

2014

The Technology Question: Adolescent Identities of Home in Dystopic Young Adult Literature Post-Hunger Games

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The technology question: Adolescent identities of home in dystopic young adult literature post-
Hunger Games

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Literature)

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Ames, Iowa

2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Matthew Sivils, and my committee members, Dr. Constance Post, and Dr. Stacey Weber-Feve, for their guidance and flexibility throughout the course of this research.

In addition, I would also like to thank my friends, colleagues, the department faculty and staff for making my time at Iowa State University a wonderful experience. The Speech Communication staff in Carver Hall deserves special recognition for fielding various questions and providing countless hours of stress relief, especially my amazingly supportive office mates. Kylie Jacobsen deserves more recognition than I can give for her willingness to sit in coffee shops for hours every day, offering support, advice, and not judging me for all the cookies I ate.

Finally, thanks to my family for their encouragement and to my future husband for his hours of patience, respect and love.

ABSTRACT

Young adult dystopian literature has grown in popularity and cultural relevance over the last 10 years. By exploring three popular dystopian series, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Delirium*, I attempt to account for this explosive growth in popularity with adolescent readers. Recent data shows adolescents losing a sense of localized home identity, an issue that all three texts highlight through a focus on borders. These borders attempt to bind the protagonists' home identity so that the dystopian governments can control its populations, but the protagonists counteract this identity freezing by forming a home identity through un-controlled social networks. By mediating the physical world through social relations, the protagonists connect both the real and imagined communities that permeate the texts. Adolescents must deal with their own home identities from within their own virtual and local communities; most research supports adolescents' use of virtual communities as a space to explore their real-life identities. These dystopian texts reflect the increasing influence of virtual communities, and these shared experiences provide a foundation not only for the genre's cultural relevance but also for a pedagogical value.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a golden age of young adult (YA) literature, Millennials experienced childhood through the eyes of beloved characters like Ponyboy Curtis, Jerry Renault, Jonas, and more recently, Harry Potter. As a part of that generation, my love for all literature grew through these characters. In the last 20 years YA literature exploded into the literary market as a commercial success for both adolescent and adult readers. Since that time, much critical work focuses on the popularity of this newfound genre. This genre, in part, grew as more research showed that a difference exists between childhood and the more liminal experience of adolescence. Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver* quartet, is asked why he chose a dystopic setting for his novel, and he answers, “A pure utopian setting would make for dull fare, I’m afraid” (Hintz and Ostry 196). Lowry highlights one of the biggest dilemmas of critically approaching YA literature: the adolescent readers. The difficulty with theoretically approaching YA literature goes back to the liminal position of adolescents readers; this liminality relates directly to the constantly changing social influences and the relatively limited time spent in the adolescent experience (Hunt 6).

Karen Coats argues that the constantly changing readership makes it difficult to offer a definition for this liminal genre (322). Nevertheless, YA literary critics still attempt to classify its slipperiness; the most basic definition is literature “intended for readers between ages of 12 and 20” (Bean and Moni 638). This definition does not, however, account for the widespread adult audiences. In Kenneth Donelson and Alleeen Nilsen’s well-established textbook on YA literature, they offer the following definition: “anything that readers between the approximate

ages of 12 and 18 *choose* to read” (1, emphasis added). This definition does account for the genre’s widespread relevance and readership, but it does not account for the variations between children’s and adolescent literature or for the cultural popularity. Roberta Seelinger Trites offers the most comprehensive definition:

The basic difference between a children’s and an adolescent novel lies not so much in how the protagonist grows — even though the gradations of growth do help us better understand the nature of the genre — but with the very determined way that YA novels tend to interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between society and the individual rather than focusing on Self and self-discovery as children’s literature does. (20)

This definition foregrounds the following argument, showing where individual identity formation intersects with the controlling elements of dystopian governments. The individual’s experience in YA literature cannot be separated from the context of power: “who has it, who doesn’t, and what must be negotiated in order for the adolescent to gain power in his or her culture” (Coats 317). These power relations also play a critical part in the lives of the adolescent readers and establish the genre’s cultural relevance.

The importance of identity construction during adolescence is a developmental factor that appears in most YA literature. Many adolescents relate to the protagonists in YA literature “as living and wrestling with real problems close to their own life experiences” (Bean and Moni 638). Literature that does mirror the experience of adolescence provides a place for mimetic exploration (Koss and Teale 569; Lukens and Cline vii). That these novels appeal to an adolescent readership is clear, but adult readers also find themselves enraptured in the world of YA literature. This genre attracts an adult readership since it shares more thematic elements with

adult literature than with children's literature (Cadden 307). Even though thematic similarities do exist, most critics agree that writers of YA literature have a certain responsibility to leave readers with hope (Hintz and Ostry 199; Bond 41-2; Totaro 129). When constructing a dystopian world for adolescent readers, a hopeful ending is necessary (Hughes 160). The call for hope specifically distinguishes adult apocalyptic literature from YA dystopian literature. These distinctions not only help define the genre, but they also set a foundation for pedagogical approaches.

This pedagogical emphasis reflects the traditional methodology for approaching YA literature. Robert Small offers a succinct historical description of critical approaches to the YA novel; the process started with librarians and educators, then moved to recommended book lists, then to theme-based annotations, and then finally gained theoretical interest as works of literature (280). Even as academic approaches to YA literature continue to grow, most authors still focus only on the texts' pedagogical value. Steven Wolk challenges educators to use the growing popularity of YA novels to teach their students about social responsibility: "Using young adult literature is one of the most meaningful and enjoyable ways for students to inquire into social responsibility because we can situate this content in the wonderful stories of good books" (667). Gary M. Salvner echoes this challenge in his keynote address for the 2000 ALAN workshop by illustrating, through student examples and letters written by Harry Potter fans, the transformative power literature holds in the lives of young adults (9). Janet Alsup continues this call, evaluating the potential of the seminal YA novel, *Speak*. While she denies fiction the ability to solve every problem, she insists that YA literature can "assist adolescents in coping with their tumultuous lives" (159). These pedagogical studies build a foundation for a theoretical approach, but the value of texts derives almost entirely from their ability to work in the classroom.

Much of the resistance to viewing YA novels as works of literature comes from traditional perceptions of the genre:

The negative qualities of literature for this age—shallow character portrayal, oversimplified conflicts, and preachy themes, among them—do little to bridge the transitions between for young adults. Because poor literature may, in fact, set readers back in their understanding of self, others, and society, such examples are useful as contrast to the good. (Lukens and Cline viii)

YA dystopian literature may not represent the highest quality of writing or character development, but it does promote and spread important cultural ideologies. These novels reflect important trends in cultural awareness, and they directly influence social trends and adolescent development. YA literature is not just popular because it relates back to the struggles of adolescent readers; it also builds upon “a narrative continuity with the preceding literature” (Wallis 85). Coats supports this idea, claiming that adolescent readers want repetitive story plots and worlds (324); this desire, of course, directly impacts the types of texts publishers’ offer. These repetitive themes also lead to the critical discounting of the genre, but the repetition does not necessarily classify as a generic weakness, merely an important characteristic of the readers. And as Lowry points out in his interview, YA authors must write stories that appeal to the readers.

Almost 20 years ago, Caroline Hunt invited literary critics to approach YA literature theoretically and build a YA literary canon. Then, as recently as three years ago, Karen Coats continues challenging critics to view YA literature as “destination literature” (317). Ted Hipple, one of the first critics to attempt canonizing YA literature, sets an important foundation for judging YA literature as a genre (6). But, in the ten years since its publication, the trends in YA

publishing and the adolescent experience have undergone drastic changes. Melanie Koss and William Teale conducted a study to better understand the new trends in YA literature, and they conclude that “as society continues to change with technological advances, adolescent literacy and the texts teens come into contact with are changing” (570). These changes directly reflect the cultural prominence of the YA genre.

Even though concerns about how to approach YA literature critically still exist, literary scholars have begun to address those issues. Studies have now begun directly approaching socially relevant YA series, most notably *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*. Joel Taxel, a well-established YA critic, provides an analysis of *Harry Potter*'s cultural impact on both the world and YA publishing (481). Natalie Wilson picks up this same argument in her book devoted to the *Twilight* phenomenon, naming her introduction “A Post-*Twilight* World” (5). Continuing the *Twilight* argument, Heather Anastasiu claims, “[T]his text dramatically reflects humankind's most basic drives and the need to negotiate between id desires and super-ego responsibilities in order to maintain and reshape our identities in the face of an always-evolving world” (53). Critics still offer reservations about both the writing quality and inappropriate gender themes of the *Twilight* series, but Anastasiu offers an example of evaluating a text based solely on its cultural relevance. Just these few examples represent the current direction of YA scholarship, by emphasizing the awareness of not only the quality of writing but also the level of cultural influence.

Since the publication of both *Twilight* and *Harry Potter*, a new trend dominates American YA publishing: the dystopian novel. YA dystopian literature places the reader within the context of a futuristic, post-apocalyptic version of the United States. Kay Sambell offers two necessary elements of dystopian literature: first, it serves as a warning against “current human

behaviors” and second, it must present a hopeful solution to those behaviors (163). Carrie Hintz, who writes about the well-known dystopian text *The Giver*, argues that the abundant political and social aspects of the novel mirror the “personal problems of adolescence,” allowing for a privileged site for “combative questioning of the society” (“Monica Hughes” 255). This combative questioning builds from the readers’ shared experiences with the text. These shared experiences change in the context of a dystopic, futuristic setting. Monica Hughes, author of *The Isis* trilogy, details the standards of “dystopian forces”: Runaway technology, political pressures, environmental threats, and human invaders (156). I explore three specific dystopian series: *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Delirium*; Hughes’s four dystopian forces appear throughout these series, but I focus specifically on the interaction between technology and political structure. This interaction forms the foundation for evaluating the virtual constructions in these three dystopian texts.

When evaluating YA dystopian literature, it is important to recognize that a fine line exists between utopia and dystopia; in fact, two of the societies in the three series first appear utopic. The façade, however, begins to crack when the government’s control interferes with the identity formation of the protagonists. Rebecca Totaro argues that the basic definitions of utopia and dystopia no longer apply in a globalized world since “one person’s ideal world may be dystopia for another” (127). Both utopias and dystopias offer the potential for individual and community suffering, and the distinction between the two comes primarily through the isolated sufferings of the heroic narrator (Totaro 129). As each hero encounters suffering that causes him or her to view the community as dystopic, these perceptions are challenged through the community’s social relationships. These social relationships highlight the important idea that what is not currently a utopia still holds the potential for utopic perceptions.

