge and communication, he also explains that the energy required by the OASIS has had devastating environmental impacts, thus damaging the real world ever further (Cline 16-17). Just as the OASIS provides its users with a wealth of knowledge and opportunities for escape, it also allows for social freedom in designed identity and connections between people across the world. OASIS users can appear in the virtual world in whatever avatar body they choose; people appear as names and avatars that they can customize themselves (Cline 28). In many ways, this designed identity provides a freedom of expression unavailable in the real world. As a mistreated, fat, impoverished orphan, Wade experiences freedom in the OASIS. He is no longer teased for his weight and clothing there, and virtual school protects him from the physical violence he had experienced in his schooling in the real world (Cline 32).

The OASIS also allows for unique social connections; Wade develops close friendships for the first time through virtual chat rooms (Cline 38-39). Wade's best

friend, Aech, is a fit, white male avatar who near the end of the novel is revealed to be a fat gay Black woman. Like Wade, Aech finds freedom from her physical reality through the OASIS. In the creation of an avatar that does not represent her gender, race, or sexuality, Aech highlights the negative stigmas that they carry. She tells Wade that she created her avatar because it changed the way she was treated and opportunities available to her (Cline 320). Aech's virtual representation of herself speaks again to Omi and Winant's comparison of disability and race as "marker[s] of identity/difference" (1063). In addition, the contrast between Aech's physical and virtual embodiment calls to mind Haraway's social cyborg; through the OASIS, Aech embraces multiple forms of identity. Although Wade initially feels shocked and betrayed by the difference between her virtual representation of herself and her reality, he quickly changes his mind and explains that the difference is "inconsequential" to their friendship (Cline 321). This unconditional acceptance between friends indicates the potential for new levels of understanding between people in a virtual format. Wade also initiates his first romantic relationship through the OASIS with an avatar named Art3mis. Despite only interacting online, Wade falls in love and confesses his feelings to Art3mis. Although Art3mis says that he can't love her if he's never seen her in person (Cline 186), when the two finally meet, Wade reasserts that he loves her (Cline 371). The real relationship and connection that they form is through the OASIS, which is only highlighted by their real-world meeting. The novel ends with Wade, Aech, and Art3mis happy and spending time together in the real world. The novel's redefinition of the world and of social connection change the nature of lived humanity; the real, deep connections that the group forms through the OASIS cements the reality that the virtual world is "real" too.

The development of technology through the OASIS reinterprets humanity in its questioning the boundaries of reality. From the beginning of the narrative, Wade indicates that virtual reality borders the real world as he explains, "it was easy to forget that everything you were seeing was computer-generated" (Cline 27). Throughout the novel, events that take place in the OASIS prove to have real, tangible consequences for characters. The plot of *Ready Player One* originates in the will of James Halliday, the creator of the OASIS. After his passing, the OASIS releases his will in video form, through which Halliday informs all OASIS users that his entire fortune, both his estate and the OASIS itself, will be bequeathed to the first person who can complete a series of challenges. When the novel begins, Wade is one of countless online users who call themselves gunters, people who search the OASIS for the mysterious source of Halliday's quest. Although the contest takes place purely within the OASIS, it produces countless dangers and opportunities. Wade miraculously becomes the first gunter to pass the first challenge, which makes him instantly famous worldwide (Cline 95-97). With so much at stake, the competition becomes very dangerous to Wade and his friends. These dangers manifest in the Sixers, members of a corporation that will go to any lengths to win Halliday's contest. This threat begins as a virtual one, with attacks against Wade and other users that threaten their chances at the contest. However, these dangers rapidly become life-threatening in the real world. In an effort to get ahead in the contest, the Sixers threaten Wade, and claim that they will kill him if he doesn't help them. When he refuses, they carry through with their threat and set off a massive explosion that kills Wade's family and neighbors (Cline 144-145). Since he wasn't home, Wade escapes physically unscathed, but is immensely shaken by the experience. It is then not a surprise

when the Sixers begin targeting Wade's friends; they successfully murder his friend Daito (Cline 242) and target Art3mis and another friend Shoto with plans to kidnap and murder them as well (Cline 293).

