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FEMALE REBELS AND ROLE MODELS

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY
IN YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAN FICTION

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Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of the gender identity of female protagonists in four young adult dystopian trilogies, namely *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and *Shatter Me* by Tahereh Mafi. A lens of feminist and gender theory is employed in this analysis, which focuses on the characters' internal construction of gender identity as well as the construction of their gender identity as a result of social relations and societal power structures. This thesis argues that the protagonists are forced to not only rapidly construct their identities as they are subjugated by oppressive forces, they also have to learn how to present and perform their identity in different circumstances. Gender thus affects the way in which the female protagonists are conditioned to act not only as individuals but in their interactions with others, interactions which are subject to external oppressions. These external oppressions are based in socially and culturally determined gender roles that instruct adolescent women on how to act according to their gender.

Key words

Gender identity; Young adult; Dystopian fiction; *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld; *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins; *Divergent* by Veronica Roth; *Shatter Me* by Tahereh Mafi; Feminist theory; Gender theory

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Introduction

In the past fifteen years, the research that has been conducted on young adult dystopian fiction has expanded significantly in numbers, along with “the recent explosion” of the genre itself (Basu 147). Books such as *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003), the *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* (2010), *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers* (2013), and *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (2016) all focus on this genre. Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz – editors of the latter book – state that young adult dystopian novels are not only classified as dystopian “because of their futuristic settings or their portrayals of social or political upheaval,” but also for their possession of a “critical energy or spirit” through which the author can offer social, cultural, or political criticism (8). A dystopian novel not only critiques the – often erroneous – society as it is depicted in the narrative, but also society as it stands in real life. This critique can be given through either a “critical examination of the utopian premises” from the novel’s society – which are frequently based on actual societal issues – or by revealing flaws in current society through emphasising those shortcomings (Booker qtd. in Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 8). A significant amount of these young adult dystopian narratives presents to its readership a teenage female protagonist to whom the reader – typically of about the same age, but not necessarily of the same gender – is expected to relate. This relation between the narrative and its readership is what makes the young adult dystopian genre so popular. Hintz and Ostry, for instance, have argued that the reason for the popularity of the dystopian genre stems from its thematic focus on “traumatic suffering and personal awakening,” which they link to the adolescent readers’ coming of age and the often simultaneous recognition that the society in which they live is faulted (qtd. in Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 7). As the book title of *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* suggests, these female protagonists are frequently the rebellious characters in their narratives. They are typically seen as ‘strong female role models’ for young adults. To analyse how these protagonists are actually portrayed in young adult dystopian fiction, this thesis will examine their protagonists’ identities through a lens of feminist and gender theory. The focus of this thesis will be on the characters’ internal construction of gender identity as well as the construction of their gender identity as a consequence of interpersonal relationships and power structures within society as a whole. As a result, the research question for this thesis is: how does gender affect the construction of identity and the social relations of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction? This leads to questions such as how gender affects the view female characters have of themselves

both physically and mentally? How are romantic and platonic relationships portrayed? How do social and political power structures affect the construction of gender identity in the female protagonists? What role does gender hold within the context of young adult dystopian fiction?

As the protagonist of young adult dystopian fiction is usually the catalyst for rebellion in their society, they are frequently placed within situations that put acute stress on them. This thesis therefore expects to find that since the female protagonists do not only experience oppression regarding their gender, but also through other social structures and power systems, they are forced to compensate for these subjugations and thus rapidly have to develop a stable (gender) identity at a young age that is heavily affected by these oppressions. Additionally, this thesis expects to find that gender affects the way in which female protagonists are conditioned to act, not only as individuals but also in their interactions with others, and that therefore their gender will have an effect – either positive or negative – on their relationships with others as well as with themselves.

The works that this thesis will be analysing are four popular young adult dystopian trilogies. The first of these trilogies is *Uglies* (2005 – 2006) by Scott Westerfeld, followed by *The Hunger Games* (2008 – 2010) by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* (2011 – 2013) by Veronica Roth, and finally *Shatter Me* (2011 – 2014) by Tahereh Mafi. These trilogies were all published during the period when the dystopian young adult genre ‘exploded’. *The Hunger Games* and the *Divergent* series especially were commercially astoundingly successful and have both been turned into popular film franchises after the success of these novels. From an academic viewpoint, both Scott Westerfeld’s *Uglies* and Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* have repeatedly been researched within a number of fields, though only little research has been done on Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* series and Tahereh Mafi’s *Shatter Me*. In all, not only will this thesis add to the discussion about gender identity and representation in young adult dystopian fiction by expanding on previous research in this particular field, it will also shed a new light upon the internal and external structures that affects the construction of gender identity of the female protagonists in these popular novels.

As stated above, this analysis will employ a combination of feminist and gender theories. Feminist theory is concerned with gender inequalities and the social and political roles that both influence and stem from these inequalities. Though the earlier forms of feminist theory neglected social and cultural differences between women, Astrid Henry argues that recent feminist theories are aware that “categories of oppression” such as gender, race, and class are experienced simultaneously (1718). Feminist theory examines how gender inequality is supported through and perpetuated by social and political structures and how

people experience these categories of oppression in various manners. Within gender theory itself, gender – being a category of oppression – is seen as a fluid social, cultural, and political construct. The use of gender in a theoretical or even political manner resulted from feminist and other social movements, as these used gender to analyse and denounce the “social construction of inequalities between the sexes” (Vigoya 853-854). Barbara Risman argues that these social constructions of gender and gender inequality have implications on the individual, the interactional, and the institutional levels of society, levels which will all be analysed in this thesis (“From Doing to Undoing” 83). As recent feminist and gender studies have argued for the importance of different identity categories in the construction of gender identity, this thesis assumes intersectionality theory as an integral part of both these studies. Intersectionality theory, in short, considers that aspects of identity such as gender, race, and class are not separate from each other and are heavily influenced by social and political hierarchies (Crenshaw, McCall, and Cho 785). A synthesis of feminist and gender theories will thus be employed in this thesis, taking perspectives from both these theories on the manifestation or construction of gender. These perspectives will be applied to the analysis of how gender affects the internal and external construction of gender identity in female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction. Both feminist and gender theory will be expanded upon in the following chapter.

An important source on feminist and gender theory that is employed in this thesis is the book *Feminist Perspectives on Building a Better Psychological Science of Gender* (2016), edited by Robert et al. This book contains a number of essays which examine gender through a feminist as well as a psychological lens. In their essay “New Perspectives on Gender and Emotion,” for instance, McCormick et al. analyse the Western gender stereotype of how women are more emotional than men and argue that emotions themselves are therefore gendered. The article “Embodiment and Well-Being: the Embodied Journeys of Girls and Women” by Niva Piran offers five dimensions in which social experiences occur that shape women’s view of their bodies and their mental health. These dimensions will serve as indicators for the analysis on the protagonists’ internal construction of gender identity.

An additional source regarding the connection between gender and social relations is the essay “Framed Before We Know It: How Gender Shapes Social Relations” (2009) by Cecilia Ridgeway. Ridgeway argues that “gender is a primary cultural frame for coordinating behavior and organizing social relations” (145). In her analysis she finds that gender acts as a biased background identity that influences social roles and identities. She argues that one

cannot understand the gendered structure of society without looking at “the background effects of gender as a primary cultural frame for organizing social relation” (157).

Another one of the main sources for this thesis is a collection of essays in the book *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. This collection of essays focuses on the female rebels within young adult dystopian fiction and makes case studies of novels by popular authors such as Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfeld, and Veronica Roth (authors whose work will be analysed in this thesis as well). The essays are concerned with themes such as social activism, sexuality, platonic or romantic relationships, and the gender identity of the female characters. The essays which are concerned with the same primary sources as this thesis form a valuable foundation upon which the research in this thesis can build.

As stated above, the first chapter of this thesis gives an in-depth explanation of the theoretical framework that is employed in the analysis of the young adult dystopian trilogies. The chapters following the theoretical framework consist of the analyses of the construction of gender identity in the female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction. Each chapter focuses on one of the primary sources, in chronological order of publishing, and the trilogies will be briefly introduced at the start of their respective chapters. These chapters then analyse the protagonists’ internal construction of gender identity by examining how the main female characters view themselves and their gender both physically and mentally. Then, the chapters engage in an analysis of the construction of gender identity as a consequence of external aspects such as romantic or platonic relationships and social, cultural, or political power structures within the societies of the narratives. Each of the chapters concludes with an examination of the role of gender within the context of young adult dystopian fiction.

1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis consists of a combination of feminist and gender theory. Both of these theoretical perspectives are concerned with gender inequalities and the social and political roles that both influence and stem from these inequities. In their book *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (2005), Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker argue that feminism – not only as a theory, but as a social movement – has sought to disrupt the “patriarchal culture, assert a belief in sexual equality, and eradicate sexist domination in transforming society” (115). They argue that feminist criticism should be called “cultural politics” rather than a theory, since feminist criticism refuses to be incorporated in any particular approach or theory (115-116). This means that feminist critics are generally in debate with other theories or criticisms and that feminist criticism is engaged in a number of other fields such as gender studies or literary criticism. Since feminist criticism is employed in a theoretical discourse in this thesis, however, it will be referred to as feminist theory.

Though the earlier forms of feminist theory were indeed concerned with gender inequalities, they unwittingly neglected social and cultural differences between women and the inequalities that stem from those dissimilarities. Astrid Henry argues in her article “Feminist Deaths and Feminism Today” (2006) that the more recent feminist theories are “often not explicitly concerned with women ... as a homogenous group with a shared experience of gender,” but these recent theories, she observes, have developed an awareness of “categories of oppression” such as gender, race, and class which are experienced simultaneously (1718). These categories of identity distinguish between various forms of oppression. A white woman, for instance, is oppressed when it comes to her gender, but not when it comes to her race. Privileged identity categories such as whiteness and maleness benefit from the social, cultural, and political power structures that maintain the privilege of these categories, which is why these inequalities are perpetuated. Rather than focusing solely on the inequality within the gender dichotomy, recent feminist studies are examining diverse identity categories in combination with gender. Feminist research on gender has thus gone “beyond the simple documentation of gender differences” and understands now that gender is one of many facets that generate experiences which are closely linked to power structures in society (Duncan et al. 4). These power structures, as stated above, are improperly balanced and thus cause sociocultural inequalities through the oppression of those identity categories which are regarded as inferior. Calogero, Tylka, and Mensinger argue that “a feminist lens can help to reveal both visible and invisible forms of oppression, which are fuelled by latent

dynamics of power and privilege” (9). This feminist lens is applicable to research on gender inequalities – such as this thesis – that focuses on power structures within society and their effect on the individual. Feminist criticism is also advantageous to research that examines the internal construction of gender identity and the internalised oppressions which are rooted in these power structures. The “most innovative work on gender today,” according to McCormick et al., is thus “likely to consider gender as a system of power relations” (215). In their article “New Perspectives on Gender and Emotion” (2016), McCormick et al. define power as “the extent to which an individual (or group) is able to provide resources to, or withhold resources from, others” (222). In other words, the ones in power, with the privileged identities, are able to control those they oppress through the supply of resources they allow their inferiors to enjoy. These resources could be both material – such as money, food, or physical safety – or social – such as access to knowledge and education, but also social interactions. These systems of power can be found on many levels ranging from the individual to levels within social groups or institutions. This thesis employs the same definition of power throughout its analysis. In short, feminist theory thus aims to disrupt the power structures that support and perpetuate gender inequality by analysing and revealing various forms of oppression suffered through unbalanced social, cultural, or political systems. Privileged identity categories play a significant role in the perpetuation of these inequalities.

The second theory in this framework is gender theory. Within gender theory, gender is seen as a fluid social and cultural construct. The modern concept of gender, Mara Vigoya argues in her chapter on sex and gender in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (2015), makes a distinction between social sex (gender) and biological sex (852). The focus of this thesis is on the former, as the biological sex of the female protagonists in the chosen trilogies is the same. Another distinction can be made between gender identity and gender expression, the first being a personal experience of gender while the latter is a set of behaviours, interests, or appearances that are associated with a specific gender. Gender identity as well as the construction of this identity are the main focus of this thesis, but this construction is in part examined through an analysis of the expression and manifestation of the protagonists’ gender. The expression of one’s gender, Natalie Sabik argues, stems from gender being a “major organizational structure that influences aspects of personality” (144). These socially determined gender roles, Sabik adds, instruct people on how to “perform social roles” concerning their behaviour, their appearance, and on how to interact with others (144). This means that gender is not inherent in a person’s nature as biological sex is, but rather a social construct that determines how people are supposed to act in accordance with their gender.

The use of gender in a theoretical or even political manner resulted from feminist and other social movements, as these movements used gender to analyse and denounce the “social construction of inequalities between the sexes” (Vigoya 853-854). In media, for instance, women are often depicted in specific and stereotypical ways. Elizabeth Daniels, who conducted research on media depictions of women, found that women in media “are often sexualized; presented in subordinated ways ... and shown in stereotypically feminine roles” whereas men were not depicted in the same manner (259). Likewise, this thesis is concerned with the depiction of the female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction, as Daniels found in her research that media representation has a major impact on how young girls and women view their femininity or lack thereof. What is considered feminine or masculine stems, according to Ephraim Das Janssen, from a “loosely related set of expectations” that has its roots in biology but which is extended to social and cultural practices such as appearance and behaviour (4). Janssen argues that gender is an interplay of a multitude of influences which are mainly external rather than internal (3). It is through these external influences that gender inequalities are established and maintained. In the introduction to *Feminist Perspectives on Building a Better Psychological Science of Gender* (2016), one of the main sources for the theoretical framework of this thesis, Stephanie Shields too defines how feminist psychologists argue that social factors and the subject’s environment play a considerable role in the creation and maintenance of that subject’s gender identity as well as gender inequality in society as whole (vi). Gender theory thus aims to analyse the constructed inequalities between the sexes by examining how expectations around gender are created and what the relationship is between individuals and the social constructions that shape their gender. As this thesis analyses both the internal and external construction of gender identity in female protagonists in dystopian young adult fiction, it first examines the way these female protagonists view their own gender identity. Then, this thesis analyses gender within the context of relationships and how these identities are affected by their society’s gender role expectations.

First, this thesis will analyse how gender affects the internal construction of identity of the female protagonists by examining how they identify themselves as female – or not female – and how gender affects their perception of their body, mind, and actions. In her article “Embodiment and Well-Being: the Embodied Journeys of Girls and Women” (2016), Niva Piran has proposed that “the social experiences” that shape how women view their bodies occur within three domains (50). The first of these is the physical domain, followed by the mental domain, and the last domain are the experiences which are related to some form of

social power (50-51). She argues that women in patriarchal systems learn to be in competition with one another by having to adhere to these three domains in the most feminine way possible (57). In her research, she offers five dimensions, which all have a positive and negative side, in which social experiences can occur that shape women's view of their bodies and their mental health. These dimensions are body connection or disruption, agency or self-silencing, expression or disruption of desire, (not) prioritizing self-care, and (not) resisting objectification (46-50). A positive connection with these dimensions has the woman in question feeling comfortable in her own skin and makes her less likely to desire to adhere to social gender roles or expectations, whereas the negative dimensions confine the woman within socially accepted gender roles. These dimensions proposed by Piran will serve as indicators in the analysis of the female protagonists' view of their body, mind, and their gender identity and the social experiences which lead to that perception.

Besides the internal perception the female protagonists have of their gender, this thesis examines how gender affects their relationships and how their social, cultural, and political environments affect the construction of their gender. In her article on gender and social relations, "Framed Before We Know It: How Gender Shapes Social Relations" (2009), Cecilia Ridgeway argues that "gender is a primary cultural frame for coordinating behavior and organizing social relations" (145). This means that gender is a category of identity that people immediately classify in their interactions with others and that they base their interactions upon suitable gender roles in that particular situation. Ridgeway finds that gender acts as a biased background identity on a personal interactional level (between only two people), within groups, or even institutions. In other words, gender often unnoticeably affects social interactions as well as people's social roles and identities when they interact. The performance of gender within these social interactions depends on whether the subject is interacting with someone of the same or a different gender, but also on the tasks they are performing and the gender roles that are typically assigned to that specific task. It is the "shared cultural beliefs" or stereotypes that people have of gender and gender roles which dictate how they behave while interacting (149). Ridgeway also argues that one cannot understand the gendered structure of society without looking at "the background effects of gender as a primary cultural frame for organizing social relation" (157). By this she means that although society is responsible for structuring gender and perpetuating gender inequalities at various interactional levels, the performance or the act of gender itself within these interactions actually aids in this perpetuation. Gender, Ridgeway concludes, is thus a "multilevel structure ... that involves mutually reinforcing processes at the macro-

structural/institutional level, the interactional level, and the individual level” (146). In line with Ridgeway’s argument for the mutual influences between gender and societal structures, this thesis analyses the construction of gender identity at the three indicated levels: the individual, the interactional, and the institutional.

