
A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

by
Stephanie J. Palmieri
December 2016

Examining Committee Members:

Jan Fernback, Advisory Chair, Media and Communication
Fabienne Darling-Wolf, Media and Communication
John Campbell, Media and Communication
Talissa Ford, External Reader, English
ABSTRACT

In this study, I use social constructionist feminist and queer theory and narrative analysis to identify messages about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence in both the book versions and film adaptations of The Hunger Games trilogy, the Divergent trilogy, and the Vampire Academy series. These three series are representative of a major pop culture trend in which young adult novels are not only popular and financially successful, but in which these types of novels are being adapted into major films. In this study, I demonstrate that the book and film series all generally privilege whiteness, able-bodiedness, and heterosexuality, and in doing so, these texts reproduce a narrow worldview and privilege normative ways of knowing and being. However, while the films strictly reinforce normative understandings of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, each book series reimagines gender in important ways, disrupts normative scripts that denigrate women’s ownership over their sexuality, and represents sexual violence in graphic but not exploitative ways that portray the real life consequences and complexity of sexual violence.

My analysis of these texts reveals that the book series employ a variety of mechanisms that empower the women protagonists including establishing their narrative agency and representing them as gender fluid, while the film series utilize a variety of mechanisms that both objectify and superficially empower women including an emphasis on women’s sexualized physical bodies especially in times of vulnerability, the pronunciation of “natural” sexual differences, and the strict regulation of women’s bodies by dominantly masculine men. I argue that the significant alteration of the books’ original
messages are a product of logistical, historical, cultural, and economic elements of the film industry, which has continually constructed women’s roles in terms of their sexual availability, victimization, and need to be rescued by heroic men. In this study, I address the institutional imperatives of the film industry that dictate specific representations of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, and I address what these representations might mean for audiences.
To my mom and dad who have always supported me, loved me, and encouraged me to get an education.

And to my husband Brian, who has given me endless support throughout this process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my committee – Jan Fernback, Fabienne Darling-Wolf, John Campbell, and Talissa Ford – for their patience and their guidance throughout this process. This group of scholars has served as a model of the kind of researcher and professor I want to be as I embark on the next stage of my career. Working with Jan and Fab in my first year in the program and working as John’s teaching assistant helped to shape me into the scholar I have become. And without Talissa, who took a chance on me and agreed to serve on this committee, I would not have been able to complete this long journey.

I also want to give a special thanks to my advisor, Jan Fernback, whose guidance throughout the last few years and throughout this process has helped me to produce a work of which I am enormously proud. Jan kept me sane as I grappled with research and writing, and she pushed me to engage with theory in meaningful ways. Jan also assigned me my first college teaching job several years ago, for which I am forever grateful.

I also owe thanks to Nicole McKenna in the Media and Communications Doctoral Program office. When I arrived at Temple more than six years ago, it was Nicole, also in her first year at Temple, who helped me to enroll in my courses and made sure that I was ready to embark on this journey. Since that first day when she calmed this slightly panicked, fully terrified first year PhD student and her father, Nicole has always made sure I was on the right track and has helped to make it possible for me to finish this degree.
In acknowledging those that have helped me in this journey, I would be remiss if I did not recognize and thank my cohort. The cohort of 2010 has always been supportive and welcoming. We have supported each other in our research endeavors and have provided each other with advice, solace, encouragement, and praise.

I also want to thank my parents, who broke the cycles of abuse and poverty they experienced as children and instilled in me a love of learning. My mom and dad always supported me and my dreams, giving me confidence, helping me to work through failure, and always being willing to listen. Although my mom passed while I was an undergrad, I know that she would be immensely proud of what I have accomplished in my academic career and in obtaining this degree.

Finally, I want to thank my husband Brian for all that he has done to support me throughout this dissertation journey. I could not ask for a better, more supportive, or more caring partner.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... iii  
DEDICATION ....................................................................................................................... v  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................................... vi  

CHAPTERS  
1. OUTLINING THE STUDY .............................................................................................. 1  
   Chapter Breakdown ........................................................................................................ 2  
   Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 5  
   Examining Pop Culture Texts ....................................................................................... 6  
   The Theoretical Importance of this Study .................................................................. 11  
   Methods .......................................................................................................................... 14  
   My Hopes for this Study ............................................................................................... 17  

2. THE HISTORY OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE 1900-2016 ............................. 19  
   The Beginning of Young Adult Literature .................................................................. 19  
   The Rise of Hard-Edged Realism ................................................................................. 24  
   Corporate Growth and Marketing Tactics: Changes in Young Adult Literature ......... 26  
   Young Adult Literature Resurrected ............................................................................. 30  
   Addressing a More Sophisticated Audience ................................................................ 33  
   Young Adult Fantasy Fiction ......................................................................................... 35  
   The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Vampire Academy .............................................. 39  

3. FEMINIST AND QUEER THEORY ............................................................................ 41
Constructing a Theoretical Framework ..........................................................41
My Theoretical Framework for this Study .........................................................43
Existing Literature ..........................................................................................61
My Contributions to the Existing Scholarship and the Field ............................72

4. METHODS ....................................................................................................74
Narrative Analysis as a Feminist Methodology ..................................................74
Narratives ..........................................................................................................76
Narrative Analysis ............................................................................................79
Sample Selection Criteria ..................................................................................83
Theme Selection and Analysis: Procedure .........................................................89
Moving Forward ..................................................................................................94

5. GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE HUNGER GAMES BOOK SERIES ......96
Research Question One ......................................................................................96
Gender and Sexuality in the Book Series ..........................................................97
Expressions of Sexuality ...................................................................................116
Recapping the Research Question ...................................................................120

6. GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE HUNGER GAMES FILM SERIES .......124
The Contrast in Representations of Gender and Sexuality ...............................124
Naturalizing Normative Gender and Sexuality ...............................................125
Recapping the Research Question ...................................................................150

7. GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE DIVERGENT BOOK SERIES ..........153
Research Question One ....................................................................................153
Gender and Sexuality in the Book Series ..........................................................153
Social Constructions of Gender and Sexuality ..............................................155
Spatial Construction of Identity ......................................................................163
Sexuality ...........................................................................................................171
Recapping the Research Question ..................................................................176

8. GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE DIVERGENT FILM SERIES .................179
   Representations of Gender in the Films ......................................................179
   Shifting the Narrative Focus ......................................................................186
   The Construction of Policed Gendered Spaces ..........................................189
   Recapping the Research Question ..............................................................200

9. GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE VAMPIRE ACADEMY BOOKS AND FILMS ............................................................................................................203
   Similarities Between the Three Book Series ..............................................203
   Similarities Between the Three Film Series ..............................................208
   Vampire Academy: Not Your Average Vampire Fiction ................................211
   Vampire Academy: Blood Sisters ...............................................................220
   Recapping the Research Question ..............................................................233

10. SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE HUNGER GAMES, DIVERGENT, AND VAMPIRE ACADEMY BOOKS AND FILMS .........................................................236
   Research Question Two ..............................................................................236
   The Difficulty of Analyzing Sexual Violence .............................................237
   Book Series: Disrupting Rape Myths .........................................................242
   Challenging Rape Myths ............................................................................253
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film Series: Eroticizing Women’s Victimization</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberal Postfeminism</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalizing Men’s Violence</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting the Focus Away from Women’s Perpetual Victimization</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapping the Research Question</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Redundancies</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood Action Films: Shifting Representations</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Influences on Economic Decisions</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions to the Field and Future Research</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Thoughts</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES CITED</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. PUBLISHING AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. THE HUNGER GAMES VOCABULARY, CHARACTER LIST, AND SUMMARIES</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. DIVERGENT TRILOGY VOCABULARY, CHARACTER LIST, AND SUMMARIES</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. VAMPIRE ACADEMY VOCABULARY, CHARACTER LIST, AND SUMMARIES</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
OUTLINING THE STUDY

In this study, I analyze three popular young adult fantasy book and film series (see Appendix A for publishing and production information) in order to determine what messages each series produces about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence and in order to determine how the messages of each book series are translated into film texts. A major goal of this study is to not only determine how the messages of the book and film series differ but to also address why each industry might produce such different messages about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. Two key concerns that I address through my analysis and in the conclusion chapter are the institutional and economic imperatives that drive the differing content in the books and the films as well as what my analysis and the institutional imperatives of each industry mean for audiences theoretically, culturally, and practically.

In addressing these ideas, I posit that while the book industry allows for a much more nuanced representation of gender and sexuality, for a frank and meaningful discussion about sexual and gendered violence, and for complex, empowered, and fully realized women protagonists, the film industry recreates normative and limiting understandings of gender and sexuality. While the books feature women protagonists who exhibit emotional, mental, and physical endurance and who demonstrate gender fluidity, the films feminize these characters and equate femininity with weakness. The films in this study downgrade masculine women’s narrative agency through a variety of mechanisms that situate these characters as superficially powerful yet ultimately frame them as subservient, weak, and in constant need of rescue. Although there are some
differences in these mechanisms across all of the different film series, a large majority of the following mechanisms are distinctly present in all three film series. These mechanisms include: eliminating scenes in which women are physically dominant; diminishing women’s power when they do exhibit physical dominance by featuring them as losing fights they otherwise win in the books; masculinizing feminine men through displays of physical power and heterosexuality; framing women who express masculine traits as irrational and mentally unstable; sexualizing women in appearance and demeanor; softening masculine women’s appearance and demeanor to more closely resemble normative femininity; emphasizing heterosexuality and its grounding of women as feminine through a relationship with a dominantly masculine man; establishing a hierarchy of multiple masculinities where dominantly masculine men are brutally yet heroically violent, mentally and emotionally controlled, and sexually savvy; establishing subordinate masculinity by linking it with femininity; having dominant men victimize masculine women as a show of power and as a way to police gender deviance; fetishizing the brutalization of women at the hands of men; establishing and maintaining symbolically gendered spaces through gendered violence; placing physical and symbolic limitations on women’s bodies and mobility; and framing the protagonists and their love interests’ respective femininity and masculinity as ideal and natural. In pinpointing these mechanisms in the films, I demonstrate the dramatic differences between the messages in the books and films and address the potential reasons for these differences.

**Chapter Breakdown**

In this introduction chapter, I briefly discuss why this study is an important contribution to the field of media studies, how it utilizes and advances media studies
scholarship using feminist and queer theory, and how it is important for audiences. These topics are addressed throughout the study as well. In this discussion, I briefly address the cultural and economic import of young adult texts, a topic that is fleshed out in chapter 2 where I discuss the history of young adult literature. Chapter 2’s discussion helps to contextualize the economic and institutional considerations in this study. I demonstrate the complex confluence of events that produced current young adult media including changes in media ownership, changing gatekeepers and cultural influences, and contributors to the progression of the genre.

In chapter 3, I establish the theoretical foundation for this study by discussing feminism and queer theory, both of which I use to analyze the texts in this study. Also in chapter 3, I discuss specific concepts and strains of each theory, and I delineate some important theory-driven definitions that will be used throughout the study. In chapter 4, I outline my methods by discussing narrative analysis, visual analysis, and grounded theory and by demonstrating how my theoretical foundation and methodical approach compliment and inform one another. In chapters 5-8, I analyze representations of gender and sexuality in each individual series. In chapter 5, I demonstrate how Suzanne Collins, the author of The Hunger Games trilogy (see Appendix B for Hunger Games summaries), seems to challenge normative understandings of gender and sexuality by differentiating moments in which Katniss’s gender and sexual performance is active and superficial versus authentic as well as through constructing characters who are gender fluid. I also discuss the way political conflicts are played out on Katniss’s body and how Collins seems to establish that conflict in order to critique modern conceptions of gender and sexuality. In chapter 6, I discuss the film adaptations of The Hunger Games series and the
ways in which the films significantly alter characters, conflicts, themes, and messages of the original book series in ways that render Katniss’s character only superficially empowered. I discuss the mechanisms the film uses to reduce Katniss’s character to a normative representation of femininity including the masculinization of Peeta, the limitations placed on Katniss’s athleticism, the propping up of dominantly masculine men, and the obscuring of Katniss’s authentic identity.

In chapter 7, I discuss the Divergent trilogy (see Appendix C for Divergent trilogy summaries) and demonstrate the ways in which Veronica Roth, the author, seems to directly challenge biological determinism both through Tris’s condemnation of the concept and through the characters’ clear social construction of identity, which stems in large part from the construction of differently gendered spaces around the city. Additionally, I address social constructionism in this series by analyzing Tris’s ability to utilize cross-cultural code-switching, which demonstrates her narrative agency, her active understanding of social norms, and her ability to reimagine her own identity. In chapter 8, I attend to the differences between the books and the films, specifically the visually prominent ways in which dominantly masculine men savagely victimize Tris. I discuss how the films establish gendered spaces through dominant men’s policing of those spaces and through their power over women and other men in those spaces. In particular, I demonstrate the way the films feature Tobias as dominantly masculine and associate his violence with heroism.

In chapter 9, I discuss the book and film versions of the Vampire Academy series (see Appendix D for Vampire Academy series summaries). I have merged the discussion of these books and films into a single chapter because of the significant thematic
redundancies that exist between all three book series and all three film series. For this series, I address the books’ empowerment of Rose by situating her as a contemporary gothic heroine and the film’s significant sexualization of masculine women through the use of elements of melodrama, horror, and pornography. In chapter 10, I analyze all three book and film series’ representations of sexual and gendered violence. In discussing sexual violence, I note the way each book series limits the voyeurism and spectacle of this kind of violence and instead presents the complexity and the true-to-life consequences of it. I also demonstrate the ways in which the film series tend to eroticize the victimization of women and the way each film series expresses a neoliberal, postfeminist sentiment that runs counter to the original books. In the conclusion chapter, I speak at length about the institutional imperatives that drive the content of the books and films and that dictate the alterations made when translating the books into films. I also address the theoretical and practical meaning these texts have for audiences, including the way that these texts present scripts for audience negotiation of their own identities.

**Research Questions**

In this study, I address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do these books and films represent gender and sexuality? How do these texts define and reinforce the concepts of masculinity and femininity? To what degree do these texts directly link masculinity and femininity with biological sex? To what degree do these texts link gender and sexuality? To what degree do these texts present the possibility of fluid gender identity?

RQ2: How do these books and films represent sexual violence; what are the norms established by each text? Is sexual violence referenced or portrayed indirectly or
directly? What are the intended messages about sexual violence in the book? To what degree are moments of sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexualized violence, and gendered violence in the book cut from the film or altered in a way that changes the original intended message of the scene in the book or significantly alters perceptions of the protagonist?

RQ3: Which major themes, plot points, conflicts, scenes of violence, and character traits are significantly altered or cut entirely from the film adaptations? Factoring in logistical filmmaking procedures and concerns, could any of these cuts or alterations have feasibly been retained during adaptation? What are the implications of significant alterations or cuts, specifically in terms of messages about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence? What are the theoretical implications of these texts and what meaning might they have for audiences?

**Examining Pop Culture Texts**

Examining pop culture texts as sites of meaning making is an important element of feminism and queer theory (Bean & Harper, 2007; Bordo, 1993; Doty, 1993; Harper, 2007; Kellner & Durham, 2006), both of which often align with a cultural studies perspective (Balsamo, 1991; Driscoll & Gregg, 2011; Kellner & Durham, 2006; Niranjana, 2007; Sheridan, 1997). Cultural studies work has long demonstrated the significance of pop culture texts, which are not merely by-products of a society or culture, but rather, are central sites of meaning making that “constitute how we know ourselves and how we believe ourselves to be valid” (Griffin, 2015, p. 67). My study continues this tradition of pop culture analysis by tackling young adult literature, which is not commonly addressed in media studies scholarship. In this study, I consider *The
*Hunger Games, Divergent,* and *Vampire Academy* in terms of production, representation, and consumption, all processes that are “saturated, at every level ‘with ideas about how men and women should behave and what they have the right to do’ (Milestone & Meyer 2012: 211)” (Griffin, 2015, p. 67). Examining these processes in regard to young adult texts, and performing scholarly research on these kinds of texts addresses this gap in media studies scholarship.

Contemporary young adult literature and fantasy fiction in particular, Bean and Harper (2007) argued, offers critical sites to engage adolescents in thinking through ways in which, “masculinity (and indeed femininity) is, and might yet be, ‘storied’ and performed” (Bean & Harper, 2007, p. 12). Dystopian and fantasy literature often encourages young audiences to grapple with questions of identity through the protagonists (Green-Barteet, 2014) who are able to explore gender and developmental issues, embrace their strengths, and challenge oppressive social structures (Brown & St. Clair, 2002; Green-Barteet, 2014). Investigating the texts in this study as sites of meaning making is particularly important given the target audience and the patterns of representation that appear across the books and across the films. Griffin argued that, “the more widely articulated and consumed a message or meaning, and the earlier it is learned, the more powerful that message is likely to be, and the least ‘constructed’ it will appear” (p. 25). Because young adults are susceptible to marketing practices (Quart, 2003) and because they have access to so much media content at such a young age and so consistently, the texts targeted specifically at them are likely to shape the way they view themselves and the world, especially in terms of consumerism and its relation to their identity construction (Bullen, 2009). With consideration for these ideas, in this study, I
discuss the ways that each book series challenges dominant ideologies while the films largely reinforce and normalize hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity.