Just as Wade and his friends experience firsthand the incredible dangers introduced by the contest, they also experience incredible accomplishments. As the novel comes to a close, Wade and his friends compete in Halliday's contest against the Sixers as they race to complete each challenge. The Sixers, armed with the wealth and workforce of their corporation, block Wade and his friends from the final challenge with a nearly insurmountable army. In response, Wade spreads a message to all OASIS users, urging them for support against the tyranny of the Sixers. Not only do they show up in unbelievable numbers, but they fight without hesitation towards "certain death" (Cline 335). Although this epic battle takes place on a solely virtual plane, the novel makes it clear that the death of avatars is a real kind of death, and is certainly a massive sacrifice by the OASIS users. This level of community is meaningful and moving, and would never have occurred if not for Halliday's contest. Ultimately, Wade and his friends succeed and Wade completes the entirety of the quest, earning immortality for his avatar and ultimate power in the OASIS, as well as unimaginable wealth. The tangible power of the money they have earned is emphasized when Wade and Aech discuss the Sixers and the violence they committed. Wade says that the Sixers will probably escape justice because they "'can afford to hire the best lawyers in the world.' 'Yes, they can,' Aech said. Then he flashed his Cheshire grin. '*But now so can we*'" (Cline 368). The inheritance that Wade and his friends acquire makes them powerful in both realities, in the OASIS and in the real world, and the two are inextricably interconnected. The real-

world consequences, both good and bad, of the events in the OASIS again establish a questioning of the boundaries of reality.

Ready Player One spends time examining the borderline between what is "real" and what is not, and the consequences of developing technology to cross that border. The questioning of virtual versus non-virtual reality indicates the beginning of collective cyborg identity as Wade, and most of the rest of the world, have integrated their everyday lives with a virtual existence. Although Ready Player One primarily centers on the possibilities of virtual reality, the close of the novel acts as a warning against trading away the real world for the OASIS. This conclusion to the novel suggests a higher valuation of life outside of the OASIS, which reinstates a normative perspective regarding lived experience and reality. This message is underscored by its origin in the creator of the OASIS himself; before his death, James Halliday was known for his social isolation and his life in the OASIS. After Wade wins the contest, Halliday's programmed avatar named Anorak meets him with a message: "'I created the OASIS because I never felt at home in the real world. I didn't know how to connect with the people there. …as terrifying and painful as reality can be, it's also the only place where you can find true happiness. Because reality is *real*. … Don't make the same mistake I did. Don't hide in here forever'" (Cline 364). This targeted message speaks directly to Wade, but speaks to readers as well, warning them not to mistake virtual reality for real life. This message works against the many ways in which the novel crosses and blurs boundaries of reality. Halliday's warning recurs in the completion of the novel; after Wade wins the contest, he logs out of the OASIS to finally meet Art3mis in person. The two greet one another and eventually share their first real-world kiss, and the novel concludes with the sentence, "It

occurred to me then that for the first time in as long as I could remember, I had absolutely no desire to log back into the OASIS" (Cline 372). This conclusion indicates that Wade has taken Halliday's warning to heart and has cordoned off the OASIS as an "unreality" of secondary importance. Up until Halliday's warning, the novel balances virtual reality with reality, weighing the benefits and consequences of life in each. However, the conclusion of *Ready Player One* suggests a devaluation of the OASIS and cyborg identity that is uncharacteristic of the rest of the narrative.

While *Ready Player One* begins to question the boundaries between the real world and virtual reality, it concludes with the assertion that the "real," or non-virtual world claims full ownership over reality. The sequel, *Ready Player Two,* builds upon the foundation of the first of the series as it further blurs the boundaries of reality and humanity in the introduction of new technology that dramatically alters the lived human experience. Much like the OASIS, the introduction of ONI technology offers a cyborgian reinterpretation of humanity through its new understanding of human identity and the boundaries of reality. *Ready Player Two* begins with Wade's discovery of an additional inheritance from James Halliday, a technological advancement called ONI that fuses with the brain, making the OASIS indistinguishable from reality. This technology fully immerses the user into virtual reality, allowing them to feel and experience the OASIS as they would the real world (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 16). ONI also allows for the recording and sharing of real and virtual experiences so that users can live moments in one another's lives. ONI technology introduces incredible possibility as well as incredible danger, which quickly becomes apparent through the novel. The plot of the novel focuses primarily on these dangers when the antagonist, Halliday's corrupted avatar, hacks into