Focusing specifically on dystopian YA literature, two critics specifically demonstrate the relationship between the futuristic communities and the protagonists' home identities. Marla Harris argues that there are "novels in which children or teens in an urban environment left on their own for a variety of reasons . . . join together to form a community that explores alternative versions of home and family" (64). Her argument offers a strong foundation for critically approaching adolescent home identities, but it appeared right before the explosive popularity of dystopian texts. Emma Wortley describes the representation of globalization through both consumerism and mass media in *So Yesterday* and *Deep Fried*. While both of these articles deal with how community forms within dystopic YA novels, Harris deals only with urbanized environments, and Wortley clearly states she only intends to focus on realistic novels (280). Additionally, Wortley ignores the correlation between globalization and technological inventions. Both articles above establish the importance of community in adolescent fiction, but adolescent communities have drastically changed over the last 10 years; the technology question remains a vital factor in the loss of adolescent belonging and thus in the construction of adolescent home identities.

The importance of technology in the lives of adolescents provides the methodology to begin answering the foundational research question for this project: why are YA dystopian series so culturally relevant and popular at this moment? Since traditional research on YA literature focuses on the importance of adolescent readers forming a mimetic connection with the texts, in a globalized, technological society, this identity formation must look different in these more recent series. Growing through the adolescents' position in American society, their identity formation continues to change as "[d]igital media technologies have given rise to a plethora of new tools and contexts for youth to express and explore their identities" (Gardner and Davis 61).

Twitter, Facebook, MUDs, video games, reality television, and blogs offer just a sampling of adolescent accessible technologies. If YA literature explores the identity formation of its adolescent protagonists, how does recent YA dystopian literature address these new technological influences? The technological aspects of the novels clearly play a role in the societal structures and power relations, but they also directly influence the protagonists' relationship with their communities and home identities.

In William Strauss, Neil Howe, and RJ Matson's seminal work on Millennials, they claim that one of the major traits for this age group is their focus on civic engagement (360). Civic engagement, however, does not reflect an adolescent's actual feelings of community belonging. A more recent study reveals: "In sum, these results primarily support the 'Generation Me' view, with linear downward trends in social engagement and community feeling" (Twenge, Freeman and Campbell 1057). Strauss, Howe, and Matson account for this difference by pointing to the pressure Millennials experience to succeed both academically and professionally (216). While Millennials participate in civic engagement, this does little to build an identifying connection with adolescents' communities. When conceptualizing an identity of home, Doreen Massey provides a broad literature review of past theoretical approaches to this identity, concluding that "they construct singular, fixed and static identities for places" (168). She then continues by arguing that the new definition of place identity must allow for more flexibility and interconnectedness (169). The identity of a place could geographically represent someone's home, but the definition of home extends to include the social: "The identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with 'the outside'" (169). Zygmunt Bauman supports this shifting home identity in his book *Liquid Times*, arguing that community no longer refers to only a group inhabiting a

geographical space, but instead, community “is perceived and treated as a matrix of random connections and disconnections” (3). Both Massey and Bauman back the importance of social relationships in globalized communities, but these social relations are no longer bound to geographical space. These arguments, along with the Millennials’ research, illustrate a shift away from geographical belonging to a more socially constructed home identity.

It is this sense of home that allows the main protagonists in the three series to break the controlling, dystopic elements the various governments employ. Even when the protagonists leave their physical communities, either by force or choice, the social connections remain whole, allowing for a continuation of community to permeate all geographical space, both imagined and real. This mediation of the physical world through a social lens speaks to the political themes in many dystopian texts and directly correlates with the way adolescent readers view their own mutable identities within their virtual and local communities. Virtual reality appears through these dystopian texts when constructed communities challenge the protagonists’ perceptions of what is real and what is not. The following chapters begin with an analysis of how the dystopic communities reflect these virtual realities and then move to an analysis of the social relationships that complicate those constructions, ending with the real-world connections to the lives of adolescent readers.

CHAPTER 2

THE INTERNET QUESTION: VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AND HOME IDENTITY IN
THE HUNGER GAMES

In 2010, Laura Miller published an article in *The New Yorker* about the new dystopian trend in YA literature in which she highlights the cultural influence of *The Hunger Games*. The article views the book as an “allegory of the adolescent social experience,” emphasizing the intense scrutiny involved in adolescent social interactions. The article continues by defining the formulaic success of the series, but this formula fails to account for the complex political structures that form the foundation of dystopian texts. Supporting the complexity of these texts, critics have begun responding to the complex ideas and themes of *The Hunger Games* and its cultural impact. Susan Shau Ming Tan accounts for the impact of the whole series on American culture: “For, set in the ruins of America, the trilogy forces us to recognize aspects of our own, current culture within the dystopian world of Panem” (55). She ends the article with a call to take the series as a literal cautioning of America’s future (55). Yonah Ringlestein supports this caution and concludes that *The Hunger Games* is “a response to the most troubling aspects of postmodernism as it filters into popular consciousness” (384). In the end, the books serves as a “prophetic warning message to consumers that they must be critical not just of reality television but of constructed systems as a whole” (Ringlestein 372). Both of these critics examine the consequences of the virtually-constructed community of the games, but they fail to integrate both the community’s construction and social connections.

Furthering this conversation, critics assert the pedagogical value of *The Hunger Games*. Amber Simmons looks at the mimetic social injustices as a way to help students understand the

real-life violence children undergo (24). Jane Saunders continues Simmon's argument, providing a literacy-based pedagogy from the series' content. Thomas Lucey, Kara Lycke, James Laney, and Christopher Connelly look at how the trilogy presents "conceptions of citizenship," and the pedagogical value of literature to teach this difficult concept (190). Jen Scott Curwood argues that technology enhances the "critical engagement with literature" by exploring empirical studies on the cultural impact of affinity spaces within the context of *The Hunger Games* trilogy (417). I expand that conversation by emphasizing the impact technology plays in the construction of a home identity, also showing the pedagogical value of this approach. I argue that in *The Hunger Games* trilogy Katniss Everdeen's home identity develops through the people surrounding her without regard to the physical community she inhabits, whether virtual or real. Her unchanging method of community formation bridges the local community to the Capitol and to the virtually-constructed community of the games, emphasizing the dangerous reality of constructed communities. Adolescent readers struggle with this danger in their own virtual communities via the Internet, and this shared experience with the protagonist provides a pedagogical foundation for approaching the series.

The presence of a virtual space dictates the plot and character development of the first and second novels as Katniss participates in the games. Most readers, both adolescent and adult, have a frame of reference for virtual reality, via the Internet, but such an abstract term needs a foregrounding definition. Michael Nitsche offers one such definition: "Virtual space is a product of human knowledge It lacks geographical, zoological, and most physical dependencies that heavily impact real-world locations" (191). Nitsche also provides the necessary communication processes needed to anchor a virtual space to a geographical location (193). Michael Heim agrees that virtual reality can have a physical presence, but his definition of the "ultimate VR"

portrays more of a dream-like state of consciousness (137). Both of these definitions reflect the two different perceptions of the games: the masses outside the games and the adolescents inside the games; the masses outside are unable to connect to the perceived non-geographical space of the games, unless they share an immediate social connection to one of the inhabitants, and this lack of connection allows the Capitol to project a dream-like utopia unto the games. In fact, for the one champion who leaves the games, this dream-like persona transfers to him or her, by gaining celebrity status in the Capitol. For the adolescents inhabiting the virtual reality, this virtual construction represents an actualized reality, geographically bound with real consequences. Technology may define the arena's borders, but the games do occupy a geographical space; thus, the games simultaneously exist in a physical and virtual space. The co-existence of these two factors explodes in the second games when Peeta almost dies from inadvertently touching the camouflaged force field (Collins, *Catching* 278). The virtual space does not eliminate the risk of physical harm, but this risk, upon first assessment, only exists for those who inhabit the virtual space.

While it is difficult to understand a completely geographically bound virtual reality, the technology of our own society comes close through themed spaces. Scott Lukas evaluates these spaces, asserting, "Theming appears organic to the consumer in major part because of the willing of consumers to accept the stories told in theming as real, meaningful, and intimate" (5). Themed environments represent a dangerous version of reality, because they present a reality that consumers want to believe in; consumers understand that the world comes through a man-made construction, and yet the fantasy of the world still draws them in. Talmadge Wright connects the notions of themed environments, such as Disney World, with the virtual realities created through video games, claiming that these environments gain their attractiveness through their perceived

“riskless risk” (247). They offer visitors the chance to experience the adrenaline rush associated with death-defying acts without risking any bodily harm. The games differ from these themed environments through the addition of physicality, both through danger and the geographical foundation. The Capitol builds a fantasy around the games in order to remain control over the masses; they give an illusion of hope to the districts, while simultaneously presenting a fantastical, immersing tale to its own residents. This fantasy provides the illusion of safety to those outside the games, but the social connections bridging the virtual games to the outside communities break the illusion, especially when Katniss integrates the games into her home identity. Katniss understands the consumer appeal of the games, and she inadvertently overcomes the power relation by viewing both the games and District 12 through the same social mediation.

Katniss’s ability to identify with home primarily through social mediation opens the beginning of the series; she offers a personalized description of the immediate environment. Her narration starts with descriptions of both her mother and sister, which helps set up her personal community, but shortly after she offers a picture of District 12’s community:

Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces. But today the black cinder streets are empty. (Collins, *Hunger* 4)

In this passage, Katniss sets up the story to come, not through physical descriptions but through the daily routines and sufferings of the *people* in her community. She mediates the physical community through social connections. She provides the necessary information about daily life

in District 12, while also establishing, through the community's absence, that today is different. In fact, Katniss does mention the words "reaping" and "Hunger Games" within the first few pages, but it is not until later that Katniss's fear of these words and their implications enter the story. The revelation of the games' function is overshadowed by the opening phrases, "It's the same story every year" (Collins, *Hunger* 18). In this context, the horror of the games disappears under the repetitive and routine descriptions Katniss provides. By ritualizing the games, the Capitol continues to assert the fantastical construction they purposefully build around the games.

The games represent a ritualized ceremony with specific orders and rules; even when Katniss first volunteers for her sister, Effie Trinket proclaims, "But I believe there's a small matter of introducing the reaping winners and then asking for volunteers" (Collins, *Hunger* 22). This ritualistic presentation of the games relates directly to the Capitol's attempt to control the masses of the Districts. Doreen Massey asserts:

When black-robed patriarchs organize ceremonies to celebrate a true national identity they are laying claim to the freezing of that identity at a particular moment and in a particular form – a moment and a form where they had a power which they can thereby justify themselves in retaking. (169)

While the ruling class in the Capitol would never wear an outfit as dull as black robes, the ritualism of the games is an attempt by the Capitol to freeze the districts' identity. Every year, right before the reaping, the mayor of District 12 reads the story of the rebellions, which serves to remind the districts "that the Dark Days must never be repeated" (Collins, *Hunger* 18). The "Treaty of Treason" enacts the Hunger Games as a constant reminder of the rebellion's failure and the subsequent consequences of further uprisings. Even during the yearlong period between the games, the districts remain aware of these consequences through either the presence or

absence of food aid and the required television broadcasts that air the Victory tour. By freezing the identity of the districts, the Capitol further asserts their dominance, keeping the districts in a stasis and thus, controllable state.