**The Cultural and Economic Importance of Young Adult Literature**

This study is also significant as a contribution to media studies because it addresses a growing subset of media that targets children and young adults, a group that has tremendous spending power (Calvert, 2008), and it also draws a large adult audience. The sizeable child, young adult, and adult international audiences that consume these texts as books or films (or both) suggests not only a wide distribution of particular messages but also a growing consumer base; not only do adults currently engage with young adult texts, but young adults who currently consume these kinds of texts are likely to continue to do so as they become adults. Young adult texts, and fantasy texts in particular, have drawn large audiences especially since the release of J.K Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, which was published in the UK in 1997 and released as a film adaptation in 2001. The *Harry Potter* series and the monetary success of its books, films, and merchandise seemed to serve as a catalyst for the publishing and screen adaptations of a variety of other young adult fantasy texts. The most successful franchises include *Harry Potter*, which is estimated to be worth over 24 billion dollars (“Total Harry Potter Franchise Revenue,” 2015), *The Twilight Saga*, estimated to be worth over 6 billion dollars (“The Twilight Franchise Sales/Revenue,” 2015), *The Hunger Games* Trilogy, whose movie and book sales total almost 5 billion dollars (“Hunger Games Total Franchise Revenue,” 2015; “Box Office History for the Hunger Games Movies”), *Lord of the Rings*, whose 3 films netted almost 3 billion dollars
(Adams, 2011), and the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which earned over 1 billion dollars at the box office ("Movie Franchises," n.d.).

The success of these adaptations coupled with the resurgence of hard hitting young adult literature in the late 90s and 2000s (Cart, 2010) served as catalysts for a number of other young adult fantasy adaptations in last ten years\(^1\). Although many of these more recent adaptations were not profitable enough to produce full series franchises, there are ample reasons for studios to continue producing young adult fantasy book adaptations. Producing adaptations of young adult fantasy fiction (YAFF) books is enticing to film studios because the content of these stories already exists, making it easier and less time consuming to generate scripts (Bourne, 2015). Adaptations of novels, and YAFF adaptations in particular, also offer the potential promise of box office success since they already have a devoted following (Bourne, 2015) and buying the rights to source material can provide producers with an added level of creative control (Bourne, 2015). Many of these adaptions also exist as series thereby offering the potential for follow-up films. Additionally, adapting these authors’ works enables studios to produce follow up works of those authors like in the case of J.K. Rowling’s spin off series *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* adaptation that led to a second of his books, *Paper Towns*, being adapted, with others slated to follow. Studios can also use the production of these texts, specifically the big budget blockbuster films, as a way to generate endless branding and merchandising opportunities including cross-media versions of the original book, licensed merchandise, cross-promotion, and reverse product placement (Bullen, 2009).
The growing importance of this genre in American pop culture is not only demonstrated in the making of past adaptations, but in the docket of adaptations currently being produced and slated for production in the next few years. The litany of past and future young adult fantasy adaptations signifies not only the major presence of this genre in mainstream pop culture and the potential earning power of the genre, but it is also indicative of the strength of writing and storytelling being produced for a young adult audience. Additionally, the young adult genre has extended beyond teen audiences. Although the target audience of young adult fiction is young adults aged 12-18, the actual audience for both the books and the films range from children to adults, with adults standing out as a prominent market. Between 2006-2012, young adult fiction book sales jumped 150%, with an estimated one third of those sales belonging to adult readers (Thomas, 2012). In 2013-2014, 55% of books targeted at 12-18 year olds were purchased by people 18 years of age or older, with the largest segment bought by 30-44 year olds (“New Study,” 2012). This huge jump in sales, at first in part spurred by the Harry Potter phenomenon, was heavily influenced by mega box office hits the Twilight Saga and The Hunger Games (Thomas, 2012). The release of these three movie series spurred an increase in book sales of those texts and other young adult fantasy fiction texts and prompted the creation of more fantasy adaptations. The influence of young adult literature, the quality of writing produced for young adults, and the earning power of the genre has changed dramatically over the course of the last century. In chapter 2, I address these changes in a discussion of the history of young adult literature, and I pinpoint the current era as one of the most significant in the history of the genre.
Despite the fact that YAFF texts are so prominent and lucrative and despite the fact that young adult literature (YAL) and the genres of fantasy and science fiction have long been written about in the academic community, YAFF is widely considered a largely non-academic pursuit. While many scholars write about YAL’s uses as a pedagogical tool, its representation of gender, sexuality, violence, socioeconomic class, and disability, and its influence as a widely distributed medium, there is still little academic and theoretical writing about YAFF. Through this project, I intend to help fill this gap by using feminism and queer theory to analyze the messages about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence in Suzanne Collins *Hunger Games* trilogy, Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* trilogy, and Richelle Mead’s *Vampire Academy* series. Additionally, I want to address the changes in content and characterization that take place during adaptation to film, which reflect larger ideological concerns about the book and film industries. In analyzing the major differences between these books and their film adaptations, I want to demonstrate the clear distinctions between the book and film industries and the way those industries promote specific worldviews and ways of being.

**The Theoretical Importance of this Study**

Feminism and queer theory are particularly well suited to analyzing modern young adult literature because they have been used by a variety of scholars to address media production, representations, and consumption and have provided a framework through which scholars can address institutional inequalities. These theories are also well suited for analysis of the selected texts because each text in this study places significant emphasis on notions of gender and sexual identity and on sexual and gendered violence, all topics that feminist and queer theory provide insight into. By using these theories, I
pinpoint the ways in which each book series can be read as empowering to readers and
the ways each film series reinforces normative gender, sexuality, beauty, and violence.
This study is theoretically important because it unites a variety of different fields of
feminist and queer thought, demonstrating the importance of extending beyond a single
strain of these expansive theories in order to better understand a given phenomenon.

These theories are also well suited for this study because they identify
institutional systems of power as creators and disseminators of ideologies and cultural
norms, particularly in terms of gender identity, sexual identity, and sexual violence
(Epstein, 1994, p. 192). These theories deconstruct the ways that media institutions
privilege particular ways of knowing and being over others (Bordo, 1993), and they place
emphasis on the ways that media narratives have the potential to shape audience
experiences and ways of knowing (Griffin, 2015). These theories also identify that
cultural norms and privilege are not necessarily stated outright, but rather are deeply
embedded in cultural texts like television shows, films, and novels (Bordo, 1993, p. 168-
170), making it important for media scholars to examine these kinds of popular culture
texts. These messages are so deeply embedded in cultural texts that particular ideologies
about what constitutes socially appropriate gender, sexuality, body shape, beauty, and
sexual violence become naturalized, normalized, and invisible (Berlant & Warner, 1998,
p. 554-555). Feminist and queer theory suggest that this normalization and invisibility
enables the perpetuation of particular ideologies, allowing these ideologies to be
replicated in people’s lives and in other cultural texts (Butler, 1990). This kind of
normalization and naturalization of particular identities is a central focus of this study,
which seeks to identify what identities are represented and how those identities are contextualized.

Griffin (2015) argued that, “understanding the practices of representation through which our popular culture artefacts make sense to us requires interrogating the visual and verbal messages that are reproduced across popular culture” (p. 61). She argued that practices of representation and production are entwined because of the ways that these processes are “entangled with questions of social power” (p. 61). Analyzing these books and films using feminist and queer theory and applying narrative and visual thematic and structural analysis are useful in determining the significant differences between the book and film industry because these theories and methods seek to identify not only the representations present in pop culture texts, but they also seek to question the underlying power structure in the production of and representation in pop culture texts. In performing this study, it became clear that the books and films across all series were dramatically different and that the representations allowed by the books, although certainly in some ways problematic, were significantly more progressive.

The film adaptations, although adhering to the general plot of the original books, make significant cuts and alterations to the characters in each story. The protagonists and other supporting and ancillary women characters in these texts get watered down, dumbed down, and turned into damsels in distress or fetishized warrior women, ultimately altering the original messages of the books. In this study, I argue that there are some changes made for logistical reasons, but others made, either consciously or unconsciously, that reflect the specific ideologies and norms of each industry, specifically the film industry. For example, the altering of a character’s build might be unavoidable
due to the limitations of casting and finances and would likely leave the most important plot points intact. The faithfulness of an adaptation is called into question when the adaptation does not accurately represent the messages of the original text (McFarlane, 1996). While the height and build of a character might not alter the messages of the story, repeated added scenes in which a man savagely chokes a woman protagonist, especially when coupled with other significant additions and revisions, certainly suggest clear (possibly unconscious) ideological implications. In this study, I argue that these kinds of significant alterations, many of which are repeated across individual films, across series, and across all three series, and many of which I identify early in this chapter as mechanisms utilized by the films to represent women as only feminine and weak, reinforce gendered stereotypes and ultimately reflect current, confining American gender norms.

Methods

In this study, identifying the ideologies promoted by the book and film industry center on identifying representations of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence in the selected texts. When analyzing representation in pop culture texts, one can look at the creator of a representation and his or her intended messages and the result of that representation, which takes the form of both intended and unintended messages. While I account for the fact that all three book series were written by women, and all three film series were directed and written almost exclusively by men, it is beyond the purview of this study to tackle this particular element in full. Instead, I focus on the representation of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence in the books and films. When analyzing these texts, I focused on the three women protagonists, Katniss, Tris, and Rose. Because all
three book series are written in first person from their point of view, the bulk of the analysis revolves around these characters, their actions, thoughts, feelings, interactions with other characters, and conflicts. When analyzing, I specifically looked for several themes: the power, purpose, use of, abilities of, and containment of women’s physical bodies; messages of social constructionism versus biological determinism or naturalism; heteronormativity, heterosexuality, and hegemonic masculinity; gendered constructions of space and the policing of that space; and expressions of gender fluidity, femininity, and masculinity. Also, utilizing grounded theory, which I discuss in chapter 4, I reshaped these themes over time, reevaluating them over the course of the study and shifting the way I categorized themes in accordance with what I was finding most prominent in the texts.

Setting Boundaries

As with any research, it was important for me to set boundaries in this study. When selecting feminist and queer theory, I knew it was equally important to determine what I did not want to or could not tackle in this single study as it was to determine what I did want to tackle. Although I am using feminist and queer theory to analyze the selected texts, I do not necessarily aim to determine or take a stance on whether or not these texts are feminist or queer. The debate on what is feminist and what is not can become complicated based on the fact that there are several waves of feminist thought and various competing strains of beliefs within those waves (Bordo, 1993; Butler; 1990). The ultimate goal of this study is not to make a blanket statement that text A is feminist and text B is not. Rather, the purpose of this study is to determine how the book and film
texts represent gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, and how alterations to the
adaptions might reflect differing ideologies in the book and film industries.

I also want to make clear my intentions in using the concept of gender within this
study. Although I believe that gender exists on a continuum and does not simply function
as a relational binary, I will be using the terms male and female in this study and will
adhere to the idea that they are relational and opposite. This use of male and female as
terms is based on the institutional and cultural realities of the moment. Both the book
publishing and film production industries operate within a culturally and historically
specific moment in which maleness often presents as physically powerful, emotionally
devoid, intellectually savvy, independent, animalistic, sexual, and violent and femaleness
presents as emotional, nurturing, submissive, dependent, physically weak, seductive, and
intellectually frivolous. Using these normative understandings of male and female and
utilizing them as definitional opposites enables me to pinpoint the ways that the books
and films either uphold and reinforce gender and sexual norms or attempt gender fluidity
by blending these identities in the women protagonists.

Although I utilize this relational and opposite identification of gender, I also
operate on the idea that male and female are just categories and are not necessarily
connected to specific physical bodies (Halberstam, 1998; Braithwaite, 2011). I use male
and female as categories that can get transposed across different physical bodies
throughout these series. I want to examine how these categories are transposed, onto
whom, and to what effect. In using these terms, I want to express the ways that the
women protagonists embody traditionally male and female traits in the books and identify
the ways that the books and films depict the protagonists’ gender differently. With this
distinction made, it is also important to note that I will not use the words female and woman or male and man interchangeably. I will refer to the protagonists as women, meaning their biological anatomy. I will refer to their romantic partners as men. Using male and female or masculine and feminine will be reserved for discussions of gender and how it is performed by any given character, man or woman. Making this distinction can make for some odd sounding sentences. For example instead of writing “the male character,” I will say “the man character.” Although male and man have two separate meanings, the two words are often conflated and used interchangeably. This will not be the case in this study.

Additionally, when setting boundaries on this study, it was important to recognize that gender and sexuality do not exist in a vaccum and are intertwined with other identity categories like race and ethnicity, nationality, disability, and socioeconomic class. These identity categories are certainly significant in terms of characters’ identities, audience identities, and in terms of academic analysis; however, it is simply beyond the purview of this study to tackle these additional categories in full.

**My Hopes for the Study**

In performing this study, I hope to identify ways in which popular culture texts create particular kinds of scripts, based on particular ideologies, and the ways in which these texts might affect audiences. My use of particular strains of feminist and queer theory and of narrative and visual analysis is contingent on my own beliefs as a media scholar; I believe that identities are socially constructed, which in turn allows for the possibility that individual human beings can alter the perception that certain (privileged) identities are natural, unchangeable, and unchallengeable. This possibility further creates
the possibility that the current and confining gender norms that exist in American culture can be altered and individuals can reimagine what their identity might look like (Bean & Harper, 2007; Butler, 1999; Epstein, 1994; Friedman, 2006, p. 182; Martin, 1994; Ranade, 2007). So, while this study is not one that deals with effects research or one that is closely linked with real human subjects, it is a study that I believe can have real world consequences both in media studies and in young adult readers and viewers’ lives.
CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: 1900-2016

The content of young adult literature (YAL) has and does reflect larger cultural trends and political beliefs, making young adult literature a cultural litmus test, providing insight into past, present, and future social and economic trends (Aronson, 1995; Pattee, 2006a, p. 154). The history of this genre contextualizes my research by pinpointing the many social and economic influences that defined the course of YAL as a genre. Significant changes in audience, content, marketing, and gatekeeping power over the last century have established the foundation on which modern young adult texts have been built. When analyzing the young adult fantasy fiction (YAFF) texts in this study, it is important to take this history into account because it provides insight into modern book publishing, content, and marketing strategies, which in turn, provide insight into the ideological underpinnings of the industry. This history also sheds light on the more recent surge in popularity of YAFF as well as how these texts have been marketed and sold to a changing population of consumers over time.

The Beginning of Young Adult Literature

Young adult literature has been notoriously difficult to categorize as a genre due to the nature of its ever changing and difficult to define target market. The current age range of a young adult in America, and the one used in this study, is generally considered to go from twelve to eighteen (Pattee, 2006a; C. Smith, 2002); however, this age range is somewhat tenuous and has been developed and debated over a long period of time. Prior to 1900, the age between childhood and adulthood was not recognized as a separate developmental stage. Many American children on the precipice of their teenage years
often had to forego school in order to tend to adult work (Cart, 2010, p. 3), and simply put, “until 1900, we were a society with only two categories of citizens: children and adults” (Cart, 2010, p. 4). This understanding of human development was altered by G. Stanley Hall in 1904. Hall identified the stage between childhood and adulthood as adolescence, a time in which twelve to nineteen year olds experienced stress, inner turmoil, awkwardness, and vulnerability (Cart, 2010, p. 4).

Hall’s classification spurred the recognition of a new developmental phase in human life and prompted a new strain of thought that adolescents had different needs than those of children and adults. American school systems began changing to accommodate this age group, but it wasn’t until the Great Depression in the 1930s that the age of adolescence was solidified as teenage youth was pushed out of the workplace and into the classroom (Cart, 2010, p. 5). This era has had a profound effect on the current understanding of young adults because of the way “American high schools helped to institutionalize adolescence, and at the same time segregated adolescents both from younger children and from adults” (Boesky, 2010, p. 187). This institutionalization of adolescence and the separation of adolescence from childhood and adulthood led to the emergence of a youth culture (Cart, 2010, p. 5) and prompted an important change in book publishing. With the recognition of adolescents as a unique group, and according to Hall, a group that experienced storm and strife (Boesky, 2010, p. 188) came the “increased focus on guidelines for behavior and morality” (Boesky, 2010, p. 187). This focus led to the idea that entertainment for adolescents could be an “important tool for enforcing middle-class values” (Boesky, 2010, p. 187) and that literature could help adolescents to learn how to “monitor and control themselves” (Boesky, 2010, p. 187).
Edward Stratemeyer

A key figure in publishing during this time period was Edward Stratemeyer who founded the book packaging company Stratemeyer Syndicate in 1905. Stratemeyer’s business and the books it produced demonstrate several influential practices that shaped young adult literature as an industry. Stratemeyer produced several series of formula fiction that featured “young people taking part in adventures firmly anchored in middle-class America” (Boesky, 2010, p. 188). These series include *Rover Boys* (1899-1926), the *Bobbsey Twins* (1904), *The Hardy Boys*, beginning in 1927, and *Nancy Drew*, whose character first appeared in 1930 (Boesky, 2010). His series, like so many modern ones, featured adolescent protagonists grappling with coming of age struggles and protagonists that “were shown prevailing over evil, setting right the disordered world around them” (Boesky, 2010, p. 188). These series, particularly *The Hardy Boys*, and *Nancy Drew*, reflect the values of one of the most prominent moments in American history. As the Great Depression ravaged the middle class, these series offered an escape and propped up the middle class through “idealized adolescent protagonists with phenomenal yet recognizable skills; they were competent problem-solvers able to set a disordered world right again” (Boesky, 2010, p. 189). This tradition of adolescent protagonists thwarting evil and righting the wrongs in the world is still a prevalent theme in young adult literature and one that has shifted to encompass modern adolescents’ struggles with technology, mental illness, and sexual violence (Aronson, 1995). The gendered nature of Stratemeyer texts also persisted through the next several decades, and the championing of the middle class remains a persistent and deeply engrained theme in young adult fiction (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014).
Stratemeyer’s formula fiction not only set the stage for the content of future young adult literature, but it also changed the way books were marketed. Stratemeyer found great marketing success in using full color hard covers and cloth covers; these changes distinguished his books from the dime novels produced in the 1880s and 1890s (Boesky, 2010, p. 188-189). The influence of this type of marketing can still be seen in modern book publishing where the visual identity of books, namely their covers, has become critically important to the marketing of a text (Yampbell, 2005). Also, because his series were formulaic, with familiar characters and predictable formats recognizable to each series, Stratemeyer was able to farm out the writing of these series to a variety of ghostwriters (Cart, 2010, p. 8). Ghostwriting enabled Stratemeyer to churn out hundreds of books, establishing large-scale ghostwriting as a viable option for more modern series like Goosebumps, Sweet Valley High, The Babysitters Club, Gossip Girl, and The Vampire Diaries⁵.