In her article “From Doing to Undoing: Gender as We Know It” (2009), Barbara Risman acknowledges the same levels at which gender operates as Ridgeway. She argues that every society has a gender structure that “has implications at the level of individual analysis, in shaping interactional expectations” and in organising “and policing social groups” (“From Doing to Undoing” 83). She does argue, however, that social gender structures may not necessarily operate in the same manner on all these levels (83). Where a woman’s gender, for instance, may be disadvantageous in one particular interaction, it may be favourable in another. Additionally, the degree to which gender or gender inequality is observed or even substantial can differ between these levels. In one of her earlier articles on gender as a social structure, Risman argues that “social structures shape individuals, but simultaneously, individuals shape the social structure,” a statement that reflects what Ridgeway argued about how gender is mutually reinforced at and by certain levels of society (“Gender as a Social Structure” 432). In the same article, Risman treats gender “as a socially constructed stratification system,” arguing that inequality is created by the mere distinction between genders which is organised and perpetuated by power structures at all social levels (430). As stated above, these are the same levels of social relations that will be analysed in this thesis. Since these levels are not separated from each other but, as argued by Ridgeway and Risman, they influence one another constantly, this thesis will be examining the effect of social gender structures on the construction of the gender identity of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction. These structures are analysed at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels of society, while keeping in mind that social gender structures can express themselves differently at each level. This thesis also examines how the power structures at these levels influence the construction of the gender identity of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction.

As has been stated in the introduction, this thesis assumes intersectionality theory as an integral part of both feminist and gender theory, since recent studies in these fields have argued for the importance of different identity categories in the construction of one’s gender identity. Intersectionality theory considers that aspects or categories of identity such as gender, race, and class are not separate from one another and that they are substantially affected by social and political hierarchies or power structures (Crenshaw, McCall, and Cho

785). Taking these hierarchies into consideration, intersectionality theory analyses the differences and similarities in identities and examines how they lead to inequalities and their relation to systems of power (785). Within the context of feminist and gender theory, intersectionality theory draws attention to the identity categories that constitute a person's identity besides their gender, since these aspects of identity both affect and are affected by a person's gender identity. This thesis thus employs a synthesis of theoretical perspectives from feminist and gender studies, taking viewpoints from both these theories on the manifestation or construction of gender and apply them to the analysis of how gender affects both the internal and external construction of gender identity and social relations of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction. As stated above, feminist and gender theory has gone beyond the documentation of simple gender binaries and recent research in this particular field has been focusing on dynamics of power and the influence of different power structures on gender as a social construct. The focus of this analysis is therefore on the social, cultural, and political structures that create and maintain gender inequalities and the power structures that support these oppressions on the individual, interactional, and societal level. With regard to the individual level or the internal construction of gender identity, this thesis analyses the view the female protagonists have of their own body, mind, and actions while acknowledging the five dimensions of embodiment and the social experiences that shape women's self-images as they are proposed by Niva Piran. Concerning the external construction of gender identity, this thesis examines the social gender roles and structures that are at play in interactions between the female protagonists and the characters with whom they have either platonic or romantic relationships. As a note of caution, in any type of gender research, Duncan et al. state, "it is essential to consider the complementary role privileged identities play in the maintenance of power hierarchies" (5). Since this thesis examines the power systems which form the foundation for social gender structures and likewise how these structures are maintained and perpetuated, it is crucial to acknowledge that privileged identities or identity categories affect the construction or expression of gender. Scholars such as Natalie Sabik also argue that researchers need to take into account that identity, whether it concerns gender or not, is not a static concept but rather a fluid process which is largely influenced or affected by cultural and social context (153, 155). Within young adult dystopian fiction especially, the female protagonists are rapidly developing not only in their maturity, but also in their identities. Over the course of these series, the protagonists make the transition from childhood to adolescence, a transition or process that is characterised by a change in personality, identity, and agency. While it would be sensible to keep in mind that the female

protagonists discussed in the following chapters are not necessarily a homogenous group of young girls who share an static experience of gender, comparisons between the construction of the gender identities of these protagonists and the effect gender has on their identities as a whole could testify to the role of gender in the context of young adult dystopian fiction.

2. *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld

This second chapter examines Scott Westerfeld's young adult dystopian trilogy *Uglies*, consisting of the novels *Uglies*, *Pretties*, and *Specials*, published between 2005 and 2006. In 2006, *Uglies* was named in the American Library Association's "Best Books for Young Adults" (ALA). That same year, 20th Century Fox bought the film rights for the novels, but the release date is as of yet unknown. Commercially, the trilogy has received mostly positive reviews, with James Hynes of the New York Times pointing out the series' "jaw-dropping action" sequences and Publishers Weekly arguing that "Westerfeld introduces thought-provoking issues," but that the novels do have some "plausibility problems" (Hynes; Publishers Weekly). Besides its commercial success, the *Uglies* trilogy has been analysed by a number of scholars such as Flanagan, Fritz, and Moran, resulting in essays primarily on the trilogy's representation and treatment of the female body. After giving a short summary of the novels, this chapter will address the internal construction of the gender identity of the protagonist Tally Youngblood by examining how gender affects the view she has of herself both physically and mentally. Then, the effect of gender on Tally's romantic and platonic relationships with David, Zane, and Shay is analysed, followed by an analysis of how social power structures instruct Tally to behave and her response to this. Finally, this chapter concludes that Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy blurs the gender division and inequality that is present in contemporary Western society, but that the novels simultaneously reiterate a number of conventional gender stereotypes.

The first novel in the trilogy, *Uglies*, begins with its fifteen-year-old protagonist Tally Youngblood as she eagerly awaits the day she turns sixteen. In Tally's society, this is the day that she, like everyone else, will receive cosmetic surgery to make her a 'pretty' and move to New Pretty Town. When Tally's best friend Shay decides to leave Uglyville to find the Smoke, an obscure and illicit community of people who reject the city's operation, Tally refuses to come along. On her sixteenth birthday, however, Tally is blackmailed by the government's Special Circumstances, led by Dr Cable, into finding the Smoke and bringing Shay back, or Tally will be refused the operation and stay an 'ugly' forever. After finding the Smoke, however, Tally no longer wishes to betray her best friend and her new boyfriend David. She has learned that the surgery alters not only a person's appearance, but creates lesions in their brains. In the old 'Rusty' days – which is what contemporary Western society is called – humanity abused nature and its natural resources. A virus had infected petroleum and since all of the Rusty society ran on oil, their society collapsed. The brain lesions from the pretty operation are meant to make people docile and more controllable, so they will not feel

the need to take natural resources for their personal gain. Tally, who no longer wishes to have the pretty operation, burns the tracker that Dr Cable had given her. In destroying the tracker, however, she unwittingly sets off an alarm and Special Circumstances attacks the Smoke. Together with David, Tally rescues the Smokies from the Special Circumstances headquarters, but not before Shay has been made pretty and David's father has been killed. David's mother, who had been a surgeon before finding out about the lesions and establishing the Smoke with her husband, had been working on a cure. Since the pretty Shay does not agree to test the cure, Tally sacrifices herself to Special Circumstances to become pretty and volunteer as a test subject for the medicine.

The next novel, *Pretties*, follows Tally after the pretty operation and her life in New Pretty Town. She and Shay have joined a group of pretties called the Crims, short for Criminals. The leader of the Crims, Zane, pushes Tally to stay 'bubbly', which allows her to remember her past and slowly work around the brain lesions left by the surgery. Zane and Tally find that through adrenaline rushes – or by kissing each other – they can retain a sense of clarity. When the Smokies leave a package for Tally with two pills to cure the lesions, Tally does not remember that she volunteered as a test subject and splits the pills with her new boyfriend, Zane. Through those pills as well as complicated stunts such as jumping off rooftops, Tally and the Crims manage to stay bubbly and eventually decide to escape the city in search for the New Smoke. Staying bubbly, however, has brought back memories for Shay, who now despises Tally for betraying the Smoke. She starts her own group, the Cutters, who self-harm in order to stay bubbly. Tally gets separated from the Crims during their escape and she eventually arrives at the New Smoke weeks later to find that Zane – who had been suffering from headaches since he took one of the pills – has sustained severe brain damage. David's mother explains that the pills were supposed to be taken together, as Tally's pill was meant to counteract the destructive aspects of Zane's. Tally's pill on its own did nothing, and Tally had been creating her own way around the lesions. Special Circumstances tracks down the New Smoke and Tally is taken into custody to join Shay and the Cutters, who have become a separate department within Special Circumstances.

The last novel in the trilogy, *Specials*, once again follows Tally after she has had an operation. This time, the operation has made her superhuman, with improved strength, senses, and abilities that allowed her to become part of the Cutters, whose primary task is to find the New Smoke. Zane, whose brain damage was cured, but left him tremorous, is trying to leave New Pretty Town again. Tally and Shay help him and a couple of other Crims to escape the city and, by secretly following them, hope that the runaways will lead them to the New

Smoke. They track Zane and the Crims to a city called Diego, where the regulations regarding the pretty operation are more lax and the cure for the lesions is spreading, and Zane is taken to the hospital to cure his trembling. At that very same time, Special Circumstances attacks the city of Diego. The hospital had been hit during the attack and Zane, without the proper care he needed, is rendered brain-dead and the doctors pull the plug. Tally decides to go back to New Pretty Town to confront Dr Cable, the new leader of the city, about the war and stealthily administers a shot of the cure to her. Tally is imprisoned and over the course of her captivity the city slowly crumbles into chaos as it becomes aware of the existence of the brain lesions. As Tally's superhuman body is presumed to be dangerous, she is scheduled for a reversal operation. She is saved by the cured Dr Cable and Tally leaves the city before heading to the Ruins – an old Rusty city – where she meets David. They agree to stay out of the cities, which are all rapidly changing because of the spreading cure and the people who are thinking freely again. Together, they vow to serve as a safeguard for nature to ensure that humanity, no longer held back from its full potential by the lesions, does not make the same mistake that the Rusty society did before.

In a society like Tally's, where everyone is classified by the way they look, she is naturally preoccupied with her appearance and, more specifically, with the day when she no longer has to be. There is a certain kind of beauty, every ugly has been taught, that is biologically attractive. This includes “big eyes and full lips like a kid's; smooth, clear skin” and “symmetrical features,” characteristics which are applicable to both males and females (*Uglies* 16). Although the pretty operation is the same for both ugly boys and girls, the term ‘pretty’, as argued by Victoria Flanagan in her article on the female body in young adult fiction, is more gendered than the term ‘ugly’ since it is “generally only used in relation to female bodies” (43). By using the term ‘pretty’ in a gender-neutral sense, Flanagan states, Westerfeld has created equality between the genders not by elevating women to the same level of privilege as men, but by making patriarchal discourse applicable to men as well as women (43). Male privilege is thus taken away, which allows for the socially constructed inequalities between the genders to be nullified. The physical perfection that the pretty operation is meant to achieve is identical for both males and females, thereby also reducing the difference between male and female bodies. Since everyone receives the same operation, however, all the pretties look virtually the same, with only subtle differences to distinguish between them, leaving hardly any place for individuality. In the beginning of the trilogy, Tally wants nothing more than to receive this pretty operation, since she believes that it will turn her into an adult and that this will solve all her flaws. *Uglies*, she thinks, “aren't happy with who

they are. Well, I want to be happy, and looking like a real person is the first step” (*Uglies* 84). Tally has been conditioned to believe that she is not complete, or a ‘real person’, until she has had the surgery that changes her appearance from how her genetics have determined she looks to the government’s regulated image. In *Pretties*, she describes how looking in the mirror had been “painful” when she was an ugly (9). This internalisation of her society’s conventions causes a disruption in the connection Tally feels with her body, a state of mind that Niva Piran argues in her essay discussed in the previous chapter, is a negative dimension in female embodiment (46). A negative dimension in her sense of embodiment means that Tally is more easily confined to social gender roles, which does not allow for her to construct or assert her personal identity and inhibits her agency.

Since everyone in Uglyville is meant to receive the pretty operation when they turn sixteen, Tally’s body and her ugliness are only temporary to her. She dislikes her “squashed-down nose,” her eyes which are “too close together,” and her “frizzy hair,” but she is not too troubled about it as she knows that these flaws will be fixed (*Uglies* 276). Her best friend Shay, on the other hand, has a different view of the pretty operation. When she and Tally are playing around with ‘morphos’, which are digital images that can be manipulated to demonstrate how they could look after the surgery, she exclaims that “This whole game is just designed to make us hate ourselves” (44). Shay – who unlike Tally has developed a sense of self-worth that is not stimulated by their society, but by her connections with the Smokies – eventually resists the regime and leaves the city in search for the Smoke. As soon as Tally follows Shay to the Smoke, her view on the ideal appearance that her society prescribes begins to transform. During her time in the Smoke and by developing feelings for the ‘ugly’ David, Tally realises that being pretty is not what is most important and her personal goals and motivations change as a result. David, who returns Tally’s romantic feelings, makes her realise that what is on the inside matters more than outward appearances, an opinion or viewpoint that Tally gradually starts to share. She is being taught a different “organizational structure that influences aspects of personality,” which allows her to counter the social conditioning of her childhood in Uglyville (Sabik 144). It is the social conditioning that Tally has gone through that hinders her in feeling and expressing romantic desire towards David, which is again a negative aspect in Piran’s dimensions of embodiment that inhibits her individual agency (48). By learning to see beyond David’s outward flaws, Tally develops a new view on the society in which she grew up and, more importantly, on who she is as a person. She recognises that it is more important to defend her friends than to look pretty, which is a complete reversal from when she was willing to betray Shay in order to receive her

pretty operation. In the following instalments of the trilogy, Tally's transforming identity is taken to another level as she has been made into another person altogether, both physically and mentally. After her special surgery, Tally observes that "it didn't matter what you looked like. It was how you carried yourself, how you *saw* yourself" (*Specials* 12). This seems to signify Tally's transformation from a dependent girl to an independent young woman, yet this transformation is only completed when Tally has undergone the surgeries that have altered her appearance. In her article on sexual awakening and social resistance in young adult fiction, Sara Day argues that when a female character overcomes doubts about "her body's failure to conform to social ideals," she can assert "a more confident resistance to the conditions that have oppressed her" (84). Since Tally does not fully overcome such doubts about her body, she is not in the position to reject the social and cultural conditions that have been placed upon her. As she is aware of the brain altering effects of the surgeries, she only becomes confused with who she is: "sometimes I think I am nothing more than what other people have done to me" (*Specials* 190). Only at the end of the trilogy, when she refuses to have the reversal surgery, Tally consciously makes the decision for her body to contradict society's expectations. This in turn places her outside the boundaries of society and allows her to resist further oppressions.

Another manner in which Tally expresses a refusal to comply with societal expectations is through her impulse to protect her loved ones, which often leads to her rejection of social or even political obligations. Tally's desire to protect her friends, Sonya Fritz argues, reiterates a "conventional figuration of femininity and girlhood" (27). In her devotion to her loved ones, Tally expresses her femininity through the role of a nurturer, a role typically reserved for females. Her friends constantly rely on Tally to save them, however, and therefore this stereotypically feminine characteristic is transformed into an expression of strength and agency. Instead of portraying the ambition to care for others as being opposed to resisting social conventions, this desire motivates Tally to rebel against the establishment. By choosing to stay in the wild with David to safeguard nature at the end of *Specials*, she once and for all pushes aside the restraints of society as she has developed a sense of self and agency: "no one rewires my mind but me" (*Specials* 371). In the end, Tally has grown into a young woman who possesses all the positive aspects of Piran's dimensions of embodiment. She feels a deeply rooted connection to her body (even if it is a modified one) and chooses not to change it back to what is considered the norm. She has agency over her own choices, is able to express her own will and desires freely, and while she is protective of others, she does not neglect to take care of her own needs first.

