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# Where Have All The Rebels Gone? Ideology and Conformity in Young Adult Dystopian Literature

Meghan I. Rimmasch
*Brigham Young University*

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Meghan I. Rimmasch

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Jonathan Ostenson, Chair
Chris Crowe
Kristin Matthews

Department of English

Brigham Young University

ABSTRACT

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Meghan I. Rimmasch
Department of English, BYU
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By employing the critical studies of adolescence from Nancy Lesko, Roberta Trites, and Maria Nikolajeva and the study of positive and negative symbols of rebellion examined by Robert Lindner through Leerom Medovoi, I will interrogate the popular notion that female protagonists in dystopian Young Adult Literature (YAL) are strong, self-aware rebels who are positive role models to YA readers. Using the didactic nature of dystopian literature, I will examine how adult authors consciously (or unconsciously) set ideological standards for their YA readers through the female protagonists and how these standards are not as empowering as they initially seem. To address this disparity between what is promoted as rebellion and what is actually enacted by female protagonists, I will analyze Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy and Ally Condie's *Matched* trilogy. The analysis will conclude that the female protagonists are problematic, subscribing to specific, conservative ideologies presented in the novels which prohibits them from seeing through the rebellion they are involved in and that their choices are determined by male characters instead of their own self-awareness.

Keywords: Rebellion, Adolescents, Young Adult Literature, Ideology, *The Hunger Games, Matched*

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When *The Hunger Games* was published in 2008, it quickly climbed the best-seller charts. The Young Adult (YA) novel was popular not only for its violent, dystopian setting but also because of its heroine, Katniss Everdeen. For many readers, Katniss was a positive alternative to the popular Bella Swan from the *Twilight* series; she was the female protagonist who was not defined by the boys around her and was a young woman who fought to survive the arena of trained, killer teenagers. The majority of reviews and responses to Suzanne Collins' novel were positive, with Katniss labeled as a "rugged individualist" who changes the rules of the horror-filled Hunger Games (Scott), "a fighter, a killer, a survivor, [who] fights boys" (Ellis), "one of the strongest heroines...encountered in YA literature" (Jia), and the heir apparent to Buffy from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Ellis). Katniss had a lot riding on her young shoulders and the stakes were high for her to be an anti-Bella.

With the popularity of *The Hunger Games*, it is not surprising that more female-led dystopian YA novels like *Divergent* and *Matched* followed. Katniss, the prototypical rebel, is a "hard as nails" fighter who is "canny and resilient" (Ellis) and calculating in her rebellion against the Capitol (Zevin). She doesn't rely on the boys in her life to save her: she saves them (Ellis). While these reviews celebrate Katniss' rebellious nature, they miss what is really going on with her character: passive, conservative conformity. Instead of the tough female protagonist fighting the system who is a beacon of rebellion for teenage readers, Katniss is a problematic character whose conformity with adult expectations of her offers very little guidance for teenagers navigating the world around them. As a character, she is forced to either be a rebel heroine or conform to adult standards, not both. If her story is supposed to be a guide for teenage readers to find their identities, Katniss falls short in telling ways.

By employing the critical studies of adolescence from Nancy Lesko, Roberta Trites, and Maria Nikolajeva, and the study of positive and negative symbols of rebellion examined by Robert Lindner through Leerom Medovoi, I will interrogate the popular notion that female protagonists in dystopian Young Adult Literature (YAL) are strong, self-aware rebels who are positive role models to YA readers. By employing the didactic nature of dystopian literature, I will examine how adult authors consciously (or unconsciously) set ideological standards for their YA readers through the female protagonists and how these standards are not as empowering as they initially seem. To address the disparity between what is promoted as rebellion and what is actually enacted by female protagonists, I will analyze Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy and Ally Condie's *Matched* trilogy. Both series are set in post-United States dystopian worlds and feature a female protagonist who finds herself not only involved in rebellion against a corrupt society but also in a love triangle. By examining the aspects of control, rebellion, and romance in each trilogy, I will scrutinize the nature of female rebellion presented by adult authors to teenaged readers in order to address the problems characters like Katniss and Cassia present to readers.

YAL by its very nature acts as an ideological tool. It can teach adolescent teenagers about the world around them and help present them with different ways to work through the struggles they deal with on a daily basis. Though the genre is often not seen as a legitimate literary genre, the stakes of YAL run high and its popularity is something that needs to be addressed. If adolescent readers are spending a great deal of their time with these novels, the ideologies presented becomes significant. According to Robyn McCallum and John Stephens, scholars and critics of children's and adolescent literature, literature for children and adolescents often "express[es] [...] the writer's social, political or moral beliefs" and is "persistently concerned

with social issues and values" making it easier for novels to "openly advocate attitudes or positions as desirable for readers to espouse" (361). These ideologies are not always overt; in fact, McCallum and Stephens argue it "is more likely to be covert […] in the sense that it is embedded in a narrative which has a primary focus on events and characters" (361-362). For Katniss — and the Katniss-like characters who follow her — the conservative ideology of conforming to and upholding traditional gender roles when she is positioned to abandon them is problematic. Her presentation as a "hard as nails" protagonist is undermined by her passive role within the central rebellion in *The Hunger Games*, a role replicated through many female protagonists in dystopian YAL.

## Ideology and Young Adult Literature

YAL as a genre is most often written by adults for adolescent audiences. When many people think of adolescence, they tend to think of young people who are coming to terms with their identity and trying to find where they fit in society. For adults, adolescents are "often positioned as inferior to and dependent upon [them]" (Lewis 43, but this dependence can interfere with the identity adolescents are striving to create for themselves. Children's and youth theory scholar Nancy Lesko gives some insight into how teenagers are positioned by their adult counterparts. According to Lesko, "teenagers appear in our cultural talk as synonymous with crazed hormones, as delinquents, deficiencies, or clowns, that is, beings not to be taken too seriously" (1, an appearance that informs many adult/teen relationships. This is not to say that all teenagers are perceived in this way or that all adults view teens as "incomplete;" however, it does show that the uncertainty of life during the adolescent years and the perception of their ineptitude due to age and lack of experience creates an unknown factor in many teenage lives.