John Newbery

John Newbery⁶, a British publisher in the early to mid 1700s, was another key figure in the early book publishing industry whose publishing practices helped to establish content and marketing norms in the early 1900s. Newbery used cross promotion by advertising some of his books on the back of his most famous ones, and he utilized early product placement by having his characters occasionally reference his pharmaceutical products (Hade, 2002; Sekeres, 2009, p. 401). Newbery’s use of product placement helped to create the concept of branding, which was officially established in book publishing in 1903 when Beatrix Potter, the author of Peter Rabbit, created the first licensed character by patenting a Peter Rabbit doll as well as other merchandise (Sekeres,
2009, p. 402). This development established a precedent that is still felt in modern book marketing and is exemplified by *The Hunger Games* book merchandise licensing (Carpenter, 2012). Newbery also inspired one of the most celebrated children’s book awards, the Newbery Medal. This award, which was first given in 1922, demonstrated the then growing importance of catering to a young audience and providing that audience with books that had literary merit. Both the focus on a young adult market and the production of well-written literature for young adults continues to be a priority for many publishers and is one that separates this industry from Hollywood film, whose main purpose is entertainment. Both Stratemeyer and Newbery have had profound influences on the publishing industry and on young adult literature. Their contributions may have taken place over a century ago, but those contributions are long lasting and have shaped the way modern publishing addresses and markets to young readers.

**An Attractive New Market**

Through the 1930s and 40s, the movement of marketing to the emerging youth culture grew as marketers realized that teenagers were an attractive demographic (Cart, 2010, p. 11). An early indicator of the success to come in marketing to teens was the popularity of Maureen Daly’s *Seventeenth Summer* in 1942. The *Seventeenth Summer* was particularly influential in establishing “a market for literature that spoke with immediacy and relevance to teenagers” (Cart, 2010, p. 11). This book featured the now popular use of first-person narrative and included scenes of teenage drinking and smoking (Cart, 2010, p. 12). *Seventeenth Summer* marked the dawning of a new age of literature for young adults and spawned a variety of popular romance novel copycats aimed at teenage girls (Cart, 2010, p. 12). Gendered texts, which were regularly featured
by Stratemeyer Syndicate, continued to be a staple of young adult writing through the late 1940s and early 50s. Romance texts continued to be marketed to girls while books for boys featured cars, adventure, sports, animals, and science fiction (Cart, 2010, p. 19). This clear separation in content for boys and girls still exists in some young adult literature today (Braitwaite, 2011; Bullen, 2009; Pattee, 2006a). Paranormal romance like Twilight and The Vampire Diaries and chick lit like Gossip Girl, The Insiders, A-List, and The Uglies tend to be targeted at and read by girl readers (N. Johnson, 2010) while action, adventure, and science fiction novels tend to be targeted at and read by boy readers (Crowe, Bucher, & Manning, 2000, p. 136).

The Rise of Hard-Edged Realism

In the 1960s, much of the literature of the previous decades was criticized for its inconsequential stories that were seemingly only created to capitalize on the newly identified and ever expanding adolescent market (Cart, 2010, p.22). During this period, authors of works for young adults railed against the saccharine romance novels of the past in favor of writing more gritty novels that reflected the social issues happening in readers’ real lives. One of the most important books of this time, and one that remains a staple of young adult reading today is S.E. Hinton’s The Outsiders, published in 1967, when Hinton was still a teenager herself (Cart, 2010, p. 23). Hinton’s and other writers’ portrayal of violence, socioeconomic disadvantage and other hard-hitting topics reflected the cultural mood of the time, particularly the “universal rejection of the status quo” (Cart, 2010, p. 27). The rise of hard edged realism marked a point in YAL history in which it became apparent that books for teens could also just be good literature (Campbell, 2008, p. 66). Authors like Hinton, J.D. Salinger, Robert Lipstye, and Walter
Dean Meyers helped to both solidify young adult fiction’s place in literature and solidify young adult audiences as important target markets, all while infusing the genre with integrity and a gritty realism that attracted young adult readers.

Throughout this era, calls for censorship of these types of books were frequent and were largely based on depictions of sex and rough language (C. Smith, 2002, p. 5). This call for censorship of young adult literature also marked an important moment in American cultural history. These graphic books of the 60s and 70s, books that featured sex, drug use, rebellion, and a questioning of the status quo, books that were so different from their predecessors, brought up questions of who adolescents were and should be fundamentally. These books dismissed the championing of middle class values so prevalent during the Depression and challenged the moral values put forth in books from the first half of the century. Both the youth culture of the time and the books written for them reflected a general rebelliousness against the rigid moral constraints of the earlier decades. Important to the understanding of adolescents’ needs at the time was the American Library Association (ALA). The ALA contributed to the fight against censorship at a conference on intellectual freedom in 1967 where it took the position that adolescents should have free access to adult literature and literature with adult content (C. Smith, 2002, p. 5). The ALA’s proclamation put forth the idea that adolescents were not just consumers; they were people with rights and needs.

The young adult literature of the 60s and 70s and the general rebelliousness that era represented was followed by an age of conservatism. After the decade-long emergence of realistic fiction that focused unrelentingly on the dark aspects of life (Cart, 2010, p. 37), there was a clear shift back to the saccharine romance of novels in the 1940s.
and 50s. These books were a response to the hyper realistic and frequently violent portrayals of teen life in the books of the 60s and 70s (Cart, 2010, p. 39). This nostalgia for a less complicated past was in part the result of the crisis of moral panic erupting out of the Reagan administration (Allen, 2012, p. 263). As this return to past conservative values heralded the return of the junior romance novel, it also brought with it the return of gendered texts. Romance novels of the 80s, like their predecessors, reinforced stereotypical sex roles, encouraged heterosexual relationships, featured simple, small town, middle class heroines, and targeted boys and girls separately (Cart, 2010). This rapid shift in tone and ideology between eras demonstrates just how closely young adult literature reflects the cultural and political moment.

**Corporate Growth and Marketing Tactics: Changes in Young Adult Literature**

Corporate growth in the 80s and high profile mergers in the 90s significantly altered the book publishing, marketing, and distribution landscape. The establishment of transnational media corporations pushed smaller, independently owned publishing houses out of the market (Martens, 2011, p. 54; Sekeres, 2009 p. 402). These new media corporations were vertically integrated megamedia giants that could engage in cross promotion and cross-media development (Jenkins, 2006; Martens, 2011; Schiller, 1999) and were poised to sell products across multiple platforms, all of which were owned by the same transnational corporations (Hade & Edmonson, 2003; Martens, 2011 p. 54). This development in marketing enabled companies to cut out the middleman. Instead of selling to high school and public libraries, companies could sell directly to the newly emerging adolescent market “whose prosperity allowed them to purchase novels for themselves, without any sort of institutional mediator” (Allen, 2012, p. 261). By selling
to adolescents directly, these companies were also able to use young adult titles as advertisements, embedding books with product placements and developing books as brands (Martens, 2011).

By the early 1990s, this sales shift from an institutional market to a trade market that included bookstores and bookselling interests effectively shifted gatekeeping power away from librarians (Martens, 2011, p. 54). Whereas librarians served as the primary gatekeepers of children’s and young adult literature in the 1950s and 60s and were often actively involved in trade journals and served as go-betweens for producers and readers (Martens, 2011, p. 52), by the 90s, 90% of children’s and young adult books were sold directly through bookstores, book clubs, mass merchandisers such as Walmart, and through the Internet (Sekeres, 2009, p. 403). By the late 90s, the new gatekeeper megacorporations, which saw a drastic rise in power with the merging power afforded them by the 1996 Telecommunications Act (McChesney, 2004), dominated the market. During this time, mergers in book publishing allowed several major publishing houses to dominate the industry (Hade, 2002). Where there were once “hundreds of independently owned publishing houses and bookstores that controlled which books would be printed and sold, by the late 1990s, there were only a handful of megacorporations that controlled the industry” (Sekeres, 2009, p. 402). By 2000, eight of these companies published and owned more than three quarters of the books that were reviewed in two of the most influential children’s books journals10 (Hade, 2001, Sekeres, 2009, p. 402). These houses were not just dedicated to producing books, but instead were owned by large media conglomerates, specifically Viacom, News Corp, Pearson, Bertelsmann, and Scholastic
(Hade, 2002; Hade & Edmonson, 2003), all of which had the ability to produce transmedia content and branded merchandise (Hade, 2001).

During this period, publishers, with the help of the Internet, had direct access to and interaction with their teen readers (Martens, 2011, p. 52), which helped them to streamline business practices. Large publishing corporations sought to publish already established authors and illustrators with concepts that were guaranteed to make money (Martens, 2011, p. 54). This small group of influential publishers also began to rely on book series rather than individual books and on series that could be easily branded (Sekeres, 2009, p. 402). Branding enabled publishers to treat children and young adults not just as readers, but as consumers. Branded fiction relied on “licensing, synergy, and vertical integration” (Sekeres, 2009, p. 404) to generate long term and constant consumer interaction with that brand (Hade, 2001). Through the cultivation of a brand, publishers were able to generate other types of products like spin off series (Cart, 2010, p. 94) and films, as well as “graphic novels, television shows, clothing, dolls, blogs, stage adaptations, translations into multiple languages, family themed travel, and websites” (Sekeres, 2009, p. 403). Frequently, many products in a single brand were placed in the same retail space, reinforcing the brand and the consumer’s interaction with that brand (Hade, 2001; Sekeres, 2009, p. 403). As this kind of branding increased, it was young adult fantasy literature texts that spawned some of the most profitable franchise with series like Harry Potter, Twilight, The Vampire Diaries, The Hunger Games, and Divergent finding economic success across platforms like television shows, film adaptations, companion books, DVDs, collectors editions, book and DVD complete sets, illustrated guides, graphic novels, soundtracks, posters, and a variety of other
merchandise including items mentioned in the books, clothing, accessories, and book spinoffs.

The 1980s also marked another significant change in publishing with the surge in paperback production, particularly episodic series like *Sweet Valley High*, and R.L. Stine’s *Goosebumps* precursor, *Fear Street* (Cart, 2010 p. 96). The publishing and selling of paperback novels like these marked a schism in the genre. While hardback books continued to be associated with prestige and educational content, paperback novels like *Sweet Valley High* displaced some of that educational institutional power by addressing and selling to teen consumers directly (Allen, 2012, p. 262; Pattee, 2011). As sales of 70s style realistic problem novels declined and the sales of formulaic series increased, Stratemeyer Syndicates’ early century publishing practices came back in vogue. Writing factories, once called syndicates, were now called packagers. The function of these packagers was to “develop an idea for a series, sell it to a mainstream publisher, and then assemble the talent – including author, editor, and illustrator – necessary to produce a finished product for delivery to (and manufacture and distribution by) the publisher” (Cart, 2010, p. 51). These packagers churned out formulaic books to meet the high demand of young adult readers.

Another significant change in book publishing came in this era as the average age of protagonists in young adult books decreased from sixteen or seventeen to twelve or fourteen (Cart, 2010, p. 52). This change stemmed from the dramatic increase in middle schools, which were no longer being considered junior high schools and were instead becoming spaces dedicated to the transition of adolescents into their later teens (Cart, 2010, p. 52). Like during the original emergence of youth culture in America, publishers
had to readjust the way they understood core demographics. As publishers produced more and more books for the middle school aged reader, earlier versions of young adult literature began to die out (Cart, 2010, p. 52). This change was reflected in super bookstores like Barnes & Noble that began shelving all young adult fiction in the children’s section and abandoned shelving titles with controversial subjects or themes (Cart, 2010, p. 52). By 1994, young adult literature was on the verge of extinction as teens faced increasingly adult problems in their personal lives and schools’ and as public libraries’ purchasing power declined (Cart, 2010, p. 55).

**Young Adult Literature Resurrected**

Despite the near death of young adult literature in the early 90s, the mid 90s marked a resurgence of youth culture as the young adult population grew by the millions and spent more than $68 billion in 1995 alone (Cart, 2010, p. 62). The purchasing power of this group and its interest in an MTV-style culture coupled with the new retail marketplace rife with malls and bookstore chains helped to spark the resurrection of the young adult novel (Cart, 2010). As the young adult book market grew through the late 90s and early 2000s, spurred in part by the success of the *Harry Potter* series, there were several key changes in book publishing and marketing including a shift in content (Cart, 2010), changes in the way young adult texts were labeled (Yampbell, 2005), changes in the placement of young adult texts in brick and mortar booksellers (Yampbell, 2005) changes in book packaging (Yampbell, 2005), the use of embedded advertising and product placement (Pattee, 2006a), branding across media platforms (Calvert, 2008; Hade, 2001), and the push for franchise development (Jenkins, 2006).
New Labels and New Advertising.

During this era, there was a return to the hard-edged realism of the 60s and 70s as authors and publishers realized,

if young adult literature is to have a future, it must be more than formula-driven fiction that begins and ends with a problem… Young adult literature, in short, must take creative (and marketing) risks to present hard-edged issues of relevance so that it may offer its readers not only reality but also revelation and, ultimately, that desired wisdom. (Cart, 2010, p. 56)

As this attitude spread, many publishers launched separate young adult imprints and by 2004, there were also two adult imprints\(^1\) dedicated to the newly emerging crossover audience consisting of people aged eighteen to twenty five (Cart, 2010, p. 92). This crossover audience, which grew up in the age of grunge and MTV rebelliousness, sought out hard-edged fiction that seemed even darker than that of the 60s and 70s (Cart, 2010). This subgenre became dubbed “bleak books” (Cart, 2010, p. 65). A string of bleak books produced in 1997 tackled issues like pedophilia, insanity, murder, rape, and juvenile incarceration (Cart, 2010, p. 65). With this changing, bolder content came an increasing need to reach young adult customers with bolder book design (Cart, 2010, p. 65) and more direct marketing tactics.

As the number of young adult texts produced yearly exploded, and as media and pop culture became increasingly visual, publishers began rethinking how young adult books should be labeled, where they should be placed in brick and mortar stores, and what they should look like (Yampbell, 2005, p. 352). By 2000, most bookstores still placed the young adult section adjacent to the children’s section; however, they created a
clear physical distinction between the two sections (Yampbell, 2005, p. 352). In 1999 and 2000, many publishers and bookstores even reclassified these areas because they were concerned that teens were unclear about the Young Adult designation. In bookstores like Barnes & Noble, terms such as ‘Teen Literature’ and ‘Teen Series’ were developed to clarify and magnify the separation of the genres. (Yampbell, 2005, p. 352)

Additionally, publishers began considering the entire design of a book. The marketing goal behind the physical design of the book was to make a text stand out visually amidst myriad other books of similar content. This goal was accomplished through peritextual material, which includes titles, cover thickness, cover art, font size and shape, book jackets, blurbs, book size and shape, and introductions, and gives each book its own visual identity (Mackey, 2001; Pattee, 2006a, p. 169; Yampbell, 2005).

Embedded advertising also became an increasingly significant tactic through the late 90s and through the 2000s. This type of product placement found its place in publishing through a chick lit subgenre often dubbed “mean girl books” or “privileged chick lit” (Cart, 2010, p. 93). The early 2000s series Gossip Girl demonstrates this aggressive marketing trend. In this book series, specific brands are explicitly and abundantly referenced throughout the series (Bullen, 2009; Martens, 2011, p. 58; Pattee, 2006a); in the first 6 books alone there are almost 600 brand references, including an average of one reference to a specific product on every page (N. Johnson, 2010, p. 55). This series, which inspired three spin-off series, found synergy in the production of a 2007 television series adaptation that ran for six seasons and featured a bevy of high end products. Gossip Girl represents the kind of Holy Grail publishers now look for in terms
of marketing and franchise potential: written quickly, easy to spin off, easy to adapt, and easy to brand (Hade, 2001, 2002; Pattee, 2006a).

**Addressing a More Sophisticated Audience**

The 2000s marked an important shift in audience sophistication. As Internet access became less costly, faster, and more convenient, young adults gained access to a virtual world of people and knowledge allowing media producers to establish new transmedia storytelling. This form of storytelling unfolds across multiple media formats and allows consumers to enter into the world of the story through any product in the franchise (Jenkins, 2006, p. 97-98). This type of storytelling not only encourages fans to become more knowledgeable about particular stories and worlds, it also encourages fans to increase their interactions with a particular text through knowledge cultures (Jenkins, 2006, p. 131). In discussing fan culture, Henry Jenkins (2006) noted that an individual fan cannot comprehend the full breadth and depth of a created world, but he or she can enter into a knowledge culture like a fan community where collectively the fans “gather information, trace allusions, chart chains of command, construct timelines, assemble reference guides, transcribe dialogue, extend the story through their own fan fiction, and speculate like crazy about what it all means” (p. 131). The Internet has helped increase audience sophistication by enabling individual readers to experience stories in new ways, connect with other fans, create additions to the world of the story, and generally learn more about a given text.

Audiences in the 2000s also developed a more sophisticated reading palette and sought out more hard-hitting topics. The hard-edged realism of earlier decades was rejuvenated in YAL and YAFF through the dystopian and post-apocalyptic sub genres.
These novels “imagined – sometimes satirically, sometimes somberly – a future world made even worse than the present one by the logical extension of current or threatened societal ills” (Cart, 2010, p. 103). While dark and bleak, books like The Hunger Games and Divergent reflect a modern political climate in which people are often dissatisfied with government intervention or lack thereof. These texts offer young readers the chance to evaluate the consequences of illogical human behavior and consider their own place in society (Basu, Broad, & Huntz, 2013; Cart, 2010, p. 103; Green-Barteet, 2014). Modern YAL and YAFF also continue to address modern social issues and present discussions of topics like suicide, incest, rape, mental disabilities, and severe mental illnesses. These types of books have worked well for publishers seeking to reach older crossover audiences. The push for marketing to these audiences, the increasing popularity of young adult fiction, the increased commercial success of young adult fiction, and the increased sophistication of the young adult audience has even attracted seasoned adult authors who are now dabbling in writing for a young adult audience (Cart, 2010).