The games play an important role in freezing this identity, but another technology, the electrified borders, also play a role in the day-to-day life of District 12. All three series have borders surrounding the communities, and this first series offers a unique perspective to begin the conversation. The fence surrounding District 12 exists to keep the community geographically bound and controlled; even though Katniss and Gale consistently hunt outside the borders, they never physically chose to leave their communities for any long period of time. They only leave the community when forced to, Katniss and Peeta through the games and Gale only after its destruction. On two distinct occasions, both Katniss and Gale suggest leaving District 12 for the untamed wilderness. Before the first reaping, Gale immediately suggests running into the wilderness as a way of escaping the Games (Collins, *Hunger* 7). Katniss immediately responds with confusion, finally objecting on account of their families (Collins, *Hunger* 9). The second instance happens in the second novel when, in a reversal of the earlier scene, Katniss asks Gale to run away into the wilderness with her and everyone they both care about (Collins, *Catching* 95). At this moment, Gale refuses to leave, insisting on fighting as a part of the revolution that Katniss sparked. Katniss, who refuses to leave the ones she loves behind, finds comfort in the wilderness; she understands, however, that her family fears its dangers. Gale refuses to leave only after the chance for rebellion and change enters the community. Upon returning to her home and the family that drives her decisions, Katniss continually works to free herself and her family from the consequences of this confrontation. Once again Katniss uses her social relationships, in this case, her family, as her method of decision mediation.

Both of these conversations do take place in the “safety” of the wilderness that Katniss uses as a place of retreat. However, even her access to this retreat depends upon a government-controlled electric fence. Katniss claims, “It’s usually safe to touch,” since the district rarely gets electricity (Collins, *Hunger* 5); but when full power restores the electric fence at the start of book two, Katniss quickly realizes the consequences of her miscalculations. While the fence visually displays the Capitol’s technological control, it is unable to keep the more persistent citizens from leaving. However, in the beginning of *Catching Fire*, when the Capitol reasserts its control, this fence is once again electrified, leaving Katniss trapped in the woods (Collins 150). Even though it first appears that Katniss defies the Capitol by evading its technology, the Capitol can still, if it chooses, easily reassert their control. The Capitol also asserts its control when it captures a girl hiding in the wilderness. The captors fail to notice a younger Katniss hiding in the bushes, but just witnessing this capture scares Katniss for many years to come (Collins, *Hunger* 82). The border surrounding District 12 defines the first community of novel, but Katniss usurps this control based on the needs of her family. By emphasizing her family as home, Katniss defies the geographical boundaries of the Capitol’s intended home identity. This tension between societal expectations and protagonists’ actual needs thematically binds all three series in this study.

Katniss understands the dangers of this uncontrolled environment, but she learns to assert her own control of that natural space, at least enough to find food that saves her family from starving. It is her perceived control over nature that makes the moments of government reclamation unsettling. This ongoing struggle between the controlled and the uncontrollable illuminates the technological dichotomy that the Capitol relies on to assert their absolute dominance. The government continually claims that the technology helps their citizens, primarily through protection: “Inside the woods [flesh-eaters] roam freely, and there are added concerns

like venomous snakes, rabid animals, and no real paths to follow” (Collins, *Hunger* 5). This protection, however, only offers insurance for the valuable coal production, and the reality is that the borders offer a physical manifestation of Massey’s ritualistic preservation of power. In the reaping scene another technological presence appears through the “camera crews;” however Katniss emphasizes not the technology, but the men controlling that technology, personifying the elevated fear the cameras provide (Collins, *Hunger* 16). This personified fear humanizes the historical reasoning for the games when Katniss offers a description of the reaping’s setting, which again revolves around the people who occupy the space during both the reaping and non-reaping days (Collins, *Hunger* 16-17). These descriptions show the importance of District 12’s social interconnectedness, while also highlighting the personal consequences of the Capitol’s technological control.

The presence of a second and third community, the Capitol and the virtually-controlled games, emphasizes this technological dichotomy. Mark Fisher considers this dichotomy as a method of control, highlighting the Capitol’s ability to subvert reality; the bustling community of the Capitol seems significantly larger than the communities of the districts, making it appear “as if the immiserated 1% work for the benefit of the privileged 99% rather than the reverse” (30). This worldview reinforces the technological control and distracts the districts from their experiences with this threatening control. In the Capitol, technology appears harmless, publically used for entertainment and aesthetics. Katniss experiences this technology during the party hosted for her and Peeta on the Victory tour; having consumed too much food, she insists that she cannot consume any more. But, of course, the Capitol has a solution, a drink that makes you throw up, so that you can enjoy all the variety. While this minute innovation seems harmless, Katniss cannot ignore the mental images of children who starve in her own district (Collins,

Catching 80). These innocent uses, coupled with the abundant and casual use of technology within the Capitol stands in striking contrast to the seemingly lack of technology in District 12. However, the technological abundance in the Capitol eliminates any fear of technology, even to the point where the Capitol's citizens approach the games as a mere form of entertainment. The opposite is true of technology in the districts, where a constant fear of the hidden presence of cameras and government-controlled technology pervades even the most mundane moments of life, and the games serve only to emphasize this complete technological dominance.

The third community, the virtually-controlled games, also emphasizes this dichotomy as Katniss builds distinct social connections that bridge the community of the districts to the games. The games represent a geographical community by mimicking the social connections of an Internet community. During the games, Katniss continues to mediate the physical community through her social connections, primarily through Rue and Peeta. Michael Nitsche argues that in order for an Internet community to represent space, it must contain both an act of identity formation and social interactions (193). The Capitol fails at completely freezing the districts' identity through both rituals and borders, since the majority of community formation is not related to either geographical places or historical moments. A home identity, specifically in virtually-constructed space, forms instead through the "vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations which is social space" (Massey 168). Since Katniss continues to identify with those surrounding her in the games, the Capitol's geographical influence over the environment and borders barely effects the construction of a home identity. By remaining constant in her home identity, Katniss reverses the process of identity freezing. This reversal allows her to subvert the intended power structures of the games, building the necessary space for two victors.

Katniss represents the only stable connection between the world of the districts and the virtual world of the games through her unwavering home identity. As Katniss makes clear right before the games, she does not want to make political statements; she merely wants to return home to her family. After Peeta confesses his fear that the Capitol will change him, the ever-practical Katniss responds, “Look, if you want to spend the last hours of your life planning some noble death in the arena, that’s your choice. I want to spend mine in District 12” (Collins, *Hunger* 142). It must be emphasized then, that her stable identity is not necessarily one of her character strengths, but reflects a complete lack of flexibility, quite possibly what also becomes her biggest weakness. Her unswerving identity continues into the final moments of the third book, when she kills President Coin, who suggests re-enacting the hunger games (Collins, *Mocking* 369). Even in the epilogue, Katniss continues to identify with the people who left an impact on her life, writing a book with Peeta filled with the stories of all the tributes (Collins, *Mocking* 387). Her inability to shed the identity of her surrounding social connections leads to the psychological scarring that continues years after the games.

Katniss’s unswerving identity, even in the virtually-controlled world of the games, emphasizes the inherent danger of technology in the novel, illuminating the horrific, lingering effects that encountering this technology brings. However, in current studies that explore the effects of virtual Internet space, Katniss’s unswerving identity is not the trend. Heather Bromberg documents the “alternate state of consciousness” created when inhabiting a virtual reality, arguing that it “allow[s] for the exploration of alternate identities and personae” (145,146). Many of the other characters selected from the games certainly do match these criteria, especially those from District 1 and 2 who trained their whole lives. They, similar to Katniss, only want to return to their districts, but when the games start, it is clear that the tributes

from 1 and 2 are willing to match the identity expectations of the games, no matter the psychological consequences. In a moment of rare openness right before the games, Peeta admits, “Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to . . . to show the Capitol they don’t own me. That I’m more than just a piece in their Games” (Collins, *Hunger* 142). The connection she builds with Peeta forces Katniss into action at the end of the games, not a desire for revenge; she realizes the need to save Peeta as her only chance of survival. Katniss needs his hope and help to get through life after the games, a fact she realizes at specific moments throughout the trilogy. This moment, seen as the start of the rebellion, highlights Katniss’s inability to let go of her social community.

Katniss fears the consequences of building social connections, but she simultaneously fears not maintaining pre-existing social connections. The two characters Katniss most associates with in the games, Peeta and Rue, both represent pre-existing relationships from within District 12. Katniss claims she owes her life to Peeta, and Rue stands in for Primrose, Katniss’s younger sister. Katniss projects her sister onto Rue because she fears the loss of her home identity, but she also fears forming further connections with the other participants in the games. Massey speculates that one of the biggest fears accompanying an expanding view of space is “when the geography of social relations forces us to recognize our interconnectedness” (170). Katniss first experiences this interconnectedness in the first games, and further magnifies the connections in the second, when she forms an alliance with the other tributes, particularly Beetee and Wiress, even as her initial connection to Peeta remains the strongest. In a literal transfiguration of this moment, the tributes for the 75th Hunger Games join hands on the stage the night before entering the arena (Collins, *Catching* 258). At the end of Book 2 a pivotal moment transpires when Katniss discovers that during her second time in the arena District 12 was destroyed (Collins,

Catching 391). It is only after the chilling revelation of District 12's fate and Peeta's capture that Katniss willingly participates in the rebellion.

Katniss defines her role and identity within her communities through the people she cares about, but the constructed virtual reality of the games does have dramatic consequences. Katniss's awareness of the showmanship needed to win the games does not make these consequences any less real. Even though the Capitol wants its citizens to separate themselves from the constructions and use them as a method of identity formation, the games are shockingly real for the tributes and thus, so are the consequences. Once outside the games, Katniss still dreads sleeping since it brings back the faces of the other tributes, some of whom she personally murdered. It is also made very clear to both Peeta and Katniss that the romantic act carried out in the games must continue for the rest of their highly visible lives, since they must play a yearly mentoring role in the games. The constructed, virtual reality of the games dramatically affects their positions in the community. In the moment when Katniss defies the Capitol, it is easy to forget that that decision affects every event that unfolds in the coming two novels.

Adolescents deal with similar consequences through their own virtual encounters via the Internet. Studies show that offline social interactions develop in much the same way as online social interactions. Research identifies that adolescents use their online communities as an extension of their offline ones (Subrahmanyam and Smahel 83; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 84; Seepersad 38; Reich, Espinoza, and Subrahmanyam 357). Since this research shows a high correlation between adolescents' geographical communities and their virtual communities, this connection forms, like Katniss's connection, through social relationships. By emphasizing the social relations, adolescents lose a sense of nostalgic connection to a physical home. While the growing popularity of virtual worlds may or may not be directly influencing this shift, it is

apparent that the “time-space compression” of technology affects our “sense of place” (Massey 162). Massey goes on to warn her readers about taking this argument too far, probably what she would claim many dystopian texts do (164); this series shows the consequences of not balancing a sense of communal belonging with both virtual and local communities.