This unknown becomes an important part of YAL as adult authors create spaces for adolescent readers in an attempt to address the liminality of the teenage years and to offer solutions to the vulnerability many teens feel.

The ideology present in many YA novels comes from an "experienced" adult author writing for an "unexperienced," non-adult audience. According to Maria Nikolajeva, noted YA scholar and chair of education at Cambridge University, "literature reflects reality" and "ideology is a dimension of a literary text that lies in the tension between the text itself, the reality behind it, the authors and their intentions or implicit views, and also the readers and their ability to create meaning out of texts" (3). Ideology in YAL then becomes the relationship of the author to their readers, more specifically the intention of the author and the interpretation of that intention by the reader. Often, YAL is seen as escapist literature, allowing readers to journey to a different world where anything is possible, including power given to adolescent characters to lead in an adult world. This escapism presented to teens who are navigating the in-between nature of their lives is meant to "offer an improved vision of the future, or address deep and possibly unresolvable fears" (Hintz and Ostry 6). What tends to happen within this escape, however, are various ideologies imposed on adolescent readers, which mirrors the adult/teen power struggle present during the teenage years.

Roberta Trites, one of the leading scholars in the field of YAL, poses the question "who holds the power" (5) in relation to the adult/teen power struggle. Her question is one of importance for YA, as many novels written by adults for adolescents engage in this struggle. To go further, Trites asks who is actually in charge in much of the literature written for adolescents, the adults authors or the teenage protagonists? With ideology playing such a covert role in YAL, the answer is clear: adult authors. For Nikolajeva, those who "hold the power" in YAL are the

adult authors who might be guiding their readers through the uncertainty of adolescence by imposing either consciously or unconsciously their goals or "intentions and implicit views" on their adolescent readers who must then interpret their meaning (3). This covert placing of authorial ideology within YAL places all the power with the author. By creating this connective tissue between author and reader, Nikolajeva points out the power positions in play and how a literary work might examine those positions (7). In looking at an adult author writing for young adult readers, this ideology or expression of their views becomes a central part of how young readers might interpret their role in the world; how they might create their own identity in a very formidable time of life. Nikolajeva continues, stating:

> Children in our society are oppressed and powerless. Yet, paradoxically enough, children are allowed, in fiction written *by adults* for the enlightenment and enjoyment of children, to become strong, brave, rich, powerful, and independent — *on certain conditions and for a limited time*. (10)

In the introduction to their compilation of works about children's utopian and dystopian works, Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry also address the complex relationship between adult and child/teenager: Because children's literature sets up a very distinct "child against the adult world" relationship, the act of the child "showing up the adults is subversive" (8). They argue this setup is what makes dystopian writing work, that by creating such a contrast it is easier for the author "through the child…[to] cast a 'critical eye' on the world" (8). This understanding of dystopian YAL corroborates Nikolajeva's claim that adult authors of children's literature give just a little bit of power to their underage readers and the stipulations placed on that power are only in play for a brief moment, thus enforcing an ideology that underage readers are incapable of wielding "adult" power for long periods of time. By this standard, the power struggle between

adults and teens continues even in fiction but baits its readers by giving their fictive counterparts some of the power they seek: power to make decisions for themselves, free from the oppressive guidance of adults — something they don't usually have in the "real world." Dystopian YAL then serves as an almost perfect setting to empower teenage protagonists as they are the characters positioned to examine their world more critically because they haven't completely "bought in" to the dystopian model.

## Dystopian YAL and Adolescence

The didactic nature of dystopian literature makes it a valuable tool for authors to set ideological goals for their readers. Not only do authors create teenage protagonists who are potential agents of change but also their ideological message shows their readers what that change should look like, and is generally conservative in nature. The potential to enact change in the world around them creates the allowance for adolescent characters to be "powerful and independent" agents, yet as Nikolajeva points out, this power is limited, enforcing the liminality adolescents face in finding their identity. However, Lesko also points out that the terminology given to the adolescent stage in life, "Coming of Age," really does imbue some sort of importance to adolescents and at the same time, gives a greater power to the adult who may be guiding them through the tumults of teenage life (3). Whatever happens during these teenage years, there tends to be a greater adult power guiding or instructing what this teenager should become, which leads to one of the more common tropes in teenage life and development (and YAL) the power struggle with adults. This power struggle is mirrored in dystopian YAL and comes about as teens try to find their identities in the world, especially as they push the boundaries set by the adults around them. Power is established quickly in dystopian YAL, and,

as defined by Trites, it is "something that conspires against" a group of people (5); it is the oppressive society which enacts power according to its own will and not necessarily in favor of those it oversees. To place this idea back on the adult/teen power struggle, if adults want to enact power over teens, they are working to enact control over them in ideological ways, such as education, or as an adult they confide in, or even in the literature they write for teens.

Dystopian YAL introduces a metaphor for adolescence by creating an oppressive society to take the place of an oppressive parent. Identity and individualism are sacrificed for the greater good of the society and things like agency and choice become tools of rebellion. These novels and their ideological messages and warnings for the future "challenge young readers to consider the value of every individual to the community, as well as the need to keep society from dismantling individual rights" (Hintz and Ostry 9). What dystopian YAL also does is give power and control to teenage protagonists; they are "special, chosen, and different" from other teenagers (Seifert 71), a difference which gives them a unique perspective of their world that is not shared by the adults who also live in it. Adolescents are empowered to "use limited resources to overcome incredible odds" (Hintz and Ostry 11), something the average teenager reading these novels might be in search of as they seek their identity. Hintz and Ostry make the argument that "during adolescence, one is indeed faced with decisions that mirror those made by society as a whole: What are the proper limits of freedom? To what extent can one rebel? At what point does conformity rob one of his or her identity?" (10). Dystopian YAL attempts to answer these questions by placing adolescent protagonists in positions of power and forcing them to seek out their identities through rebelling against control and conformity.

One of the main themes in dystopian YAL, which also mirrors the adolescence experience, is choice: "who has it, who doesn't, who wants it, and who abuses it" (Seifert 52).