The young adult audience has also become more sophisticated in the ways they engage with gender and sexual identity. The growing acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersexed, and androgynous (LGBTQIA) culture through the 2000s was reflected in YAL. There has been a clear, albeit small, shift in the understanding and framing of LGBTQIA characters and issues in YAL. In the last decade, the genre began to address these particular perspectives and aspects of sexuality (Pattee, 2006b, p. 34), sex, and non-normative gender identity (Bittner, 2012, p. 357; Meixner, 2006) through books like Alan Sanchez’s Rainbow Boys (2001), David Levitan’s Boy Meets Boy (2005) and Two Boys Kissing (2013), and Sara Farizan’s If
You Could Be Mine. Since about 2004, YA novels have more commonly depicted queer characters (Bittner, p. 358; Crisp, 2009, p. 334; Koss and Teale, 2009, p. 567) and have portrayed positive representations of non-normative sex and transgendered physical bodies; these novels are also addressing “the relationship between sex, love, and emotional intimacy” (Bittner, p. 358). There are an increasing number of YA books that address these issues directly, going beyond coming out stories to include a wide variety of LGBTQIA issues, perspectives, and experiences (Wetta, 2013). This shift towards “a more progressive inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning characters” (Wickens, 2011, p. 149) is demonstrated in storylines where homophobia, not gayness itself, is made problematic (Wickens, 2011, p. 149). Rather than the realistic young adult fiction prominent from 1980-1995 in which LGBTQIA characters were often “dead or killed off during the narrative, or run out of town and separated from community and/or family” (Banks, 2009, p. 35), more recent young adult novels see LGBTQIA characters as full, complex, human beings (Banks, 2009, p. 35). Despite more recent YA novels depicting more LGBTQIA characters in positive ways, there is still an overarching theme that depicts these characters in struggles with or against their sexuality (Banks, 2009, p. 35), marking these characters’ existences as in some ways outside of the norm or disproportionately focused on only these aspects of their personalities.

Young Adult Fantasy Fiction

As a genre, fantasy has its roots in fairy tales, myths, and legends (Crowe et al., 2000, p. 135). Although fairy tales played an important role in the modern construction of fantasy, including the influence of magical elements like wizards, witches, dragons, and wands, fantasy is much more “closely connected to modernity” and was drastically
influenced by modern technology (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 139-140). Also, while fantasy stories for children tend to feature modern fairy tales, fantasy for young adults and adults is usually high fantasy “where the story is set, in whole or in part, in a created or secondary world and where the focus is on the epic and heroic” (Crowe et al., 2000, p. 135). Modern fantasy has blurred genre lines by crossing over into genres like romance and horror and includes five major types: epic high fantasy, paranormal/urban/contemporary fantasy, historical fantasy, realistic fantasy, and literary fantasy (Burcher, Hollands, Smith, Trott, & Zellers, 2009, p. 227). Other prominent types of fantasy include dystopian literature, political fantasy, hero fantasy, dark fantasy, romantic fantasy and fantasy romance, humorous fantasy, fables, and science fantasy (Burcher et al., 2009, p. 227). Modern fantasy literature is a “conscious creation, where authors choose the form that suits them best for their particular purposes,” which can include “instructive, religious, philosophical, social, satirical, parodical, or entertaining” (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 139).

Although young adult fantasy, one of the fastest growing modern genres (Burcher et al., 2009, p. 227), seems to have appeared overnight in mainstream culture, fantasy literature has run parallel to more realistic young adult fiction for decades. At the turn of the twentieth century, Edith Nesbit “transformed the fantasy tradition by focusing on the clash between the magical and the ordinary, on the unexpected consequences of magic when introduced into everyday real life” (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 139). Nesbit set the stage for the arrival of more sophisticated fantasy texts including George Orwell’s 1984 (1949), C.S. Lewis’s The Chronicles of Narnia (1950), Issac Asimov’s The Foundation Trilogy (1951), Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 (1953), J.R.R. Tolkein’s seminal The
Lord of the Rings trilogy (published in America in 1966), Ursula Le Guin’s Earthsea trilogy (1968), Octavia Butler’s works like Wild Seed (1980), Tamora Pierce’s Alanna series (1983), William Gibson’s Neuromancer (1984), Orsen Scott Card’s Ender’s Game (1985), Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), and Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials trilogy (1995). These fantasy and science fiction books, although not necessarily mainstream when first released, hold powerful places in literary history and mark a progression of increasingly more complex plots, conflicts, characters, and reading levels. These books and the trend of writing powerful and complex narratives, featuring non-normative identities, for adolescent audiences demonstrates an ideology that has been present in book publishing for many decades. Although profit is a major factor in book publishing, as demonstrated by branded content, this industry, in part by virtue of its ability to produce so many books per year, produces content that helps to construct a variety of world views and identity possibilities for characters and audiences.

Series like Harry Potter, which became emotionally darker as the series progressed, and supernatural series like The Twilight Saga and The Vampire Diaries, which are sexually explicit, mark a more modern version of the young adult literature of the past. Modern young adult fantasy literature not only continues to build complex and interesting plots and characters and address real teen concerns like books of the 60s and 70s, but it also harkens back to the romance books of the 40s and 80s, while upping the ante on overt sexuality and sexual practice. The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Vampire Academy have all taken up their place in this modern YAFF realm and add to a cannon of hard-hitting fantasy literature that addresses real young adult concerns. Combined, these series features overt violence including direct and indirect references to sexual violence,
discussions of first time sexual encounters, accounts of mental illness, disability, depictions of poverty, and frank depictions of teenage life, but do so in ways that are not gratuitous and instead encourage readers to examine these difficult issues through the protagnoists.

What distinguishes many YAFF books from their YAL counterparts and what plays an integral role in the books in this study is the use of magical realism and dystopian settings. Magical realism is a sub genre that involves the merging of realistic and magical realms, fluid rather than fixed identity, magic as a primary catalyst for character identity formation and change, and a questioning of the status quo (Latham, 2006, p. 59-62). These elements are perhaps indicative of the recent surge in popularity of YAFF books and films because they reflect the current political and social climate in America in which young people are increasingly questioning cultural norms and authority. Typically, YAL works to socialize young adults, preparing them to take up their place as productive citizens, and preparing them to accept their place within particular power structures (Latham, 2006, p. 60-61). Conversely, magical realism and dystopian fantasy encourages young adults to develop their adult identity while at the same time questioning and undermining society’s power structures that limit that identity (Green-Barteet, 2014; Latham, 2006). Homophobia, economic exploitation, the American academic system, the wealthy without a conscience, the military, science and technology, and media are power structures that are addressed in these texts through the protagonist’s questioning of these systems and their realization that the existent systems of power are confining, limiting, and oppressive.
The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Vampire Academy

Examining the impact of young adult literature on American society and on the publishing industry is increasingly important as the young adult genre becomes more and more popular and profitable and because of this genre’s longstanding reflection of the cultural and political norms and moods of the time. Modern young adult literature, and YAFF in particular, is indicative of a new era in publishing. These books, which have gained popularity in their own right, are perfect for branding and adaptations because the characters and worlds in these books offer the opportunity for expansion into full franchises and because they garner a large and dedicated fan base. YAFF also address not only a young adult audience that continues to grow in terms of purchasing power, but it also addresses a crossover audience of children and adults. This more recent push to sell young adult texts to younger and older audiences alike is one that is unique to the last two decades, and one that demonstrates the incredible growth of the genre over the last century.

The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Vampire Academy are particularly historically and culturally important. Each of these series has sold millions of book copies and each has produced a variety of spin off texts and merchandise. However, it is their film adaptations that mark these texts, along with several other YAFF texts from the last fifteen years, as particularly noteworthy. The crossover from literature to film provides insight into both the publishing and film industries. Typically, it is “the author’s purposes that ideologically frame the books” (Sekeres, 2009, p. 400). However, when “brand awareness is part and parcel of the conception of a story…ideologically, the story reflects marketplace goals as well as the personal ideological goals of the author” (Sekeres, 2009,
These three series were developed into films only after the success of the books\textsuperscript{13}, indicating they were not originally conceived for the purpose of franchise development. This distinction indicates that the book series represent the ideological underpinnings of the authors’ and of the publishing industry while the films represent the ideologies of the film industry. These series, and YA books more generally, reflect culturally and politically significant values, moments, and events and serve as an indicator of how modern pop culture adapts to new audiences and trends. In relaying this history, I wanted to contextualize my study and provide insight into how the genre has arrived at its current point in terms of content and marketing. These insights allow for a fuller understanding of the ideological significance of \textit{The Hunger Games, Divergent,} and \textit{Vampire Academy} as young adult fantasy texts and as texts of this historical moment.

In chapter 3, I expand the discussion of YAL and fantasy texts by discussing the theoretical framework with which I analyze these texts and by discussing existing scholarship that examines YAL from feminist and queer perspectives.
CHAPTER 3  
FEMINIST AND QUEER THEORY

This chapter serves as an extension of the literature review in order for the full literature review to encompass the history of young adult literature, major changes in the publishing industry, and theory that addresses gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. This combination of topics allows me to draw meaningful conclusions about the texts in this study and about the industries that produced them. In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the major tenets of feminism and queer theory that relate to my study. Throughout the bulk of this chapter, I demonstrate my own theoretical approach, which merges several different strains of feminism and queer theory and in particular, unites strains of these theories that address the following: the performative nature of gender and sexuality; the normative link between gender, sexuality, and anatomy; gender fluidity; heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity; a hierarchy of multiple masculinities; sexual and gendered violence; the construction and policing of gendered spaces; and women’s narrative agency. I address each of these concepts fully, providing the definitions that I utilize throughout this study. In the second half of the chapter, I discuss relevant existing scholarship about young adult literature and fantasy fiction.

Constructing a Theoretical Framework

Feminism and queer theory are both suited for analysis of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence as well as for the analysis of pop culture texts and media institutions. Both of these theories take seriously the analysis of pop culture texts, identifying these kinds of texts as significant in the ways they represent categories like gender, sexuality, race, nationality, disability, age, and beauty and in the way these texts produce,
reproduce, and disseminate specific ways of knowing and being (Bordo, 1993; Christian-Smith, 1987; DeBlase, 2003; Dow. 1996; Kwan, 2010). In particular, both feminism and queer theory identify pop culture texts as sites through which dominant groups normalize, naturalize, and institutionalize specific ways of knowing and being (Bordo, 1993). These theories seek to analyze the ways that power structures shape people’s enactments and understandings of the self (Sullivan, 2003, p. 51) specifically in terms of gender and sexuality, and these theories revolve around overturning conventional norms, addressing a co-sexual politics in which men and women participate on the same footing, and offering a way to characterize all people whose sexuality or gender places them in opposition to the norm (Epstein, 1994).

These theories question and complicate the norms set forth by media institutions, specifically those that are heteronormative (Alexander, 1994; Berlant & Warner, 1998; Rich, 1980; Sedgwick, 1990; Sullivan, 2003) and those that marginalize particular groups, specifically in terms of gender and sexuality. These theories challenge a gender and sexual hierarchy that is based on relational opposites that privilege maleness and straightness over their perceived opposites, femaleness and gayness respectively (Bean & Harper, 2007, p. 12; Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548; Butler, 1990, p. 30; Martin, 1994, p. 104; Rich, 1980; Salamon, 2008), and they also disrupt the normative correlation between anatomy, gender, and sexuality (Alexander, 1994, Bean & Harper, 2007, p. 12; Martin, 1994; Sullivan, 2003). Queer theory in particular seeks to “complicate hegemonic assumptions about the continuities between anatomical sex, social gender, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual object choice, and sexual practice (Martin, 1994, p. 105). An important part of destabilizing the links between these ideas is the recognition that
neither gender nor the physical body could solely account for the wide range of sexual preferences, including preferences for “certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, and a certain number of participants” involved in the enactment of sexual practice (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 8). Ultimately, an overarching goal of feminism and queer theory is to “queer – make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialites that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (Sullivan, 2003, p. vi).

**My Theoretical Framework for this Study**

In this section I delineate my theoretical approach, identifying the elements of these two theories that best address the project at hand. I provide definitions for words and concepts that are dense with conflicting meanings and that I utilize in my analysis to dissect the themes addressed in this study. When constructing my theoretical framework, it was important to keep in mind that while the goals of feminism are largely the same across time, each wave of feminism has focused on specific issues, contextualized and motivated by particular political movements. Each wave of thinkers and even thinkers within each wave have utilized different theories and developed contradictory ideas about topics including the production of knowledge, the construction and enactment of sexuality and gender, the links between biological sex and socially constructed gender, and the kinds of practices that are empowering to women and marginalized groups. Additionally, while feminism and queer theory intersect at points in their histories and while particular feminist and queer scholars’ beliefs align in some ways, feminism and
queer theory are certainly distinct. Because there are so many different strains of thought within each of these theories and because there is so much disagreement about particular concepts, it is especially important to delineate the specific ideas used in this research.

**Social Constructionism**

In this study, I utilize strains of feminist and queer theory that apply a social constructionist approach. Social constructionism dictates that ways of knowing and being, including values, beliefs, morals, and identity construction are affected by culture, history, and media and are established and enforced by society itself (Butler, 1990; DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Friedman, 2006; Haslanger, 1995; Turner, 1991; Sullivan, 2003). Social constructionism played an important role in second and third wave feminism as prominent scholars like Judith Butler (1990) posited that gender is not a biological fact but rather a performance influenced by social institutions and cultivated through the repetition of daily acts. This school of thought suggests that identity markers like gender, race, and sexuality are culturally constructed through social relationships, practices, and discourses (Friedman, 2006, p. 182) and rely on a complex social context (Haslanger, 1995, p. 97) that changes across time and place (Sullivan, 2003, p. 83).

Within this system, descriptions and classifications are linked with normative expectations and evaluations. These classificatory schemes are not only used to “map preexisting groups of individuals” but can also be used to “establish and reinforce groupings which may eventually come to ‘fit’ the classifications” (Haslanger, 1995, p. 99). Bordo (1993) argued that mass media in particular tends to present homogenized representations of identity categories, which are then normalized and serve as “models against which the self continually measures, judges, ‘disciplines,’ and ‘corrects’ itself”
(p. 25). In this way, mass media play an important role in the developing and policing of specific cultural expectations and reinforce specific and “prevailing relations of dominance and subordination” (Bordo, 1993, p. 26). Both social constructionist feminist and queer theory are concerned with understanding how mass media “images and cultural constructions are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression” (R. Gill, 2007a, p. 7). Despite the power of mass media to create oppressive cultural hierarchies, the theory of social constructionism also recognizes the potential for human beings to alter these power structures and norms and reconstruct them in more positive ways (Friedman, 2006, p. 182; Ranade, 2007).

Many feminist and queer scholars applied this social constructionist approach as they grappled with the increasing presence of mediated texts through the 80s, 90s, and 2000s and with the messages and ideologies embedded in those texts. The emphasis on deconstructing mediated pop culture texts coincided with an emphasis on the importance of analyzing women’s everyday experiences (de Lauretis, 1986; Mohanty, 1988). Some feminist scholars were particularly interested in social constructionism because it is “deeply concerned with the concepts, practices, entities and attributes that constitute oppression” (Friedman, 2006, p. 182), including those that appear in mediated texts and in daily social interactions and relations. Sources of social dominance became a focus of feminism and of queer theory as theorists asked how “dominant persons, institutions, practices, and, above all, dominant discourses” (Haslanger, 1995, p. 119) establish oppressive practices that define specific identities and serve the interests of socially dominant groups (Butler, 1990; Friedman, 2006). These theorists were also concerned with the normalizing and homogenizing effect of social norms (Bordo, 1993) and the
institutionalization of those norms through individual adaptation, habitual use, and through the creation of mechanisms of social control that perpetuate specific norms and classifications and the expectations that come with them (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998, p. 14).

Using the aforementioned principals of a social constructionist feminism and queer theory, I have constructed my own theoretical framework with which to analyze the texts in this study. I have selected specific strains of thought from each theory that address the aforementioned ideas and account for my own beliefs and concerns about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, and I utilize them to analyze the themes of the texts in this study. These themes, mentioned in chapter 1, include: the power, purpose, use of, abilities of, and containment of women’s physical bodies; messages of social constructionism versus biological determinism or naturalism; heteronormativity, heterosexuality, and hegemonic masculinity; gendered constructions of space and the policing of that space; and expressions of gender fluidity, femininity, and masculinity. A major focus of many of these themes is the establishment of women’s bodies as sites of conflict and power. In this study, I address women’s bodies in terms of their own agency and also discuss the cooption of women’s bodies by political entities (Alexander, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Salamon, 2008) as well as the ways in which women’s bodies are abused, manipulated, and violated (Alexander, 1994; Braithwaite, 2011). I discuss these overarching themes below by delineating their definitions and the ways I will use theoretical concepts in this study.
Definitions

The history of feminism and queer theory provide important building blocks for the definitions in my study. I am providing these definitions here rather than in my methods chapter because these definitions are deeply influenced by the theoretical framework in this study.

Anatomical sex. When referencing anatomical bodies, I use the words woman and man. I do want to note that this definition can be problematic, particularly since there are people born with ambiguous genitalia and people who choose to alter their physical anatomy to more closely resemble another type of physical body. These definitions are also complicated by English pronouns, which tend to reference gender and physical anatomy simultaneously. When I use the pronouns his and her, I am using them to reference the physical anatomy of the character.