One of the desires Tally expresses comes in the form of romantic relationships, and over the course of the three novels, she is romantically involved with both David and Zane. As an ugly, this type of relationship is as temporary as one's appearance, since everyone expects to change after the pretty operation. Real attachments besides friendships are new to Tally and she is taken aback by the intensity of her feelings, but she is not – as the other protagonists who are discussed in this thesis – afraid of intimacy. As stated above, it is her attraction to David that makes Tally realise that personality matters more than outward appearance. After her pretty operation, however, Tally has forgotten all about David and begins a relationship with Zane. While Tally was still coming to terms with the insignificance of her looks in her relationship with David, when she is with Zane she immediately acknowledges that she likes him for his rebellious personality. She says that “it made him even prettier than the others, somehow,” and shows that she has retained something of her real self even after the operation (*Pretties* 56). As she and Zane find their way to the New Smoke and encounter David, Tally is aware that “her life among the pretties must have changed something even more profound: the way she saw him, as if this wasn't the same David in front of her anymore” (322). Something about Tally has changed – as at this point she is no longer affected by the lesions – that makes David less attractive to her. In her essay on identity change in the *Uglies* trilogy, Mary Jeanette Moran argues that “feminist ethics recognizes that human beings develop a sense of self through their relationships with others” (130). Tally has learned the importance of personality from her relationship with David, which led to her rejection of the norms and values of her society. In the same manner that her relationship with David changed the way Tally thought about appearances, her time with Zane has developed Tally's identity again, leaving David in her past. When she decides to remain with Zane instead of running away with David, the latter accuses Tally of only staying with Zane because he is pretty, “He looks like a baby to you, a needy child, which makes you want to help him. You're not thinking rationally” (353-354). David calls Tally out for thinking emotionally rather than rationally, which reinforces the feminine stereotype of placing feelings above rationality. In this situation, Tally's gender is what Ridgeway called a biased background identity, one against which David is prejudiced as “gender beliefs” – such as women being more emotional – “will bias judgments and behaviors more strongly in favor of men” or typically masculine attributes (151). Being a girl, Tally and her decisions are not taken as seriously as those of male characters of the same age, which prevents her from establishing the same agency as them. Additionally, Tally may on the surface seem like an active agent in her relationships with both David and Zane, but it is only through her involvement with them and the desire to take care

of them that she is compelled to rebel against the establishment. Tally's best friend Shay, on the other hand, has carried agency to a higher degree than Tally does throughout the trilogy.

For the majority of the time that Shay and Tally have been friends, Tally has been choosing others over Shay. First, Tally chooses her pretty operation over her friend's safety and happiness when she decides to help Special Circumstances to find the Smoke. Then, being fully aware of the fact that Shay has a romantic interest in David and even after the girls agree that Tally would break things off with him, the latter still pursued David and consequently not only betrayed her best friend, but the entire Smoke. In *Pretties*, Tally gives Zane the second pill and thus intends to cure him instead of Shay. When becoming bubbly, Shay realises this and her buried anger towards Tally about the Smoke, David, and now Zane resurfaces, which leads to Shay's self-harming habits. In her article discussed in the previous chapter, Niva Piran argues that women in patriarchal systems learn to be in competition with one another (57). Not only are Tally and Shay in competition with each other when it comes to David's affections – Tally asks him if she is “more beautiful than Shay?” – but Shay seems to be in constant competition with Tally's love interests as well (*Uglies* 277). The female best friend is discarded in favour of a romance with one of the male characters. When Shay confronts Tally about giving the cure to Zane rather than to her, Tally still maintains that she has made the right decision. In the essay “The Incompatibility of Female Friendship and Rebellion” (2016), Ann Childs argues that by choosing a “male love interest over a pre-existing female friendship” and rebelling for his sake rather than for the sake of the protagonist (in this case, Tally) herself, she “plays into the stereotype of passivity as primary role of a female” (191). Tally is being lead in her actions by her attraction to David and Zane, relying on the judgement and socially active rebellion of these males rather than her own. Because Tally chooses David and Zane over Shay and sees this as the proper decision, she inadvertently accepts rather than challenges “society's preconceptions of female friendships as intrinsically shallow” (200). What is even worse is that Shay was originally the one who rebelled against the system, but she – through Tally's betrayals – became exactly what she set out to avoid: “a vapid, boring pretty” (*Uglies* 84). And in *Pretties*, it is again through Tally's betrayal – this time by giving Zane the cure rather than Shay – that Shay begins to self-harm in order to stay bubbly. In the end, Tally again chooses David over Shay, promising her best friend that they will not see each other again.

In her romantic relationships, Tally learns that the inside matters more than the outside, which shows how she – as Moran argues – develops her sense of self through external relationships. Tally finds it important to be of use to her love interest, making her seem like an

active agent. Her agency, however, only surfaces when the love interest is in need of it. When the Smoke is attacked, for instance, Tally wishes to rescue the captive Smokies because it was her fault that David's home got destroyed and she wants to make it up to him, not to the captive Smokies. In *Pretties*, when Tally gradually regains her memories and her real self surfaces, she intends to leave the city and find the New Smoke. The reason behind her wish to escape, however, is that Zane is suffering from headaches after taking half the cure and she wants the Smoke doctors to fix him. Again in *Specials*, Tally and Shay rebel against Special Circumstances. Shay does this to find the New Smoke and rescue their friend Fausto who got kidnapped, but Tally does it to make sure that Zane gets cured. At every point in the trilogy, Tally puts her male love interests above anyone else, and in particular, above her female best friend Shay. By doing this, the novels inadvertently illustrate that female friendship is only important until a male romantic interest comes around, which allows for the female friendship to be discarded, placing the importance of heterosexual relationships above homosocial ones. Additionally, as Tally only rebels to benefit her love interest, she perpetuates the passivity that is stereotypically bound to femininity. Tally may thus at the surface appear to be an active agent, through her relationships it becomes clear that she instead complies with socially determined gender roles that, as Natalie Sabik argues, instruct her on how to "perform social roles" within certain interactions (144). On the other hand, these interactions with others, and especially the ones with David and Zane, do aid Tally in the construction of her identity by opening up her mind to new perspectives about herself and society.

At first glance, the society in which Tally grew up seems utopian with its highly developed technology and worldwide peace. "This city is a paradise," Dr Cable tells Tally, "It feeds you, educates you, keeps you safe. It makes you pretty" (*Uglies* 106). As discussed in the previous chapter, McCormick et al.'s definition of power is "the extent to which an individual (or group) is able to provide resources to, or withhold resources from, others" (222). Those in charge of Tally's society exert a great amount of leverage over its population, which keeps the population dependent and perpetuates that society's social and political power structures. The reason that virtually no one challenges this regime is because they need the resources that the government provides them with, such as food, housing, and education, which fall in both the physical and social systems of power that McCormick et al. discuss (222). Another reason for the population's contentment is that everyone receives the brain lesions which ensures their complacency at the age of sixteen. The reason that this changes and people begin to challenge the power structures which are in place, David explains to Tally, is "that every civilization has its weakness. There is always one thing we depend on ...

The weakness could be an idea” (*Uglies* 346-347). *Pretties* demonstrates this on a smaller scale through the villagers that Tally meets when she is separated from the Crims while escaping the city. The villagers live their lives in a pre-Rusty manner, as hunter-gatherers, and Tally is shocked to see how primitive their lives and society are. Above all, it annoys her to find a distinction between the men and women in the village similar to the gender division in Western society before gender equality became a mainstream ideal. This gender division is a distinction that has never been present in Tally’s life before. She notices that the women are standing back and execute their chores while the men go out hunting. They treat Tally, whose pretty face marks her as a god in their culture, as an “honorary man,” allowing her to eat with the men before the leftovers are given to the women (*Pretties* 285). This community shows how gender can be seen as a “socially constructed stratification system” in which inequalities between the genders are created by the mere distinction between male and female (Risman “Gender as a Social Structure” 430). When their “holy man” or priest, Andrew Simpson Smith, agrees to escort Tally to the New Smoke, he tells her that such a journey must lie beyond the “edge of the world” (*Pretties* 279). In actuality, the pre-Rusties are an experimental project, a community kept in a small reservation in the wild enclosed by Special Circumstances’ force fields for scientific studies. No one, Andrew tells Tally, has ever gone beyond the edge. Tally gives Andrew the knowledge or the idea that there is a whole world beyond those borders. In *Specials*, she runs into him again and he thanks Tally for helping him see the world for what it really is. He burned down the force fields – along with half of the forest – and escaped the reservation with many of the villagers, who are now helping runaways from the cities to find the New Smoke. Tally realises that her “attempt to explain the real world to Andrew had resulted in massive destruction instead of enlightenment,” a sentiment that reflects Tally’s view on her own rebellion by the end of the trilogy (*Specials* 156).

Tally’s own rebellion is sparked when she, like Andrew, has been shown a different view of the world she lives in. With the emphasis on physical beauty in Tally’s society and Dr Cable’s promise to withhold the operation from Tally, she is pushed outside the boundaries of the community in which she grew up. She is no longer meant to be an ugly, but with her natural body she is not a pretty either. Sara Day, in her article on sexual awakening and social resistance in young adult fiction, argues that adolescent women are “expected to conform to specific physical requirements,” a social control which has been taken to the extreme in the *Uglies* trilogy (77). In the Smoke, Tally says that she was “hardly a pretty, but she didn’t feel like an ugly either. She was nothing in particular” (*Uglies* 352). By not adhering to society’s

physical requirements, Tally – who has been conditioned to think that she is not a ‘real person’ until she has had the operation – is lead to believe that she no longer has an identity at all. While being outside the boundaries of her own society, however, Tally realises that she does not need to conform to that society’s standards and that she can create her own identity. When she takes control over her own body by deciding to undergo the pretty operation to test the cure and then again by not reversing the special operation at the end of the trilogy, Tally fully establishes herself on the perimeter of society. Her nonconformity exposes the underlying forms of oppression within her society, namely how those in power suppress the population through an overbearing obligation to conform to society’s beauty standards and by physically impairing the population’s ability to think freely. By conditioning the population into thinking that they need the pretty operation to become adults, young boys and girls in the city do not feel the need to grow up or develop their identities on their own. It is through being driven from society and the convenient resources it provides that Tally challenges the perspectives and ideologies that she has been taught in favour of creating her own viewpoints and, consequently, her own identity.

In their introduction to *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz argue that the rebellious identities of female protagonists in young adult fiction are not only “defined by their situation and surroundings,” but also by the conventions – usually taken from contemporary society – that are either blurred or reinforced by these novels (11). Victoria Flanagan states that young adult fiction, and in particular dystopian fiction, “demonstrate[s] how narratives produced for adolescents attempt to make sense of feminist ideology” (52). In line with this feminist ideology, Scott Westerfeld’s *Uglies* trilogy does indeed blur the gender division or inequality that is present in contemporary Western society by making people of all genders pretty, treating their bodies and minds in the same manner. On the other hand, the novels still reiterate a number of conventional gender stereotypes, such as Tally’s desire to protect and care for others. Besides that, the novels neglect to dismantle the priority that romance has over platonic relationships in many fictions, giving preference to male-female heterosexual relationships over female-female homosocial ones and thereby perpetuating heteronormative ideals. As the aim of this thesis is to research how gender affects the construction of identity of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction, this chapter analysed the construction of Tally’s gender identity as a consequence of internal as well as external influences such as Tally’s self-image, her relationships, and societal power structures. From a feminist and gender studies standpoint, the *Uglies* trilogy has shown a certain progress in the field of gender equality, as gender

divisions are absent from the most important structures in society, namely the operations and their consequential lifestyles. However, as Tally has internalised these standards of beauty, they have caused a disruption within her self-image. It is through this social conditioning and the internalisation of a feeling of inferiority that the society in which Tally grew up can maintain its power over the population. Tally only realises how she has incorporated her society's viewpoints when she is placed outside its boundaries. Through her relationships with David and Zane and, to a lesser extent, Shay, Tally learns to construct her own views and identity. Although the social gender structures such as stereotypical gender divisions are not in place in Tally's – as expressed through her annoyance with the gender segregation in Andrew's village – the fact that Tally's rebellious nature only surfaces for the sake of her male love interests undermines the social gender equality that has been tried to set up. Overall, Tally succeeds in many ways in being a strong female protagonist, but her dependence upon the male love interests in the construction of her identity subverts the feminist ideal of absolute gender equality.

3. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins

This third chapter analyses Suzanne Collins's popular young adult series *The Hunger Games*, which consists of the novels *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*, published by Scholastic in 2008, 2009, and 2010 respectively. Both *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* became instant *New York Times* bestsellers, and *Mockingjay* surpassed its predecessors by topping all US national bestseller lists in its first week of publication (Scholastic). Besides its commercial success, which was amplified by the popularity of the film adaptations starring Jennifer Lawrence, scholars – such as Henthorne, Gilbert-Hickey, and Kraemer and Lander – have taken an interest in the novels as well. Collins's trilogy has been researched in multiple fields, with some analyses focussing on the “social and political concerns” portrayed in the narrative, while others are concerned with issues of gender and identity (Petroni, Sarigianides, and Lewis 519). After giving a brief summary of the novels, this chapter will address the internal construction of the gender identity of Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist of the trilogy, by examining how gender affects the view she has of herself both physically and mentally. Then, the effect of gender on Katniss's relationships with Peeta and Gale is analysed, followed by an analysis of how social power structures instruct Katniss to behave and her response to this. Finally, this chapter concludes that *The Hunger Games* trilogy shows a clear fluidity of gender identity in its protagonist and highlights the effects of societal gender role expectations on a young woman's identity.

The narrative is set in Panem, a futuristic dystopia in what was once North America. Panem is controlled by the extravagant and affluent Capitol, where president Snow reigns over the less prosperous districts which are numbered 1 to 12. Katniss herself is from District 12, well-known for its coal mines and the poorest of the districts. To provide for her mother and little sister Prim, sixteen-year-old Katniss took on her late father's hunting and poaching at the age of eleven. The first novel starts at the day of the reaping, when two names are drawn – one boy and one girl, each between the ages of twelve and eighteen – to participate in the Hunger Games, where they must fight the tributes from other districts to the death. The Hunger Games are a tool for the Capitol that serve as a “yearly reminder that the Dark Days [when the districts rebelled] must never be repeated” (*Hunger Games* 21). Although Katniss has a higher chance of her name being called out than Prim, it is the latter's name that is picked. To save her little sister from certain death, Katniss volunteers to take her place. She is taken to the Capitol to participate in the Games, yet Katniss understands that the Games begin even before she is led into the arena. Peeta Mellark, the boy tribute from District 12, surprises Katniss with a love confession in front of the entirety of Panem, who are

obligated to watch the Games on television. In doing so, Peeta sets them both apart as star-crossed lovers and feeds into the sensation-seeking culture of the Capitol in the hope of getting more sponsors – wealthy people who send gifts to the tributes in the arena. In the arena itself, Katniss moves on her own, but is eventually reunited with Peeta after a change of rules: instead of only one victor, two victors will be allowed if they are from the same district. When Peeta and Katniss are the last tributes standing, however, the rule change is revoked. Katniss, knowing that the Gamemakers need a victor, suggests that they both eat poisonous berries, which will leave no victor at all. Before Peeta and Katniss can commit a double suicide, they are stopped by the Gamemakers and are both hailed victorious.

This double victory, however, has stirred something within the districts. In *Catching Fire*, Katniss is visited by president Snow himself. He warns her that her act of defiance has not gone unnoticed and that she will have to convince him that she really is in love with Peeta during their victory tour of the districts. Katniss has provided the dissatisfied districts with “a spark that, left unattended, may grow to an inferno that destroys Panem,” and Snow threatens to harm her family if she does not douse the flames (*Catching Fire* 26). By the end of the tour, however, it becomes clear that there is no dousing the flames, as Katniss hears of an uprising in District 8 and notices similar unrest in others. At the announcement of the third Quarter Quell, a special Games held every twenty-five years, is it revealed that that year’s tributes are to be reaped from the pool of existing victors. As Katniss is the only female victor in District 12, she is obligated to return to the Capitol and participate once again with Peeta by her side. By the end of the Quarter Quell, Katniss, Peeta, and their ally tributes have devised a plan to electrocute the remaining enemies, but in a chaotic turn of events, Katniss dismantles the force field that closed off the arena and she is taken away by rebels from District 13.