Adolescents, who view the Internet as a “non-place” where they can experiment with different communities and identities, quickly realize the consequences that accompany this misperception. Advertisers want adolescents to view the Internet as a safe place. The reality is that the Internet only extends the dangers associated with local communities; it actually offers more opportunities for encountering potentially dangerous situations, since it represents a space where a whole world collides. Breaking down the reality of virtual spaces through psychoanalysis, Mark Lajoie warns, “The network is much like a shopping mall: it gives the impression of being a public space, but is in fact privately owned” (167). The same truth exists in the *Hunger Games*; the Capitol encourages everyone to take pride and ownership of the games, broadcasting every moment for the public to enjoy. The reality, however, is that the games and the tributes belong to the Capitol, who can, at the push of a button, control every aspect of the arenas they design. Intentional design as a method of control plays a large role in the dangers of the games, which becomes quickly apparent in the second games, when the arena literally morphs into a weapon. Intentional design also emphasizes the dangers of Internet communities; web designers build interfaces to appeal to a specific audience, often targeting adolescents. Lajoie ends the argument with a reference to dystopian novels, claiming that they show what could happen if we ignore the “mess outside the windows,” focusing, instead, too much time in a virtual world (168). Although the current analysis or the analyses in the coming chapters do not seek to offer a pedagogical application, it is impossible to ignore the potential. Teenagers devour

both the text and movie form of these series, providing ample space for these novels to help shape their own mutable home identities. While some content depicts either a romanticized or false view of the world, educators can use the inherent appeal of this genre to teach real world applications that will better help adolescents understand their roles in both virtual and local communities, an idea which I return to in the conclusion. It is in the next series, *Divergent*, where adolescents' misconceptions about the connection between social media and their geographical communities force them to explore the media question.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEDIA QUESTION: ADOLESCENT MISCONCEPTIONS IN THE *DIVERGENT*
SERIES

The *Divergent* trilogy just began its transformation into a worldwide film franchise, owing much of its status to post-*Hunger Games* publishing trends (Dobbins 1). These two trilogies do share many of the same conventions, but the two main heroines offer differing approaches to the communities they inhabit. Both governments fragment the community, *The Hunger Games* through the districts and *Divergent* through factions. Societal grouping extends into most YA dystopian literature, having roots in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Carrie Hughes's *The Dream Catcher*, and Zilpha Snyder's Green-sky trilogy (Hintz, "Joy" 108). The formulaic equation described by *The New Yorker* article in the previous chapter looks at these very basic similarities, but fails to account for the complex and different community structures. Two main differences between the series further the technological conversation of the first chapter: the presence of a *hidden* outside agency and the illusion of democratic choices. Offering an initial utopic perception, these two new aspects create chaos when they subvert the reality of the community. This community appears in a post-apocalypse version of Chicago where every seventeen year old must choose one of five factions: Abnegation, Candor, Erudite, Amity, or Dauntless. Each faction provides a unique service to Chicago's whole structure, mimicking the larger district system of *The Hunger Games*. *Divergent's* faction system departs from the previous chapter by offering at least the illusion of identity choices, but the problem arises when none of these options account for Beatrice Prior's (Tris) "Divergence."

Since Tris, the main narrator, cannot form a home identity within the confines of her fragmented community, she mimics the dominant community in order to conform to an expected identity of home. This mimicry ends when her utopic projections disappear, leaving Tris in a moment of liminality as she encounters a redefinition of her home community of Chicago. Offering the theoretical foundation for this process of redefinition, Michael Foucault describes a heterotopia as “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). By challenging her home identity, the heterotopic experience of the Bureau forces Tris to re-define her own perceptions, leading to a moment of crises. While a true heterotopic space may not exist in the lives of many adolescents, most inhabit spaces that challenge their feelings of home. Adolescents use the Internet and other forms of media, especially social media, as points of mimetic experience. These experiences cause moments of crises when adolescents must deal with their misperceptions. By integrating the heterotopic experiences with their geographical communities, adolescents and Tris move beyond the moment of crises to an integrated home identity.

Virginia Wolf demonstrates the role of home in YA literature: “[I]n books for increasingly older children, we might expect the focus to shift to the need to protect, make, find, or recover a home. The next shift would be to a character’s internalization of the meaning of home” (56). Tris comes to an internalized home identity, but she furthers her internal connection by integrating this meaning back into her geographical community. This process of home identification relates more specifically to Arnold van Gennep’s three stages of symbolic transition: “separation, margin, and reaggregation” (Hetherington 32). The separation step involves a process of required initiations that one must complete to move from one part of life to another, for example,

from adolescence to adulthood (Hetherington 32). This separation places the person in a liminal state where he or she loses any previous identity, thus moving into the margin stage (Hetherington 32). In order to move into the final stage and re-enter society, he or she must embrace a new identity and societal role (Hetherington 33). The social relationships that bridge all three stages help Tris move into this final stage and finally discover a new home identity.

Tris enters the first stage of separation when she chooses to move from Abnegation to Dauntless; she enters and stays in the second during most of the series, beginning with the liminal space between faction training and orientation. In van Gennep's theory, liminality represents "the relationship between freedom and order" (Hetherington 32). In this case, Tris's liminality represents the space between acceptance into an ordered community and exile into a community of chaos. When she inhabits the liminal space of faction training, she fears exile into the factionless, and when she inhabits the liminal space of the Bureau, she fears a permanent loss of home. For Tris, this moment of liminality also reflects her inability to identify with an ordered community; in a sense, Tris inhabits a liminal space just due to her divergence status, but the threat of communal exile actualizes this position. Since Tris belongs to neither Abnegation nor Dauntless, this marginalizing stage suspends the normal societal structure, allowing for the possibility of community exile. In this stage, when Tris belongs to no geographical community, her need for a home identity seeks the comfort of social relationships. These social relationships ultimately allow her to move into the final stage, when, after experiencing the Bureau as a heterotopia, she chooses re-integration into her home community of Chicago, breaking through her liminal position in both communities.

The five factions embrace a singular quality that unites them through a familial bond: "Faction before blood" (Roth, *Divergent* 43). Abnegation values self-sacrifice; Candor values

honesty; Erudite values knowledge; Amity values peace, and Dauntless values bravery. The faction names help readers better identify with a world vastly different from their own, but they also emphasize the extreme singularity of Tris's community (Nilsen and Nilsen 83). The singularity of each faction forces every member of the community to embrace a specific home identity, but from the very beginning of the novel, Tris struggles embracing the selflessness of Abnegation, and even before undergoing the testing for the Choosing Ceremony, she feels drawn to the perceived freedom of the Dauntless lifestyle: "[Dauntless] should perplex me. I should wonder what courage—which is the virtue they most value—has to do with a metal ring through your nostril. Instead my eyes cling to them wherever they go" (Roth, *Divergent* 7). In particular, her eyes follow the Dauntless as they jump on and off the train. By emphasizing Dauntless's connection to trains, this community gains the perception of utopic identification. Trains in YA literature traditionally represent the method of "conveying characters and readers to the envisioned utopia" (Jenkins 23). Tris perceives the freedom of the Dauntless as a utopia, a place to discover her home identity without the restrictions of the Abnegation lifestyle. Tris's inability to conform to the selflessness of Abnegation leaves her in isolation, but when she moves into the perceived freedom of Dauntless, she realizes that this utopic projection only offers an illusion of home.

The protagonists' nicknames reflect this desired home identity, and by accepting new names, both protagonists try to reclaim a sense of belonging. Since Tris's divergence marks her as an outcast, she relies on mimicry of societal expectations in order to fit into the Dauntless community. Born Beatrice Prior, the daughter of a well-known political leader, she changes her name to Tris upon joining Dauntless, leaving all her familial connections behind. Four gains his name out of respect from his community as the holder of only four fears, an abnormally low

number. He accepts this name change as a way to shed the past injustices of his father, reclaiming his lost home identity. Hava Bechar-Israeli's research supports the connection between nicknames and home identity, showing that almost half of chat room users choose names related to their real-life identities (qtd in Filiciak 90). Kaveri Subrahmanyam and David A. Smahel's research also supports this claim: "In some online applications such as chat rooms, discussion forums, or textual online games, identity is often established through a nickname or username" (64). By choosing names that emphasize their citizenship in the Dauntless community, both Tris and Four force their home identities to match their chosen lifestyles. Alleen and Don Nilsen show that adolescents change their names "in a celebratory mood filled with optimism and anticipation" (x). Tris and Four both shed their old identities and embrace their new identities as a moment of celebration, but these new names only offer the illusion of community, especially when Four meets his father again.

When Tris chooses Dauntless and changes her name, she wants to shed the limiting mimicry of her former community. In *Abnegation*, Tris tries to build a sense of belonging by mimicking those that she admires and cares about. By mimicking successful members of the dominant community, Tris attempts to inject herself into that same community. Her divergence places her outside the standard societal positions, since she associates with three different characteristics: selflessness, bravery, and intelligence. Tris finally gains an answer to her Divergent classification, but this answer offers no solution to Tris's missing home identity, since it only reflects her inability to identify with a singular community and meet the expectations of Chicago's societal system. In an attempt to meet these expectations, Tris chooses the community that she previously perceived as utopic, but even in this community, Tris's dynamic personality forces her back into mimicry.

The Dauntless leaders strip the community of their ability to make decisions through the use of a mind-control serum, dissolving one of the original utopic elements. During the simulations, Tris reverts back to mimicry in order to protect herself and both her Abnegation and Dauntless communities. The earlier tension she experienced when choosing either Abnegation or Dauntless actualizes itself when Tris must decide to save her old family from death or to save her new faction from the simulations. This choice highlights Tris's divergence, as she occupies a space between the two communities, and in this moment she suffers the loss of her mother and the loss of a good friend, each representing a different community. Tris experiences the loss of this first utopic element through the suffering and tension of these two communities. These social connections allow Tris to move beyond her mimicry; when the community loses the faction system, Tris relies on these social connections to revitalize a sense of belonging.

Tris must rely on her newfound social connections since, when the community enters the chaos of a new factionless system, a dominant community structure disappears. When the community's structure disappears, the faction ideology still leaves a sense of community. The overwhelming ideology of the faction system appears in the chaos that follows the destructions of the choosing ceremony relics. These relics represent the community's ideology, and for most of the community they hold a utopic association. After the community's extreme response to the loss of this ideology, Tris finally makes her decision to leave the city in search of a new home identity:

I close my eyes. The faction bowls are printed on my eyelids, tipped on their sides, their contents in a pile on the street. The symbols of our old life, destroyed—a man dead, others injured—and for what?

For nothing. For Evelyn's empty, narrow vision: a city where factions are wrenched away from people against their will.

She wanted us to have more than five choices. Now we have none.