Sexuality. When discussing sexuality and the representations of it, I am referencing several ideas. Sexuality in this study pertains to physical expressions including a sexualized appearance of the physical body and physical acts like touching, petting, hugging, kissing, oral sex, anal sex, and vaginal sex. It also references the expression of sexual desires and love in a character’s mind, in dialogue with another character, and through a character’s physical expression of that desire. Sexuality also references a character’s selection of specifically sexed or gendered partners. Sexuality’s definition encompasses a complex confluence of meanings. When analyzing sexuality in the second half of this study, I delineate which meaning I refer to when using the term sexuality.
**Gender.** When discussing gender, I am referring to the socially constructed performance of normative masculine and feminine traits (Butler, 1990, 1993). Normatively gendered traits are in some ways difficult to define since they are conceptualized in this study as social and not biological. Given this distinction, the definitions of masculinity and femininity are somewhat anecdotal as they are dictated and reinforced by “a network of practices, institutions, and technologies” (Bordo, 1993, p. 167), all of which may change or be perceived differently over time and in different contexts. It is important to note the complexity of the gender definitions I provide below.

The idea of gender is complicated by physical anatomy and expressions of sexuality, both of which are often conflated with gender or paired with particular genders. In this study, I not only understand gender as a socially constructed performance, but I also see gender as independent from anatomy and sexuality. By acknowledging the idea that the anatomical body and sexual identities are not necessarily correlated to any particular gendered performance, I allow for the opportunity to identify which characters, men or women, straight or not, embody particular gender identities and how practices like actions, speech, personal style, and tone (Braithwaite, 2011) represent particular gender performances.

In this study, I make the distinction that masculinity and femininity can be overlaid onto any given physical body (Bean & Harper, 2007; Berlant & Warner, 1998; Braithwaite, 2011; Consalvo, 2003; Halberstam, 1998). This distinction allows me to analyze the women protagonists in these three series as masculine, feminine, or gender fluid in their performance of both normative masculine and feminine traits. In using this approach, I pinpoint how these women protagonists are celebrated or denigrated and
punished for their performance of normative masculinity. Although I believe that sexuality and gender both exist on a continuum rather than as binaries (Halberstam, 1998; Harper 2007; Martin, 1994; Scott, 2008) and that the physical body, gender, and sexuality are not necessarily linked (Bean & Harper, 2007; Braithwaite, 2011; Halberstam, 1998; Martin, 1994), I still utilize the normative understandings of masculinity and femininity and the idea of a relational binary as it is a prevalent understanding and one that is reflected in western popular culture (Lem & Hassel, 2012).

Given the complexity of defining masculinity and maleness and femininity and femaleness, I am providing my own definitions for each. These definitions are constructed from a culmination of sources (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Bean & Harper, 2007; Braithwaite, 2011; Burns-Ardolino, 2003; Christian-Smith, 1987; Cole, 1993; Dutro, 2003; Halberstam, 1998; Hatfield, 2010; A. Johnson, 1997; Silver, 2010). For the purposes of this study, masculinity refers to aggressive and dominant behavior including dominant sexual behavior; physically powerful bodies; violent behavior; proficiency with weapons; proficiency with hand-to-hand combat; tactical thinking; proficiency and participation in sport; risk-seeking behavior; tendencies toward action and in particular rash action; use of crass language; agency and control; self-sufficiency and autonomy; pragmatism and rationality especially during duress or in times of high emotion; and independence. Masculinity will also be classified through styles of dress including athletic clothing, pants, short hair, flat shoes, and tactical gear. Femininity in this study refers to maternal behavior including tending to others’ physical and emotional needs; excessive display of emotions including crying; general emotional expressiveness; vulnerability; submissive behavior; attentiveness to body beautification; interest in
romance and seduction; interests in birthing and raising children; tendency to avoid conflicts; readiness to negotiate and compromise; significant dependence on others; passivity; and tendency toward self-sacrifice for the comfort of others. Femininity will also be classified through styles of dress including dresses and skirts, tight clothing, see-through clothing, clothing that reveals breasts, hips, and buttocks, high heeled shoes, and pastel colors.

**Gender fluidity.** In this study, I utilize the term gender fluidity to describe two possibilities in these series; this term employs the use of the definitions of normative masculinity and femininity identified above. The first possibility for gender fluidity is that men or women can embody masculinity or femininity. The second possibility is that an individual character, either man or woman, can embody both masculinity and femininity at different times in equal measure or both simultaneously. This term relies on normative understandings of gender as a relational binary because of the cultural assumptions made by both the book and film texts. Because all of the texts in this study distinguish between man and woman, masculinity and femininity, the application of this concept allows me to determine if and how the books or films queer normative understandings of gender through the possibility of gender fluidity.

**Multiple Masculinities.** The concept of multiple masculinities (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Braithwaite, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009) is useful in this study as it can be used to identify different degrees and expressions of masculinity as well as the ways in which dominant masculinities are cultivated. Braithwaite (2011) established that there is no single masculinity, rather there are “multiple and even seemingly contradictory paradigms of
masculinity [that] co-exist at the same cultural moment” (p. 419). These co-existing masculinities are “ordered into a hierarchy” (Consalvo, 2003, p. 29) so that while these multiple forms, “participate in and benefit from patriarchy” they are not all “exemplars of dominant or hegemonic masculinity” (Braithwaite, 2011, p. 420). These masculinities, which are constructed in relation to each other and femininity (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009), are situated within the hierarchy through identity factors like race, class, sexual orientation, education, and social interests (Consalvo, 2003, p. 29). The concept of multiple masculinities relies on the notion that masculinity (and femininity) is not a monolithic category, but rather it is a constellation of changeable social practices through which gender identity is expressed (Bean & Harper, 2007; Braithwaite, 2011). In this sense, the body is a text on which gender is written through physical appearance, mannerisms, styles of movement, and rituals.

Masculinity in particular is, “a multifaceted set of visible gendered social practices” (Braithwaite, 2011, p. 423) that establish different types of masculinity and the power differences between those types. Dutro (2003) noted that, at any given historical moment, many versions of masculinity will coexist, but that only one version of masculinity will, “hold a position of authority” (Dutro, 2003, p. 471). The dominant masculinity holds that position of cultural authority and sets the standard by which all other masculinities are measured (Dutro, 2003, p. 471). However, because gender identity is socially constructed, masculinity is accomplished through sets of social practices that are continually renegotiated (Braithwaite, 2011, p. 419). The dominant position in the hierarchy of multiple masculinities is tenuous since understandings of masculinity, what
counts as masculinity, and what counts as dominant masculinity is always changing (Braithwaite, 2011). The changing sets of social practices that constitute masculinity means that, “dominant masculinities are continually negotiated, adjusting to changes in the gender order” (Braithwaite, 20011, p. 419), making the dominant, hegemonic position always contestable (Braithwaite, 2011; Connell, 2005).

**Hegemonic masculinity.** Connell (1987) defined hegemonic masculinity as, “the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men’s dominance over women” and as “constructed in relation to women and to subordinate masculinities” (p. 185-186). Based on the aforementioned ideas about multiple masculinities, hegemonic masculinity (dominant masculinity) is changeable and always contestable, its construction contingent on social norms of that historical and cultural moment. Many scholars have noted that a major factor in the construction of modern western hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Bird, 1996; Connell, 1992; Donaldson, 1993; Nettleton, 2016; Sparkes, Brown, & Partington, 2010). Because heterosexuality is central to the establishment of past and contemporary dominant masculinity, and because dominant masculinity is the marker by which other masculinities and by which femininities are measured and defined, the inclusion of heterosexuality as a main marker of hegemonic masculinity positions only heterosexual men’s masculinity as normal and as powerful, denying non-straight and feminine men legitimization as masculine (Bird, 1996). In this system, homosexuality is understood as “a negation of masculinity” (Connell, 1992, p. 736), and the construction of hegemonic masculinity not only includes heterosexuality but also homophobia (Connell, 1992).
Berlant and Warner (1998) noted that queer theory in particular seeks to unsettle the powerful norms and material practices that privilege heterosexuality and that establish dominant masculinity as heterosexual. They noted that a system of heteronormativity, which they defined as “a constellation of practices that everywhere disperses heterosexual privilege as a tacit but central organizing index of social membership” (p. 555), contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity as heterosexual. Implicit in the concept of heteronormativity is the idea that gender is a “structure of social power” (Connell, 1992, p. 736) through which social practices, like sexuality (Connell, 1992), shape the gender order, helping to define what is considered normal and ideal. Ideals are shaped by social practices but are also formulated by and disseminated through “institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent…but also privileged” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548). In this study, I utilize the concept of multiple masculinities, hegemonic masculinity, and heteronormativity to identify how each text represents dominant masculinity and to identify which characters exhibit dominant masculinity by that text’s definition. Identifying dominant masculinity is also useful in pinpointing how a text understands and represents subordinate masculinities and femininity. Identifying these types of identities and seeing how these identities are celebrated or punished within a narrative demonstrates the ideological position of the text, especially through the emergence of narrative patterns that privilege certain types of masculinity over others and over femininity.

**Sexual and gendered violence.** In chapter 10, I discuss sexual and gendered violence and related theories in depth before applying those theories to the texts in this
study. In that chapter, I dedicate some of the discussion to demonstrating the complex
dialogue surrounding sexual and gendered violence, specifically in terms of how terms
like victim, survivor, and perpetrator are defined and conceptualized. In this chapter, I
focus on the ways in which I categorize and define specific concepts. The definitions
used for the terms sexual and gendered violence are particularly important given the fact
that there is significant crossover between these ideas and ideas about agency, power, and
women’s bodies.

Sexual violence in this study takes two forms: sexual violence and gendered
violence. When using the term sexual violence, I am referring to a physical, sexual
volition including unwanted touching, kissing, or penetration. Gendered violence refers
to violence that, “often serves to maintain structural gender inequalities, and includes all
types of violence against men, women, children, adolescents, gay, transgender people and
gender non conforming” (“What is Gender Violence?”). Gender violence is a “male-
patterned” violence motivated by, “aggression, revenge, competition, and entitlement,
and include sexual and other violence against women, partners and children” (“What is
Gender Violence?”). In this study, gendered violence will also refer to any physical acts
of violence that while not sexual in nature, carry the connotation of sexual violence by
indicating significant physical, mental, or emotional violation. I also include sexual
harassment and bullying under this category since they are devices used to
psychologically assert power over another character and can be sexualized in nature. It is
important to note that in this study, I identify both women and men as masculine, making
it possible for masculine women to also engage in this kind of gendered violence and for
feminine men to be victims of it.
In discussing sexual and gendered violence, it is also important to define the terms victimizer, perpetrator, victim, and survivor. These terms are particularly important to define given the long-standing feminist discourse and disagreement about the definitions of these terms and whether or not these terms should be used at all (Leisenring, 2006; Schott, 2012). The debate about these terms and their meanings is largely semantic as it is based on evaluating the consequences of using particular words and meanings to define different individuals and groups. This debate is certainly an important one since these terms and definitions can be affected by existing cultural expectations and since “debates over victimization are often centered on issues of blame and responsibility” (Leisenring, 2006, 309). In my study, the importance of defining the terms victimizer, perpetrator, victim, and survivor lies in its practicality. Defining these terms allows me to distinguish between times when a character is victimized versus when a character has agency. In this study, I do not focus on passing moral judgment or on dictating how a person should identify him or herself in relation to these terms. Rather, I focus on identifying thematic redundancies surrounding sexual and gendered violence. Identifying these redundancies allows me to analyze these specific texts in terms of how a character’s experience is framed by the author, which in turn, reveals ideologies embedded in the text.

In this study, I classify a victimizer as a character whose physical, mental, or emotional violation of another character is deliberate and premeditated and who often takes advantage of characters who are already weak, vulnerable, and desperate, for personal gain and pleasure. A victimizer may be a one-time abuser or a perpetual abuser whose abuse is systematic. A victimizer actively asserts his or her dominance over another character in an attempt to destabilize or punish another character physically,
emotionally, or psychologically. The term perpetrator is used to describe any character that has sexually harassed, assaulted, or in any way violated another character whether that assault was conscious or unconscious. The term victim will be used when describing a character who has been violated and is made or appears to be made vulnerable through that violation. Victims are the target of one time or systematic victimization at the hands of a victimizer or perpetrator. A character who is subject to sexual or gendered violence is not necessary inherently a victim and in this study, those designated as victims are not at fault for their violation. Rather, victims are a product of circumstance (Leisenring, 2006, p. 308), including the rage and jealously of others. The term survivor is used in this study to indicate any character who lived through sexual or gendered violence.

**Agency.** When discussing sexual and gendered violence, it is also important to discuss agency. Scholars have debated whether or not victims have agency and if so, how and when that agency is demonstrated (Schott, 2012). The term agency calls up issues of power, mobility, and choice, all of which are complicated concepts in themselves. Integral to the concept of agency in this study is the literal and figurative act of being heard (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015) – to be able to speak without being silenced, to have others listen, to represent oneself through story and action, to be free to act in accordance with one’s own desires, and to have others recognize one’s ability to act in accordance with one’s own desires. When aligning this idea with an analysis of sexual and gendered violence in the texts in this study, agency is illustrated by a character’s ability to deny unwanted sexual advances, have those denials recognized and abided by, and in a character’s attempted or successful verbal, mental, or physical challenge of a victimizer or perpetrator. In this sense, if a character defies the victimizer through any of
these means - struggling against that perpetrator, wanting to struggle against that perpetrator even if unable to do so, seeking revenge against a perpetrator, enacting revenge against a perpetrator, recovering from the emotional trauma of being violated, or giving voice to that violation – he or she retains or regains agency. A character’s reclaiming of things symbolically or literally taken imbues that character with the ability to be viewed as an equal member of society (Bou, 2011), thereby solidifying agency.

**Narrative agency.** Narrative agency is also significant in this study, which deals directly with fictional narratives. Narrative agency is considered in this study both in terms of the authors’ construction of fictional narratives and their ability (or lack thereof) to tell a particular story in a particular way without restraint from outside forces, like the publishing industry, as well as in terms of the protagonist’s ability to be heard and to establish the self as the “prime organizer of the narrative” (Gaylin, 2001, p. 306) within the story itself. In regard to the protagonists in the book and film narratives, I define narrative agency as follows: a character’s “perception of his or her competency or ability to take action” (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015, p. 7); a character “having a voice and being free to use that voice or not to use it” (Anderson, 1997, p. 231); a character’s ability to act on her intentions and have the capability to accomplish her intentions (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015); the ability of a character to craft her own narrative for her life within the world of the story; a character’s ability to tell her own story, particularly painful stories, without being silenced; and a character’s ability to produce a collective voice through the sharing of her story (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015).

Important to this definition is the idea of power. Christian-Smith (1987) discussed narrative agency in terms of which characters have power and which characters may
legitimately exercise that power, specifically in situations of romance, sexuality, gender, and identity. In discussing fictional narratives, especially those that deal heavily with issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, and in identifying narrative agency within those narratives, it is important to identify which characters have restrictions and constraints (Christinan-Smith, 1987), who regulates these characters’ mobility and romantic or sexual choice (Christinan-Smith, 1987), who punishes non-normative behavior (Gaylin, 2001), who is punished for non-normative behavior (Gaylin, 2001), and who is able to or does challenge regulations and those who regulate. Identifying these elements provides insight into how each text and each industry conceptualize privilege. In this study, a character’s physical athleticism (Linder, 2011), physical mobility and ability to move freely unharmed through different spaces (S. Low, 2003; Ranade, 2007), ability to shape or mold the space around him or her (Acarón, 2016), choice of sexual partners and sexual acts, and ability to challenge regulatory systems all demonstrate narrative agency. Additionally, a character is imbued with narrative agency if he or she is not simply a prop that assists other characters in driving the plot forward, but rather, is the driving force of the story (Griffin, 2015).

The Construction and Policing of Gendered Space

One particularly prominent theme that arose during data collection was the intersection of gender and physical spaces. In this study, I analyze this interaction using literature that addresses the socio-spatial construction of physical spaces and the ways in which power is manifested through social relations in those spaces (Acarón, 2016; M. Löw, 2006). This type of literature identifies and analyzes the ways in which space and gender shape one another (M. Löw, 2006; Ranade, 2007; Sparkes et al., 2010) as well as
the ways in which particular bodies, specifically women’s bodies, are denied access to particular spaces at particular times, often through threat and violence (Acarón, 2016; Koskela, 1999; Pain, 1991; Valentine, 1989; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). This literature also identifies the ways in which physical spaces are constituted by and reinforce power relations, specifically those that privilege men’s masculine bodies (M. Löw, 2006). I focus my analysis on the gendered construction and policing of spaces in chapter 7 and 8, where I discuss the Divergent series; however, this idea plays out in all three series, which I discuss briefly in the other analysis chapters.

The concept of the construction of gendered spaces revolves around four main ideas: physical structures and layouts of spaces encourage people to use particular spaces in certain ways and act in certain ways in those spaces (Ranade, 2007); both gender and the symbolic uses and connotations of spaces are socially constructed (Acarón, 2016; Koskela, 1999; Ranade, 2007), with both gender and space existing in a “constant state of becoming” (Ranade, 2007, p. 1519); “gendered bodies produce and are produced by particular spatio-temporal configurations” (Ranade, 2007, p. 1524), marking the body as both “a receiver and actor, producing and being produced by spatial relations” (Acarón, 2016, p. 139); and “different bodies experience space differently” (Ranade, 2007, p. 1520) based on a variety of factors including gender, class, age, sexuality and physical ability (Acarón, 2016; Koskela, 1999; Ranade, 2007; Valentine, 1989; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007), all of which form a constellation of culturally constructed ideas that label bodies as normative or deviant (Ranade, 2007). Culturally normative bodies that align with the symbolic purpose of spaces and with the power relations that dictate those spaces are granted mobility through those spaces (Acarón, 2016), while bodies marked as
deviant are policed. In this way, existing social power structures reinforce the way a space is policed and the way a space is constructed or policed reinforces what qualifies as normative in terms of gender, sexuality, body type, ability, race, and age among other things.

In discussing what she called “the bathroom problem,” Halberstam (1998) noted that gender deviance in particular is highly regulated, especially in public places like airport bathrooms, “where people are literally moving through space and time in ways that cause them to want to stabilize some boundaries (gender) even as they traverse others (national)” (p. 20). She noted that in these kinds of spaces, the cultural expectations about what constitutes normal within those spaces encourages people to regulate which bodies utilize that space. Bodies perceived as deviant, for example a woman’s body that appears too masculine in a women’s restroom, are marked as transgressive and as punishable, sometimes by violence. The construction of spaces and what is considered normal in those spaces presents limits on different bodies’ abilities to move fluidly or unmolested through those spaces (Halberstam, 1998). In turn, limits on mobility also limit agency and a person’s ability to dictate his or her own life and have his or her choices recognized by others as valid.