Most often, individual choice is controlled or even removed by the dystopian society, much as it is by adults with adolescents. According to University of London professor and dystopian literature scholar Gregory Claeys, the creation of such societies implies that "people sacrifice their individual interest for the common good. Social solidarity trumps selfish individualism" (8). Claeys also states the dystopian group identity is a "compulsory solidarity" (8) wherein the members of the society are coerced into a system they may not have chosen otherwise. Choice is often removed by dystopian societies to protect citizens from making poor choices that would affect them and those around them. In this manner, a dystopian society may look utopian on the surface, but once the seed of curiosity and rebellion is planted, the utopia becomes a darker, more oppressive unit: a society where "conformity kills individual creativity, resulting in a dull, oppressive" way of life (Hintz and Ostry 7). Each community is trying to control most or all aspects of life to maintain order and they do it under the guise of safety and the greater good. For Panem, control is meant to keep the Capitol safe from rebellion. By taking away the will of the people through The Hunger Games, they physically show the Districts that they have no power, no voice in their own lives and that control has worn the Districts down. We even see this wearing down with Katniss who on multiple occasions willingly follows what the Capitol says instead of joining in with rebellious talk. For the Society in *Matched*, controlling choice is the safest path because choice is what led to the downfall of the previous society. Mistakes are made by those who make choices so these communities take all choice away, especially the choice of whom to love. The citizens of the Society buy in completely, having given up their choice in exchange for safety and long, healthy lives. Cassia is also complicit with this lack of choice and completely trusting of the Society, stating, "The Society doesn't make mistakes" (Condie, *Matched* 60). Both Collins and Condie have created worlds where the control of the governing

body is absolute, a control that extends far beyond the Capitol or the Society and embeds itself within its citizens.

Control of nearly every part of life is essential in these societies which suggests the importance of ideals like personal choice, individual freedom, and the dangers of conformity in the real world. These ideals are important in helping shape personal and national identity. However, without keeping that freedom in check, without placing boundaries and ideologies on it, the consequences of unrestrained freedom might be too great. In this sense, some form of conformity is needed; a more "adult" ideology is placed on adolescents to keep them in check and help steer them to uphold more traditional values.

## The Ideology of Rebellion in YAL

Within these novels, rebellion is mentioned in passing as something that happened but was quickly resolved by the society, thus securing the society's place as leader and "all knowing" parent to citizens unable to make good choices for themselves. In this respect, Katniss and Cassia should become surrogates for the reader, becoming "agents of hope [who] embrace their ability to lead" (Hintz and Ostry 10) showing the power, even if temporary, that hope and rebellion can give to teenage readers. Central to dystopian YAL is this rebel Hintz and Ostry are talking about; a rebel who is fighting against conformity and surrendering personal liberties in exchange for security and prosperity, values that adults and teens have in common. This example of rebellion is appealing to teenagers because of the fight the rebels wage to reinstate their own personal liberties and choice, a fight that, again, is one for a common value both adults and teens prize. This is the fight Katniss and Cassia have the potential to win and are setup to do so by their authors. They value what rebels value and fight against the loss of personal freedom, but to

what end? To uphold the ideologies of adult authors or the fictional goals of the protagonists? To rebel just enough to get what they want and then come back to a conservative ending? Katniss and Cassia's hesitation to embrace their status as "agents of hope" with the "ability to lead" is problematic in the greater fight for independence from their oppressive societies and leads to greater issues within the scope of rebellion.

If Katniss and Cassia are meant to represent the teenagers in the adult/teen power struggle, their rebellion is short-lived and ends in conformity to the adult ideology for teens: rebel for a short while, but come back and be a contributing member of society. For teenage readers, this rebellion may not be what they envision. Teenage rebellion is built on the foundation of the adult/teen power struggle. Without the power play teenagers find themselves in for their own autonomy, rebellion would not play the role it does in creating identity, in making choices to determine who they will be; they are at once coming of age, as Lesko states, and held to strict expectations of their age and perceived ineptitude. Adolescence itself is two-sided in many ways as teenagers are struggling to find themselves during a time of life that is constantly changing but are also expected to act and react in ways deemed appropriate by adults. The liminal state of life during adolescence makes rebellion not only possible but understandable; the choices to push against the strict confines set up by an adult paradigm is how teenagers address the uncertainty of their lives. By receiving limited power from adults as described by Nikolajeva, the understanding of "coming of age" or liminality of teenage lives becomes elevated and the choices they make in creating their identities have higher stakes.

Dystopian YAL is designed to illustrate teenage rebellion and the high stakes present in adolescence. According to Trites, "YA novels serve both to reflect and to perpetuate the cultural mandate that teenagers rebel against their parents" (69); they show us what we expect of teenage

characters in a coming of age story: rebellion to find out who they are, straining beyond their parents' control in order to grow. Something that becomes clear delving deeper into the world of adolescence is that teenagers value choice, just as adults do. However, since teens are seen as incapable of making clear decisions for themselves (Lesko 3), adults often exercise their power and authority within the power struggle dynamic to assert their choice and their control over the situation. This assertion then plays back into the cycle of rebellion as teens seek to challenge that authority, something that they may come by naturally as they seek to push the limits of the oppressive units surrounding them (3). Both sides in the struggle are seeking for control but due to the very nature of the adult vs child mentality, whatever control teenagers gain during these years is as Nikolajeva points out, "on certain conditions and for a very limited time" (10). It is easy to see how well the dystopian YAL power struggle works. With all choice removed from the protagonist, they are unable to find their way to their identity; instead they find themselves subscribing to the identity terms their society places on them to give themselves a place within their world: Katniss is the "girl on fire" and Cassia is defined by her job as a sorter (Collins *The Hunger Games* 67). The title is not chosen by the girl — it is given to her and she accepts it. If the oppressive unit is seeking total control, what better way to gain it than by removing identity and choice?