I know for sure, then, that I can't be her ally, and I never could have. (Roth, *Allegiant* 38)

In this passage Tris watches the death of a man who went through Dauntless initiation with her, and she mediates the loss of community belonging through this personal connection. This meditation expands to include the suffering of all of Tris's friends and family. The loss of societal structure leaves everyone in a dystopian state, whereas before at least most of the community experienced a utopic home identity. As a way to subvert this loss of utopic association, Tris decides to leave the community in order to rediscover and reclaim a utopia. In this moment, Tris emphasizes the social relationships over the structure and expectations of the geographical community. By making this decision, Tris ultimately hopes to move out of the liminal state and into a fully operational home identity.

Tris intends to reclaim this utopia by revealing and pursuing the meaning of her divergence. The second book ends with the haunting picture of Jeanine's death, followed by the life-changing message Tris brings from a woman named Amanda Ritter who, in order to forget her past, changes her name to Edith Prior:

The reason I am leaving this footage for you is so that you will know when it's time to help us. You will know that it is time when there are many among you whose minds appear to be more flexible than the others. The name you should give these people is Divergent. Once they become abundant among you, your leaders should give the

command for Amity to unlock the gate forever, so that you may emerge from your isolation. (Roth, *Insurgent* 524)

This passage ends the second book in a moment of chaos, but Tris finally understands why she never identified with Chicago's community. The otherwise chaotic atmosphere preceding and following the announcement further emphasizes Tris's isolation from the community. Before this moment, Tris could hide behind her mimicry, since no one knew of her divergence. But with the presence of a second community, Tris no longer needs mimicry; she moves her utopic association to the world outside the gates. By transferring her utopic perceptions to "the outside," Tris begins the process of communal separation. Just as Tris begins to understand her communal role, the rest of the community doubts its own. The revelation of an outside world creates chaos at the end of the second novel, but for Tris and Four the existence of a larger world creates hope, a place where they can escape their damaging pasts and discover a revitalized sense of belonging. This process proves more complicated when they encounter the world outside and issues of globalization.

Trains serve as the main method of travel between the communities outside and inside the fence, emphasizing Tris's search for a utopic society. Alice Jenkins observes, "[T]rains tend to have a peculiarly ambiguous status, negotiating between and blurring the boundaries of the home, 'real' world and the utopian, dystopian, or fantasy world" (25). The train tracks bridge the boundary between the "real" world of Chicago and the perceived utopic community where Tris projects her need for a home identity. This projection proves literal when she discovers that her mother came from the world outside the walls: "I just keep thinking . . . that in some way I belong here. Like maybe this place can be home" (Roth, *Allegiant* 192). After discovering her mother's origins, Tris moves her search of home from an outward projection to an internalized

identification, echoing Wolf's "meaning of home" as a shift from recovery and protection (56). Tris always best identified with her mother, and right after her mother dies, she projects this identification internally: "Just after my mother died, I grabbed hold of my Divergence like it was a hand outstretched to save me. I needed that word to tell me who I was when everything else was coming apart around me" (Roth, *Allegiant* 134). By moving into an internalized home identity, Tris once again highlights the social relationships that she claims should bind Chicago together. When she first encounters the Bureau, she struggles to deal with the challenging dichotomy of the constructed reality and her mother's role in that construction.

Upon evaluating this constructed reality, Michael Foucault offers a necessary distinction between the utopia and the heterotopia. On defining utopias, Foucault claims, "They [utopias] present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces" (24). Utopias play two important roles in this series. The first role appears through the earlier analysis of Tris's projected home identity. Tris's projections represent an unobtainable fantasy, and when Tris finally embraces the impossibility of these utopic projections, she breaks from the liminal, margin state into a fully integrated identity of home. The second moment of utopic longing happens when Tris enters the outside world of the Bureau. The Bureau views the "experiment" as a utopia – an "unreal space" where they can exert control without any consequences. In fact, the very aim of the Bureau is to perfect American society through these experimental manipulations, of which the factioned Chicago represents the most successful (Roth, *Allegiant* 125). By paralleling Tris's utopic perception alongside the Bureau's mission, a tension forms that forces Tris back to her original community. The Bureau views the Chicago experiment as its last hope, while Tris views the Bureau as her last hope for freedom; both groups view the other as their utopias, but separating themselves

from this pattern, both Tris and Four quickly realize that the constructed and geographically bound space of the Bureau actually represents a heterotopia.

The Bureau begins to lose Tris's utopic projection when it fails to account for the ongoing personal relations that form her home identity. The Bureau's mission, like the factored society of the experiment, is so singular that it erases the entire memory of the experiment without any ethical qualms. David Storey, recognizing the connection between land and identity, warns about over-romanticizing this relationship, showing how in that process the inherent consequences of dominating relationships gets ignored (12). The Bureau falls into this trap; since the Bureau views Chicago as Foucault's utopia, it conveniently glosses over the identity crises its control enacts on a thriving social and geographical community. The Bureau views the lands of the experiment only through its own lenses, not looking at the other side of the relationship. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss continues to embrace her identity no matter the physical community, but in that case, the government clearly displays the construction. Tris's liminal position places her between two communities; this liminality prevents Tris from connecting to a geographical community, instead forcing her into a social community that spans both faction and heterotopic boundaries. It is this liminal position that prohibits her ever returning to Chicago, even though she chooses reintegration.

When Tris realizes that all her friends and family back in Chicago belong on the other side of the power relationship, the dominated side, Tris gains the ability to move from the liminal state of the Bureau, showing her final transition into the re-integration stage. Tris moves out of her liminality when her perspective of the Bureau changes from utopic to heterotopic. In attempting to de-mystify Foucault's heterotopia, Peter Johnson suggests, "Heterotopias draw us out of ourselves in peculiar ways; they display and inaugurate a difference and challenge the

space in which we may feel at home” (84). The Bureau challenges Tris’s established social connection through the enforced segregation of genetically cured and uncureds, especially since most of her friends are “uncured.” As Foucault claims, heterotopias are utopias “in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). The Bureau takes the societal factions of Chicago and enacts the same segregation within its own buildings, but in this case, the utopic element of choices is never even artificially offered. The Bureau wants to create a utopic society, but it inverts this ideology by isolating over half of its own population through segregation practices.

Tris most strikingly loses her utopic projection when she experiences the extent of the Bureau’s influence over Chicago. This manipulation proves disorienting when Tris realizes the extent of technological control the Bureau possesses over its experiment, through both serums and video cameras. As Tris and Tobias go to have their genes tested, Matthew, their tour guide and geneticist, tells them about the memory serum used to keep the citizens unaware of the Bureau’s presence: “Only they [Erudite] didn’t do much with the memory serum—the Abnegation serum. We did a lot more with that, since it’s our greatest weapon” (Roth, *Allegiant* 167). He also reveals how they administered the serum to the “experiments” in order to maintain control over any disputes that would arise. From these initial interactions, Tris deduces that the Bureau supported the annihilation of her people, offering the new serum to Erudite in order to preserve the success of the Chicago experiment. Tris’s struggle to incorporate her mother’s decisions with the reality of the constructed Bureau shatters when Tris discovers its role in her mother’s death. Any lingering, potential home identification Tris experienced with the Bureau’s community dissolves, leaving no doubt that the Bureau’s inverted, counter-site represents a heterotopia.

This heterotopic experience directly relates to the trilogy's classification as a dystopia. Exploring the dilemma of suffering in YA utopian literature, Rebecca Totaro notes, "By experiencing the contrast between two different worlds, the hero comes to understand the nature of his or her own suffering, and of his or her community of origin as primarily utopian or dystopian" (129). While Tris never experiences a utopic home identity, the Bureau, as the instigating agent, plays a significant role in the loss of Chicago's utopic ideology. As in *The Hunger Games* these two communities are linked through a social interconnectedness. Tris and Four both develop community-oriented relationships during their time in Chicago, and it is these relationships that connect the two different realities. When Uriah dies during the attack on the Bureau, Four realizes that his actions in the Bureau affect actual people still in Chicago, and he knows that he will have to face those very real consequences (Roth, *Allegiant* 301). By interconnecting the spaces, the realness of both is emphasized. Massey argues that "[t]he identity of a place . . . derives . . . from the specificity of its interactions with the 'outside'" (169). In this case, the "outside" is the Bureau, and until Tris breaks the connection, Chicago's identity comes only through this relationship. While recognizing that the past does affect the identity of both the concept of home and individual identities, Massey concludes that "the identity of place . . . is always and continually being produced" (171). In this argument, Massey implies that space does not always mean home. A particular place can be directly related to a personal connection of home and identity, but their home could also be based on interpersonal connections. These interpersonal connections lead Tris and Four back to the community of Chicago.

The heterotopic experience also relates directly back to the adolescent experience in a globalized world. Adolescents experience heterotopias everyday as they interact with the communities formed through Internet and television: "By aligning TV viewers with a

proliferating supply of techniques for shaping and guiding themselves and their private associations with others, reality TV has become the quintessential technology of advanced or ‘neo’ liberal citizenship” (Ouellette and Hay 4). Television, like the Internet communities from the previous chapter, represents a socially-connected community inhabiting a liminal space between the two different geographical points of the actors and the audience. Many adolescents view reality television and Internet spaces as places where they can explore their own identities (Subrahmanyam and Smahel 64). It is the liminality of the space that gives adolescents these perceptions of safety. Most research, however, shows a correlation between the social connections of these liminal communities and adolescents’ geographical communities (Subrahmanyam and Smahel 83; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 84; Seepersad 38; Reich, Espinoza, and Subrahmanyam 357).

As Tris chooses re-integration into her geographical home, she pushes back against the current trends of placelessness and loss of local identity. The social connections ground Tris to her local home. Even though she struggles to identify with home in the societal expectations of Chicago, the social connections she discovered throughout all the factions give her the internalized identity that Wolf classifies as the final acceptance of home and van Gennep identifies as re-integration into society. Leonard Lutwack notes the shift from the relevance of fixed places in defining identity to “a life governed by mobility and communications” (213). While this movement to communication appears in the content of these first two series, these texts also re-enforce the importance of social relations grounded in a geographical understanding of place. Tris forces her social relationships to work within her geographical community by changing the perceptions of the heterotopia, not the expectations of her local community.

These heterotopias cause moments of crises when adolescents begin to use them as mimetic experiences. This mimetic experience expands beyond Internet into both advertising and television. These media experiences often reflect the real-life experiences of their audiences, impacting the identity development of adolescents (Huntemann and Morgan 303). Media that specifically offers a reality-based concept, such as reality television, purposefully creates a mimetic experience for its viewers: “[R]eality TV circulates informal ‘guidelines for living’ that we are all (at times) called upon to learn from and follow” (Ouellette and Hay 2). The previous chapter shows the clear connection between local communities and virtual spaces, and thus, these reality-based experiences cause moments of crises, when, like Tris’s experience, they challenge the home identities of adolescent readers.