In this way, the architecture of physical spaces, the purpose of that space, and the constructs of gender within that space places limitations on how bodies can act and be perceived (Nettleton, 2016; Ranade, 2007; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). These limitations and the policing of them creates a heightened sense of body consciousness and an awareness that certain bodies do not conform to the norm and will be punished with fear, anxiety, insult, injury, a sense of not being welcome or not being real (Kwan,
In this way, the symbolic construction of spaces can result in the invisibility (Kwan, 2010) or ultra visibility (Halberstam, 1998) of particular bodies, both of which reinforce “negative stereotyping, stigma, and/or social isolation” (Kwan, 2010, p. 149). In this study, I identify how the books and films situate and regulate spaces differently, particularly in terms of gender and gender deviance. I pinpoint which bodies are marked as deviant in which spaces, how they are marked as such, how they are punished and by who in order to identify particular ideologies within the texts, specifically in terms of what bodies are designated as normal and as deviant.

Existing Literature

Although there is a sizeable field of writing dedicated to young adult literature, particularly in the vein of pedagogy, there is relatively little writing, let alone theoretical writing, about contemporary young adult fantasy fiction. Unsurprisingly, most of the scholarly literature about modern fantasy fiction pertains to *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*. There is a distinct lack of writing about *Vampire Academy* and *Divergent*. In discussing relevant existing scholarship on modern young adult fantasy fiction, I address the body of *Hunger Games* literature and also reference literature on *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* as well as other fantasy texts with strong women protagonists like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dollhouse*. In this review, I provide the foundation for my later analysis of gender, sexuality and sexual violence in the book and film versions of *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and *Vampire Academy*. In the following section, I discuss some of the above concepts in terms of other scholars’ work on young adult fantasy and dystopian fiction.
Constructions of Gender

In *Of Bread, Blood, and The Hunger Games*, a compilation of essays on the series, many of the authors address gender identity in the series. In this collection of essays, there is a widespread recognition of gender construction within *The Hunger Games* books. DeaVault (2012), Firestone (2012), Lem & Hassel (2012), Mitchell (2012) and Montz (2012) all write about Katniss’s conscious understanding that “her success or failure in the Games depends upon her image, her ability to shape public perception” (Koenig, 2012, p. 41) and on her equally conscious adherence to normative femininity in order to shape that perception and survive the Games. This social constructionist approach to this series is one that aligns with my own. Although this general recognition permeates most of the essays in this collection, each author discussed gender in different contexts.

Lem and Hassel (2012) addressed gender identity in *The Hunger Games* in terms of readership. Their analysis of Katniss’s gender fluidity works in service of a larger argument about gendered readership (Lem & Hassel, 2012, p. 120). Despite the differences in our arguments, their analysis supports an important aspect of my study. They situated femininity and masculinity in the same way that I do – as categories that can get transposed onto any given physical body (p. 122). In using this lens, Lem and Hassel identified a variety of scenes in which Katniss demonstrates both normative masculinity and femininity. Taber, Woloshyn, and Lane (2013) confirmed this same idea in their study where participants identified Katniss and Peeta as both demonstrating normative masculinity and femininity (p. 1031). Lem and Hassel (2012) also noted that Katniss’s normatively masculine traits are often contrasted with excessively feminine
characters like Prim, her mother, and Effie, and to Peeta’s more feminine traits (p. 123-124). This idea is confirmed by Green-Barteet (2014), an author featured in the compilation *Female Rebellion in young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, who noted that Katniss’s masculinity is pronounced in relation to her mother and Prim as she assumes the role of provider after her father dies. The way that these scholars discussed Katniss’s gender can also be extrapolated to fit my analysis of Tris and Rose in *Divergent* and *Vampire Academy* respectively.

Mitchell (2012) also addressed the idea of gender within *The Hunger Games* series, noting that Katniss’s gender fluidity is a queer gesture in itself. She stated,

> Katniss Everdeen is the most active character within *The Hunger Games* series, as the positions that she occupies throughout the trilogy span the broadest spectrum of possibilities and encompass such seemingly disparate roles as sister, love interest, killer, and political symbol. That mobility is contingent upon her constantly shifting gender identity. (2012, p. 128)

Mitchell’s analysis of Katniss’s gender fluidity reflects my own. In examining Katniss, Tris, and Rose as characters, it becomes clear in each book and across each series that each of these protagonists shifts back and forth between occupying normatively masculine and feminine positions and seemingly disparate roles. In Katniss’s case, even her name epitomizes her constant gender shifts. Mitchell (2012) noted that the plant for which Katniss is named is a unisexual plant, the hermaphroditic nature of which “speaks directly to the configuration of Katniss as a character who blurs, erases, transcends, and challenges traditional representations of gender in the series” (p. 129)

Mitchell (2012) also highlighted the way that Katniss’s gender is not only constantly renegotiated, but it is constantly on display both for the reader and for the
fictional world of Panem (p. 134). Katniss’s public image, and in particular, her gendered public image, is addressed throughout the plot. Her body and gender are altered to align with the more normative gender presentation of femininity demanded by the Capitol (Mitchell, 2012, p. 136). Accordingly her body is stripped down, remade, dressed up and paraded around for the satisfaction of a crowd (Mitchell, 2012, p. 134). The demands of the Capitol remind Katniss and the readers of the masculine traits that Katniss prefers. Her masculine acts of brutality and tactical pragmatism under pressure are also set in distinct opposition to her feminine compassion for characters like Prim and Rue (Lem & Hassel, 2012, p. 123). This distinction, and the constant switching of gender roles keeps the idea of gender performance and the distinction between masculinity and femininity in the forefront of readers’ minds. The social construction of gender is an important concept in this study; in suggesting that each book series promotes the idea of social constructionism, thereby refuting biological determinism and the limitations it creates on identity construction, I also suggest that these book series serve as scripts that help to redefine gender, sexuality, and identity construction in general.

Women’s Bodies as Sites of Conflict

A major theme across all three series, and one that comes up in some of the scholarly writing about dystopian fiction, is that women’s bodies are sites of conflict (Day, 2014; Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014; Fritz, 2014; Kirby, 2015). The political, sexual, biological, and technological tensions played out on women’s bodies are foregrounded in these series and in feminist scholarship.

Women’s bodies as political bodies. Feminist scholarship has long addressed the idea of women’s bodies and the political and sexual conflicts that get played out on them.
Alexander (1991, 1994) addressed this struggle through her identification of the connection between women’s bodies and their land of origin. In her discussion of the colonization of third world women’s bodies, Alexander addressed the active role of the state in the creation and institutionalization of ideas about morality and normal and natural sexual practices, as well as its role in the criminalizing of “amoral, unnatural” sexual behavior (1991, p. 147). She also addressed the state’s role in the construction of womanhood and women’s agency by ascribing agency, or at least perceived agency, only to those women who embody normative ideals (1991, p. 148). Alexander identified the way power relations and politics were played out on women’s bodies through the use of women’s bodies as economically productive bodies (Alexander, 1994, p. 19). In her discussion of postcolonial Caribbean women, she noted that women’s bodies are tied to the land and that both are sexualized and positioned as exotic conquests (Alexander, 1994, p. 19).

This same connection of women’s bodies and native land play out for Katniss. In her discussion of power relations In *The Hunger Games* book series, Frankel (2012) argued that the Capitol and its people are symbolic of first world colonization. Despite their own barbarism and the silliness and frivolousness that masks it, the people of the Capitol see themselves as civilized and the people of the districts, especially the outlying ones, as barbaric. Frankel (2012) noted that Katniss “appears like a foreigner from a developing country” (p. 49) as she is ferried to the Capitol (Frankel, 2012, p. 49); in this moment of Katniss’s physical transition from one place to another, it becomes clear to the reader that while the Capitol citizens see themselves as civilized and the districts as barbaric, the opposite is actually true. The stark contrast of bodies is what visibly
differentiates these two groups of people, making “the indigenous communities of the Districts” curiosities to those in the Capitol (Kirby, 2015, p. 6). Frankel asserted that when Katniss’s prep team removes her body hair and repeatedly bathes her, they are “removing her objectionable ‘third-world’ origins” (Frankel, 2012, p. 51). This symbolic destruction of foreign bodies through perpetual cleansing (Kirby, 2015, p. 6) and the connection of those bodies to environmentally specific skills (Frankel, 2012, p. 56) link Katniss and the other tributes’ bodies to their lands of origin. In adherence to Alexander’s arguments, the Capitol is the governing body that colonizes Katniss’s physical body, forcing her adaption to a stringent set of gender norms that entail actions, mannerisms, and physical alterations to her body. The Capitol, whose framing of Katniss both before and during the Games establishes her exoticism, utilizes Katniss’s body for economic and political gain through the Hunger Games themselves.

Montz (2012) also discussed the political cooption of Katniss’s body both by the Capitol and by the rebels. She noted that Cinna’s costumes are a prime example of a political agenda getting played out on Katniss’s body. He physically and publically transforms her body into the girl on fire and the Mockingjay through his costumes (Montz, 2012, p. 140). Montz noted, “the followers of the Mockingjay use Katniss’s female body as the visual and public site of resistance through consistent, stylized use of spectacle” (Montz, p. 140). Wezner (2012) noted that in the panopticon-like state of Panem and of the Games, Katniss’s body is designed for public consumption. Like Montz, Wezner (2012) she argued that this presentation most clearly takes place in the prepping and costuming of Katniss’s body by the design team (p. 153). Cinna shapes Katniss’s appearance and her performance in ways that simultaneously uphold the
normative ideologies of the Capitol and debunk them, providing the rebel resistance with a tangible persona of rebellion (p. 153). Wezner (2012) also argued that “the escalation of punishment and surveillance by the Capitol” spurs her transformation into the Mockingjay in District 13. It is here that Katniss realizes, through her confinement, that District 13, “instead of being a safe haven, is, in fact, a more insidious prison because its controlling mechanisms are disguised or hidden” (p. 156). Katniss, Tris, and Rose all experience the rigid control of their governments and through them, the authors seem to demonstrate the consequences of institutional oppression, specifically through the ways in which the women protagonists’ bodies are coopted politically.

In addition to demonstrating these consequences, the authors also seem to position these women as agents of political change, demonstrating how these women characters confront oppressive institutions, utilizing their intelligence, emotional strength, and powerful bodies to enact change and garner agency. Both Fritz (2014) and Green-Barteet (2014) argued that in contemporary dystopian fiction in particular, a central theme is the growth of women protagonists from passive objects of an oppressive government to active and independent political entities. Green-Barteet (2014) argued that it is only when Katniss and Tris cease to be passive, through individual rebellious acts, that they turn into subjects; rebellious acts lead to power, power enacts a subject into being, and subjectivity leads to agency (p. 37). Fritz (2014), in her discussion of dystopian fiction characters, including Katniss, argued that girl characters in these kinds of books demonstrate agency by: “refusing to internalize the machinations of her society’s governing bodies” (p. 20); exercising independent thought; acting autonomously and independently; recognizing herself as a powerful social and political agent; and evolving over time to recognize the
self as an agent of social and political change. In my analysis chapters, I address the concept of agency, identifying the ways in which Katniss, Tris, and Rose exhibit these traits and the ways in which the films alter scenes, characteristics, and conflicts with the effect of limiting their agency and replacing it with men’s.

**Athletic bodies.** These book series also demonstrate the way that athletic activity and the development of the physical body can, as Linder (2011) noted, provide women with a sense of agency and resistance (p. 321). In discussing Buffy, an iconic ass-kicking woman character from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Owen (1999) noted the power of Buffy’s physical body. She stated “Buffy’s embodied strength, power, and assertiveness destabilize the traditional masculinist power of the vampire character in the horror genre, in effect policing those who prey upon the feminized” (p. 25). This description also accurately accounts for Katniss, Tris, and Rose’s characters. All three routinely utilize their athleticism and physical prowess to protect feminized characters and to police political entities. Katniss’s affection for and protection of Prim and Rue as well as her protection of Peeta in the second half of the series is indicative of this idea (King, 2012, p. 112; Montz, 2012, p. 145).

In detailing the complexity of the way women’s bodies are constructed socially, Linder (2011) also argued that women’s engagement in athletic activity can be empowering as it “allows for experiences of the body as capable and competent in moving through and relating to people and objects in the space surrounding it” (Linder, 2011, p. 321). This empowerment is demonstrated in all three book series as Katniss, Rose, and Tris embrace the physical power of their bodies and understand their bodies not as sites of denial and limitations but as sites of agency and liberation (Fritz, 2014;
Green-Barteet, 2014; McDonough & Wagner, 2014). This sense of freedom connected to a competent and powerful physical body is demonstrated in Katniss’s profound feeling of belonging and autonomy when hunting where she is “athletic and nimble, accustomed to moving through forested areas quietly and efficiently” (Firestone, p. 212). When Katniss hunts, whether she hunts animals or humans, she is deadly accurate and a powerful force. It is through hunting, namely in the forest where her father taught her how to survive, where she finds a place to be herself, a place where she can write her own story (Koenig, 2012, p. 39). Tris feels pleasure at noticing the muscular contours of her body that have developed as a result of her training. Rose feels a sense of freedom and rightness when she engages in hand-to-hand combat. She is lethal; her muscular body moving with speed and accuracy, refusing to concede defeat even when injured. Katniss, Tris, and Rose’s bodily abilities stand in stark contrast to Bella’s. Where Bella (the protagonist of the Twilight Saga), marked as a victim, is clumsy, helpless, and passive (Firestone, 2012), Katniss, Rose, and Tris, marked as heroines even in times of victimization, are coordinated, athletic, physically strong, and active. These women’s bodies are physically fit, they are trained, and they are fine tuned through personal hard work. Their bodies and combat competencies protect others. Their bodies are capable. There is power in the transformation of their bodies from girlish into dominant entities that exhibit strength and prowess. Unlike in Twilight, where Bella’s body is repeatedly marked as weak, fragile, and as a vessel (ultimately destroyed) for her child (McGeough, 2010), Katniss, Tris, and Rose’s bodies are marked as strong, powerful, and as vessels for survival.

**Bodies and technologies.** In discussing Joss Whedon’s Dollhouse, Randell-Moon (2012) brought to light the concept of understanding women’s bodies in terms of
somatechnics, the ways in which “material corporeality (soma) is inextricably conjoined with the techniques and technologies (technics) through which bodies are formed and transformed” (Pugliese & Stryker, 2009, p. 1). For Katniss, this formation and transformation through technology is most notable in her makeover sessions and in the Gamemakers’ brutal technologies that dictate her movements in the arena. These technologies alter her body, force her into battle, and wound her in ways that force her to play the Games by the Capitol’s rules, limiting her agency and independent will. She is also subjected to ever increasing surveillance that connotes the technological and political power of the Capitol (Koenig, 2012, p. 44). For Tris, this relationship plays out most notably in the administering of simulation serum, which causes vivid hallucinations. These simulations are government controlled and ultimately used to ferret out deviant bodies and minds. While *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* place emphasis on physical technologies and surveillance, *Vampire Academy* emphasizes magic use, which can serve as “a form of alternate technology” (Saxena, 2012, p. 80; Oakes, 2003). In the context of *Harry Potter*, magic “enables wizards and witches to work in a faster, abler, and more efficient manner than their muggle counterparts” (Saxena, 2012, p. 80; Oakes, 2003). Magic serves this same purpose in *Vampire Academy*, acting as a conduit for specialized performances and as a process by which physical bodies can be altered and controlled.

Magic, Saxena (2012) noted, is “synonymous with the power of agency and action” and it “embodies a threat since the agent of action always has the power of going against the rules and norms decreed by the dominant agencies” (p. 82). These ideas play out in *Vampire Academy* most notably for Rose’s best friend Lissa, whose rare spirit magic is dangerous and powerful. Similar to the ways technology is tied to the governing
of the protagonist’s bodies in *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, magic creates a rift between Rose and the government. In *Harry Potter* magic is “situated in the networks of power and politics” (Saxena, 2012, p. 81). Magic serves as a threat because “the essence of magic as a power lies in its inherent subversiveness – the secrecy, isolation and element of threat that characterize it” (Saxena, 2012, p. 80). Magic’s threat “is embodied by the bottom-up power that upsets the hierarchy and therefore needs to be controlled” and it serves as “an adolescent’s answer to the adult power systems” (Saxena, 2012, p. 80). These same ideas transpire in *Vampire Academy* as Rose and Lissa utilize spirit magic to manipulate others and defy the government, marking them as a target for government action.

**Sexual violence.** There is little writing about representations of sexual violence in modern young adult fantasy fiction. Although most modern fantasy fiction texts address sexual violence directly or indirectly, this subject is only occasionally discussed in passing, like in Silver’s (2010) article about *Twilight* in which she discusses Bella’s submissiveness, but glosses over the gang rape of Rosalie. In my study, I address moments of sexual violence directly, linking that violence to the punishment of the protagonist’s gender fluidity and in particular their masculinity. Halberstam (1998) addressed the punishment of gender deviants in her seminal work, *Female Masculinities*. Halberstam argued that ambiguous gender is “inevitably transformed into deviance, thirdness, or a blurred version of either male or female” (1998, p. 20). Perceived gender deviance, especially in publich spaces, Halberstam noted, is quickly identified, leading to often violently enforced normative gender. In *Divergent*, Tris’s perceived gender deviance – her masculine risk-taking and muscular growth – is violently punished by
several men in Tris’ initiate class who feel threatened by her success in initiation. Peter, Tris’ adversary, who sexually harasses her for weeks, attempts to reclaim his dominant position in the class through a violent attack on Tris. Braithwaite (2011) described this kind of violent reclaiming in discussing chick dick texts like Veronica Mars. She described a rapist character on the show that attempted to reclaim his masculinity through vicious language, aggression, and physical violence (p. 426). Peter utilizes these same techniques in a scene in which he and two other men jump Tris, gag and blindfold her, punch her, kick her, smash her head into a metal bar, and touch her breasts while joking about her childlike body. Peter’s violence against Tris is a topic I examine further in chapter 10, where I also discuss sexual and gendered violence more broadly as well as sexual and gendered violence in each book and film series.