and controls the entire ONI system, endangering the lives of every user worldwide who is logged into ONI. Due to this focus, *Ready Player Two* appears to expand upon the warning left behind by the conclusion of *Ready Player One.* However, much like *Ready Player One, Ready Player Two* explores the nearly indecipherable line between what is real and what is not. While ONI does make users vulnerable to harm, it also expands upon human existence. The novel's simultaneous representation of ONI's potential for benefit and danger to humanity indicates multiplicity. *Ready Player Two* embraces cyborg hybridity even beyond its predecessor through its understanding of ONI technology; this message is emphasized further in its conclusion in which each of the main characters takes on dual identities in the real and virtual worlds. These dual identities turn the characters into permanent cyborgs, with full lives both in the real world and in a real virtual reality; therefore, *Ready Player Two* expands the realm of possibility in its envisionment and valuation of a cyborg existence.

ONI technology introduces unimaginable possibility for human identity and for the world; it opens users up to a new level of experience in virtual reality and in one another's lives. The blending of lines between virtual and non-virtual reality and between different people's lives offers dramatic reinterpretation in the tradition of Haraway's cyborg. As Wade explains, people begin to choose to live experiences in ONI over the non-virtual world. People prefer the virtual world to the real one because "reality *was* completely miserable for a vast majority of the world's population" (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 56). People in the real world live in poverty, war, environmental crisis, and social isolation. As an escape from the circumstances of the real world, ONI presents a cheaper, easier, safer, and generally preferable way to experience everything (Cline, *Ready Player*

Two 26). While Wade, Aech, and Shoto are fully on board with adapting the world to

ONI technology, Art3mis, who now alternately goes by her real-world name Samantha,

remains unconvinced that ONI's benefits outweigh its potential for harm. Even

Art3mis/Samantha, who disapproves of ONI, emphasizes the dual identities experienced

in the virtual and non-virtual worlds through her adoption of two different names to

signal her virtual and non-virtual lived experiences. During arguments about ONI, the

group brings up key consequences of the technology. In this discussion, many positive

points about ONI are raised, including its ability to free people from pain or illness, the

expansion of education through others' experiences, and safety from the spread of illness

and other dangers (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 77-79). However, perhaps the biggest

impact that ONI has on people is the expansion of empathy. Living another person's

experiences fosters a global sense of empathy and understanding that alters the limits of

humanity; it changes the human experience from living as an individual to living

collectively.

    The ability to experience moments collectively through technology hearkens back

to Kafer's adaptation of the cyborg to include the communal unity between the lives of

disabled people and their aides, friends, and communities. Not only does ONI allow for

increased empathy for marginalized and oppressed groups (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 78),

it also allows for increased understanding of individual identity. The global release of

ONI technology frees people from traditional understandings of gender and sexuality as

they experience both within different bodies. As a result, a new gender classification

called øgender emerges; øgender people experience sex exclusively through ONI, and do

so without limitations based on gender or sexual orientation (Cline, *Ready Player Two*

104). In other words, øgender people experience gender and sexuality outside of the bodily constraints of traditional understandings of humanity. As Wade explains, "For the first time in human history, anyone eighteen years of age or older could safely and easily experience sexual intercourse with any gender and as any gender. This tended to alter their perception of gender identity and fluidity in profound ways" (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 104). This quote suggests that ONI changes what it means to define human identity as it is traditionally understood and indicates the hybridity of cyborg identity. As evident through the text, ONI provides humanity with immense opportunity, including the opportunity to change the nature of humanity through collectivism and hybridity in gender and sexuality.

While the introduction of ONI technology begins with focus on its benefits, the novel also acknowledges its negative consequences. Again, the novel's simultaneous demonstration of technology's potential for benefit and harm establishes an understanding of cyborg identity that aligns with Haraway and Kafer's portrayal of hybridity. The most immediate consequence of ONI's development is the world's dependence on the technology, which takes place both on an individual and on a grand scale. After ONI's release, Wade and countless other ONI users struggle with addiction to technology (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 27, 55), which has become especially dangerous due to Synaptic Overload Syndrome, or SOS, a deadly neurological condition caused by 12 or more hours of continued exposure to ONI technology. On a larger scale, the world depends on the Internet, which becomes inextricable from ONI and the OASIS; Wade understands that their collapse could easily bring about the end of humanity (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 59). In addition to these points, a more immediate danger arises that

threatens every ONI user: the entire system is hacked, putting everyone's lives in danger.