Tris’s liminality also relates directly to the adolescent experience as a move from the innocence of childhood into the freedom of adulthood. Most adults look back on adolescence as a horrific moment of their life, and most adolescents dream for the freedom of adulthood. In this way, the adolescent experience mimics Tris’s plights. Foucault briefly sketches out the different types of heterotopias, calling one the heterotopia of crisis (24). One example Foucault offers for this type of heterotopia specifically addresses spaces inhabited by groups of adolescents (24). True heterotopic spaces may not exist in the lives of many adolescents, but television and Internet provide points of mimetic experience. Adolescents experience moments of crises when their perceptions of virtual reality spaces do not align with the heterotopic constructions. The *Divergent* series emphasizes the dangers of these misperceptions by building a geographical heterotopia, emphasizing the connection that exists between the two communities, constructed and real. By experiencing the heterotopia, the characters realize that no matter the space of the community, they must still deal with all the consequences of their actions.

This conversation continues into the next chapter by exploring the impact of propaganda on adolescent home identity. These problems encountered throughout the last book culminate in a conclusion that directly relates back to the struggles in the lives of adolescent readers. Adolescent decisions may not directly influence the globalized world, but they do make decisions that drastically affect their own role within both their virtual and local communities. Hintz points directly to this trend, showing how “in young adult utopian and dystopian writing, young people bear much of the pressure of political reform” (“Monica Hughes” 115). By connecting the struggles of the young narrators alongside the political struggles of the novels, this series emphasizes the impact that crucial, community-based decisions have on adolescents. And, even though adolescents do make decisions that impact their own communities, as *Delirium* emphasizes, communities also impact adolescent decisions through targeted propaganda.

CHAPTER 4

THE RELIGION QUESTION: MEDIA AND PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS IN THE
DELIRIUM SERIES

Even though it has yet to receive as much mainstream support, *Delirium* offers a distinct perspective to YA dystopian literature. The complicated religious messages of the series are, I believe, part of the reason adolescent readers have a hard time connecting. As Marjorie Hogan emphasizes:

In our rapidly evolving modern society, churches and communities no longer are able or expected to be traditional cultural teachers for youth; the homogenized picture of American culture is provided through characters, plots, and commercials on screens and other media across the land. (661)

Religious teaching still exists, but as Hogan argues, it looks much different from even 20 years ago, making any traditional approach to religious instruction difficult for adolescent audiences to grasp. Much of American ideology comes first through a technological medium that then enters local communities. The media continues to shape popular culture and ideologies, and adolescent audiences receive particular attention from most media forms (Huntemann and Morgan 303).

Robert Kubey, Smita Banerjee, and Barna Donovan also highlight the importance of mass media in communicating messages of value, while simultaneously not discounting the continued importance of the parental role (346). Hogan shows that media plays a foundational role in the spread of ideology but admits that important religious values are most often passed on through parents (662). The substitution of traditional religious teaching with media is a reality that

currently affects American mainstream culture, and this change affects both adolescent home identity and subsequent parent-child relationships.

When accounting for these religious changes currently taking place in American society, the content of *Delirium* fits better into the overall focus of YA dystopian literature as a mirror for the “personal problems of adolescence” (Hintz 255). *Delirium* takes place in a dystopic, futuristic version of the United States, and Magdalena Haloway (Lena), the main narrator, lives in the bordered community of Portland. In *Delirium*, I argue that the religious propaganda relates directly to adolescents’ own encounter with propaganda in media. In describing the religious material in YA literature, Trites proposes, “Adolescent novels that deal with religion as an institution demonstrate how discursive institutions are and how inseparable religion is from adolescents’ affiliation with their parents’ identity politics” (38). Since Lena’s mother represents an opposing ideology, Lena’s personal narrative of home identity struggles to incorporate both Portland’s propagated religion and her mother’s expectation into a home identity. It is only through a combination of both ideologies within the framework of a localized sense of belonging that Lena discovers an identity of home. Adolescents deal with these same expectations as they encounter propaganda through both their social relationships and virtual worlds.

Robyn McCallum describes the different forms that identity formation takes in YA literature: “Concepts of personal identity and selfhood are formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people” (3). Thus far, the previous chapters’ show how identity forms through both society and other people but little emphasis focuses on the effect of language. While the *Delirium* series deals with both the dialogue of societal and personal relations, it also highlights the linguistic aspect through the religious question. The dystopian government of this series exerts control over the people through the propagandized fear of *amor deliria nervosa*

“[t]he deadliest of all deadly things: It kills you both when you have it and when you don’t” (Oliver, *Delirium* 4). Readers know the delirium only as “love,” and in this futuristic version of the United States, the familiar concept morphs into a disease every loyal citizen fears contracting. Until the age of eighteen, when citizens can safely receive the cure, they are taught to fear the disease through both religious education and ongoing propaganda. This propagated religion affects both the community as a whole and Lena’s individual home identity.

Arnold van Gennep’s three stages of symbolic transition are supported and challenged through Lena’s individual choices and the community’s ideology. The three stages – “separation, margin, and reaggregation” – change depending on the individual choices Lena makes (qtd in Hetherington 32). *Delirium*’s government attempts to control these stages by completely removing the second marginalizing stage. This stage, as Hetherington illustrates, places the person into a liminal identity (32). By avoiding this liminal position, loyal citizens never lose their given identities as either an uncured or cured, reinforcing the propaganda that the government relies upon to sustain control over the community. Lena’s individual home identity, however, forces her into the margin stage, and as I will emphasize later, shows how Lena navigates the pressures of societal and parental expectations.

While elements of technological control exist in *Delirium*’s community, the government re-enforces their expected home identities primarily through propaganda. Just like in the *Hunger Games*, television broadcasts connect the communities, providing everyone with the same, official story. Portland’s technology, however, does not emphasize the same controlling effect that pervades Katniss’s narrative. Hardly anyone in Portland actually believes the official stories, openly mocking the broadcasts. The government’s control exists, however, not in the technology, but through the religious propaganda taught to children. Every child in the community grows up

reading from and learning about *The Book of Shhh* in their Biblical Science class (Oliver, *Delirium* 87). Throughout the series, readers gain glimpses of the mysterious *Book of Shhh*; every chapter in *Delirium* begins with a poem or quote from various texts that form the government's ideological foundation. The opening chapter begins with a quote from Proverb 42 of *The Book of Shhh*, "The most dangerous sicknesses are those that make us believe we are well" (Oliver, *Delirium* 1). Right away, this quote underlines the experience readers are about to enter, emphasizing the importance of linguistic control in this community. Two particular stories make their presence known throughout the novels: Mary Magdalene and King Solomon. Both of these stories sound familiar to anyone with a basic knowledge of the Bible, but the morphed stories of *Delirium*'s biblical text reflect the controlling ideology the dystopic United States government depends upon.

The first story comes from the book of Lamentations, and Lena's full name, Magdalene, comes from this book, representing the last connection to her mother. Lena provides readers with a passage from this specific text: "I was named after Mary Magdalene, who was nearly killed from love: 'So infected with *deliria* and in violation of the pacts of society, she fell in love with men who would not have her or could not keep her.'" (Book of Lamentations, Mary 13:1)" (Oliver, *Delirium* 87, italics original). Continuing the story, Mary meets Joseph, a man who tries to nurse her back to health, but her deliria persists, and when Joseph, unable to help, abandons her, she finally collapses, asking God for help: "He heard her prayers, and in his infinite compassion he instead removed from her the curse of the *deliria*, with which all humans had been burdened as punishment for the original sin of Eve and Adam" (Oliver, *Delirium* 88, italics original). More than anything, Lena wants to walk in "righteousness and peace until the end of her days," but Lena's connection to this story also relates directly to her mother's death and a

subsequent desire for a home identity (Oliver, *Delirium* 88). Stewart M. Hoover, in the introduction to his book, *Religion in the Media Age*, argues for a growing connection between media and religion (1). This religion reflects propaganda through its wide-reaching and overwhelming effect, creating what Hoover calls a “‘common culture’ that is at one and the same time both challenging *and* alluring” (267, italics original). The religion of *Delirium* creates a “common culture” that binds the whole community together, and at various moments in the text, simultaneously appeals to and disgusts Lena.

Hana’s first moment of narration opens with a passage from the “Legends and Grievances” section of *The Book of Shhh* entitled “Story of Solomon.” This story commonly appears in mainstream American culture, but Hana’s haunting rendition changes the tone of the original. The story starts off much as expected, with each mother claiming the baby belongs to her and begging Solomon to give her the child. After Solomon proclaims his decision, his famous wisdom morphs into nightmarish actions:

The women agreed that this was just, and so the executioner was brought forward, and with his ax, he sliced the baby cleanly in two.

And the baby never cried, or so much as made a sound, and the mothers looked on, and afterward, for a thousand years, there was a spot of blood on the palace floor that could never be cleaned or diluted by any substance on earth (Oliver, *Requiem* 10)

Just like Hana, readers have a hard time removing the image of the baby “split open on the tile floor, like a butterfly pinned behind glass” as they continue to read the novel (Oliver, *Requiem* 10). From Lena’s perspective this story illustrates the dangers of an uncaring society and the necessity of self-sacrifice, a lesson Alex reveals through the real story. But, then Hana offers an unexpected perspective: “That’s what’s so great about the story. It’s real I remember feeling

just like that baby: torn apart by feeling, split in two, caught between loyalties and desires. That's how the diseased world is. That's how it was for me, before I was cured" (Oliver, *Requiem* 10). These two different perspectives, of the cure as safe but also as dangerous, battle throughout Lena's narration as she moves between the Wilds and the official communities, and when Hana re-enters the story, the readers must deal with these same complications, reinforcing Hoover's view of "common culture."

The simultaneous appeal and challenge of the "common culture" reflects directly back to the inherent safety of the constructed, fixed identity that Portland enforces through its borders. Trites discusses the religious influences in the popular YA novel *The Chosen*, showing how religious beliefs mirror personal identity that "is determined solely by patriarchs" (39). Doreen Massey shows how this approach to religious identity reflects past approaches to geographical space:

All of these have been attempts to fix the meaning of places, to enclose and defend them: they construct singular, fixed and static identities for places, and they interpret places as bounded enclosed spaces defined through counterposition against the Other who is outside. (168)

While the idea of "othering" through borders is common in postcolonial theory, the approach needs updating when evaluating both a futuristic and technologically dystopic community. Rachel Wagner offers an updated definition for the sacred "Other," which she claims represents "a Platonic ideal of Perfection" (78). Wagner contends, "Virtual Reality is commonly described as 'other' from physical reality, despite its increasing spillover into physical life. Virtual reality is a different 'place' where we can live out our fantasies, where we can be other people" (78). The Wilds of *Delirium* do not represent a "virtual reality" as specifically as the games or the

heterotopia of the first two series; however, the Wilds do represent the place where Lena occupies a liminal space, allowing her to explore the fantasy of love. This liminal space reflects van Gennepe's margin stage, and since the government intends to eliminate this liminal space, they unintentionally create an option for escaping societal expectations by building a segregated space of "Others." By enacting these borders, the government not only creates an "Other," it also offers an unintended protection to those outside the cities. Lena reinforces that the government's denial of Invalids, those who inhabit the Wilds, actually allows the Resistance to flourish. The government cannot publically strike against a group that they claim does not exist, but this propaganda fails to convince most citizens, since as Massey asserts, all borders enforce the separation of one thing from another (168).