It is in District 13, which was supposedly destroyed in the Dark Days but its population survived in an underground bunker, that *Mockingjay* takes place. Although Katniss was saved from the Quarter Quell arena, Peeta is taken captive by the Capitol. District 12 has been bombed and the few dozen survivors – amongst whom are Katniss’s family and her best friend and hunting partner Gale – have been able to escape to District 13. President Coin, the leader of 13, wants Katniss to operate as the ‘Mockingjay’, the living embodiment of the rebellion that has taken over all the districts. Katniss agrees, but demands that Peeta is rescued from the Capitol. It is not, however, the happy reunion she had envisioned. Through a severe torture called hijacking, which alters a person’s memory, Peeta has been reprogrammed by the Capitol to believe that Katniss is dangerous and he tries to murder her on several occasions. Towards the end of the novel, Katniss is filming a propaganda spot in a supposedly safe street

in the Capitol, which the rebels have started to invade, but her squadron leader is killed by a mine and he ushers her to complete what she came for: Snow's assassination. As Katniss reaches Snow's mansion, a hovercraft drops bombs on the Capitol's fleeing children and rebel doctors step in to help, amongst whom is Prim. A second detonation has Katniss witnessing her sister's death and she sinks into a deep depression. The Capitol falls and when Katniss is asked to assassinate Snow, she fires the arrow not at him, but at Coin. Katniss found out that Coin was behind the bombardment that killed Prim and afterwards stepped up to take the lead over the country. The trilogy ends as Panem has elected a new president and Katniss returns to District 12 as it is being rebuilt. The epilogue shows that Katniss and Peeta – who grew better after the hijacking – eventually married and had children, for whom there are no more Hunger Games to participate in.

Unlike most protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction – such as Tally in *Uglies*, who was oblivious to the cruelty of her government – Katniss is keenly aware of the oppression within her society which gives her a clear sense of self from the beginning of the narrative. While growing up, she was no stranger to hunger and poverty, as her family had to rely on her father's illegal hunting to bring food to the table. After his death, Katniss took over her father's task, thereby adopting the paternal and stereotypically masculine role as provider for her family. Throughout the trilogy, Katniss is compared to her late father – not only by those around her, but by herself as well – in regard to their appearance, their hunting qualities, and even their singing. Katniss recalls that she and her father shared their “straight black hair, olive skin” and the “grey eyes” which are typical for the miners in District 12 (*Hunger Games* 9). In contrast, Katniss's sister Prim resembles their mother – who was originally from the merchant class – with her “light hair and blue eyes,” which makes her “look out of place” and appear more feminine than Katniss (9). Both their mother and Prim herself have a talent for practicing medicine, a talent that Katniss does not share. She tells Peeta that she has her “father's blood. The kind that quickens during a hunt, not an epidemic” (*Catching Fire* 361). Since Katniss had a better relationship with her father and shares many characteristics with him rather than with her mother, it illustrates how Katniss is more comfortable within a stereotypically masculine atmosphere than in a feminine one. Many scholars have indeed pointed out Katniss's role as provider for her family, arguing that her “boyish figure, tough demeanour, and disdain for stereotypically female activities” portray her character more as masculine than feminine (Pulliam 174; Kraemer and Lander; Petrone, Sarigianides, and Lewis). Even Katniss herself, after winning the first Games and receiving enough money and food to provide for her family for the rest of her life, feels that she loses a

part of herself when her hunting is no longer necessary: “Take that away and I’m not really sure who I am, what my identity is” (*Hunger Games* 365). Despite feeling that her only purpose is to provide food and safety for her family, Katniss’s identity is not solely based on the masculine traits pointed out above. Another integral part of who she is as a person is her ability to feel empathy as well as the impulse to take care of those she loves. These “attitudes of a nurturer” that are conventionally associated with femininity are not only an expression of feminine traits or ideals, but in Katniss’s case they are “politically charged” (Fritz 28-29). Whenever Katniss expresses this nurturing attitude – for instance by volunteering for Prim at the reaping, burying her ally Rue in flowers in the arena, saving both herself and Peeta at the end of the Games – she also expresses the ability to critically think about the political consequences of her actions. This expression or behaviour fuses a feminine characteristic (nurturing) with one that is commonly viewed as masculine (political awareness), thereby creating an ambiguous or androgynous character. Katniss is aware of what her actions entail, even if she does not immediately see the full potential or extent of her influence over others. Throughout the trilogy, Sonya Fritz argues, Katniss demonstrates “that she is able to think and act as an independent political entity,” which demonstrates her agency, empowerment, and her ability to keep others from influencing or dominating her sense of self (24). Regarding Niva Piran’s dimensions of female embodiment as they were discussed in chapter one, Katniss expresses a remarkable connection with her physical body as she is aware of her strengths and limitations. She knows, for instance, that the hours she has spend in the woods and her athletic physique will give her a distinct advantage in the Games. When the tributes meet for the first time in the training centre, she notices that she is smaller than most of the others, but “while [she’s] thin, [she’s] strong. The meat and plants from the woods combined with the exertion it took to get them have given [her] a healthier body than most” (*Hunger Games* 108). Through her experience with hunting, Katniss is aware of what she is physically capable of and the importance of knowing how to carry herself in different situations, which allows her to navigate the masculine space of District 12 as well as the feminine space of the Capitol. In his essay “The Importance of Being Katniss” (2012), Tom Henthorne argues that through her experiences with the Games, Katniss learns that “both masculinity and femininity are performances” that can be acted out according to one’s needs (45). As stated above, Katniss transcends gender typical or female stereotypes by adopting a more masculine identity while she is in District 12, while in the Capitol she is forced to perform femininity in order to appeal to the sponsors who will help to keep her alive in the arena. Although Katniss herself is not an excellent performer – as noted by those who try to coach her – she is aided by

Peeta as he makes her look desirable by confessing his love for her in *The Hunger Games* and by pretending that she is pregnant – the highest grade of femininity – in *Catching Fire*. Pulliam and Gilbert-Hickey, however, argue that Katniss’s gender performance is both “androgynous” and “circular,” meaning that her behaviour is balanced between masculinity and femininity and that her performed femininity is an act that is born out of “‘feminine’ nurturing” (Pulliam 175; Gilbert-Hickey 100). Katniss’s feminine performance only surfaces when it is beneficial to those she wants to protect, for instance by playing the loving girlfriend to protect Peeta. When Katniss talks about the other tributes in the Quarter Quell, however, she says that “a lot of them are so damaged that [her] natural instinct would be to protect them,” even though they pose a threat to her and Peeta (*Catching Fire* 264). This demonstrates that Katniss, who is gradually becoming aware of her influence over the citizens of Panem, is expanding her boundaries of protection from a handful of loved ones to people she does not have a direct bond with. She takes on the role of nurturer, once again combining it with political awareness, and eventually protects the entirety of Panem.

Katniss, again in contrast with many young adult protagonists such as Tally, is highly aware of her own character, and consequently, her own flaws. Early on in the trilogy, she describes herself as “not [being] the forgiving type” (*Hunger Games* 10). In *Catching Fire*, she says that “[she is] the kind of girl who, when she might actually be of use, would run to stay alive and leave those who couldn’t follow to suffer and die” (*Catching Fire* 134). Katniss’s character, as seen throughout the trilogy, is all about survival. Her ability to perform gender as the situation commands it aids her in this survival. Her masculine willingness to fight for her life and for what she believes in, combined with a “feminist model of ethics that is rooted in women’s traditional roles as nurturers,” makes Katniss a character with an androgynous gender performance (Pulliam 182). She is aware of her own physicality and the way she and others around her employ her body, but remains in control over her identity because of her level of agency and political awareness.

As stated above, Katniss is forced to perform her femininity to gain sponsors while she is in the Capitol. In line with Natalie Sabik’s “socially determined gender roles,” the sponsors expect Katniss to act according to the view they have of a sixteen-year-old girl, which includes her having an interest in boys and relationships (144). Katniss herself, however, has never experienced this type of interest. Up until the end of the trilogy, she refuses to get into a real – as opposed to a performed – romantic relationship, as she perceives it “as frivolous distractions from the care of first her family, then, by the second book of the series, her fellow tributes and rebels, and finally, the people of Panem” (Gilbert-Hickey 98-99). Romance, to

Katniss, is not something she considers useful or beneficial to her survival. She prioritises self-preservation and the safety of those she considers to be her responsibility above heteronormative tropes or expectations that are imposed not only upon her, but upon every teenage girl in a patriarchal society. She makes it very clear from the beginning of the trilogy that she never wants to get married or have children, her reasoning being that those children would only end up suffering either from poverty or by being forced to participate in the Games. This does not mean, however, that Katniss has no meaningful relationships with those of the opposite sex, such as her best friend Gale and of course Peeta. When she describes her relationship with Gale – who is portrayed as a hyper-masculine character who is both good-looking and has a strong fighting spirit – she says that “there’s never been anything romantic between Gale and [herself]” (*Hunger Games* 11). Henthorne argues that in “a patriarchal society like Panem, it is unimaginable that a woman would refuse to subordinate herself to a man” (49). Katniss’s dismissal of a possible romantic entanglement involving Gale not only sets her apart as an independent character, but this refusal of a relatively minor subordination sets a precedent for Katniss’s ultimate defiance of the Capitol’s oppressions. Despite Katniss’s rejection of heteronormative tropes, she is forced – again by the Capitol – to perform them in front of all of Panem. In an interview, the day before Katniss and Peeta enter the arena for the first time, Peeta confesses his love for Katniss. She was previously unaware of his feelings towards her and initially assumes he made it up to attract sponsors, but later finds out that the confession was genuine. She plays along because her survival, Petrone, Sarigianides, and Lewis argue, “depends upon normative tropes of adolescent love,” expressed through Katniss’s performed sexuality and her fabricated relationship with Peeta (523). Peeta is heartbroken when he realises that their relationship was not real and Katniss wants to tell him that “[she] did what it took to stay alive, to keep [them] both alive in the arena” (*Hunger Games* 435). As stated above, Katniss prioritises protecting those for whom she feels responsible above possible romantic relationships, but in this case the romantic relationship ensures both her and Peeta’s safety, which allows her to make an exception.

Gilbert-Hickey highlights the “vast discomfort” Katniss shows when “displaying feminine heterosexuality” (99). In both her relationship with Peeta and her relationship with Gale – who Katniss eventually learns has romantic feelings for her – she only expresses romantic gestures when she believes she is expected to. First, she kisses Peeta in the arena and plays into their pretend relationship because she knows that that is what the audience wants to see. Then, on two occasions, the first being after Gale got whipped for poaching and the second when he and Katniss revisit the bombed remains of District 12, Katniss kisses Gale. It

is after this last kiss that Gale says he knew she would do that, “because [he is] in pain ... That’s the only way [he] get[s her] attention” (*Mockingjay* 146). When performing these romantic actions, Katniss taps into her identity as a nurturer and her eagerness to protect those who are hurt or damaged. Every expression of romantic interest from Katniss’s side is a coded performance which goes hand in hand with her performance of femininity, both of which are to an extent performances of societal expectations. It is, however, not only society that expects Katniss to adhere to heteronormative tropes, as Gale and Peeta too await Katniss’s eventual choice between the two of them. Katniss herself is confused regarding her feelings: “It’s too complicated. What [she] did as part of the Games. As opposed to what [she] did out of anger at the Capitol ... Or what [she] did because [she] cared about [them]” (*Hunger Games* 419). She overhears a conversation between Peeta and Gale during their infiltration of the Capitol and she is horrified when she hears Gale say that “Katniss will pick whoever she thinks she can’t survive without” (*Mockingjay* 371). Katniss is expected to adhere to social gender structures or to “perform social roles” that prescribe her to want to engage in a heteronormative relationship with one of the male characters (Sabik 144). After hearing Gale’s statement, she feels so enraged that she decides she “can survive just fine without either of them” (*Mockingjay* 372). By the end of the trilogy, she has made her choice, aided by the knowledge that Prim was killed by bombs that were most likely of Gale’s design:

[W]hat I need to survive is not Gale’s fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the ... promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again. And only Peeta can give me that (436).

Here, Katniss remarks that she does not need Gale’s masculinity, but rather the nurturing or even feminine side of Peeta. This implies that in order to survive, Katniss does not need either masculinity or femininity, but rather a blend of the two.

The epilogue of the trilogy is set twenty years after the end of the war between the districts and the Capitol. It shows Katniss and Peeta as a married couple with two children, one girl and one boy, which is an ending that has made this epilogue the subject of debate. Katherine Broad, for instance, has argued that the conclusion of the trilogy has “an epic heroine defaulting to a safe, stable, and highly insular heterosexual reproductive union” that resembles the “social and sexual status quo of our world” (qtd. in Pulliam 171). Kraemer and Lander, too, state that the “return to gender norms” in the epilogue is a “return to the illusory familiarity of the readers’ own society and culture,” thereby arguing, like Broad, that the trilogy ends with a familiar and therefore comfortable scene for contemporary readers (174).

Pulliam, on the other hand, argues that Katniss's hesitance in choosing to marry Peeta, or to marry at all, displays "the impossibility of a complete escape" from societal obligations (184). Simultaneously, Katniss exposes the power structures that construct young girls' desires by questioning what "shaped her feelings" (184). Although Katniss, Peeta, and their children conjure the image of a typical nuclear family at first, the ending of the trilogy does not show a complete return to gender norms. Katniss explains that while growing back together, she and Peeta come back to what they did before the Hunger Games: "Peeta bakes. I hunt." (*Mockingjay* 435). Katniss stays within her masculine space when she is hunting and Peeta has returned to his talent for baking – a typically rather feminine activity. Neither Katniss or Peeta are defined by their sexuality or gender, as even in the epilogue the psychological aftermath of the war takes precedent over their relationship with each other and their children. Throughout the trilogy, Katniss has demonstrated a high level of independence and agency by prioritising ethical actions over the pursuit of a romantic relationship, even when expectations of heterosexuality are imposed upon her. Similar to her femininity, Katniss's sexuality is mainly a performance, one that ensures not only her own survival, but the safety of those around her. Only after the war, Katniss feels safe enough to pursue a relationship which, most importantly, is on her own terms.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mary Jeanette Moran argues that "feminist ethics recognizes that human beings develop a sense of self through their relationships with others" (130). Although Katniss was rebellious and aware of the Capitol's shortcomings since childhood, this was not an awareness she developed on her own. First, it was her father who talked openly to Katniss about the inequalities in their society; then it was Gale. Katniss's knowledge or awareness of the inequities in her society may have been instigated and supported by the men in her life, but she does not act upon that knowledge immediately. She maintains her role of protector, mindful of the repercussions that rebellious actions might have for herself and her family. The first outburst Katniss has is during her private session with the Gamemakers in the training room. After showing her skill with a bow, she is irritated when she sees that the Gamemakers are not paying attention and she shoots an arrow straight at them. Immediately afterwards, she fears for the consequences of her actions: "What really scares me is what they might do to my mother and Prim; how my family might suffer now because of my impulsiveness" (*Hunger Games* 120). Following McCormick et al.'s definition of power from chapter one as "the extent to which an individual or group is able to provide resources to, or withhold resources from, others," it becomes clear that the Capitol maintains power over its subjects by keeping them afraid of displaying disobedience (222). Because the

traffic of resources between the districts is monitored and supervised by the Capitol, the government maintains the subjugation of the population regarding both physical and social systems of oppression (222). It is for the illusion of security and safety, Green-Barteet argues, that “the citizens of Panem voluntarily repress any desire for autonomy” (48). The Hunger Games are one tool for perpetuating this oppression, as they show the people in the districts that the Capitol can take away their children – thereby corrupting innocent lives – and thus take away the security that the population would normally rely on. This instigates fear, which overrides the motivation to seek independence. Besides the distinct division between the districts and the Capitol as well as the distribution of wealth between the districts, Henthorne argues that the Capitol also uses gender as a means of “dividing people against each other within districts” (47). As discussed in the first chapter, gender can be treated “as a socially constructed stratification system,” which creates gender inequality by merely distinguishing between male and female (Risman “Gender as a Social Structure” 430). This gender division, which is similar to gender divisions in contemporary Western society – Panem is based in North America – is maintained through a separation of labour. The men in District 12, for instance, work in the mines while the women work at home. Another way in which *The Hunger Games* maintains this gender division is through imposing different behaviours on men and women, as demonstrated in the feminine behaviour the Capitol prescribes to Katniss. The gender separation of labour, especially, leads to an uneven distribution of basic resources such as money or food and thus eventually leads to an uneven distribution of both financial and physical stability and security. After the death of Katniss’s father, for example, her mother was expected to look for work. When her mother fell into a crippling depression, however, Katniss had to take over the paternal role of provider and protector, which gave Katniss’s family a greater sense of security than many other households headed by a single woman. Because of this greater sense of security, Katniss is in a position where she can begin to take a critical stand against the Capitol. Even within District 12, however, there is a clear hierarchy where people from the Seam – the poorest part of town where the miners live – are separated from those who belong to the merchant class and live in a better part of the district. District 12 is rather small, as Gale notes, and will need every person to support an uprising if there is ever to be one. The division between the Seam and the merchant class prevents a full-scale rebellion, since the latter is more secure in their acquisition of resources and is therefore more likely to perpetuate the current power systems. As stated above, this distinction is also made clear through appearances, as the people from the Seam generally have dark hair and darker skin compared to the fairer merchants. In line with the theory of intersectionality, this

distinction between those from the Seam and the merchants indicates that Katniss belongs to a marginalised social class as well as a subordinated gender even within her own impoverished district (Crenshaw, McCall, and Cho 785).