**My Contribution to the Existing Scholarship and the Field**

One of the most important contributions this study makes to the larger field of scholarly work on young adult literature is my use of theory to analyze these texts. I do not just address these texts broadly, but instead apply specific strains of feminist and queer theory to address issues like the gendered construction of physical spaces, women characters’ narrative agency, sexual and gendered violence, multiple masculinities, and hegemonic masculinity. While some of the literature in this field is theoretically inspired, much of it is speculative, providing a general recap of opinions and facts. Additionally, there is a large gap in the literature on Divergent and Vampire Academy, and there is a significant gap in terms of comparing the books and the films. In this study, I identify the way the books and films represent gender, sexuality, and sexual violence as a way to pinpoint the differing ideologies of each industry. My application of feminist and queer
theory is useful in this study because of the way these theories conceptualize and take seriously mediated and pop culture texts. In the following chapter, I delineate my methods, demonstrating the strong connection between the theory discussed in this chapter and my methodological stance and procedure.
CHAPTER 4

METHODS

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology utilized in this study. I start this chapter with a discussion of narrative analysis by addressing its intersection with feminist theory, by defining narratives and their importance, by defining narrative analysis, and by establishing which models of narrative analysis I use in this study. I then discuss the sample for this study and the criteria for selection. After identifying the sample selection process, I outline the themes addressed in my analysis and the process by which I selected and recorded those themes. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the logistical factors of adapting a book into a film and I address the difference between a logistical factor and a potentially ideological factor.

Narrative Analysis as a Feminist Methodology

Oikkonen (2013) argued for the use of narrative analysis in feminist work despite the position of some feminist scholars who label this method as limiting. Oikkonen explained how these scholars argue that narrative analysis privileges “universal structure over historically specific context” (p. 296), that it is largely untheorized, with the term narrative often used simply as a synonym for story or account, and that the term narrative is often used in feminist studies to refer to “women’s personal accounts rather than the complexities of cultural logics of narration” (p. 297). Oikkonen (2013) and Pitre, Kushner, Raine, & Hegadoren (2013) argued that instead of seeing narrative analysis in this way, it can be utilized as a method that focuses on the relation between structure and context, with structure defined as “the persistent tendencies that allow certain kinds of discourses to take shape, that push narrative in particular directions” (Oikkonen, 2013, p.
and with context defined as “the culturally and historically specific conditions through which knowledge is produced and interpreted” (p. 297). In my study, I employ Oikkonen’s understanding of this method, applying it in order to parse out the patterns within a narrative, specifically those that reflect specific ideologies (Oikkonen, 2013) and in order to contextualize these patterns in terms of the institutions that produce them, the historical moment in which they are produced, and the cultural moment in which they are distributed and consumed. This connection between structure and context, Oikkonen (2013) argued, is “at the heart of the feminist project” (p. 306) because a fundamental element of feminist theory is the idea that “power and inequality are structural, historical as well as personal questions, that institutional structures affect individual lives, and that personal experiences take shape in everyday negotiations regarding structural constraints and possibilities” (p. 306).

In applying this understanding of feminist narrative analysis to my own study, I address structure by seeking patterns in the narratives by using feminist and queer theory with a specific focus on identifying and analyzing the elements of each narrative that communicate meaning about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. Identifying thematic redundancy within an individual text, across a series, across all three series, and across texts presented in a particular medium is a central focus of this study. The process of identifying narrative patterns and thematic redundancies across texts enables me to expose and make visible the patterns and messages within the selected texts that naturalize particular ways of knowing and being in relation to gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. This process also allows me to identify the meaning and potential consequences of those messages. I also situate the texts and concepts in this study within
the larger historical and cultural framework of young adult literature, media institutions, and feminist and queer theory, providing context and highlighting the importance of understanding that narratives are “always part of the larger cultural interpretive framework in which texts, images and discourses emerge and are made sense of” (Oikkonen, 2013, p. 298). The use of narrative analysis as a feminist method in this study hinges on this interplay between the structure of the narrative (how it is crafted and told) and the context of the narrative (the conditions in which is produced and consumed) to better understand how particular kinds of narratives about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence “appear as conceivable” (Oikkonen, 2013, p. 306) and how assumptions about those ideas become naturalized through pop culture narratives.

**Narratives**

Before discussing narrative analysis more fully, it is important to understand what constitutes a narrative. A narrative, most generally, is “the representation of real or fictive situations and events in a time sequence” (Prince, 1982, p. 179). In the telling of a narrative, events are selected, organized and connected, and evaluated by a particular audience as meaningful (Riessman, 2005, p. 1). A narrative serves as the “implicit logic that organizes texts and images” (Oikkonen, 2013, p. 298), acting as a set of ordering presumptions and patterns (Hausman, 2000) through which human beings make sense of “perceptions, events, cause/effect relations…and life” (Roof, 1996, p. xv). Human beings use narratives to help them “make sense of the world and their place in it” to “distill and reflect a particular understanding of social and political relations” (Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004, p.148), and to “build social bonds and make sense of unexpected experiences” (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015, p. 6). Narratives are important
sites of study because they address both the narrative manifestation of a story (the story that is told) and its underlying logic (the organizing rationale that gives it shape) (Oikkonen, 2013, p. 298) and because narratives shape and are shaped by “ideologies, social relations, and social agendas in different communities, times, and spaces” (DeFina & Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 3). Narratives are important not only because they are shaped by context but because they also “create new contexts by mobilizing and articulating fresh understandings of the world, by altering power relations between peoples, by constituting new practices” (DeFina & Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 3).

There are several ideas pertaining to narratives that are particularly important to this study. First, this study identifies narratives as units and narrative analysis as the study of those units (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 9). It is important to note that narratives can be written, oral, or visual (Riessman, 2008, p. 141) and that visual narratives have become increasingly complex as visual technology and visual storytelling have become more accessible and popular (Riessman, 2008). Both written and visual narratives are analyzed in this study and are evaluated both individually and in contrast with one another. Additionally, a story is a type of narrative that contains a sequence of actions and experiences, real or imaginary, and progresses from a distinct beginning to a distinct end point (Feldman, et. al. 2004, p. 149). People or institutions can tell a story, and a story can appear in different mediums like books and films (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 9). In this study, I also understand narratives as a representational device; it is only one tool that humans use to communicate information, identity, and ideas (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 4). Also, a narrative is not fixed or final but rather a “continual process of recreation and reproduction” (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015, p. 7). In understanding
narratives in this way, the methodological emphasis shifts away from “the connection between mind and narrative” and instead focuses on “the use and effects of narrative on a more practical level, closer to rhetoric” (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 5). A representational understanding of narrative separates the narrative from lived experience and identifies narrative construction as “tailored, consciously or not” (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p. 5) by the teller, putting focus on the producer of a narrative no matter who (author or director) or what (film crew) that producer is. While this application of narrative analysis is generally used in analyzing participant narratives, it can also be useful in understanding book and film texts as stories told for particular reasons, by particular people or groups, and with regard to particular “truths.”

Using narrative analysis to address mass media pop culture texts is particularly important because these kinds of narratives are disseminated on a large scale, reaching people of all ages and people across the world. Like all narratives, pop culture narratives are embedded with messages that are created in a particular social context, are “entangled with questions of social power” (Griffin, 2015, p. 61), are embedded with particular ideologies, represent particular ideologies, and both construct and reflect cultural practices and social norms (Griffin, 2015). In this study, I address young adult texts, analyzing the ways in which these book and film narratives serve as arbiters of particular ideologies and how these texts might potentially influence “how people ‘know’ the world and how they then choose (or are able) to act within it” (Griffin, 2015, p. 62). I demonstrate the ways in which the selected texts are produced in accordance with particular cultural assumptions about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, and how they produce particular kinds of knowledge in regard to these ideas. In focusing on the
construction of the narratives produced in each text and series and by the book and film industries, I pinpoint the ways in which particular ideas become naturalized, and I demonstrate how the production of those narratives either reinforces or challenges normative understandings about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence.

Narrative Analysis

The definition for narrative analysis as a method is somewhat nebulous because this methodology is influenced by a variety of disciplinary traditions (DeFina & Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 1) and is used differently across fields for different methodological purposes (Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p 2-3). Narrative analysis is generally concerned with stories and with storytelling practices (Riessman, 2005); however, different fields emphasize different elements of narrative and emphasize different uses of this method in reaching specific kinds of goals. For example, sociolinguists, psychologists, and anthropologists tend to utilize narrative analysis in the study and interpretation of participant narratives (Edvardsson, Rasmussen, & Riessman, 2003, p. 380). The goal of these kinds of studies is to understand how participants use narratives to make sense of their own lives, their experiences, and the world (Edvardsson et al., 2003; Feldman et al., 2004; Riessman, 2005), specifically through not only the content of the narrative, but also through the way the narrator structures the narrative, the context of the original event, the context of the retelling of the narrative, and through the narrator’s use of linguistic devices (Edvardsson et al., 2003, p. 380).

While much of narrative analysis scholarship utilizes the approach above, there is another field of study stemming from structural and semiotic analysis that has been used to “understand folklore, literature, and popular communication” and has “been applied to
the study of fictional mass-media texts including televisions shows and films” (Kitch, 2007, p. 40). Kitch utilized this methodology in performing a narrative analysis of magazine articles. She discussed the importance of identifying narrators’ thematic and structural choices as well as the importance of identifying recurring themes in order to understand both “the connotative as well as denotative meanings of media language and imagery” (Kitch, 2007, p. 40-41). She noted that this kind of narrative analysis takes note of the events and anecdotes in stories (what is in them and what is left out) as well as overall plot development (how, in what order and with what language, the story is told; how it opens; how its conflict is established and resolved; and how it ends) and characterization (who, within the story structure, emerges as the most salient players and how they interact). (Kitch, 2007, p. 40)

It is this methodological approach that most informs my analysis. In analyzing both the book and film texts, I focus on plot points, overall plot development, conflicts and resolutions, characterization, and character interactions. The repetition of themes involving plot, conflict, and characterization are particularly important, as they emphasize important moments in the narrative and suggest symbolism as well as underlying social principles (W. Wright, 1998, p. 120) or ideologies of the producer. I also pay attention to what plot points, conflicts, characterization, and character interactions do not appear in the film adaptations as well as which of those elements is significantly altered and how that alteration might change the original message.

**Models of Narrative Analysis**

In addition to the different use of narrative analysis by different fields, there are also a variety of different models of narrative analysis. Riesmann (2005) identified several different models including thematic analysis, structural analysis, performative
analysis, and visual analysis, all of which are blended and utilized in this study. The emphasis in thematic analysis is on the content of a text, on what is said more than on how it is said (Riesmann, 2005, p. 2). This model is useful for grounded theorists who identify common thematic elements across texts (Riessman, 2005, p. 3) and “inductively create conceptual groupings from the data” (Riesmann, 2005, p. 2). Structural analysis emphasizes the way the story is told (p. 3). This type of analysis does not disregard thematic content, but rather places equal focus on the form of a narrative. Structural analysis looks at the organization of content and structure of a narrative, linguistic devices, and literary devices (p. 3). Performative analysis identifies characters and their positioning within a story, interactions between characters, the performance of dialogue between characters, and the way narrators tell the story and how that telling reflects, “how narrators want to be known” (Riessman, 2005, p. 5). While Riessman (2005) developed these categories in reference to use with participant interviews, these categories are applicable in textual analysis, as demonstrated by Fiske and Hartley (1978), Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994), W. Wright (1998), and Kitch (2007).

Visual analysis is another important category of narrative analysis utilized in this study. Visual analysis addresses narrative structure in terms of sites of production and modalities. Sites of production at which meaning is made include “the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by a variety of audiences” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 13). Each of these sites has three different modalities that “contribute to a critical understanding of images” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 13). These modalities include technological – the apparatus designed to be looked at, compositional – formal strategies and material qualities of an image, and social – “the
range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 13). In this study, I engage with the sites of production of the films and with the films themselves and look specifically at the compositional and social modalities.

G. Rose (2007) breaks down these sites and modalities further through a description of how visual texts can be analyzed and what focus a researcher can take when analyzing visual images. These approaches are also applicable to the analysis of written texts, making the discussion of these approaches particularly important. G. Rose discussed five foci a researcher can undertake, all of which can be combined in different ways to suit a particular study. The first way she identified is analyzing how visual images “offer very particular versions of social categories such as class, gender, race, sexuality, able-bodiedness and so on” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 7). This approach focuses on representation, specifically on how different identities are constructed and presented in a text and on how those representations might be connected to “patterns of inequality, domination and oppression” (R. Gill, 2007a, p. 7). The second approach focuses not simply on how images look, but on “how images are looked at” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 7), which includes the relationship of the image to the viewer (G. Rose, 2007, p. 10). This approach is more suited for effects and audience reception research, which is not addressed in this study. A third approach ties in with the second. This approach to analyzing visual culture focuses on the audience and situates audiences as active viewers that “bring their own interpretations to bear on its [visual images] meaning and effect” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 11). A fourth approach to analyzing images pays attention to the context of visual images and the “embeddedness of visual images in a wider culture” (G.
This approach identifies the social context in which the images are constructed and viewed and requires researchers to understand “who is able to see what and how, and with what effects” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 10). The last approach G. Rose identified is a focus on the agency of any given visual image (G. Rose, 2007, p. 11). This approach notes that while visual images are often multimodal and are seen in relation to other visual, written, or spoken texts, the visual image itself is “not reducible to the meanings carried by those other things” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 11). In this study, I do not attempt to address the approaches that deal with audience and effects directly, but rather, I focus on determining what kinds of representations are visually depicted and on how those representations are contextualized by the institutions that produced them.

**Sample Selection Criteria**

The texts analyzed in this study include *The Hunger Games* book trilogy and its four film adaptations, the *Divergent* book trilogy and its first two film adaptations, and the *Vampire Academy* book series and its one film adaptation. I only address two of the four *Divergent* films because the third installment was not released in time for this study and the fourth will not be released until 2017. Also, although the *Vampire Academy* book series consists of six books, only the first book was adapted into a film. In this study, I focus on the narrative(s) constructed by the book and film texts through the stories told in those texts, and I address institutional imperatives that may serve as catalysts for the differences in the way the books and films represent content. Selecting full book and film texts was important because they lend themselves to the telling of complete stories, allowing for the emergence of clear narrative patterns, while texts like still images and trailers provide only a small piece of the overall story. Additionally, I addressed the full
book and film texts in order to more fully explore the institutional influence on these texts.

**Criteria for Selection**

When determining the parameters for this study and when deciding what book series to cover in this study, I developed a list of criteria. Below, I list the nine factors that played a significant role in the selection of the texts in this study. I follow that list with a description of each criterion in order to make transparent my sample selection process. These factors include: personal enjoyment; the original publication dates being between 2005-2015; commercial success; at least one film adaptation of the book series; the classification of the original book series as fantasy literature; the presence of (strong) women protagonists in the original book texts; the protagonists’ embodiment of both normatively masculine and feminine traits; the books being authored by women; and sexual violence being featured directly or indirectly in the original book texts.

**Criterion 1: Personal enjoyment.** This research is important to me because young adult fantasy fiction is important to me. As a child, I found solace in the fantastical worlds and characters in the pages of young adult fantasy literature. When I first read each of the series in this study, I couldn’t put them down. The writing is strong, the pace of the plot is thrilling, the conflicts are chilling, and most importantly, the characters, especially the women characters are complex and fully formed. I connected with Katniss, Tris, and Rose and enjoyed them as characters. Although many people seem to utilize pop culture media as an escape, I believe in the importance of actively analyzing those texts, even and especially those that I enjoy. The active analysis of pop culture texts is important because there are no innocent texts. As Kellner and Durham (2006) argued,
“all artifacts of the established culture and society are laden with meaning, values, biases, and messages that advance relations of power and subordination” (p. xiii), and as Griffin (2015) argued, pop culture texts are, “central sites of meaning-making. more than simply the by-products of a society or culture, they constitute how we know ourselves and how we believes ourselves to be valid” (p. 67). Young adult literature in particular is important to analyze because it “offers a potentially rich and critical site to engage adolescents in thinking through the ways in which masculinity (and indeed femininity) is, and might yet be, ‘storied’ and ‘performed’ in and out of school” (Bean & Harper, 2007, p. 12).

**Criterion 2: Published between 2005-2015.** In addition to enjoying the books in this study and respecting the writing of the authors, I needed to make sure these books fit some additional and more formal criteria. As noted in chapter two, young adult literature and fantasy literature have a long and complex history. I knew that I wanted to tackle books published more recently because more recent books are more culturally relevant than books published in past decades, and cultural relevance is particularly important when attempting to parse out messages influenced by and messages about modern gender and sexual norms. Originally, I thought I would analyze the *Harry Potter* series and *The Twilight Saga*, since those two series were arguably the most popular in the past decade. I cut *Harry Potter* from the list for several reasons, one being that only the last two books in the series were published within my stipulated time frame. Additionally, I solidified my focus on women protagonists. Although *The Twilight Saga* was published within this time frame and featured a woman protagonist, there is already a full set of scholarly
literature dedicated to this series and the woman protagonist is devoid of physical, emotional, and intellectual strength (Backstein, 2009; Deffenbacher, 2014; Silver, 2010).