The *Delirium* government recognizes the appealing security of this type of home life, and it capitalizes on this identification through the individual communities; however, Massey also describes the consequences of bounding identities. As in both *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, Lena does not just inhabit a geographical community, but she inhabits a social one as well. A home identity must reflect the complex relationship of the "mix of natural and cultural features in the landscape" that also includes "the people who occupy the space" (Convery, Corsane, and David 1). *Delirium*'s government uses borders to control the natural landscapes, while using propaganda to control both cultural and social interactions. By enacting borders that separate the chaos of the Wilds from the structure of society, the government creates a place that reflects the fantastical elements of virtual reality, but as the other chapters highlight, this utopic perception often changes when it clashes with the limitations of a geographical community. Leonard Lutwack emphasizes the "wildness" of natural spaces in literature: "Resorting to the wilderness is the furthest step one may take away from civilization without being engulfed altogether by

chaos” (210). Tris’s initial fantastical experience with the Wilds disappears when she experiences the dangers of inhabiting an “other” space, such as the lack of food and health care: “This is what we have become in the Wilds: We starve, we die, we wrap our friends in old and tattered sheets, we burn them in the open” (Oliver, *Pandemonium* 122).

Lena’s first experience in the Wilds is through Alex’s perspective, and he romanticizes the natural beauty and speaks forbidden words of love (Oliver, *Delirium* 292-301). This romantic experience gives Lena a sense of fantasy and euphoria; the Wilds represent this sacred “Other,” then, as they literally become a separate place where Lena can be a different person. Through this euphoric association, the Wilds represent a virtual space, when they become a utopic, dream-like place, reflecting Michael Heim’s definition of a virtual place (137). In offering a definition of utopic spaces, Michel Foucault focuses on utopias as “fundamentally unreal spaces” (24). This first experience represents a utopia, because it did not reflect the reality of the Wilds experience. Lena recognizes the chaos of the wilderness only when she enters the world without the fantasy of Alex. Due to increased governmental control, the Invalids must come together, attempting to form a “utopian” community outside the walls of Waterbury. Lena’s small group heads to this city hoping for a level of security, but when they encounter the ruthlessness of a starving and scarred town, Lena loses even more hope: “This is not freedom. This is not the world we imagined. It can’t be. This is a nightmare” (Oliver, *Requiem* 158). The loss of this utopic dream ultimately forces a perception shift between the two communities.

Since the borders play an important role in forming the community’s ideology, they deserve specific attention in this series. Several layers of separation exist within this dystopian society: cured from uncured, men from women, wildness from order, and rich from poor. Unlike the borders in the other two series, Lena initially takes pride in the safety that her community’s

borders provide against the deadly deliria that still exists in the non-controlled areas. Even through the description of the borders, the supposed chaos of the Wilds directly foils the strict order of the sanctioned communities: “Every sanctioned and approved community must also be contained within a border This is for our own protection. Safety, Sanctity, Community: That is our country’s motto” (Oliver, *Delirium* 42). Experiencing this propaganda makes the reader uncomfortable, but Lena, her family, and friends take comfort in the order and protection their community offers. The borders help secure the orderly societies that the government needs, while also re-enforcing the ideology of safety that the citizens depend upon. Thus, the chaotic world of the Wilds only appeals for those people who refuse the procedure. This appeal originates from both the government’s safety and fear ideology; by experiencing the fantastical world of love, citizens no longer want the government’s “safety,” and as such, they are more easily able to experience the pervasive fear. When the government’s fear ideology is the only part of the equation, it places the citizen in a liminal state, suspending his or her participation in the larger community, which creates a space of chaos. The chaos of the Wilds offers them a reality that more directly reflects their new position. When Lena meets Julian, the son of a high-level official, he supports this idea, claiming that the cure is the only solution to chaos; people have to believe in the safety of the borders and the cure (Oliver, *Pandemonium* 235).

The first layer of separation, cured from uncured, provides the necessary perception of government control over both the official communities and the Wilds. Portland’s surrounding fence eliminates the risk of contracting delirium from the Wilds, and yet, the community allows for the presence of cooperating uncureds: “Until the procedure has been perfected, until it has been made safe for the under-eighteens, we will never be totally protected” (Oliver, *Delirium* 3). While Portland allows those under the age of eighteen relative freedoms, they have strict rules

regarding the interactions of uncureds, including a curfew. This separation, however, goes deeper than it first appears. In Portland, a prison called the Crypts by the local community houses criminals, Invalid sympathizers, and “crazies.” The “crazies” usually consist of cureds who experience complications from the procedure. The Crypts provide a further border within the community, a heterotopia of types, which supplies a constant presence of fear that any disobedience leads to eternal segregation from the border’s safety. The injustice of the heterotopic Crypts plays a dramatic role in Lena’s home identity shift and utopian perspective.

The second level of separation between men and women applies primarily to this group of uncured. Since they lack the protection of the cure, the two sexes must not interact in order to stop the disease from spreading. The gendered separation not only allows for the government’s control over the delirium, it also adds another level of fear. More than anything Lena fears getting caught with an uncured male, even after she meets Alex:

Breaking curfew is one thing; listening to unapproved music is even worse. But breaking segregation laws is one of the worst offenses there is. Thus Willow Marks’s early procedure, and the graffiti scrawled on her house; thus the fact that Chelsea Bronson was kicked out of school after allegedly being found breaking curfew with a boy from Spencer, and her parents were mysteriously fired, and her whole family was forced to vacate their house. And—at least in Chelsea Bronson’s case—there wasn’t even any *proof*. Just a rumor going around. (Oliver, *Delirium* 127, italics original)

The government does not hide the consequences of an early procedure, and in fact, Lena understands the consequences from the beginning of her narration (Oliver, *Delirium* 43, 55). Lena struggles throughout the novel to balance the fear that the segregation enacts against the stability that it supplies, and she only chooses to leave or re-enter a community based on her

social connections. The government depends upon both the fear and the safety to maintain control before the cure, and even after the cure, the fear ideology continues to haunt the community through sympathizer propaganda.

The third layer of borders physically separates the official communities from the Invalids who supposedly inhabit the woods outside the fence: “We pretend that the Wilds—and the people who live there—don’t even exist” (Oliver, *Delirium* 43). When Lena meets Alex, she realizes the border’s inability to keep the Invalids from moving in and out of the community, but the government uses the Incidents to re-enforce the borders. The Incidents were a series of bombings that took place at the same time throughout the entire nation; the government claims the bombs were planted by the Resistance, a group of Invalids working for change from both within the cities and outside the cities. The government uses the Incidents to incite rage in all citizens, and spark a desire for further protection methods, showing how the ideology of democracy persists into a dystopian form of the United States. When Lena escapes from her kidnappers in the second novel, she realizes that the government actually plans for these instances of chaos (Oliver, *Pandemonium* 214). These moments of controlled chaos allow for the continued success of the government’s propaganda, since it only works when people need its comfort and answers. By creating chaos, the government acknowledges that their fear ideology has certain limits; they must counteract the fear with the promise of safety. In order for the control to create the dichotomy that Lena experiences, a balance between fear and safety must exist.

The last layer of separation permeates the community, and yet it is the only one not officially advocated by the government: the separation between the rich and the poor. Religious ideology in YA novels often directly influences “identity politics,” especially, in this novel,

issues of class (Trites 38). Lena obviously comes from the poorer part of town, as her family rations electricity, causing familiar appliances, such as a washer and dryer, to go unused. Lena's best friend, Hana, comes from the opposite situation, living in a mansion with unlimited electricity. Julian's house also emphasizes the difference lifestyles between the rich and the poor. This level of separation causes distinct differences in the communal role of each citizen, but as Hana's narration shows, the rich use their power to further the gap between the two communities: "Of course, the lights are not about celebration. They are a statement of power. We will have, control, possess, even waste—and others will wither away in the dark, sweat in the summer, freeze as soon as the weather changes" (Oliver, *Requiem* 308). Hana's future husband, Fred Hargrove, is the mayor of Portland, and he creates an initiative that withholds electricity from neighborhoods housing dissenters or sympathizers, most of which exist throughout the poorer areas. Everyone in the bordered community earns the protection of both the procedure and the wall; however, the segregation between the rich and the poor undermines the overall effectiveness of the safety ideology.

Most of this undermining grows through the double narrative of the final book, which, echoing *Divergent*, splits the plot between two narrators, a growing trend in YA literature (Koss and Teale 570). This type of narration shows "how difficult it may be for ordinary people to oppose those who seek control over their minds as well as their bodies" (Bond 47). By this point, Hana, having undergone the procedure, no longer resembles the carefree youth of the first novel. Offering the second narrative shows the difficulties in overcoming the government's melodramatic propaganda. The government promotes a feeling of melodrama by drawing a physical border between good and evil, and unable to break from this ideology, the Invalids propagate only a reversal of the same idea. Marc Bousquet emphasizes the impact of melodrama

in the *Harry Potter* series, asserting that “melodrama can be an extraordinarily effective organizer of public opinion in service of imperial, dominative ambition, whether employed by the black shirts of the Third Reich or by recent occupants of the White House” (177). The melodrama of this community exists through the extreme segregations of cures from uncureds and through the segregations of the borders, a dichotomy challenged and supported through the double narrative.

The split perspective complicates this melodramatic dichotomy. Hana does not experience the relief and “safety” the government promises. She still feels the guilt of turning in Lena, and she stills feels the fear that her future husband instills in her. Even though the scientific community, supported through the government, promises that they can cure all human feelings, the reality of human nature complicates this type of control. Hana represents an isolated perspective in a huge society, but through her narration, it is clear that the operation faces limits when attempting to wipe out past emotions, especially ones as strong as love, fear, or guilt. While it is easy to just assume that this message warns adolescent readers about the consequences of conforming, Hana’s narration provides moments of striking clarity that often counterbalance this warning. She plays a role in the assumed death of her husband and in Lena’s escape, but she still must live under the shadow of the procedure. She ultimately makes decisions that free her from the oppression of her guilt and fear, but it is unclear whether the ability to ever fully love again exists in her future.