After Wade meets and interacts with Halliday's avatar, Anorak, at the close of *Ready*

Player One, the avatar takes on a mind of its own as an AI. Exploiting the dangers of

SOS, Anorak develops control over ONI software, disabling users' ability to log out of

ONI. In other words, he holds over half a billion people hostage, including Wade and his

friends, until Wade and his friends will help him complete another mysterious quest

(Cline, *Ready Player Two* 150-151). This turn of events calls into question the utopic

vision that Wade, Aech, and Shoto had of the OASIS and the addition of ONI. Anorak

has turned the technology against them so that instead of enriching their lives, it is

endangering them. Further, Anorak himself is a technological advancement born of the

OASIS and ONI and indicates the dangers of integrating human life with technology. As

much of the novel centers around this conflict and the many hazards it introduces, *Ready*

Player Two seems to suggest that technology is dangerous and should be treated with

caution even while celebrating its potential for reimagining humanity.

The novel's vision of technology as potentially disabling works against traditional

understandings of cyborg existence; as Kafer explains, the cyborg is often understood to

have a curative relationship to disability. Readers can see this perspective through the

roots of ONI's creation in its attempt to "cure" disabilities. While ONI technology opens

up disabled users' accessibility to various experiences of the world, the novel takes on a

largely negative and curative view of disability that recalls Kafer's explanation that

cyborg embodiment often presents a normalizing lens to disability (Kafer 107-108).

When Wade explains the background of ONI development, he explains that the

technology was developed in a series of prosthetics designed to remove barriers for

disabled people to use and interact with the OASIS. Over time, these technological advancements expanded into application in the real world as well as the OASIS, essentially "curing" many disabled impairments (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 20-22). The technology developed as an interface with the brain allows blind people to see, deaf people to hear, and amputees and paraplegics to operate and feel prosthetics and robotic implants. Ultimately, with the full development of ONI, disabled individuals can even live moments and experiences in another body entirely.

Although these developments provide notable opportunities for disabled people, the novel portrays this technology as a charitable benefit for disabled people, especially when Wade explains that Halliday's company gave technology to disabled people for free, in exchange for using "a nearly unlimited supply of willing human guinea pigs on whom to conduct their ongoing experiments" (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 21). While the novel portrays this as an equally beneficial exchange, it betrays a clear devaluation of disabled life; disabled people are not only expected to desire a "cure" for their disabilities, they are also expected to subject themselves to life-threatening experimentation for the possibility of developing such a "cure." Further, although Wade claims that ONI introduces new empathy among marginalized groups, disabled people are excluded from the reaches of human understanding. The novel's portrayal of disability hearkens back to Kafer's radical reinterpretation of valued lives. Kafer's understanding of disabled valuation would question why, when ONI users worldwide live pieces of one another's unique lives, no one shared any experiences exclusive to disabled embodiment. This absence again indicates a devaluation of disabled lives and excludes disabled individuals from a positive future that was supposedly built with them in mind.

The main conflict of the novel, in which technology overpowers and literally disables its human counterparts, complicates this overwhelmingly curative perspective of cyborg technology for disability; in this instance, technology is instead the disabling agent.

In *Bodyminds Reimagined,* Schalk speaks to the issue of technology's role in "curing" disability through her understanding of Octavia E. Butler's *Parable* series. The protagonist of the series experiences the disability of hyperempathy, and as the series progresses, it is revealed that this disability originates from her mother's use of a "smart pill" during her pregnancy. Schalk explains that Butler takes a balanced viewpoint on technology, understanding that it always has consequences (Schalk 105). Through the revelation that a technological development intended to improve human capability also produced a new disability, Butler asserts that technology is neither purely beneficial nor harmful. Schalk explains, "Further, the line between enhancement and harm is not always clear—nor are the two mutually exclusive. Enhancement for whom and harm to whom? What kind of enhancement and how much? What kind of harm and how much?" (106). Schalk asserts that the borderlines of benefit and harm are telling in where they interact with disability, gender, race, and class. For example, the reality in *Ready Player Two* that disabled individuals become test subjects for ONI technology is an abuse of the disabled community; Halliday's company exploits this marginalized community in a place of vulnerability, with the promise of a "cure" for the supposed suffering attributed to their disabilities. *Ready Player Two* begins with oppression of the disabled community that establishes technology as curative, however, the narrative danger that the same technology presents detracts from that initial representation. Instead, the series as a whole represents technology through its complex potential for both enhancement and harm. The

expression of technological development through contradictory possibility in this way embraces the contradictions of Haraway and Kafer's cyborg.