With this in mind, promoting Katniss and Cassia as strong characters with rebellious tendencies meant to empower their readers is expected of the genre. Rebels who fight against a society that has stripped them of their personal liberty and taken away their choice are the examples of rebellion that are safe, that promote social change without the dangers of teenagers going too far in their rebellion. The ideology they fight for is one that is embraced by both adults and teens. The end result of these rebellions, however, is not one of social progress and change,

it is to reinforce the option of adopting traditional roles for female heroines (i.e. marriage and family) instead of offering real change for characters. Both Katniss and Cassia have the potential to be real rebels, to overthrow the oppressive systems bounding them and regain the personal choice and freedom for not only themselves, but for the people around them. However, they lose that potential as their stories progress. Both characters are more passive than active in their own lives and both are motivated by limited, conservative desires such as protecting their families and love interests rather than seeking widespread change for all in their societies. The rebellious characters of Katniss and Cassia promoted to sell books fail to be as empowering as they are sold to be.

## Problematic Rebels

Due to their controlling societies, teenage rebellion is an overt trope in *The Hunger Games* and *Matched*. *The Hunger Games* presents a society that is post-natural disaster United States with the nation of Panem as the governing body. Within Panem, there are 12 Districts who each provide certain commodities for the Capitol, the seat of government which controls each District through tributes of goods and wares but also tributes of children for the annual Hunger Games. Collins makes an interesting move in introducing the history of Panem as a part of the Reaping of children for The Hunger Games, a history that involves the Capitol establishing their dominance over the 13 Districts and then fighting the rebellion instigated by the districts known as "the Dark Days" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 18), with The Hunger Games being a central punishment for that rebellion. As Katniss recalls the history of Panem, she states:

> Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch — this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little

> chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just like we did in District 13.” (18-19)

This absolute control enacted by the Capitol is a sharp reminder of previous infractions against the powers that be and by sending their children to be sacrificed yearly in The Hunger Games, each District is held captive by the Capitol.

As the protagonist, Katniss is placed in a position of power. She could be resistant to the control of the Capitol and fight it as a strong character, yet she is continually controlled by nearly everyone around her. When the character of Haymitch is introduced, he seems to have a plan in place for one of District 12’s tributes — Katniss or Peeta — to win the tournament. This plan involves controlling as much of Katniss’ action as possible and begins early on with him demanding, “you have to do exactly what I say” (58). In order to survive, Katniss agrees to his terms and even when she tries to put up a fight, she is constantly reminded by Haymitch of her agreement. She is constantly under another’s control before entering the arena, from her prep team choosing how she will look to her stylist Cinna who determines how others will remember her through her clothing, coining the phrase: “Katniss, the girl...on fire” (67), which becomes her main identity leading up to the Games. Each person she encounters on her way to the arena has some sort of control over her and surprisingly, she doesn’t seem to fight it. Her only real fight against the plans made for and about her is when Peeta makes her “an object of love” (136) during the interview process designed to up her chances of survival. This fight is not because of what he did but how he did it - without her consent, literally blindsiding her in front of all of Panem. She doesn’t fight because of his professed love but because she fears his love makes her

look weak, the one thing she was hoping to control throughout the Games. The whole process of preparing for the Games awakens Katniss to the control that acts upon her and shows her that she has virtually no say in how her life is run, shattering the illusion that she is the acting agent in her story. Instead of acting for herself and fighting to control her own life, she gives in to what everyone tells her to do.

Katniss continues to give up control as she fights inside the arena. The Gamemakers (and by extension, the Capitol) control her and the other tributes throughout the Games by controlling the elements within the arena. Katniss goes without water even though the Gamemakers can make it rain (167), they send a firestorm to flush out the tributes hiding to make the Games more interesting for viewers (173), and they change the rules to allow two winners to get Katniss to team up with Peeta (244), playing off the love story Peeta has invented. Katniss' entire strategy changes according to the Gamemakers' whims; she is their puppet and she plays right along with them. Even at the end of the Games when the Gamemakers revoke the rule change, she is still controlled by the Gamemakers and is ready to kill Peeta: "Before I am even aware of my actions," she says, "my bow is loaded with the arrow pointed straight at his heart" (343) until she comes to her senses. Her one act of taking control from the Gamemakers, the act often seen as rebellion, is when she and Peeta decide to eat the poisonous berries to make the Games end, or to save themselves from death. Unfortunately for Katniss, the control of the Capitol only seems to tighten on her due to her decision, a control that lasts for the rest of the trilogy. This control and lack of fighting against it then becomes a trope for dystopian YA novels that follow.

With *The Hunger Games* already a best-selling trilogy by the time Condie's *Matched* trilogy was published, it makes sense that Condie's novels would reflect the same concerns. *Matched* introduces a society where all choice has been removed from the citizens and the

Society has been given power to control all aspects of their lives from the job they are assigned to the music they listen to and even to the person they are "matched" with — which in this case means the person you are assigned to marry. Condie presents a post-United States, futuristic society created to protect its citizens from the evils of choice and independence. To maintain the purpose for the Society — keeping everyone safe — they have maintained a sort of history of the world that came before with "the Hundred:" the Hundred Songs (Condie, *Matched* 85), the Hundred Poems (71), and the Hundred Paintings (118), to name a few. Each set of Hundred is carefully chosen and set aside as "safe" and nothing new is created; emotion is something that is not openly or often expressed and the art that remains is meant to invoke pride in the accomplishments of the Society, not to elicit emotional responses. The remaining works of art and literature are destroyed and works found that are not on the lists are burned. Cassia rarely questions this control, though her own experiences should lead her to question what the actual goal of the Society is.

One of the greatest forms of control the Society uses is through issuing different colored tablets to its citizens, pills only taken under specific circumstances. Cassia explains that the tablets are given to citizens as they reach certain ages and is "an important step toward...independence" or being an adult (51). There are three tablets issued and each is administered in certain situations: the blue tablet is meant to offer nutrients when food is not available, the green to calm, and the red is only taken when a high-level Official of the Society instructs them to. The citizens of the Society do not question the tablets or their uses and completely buy in to the safety and security the Society seemingly offers them; they don't worry about the tablets because they are told the tablets are for their own good. As mentioned, the Society also uses art and literature as a means of control. By setting aside specific art, music, and

poetry as “safe” for consumption and forbidding the creation of anything outside the Hundred sanctioned pieces, they stifle the creativity of their citizens and keep them safe from individuality. The Society has also deemed it unnecessary for its citizens to write, again keeping them safe from creating something unfit for Societal consumption. This control of creativity diminishes the individual, something the Society has obviously decided is not in line with helping the greater good. In protecting the greater good, the Society has fashioned itself a utopia, though with the genre of dystopia, it is easy to see how it will all fall apart. With all choice stifled by the oppressive Society, rebellion by the protagonist to gain personal freedom would seem the next logical step.