Katniss's appearance does not only determine her position within her own district, but it is also crucial when it comes to presenting herself as a tribute. To navigate this new environment, Katniss is aided by a team of coaches and stylists who tell her when to behave in what manner and how to look. Much of this preparation includes day-long beauty routines, which are structured differently for men and women, as evidenced by how much longer Katniss spends with her prep team compared to how quickly Peeta is finished. Before the tributes have their interviews and enter the arena, they are taken to the "Remake Centre," a location where they are scrubbed, manicured, and waxed to become presentable (*Hunger Games* 70). Not only Katniss's appearance, but also the way she presents herself, and consequently how she presents her gender, are dictated. This performance of gender, as Ridgeway argues, only perpetuates the gender stereotypes to which Katniss is supposed to adhere (149). Her coaches teach her how to behave in a feminine manner, which according to Pulliam shows how "gender is not the natural consequence of sex but rather a disciplinary institution, a political construct, constructed to oppress women" (Pulliam 174). Effie, a woman from the Capitol, has Katniss walking in high heels for hours until she masters the new footwear, which signifies how Katniss has to substitute masculinity (or her hunting boots) for a feminine appearance. The heels do not only signify femininity, but they also impair Katniss's talent for hunting and fighting and in a way suppress her ability to revolt. In a physical sense, and to a lesser extent in a psychological sense, Katniss is under the control of adults. Petrone, Sarigianides, and Lewis argue that because of this control over how she is allowed to present herself, Katniss "transforms from adulthood to adolescence" (522). Instead of the independent young woman who provides for her family and who has a certain degree of critical awareness, Katniss is presented to the viewers of the Games as a flat character, a sixteen-year-old who has no qualities besides being loved by Peeta. During the Games in the first two novels of the series, however, Katniss does show the audience that she is a capable survivor, but it is not in her best interest to completely abandon the feminine performance that was imposed upon her. It is only in the final novel of the trilogy that Katniss, although she is asked to perform again, now as the Mockingjay, is allowed to employ a more gender neutral approach to how she presents herself. She is allowed to fight in the war, although she is still expected to be prepped to become damaged, burned, and scarred "in a more attractive way" (*Mockingjay* 67). When the war and her role as the Mockingjay are over and Katniss

assassinates president Coin, she is kept in isolation and wonders “if they have more plans for [her]? A new way to remake, train, and use [her]?” and decides that she will not do it again (424). She has learned to resist internalising societal expectations and resolves to maintain her own authentic gender identity at all cost.

The Hunger Games, Gilbert-Hickey states, does not demonstrate “a simple inversion of gender roles” (96). As the aim of this thesis is to research how gender affects the construction of the identity of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction, this chapter analysed the construction of Katniss’s gender identity as a consequence of internal as well as external influences such as Katniss’s self-image, her relationships, and societal power structures. From a feminist and gender studies standpoint, *The Hunger Games* trilogy shows a clear fluidity of identity in its protagonist as well as the effects of societal gender role expectations on the (gender) identity of Katniss Everdeen. She, like Gilbert-Hickey argues above, transcends typical gender role expectations – without inverting them – as she takes on a paternal or masculine role while she is in the private sphere of District 12, is forced to perform femininity for the sake of her own survival in the public sphere of the Capitol, but internally maintains a gender identity that combines both masculine and feminine traits throughout the trilogy while neither is given a preference. This illustrates a distinction between the internal and external construction of identity, which the trilogy shows is heavily affected by the “major organizational structure” of societal gender role expectations (Sabik 144). As the social gender structures in the patriarchal society of *The Hunger Games* are remarkably similar to those in contemporary Western (and in particular, American) society, Katniss’s reluctance to adhere to or internalise these oppressions exposes the structures behind not only the role of gender in Panem, but in contemporary society as well. When Katniss is allowed to present her authentic gender identity in her role as the Mockingjay, she frees herself of all the fears and rules that society had imposed upon her and demonstrates her agency, empowerment, and her ability to keep others from influencing or dominating her sense of self. Katniss’s transcendence of gender role expectations thus goes hand in hand with her rebellion against the oppressive political systems which are in place in her society. Besides that, her character in *The Hunger Games* demonstrates that adolescents can have a clear sense of their own identity, but that this identity can either be taken advantage of or sculpted, usually by adults, to suit the societal expectations that are linked to the adolescent’s gender, even if those expectations are not in line with the identity the adolescent already possesses. Ultimately, Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy demonstrates that gender norms are no rigid constructions and that one does not need to choose between masculine or feminine, or that

one is better than the other, and that a person can compose their own fluid identity using traits that stereotypically belong to either or both.

4. *Divergent* by Veronica Roth

This fourth chapter analyses the dystopian young adult trilogy *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, which consists of the novels *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant*, all published between 2011 and 2013. Roth's new young adult novels were compared to the popular book and film series that had dominated the young adult market since 2008, *The Hunger Games*. Some comparisons were in favour of *Divergent*, with Christopher Borelli of the *Chicago Tribune* calling Veronica Roth "the next YA superstar" and comparing her to Suzanne Collins and J.K. Rowling (Borelli). Others, however, were less enthusiastic, as Susan Dominus of the *New York Times* points out the "blatant overlap" between the two trilogies (Dominus). Commercially, the *Divergent* trilogy was still a grand success and, similar to *The Hunger Games*, the series' popularity increased with the release of the film franchise by the same name, starring Shailene Woodley as the protagonist Beatrice 'Tris' Prior. A modest number of scholars have analysed the trilogy – such as Cothran and Prickett, Green-Barteet, and Day – who have examined the *Divergent* trilogy with regard to identity construction and transformation. After giving a short summary of the novels, this chapter will address the internal construction of the gender identity of Tris Prior by examining how gender affects the view she has of herself both physically and mentally. Then, the effect of gender on Tris's romantic relationship with Tobias is analysed, followed by an analysis of how social power structures instruct Tris to behave and her response to this. Finally, this chapter concludes that the *Divergent* trilogy demonstrates a similar social gender structure to that of contemporary Western or American society, but that the manner in which female characters challenge these expectations serves as a critique of society's gender role expectations.

The *Divergent* trilogy is set in the futuristic remains of Chicago, a city now divided in five factions – Abnegation, Amity, Candor, Erudite, and Dauntless – which are based upon valued personality characteristics. At the age of sixteen, every teenage boy and girl has to decide whether they remain with their parents in the factions where they grew up, or whether they would like to transfer to another. Beatrice Prior has been raised in the Abnegation faction which values selflessness. She feels, however, that she does not fit in and wonders if she is selfless enough to stay with her family. Her aptitude test – a mandatory test that is supposed to conclude upon a person's ideal faction – is inconclusive, meaning that Beatrice has aptitude for more than one faction and that she is what is called 'divergent'. She chooses to transfer to the Dauntless faction, which values bravery and risk-taking, and begins her initiation. Her divergence allows Beatrice – who renamed herself Tris – to be self-aware during serum-induced simulations like the aptitude test and the initiation tests for the Dauntless. The

divergent are considered dangerous by those in powerful positions in society, as their self-awareness and reluctance to conform means that they “can’t be controlled” (*Divergent* 442). This becomes clear when, after Tris is made a member of the Dauntless, the entire faction is put under a simulation by the Erudite. Erudite, valuing knowledge, wishes for a place in governing the city, a task which is appointed to the selfless (and thus incorruptible) Abnegation. The Dauntless, who are trained soldiers meant to protect the city, attack the Abnegation faction as mindless pawns under the simulation’s influence. In the attack, Tris’s parents give their lives to save their daughter, which leaves her with mental traumas that haunt her during the rest of the trilogy. Along with her love interest – and also divergent – Tobias ‘Four’ Eaton, Tris is not affected by the simulation and together they manage to put an end to the attack, but the Erudite have taken control of the government and Tris and Four are forced to flee the city.

The next novel follows Tris and Four as they and a number of survivors from the attack – amongst whom are Tris’s brother, Caleb, and Four’s abusive father, Marcus – to the Amity compound, the faction which values kindness and peace. They are not allowed to stay for long, however, and they must leave when the Erudite track them down. They run into the factionless, a group of people who were either rejected by their factions or chose to leave the community for other reasons. Four’s mother, Evelyn, who was presumed dead but turned out to have voluntarily joined the factionless to leave her abusive husband, now leads the factionless in their plans to overthrow the newly established Erudite government. Four refuses his mother’s request to rally the Dauntless to fight alongside the factionless and he and Tris decide to head to the Candor headquarters where the remaining Dauntless reside. In a tragic event, however, three people are again put under a simulation and Tris is only able to save two of them. She receives a message that by handing a divergent over to the Erudite, she could prevent this from happening again. Tris gives herself up and is put through a number of experiments by Jeanine Matthews, leader of the Erudite, to understand her divergence and to create a simulation serum that prevents the characteristic self-awareness. Though the experiments fail, the Erudite decide that they no longer need Tris and she is scheduled for execution. Surprisingly, she is saved by one of her enemies and co-initiates from Dauntless, Peter. As Tris rejoins the Dauntless – who have now combined their numbers with the factionless – plans are made to attack the Erudite. Unlike the others, Tris wishes to know why the Erudite attacked in the first place, and conspires with Marcus and her best friend Christina to infiltrate the Erudite headquarters and find the truth. As she reaches her goal, she is stopped by the Dauntless attackers and is branded a traitor. In the end, Four and Caleb manage to

reveal the document containing the truth and the citizens of Chicago learn that they were placed in the city to increase their number of divergents, as divergence is believed to be able to stop the corruption in the society outside their city limits.

In the last novel, Tris and Four leave the city with a number of their friends. Notably, while the previous two novels were focalised through Tris only, *Allegiant* is narrated by Tris and Four in alternating chapters, giving both their perspectives on events. In a compound not far from the Amity headquarters, they find the Bureau of Genetic Welfare and learn that their city was part of an experiment. Genetically Damaged people (or GD's) were the result of a failed experiment to correct human nature. Cities like Chicago were meant to produce Genetically Pure (GP's) or divergents to combat this failure. The Bureau had been monitoring the city for generations and have let the current war between the factions and the factionless go on, but now that the factionless threaten to release a death serum upon the rest of the city, the Bureau needs to step in. Tris, who was able to gain a place in the Bureau's council, learns that they want to release a memory serum on the city, wiping everyone's memory and restarting the experiment afresh. Tobias, Christina, and Peter return to the city to administer antisera to some of their friends and family, while Tobias convinces his mother to stop the war and leave the city with him. Back at the Bureau, Tris releases the memory serum on the people there to prevent them from attacking the city, but she is shot and killed in the process. The trilogy ends two and a half years later, when the city has been opened to people from the outside, and GP's and GD's live alongside each other. In the final pages, Tobias releases Tris's ashes, having finally accepted her sacrifice.

The faction system in the society where Tris grew up forces her to be aware of her own personality and identity on a different level from most protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction. In the first novel of the trilogy, she struggles mostly with the choice between the selfless behaviour she has been taught during her Abnegation upbringing and her selfish desire to find her own identity as well as her place in a faction and, consequently, in society. After her aptitude test, Tris is told that she displays "equal aptitude for Abnegation, Dauntless, and Erudite" and she realises that the choice she will have to make is entirely her own and does not – as she had hoped – depend on the test results (*Divergent* 23). As she chooses Dauntless over both Abnegation and Erudite at the Choosing Ceremony, she reminds herself that "[she is] selfish, [she is] brave," but this choice has also made her leave parts of herself behind (47). She desperately wants to conform to her new faction's values, but soon learns that she cannot completely forgo her Abnegation or Erudite tendencies, although she tries to repress them. This fracturing of the self is symbolised in the nickname she takes on the day

that she joins the Dauntless – Tris instead of Beatrice – and her initiation into the Dauntless faction constitutes a transformation in not only the way she sees herself, but also how the rest of society views her.

Similar to Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, Tris takes on the masculine role of a fighter as she is trained to be a soldier during her Dauntless initiation. The training she receives makes her gain muscle, giving her a more masculine body instead of the slight, childlike body she used to have. In one particular scene, Tris has to leave the showers in nothing more than a towel in order to retrieve a new pair of fitting trousers because she grew too bulky for her old ones, but she is cornered by three antagonistic fellow initiates, Peter being one of them. They begin teasing her, saying how “she’s practically a child” and wondering what she could be hiding under that towel before tearing the fabric away (169). Tris is highly uncomfortable with any type of attention towards her physique. Miranda Green-Barteet argues that since Tris was raised in Abnegation, she “has been conditioned that her physical appearance ... is of little importance” and additionally she has been taught to be modest and wary of physical displays of affection (43). The nickname other factions have for the Abnegation – and thus for Tris – is ‘Stiff’, which refers to both their muted personalities as well as their prudery, and it is one of the stereotypes that Tris works hardest to counter. In Abnegation, for instance, the dress code for both men and women are loose grey shirts and trousers, which prevents vanity and allows them to forget their individuality in order to serve others. In Dauntless, Tris is allowed to wear more feminine clothes, such as tight fitted dresses, and even make-up. Cothran and Prickett argue that in doing so, Tris “openly assert[s her] femininity through dress” because those around her “interpret [her] behaviour as drastically non-feminine” (28). On the other hand, Tris still adheres to her new faction’s dress code (all-black clothing) and does not fully assert her own gender identity through her choice of clothing. She struggles with the “socially determined gender roles” and the expected behaviour and appearance for young females as these expectations differ from faction to faction (Sabik 144). In *Insurgent*, for instance, while Tris and the others are on the run, she wears a combination of clothes from Amity (either red or yellow) and the grey from Abnegation. The clothes do not fit – “I have to roll [the trousers] up three times” – and they demonstrate how clothing signifies Tris’s transforming identity from wanting to belong to one single faction to realising that she – like the clothes – cannot fit in or be defined by one character trait (*Insurgent* 13). It is in *Allegiant*, where because of the absence of factions there are no more faction colours, that Tris begins to combine her own sets of clothing, asserting her divergence through what she wears.