While *Ready Player One* and *Ready Player Two* can read as complex debates about the boundaries of reality and humanity based on the opportunities and dangers that arise from expanding these borderlines, the simultaneous presence of both in the texts indicates multiplicity. The conclusion of *Ready Player Two* offers a vision of cyborg existence for humanity that expands upon the duality of humanity and technology throughout the series. Just as in *Ready Player One, Ready Player Two* concludes with the completion of another of Halliday's quests and another unbelievable reward: the promise of immortal cyborg existence. When Wade and his friends complete the new quest, the OASIS and ONI resurrect Kira, a woman who Halliday had loved and who had died years prior. Her resurrection reveals that ONI's connection to users' brains causes the technology to scan and save complete copies of their consciousness. Therefore, the technology can create complete virtual copies of people independent of their physical bodies (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 411-412). These virtual copies introduce themselves in the novel as full humans; Kira explains that while she is entirely virtual, "I don't feel like some sort of unnatural abomination… I feel fine. I feel alive" (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 410). Kira's expression of her own humanity legitimizes this version of cyborg identity. In other words, Halliday's final quest leads Wade and his friends to the gift of human immortality through virtual existence. Wade expresses his reaction to this understanding, "We were witnessing the dawn of the posthuman era. The Singularity by way of simulacra and simulation. One final gift to human civilization from the troubled-but-brilliant mind of James Donovan Halliday" (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 416). While the

novel expresses a version of cyborg identity throughout, this final piece of the puzzle

takes humanity and creates a form of existence entirely dependent on technology and

independent of physical human bodies.

Although the series is told from Wade's perspective, the epilogue of *Ready Player*

Two pivots slightly as it is written from the perspective of Wade's virtual counterpart,

who goes by Parzival, the name of Wade's avatar. Parzival's perspective at the close of

the novel firmly establishes his virtual cyborg existence as legitimate. He explains to

readers that Wade and his friends all created virtual copies of themselves to live together

and virtually operate an exploratory spaceship with an online component entitled

ARC@DIA. Parzival tells readers about the benefits and drawbacks of his existence,

"Well, there are a few downsides to becoming a completely digital person. We can't log

out of ARC@DIA—ever. But on the upside, we've stopped aging. And we no longer

need to eat, sleep, or get out of bed to take a leak. We have been freed from all of the

hassles that came with being trapped inside a physical body— including death" (Cline,

Ready Player Two 420). These details about being "freed" from a physical body

emphasize the legitimacy of a virtual cyborg existence. Parzival is inextricable from

technology; as he explains, he can never "log out," but he can express his own thoughts

and opinions that are both linked to and independent from Wade. Like Kira, Parzival

expresses his own identity, independent even from Wade, "Right up until that final scan,

our memories were identical. But from that moment on, our experiences and our

personalities began to diverge, and we started to become different people" (Cline, *Ready*

Player Two 419). Parzival's perspective in this quote expresses both his unified identity

with Wade as well as his legitimacy as an individual, a contradiction befitting his cyborg existence.

Through reading the completion of the novel through Parzival's perspective, readers are forced to accept Parzival's identity as real and complete. Wade's split between himself and Parzival is both a separation and a dual identity; while Wade decides never to return to ONI use himself (Cline, *Ready Player Two* 422), both real-world Wade and virtual Parzival are parts of who Wade is. The novel concludes here, with cyborg versions of each of the main characters off exploring the universe, hoping for a better future in the world they leave behind and for the worlds they hope to find. Just as with the introduction of the OASIS in *Ready Player One* and ONI in *Ready Player Two,* the full realization of virtual existence is expressed through the ways in which it reimagines humanity as infinitely adaptable, both in its potential for collective hybridity as well as in its potential for integration with technology.