Like Katniss, Cassia is constantly controlled by the Society and doesn’t question the motives behind the rules. She is giddy with excitement in being “matched” and doesn’t question the method of matching or why it is done. She, like those around her, accepts the Society’s reasoning for matching as the best way to create the healthiest future for its citizens — a good match made with the proper data will ensure the success of the Society in the future (44). When Cassia realizes she has been matched with two boys — Xander and Ky — instead of one, she fears the repercussions of the Society and worries that she will be in trouble. Fearing punishment, she complies with the Matching Official who meets with her to discuss the glitch. Instead of questioning why the glitch happened, Cassia experiences relief in the acknowledgment that she did nothing wrong. Her complete buy-in with the Society makes it difficult for her to see the real problem at hand: no one knows how she was assigned two matches.

Cassia is so invested in the Society, so ready and willing to continue her life in it, that when her grandfather gives her forbidden poems she panics and doesn’t know what to do with them. Though she reads them and even shares them with her second match Ky, the words are

dangerous enough for her that she decides to destroy them. Instead of risking punishment for having illegal poems, she takes an easier route of ridding herself of them, though the words stay with her and begin to guide her as she sees past the veneer of her Society. As she begins to interact more and more with Ky (who has been marked an Aberration and therefore ineligible for matching) she begins to see the control the Society imposes on her and those she loves. As Cassia and Ky become closer, Cassia begins to question the Society's motives. Near the end of the novel, she is asked to sort a group of workers, of whom Ky is a part, to either send them to the battle front of an ongoing war or to keep them in the city. Thinking she has saved Ky from a horrible end, she sorts him into the "higher group" but finds out later that it was a test for her and she has sent him away to fight in the ongoing war against the Society (288; 322). As she realizes the total control the Society has over her and her choices, she also learns how the Society ultimately controls everyone: the red pill erases memory and therefore keeps the citizens oblivious to the events around them. As Cassia realizes this control, she decides out of love to find Ky, who has been sent to the Outer Provinces, and to set right the wrong decision she made. The control of the Society, much like Panem, continues to follow Cassia throughout the remaining novels.

As the novels continue, however, the protagonists begin to see past the control and find the "man behind the curtain:" they discover the lie of their society. Hintz and Ostry liken this discovery of the lie to the "traumatic social and personal awakening" of adolescence: the protagonist discovers the "secret and unsavory workings of the society" and through that action, suffer a "loss of innocence," something very common in coming-of-age novels (9). What this loss of innocence generally leads to for teenagers is a fear of what they have uncovered and rebellion against their adult controllers, which in the case of dystopian YAL is the oppressive

community itself. If the main rebellion is for personal choice and control of their own lives, fighting against a strict system of governing becomes the option they take.

The seemingly natural course to teenage rebellion isn't always a positive one. In addressing rebellion and the nature of rebels, bio-political theory professor Leerom Medovoi points out that "the rebel" is the unadjusted part of a mass society (31), the figure who pushes against what society has deemed the norm, which sounds like an adult description of an adolescent rebel. This understanding I have built up of teenagers and their responses to searching for their identity in an adult world makes Medovoi's description of the rebel work well with not only teenagers, but also the adults who are the controlling factor in the power struggle as adults are often the ones deeming teenagers as unadjusted or underdeveloped. Much of Medovoi's work seeks to explore teenage rebellion in the scope of the Cold War, a time in which not only teenagers but the United States itself, fresh off World War II, were seeking to find their identity in a new world. He states:

> ...whenever a young person exercised his or her autonomy in a way that visibly defied adult wishes, s/he crossed over an important threshold of Cold War cultural meaning. In defiance, autonomy passed into the even more charged state of rebellion, transfiguring the teenager into the young rebel. If the teenager provided the metanarrative of identity with its character, the rebel provided it with a plot: dissent, defiance, or even insurrection mounted against a social order of conformity. (30)

This description of a Cold War teenager moving into rebellion is not to say that what they were doing was bad or wrong; on the contrary, teenagers rebelling against conformity was an example of Americans pushing back on their own fears of the U.S.S.R. The power struggle in this case is not necessarily against a parent but against a real-life oppressive regime.

However, this example is not necessarily what psychologist Robert M. Lindner deemed a "positive symbol" of rebellion (32). According to Medovoi, Lindner offers a comparison of the American and Russian revolutions as positive and negative symbols of rebellion. For Lindner, the creation of the U.S.S.R. is a negative symbol of rebellion in that it was not progressive and created a "Mass Man ideal," much like the dystopian societies shown in YAL — supposedly all for the greater good. The American Revolution, however, is positive because "its democratic principles protected the human instinct to rebel against social constraints and thereby create social progress" (32). It is this idea, this reasoning, that shows us why we like rebels and why we cheer for them: If they are making strides toward social progress and working to make democratic decisions, keeping intact the autonomy of the people, then it is a positive thing.

These examples of positive and negative symbols of rebellion could inform the ideologies embedded in dystopian YAL by showing teenage readers how to rebel in a positive way that brings about social change. However, the positive symbols of rebellion are lacking in both trilogies. The very setup of a dystopian world calls for a positive symbol of rebellion, something or someone who can create a way for society to break free from oppression and embrace progress; yet one of the traits of these novels is that the "rebellious" groups, or those that are fighting against the system, are not positive symbols — they do not create any social good or progression. Looking at both trilogies, this trope is easily seen in District 13 (*The Hunger Games*) and The Rising (*Matched*). Both rebel groups are similar in their secrecy and their appeal to those citizens seeking a better way of life. In fact, the similarities both groups share with each other and with the dystopian regimes they are attempting to overthrow are worth looking at. For both trilogies, the "rebellious" group fighting the oppressive societies are what Lindner would call negative symbols of rebellion. They do not seek to change society for

socially progressive ways; in fact, their similarities to the societies they wish to overthrow are far more troubling, especially since Katniss and Cassia seek out and become part of these rebellions so they can have the ability to choose for themselves.