Another transformation in Tris's behaviour is her expression of emotions and thoughts, something which she was hardly allowed to do while living in the Abnegation faction. She even physically assaults one of the initiates who bullied her in the towel incident, which would not have been allowed in Abnegation but is applauded in Dauntless. Although Tris rejects the gender neutral values of her old faction, she begins to conform to the gendered values of the Dauntless. Since the Dauntless value physical fitness and bravery, girls are generally looked down upon as the weaker sex until they prove themselves worthy. As Tris learns to fight and defend herself, she grows more in touch with her masculine and even violent side, allowing her to fit in with her chosen faction, while it simultaneously allows her to tap into aspects of her personality that she has previously concealed. Tris becomes aware of this shift in her personality during the attack on Abnegation when she encounters Peter, who has sided with the Erudite. As he taunts her, she responds that "People tend to overestimate [her] character ... They think because [she is] small, or a girl, or a Stiff, [she] can't possibly be cruel. But they're wrong" and she shoots him in the arm (*Divergent* 463). Tris is smart enough to know how others perceive her, Jeanine Matthews notices, as Tris refers to herself differently "depending on what is convenient" (*Insurgent* 343). Similar to Katniss, Tris expresses her gender identity differently depending on the situation she finds herself in. It is this contrast between the way Tris views herself and how she is viewed by the world around her, Cothran and Prickett argue, that illustrates how she is pushed "to embrace an organic, intrinsic sense of identity instead of the culturally constructed view of the feminine" (27). If being Dauntless means displaying a violent form of masculinity, Abnegation's selflessness and need to take care of others (the same need that both Tally and Katniss possess as well) displays femininity (Fritz 27). Over the course of the trilogy, Tris struggles between these two aspects of her personality before she finds that bravery and selflessness frequently go hand in hand. In her rebellion against the factions and her society's status quo, Tris – again, similar to Katniss – employs both masculine and feminine characteristics, creating the 'organic, intrinsic sense of identity' that Cothran and Prickett pointed out. With regard to Niva Piran's dimensions of embodiment, as they are explained in chapter one, Tris starts out with a negative view of herself as she experiences a disruption in the connection with her body and her desires (both sexual and non-sexual) as well as being conditioned to prioritise others over herself (46-50). Although she never considered herself to be pretty or finds her own body particularly feminine – "I still look like a little girl" – Tris does fully acknowledge and play into her femininity, even despite her frequently masculine surroundings (*Divergent* 2). When her fellow initiate and best friend Christina wants to talk about a romantic moment between

her and her love interest Will, for instance, she tells Tris to “be a girl for a few seconds” (369). Tris immediately responds that she is “always a girl,” showing that her masculine behaviour does not mean that she is no longer a female (369). Tris’s gender thus acts as a biased background identity, as Ridgeway argues, and affects the social relations between herself and those around her as they approach Tris on the basis of her (perceived) female gender (152). As the trilogy progresses, Tris acknowledges that she will never be able to fit in with any of the factions, and this realisation has a liberating effect on her anxiety about finding her identity. This is noticeable in the way she views herself as well: “I don’t belong to Abnegation, or Dauntless, or even the divergent ... I belong to the people I love, and they belong to me – they, and the love and loyalty I give them, form my identity far more than any word or group ever could” (*Allegiant* 455).

As stated above, Tris never found her appearance particularly pretty or feminine and was raised to be wary of physical contact, especially with regard to romantic or sexual intimacy. Niva Piran argues that women in patriarchal systems learn to be in competition with one another by having to adhere to gendered expectations in the most feminine way possible, which leads to Tris’s worries about not being feminine enough for her love interest (57). Her worries and wariness for physical contact shows in the most significant relationship that Tris has, besides the relationship with her family, with the Dauntless member Four, or Tobias. As Tobias is her instructor during her initiation into the Dauntless faction, their relationship begins with an atmosphere of forbidden desire where Tris reluctantly feels attracted to him. Before the relationship between Tris and Tobias begins to blossom, however, there is another initiate, a sensitive boy and friend of Tris named Al, who has also developed feelings for her. Tris does not return his affections and remarks that she “could not be attracted to anyone that fragile” (*Divergent* 115). As Al makes a move on her, Tris gently pushes him away and wonders if she should tell him that she has “trained [herself] to pull away from all gestures of affection” (192). After her rejection, Al teams up with Peter and another initiate – who have grown jealous of Tris’s excellence during the initiation process – and they try to throw her over a chasm that runs through the heart of the Dauntless headquarters. Tobias saves Tris just in time and later explains to her that Al “wanted [her] to be the small, quiet girl from Abnegation ... He hurt [her] because [her] strength made him feel weak” (285). Al felt that his masculinity was threatened by a small girl since she was doing better during the initiation tests than he was. These interactions between Tris and Al both reinstate and subvert gender expectations. These expectations are reinforced by Tris’s rejection of Al because of his sensitivity, a character trait that is usually not considered masculine, and her choice of the

hyper-masculine Tobias in his stead. On the other hand, Al turns on Tris when he realises that she is not the submissive female he had hoped she would be. Her rejection of his affections further establishes her strength and independence from him as a male, which makes her a threat rather than an object of desire.

Tris does not understand why she is suddenly desired by those of the opposite sex when that has never occurred before. Tobias tells Tris that although she is not pretty – which he readily admits, a rarity in young adult fiction – he likes her because she is smart and brave. Tris too admits to liking Tobias despite his flaws, since although he “is not sweet or gentle or particularly kind ... he is smart and brave, and even though he [saved her from Al and Peter], he treated [her] like [she] was strong.” (289). With this blossoming relationship comes Tris’s anxiety to live up to societal expectations of how she, as a female, is supposed to “perform social roles” and behave sexually (Sabik 144). Her fear of intimacy in relationships is also illustrated in the final simulation of her Dauntless initiation, in which she has to face her biggest fears while her reaction to them is monitored. One of these fears demonstrates a possible situation with Tobias. As simulation-Tobias begins to slowly undress her, Tris realises that she is afraid of being with him in such an intimate way. She manages to push her anxieties aside and successfully finishes the simulation by refusing to engage in sexual intercourse, but she feels embarrassed, remarking how she “must be the only initiate with this fear” (394). Similar to how she learns to face her fear of intimacy in the simulation, she faces this anxiety in reality as her relationship with Tobias eventually becomes sexual.

As stated in the summary of the novels, the reader is given the perspectives of both Tris and Tobias in the final novel of the trilogy, *Allegiant*. This gives a unique insight into what the love interest thinks and feels about the protagonist that is not usually found in other young adult fiction. The relationship between Tris and Tobias has never been without its issues – both have lied to and betrayed each other on multiple occasions – but nevertheless, the two of them resolve their arguments and ultimately grow stronger together. Tensions rise between Tris and Tobias, however, after the latter finds out that he is, in fact, not divergent, but Genetically Damaged. He loses grip of his identity and joins a rebel group of GD’s who wish to attack the Bureau but fail in doing so. Tris, not willing to believe that Tobias is damaged as she maintains he is still the person she fell in love with, is on the verge of ending their relationship after one of their friends is rendered brain-dead by the failed attack. This marks the first time that Tobias feels vulnerable in the presence of his girlfriend. He says:

To me, Tris has always seemed magnetic in a way ... that she was not aware of. I have never feared or hated her for it ... but then, I

have always been in a position of strength myself, not threatened by her. Now that I have lost that position, I can feel the tug toward resentment (*Allegiant* 332).

Similar to Al's reaction to Tris's rejection of his affections in *Divergent*, Tobias's masculinity and his socially superior position within their relationship is jeopardised through his mistakes. At this moment in the trilogy, Tris feels secure with the person she is, having fully established her own identity and her sense of self-worth. She forgives Tobias and chooses to stay with him as, she says, he is "still the only person sharp enough to sharpen someone like [herself]" (372). Here, Tris takes complete control over their relationship, a role that is stereotypically reserved for the male.

In her essay on sexual awakening in young adult dystopians, Sara Day argues that "in overcoming her discomfort with desire ... Tris also achieves a degree of strength and control" (88). Unlike Tally in *Uglies*, who was only compelled to rebel against the established society because of her male love interests, Tris is not led or guided by her romantic feelings for Tobias. At the end of *Insurgent*, she actively lies and even betrays him to accomplish her personal goals, demonstrating that romance is only secondary to Tris's personal needs. Green-Barteet argues that this betrayal, the sacrifice of "her burgeoning relationship with Four marks the moment [Tris] ceases to be guided by others" (47). As her betrayal of Tobias was a fully conscious decision, thought out in advance and acted out in secret, Tris establishes her autonomy, thereby risking a romantic relationship that is so often portrayed as all-important for adolescent women in young adult fiction. Cothran and Prickett state that in the *Divergent* trilogy, similar to other young adult fiction like *The Hunger Games*, "women fight and protect men, who often appear more sensitive, fragile, and interested in love" (28). Tris indeed takes on the masculine role of a fighter, but otherwise remains feminine in the expression of her gender, thereby forming an androgynous gender identity. It is her perceived femininity – and thus, her perceived but false weakness – that seems to threaten both Al's and Tobias's masculinity. Both these men wish to fulfil their expected role of protector, but fail in doing so when it becomes clear that only Tris is capable of saving herself and even saving the men around her. In contrast to Al, Tobias is able to recognise and acknowledge Tris's strength, a recognition that leads to their successful relationship. As discussed in the previous two chapters, Mary Jeanette Moran argues that "feminist ethics recognizes that human beings develop a sense of self through their relationships with others" (130). With this in mind, Tris finds empowerment through her relationship with Tobias and the consequent exploration of her sexuality. By rejecting gendered expectations that prioritize romantic relationships for

young women as well as overcoming internalized trepidations about physical intimacy in her relationship with Tobias, Tris is able to reject larger societal expectations as well.

At first glance, the society in which Tris grew up seems peaceful, stable, and allows its population the freedom to choose their own path in life. The Choosing Ceremony is the most important event in a person's life and the ceremony is the same for both boys and girls. Gender does not appear to influence Tris's life much before she chooses to leave her parents' faction. Green-Barteet argues that "gendered stereotypes seemingly matter little" in the factions, especially in Abnegation (43). The grey and formless clothes of the Abnegation, the same for both men and women, do not allow young girls to put emphasis on their gender in manners that teenage girls typically do with the help of clothing and make-up. The nature of the Abnegation faction, where everyone is expected to put others before themselves, does in principle not allow for gender inequalities. When Tris transfers to Dauntless, however, she notices that the genders are treated differently. Even though during training the fights are between mixed genders, the boys are ranked as physically more capable than the girls. One of Tris's friends, the Dauntless-born Lynn, explains to Tris that this is the reason she shaved off her hair during the initiation process: "Dauntless guys don't see Dauntless girls as a threat during initiation ... if I don't look so much like a girl, maybe they won't look at me that way" (*Insurgent* 173). Similar to how male initiates like Al and Peter looked down upon Tris's femininity, Lynn experiences gender discrimination when her mental, but mostly her physical capabilities as a Dauntless are underestimated. Many of the Dauntless females quip about gender stereotypes and expectations in their faction. Another friend of Tris, Marlene, ponders if it would be easier to fight in a dress, since it would give her legs more freedom and "who really cares if you flash people your underwear, as long as you're kicking the crap out of them?" (168). This mere distinction between the genders, Barbara Risman argues, creates inequality within the social system ("Gender as a Social Structure" 430). Despite how the majority of gender role expectations in the *Divergent* trilogy are similar to those in contemporary Western society – as the novels are set in Chicago – they are mocked and ridiculed by the female characters who, just like the men, fight in the war between the factions that struggle for power.

As discussed in the previous chapters, McCormick et al. define power as "the extent to which an individual (or group) is able to provide resources to, or withhold resources from, others" (222). The factions provide their people with homes, food, education, and safety, elements belonging to both the physical and social systems of power that McCormick et al. describe (222). The only exception to this are the factionless, who either rejected or were

rejected by the faction system and now live outside society's borders, gaining none of the benefits that the factions distribute. The Choosing Ceremony gives teenagers a very limited choice between the five factions, but living factionless is never presented as an option. Rather, it is presented as an exile from what is believed to be most important in their society: community and conformity. This illusion of choice, Amy Montz argues in her essay on competitive girlhood in young adult dystopians, is a common restriction for protagonists in the genre. These limited choices help distract the protagonist from the fact that "in reality, there is no choice at all" (109). Tris is made to believe that she has a choice between the five factions, which in reality are an inadequate and restricting way of making people complacent. The faction system offers those in charge a form of control, as the people who do not adhere to these narrow societal expectations are threatened to be exiled from society to live in poverty. Tris has been taught that "without a faction, we have no purpose and no reason to live," and like Tally and Katniss, this makes her reluctant at first to break away from society's expectations (*Divergent* 20).

The way that this society operates has been the same for generations, "since the beginning of the great peace, when the factions were formed. [Tris thinks] the system persists because we're afraid of what might happen if it didn't: war" (*Divergent* 33). War is precisely what happens, though it is a result of the way the factions are organised, which creates inequalities between the different factions. It was not caused by the failure of the population to commit to the system, which demonstrates how the faction system was fundamentally flawed. As Tris infiltrates the Erudite headquarters at the end of *Insurgent*, she remarks that it does not matter that the "factions are destroyed," marking how she has moved away from her desire for conformity (*Insurgent* 472). Though at first Tris wishes to belong to a faction, feeling that she did not fit in with the Abnegation, she realises that people cannot be labelled or belong to one single category. No one, however, is allowed to "defy the norms of their factions" and this is why being divergent is considered dangerous (*Divergent* 9). Tris's mind, as any divergent's mind, is wired differently from those who are not divergent, which makes her less pliable so that those in power cannot force her to act in a certain prescribed manner. Similar to Tris's androgynous gender expression, her divergence implies that certain societal expectations – whether that is the expectation to conform to the factions or to stereotypical gender norms – are limiting and constraining. Tris is pushed to the outskirts of society, both literally and figuratively, as she no longer belongs to one single faction because of her divergence. Her divergence, however, makes her a Genetically Pure human being, suggesting that her reluctance to conform to society's norms is something to strive for.

From a feminist and gender studies standpoint, the *Divergent* trilogy demonstrates a similar social gender structure to that of contemporary Western (and in particular, American) society, but the manner in which Tris and other female characters challenge these expectations serves as a critique of this social structure. As the aim of this thesis is to research how gender affects the construction of the identity of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction, this chapter analysed the construction of Tris's gender identity as a consequence of internal as well as external influences such as her self-image, her relationships, and societal power structures. At the start of the trilogy, Tris is characterised by her desire to adhere to society's structure. Her divergence, almost symbolic for her hybrid identity as well as her androgynous gender identity, does not allow her to fulfil this desire. The inconclusive aptitude test demonstrates how society cannot aid her in forming her identity, but that the choice lies with Tris herself. She was raised in Abnegation, which on the surface seems gender-neutral, but employs stereotypically feminine values of care and nurture. Through her transfer to Dauntless, she unlocks a more masculine side of her identity and combines it with her femininity, which she sees as an innate part of herself – "I'm always a girl" (*Divergent* 369). The *Divergent* trilogy neither reinforces nor inverts gender roles, unless it is to demonstrate the arbitrariness of such social expectations. Femininity, Tris shows, does not have to mean weakness, but possesses a great amount of strength in itself. This is illustrated most clearly when she gives her life for her brother Caleb in a selfless act out of love, an action that ultimately leads to the reform of the entire city as well as the government of the United States. Her strength, typically associated with masculinity rather than femininity, marks Tris as a threat to the male characters in the trilogy. Her embarrassment over intimacy, however, sets her apart specifically as a female. Sara Day argues that "literary representations of adolescent womanhood ... restrict young women's explorations of their own physical agency and desire" (75). The *Divergent* trilogy counters this phenomenon as Tris steadily grows more comfortable with her own desires and her female sexuality. Through her relationship with Tobias, Tris achieves a greater degree of agency. It is important to note, however, that their relationship is secondary to Tris's personal goals and that she rebels against the established society and its expectations because of her own volition and not through Tobias's guidance. It is for her non-conformity to the established social stipulations – of adhering to gender roles as well as the faction system – that Tris is pushed to the boundaries of her community, which puts her in a position where she is allowed and able to form her own identity beyond the borders of these expectations.

5. *Shatter Me* by Tahereh Mafi

The final young adult dystopian trilogy that this thesis analyses is *Shatter Me* by the Iranian-American writer Tahereh Mafi. The trilogy consists of the novels *Shatter Me*, *Unravel Me*, and *Ignite Me*, which were published by HarperCollins in 2011, 2013, and 2014 respectively. In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly* in April 2017, Mafi announced that she will be continuing the trilogy and expand it into a six-novel series. The fourth novel, *Restore Me*, was consequently released in March 2018. Mafi's reasoning behind the expansion of the series was that "at the end of *Ignite Me*, Juliette's story had only just begun" and Mafi "was suddenly anxious to bring the world back to life" (Serrao). Since the expansion of the series is as of yet incomplete, this thesis will solely focus on the original trilogy. The reception of this trilogy was mixed, with critics finding flaws in Mafi's writing style and plot, saying that the series "strain[s] after lyricism" and that "the ending [of the first novel] falls flat," but that the novels are nonetheless an appealing and action-packed read (Publisher's Weekly; Kirkus Review). In contrast to the other trilogies analysed in this thesis – and besides one section in the essay "Docile Bodies, Dangerous Bodies" by Sara Day – there has been no previous academic research on the *Shatter Me* trilogy. The analysis of these novels will therefore rely primarily on a close reading of the texts. After giving a short summary of the novels, this chapter will thus address the internal construction of the gender identity of Juliette Ferrars, *Shatter Me*'s protagonist, by examining how gender affects the view she has of herself both physically and mentally. Then, the effect of gender on Juliette's relationships with Adam and Warner is analysed, followed by an analysis of how social power structures instruct Juliette to behave and her response to this. Finally, this chapter concludes that the *Shatter Me* trilogy demonstrates that the adolescent female body is considered dangerous when it does not adhere to society's values of what females should embody, but that through a growing connection with her body, emotions, and desires, Juliette is able to develop herself into an empowered young woman.