The *Ready Player One* series expresses a questioning of "reality" and "humanity" through its integration of the human experience with technology. As a whole, the series works against binaries between body and mind by blurring boundaries between what is virtual and what is reality, as well as where technology begins and the body ends. The series effectively emphasizes the immense possibilities of technological development and the consequences of depending too heavily on it, emphasized also by the way the series ends in a split narrative between Parzival's cyborg life lived entirely through technology and Wade's life to be lived entirely without ONI's virtual reality. The *Ready Player One* series demonstrates a complex understanding of cyborg embodiment through the blurring of reality, the integration of humanity with technology, and the portrayal of technology's

potential for benefit and harm. The series' ability to capture multiplicity aligns with Haraway and Kafer's portrayal of cyborg identity as radically socially and politically inclusive.

Conclusion

Uglies and *Ready Player One* aren't quite sure what to do with the blurred boundaries of embodiment that they themselves construct, and therefore produce contradictions against the messages they intend to portray. The cyborg provides an ideal theory through which to examine this contradiction because the cyborg necessitates and embraces contradiction. As examined throughout the chapters of this dissertation, speculative fiction persists in ties to normativity that restrict its imaginative ability to include and value all marginalized people in positive projected futures. Even in fictional understandings of cyborg identity, a figure designed for revolutionizing human identity and embodiment, the novels of this chapter reinforce the devaluation of disabled lives. Schalk explains that fiction invites readers to the exceptional inclusion of non-normative perspectives. Cyborg identity, as understood by Haraway and Kafer, likewise offers a vision of hybridity and inclusion for human identity and lived embodiment. Young adult dystopian fiction therefore has the potential to discover the intersection between these perspectives; the fictional cyborg presents the opportunity to introduce readers to radical inclusion, but only when represented through a "cripped," or hybrid lens.

In different ways, both *Uglies* and *Ready Player One* question what it means to be truly human through their demonstrations of surgical and technological alterations to human embodiment. *Uglies* overwhelmingly rejects the figure of the cyborg as a

corruption to natural humanity, yet *Ready Player One* embraces multiplicity in exploring

the potential for cyborg embodiment. In "New Directions in Disability Narratives,"

Yasmine Sweed examines similar contradictions in her examination of three novels'

differences in portraying disability and cyborg identity. The article suggests that the

model of the cyborg itself challenges the boundary between ability and disability because

the figure of the cyborg is simultaneously abled and disabled (Sweed 191). The continual

prevalence of contradiction in the novels discussed in this chapter recalls Kafer's

assertion that contradiction is necessary in order to truly embrace the hybridity of a

"cripped" cyborg embodiment that questions boundaries of disability, humanity, and

reality. Embracing hybridity and contradiction is essential in order to truly expand upon

humanity in the manner of Haraway and Kafer's cyborg. Alteration to human identity of

this kind would allow for political and social collectivity as well as the radical inclusion

of all who are marginalized based on the conditions of their lived embodiment, regardless

of gender, race, sexuality, or physical ability.

Conclusion

Each chapter of this dissertation conveys a cumulative effect of the marginalizing impact that oppressive and normative conventions have upon individuals and communities deemed "other" for their unconventional forms of embodiment. The first chapter of *Anatomic Dystopia* examines the function of normative gender and sexuality in Ally Condie's *Matched* series. Although the narrative focuses on the importance of choice in sexuality, its representation of white heterosexual rebellion does little to challenge patriarchal and heteronormative understandings of gender and sexuality. The second chapter critiques representations of sexual violence and sexual trauma in *Divergent,* by Veronica Roth. The inconsistency of the protagonist's trauma throughout the series suggests that sexual trauma is fleeting and unimportant, which is a dangerous message for young adult audiences. Chapter Three studies representations of disability in *Woman on the Edge of Time,* by Marge Piercy, and *The Hunger Games,* by Suzanne Collins. While *Woman on the Edge of Time* centers disability through the mental institutionalization of its protagonist, *The Hunger Games* keeps disability on the margins through its focus on the able-bodied physical strength of its protagonist. Although the two works deviate significantly in many ways, they both devalue disabled lives in their suggestion that disability be overcome. The fourth and final chapter of the dissertation examines cyborg embodiment in *Uglies,* by Scott Westerfeld, and *Ready Player One,* by Ernest Cline. While *Uglies* prioritizes the natural human body's independence from integration with technology, *Ready Player One* questions the dangers alongside the possibilities that cyborg embodiment offers post-humanity, a concept that rejects the notion of humanity entirely as it looks forward into expansive futures. Despite their

opposing viewpoints on cyborg technology, their mutual envisionment of a future that reimagines the nature of human embodiment offers readers the opportunity to reimagine the future of human embodiment as well. The novels examined throughout the dissertation reinforce rigid and exclusive social boundaries, however, many of these restrictions could be lightened through incorporating the multiplicity introduced by cyborg identity.