Katniss' association with rebellion in the novels comes as she is saved from the Quarter Quell Games by District 13, completely unaware that her trainer Haymitch was colluding with them. This betrayal by Haymitch makes her question the group's motives but she eventually joins their cause to save Peeta from the Capitol, or in other words, she rebels for love (Collins, *Mockingjay* 31). Cassia ends *Crossed* with finding The Rising and joining their ranks to save her family and pursue her love for Ky. She spends most of *Reached*, the final book, working for The Rising, trying to overthrow the Society. Though they have joined rebellious groups, both characters start to see similarities between the rebellion and their previous society early on and the veneer begins to fade. Katniss is put under strict conditions by President Coin, much like she was by President Snow of Panem, and finds that Coin treats Katniss' friends from the Capitol in a harsh manner that echoes Snow's treatment of the Districts. As she takes on the symbolic role of the Mockingjay, Katniss begins to see District 13's militaristic setup as confining and controlling in an all too familiar way. It is not until a defeated Snow confides to Katniss that the bombs which killed her sister and many Capitol children were sent by District 13 that Katniss begins to see the truth: there is no difference between the Capitol and District 13. This lie is further exposed as Coin sets up a Hunger Games for the Capitol's children to punish them in the same way they were punished (369). The revelation of District 13's true nature is the final straw for Katniss. Where she thinks she has found rebellion, she realizes she has only perpetuated the same lie she thought she was fighting against and the personal freedom and choice she wants is lost in District 13's lie. She is swept up in the movement without seeing the similarities until it is

too late; her own lack of self-awareness has led to her failure to save her sister, who is the reason she embraced the rebellion to begin with.

Condie follows a strikingly similar path with Cassia and The Rising. In *Reached*, Cassia has joined The Rising and is working undercover in Central, the main city of the Society. Condie's setup of the novel has Cassia, Ky, and Xander narrating to show all three characters as part of The Rising and their narrations give away their feelings for the ever growing rebellion. For Ky, he realizes early on that the Pilot, the leader of The Rising, is proposing a system that sounds very much like the Society but his suspicions are brushed off by The Rising. Cassia is disappointed when she first hears the Pilot's voice over the sound system because she is expecting something different from the Society and her disappointment begins to make her question The Rising (93). Xander takes the longest to see the lie of The Rising and he only sees it when he is explicitly told by Oker, a former member of the Society, "They're no rebellion. They're Society with a different name" (317). With this revelation, Xander begins to question The Rising and his role within it. This is the point, similar to Collins, where Condie overtly states that The Rising is the same as the Society and that the Society maintained control of its citizens by becoming The Rising: both sides infiltrated the other to such an extent that they no longer knew who was who. If the adults in these novels are unable to see the connection between the two groups, the teenage protagonist should, as she is empowered to rebel and act for herself. However, Cassia is unable to see the lie until it is explicitly revealed because she is not as self-aware as she should be.

Much like Katniss, Cassia questions the motives of The Rising but doesn't fully realize how negative of a symbol they are until she sees both sides have used her and then "dropped" her (472). In the Society, she was a strong sorter, someone chosen for her skills to sort people and

things in order to maintain the Society but after her sorting job, she is told to take the red tablet to erase her memory. The Rising gave her the same job, using her skills to insert their data into the Society's algorithms, and the outcome with the red tablet is the same. Her realization of the matching tactics used by both sides is the final piece in seeing the lie of The Rising and she responds by leaving both groups, a striking similarity to Katniss. However, instead of trying to alert people to the problems within The Rising, she abandons the larger rebellion to change the Society and instead seeks more self-focused goals like being with Ky.

The reactions of these characters is important to uncovering ideology in YAL: if the only symbols of rebellion are negative, how can positive symbols of rebellion be presented for teenage readers? Katniss and Cassia are inadvertently seeking out negative symbols of rebellion and only realize this when the "lies" of their respective rebellions are revealed. It takes three novels for the negative symbol to reveal itself and just as long for the teenage "rebels" to realize they are being played. If they are unable to see the negative symbol, how can they be expected to rebel in a positive way? Can we translate the positive rebel to the teenage rebel? Lindner states: "the positive rebel is also an 'identified' person who thereby possesses 'a sense of his own individuality, his uniqueness as a human being, his assets and potentialities as a person" (Medovoi 33). This self-awareness Lindner examines in the positive rebel doesn't necessarily work for these teenage rebels: It is often the perceived liminality that teenagers deal with that keeps them searching for their identity and their own awareness of where they fit in within their community. Without this self-awareness, Katniss and Cassia become problematic as examples of positive rebels. If they are presented as incomplete in their self-awareness, if they haven't found their identity, they can't be "real" rebels. Following Lindner's setup for positive and negative

symbols of rebellion, dystopian teenage rebellion is not a positive symbol for teens to follow and if that's the case, how can these teenage characters actually rebel?

What does this mean in relation to the promotion of Katniss and Cassia as tough female rebels? Instead of finding positive symbols of rebellion in their dystopian worlds, both characters are faced with the implications of negative rebellion, of rebellion that seeks to create one kind of person with limited access to freedom and choice. Katniss and Cassia are themselves subject to this negative symbol as they buy in to their respective systems and fail to become self-aware in their own lives. They both fail to live up to the potential given to them as positive rebels, characters positioned to enact real social change for their societies and those living within them. Their authors have chosen to have Katniss and Cassia seek out select reforms that enable them as characters to have the freedom to choose whom they love and whom they wish to spend their lives with instead of empowering them to topple the dystopian state that annihilates individuality and choice. Instead of being a positive symbol of rebellion for their readers, Katniss and Cassia are negative symbols, seeking only to help themselves and not those around them. Their own awareness of their potential is stifled, subjecting their identities to be defined by the people they love — specifically the boys — instead of creating an identity for themselves. Both characters are defined by the boys in their stories instead of being defined by their own actions, which undermines any feminist stances either character has been praised for. Both Katniss and Cassia find themselves engaging in rebellious acts with the boys in their lives who are actually the characters looking for rebellion against the corrupt, dystopian system and the few choices Katniss and Cassia make, instead of being liberal or rebellious in nature, are very conservative and passive. The very nature of their rebellion lies in the ideas of others and not their own limited choices.