The first novel of the trilogy begins as Juliette Ferrars, a seventeen-year-old girl with the power to kill a person with a mere touch of her skin, has been in isolation in an insane asylum for nearly a year after she accidentally killed a toddler. After months of solitude, she has been notified of the arrival of a cellmate: a boy named Adam. He seems familiar to Juliette, but before she grows to trust him, he reveals himself as a soldier of the Reestablishment and takes Juliette to see the commander of Sector 45 – the location in North America where the trilogy is set. The nineteen-year-old commander, Warner, has been interested in Juliette and her ability for some time and wishes to recruit her for his army.

Juliette is given no choice and is taken to the military base of Sector 45, where Warner pressures her to become part of his schemes. Juliette and Adam, who is assigned as her new bodyguard, find that they used to be schoolmates and that they have been in love with each other for years. Adam is inexplicably immune to Juliette's lethal touch, which allows their relationship to grow physical. They plan to escape the military base together and flee from Warner, who has also fallen in love with Juliette. During their escape, however, Juliette finds that Warner too is immune to her touch. After losing their pursuers, Adam brings Juliette to the house he shares with his little brother James, but they are followed there by Adam's friend and fellow soldier Kenji. He turns out to be a rebel spy and leads Juliette, Adam, and James to Omega Point, where Juliette learns that she is not the only one with special powers.

Omega Point is a safe haven for people who, like Juliette, have special powers. In the second novel, *Castle*, the leader of Omega Point who possesses telekinetic abilities, wants for Juliette to harness her ability and help them overthrow the Reestablishment. As Juliette, Adam, and James are settling in, the researchers at Omega Point examine Adam and his immunity to Juliette. They find that he too possesses an ability that allows him to nullify the effect of another person's special ability such as Juliette's touch. As Juliette and Adam grow closer, however, his ability to touch her diminishes and Juliette decides to end their relationship because she does not want to hurt him. Simultaneously, she develops a friendship with Kenji – who plays a prominent role within Omega Point and can also turn invisible –, as he teaches her to gain control over her powers. Besides her lethal touch, Juliette possesses an inhuman strength that allows her to pulverize bricks and metal with her bare hands and create earthquakes by hitting the ground. This becomes important when Omega Point learns that one of the five Supreme Commanders of the Reestablishment, Warner's father Anderson, has suddenly arrived in Sector 45. They plan an attack on Anderson's forces, who have taken a number of hostages from Omega Point, and Juliette happens to get trapped between Warner and his father. With the help of Kenji and Adam, Juliette escapes and Warner is taken hostage in return. Castle assigns Juliette to learn as much from Warner as she can about future plans of the Reestablishment, and she – always having found Warner attractive – begins to sympathise with him. Warner too learns that he possesses a special ability – he can feel emotions and also take another person's power and redirect it – and promises to stand by Omega Point's side in their next attack on his father, whom he despises. Naturally, he leaves the rebel base as soon as he can and the rebels are left to fight the Supreme Commander on their own. Juliette faces Anderson once more and this time he shoots her in the chest. Warner rushes to her aid and saves her from the brink of death.

In the final novel, *Ignite Me*, Warner has taken Juliette back to the military base of Sector 45, where she recovers from her near-death experience and gets to know Warner even better. She asks him to let her return to Omega Point, but he tells her that the rebel base has been bombed and that there were likely no survivors. They both return to the site of the base and are met by Kenji. He takes Juliette back to Adam's house, where the nine remaining rebels have taken refuge. Juliette urges them to fight back, despite their small numbers, as she believes that with Warner's help – who wants nothing more than to kill his own father – they can overthrow the Reestablishment. As anticipated, the rebels are hesitant to work with Warner (a mutual feeling) but they eventually agree, with the exception of Adam. In the previous novel, Adam found out that Anderson is not only Warner's father, but also his own abusive dad and that he and Warner are thus half-brothers. He also has not taken the separation between himself and Juliette well and accuses her of being a traitor. Adam and James stay behind as the rest of them are relocated to Warner's personal training facility where they make further plans to fight the government. Kenji, unwilling to let Adam and James die of starvation, eventually gets them to join Juliette and Warner's new team of rebels and Warner is finally told about his relation to Adam and James. Meanwhile, Juliette manages to rally the soldiers of Sector 45, who are severely maltreated by the Reestablishment, and calls for an attack on Anderson and his armies. Similar to the previous novel, Juliette chooses to face Anderson on her own. Having mastered her abilities, however, she easily overpowers him and shoots him in the head. She declares herself the new leader of Sector 45 as well as the rest of the country, and the novel ends after the battle and Juliette's reunion with her new boyfriend Warner.

Throughout the trilogy, both Juliette's perceived and internal identity develop substantially. At the beginning of the first novel, she has internalised society's distrust of her body and, as Sara Day argues, she "embodies physical insecurity and self-hatred because of the ... way her body deviates from the norm" (83). Though her outward appearance, as described by Adam and Warner, is uncommonly attractive, it is the contrast between her adolescent female body and her lethal touch that both repulses and terrifies others. Her own body horrifies Juliette to such an extent that she has not looked in a mirror for years because she is "afraid of what [she will] see," as if her outward appearance displays the monster she feels she is inside (*Shatter Me* 70). Juliette is extremely vulnerable in her sense of self, the ideas that others impose on her, and her emotional state. In *Shatter Me*, specifically, Juliette can frequently be found crying when she is either scared or, in many interactions between herself and Adam, when she feels loved for the first time. According to McCormick et al.,

emotion stereotypes – crying, for instance, is associated with female weakness – maintain and perpetuate gender power relations as women are considered to be more emotional, and therefore more irrational, than men (213). In the first novel, Juliette is primarily lead by Adam and Warner in her actions and has little to no agency of her own. In the second novel, though making some progress in taking control over her own decisions, she remains “caught up in [her] own little world,” as Kenji says (*Unravel Me* 146). Kenji, who has quickly become Juliette’s best friend, calls her out on her behaviour and ushers her to get past “the sad little girl you keep clinging to – and stand up for yourself. Stop crying. Stop sitting in the dark counting out all your individual feelings about how sad and lonely you are. Wake up” (146-147). Although Juliette’s emotional state can be and is frequently associated with female passivity by the other characters, the novels also show how her emotions can give her strength. On multiple occasions, Juliette accesses her inhuman strength when she or someone she cares about is in a hazardous situation. During the tests that Castle runs on Adam to find his ability, for instance, Juliette walks in on the experiment and sees that Adam is – willingly, although she is not aware of this – undergoing electroshock therapy. Juliette becomes enraged, a violent emotion typically associated with masculinity, and unknowingly creates an earthquake by releasing her anger in punching the ground, nearly collapsing the underground base of Omega Point in the process. Although conflicted at first about her powers and lethality, Juliette eventually acknowledges that her capacity for harming others is inherent and she starts to accept this. Whereas she was adamant that she did not want to hurt anyone in the beginning of the trilogy, she finds that in moments like these she was willing to hurt those who had done her, or someone she cares about, wrong. Until she learns to maintain full control over her powers at the end of *Ignite Me*, Juliette can only employ her inhuman strength when she taps into the masculine emotion of rage, which would symbolise male strength rather than female weakness. On the other hand, she only becomes enraged when she feels that one of her loved ones is in danger. Similar to Tally, Katniss, and Tris, Juliette makes use of her qualities as a nurturer, which Sonya Fritz argues reiterates a “conventional figuration of femininity and girlhood” (27). Ironically, it is Juliette’s conventional femininity as a nurturer that branded her as dangerous, since she was incarcerated for trying to help a toddler, who then died because of her touch.

According to Niva Piran’s dimensions of embodiment discussed in chapter one, Juliette, at least in the first novel, expresses an extreme disruption in her connection with her body. She does eventually learn to connect with her body, which is illustrated later on in the trilogy when she is taught to control and, more importantly, to accept her special abilities. This

allows her to prevent her body and the power it contains from lashing out unexpectedly, thereby subverting the prejudices that society has against her while simultaneously undermining the internalised aspects of these prejudices that impeded the formation of her sense of self. As Sara Day argues, Juliette “overcomes doubts about her body’s failure to conform to social ideals in order to assert a more confident resistance to the conditions that have oppressed her” and that Juliette’s embrace “of her body results in a more general acceptance of her power” (84). It is through acceptance of her body and her abilities that Juliette gains the confidence she needs to not only stand up to society’s general intolerance towards her and others like her, but also to truly and literally fight back against the leaders of society. The first two times that Juliette faces Anderson, for example, she is only able to overpower him for a short amount of time before she has to be saved by her male friends. The final time Juliette encounters Anderson, she has completely accepted her body and its abilities and easily subdues her opponent while saving one of her male friends in return. Juliette gradually learns to take control over other aspects of her life too, especially regarding her romantic desires – which are explained in more detail below – and in her possession and assertion of agency. Society’s distrust of her body thus leads to Juliette’s initial internalisation of the same distrust and discomfort. This internalisation prevented her from forming an individually supported view of her body and her abilities, which in turn restricted Juliette’s construction of a genuine (gender) identity. She recalls how for “17 years [she] tried to force [her]self into a mold that [she] hoped would make other people feel comfortable, safe, unthreatened,” but it was her “own unwillingness to recognize [her]self as a human being” that kept her trapped in a state of self-hatred and self-pity (*Unravel Me* 451; *Ignite Me* 245). It is when she starts to view her body as desirable – and thus as more human – with the help of Adam and Warner as well as by learning how to control her abilities that Juliette finds the confidence in her body that allows her to assert her stereotypically masculine emotions and power and utilise it in her own feminine way.

After being ostracized by those around her for her entire life – her own parents repeatedly told her she was a monster until she started believing it – the notion of being desired, especially in a romantic sense, has been unconceivable to Juliette. As discussed in the previous chapters, Mary Jeanette Moran argues that “feminist ethics recognizes that human beings develop a sense of self through their relationships with others” (130). In Juliette’s case, the transition she undergoes from a scared and dependent young girl to a self-reliant and confident young woman is the result of first her relationship with Adam and later on with Warner. Sara Day argues as well that Juliette’s “progression from fearful and isolated to

confident and rebellious occurs almost entirely as a result of her being reunited with Adam” (83). When Juliette first meets Adam as her new cellmate in the asylum, she is mortified when he turns out to be a boy. Since she has not been able to touch anyone since she was a child, she is fearful of the heteronormative expectations to “perform social roles” that are placed upon young girls when they are in the presence of someone of the opposite sex (Sabik 144). Juliette is certain that the people in charge have chosen a boy as her cellmate on purpose “to torture [her], to torment [her], to keep [her] from sleeping through the night ever again” (*Shatter Me* 3). To her, Adam, and the romantic or even sexual ideals he embodies, is attractive yet terrifying and as they get to know each other she is torn between her desperation for his touch and her fear for what she could do to him. Young women’s “sexual awakening,” Sara Day states, “has been imbued with a discomfort with desire” (84). Indeed, Juliette does not feel comfortable around Adam, or anyone of the opposite sex, and she even feels an “inexplicable humiliation” when she sees him without a shirt for the first time (*Shatter Me* 24). The idea that young women should stay pure and untouched is taken to the extreme in Juliette’s situation, but in contrast with the innocence that this notion typically portrays, Juliette herself embodies lethality. The realisation that Adam is the only person who can touch her leads to him and Juliette forging a strong bond which develops into a romantic relationship. When in the second novel it becomes clear that Adam is not truly immune to her touch, Juliette instantly wishes to break off their relationship despite Adam’s pleas for her to stay with him. Though they have known each other for years but had never spoken before Adam stepped in Juliette’s cell, he assures her that he has always loved her and he is consequently the one who struggles most with their breakup. Throughout their relationship and in particular in this conflict, the physical aspect of their romance is given precedence over the emotional or mental facets, indicating how for Juliette this relationship may have been one of convenience rather than of true romantic love. After their breakup, she has “come to realize that being away from him has forced [her] to rely on [her]self” (*Unravel Me* 385). During their time apart, Juliette has learned more about her abilities and, as argued above, she develops a sense of control over her body and her life. In the final instalment of the trilogy, Adam and Juliette grow even further apart. Adam is still upset over their separation and accuses Juliette of not being the same person that he fell in love with. To him, she stopped being the quiet, meek girl that he remembers from school ever since she grew into an indestructible fighter. During their time at Warner’s training facility, Adam grows closer with Alia, a smart but quiet girl from Omega Point. Similar to the complex friendship between Tris and Al in *Divergent*, as examined in the previous chapter, the female in the relationship – now

Juliette – becomes a threat to the male’s masculinity by not embodying typical feminine passivity which leads to the male’s hostile feelings towards her. When learning to fight, Juliette – like Tris – rejects the “socially determined gender roles” that instruct her on how to act feminine, and this creates a rift between her and the masculine Adam (Sabik 144). Eventually, the hostility between Adam and Juliette subsides, but they never regain the closeness they had before.

Despite her relationship with Adam, Juliette has always found Warner, the main antagonist of the series, attractive and he too is able to touch her without consequences. Though Juliette is at first repelled by his despicable personality, Warner can only foresee a future with Juliette by his side and tries to pressure her into feeling the same way. While she does not return his affections at first, Juliette does not hesitate to exploit his attraction towards her for her own gain on multiple occasions. There is one notable scene in *Shatter Me* where Juliette passionately kisses Warner – while still in love with Adam – to gain access to the gun in his jacket before she shoots him and makes her escape. In doing so, Sara Day argues, “Juliette rejects her previous docility and capitalizes on her sexual attraction as a means of gaining power” (84). In this instance, Juliette uses her feminine sexuality rather than the lethal power of her touch to fight back. By being unable to use her deadly powers and thus having to rely on her attractiveness and feminine appearance, Juliette subverts the prejudices that society has against her. Instead of acting like the monster she was labelled as, she demonstrates her feminine sexuality and even uses it as a weapon, challenging society’s expectations for the adolescent female body. The fact that Warner is immune to her touch would make him, like Adam, another convenient subject for Juliette’s affections. Her relationship with Warner, however, is a mirrored image of her romance with Adam. While Adam and Juliette had known each other for years but were still practically strangers, Juliette never made the effort of getting to know him. When Warner, on the other hand, is held hostage at Omega Point, Juliette is set on learning about his past. Contrary to her romance with Adam, which was primarily based on physicality, her relationship with Warner is based upon a mutual understanding and appreciation besides their physical attraction. It is only when Juliette learns to fully control her powers – which allows her to touch anyone – that she is willing to pursue her affections for Warner, unlike how her relationship with Adam began. In her relationship with Adam, Juliette “tiptoed around his feelings, pretending to be a nice little girl for him,” still acting as the passive and docile girl he met in school (*Ignite Me* 57). With Warner, on the other hand, she is pushed to her limits, both physically and mentally, to be the strongest she could possibly be. Both these relationships are not without their flaws, but

Juliette's "desire for Adam [and later on Warner] allows her to revise her view of her own body" (Day 83). Since both of the boys find her attractive, Juliette is lead to see her body and consequently her femininity in a more positive light, which allows her to develop her agency and rebel against the society that oppresses her.