As demonstrated in *Anatomic Dystopia,* speculative fiction continues to demonstrate a limited imagination when it comes to who is included and centered in projected futures. The genre challenges some social norms; for example, the trope of the "strong girl," embodied by protagonists like Katniss and Tris, opposes stereotypical female passivity. However, while young adult dystopian fiction proves that it can imagine alternative futures, it remains limited by normative perceptions of embodiment based on gender, sexuality, and disability. Novels such as those examined within this dissertation introduce alternative forms of embodiment, but then don't know what to do with the identities they create. Therefore, these imaginings fall flat of truly revolutionizing humanity towards inclusivity. As discussed in Chapter Four, the fictionalization of cyborg embodiment envisions a radical reinterpretation of human identity. This kind of reinterpretation points towards the exceptional inclusion that Schalk imagines for fictional depictions of unconventional forms of humanity. However, even the fictional cyborg, a model of revolutionary hybridized embodiment, has a history of normative limitations that steers the cyborg away from inclusivity.

Literary critics connect the fictional figure of the cyborg to oppression faced by people with disabilities. James Cherney's "Deaf Culture and the Cochlear Implant

Debate" examines the fictional history of cyborgs, as well as their prevalence in debates about cyborg identity for those encouraged to acquire cochlear implants. A common trope among early science fiction cyborgs is the transformation of disabled individuals into cyborg spaceships (Cherney 23-24). While other characters' acknowledgement of these cyborgs as human works towards redefining humanity, the disposability of "unfixable" disabled people and cyborgs devalues disabled life. Cherney then applies this conditional valuation of fictional cyborgs to discussions about cochlear implants. He explains that for many, cochlear implants represent conformity to a normalcy as defined by able-bodied people. Therefore, when able-bodied people insist that cyborg embodiment will improve disabled lives, they are "suggesting both that people with disabilities are broken machines requiring fixing and that, even repaired, they always remain damaged goods" (Cherney 26). Not only does this perspective reflect conditional valuation of disabled lives, it also removes disabled people from bodily agency. As explained by Kafer and others, cyborg identity should not be curative or forced upon disabled people; disabled individuals have value regardless of impairment and should maintain agency over their own lives and identities.

Enno Park's "Ethical Issues in Cyborg Technology" engages with this discussion in its distinction between cyborg embodiment for disabled versus non-disabled people. Park explains, "Inducing disabled people to undergo surgery for implants while at the same time deterring non-disabled people from altering their bodies is nothing other than an attempt to normalise individuals. That is the opposite to the idea of inclusion" (306). Park repeats Cherney's assertion that disabled people should not be made to fit an exclusive normalcy, but adds the alternative perspective that while disabled individuals

are often encouraged to undergo surgical procedures to conform, able-bodied people are encouraged to preserve their natural, unaltered bodies. This contradiction evokes the dynamic present in *Uglies* whereby Westerfeld rejects the surgically altered cyborg. It also recalls the surgical control enforced upon institutionalized patients in *Woman on the Edge of Time,* an invasion of body and mind endorsed as a "cure" for their disabilities.

Despite the ways in which cyborg embodiment is commonly depicted as a "cure" for disability, the figure of the cyborg as represented by Haraway and Kafer maintains the potential to expand upon traditional understandings of humanity. While Cherney acknowledges the reasons that disabled people would choose not to embrace a cyborg identity, he additionally indicates the possibilities of cyborg embodiment, "The cyborg questions virtually all established structures of differentiation by combining the uncombinable. … Its existence proves that traditional boundaries can be broken, and its power and appeal are so strong as to question the value of boundaries altogether" (Cherney 32). This statement reinforces the messages portrayed in *Ready Player One,* in which cyborg technology redefines the world's understanding of human existence. Cherney's suggestion that we "question the value of boundaries altogether" positions his understanding of the cyborg as an approach to posthumanism. As explained in *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults,* books about cyborg existence commonly question the boundaries of humanity. The book uses an example from a novel in which a human and cyborg embrace in closeness and understanding and explains, "The rapprochement between the two marks their mutual transformation into posthumans. One is augmented, the other is not, but both make ethical judgments informed by a deep familiarity with the mixed moral results of blending human being and machine"