A character like Katniss is the obvious choice for a teenage rebel. She is self-sufficient, taking care of her mother and sister after the death of her father. She is a well-known person in her community and seems to go her own way. Early on in the first novel, however, Collins sets her up as complacent within Panem and the rules enforced by the Capitol so she can continue to protect and provide for her family: "I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts" says Katniss, adding that she keeps quiet at home as well so her sister Prim does not accidentally repeat her words and get into trouble (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 6). When her friend and hunting partner, Gale, suggests they run away before the Reaping, she objects, thinking the idea "preposterous" (9). As stated earlier, Katniss allows herself to be controlled by nearly everyone around her and she doesn't often fight that control because she thinks it will help her survive which will bring her back to her family so she can continue to provide for them. The one real choice she makes in her overly controlled world is when she volunteers to take her sister's place in the Games, an instinctual decision through her role as provider.

Throughout the trilogy, Katniss shows that she is not the rebellious one, being caught off-guard numerous times by those plotting rebellion around her. She is not self-aware or self-possessed and this lack of awareness informs her limited decisions, most of which are made out of fear or familial love (like volunteering for Prim) or romantic love (becoming the Mockingjay to save Peeta) and not for rebellion to enact widespread change. For Katniss, the decisions she makes are for specific people in her life and not for the greater cause; instead of fighting the Capitol to create a better world, she is fighting President Snow to save her loved ones from his grasp. Even offering the berries at the end of the Games, the action seen as rebellion by everyone else, is to save herself and Peeta from having to kill each other: "Funny," she says, "in the arena,

when I poured out those berries, I was only thinking of outsmarting the Gamemakers, not how my actions would reflect on the Capitol" (358). This lack of rebellious thinking on her part puts her and her loved ones in a dangerous position; Katniss' actions are those of an apprehensive girl trying to save her family, not those of a self-assured rebel.

Cassia's situation is similar to Katniss' in that she doesn't see herself the rebel. In fact, she tries to stay away from the very idea of rebellion even though it surrounds her. She, like Katniss, is setup as a rule-abiding citizen who only begins questioning the control and safety of the Society after receiving two matches and inheriting forbidden poems from her dying grandfather — questioning that makes her fear rebellion as the undoing of her and her family. Also like Katniss, Cassia lacks self-awareness and makes her decisions based on the Society and what she believes is a glitch in the matching system. Throughout the trilogy, any decisions she does make reinforce traditional values and are based on her love for Ky and her fear for the safety of her loved ones. Even joining The Rising is a decision she makes because of Ky: she wants the freedom to love him and to choose to be with him instead of whom the Society deems the most appropriate match.

One of the greatest factors in the supposed rebellion of Katniss and Cassia are their respective love triangles and the romance that informs their attempts at decisions. Though these triangles are not present in all YAL, they are often present in dystopian YAL with female protagonists. With two boys vying for the attention of the girl, it makes her role as rebel difficult. Instead of acting for herself in her rebellion, she is constantly acted upon by a boy in nearly every large decision she is faced with. Even the ever important awakening to the greater evils of their society is brought about by their relationship with a boy. If they are not acting agents, can these girls be named strong, feminist heroines? Or even rebels?

The love triangles in both trilogies play a larger role in the narrative than the rebellion does, pushing more of a romance angle than a toppling-dystopian-societies angle for their audience. In fact, without the boys in each trilogy Katniss and Cassia may not have found out the lie of their respective communities and would have never sought out rebellious groups. Peeta continually fights against the Capitol and District 13 because he doesn't want to be controlled by either group and he shows this to Katniss throughout the trilogy. Ky is constantly teaching Cassia how to write and telling her about the events taking place outside her safe haven. He shows her how corrupt the Society is and how they control people through the pills they issue. Without these rebellious boys, the idea of rebellion would not have found a place with the girls. The love triangle pushes the idea of love and presents the real fight Katniss and Cassia are waging: the fight to choose who to love, not to fight for social change for all. Instead of choosing Gale, which would have been the rebellious choice given her circumstances, Katniss chooses the path of least resistance, something that is not generally associated with a rebellious nature, in choosing Peeta. Peeta is the one she is willing to fight for, especially when he is captured and brainwashed by the Capitol. Peeta is the only positive symbol of rebellion in the triangle. He is the one who makes up the love story to try and bolster Katniss' chances in the Games, the one who says, "I keep wishing I could think of a way to...to show the Capitol they don't own me" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 142) and then finds ways to fight them during the Games and even after he is taken prisoner. At the hands of the Capitol, he says in a televised statement to District 13 and specifically to Katniss that she needs to "think for [herself]" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 113) and fight the new oppressive regime she finds herself in. He continues to fight and rebel even when District 13 has won: instead of agreeing to a Hunger Games for the Capitol's children like

Katniss does, he votes against it, rebelling for social change to the end and fighting against a controlling leader.

Cassia is also entrenched in her love triangle but her triangle is created by the Society and The Rising. Unbeknownst to her, both boys are rebels with Xander being a part of The Rising from the beginning of the trilogy and Ky, as an Aberration from the Outer Provinces, already marked as an outsider and rebel. Ky writes and draws, creating things when it is against the law, and teaches Cassia to do the same. However, Cassia only seeks Ky out and begins to fall in love with him because of the glitch in the system; it's her curiosity, not her desire to rebel, that draws her to him. Ky's actions are what make her reconsider the Society and she only begins to wish for the downfall of the Society so she can choose to be with him. Cassia chooses Ky, the expected choice given her story, and seeks The Rising as an alternative to the Society so she can live freely with Ky, not to enact social change. Xander wants only for Cassia to love him instead of Ky and all of his actions are to garner her attention and show her that he too is a rebel. Once he realizes the lie of The Rising, Xander is able to exit the love triangle on his terms by letting Cassia choose Ky and even finds love for himself by the end of the trilogy, completely abandoning The Rising for a life away from both factions. Of the three involved in the triangle, he is the positive symbol of rebellion by becoming self-aware and finding freedom from the control of both groups, leaving to find ways to better life for others and to become a better caretaker for those around him.