The dystopian society in the *Shatter Me* trilogy is the result of a new regime after the earth's natural weather patterns were impaired due to human maltreatment of the ecosystem. Juliette, who was only ten years old at the time of the natural disasters, recalls the "pissed-off skies and the sequence of sunsets collapsing beneath the moon ... civilization has been reduced to nothing but a series of compounds stretched out over what's left of our ravaged land" (*Unravel Me* 3). The rapid climate change caused crops to fail and animals to die, which in turn lead to food shortages and a considerable part of the population to die of starvation. The Reestablishment, the new regime, began as an initiative to aid the dying population. It soon became clear, however, that the Reestablishment was "not interested in maintaining a facade of kindness," but that they wanted power and "to make sure that they are as comfortable as possible as [humanity] dig[s its] own grave" (*Ignite Me* 69). As discussed in the previous chapters, McCormick et al. define power as "the extent to which an individual (or group) is able to provide resources to, or withhold resources from, others" (222). The Reestablishment controls its population by denying its citizens nutritious food and forcing them to work in their factories for meagre salaries, thereby withholding resources from both physical and social systems of oppression (222). Those who defy the regime by refusing to have "every movement ... tracked and monitored" are considered a threat, which the Reestablishment "has no qualms about removing" (*Unravel Me* 123). Before the new regime came into power, however, the society in which Juliette grew up was comparable – if not the same – to contemporary Western, and in particular, American society. The norms and values of this society were maintained by the new government. Unlike the protagonists of the other trilogies in this thesis, who grew up in different societies altogether, Juliette has internalised societal expectations which are similar to those that adolescent girls and women encounter in current Western society. The adolescent woman in both contemporary Western society as well as in literature, Sara Day argues, "is expected to conform to specific physical requirements that ultimately position her as a threat that may be monitored, controlled, or exploited by the social system in which she lives" (77). This means that expectations are set for a woman's appearance, but that these expectations in practice are interpreted as dangerous, especially with regard to a woman's expression – or lack thereof – of femininity and sexuality.

Ever since her childhood, Juliette has been cast off by her parents and the rest of society because she posed, in the literal sense, a threat to others by not adhering to the physical requirements that are imposed upon young girls. Her isolation from society in the beginning of the first novel and the subsequent exploitation of her powers by Warner underlines how deviating from social norms suppresses a woman's agency. One way in which Warner kept his control over Juliette was by dictating what she was or was not allowed to wear. He had a full wardrobe prepared for her and insisted that she would wear the dresses he had chosen for her rather than the simple tunic and trousers that she was used to wearing. In their essay "Death and the Real Girl" (2016), Goldenberg and Morris argue that "consistent with the portrayal of women as temptresses, women's bodies – the source of temptation – are subject to regulations restricting which features can be exposed" (30). At the military base in Sector 45, Juliette is surrounded by young soldiers who, as Warner explains to her, have not been in the presence of a woman for months. While Juliette's exposed feminine body might serve as a temptation for the soldiers, they are all aware of her ability to kill with her touch. By dictating what Juliette could wear, Warner accentuates her feminine features with tight dresses that expose her arms and legs, thus simultaneously exposing her lethality. In contrast, Juliette is given a skin-tight outfit by those at Omega Point which is specially designed to cover most of her skin, leaving only her face exposed. This outfit, though it shields others from Juliette's body, again accentuates her feminine shape. Both Warner's dresses and the rebel outfit serve as a reminder of Juliette's unconventional femininity, her power, and the threat she poses to the rest of society. Her appearance and femininity, much like Katniss's in *The Hunger Games*, has been imposed upon her by those who maintain a certain degree of power over her. It is at the end of *Unravel Me*, when she calls herself "a deviation of human nature" who is "done being nice ... done being nervous," that she leaves her gloves behind, thereby baring the danger that her body possesses to the world (460-461). At this point in the trilogy, she is not yet able to fully control her powers. By refusing to cover herself up or to isolate herself from society, she highlights the conception of her body as a weapon, but one that is no longer controlled or exploited by those in power or the power structures that are in place in her society.

Juliette's internalisation of society's expectations for the female body as well as her inherent disability to adhere to them have caused her to fail in developing a sense of self and a solid personal gender identity. In her essay on social and cultural influences on personality and identity, Natalie Sabik argues that "women experience greater depressive, anxious, and somatic symptoms" compared to men since "exposure to sexism is a stressor unique to

women” (154). Since the values that society places on women rather than on men are not or hardly ever applicable to Juliette – such as docility and harmlessness – she spends most of her time in the subdued and isolated sphere of her own fear and self-hatred. It is her fear of herself and her powers that disrupts the initial formation of identity, as she is too eager to please and to adhere to the norms that society wishes to apply to her. In the beginning of the trilogy, Juliette acts submissive in all of her interactions with other characters, which is a result of her performance of the stereotype that dictates that women are “more reactive and emotionally expressive” than men (Ridgeway 149). This performance or act of gender is in itself a perpetuation of such stereotypes, as the mere distinction between genders creates inequalities (152; Risman “Gender as a Social Structure 430). Though Juliette gradually changes as a result of her relationship with Adam, as examined above, it is not until she has been shot in the chest and nearly dies that she is willing to let go of her own fear. She feels ‘stronger’ and ‘angrier’ – again, a stereotypically masculine emotion – and is willing to take control. Unlike many protagonists in young adult dystopians, Juliette does not only wish to have agency within her own life, but after taking down Anderson and the Reestablishment, she appoints herself as the new leader of North America. In doing so, she effectively complies to the view that society had of her as a dangerous young woman, while simultaneously presenting herself as someone who could lead the country to prosperity, signifying a form of power in the danger she symbolises. She says that she has “always known, deep down, who should be leading this resistance ... It should be me” (*Ignite Me* 35). Despite the fact that Juliette is only seventeen and has been isolated from society for three years without any knowledge of the current state of affairs, nor that she has ever proven to possess any leadership qualities, her power and indestructible body are enough to convince the remaining rebels and Warner’s soldiers to join her. Her deviance from society’s norms and expectations thus eventually leads to Juliette’s ability to assert her power and agency on a larger scale.

As the aim of this thesis is to research how gender affects the construction of the identity of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction, this chapter analysed the construction of Juliette’s gender identity as a consequence of internal as well as external influences such as her self-image, her relationships, and societal power structures. From a feminist and gender studies standpoint, the *Shatter Me* trilogy demonstrates that ultimately, the adolescent female body is considered to be dangerous when it does not adhere to the norms and values of what females are expected to embody according to society. Similar to Tally and Tris, Juliette starts out by desperately wanting to fit in with society, but her circumstances do not allow for this. It is only when she makes the transition from a dependent

and fearful girl to an independent young woman by developing a certain degree of agency that she is no longer regarded as a threat, but as a person of power. This development into an empowered woman is brought about by Juliette's control of her abilities through a better connection with her body, her emotions, and her desires. Sara Day argues that sexist structures that are in place in dystopian novels such as the *Shatter Me* trilogy "may offer young women the possibility of empowerment through sexuality, but the representations that make such promises in fact perpetuate gendered expectations" (91). So, while at the surface it may seem that Juliette has gained her independent agency by asserting herself through her body and her sexuality, the fact that she has to use her female body to achieve this empowerment perpetuates the stereotypical assumption that female sexuality poses a threat. Additionally, while Juliette does learn to fight, she continues to rely on her inherent abilities rather than a more physical or violent – masculine – way of fighting with her fists or her guns, thereby maintaining the femininity that, for instance, Katniss and Tris seemed to have had to sacrifice in their transformations to rebel fighters. Juliette therefore remains a more feminine rebel, relying on her female body and the deep-rooted hazards it represents that are feared by society and those around her. She takes every aspect of her identity that might be considered a threat to her femininity and emphasises it in specifically feminine manners, subverting the expectations that had weighed her down in the past.

6. Conclusion

The introduction to this thesis briefly discussed the capacity for social, cultural, and political criticism that the young adult dystopian genre possesses. As Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz argue, dystopian young adult novels are known for their “critical energy or spirit,” which examines the utopian promises or ideals in a novel’s society, ideals which are frequently created to counter contemporary societal issues (8). A manner in which the young adult dystopian genre critiques cultural concerns is by revealing flaws in current society through emphasising those precise shortcomings in its narratives. One such societal issue that is addressed in many young adult dystopian novels is the issue of gender, and specifically gender inequality, with the genre’s typical ‘strong female protagonist’ presented as a role model for its adolescent readers. To analyse how these female protagonists are actually portrayed in young adult dystopian fiction, this thesis examined four young adult dystopian trilogies and their protagonists’ identities through a lens of feminist and gender theory, thereby focussing on how gender inequality is supported through and perpetuated by social and political structures.

Feminist and gender theory both argue that gender inequality is closely linked to power structures as well as other forms of oppression such as the oppression of certain classes or races (Henry 1718). Gender theory in particular examines what the relationship is between individuals and the social constructions which shape their gender and argues that gender is a social structure that operates on multiple levels. Stephanie Shields, for instance, argues that social factors and the subject’s environment play a considerable role in the creation and maintenance of that subject’s gender identity as well as gender inequality in society as whole (vi). This thesis consequently analysed the internal construction of identity as well as the effect of external relationships and societal power structures on the gender identity of the four protagonists. Therefore, this research addressed the question: how does gender affect the construction of identity and the social relations of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction?

Each of the previous chapters addressed the same structure in their analyses of the four dystopian trilogies. First, they focused on the internal construction of gender identity within the protagonists. In the analysis of the four trilogies, a number of similar themes or issues surfaced. The first of these is that, with the exception of Katniss, the female protagonists were unaware of their oppression at the hands of their government. Tally, Tris, and Juliette all feel a desperate desire to fit in with society, an ambition which has them internalising societal expectations which prevent them from forming a critical awareness of their position within

their community. Katniss, on the other hand, is conscious about the oppressions she faces and thus refuses to internalise society's norms and values, immediately setting her apart as a rebellious character. The internalisation that Tally, Tris, and Juliette fall prey to, and especially the internalisation of society's view of femininity and the female body, manifests itself in a disconnection with their bodies and their romantic or even sexual desires. Niva Piran, as discussed in chapter one, argues that such a disruption of embodiment confines women within socially acceptable gender roles, as they "are preoccupied with repairing inherent deficiencies in relation to an idealized objectified ideal" (50). Tally, Tris, and Juliette all repress elements of their gender identity in order to fit the mold that society has shaped for them, whereas Katniss, though she is eventually forced to play the part of the 'objectified ideal', embraces her identity from the beginning of her narrative. It is the masculine traits which these characters possess – such as fighting skills, a tendency to anger quickly, or a boyish body – that are in conflict with how they wish to or are forced to present themselves in a feminine manner. These masculine traits are typically the ones that set these protagonists apart as strong and independent women, but to equivalent strength in a woman with typically male attributes insinuates that to be a 'strong' female, she has to be less feminine. Despite their diverse identities, there is one feminine attribute that all four of these characters embody, namely the feminine impulse to nurture, which Sonya Fritz argues reiterates a "conventional figuration of femininity and girlhood" (27). In all of the analysed trilogies, it is the nurturing aspect of their identities that leads them to rebel against the forces that oppress them, signifying how a typically masculine political awareness can be brought about by a feminine characteristic such as caring for loved ones. Additionally, the fact that this trait returns in every young adult dystopian discussed in this thesis emphasises how young women (in literature as well as in real life) are expected to carry out the stereotypically female role of a nurturer.

This impulse to take care of those they love expresses itself mainly in the romantic relationships that are portrayed in these dystopian series. Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz argue that even when a young woman rebels against the oppressive systems in her society, she "cannot change every aspect of their societies' controlling frameworks, particularly as these relate to romance and sexuality" (4). As established in the previous chapters, the female protagonists develop their identity through or as a result of their relationships with their romantic partner or partners (Moran 130). All four of the discussed dystopian trilogies present their readers with at least one heteronormative relationship in their respective narratives, emphasising how in general this type of relationship is considered to be of importance to

adolescent girls. In her essay on sexual awakening in young adult fiction, Sara Day argues that “assumptions about heteronormativity also problematize [these novels’] messages of empowerment through sexual awakening” (90). These messages of empowerment are frequently based in the representation of the female body as well as female sexuality and desires. In the *Uglies* and *Shatter Me* trilogies especially, the female body is shown to contain and present a threat, not only to the males in their relationships, but also to society as a whole. This places the protagonists outside the boundaries of their societies’ control and the framework in which their bodies were supposed to fit. Katniss and Tris, on the other hand, subvert this social framework by training their bodies in typically masculine ways, thereby disrupting the femininity that their bodies were expected to express. With regard to female sexuality, the protagonists in these series were all new to the experience of desire in a romantic or even sexual way. This was in some instances – such as with Tris and Juliette and, to a lesser extent, Katniss – paired with a fear of intimacy. Overcoming this fear is portrayed as a stepping stone to overcoming political oppressions, suggesting that male-female heterosexual relationships are an integral part of the protagonists’ growing political awareness and agency, as well as their construction of identity as a whole. Though the novels that are discussed in this thesis do to a certain extent attempt to subvert the heterosexual expectations that are imposed upon adolescent girls, by having all their protagonists paired up with straight males and in a relationship by the end of their respective narratives, the novels inadvertently reiterate contemporary cultural practices and underline the assumed importance of romantic relationships in the lives of adolescent women.

The protagonists’ reluctance to adhere to the social or political oppressions of society exposes the structures behind not only their civilizations, but the gender roles in their respective cultures as well. While the society in *Uglies* did not maintain the same gender divisions and inequalities that are in place in current Western cultures, the societies in the other three trilogies did. They expressed how deviating from these social norms suppresses a woman’s ability to assert her agency. This is demonstrated, for instance, in *The Hunger Games*, when Katniss is forced to perform her femininity in order to increase her chances of survival, instead of relying on her more masculine hunting and fighting capabilities. Gender in these dystopian novels is frequently portrayed as a performance of societal expectation. In more than one of these series – notably in *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Shatter Me* – the performance of gender manifests or represents itself through the way the protagonists dress. Ill-fitting clothes, which both Tris and Juliette struggle with at a certain point in their narratives, symbolises their resistance to comply with society’s expectations of their

expression of gender as well as their inability to fit in with society in general. For Katniss, Tris, and Juliette especially, their gender identity adds to society's view of them as rebels. Both Katniss and Tris maintain androgynous gender identities, which highlights their refusal to submit to oppressive gender role expectations. Since they are portrayed as the morally correct and strong protagonists, their non-conformity is depicted as something to strive for. Juliette, on the other hand, subverts negative views about the female body and sexuality and demonstrates the strength in emotions, undermining the stereotype of the emotional woman as irrational and weak. Tally's gender identity, however, is not as clear or distinct as that of the previous three. Her narrative, though debasing some gender inequalities through creating a society where they no longer exist, mainly reiterates stereotypes about heterosexual versus homosocial relationships by placing Tally's entanglements with David and Zane above her friendship with Shay. As Niva Piran has argued, women in patriarchal systems learn to be in competition with one another, which is expressed in this competitive relationship between Tally and Shay (57). Eventually, all of the protagonists in these novels are either reluctant or find it challenging to conform to society's standards, which once again – as with the physical requirements for their female bodies – places them on the boundaries of their civilizations, leading to their rebellion against the oppressive systems to which they are subordinated.

In the introduction to this thesis, the expected hypothesis was that since the female protagonists do not only experience oppression regarding their gender, but also through other social structures and power systems, they are forced to compensate for these subjugations and thus rapidly have to develop a stable (gender) identity at a young age that is heavily affected by these oppressions. This proved, at least to a certain extent, to be the case. All four of the protagonists are forced to not only rapidly construct and understand their identities as they are placed in life-threatening situations that resulted from their subjugation to oppressive forces, they also have to learn how to present and perform their identity in different circumstances. Gender thus does indeed affect the way in which female protagonists are conditioned to act, not only as individuals, but also in their interactions with others. As discussed in the first chapter, social gender structures may not necessarily operate in the same manner on all levels of society (Risman "From Doing to Undoing" 83). Of all the novels discussed in this thesis, *The Hunger Games* trilogy most distinctly portrays the effect of societal gender structures on the formation of gender identity on different social levels. It makes a distinction between the internal and external gender identity of Katniss by demonstrating how she accesses and performs different gender identities in specific social and political spheres. Gender expression, in contrast with the more stable gender identity, is thus portrayed as being non-

inherent and subject to external oppressions. These external oppressions are based in socially and culturally determined gender roles that instruct women on how to act according to their perceived gender in a certain situation.

In answering the research question, this thesis adds to pre-existing research in the fields of literature and feminist and gender studies by expanding and focussing on societal power structures and their influence on the construction of adolescent women's gender identity. As could be expected, more research could be done on young adult dystopian fiction and its portrayal of female or male gender identities. Other identity categories which were not examined in this thesis – for instance, race, class, and sexual orientation – could also prove to be compelling research subjects. The scope of this thesis could be expanded upon by examining aspects such as platonic relationships or family relations in more depth than this research allowed for. Naturally, this analysis could also be performed with other primary sources, as the young adult dystopian genre encompasses a vast number of texts. Since scholarly research on young adult literature is relatively new and this popular genre is still developing, this field could potentially benefit from the development of a critical viewpoint on the genre's adolescent characters and the effect of their representation on its young readership.

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