(Morrissey 198). In other words, despite their embodied differences, their connection expresses the reality that posthumanity has been achieved because their differences are inconsequential. This idea reflects the close of *Ready Player Two* in which virtual and non-virtual human lives carry equal claims to reality and validity.

While posthumanism can be understood in different capacities, theorists generally agree that posthumanism offers a reinterpretation of humanity in the spirit of Kafer and Haraway's cyborg. In defining posthumanism, sociologist Simon Susen explains that humanism insists upon the existence of a binary between the human and non-human to assert humanity as separate from a perceived non-humanity (64). The divisions between these categories are attributed with value that is founded on and sustains societal structure and oppressions. Susen's description of humanism indicates that posthumanism transcends these boundaries as well as the oppression upheld by conventional conceptions of humanity itself. While Mervyn Bendle's "Teleportation, Cyborgs and the Posthuman Ideology" primarily considers cyborgs and posthumanity as mythical figures best kept within fiction, the article acknowledges the ways in which these concepts question humanity as we understand it today. Bendle defines posthumanism through its understanding of humanity as "only contingently embodied" (47). In other words, posthumanism points to embodiment as only one conditional element of humanity. Bendle highlights the potential of the cyborg and posthumanism to reinterpret the human relationship to the world at large. In the absence of social divisions dictated by the positionality of the body, the cyborg allows us to rethink many aspects of human life, including "freedom, self-determination, the relationship of humanity to technology, and the transgression of fixed boundaries that previously had been regarded as vital to

civilization" (Bendle 58). Much like Haraway and Kafer's revolutionary theorization of cyborg embodiment, posthumanism indicates potential for the reinvention of humanity.

Critics examine the ways in which contemporary society already positions itself towards posthumanism in our cyborgian integration of human lives with technology. Park claims that our society's dependence on technology, through means such as cell phones, makes us all cyborgs to some degree (303). In terms of the cyborg's future potential for inclusivity, Park remains hopeful; "cyborg technologies offer the chance to understand inclusion as a continuum that encompasses individuals with a wide variety of abilities and disabilities without defining a norm" (306). Park argues that cyborgs offer a new understanding of humanity independent of norms based on physical ability. Cyborgs not only resist normativity, but also create a new means through which to understand humanity regardless of embodiment.

The ties evident between cyborg embodiment and posthumanism indicate the ways in which both concepts revolutionize contemporary understandings of human identity. Cyborg embodiment and posthumanism offer a potential avenue for revolutionizing humanity in order to include all marginalized bodies. Through the perspective of posthumanism, bodies are a negligible means through which to define people; differentiation and devaluation based on embodiment therefore become irrelevant. As established throughout this dissertation and among the posthuman theorists cited in this section, society is founded on ideologies that are rooted in oppression. Oppressive marginalizations in the form of heteronormativity, sexism, binary gender, ableism, and racism are founded on contemporary society as we know it, therefore it is impossible to radically include all marginal identities within its existing structure.

Perhaps the best way to achieve true inclusivity is to abandon completely the boundaries of identification and to redefine humanity through a posthuman lens. While this form of revolutionary inclusion may seem radical in the face of the rigid confines of contemporary society, Haraway introduced her vision of cyborg embodiment in 1985, despite the seemingly fixed social conventions faced by second wave feminists. Haraway and her feminist contemporaries dramatically altered the lives and opportunities offered to women, and their work continues to significantly impact the world today. Young adult fiction is such an important genre for its influence on readers at a pivotal age, readers who will themselves shape the future. It is therefore critical that young adults retain access to literature that takes an active role in inclusion and remains open to the expansive possibilities of embodiment. Young adult dystopian fiction grows ever closer to realizing its potential for the radical reinterpretation of humanity in the tradition of Haraway's cyborg and posthumanism; every day, the genre acquires new readers who are ready to imagine a better, more inclusive world.

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