Because of the love triangle setup in both trilogies, the romance aspect of the stories becomes more important to the story than overthrowing the oppressive societies and the female characters suffer from a failure to recognize the negative rebellion because they are unable to recognize their own identity and individuality. The trilogies end with both Katniss and Cassia

leading their traditional "happily ever after" with Peeta and Ky, and an unknown future ahead of them. There is no indication in either trilogy if the dystopian government is overthrown, though both end on a hopeful note for the future. Katniss and Cassia end their journeys with one option for the future and are unable to consider what else they could become. The ideology revealed within their stories prohibits them from enacting any progressive, social change for themselves and their society. By focusing solely on the traditional "happily ever after" ending for Katniss and Cassia, the oppressive governments that are a main focus of each trilogy are forgotten and the build up to their demise is never fulfilled, further limiting the power each character is given to enact change.

With all the talk of rebellion and the influential role assigned to characters like as Katniss and Cassia, their version of rebellion is not what positive rebellion entails. They are passive characters who seek out the freedom to choose for themselves, something teenagers are seeking in their own lives, and yet once they are free to choose, they stop short of changing the world around them for the better. The reason they stop? The very conservative ideal of love and having a "happily ever after." They use all the strength they gain over the course of the trilogy to ensure their right to love whom they will and then give up the fight for a better world for all, sounding more like romance than rebellion. Katniss' story ends with her and Peeta married, raising their two children in District 12. Katniss doesn't stay to see a new government put in place even though her mother and Gale take part in it, and by the end of the trilogy, it is unclear if the government has changed at all. Cassia's story ends with an election for a new government taking place, but the result of the election is unknown to readers as Cassia chooses to leave with Ky and start a new life together, away from the spotlight. Neither character stays around long enough to ensure freedom and choice is made available for all, instead choosing their boy and leaving the

spotlight for a quiet life. YAL scholar Christine Seifert sums this up well: “While the books seem to critique a system that makes pawns of girls, the characters themselves remain conservative in their desires…” and even though they have grown as characters, “their strength is undermined by their romantic relationships” (72). YA scholar Katherine R. Broad backs this up, saying “Perhaps it is a step forward for YA dystopias to allow female characters moments of success. But it is a small step if that success is only allowed to happen *to* female characters, rather than come from their agency and action, and it primarily serves to uphold rather than transform the status quo” (126).

Katniss and Cassia have the potential to be positive role models and rebels and are given the power and circumstances to change the world around them and yet, they don’t complete their journey. For all their growth, they don’t take the path of positive rebellion to better their world and instead end up where adult ideologies would have had them in the first place: living a quiet life with a husband, contributing to the system. This ending for each character is not necessarily a bad one but it is the only option made available to them for their story to end on a hopeful note. If this is the popular ending in dystopian YA that teenage readers are being exposed to — the only way for the adult/teen power struggle to play out — then these readers are being done a disservice. They are not given different options for their positive rebellion to play out. They only see the passive end: a conservative, traditional conclusion of marriage when these protagonists are positioned to change the world they lived in on a larger, positive scale.

## Conclusion

Katniss is a figurehead, not only for District 13 but for dystopian YAL featuring a female protagonist. Because she breeds more Katniss-like female protagonists like Cassia, her adherence

to the ideology placed upon her reinforces traditional gender roles instead of breaking them. Authors seeking to recreate the fervor following Katniss may be unconsciously keeping the idea of an active, rebellious female protagonist at bay in favor of having a protagonist who conforms to the idea of hearth and home. Because of this ideology placed on both narratives, Katniss and Cassia are victims of gender roles instead of being the driving factor of rebellion. As I have shown, these characters, though promoted as strong, resilient rebels, are merely passive characters acted upon by their environment instead of acting against it. Given this argument, the ideology present in these novels is not one of empowerment; it doesn't show any sort of social change or self-assuredness on the part of the protagonists, which sends a message of stagnation or complacency, not of any type of positive rebellion. If teenagers are in such a liminal state and searching for their identities, Katniss and Cassia are not the examples to follow, which is a sad fate for what should be empowering, female characters. The implications of such popular characters not living up to the hype surrounding them is great.

Without clear examples of positive female rebels for teenage readers to follow, adult authors, editors, and publishers are doing YAL a disservice. Teenage readers need positive examples to follow as they navigate their own liminality. They need protagonists who grow and find their own identities among all the voices surrounding them and are not confined to either a traditional, conservative ending or a liberal, progressive ending. Teenage readers, and especially female teenage readers, need to have as many options and possibilities in their protagonists as they do in their own lives. They need protagonists who fail, who succeed, who have "happily ever afters," who reject romance altogether; they need protagonists who overthrow the system or let it be or are somewhere in-between. Teenagers should be allowed to judge characters for themselves and to decide which routes are better for them to take, be they traditional or non-

conventional, and authors need to trust their readers to make these choices for themselves. As stated by Lesko, teens are seen by adults as deficient and unable to make such choices; because of that viewpoint, many YA novels tend to "preach" to their audiences to show them a "correct" or "right way" to live their lives, an action which ultimately robs teens of the autonomy they seek.

Dystopian YAL needs someone in addition to Katniss and her successors to show that there are different and varied ways to become strong, self-assured, positive rebels. These female protagonists should be examples of positive rebellion: Teenagers who come to understand who they are as they successfully navigate the power struggles they face with adults in their lives by rebelling in a way that is beneficial to themselves and those around them. They should see the choices they make enrich their own lives and the lives of others, rebelling against the evils of controlling dystopian societies and creating brave, new worlds worthy of the teens who build them, not having the consequences of their choices placing them in quiet, traditional roles that undercut their growth and potential as rebel heroines.

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