Hana’s story ends simply and rather abruptly, leaving more questions than answers: “There is the slapping of my shoes, and the trees that seems to nod and tell me, *You’re okay. Everything will be okay.* Maybe, after all, they are right” (Oliver, *Requiem* 383, italics original). The presence of anthropomorphized nature at this particular moment emphasizes the dissolution

of the borders and mirrors the story of Solomon that began her narration. These fantastical bookends frame Hana's narrative and emphasize not the importance of the story itself, but the importance of actually telling and listening to the story. As Bond argues, by offering a second perspective, that counterbalances Lena's narrative, Hana complicates the melodramatic propaganda of both the government and the Resistance (47). Taking Bond's argument further, this anthropomorphized moment specifically speaks to the suffering of Portland's resistance: "The inverse process of anthropomorphism is dehumanization, whereby people *fail* to attribute humanlike capacities to other humans and treat them like nonhuman animals or objects" (Waytz, Epley, and Cacioppo 59, italics original). Hana's narration exists specifically to address the procedure's "dehumanization," and it shows the other side of the story. Just as King Solomon's story mars the beginning of Hana's narrative, this anthropomorphized moment haunts the end: instead of the baby cut in half, readers experience this splitting sensation. By occupying a liminal space between the two narrators, readers catch a glimpse of hope, while also understanding that realistically the search for a utopia involves more than just removing a physical border.

It is through the double narrative that the presence of virtual space gets blurred, causing a perception shift between the ordered communities and the Wilds. In a way, this shift presents an opposite effect from *The Hunger Games*. Through the different perspectives, Portland represents a virtual space and the Wilds a "real" space. Even though Lena struggles with life in the Wilds, she does not want to return to Portland. She now understands the truth Alex told her about the procedure: "*Hate isn't the most dangerous thing, he'd said. Indifference is*" (Oliver, *Delirium* 362, italics original). Scott Lukas emphasizes the appeal of themed environments through the consumers' willingness to accept the reality of such constructions "as real, meaningful, and intimate" (5). Portland's "themed environment" does build this shared experience, but the shared

space is compromised by the presence of an “other” space. Thus, just as the government misperceives Massey’s static identity formation, it also misunderstands the appeal created by building this fantastical space. Lena starts the novel as an ideal citizen, but as she experiences the injustices of the borders and the propagated religion, her identity within that community changes. Lena moves from viewing her society as utopia to dystopia based on both personal and social sufferings (Totaro 129). It is the emphasis on social connections that leads to the second part of the argument.

This final part connects the government’s propaganda back to Tris’s struggle of integrating her mother’s influences into Portland’s expected home identity. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Lena, like Tris, experiences van Gennep’s three stages of symbolic transition. Her movement through these stages, however, differs in two important ways. Lena’s community places her in the separation stage from birth until the time she receives the procedure. Now most members of the community move right into re-integration after completing the procedure. Thus, when Lena moves into the margin stage, it is by her own choice; by choosing the margins, she separates herself from both Katniss and Tris, who are forced through their government or their own inability to leave their communities. She only chooses Alex’s life when she learns of the societal injustices her mother experiences. Lena believed her mother died many years ago, but she discovers that the government actually put her mother into the Crypts. Lena uses her mother’s actions as a catalyst for her own decision-making. The second difference within this process comes when Lena refuses reintegration into Portland. It is only through her mother’s influence that she returns to the community. These two differences underscore Lena’s loyalty to her mother, while also placing an important emphasis on individual agency.

The propagated fear of the delirium parallels Lena's search for a home identity after the confusing loss of her mother. Lena fears the disease more than most due to her mother's previous association and supposed suicide (Oliver, *Delirium 2*). She can never hide from the impact that her mother's delirium left throughout childhood, and this impact directly correlates to Lena's place within the community. Portland promotes transparency, keeping all records publically available; thus anyone can discover Lena's association with the deadly delirium. The community fears, as does Lena through extension, the residual effects of the disease. Even though the government acknowledges that delirium does not spread through genes, it also offers no actions to control the spread of fear that accompanies this association (Oliver, *Delirium 2*). In the first half of the novel Lena strives to meet the expectations of her community, overcompensating in many ways with the hope that she can escape any residual effects of her mother's disease. She only fails in identifying with this home when she discovers her mother's fate in the Crypts. As mentioned earlier, the Crypts represent a border within a border, a way for the city of Portland to exert total control over the community. In the previous chapter, Johnson contends that heterotopias "challenge the space in which we may feel at home" (84). The Crypts represent a heterotopia, challenging, through the social bond of her mother, Lena's previous feelings of home. It is her mother's suffering, then, that allows Lena to break from the propagated religion and move into the margin stage.

Lena stays in the margin stage until she finally accounts for her mother's influence and suffering. The one connection she always had to her mother was her name: Magdalene. As a child Lena read the book of Lamentations over and over again, trying to decipher why her mother gave her that particular name. When Lena finally reunites with her mother, she better understands the reasoning: "The Book of Lamentations is a story of love. More than that: It's a

story of sacrifice” (Oliver, *Requiem* 274). She begins to understand the inherent danger of the delirium in that moment: love makes people unpredictable. The delirium lets people feel guilt, love, sadness, and most important, connected. It is this interconnectedness, with her mother and with others inside the wall, that leads Lena back to the community she left. The dangers of social connections stress Massey’s proposed border ideology as a way to freeze national identity (169). It is only through Lena’s reformed parental bond that she can move from the liminal margins into a re-integrated identity of home.

When Lena chooses to return to Portland, she does so not just at the request of her mother, but also as a way to re-claim her own home identity, highlighting her agency in the process. When Lena does make it into Portland during the invasion, she reveals, “The resistance may have a mission in Portland, but I have a mission of my own” (Oliver, *Requiem* 346). In this moment, Lena makes her own decision, choosing to save both her cousin Grace and Hana. She chooses a home identity that integrates both her mother’s expectations and her responsibility to the interconnected, geographical community of Portland. Both Hana’s and Lena’s narrative complicate the melodramatic religious propaganda, but their narratives also both emphasize the importance of individual agency. By emphasizing her own agency within the context of both cultural and parental expectations, Lena’s story echoes the struggles of many adolescents.

Adolescents struggle to integrate their local home identities with both media and parental expectations. The more technology plays a role in adolescents’ home identities, the more “media and religion will continue to interact and evolve” (Hoover 6). In studying parental relationships with media, Hoover contends, “[M]ost [parents] have concluded that the appropriate response is to prepare their children to interact with it, rather than attempt to avoid it” (276). But, as this series emphasizes, adolescents make their own choices that both separate and connect

themselves to their various communities; these communities, whether imagined or real, “are formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people” (McCallum 3). Lena discovers her own home identity by incorporating all three aspects into a geographically-bound, local sense of home. By mediating the propaganda through her various relationships, especially her mother, Lena finds a sense of belonging and home identity. As adolescents participate in this dialogue, they must also navigate their experiences with propaganda whether through their family or through their friends or through their virtual communities. Returning to Hogan’s argument from the beginning of this chapter, adolescents must navigate the various identities “provided through characters, plots, and commercials on screens and other media across the land” (661). As Tris discovers in the previous chapter, adolescents can identify too readily with this culture, and while *Divergent* warns against extreme mimicry, *Delirium* shows how this cultural identity needs to coexist with both a local sense of belonging and a set of social connections formed through both family and friends in order to successfully participate in a globalized community.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The main question for the study, why dystopian literature is so culturally relevant now, may not be completely answerable. Lisa Damour, however, suggests that one of the appeals of the Harry Potter series is Rowling's realistic portrayal of adolescent emotions: "In this, she sets herself apart from many contemporary adults who are increasingly unwilling to view adolescent distress as in some way developmentally essential" (3). Rowling understands the series' intended audience, and she builds the content around that audience's unique experiences. By offering the unique perspective of adolescents, YA writers build a powerful connection with their intended readers. The dystopic governments specifically reflect the fear of an open and globalized world (Bauman 26). The three series above directly address the fears of adolescent readers, while providing a place to move safely beyond those fears.

As YA writers continue to build spaces that relate to adolescent readers, they must address the changing effects of both globalization and the subsequent loss of local home identity. YA authors address this change by incorporating the technological communities that permeate adolescents' lives into their texts. In Marc Augé's foundational text *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, he explores the growing importance of globalization, "[T]o cross international borders brings no more profound variety than is found walking between theatres on Broadway or rides at Disneyland" (XII). These "non-places" impact the home identities of adolescents, and they help account for the "downward trends in social engagement and community feeling" (Twenge, Freeman, and Campbell 1057). Dystopian novels respond to this

trend of homelessness directly by reverting to the opposite extreme of societal segregation and bordering.

Above all, this study answers the challenges of YA critics from the introduction, proving that YA literature can be a “destination literature” (Coats 317). YA and children’s literature traditionally recognize the importance of identity formation and communal belonging, but as technology permeates more of our society, this identity formation must change. These three series ultimately seek to make sense of the individual and localized experience in a globalized American society. While all of the series geographically take place within the borders of the United States, this location and its government loses relevance in light of the social relations that exist through the local community. These novels offer a mimetically safe place to experience any future societal roles that adults, and someday adolescent readers, inhabit in both the local and global community. Adolescents connect to these dystopic worlds through these social-based mimetic experiences.

Since identity formation traditionally plays an essential role in adolescent and children’s literature, these three series share commonalities that help establish a standard for that type of development in dystopian novels. In the introduction, Monica Hughes’s four dystopic forces – runaway technology, political pressures, environmental threats, and human invaders – start the conversation about YA dystopian standards, and these three series both reflect Hughes’s standards and continue the conversation (156). *Delirium* bridges the gap between *Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, showing how personal identity forms through “dialogue with society, with language, and with other people” (McCallum 3). This identity formation takes place as the main characters’ struggle with borders, government control, and the limitations of human nature. At some point in all three series human nature pushes back against the elements of government

control, and when this pushback causes the carefully constructed borders to disintegrate, the government loses control over the constructed home identities.

These novels are shaping current adolescent behaviors and leaving a significant impact on cultural trends. These books may not be widely read 20 years from now, and a new trend is sure to appear for YA readers as Caroline Hunt maintains (6). Technological trends also rapidly change, compounding the difficulty authors face when accessing and writing to adolescent readers. These facts confirm that YA publishing is changing; this change reflects the fluctuating expectations and experiences of the adolescent readership. In *The Hunger Games* these changes materialize through Katniss's social mediation of her home identity as she inhabits both the real and virtual communities. In *Divergent* Tris's interaction with the heterotopia shows the importance of a geographically and socially grounded identity of home. Finally, in *Delirium*, Lena must navigate both the constructed and free communities, simultaneously balancing the influence of propaganda and parental expectations. These struggles take place within the technologically-constructed worlds of a futuristic United States. These societies all reflect some truth of human nature, and adolescents can imagine that in not so many years the United States' democratic experiment could end very wrong. By offering a hopeful solution to these deep fears, these series offer a space where adolescents can explore this nightmare within the safety of a fantastical construction. In the end, these dystopic novels offer value both as literary works and as pedagogy for exploring the effects of globalization and technology on adolescent development.

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