**Criterion 3: Commercial success.** I wanted to analyze books that are popular in their own right and popular enough to spawn a film adaptation. All of the series in this study have had tremendous commercial success. *The Hunger Games* trilogy has sold over 65 million copies in digital and print (“Scholastic News Room,” n.d.) and has been sold in 56 territories in 51 different languages. All three books in the series were *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly* number one best sellers, and *The Hunger Games* has spent more than 260 consecutive weeks (more than five consecutive years) on the New York Times bestseller list since publication in 2008 (“Scholastic News Room,” n.d.). *Divergent* debuted at number six on the New York Times best-seller list and its follow up, *Insurgent*, reached the number one spot on that list (Blumberg, 2016, para. 3). By the end of the 2014 fiscal year on June 30, the Divergent series had sold 19 million net units (“News Corporation,” 2014, p. 52). By 2013, the *Vampire Academy* series had sold nine million copies in 35 countries (Burnett, 2014), and the first three books in the series have been turned into graphic novels.

**Criterion 4: Film adaptations.** It was crucial to this study that each series selected had at least one film adaptation. A key aspect of this study is to identify the ideological differences between the publishing industry and the film industry. That distinction is made through my analysis of the changes and cuts made during the adaptation process as well as through my identification of thematic redundancies that occur across the books and across the films.
Criterion 5: Young adult fantasy literature. Categorizing young adult fantasy
texts relies on an evaluation of several generic elements. This genre features adolescent
or teen protagonists who are involved in a quest or journey that will determine if good or
evil prevails in that world (Beers & Barron, 1998, p. 588). Typically, protagonists are
average and relatable, at first appearing to be utterly ordinary. However, these
protagonists often come to realize that they hold within them an innate ability or
sentiment that will aide them in their difficult journey (Ramaswamy, 2014, p. 225).
Protagonists in this genre often undergo significant physical and emotional growth; this
emotional and physical journey, often sexual, helps the protagonist to develop the self.
This genre also often includes the presence of magic or magical objects and/or innate
special abilities. Protagonists in this genre tend to transform from utterly ordinary to
profoundly extraordinary and often find that magic or special abilities are innate and have
merely lain dormant. Another element of this genre is the featuring of protagonists who
have dead, missing, inept, mentally ill, or otherwise absent parents (Grynbaum, 2001,
Alchemy of the orphan, para. 6) and who are aided by the help of mentors who often
serve as surrogate parents. Although often aided by friends and mentors, the protagonist
is the only one who can save him or herself, his or her loved ones, and the world. All
three book series meet these requirements and these elements play a significant role in the
development of narrative patterns within each text.

Criterion 6: (Strong) women protagonists. I also wanted to focus on texts that
had women protagonists and specifically women protagonists that are physically,
emotionally, and intellectually strong. These women protagonists are interesting
characters because they are fully formed and complex. They have strengths and
weaknesses, they have flaws, and they demonstrate their emotional strength through growth and maturity. Strength and power are inherently bound up in the concepts of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, which are central topics in this study. In assessing representations of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence, I wanted to determine not only how each book and film series portrays these ideas, but if and how those representations differed ideologically.

**Criterion 7: Gender fluidity.** Each protagonist in these series grapples with gender identity. All three of these protagonists embody both normatively masculine and feminine traits, making their gender identity fluid. A key component of this study is using feminism and queer theory to analyze representations of gender within the books and films. Analyzing these representations is useful in determining whether or not each text queers normative gender roles and identity.

**Criterion 8: Women authors.** In addition to selecting texts with women protagonists, I also wanted to examine texts written by women authors. It felt important to select texts that had women authors writing women protagonist characters. It is important to note that all three of these series, like any book or series, exist in a larger social, cultural, and political context. It is also important to note that there are methodological limitations in the books selected. One major limitation is that these books are all written by white, American women authors producing texts for large, multinational media companies. These texts also feature white women protagonists, making the white point of view the most resounding one in these series. Although there are certainly more young adult and young adult fantasy texts written by different kinds of authors and featuring different kinds of protagonists than there used to be, this white,
middle class, corporate viewpoint is still dominant in the genre. Analyzing texts that potentially reinforce this viewpoint is important because they represent the status quo of modern book publishing and may provide insight into the larger publishing industry and its ideologies.

**Criterion 9: Sexual violence.** One of the most important parts of this research and one of my biggest motivators in doing this research is the featuring of sexual violence in these texts. Young adult texts have begun to feature some of the most honest and graphic depictions of modern American adolescence seen in fiction and through the history of the young adult novel (Cart, 2010). Many of the most popular young adult texts feature teenage experiences with first time sexual encounters, sexual harassment, rape, self-harm, suicide, mental illness, and death. *The Hunger Games, Divergent,* and *Vampire Academy* all in some way contend with not only burgeoning sexuality and first time sexual encounters but also, either directly or indirectly, with sexual harassment, coercion, or full-blown rape. These authors depict these issues amidst a bevy of other conflicts, making sexuality and sexual violence a part of the lives of the characters but not the whole of their lives. I wanted to further analyze these instances and determine how sexual violence is being represented in these texts and if there was a significant difference in the representations of sexual violence between the books and the films.

**Theme Selection and Analysis: Procedure**

Grounded theory is an important methodological tool in this research because it allows me to address themes in the data as those themes emerge. Grounded theory, developed by Charles Pierce and John Dewey, was designed as a way to establish solutions to practical problems and positions data gathering and data analysis as a
simultaneous process (Oktay, 2012). Grounded theory, which stems from symbolic interactionism, is particularly useful when paired with my theoretical perspective, which relies on social constructionist feminist and queer theory. Symbolic interactionism’s basic tenants align with social constructionism, dictating that interactions between people and the environment are dynamic, resulting in a continually growing and changing self (Oktay, 2012) and that the creation of identity is further influenced by symbolic shared meanings that develop through interactions with others and the environment (Oktay, 2012). A grounded theory approach calls for the researcher to engage in four key actions: theoretical sensitivity, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation (p. 16). In this study, theory is a driving factor and one that separates my research from most other scholarly writing about young adult literature. Feminist and queer theory played an integral role in my method selection and influences my entire analysis. Additionally, I used narrative analysis and my theoretical framework to pinpoint patterns in the texts and identify thematic redundancy, which demonstrates a larger ideological connection between texts. Grounded theory is also useful for monitoring researcher bias because this approach does not require a hypothesis. The researcher collects data, examines that data, ponders its meaning and connections to other data, and develops a theory that addresses what is actually found in the data not what one expects to find in the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 135).

**Identifying Themes: Narrowing the Focus**

There are a total of twelve books and seven films in this study. Because there was so much data to address, I approached the recording and analysis of this data in a systematic and clear-cut way. When reading each book and watching each film, I
recorded the chronological order of plot events. Recording the order of the plot was important for comparison of the narrative structure in the books and films and also enabled me to pinpoint significant cuts or alterations in the adaptations. When recording the order of the plot, I highlighted the scenes that contained the selected themes. Narrative analysis dictates this thematic focus and requires analysis of those themes especially in relation to plot progression, conflict, and characterization. The selected themes include: the power, purpose, use of, abilities of, and containment of women’s physical bodies; messages of social constructionism versus biological determinism or naturalism; heteronormativity, heterosexuality, and hegemonic masculinity; gendered constructions of space and the policing of that space; and expressions of gender fluidity, femininity, and masculinity. These themes were fleshed out in chapter 3.

It is important to be transparent in detailing my data collection process because of the subjectivity involved. The process of recording plot events is both objective and subjective. The events themselves and the order of those events is objective. The emphasis I place on any given event and the way I determine significant events is subjective. In order to make sure I evaluated the most important scenes, I went series by series. I read the first book then I watched the corresponding movie until I had finished the series. I then proceeded to the next series. While analyzing data, I went back and reread or rewatched sections from different texts in order to continuously evaluate emerging patterns. This approach allowed me to identify important scenes within individual texts and within a single series, as well as to identify important patterns among all three series. It is important to note that another researcher may label and analyze plot events and scenes differently and may define concepts based on different theoretical
frameworks; however, my methodological decisions are based on the previously established theory and methods and are based on my research questions.

**Logistics vs. Ideology**

One focus of this study, as previously discussed, is the comparison of the selected books and their film adaptations in order to better determine the ideological foundations of the book and film industry. The task of determining what is logistical and what is ideological is a difficult one since books and films are created under different circumstances and each presents a story through different techniques. McFarlane addressed this concern by identifying two key questions: “(a) in the transposition process, just what is it possible to transfer or adapt from novel to film; and (b) what key factors other than the source novel have exercised an influence on the film version of the novel?” (p. 22). When analyzing film adaptations and addressing McFarlane’s two questions, it is important to remember what George Bluestone noted in his seminal adaptation studies book, *Novels into Film*, about the lack of awareness that:

> Mutations are probable the moment one goes from a given set of fluid, but relatively homogeneous, conventions to another; that changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium…the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture. The film becomes a different thing in the same sense that a historical painting becomes a different thing from the historical event which it illustrates. (1961, p. 5)

Bluestone’s argument is an important one as it reminds researchers that books and films are inevitably different and that there will undoubtedly be changes when translating a book narrative into a film narrative. While a film adaptation attempts to be faithful to the source material, there are a variety of factors that determine that fidelity.
McFarlane (1996) addressed this issue of fidelity, noting that even if a film adheres to the original book to the letter, the adaptation may not capture the essence of the work or be a successful adaptation (p. 8-9). He noted that it is difficult to assess whether or not the spirit or essence of the novel has been captured because different readers will read and understand the source material differently; the filmmaker can only hope that his retelling coincides with the reading most common to readers and viewers (p. 9). Orr (1984) argued for a more nuanced approach to studying adaptations in terms of intertextuality; he noted “the issue of not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film’s ideology (p.72). McFarlane (1996) and Blustone (1961) noted that while a film adaptation addresses the content of the source material, the adaptation is its own text, which is developed in a specific cultural and historical moment and which reflects the specific ideologies of that moment.

The information presented in the preceding chapters helps to situate the historical and cultural moment in which the film adaptations of *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Vampire Academy* have been produced. In the analysis, I seek to identify the filmmakers’ and studios’ approaches to representing the source material, namely the representation of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence as demonstrated through the aforementioned themes, and in doing so, I hope to parse out the ideological foundation of the film industry. I address the issue of film making logistics in the conclusion chapter more fully, but have listed the most pertinent elements here in order to make it clear that this project intends to take these ideas into account during analysis of cuts and alterations. Logistical elements that might account for changes during film adaptation include: time constraints;
modes of expression; linearity vs. spatiality, language codes vs. cinematic codes; linguistic tropes vs. editing, narrative point of view; and institutional restrictions. When discussing the major patterns that emerge in the three book series and that differ significantly from the three film series, I use these elements to determine the logistical merit of significant alterations or cuts in the film adaptations. In my analysis, I clearly delineate between alterations that were made due to these elements and alterations that could have feasibly been done differently or were logistically unnecessary.

**Moving Forward**

When performing qualitative research, it is important to select methods and theories that inform one another. Using Oikkonen’s (2013) model of narrative analysis allows me to tackle an issue taken up by feminist and queer theory scholars – how specific ways of knowing and being become naturalized. This model of theory and method allow me to look at both structure and context, seeking out patterns in individual texts and across texts as well as situating these texts within a larger cultural and historical context. Using narrative analysis and social constructionist feminist and queer theory are particularly important in this project because as a scholar, I subscribe to the idea that media representations homogenize and normalize (Bordo, 1993) particular ways of knowing and being that “serve prevailing relations of dominance and subordination” (Bordo, 1993, p. 26) and that “function as models against which the self continually measures, judges, ‘disciplines,’ and ‘corrects’ itself” (Bordo, 1993, p. 26). I also subscribe to the idea that the dictation of a particular way of knowing or being is established through clear patterns in a text and that those patterns, once identified, can be altered (Bean & Harper, 2007; Butler, 1999; Epstein, 1994; Friedman, 2006, p. 182;
Martin, 1994; Ranade, 2007). In the following chapters, I analyze the texts in this study, applying narrative analysis and feminist and queer theory
CHAPTER 5

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE HUNGER GAMES BOOK SERIES

In my analysis of *The Hunger Games* trilogy (see Appendix B for book summaries, vocab, and character list), I address my first research question by discussing all three books and all four film adaptations. In this chapter, I discuss the book series’ representations of gender and sexuality, pinpointing the way Collins constructs masculinity, femininity, and gender fluidity within the books. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Collins seems to critique modern American gender and sexual norms through the way she constructs the Capitol and juxtaposes it with the districts. I identify how gender and sexuality are constructed differently in these disparate spaces marking the Capitol as a place where gender identity is inauthentically performed and the districts as spaces where identity is constructed through experiences, social interactions, and surroundings. In chapter 6, I discuss the film series’ representations of gender and sexuality, specifically its feminizing of masculine women, masculinizing of feminine men, and its emphasis on a hierarchy of multiple masculinities. In this chapter, I briefly address these texts in terms of institutional imperatives and implications for audiences, but speak at length about these topics in Chapter 11.

Research Question One

How do these books and films represent gender and sexuality? How do these texts define and reinforce the concepts of masculinity and femininity? To what degree do these texts directly link masculinity and femininity with biological sex? To what degree do these texts link gender and sexuality? To what degree do these texts present the possibility of fluid gender identity?
Gender and Sexuality in the Book Series

There is an important distinction in this series between the way the Capitol and the districts dictate gender. This distinction allows Collins to differentiate between gender performativity that is normative and inauthentic and gender performativity that is authentic and fluid. In making this distinction, Collins disrupts normative understandings of gender and complicates the normative linking of masculinity and femininity with specifically sexed bodies. This distinction is largely predicated on Katniss’s understanding of and interactions with the Capitol; Katniss’s clear disgust for the Capitol’s strict identity regulations and its citizens’ clearly inauthentic performances of identity serves as a condemnation of Capitol itself and of its regulation of tributes’ gender identity.

Although Collins upholds a gender binary system in which male and female are opposites and exist as the two possible genders, she queers this normative system through characters’ gender fluidity. Katniss’s character in particular demonstrates this fluidity, as Mitchell (2012) argued, by occupying a broad spectrum of roles, granting her mobility, and through her constantly shifting gender identity, which is itself a “gesture of queerness” (p. 128).

Gender in the Capitol

The Capitol reinforces normative understandings of sex and gender, representing gender as a physical distinction whereby girls and boys maintain different and opposite physical appearances that correspond to normatively feminine and masculine traits respectively. The Capitol’s visual emphasis on highly stylized gendered performance by differently sexed bodies plays out in its public spaces and televised events where gender and its connection to physical anatomy is closely monitored and strictly enforced. In this
space, girls and boys have a fixed set of different and equally limiting gendered standards that are expressed through clothing, mannerisms, and the physical body. This distinction is demonstrated in part through the tributes’ styling in the Capitol’s performance space where Katniss and the other girl tributes wear signifiers of femininity including dresses, fitted clothing, and high heels while Peeta and the boy tributes wear signifiers of masculinity including pants and shirts. Katniss’s costumes in particular emphasize her femininity through their design, which often reveals her skin, incorporates sparkles and gems, and are designed for twirling. Burns-Ardolino (2003) argued that normatively feminine clothing encourages, trains, and polices, “women’s performances of normative feminine motility, spatiality, and comportment” (p. 43). This argument applies to Katniss, whose movements, personal space, and mannerisms are restricted by the feminine clothing that contrasts so clearly with her preferred masculine style, which allows easy and fluid movement. The limitations feminine appearance places on Katniss’s motility and comportment are also made clear by Effie, who chastises Katniss for her hiking up her gown in an unladylike fashion (1172) and who makes Katniss practice sitting, posture, eye contact, hand gestures, and smiling (1172).

The prominence of gendered physical bodies and the difference between genders in the Capitol is made more concrete through the continuous and often painful body modifications Katniss undergoes before each publicly televised performance. Katniss often laments her time with her prep team where she is made more normatively feminine. In these moments when she is stripped down, has her body hair removed, her nails filed, her skin scrubbed, her hair styled, and her makeup done (621), Katniss’s body is made docile through its external regulation. This kind of external regulation indicates a loss of
mobility and voice (Bordo, 1993, p. 168; Burns-Ardolino, 2003), especially in relation to the different and less immobilizing standards placed on boys. In preparation for her second Games, Katniss realizes that Peeta gets to sleep all morning while she has her body hair ripped out (4259). This realization makes it clear that there are different expectations for the appearances of girls and boys in this space and that girls must maintain a stringent and set standard of beauty that includes what Adams & Bettis (2003) identified as a fairly static set of normatively feminine indicators of attractiveness like smooth skin and hairlessness. As the first person narrator, Katniss’s discomfort with this gendered styling serves as a condemnation of the frivolous and shallow nature of the Capitol as well as of its strict control over gendered appearance, specifically over women’s feminine appearance.

The Capitol also establishes a connection between gender, anatomy, and normative expressions of sexuality specifically in terms of presenting the girls as sexualized while the boys’ bodies remain largely asexual. The different styling of the boys and girls, which can be seen in Katniss’s post-Games modifications and in the pre-Games styling of the other tributes, makes clear the different expectations of sexuality for boys and girls. Before Katniss takes the stage for her final interview after winning the Games with Peeta, Cinna adds padding over her breasts to disguise her starvation (3578), which has made her body non-feminine and deviant in its more masculine, curve-less appearance. Before she can object, Cinna tells her that the Gamemakers wanted to alter her surgically and that the padding was a compromise. The Capitol’s insistence on Katniss’s womanly appearance emphasizes the importance of physically sexed bodies and the culturally appropriate sexuality of those bodies, at least on stage. In this scene,
there is a linking of her breasts, a marker of biology, with her femininity and sexuality since it is only after she wins with Peeta by playing the romance angle that these extreme body modifications are suggested.

In this same scene, Katniss realizes that Cinna has made her look like a young girl by dressing her in sheer yellow fabric, a loose hair style, and makeup that rounds out the sharp angles of her face (3585). This style of dress is a calculated move to make Katniss appear more normatively feminine and less like the masculine rebel that defied the Capitol, thereby conforming Katniss to the Capitol’s normative standards of femininity, which is both sexual and submissive to men, two traits that Adams & Bettis (2003) identified as markers of normative and ideal femininity. Despite the youthfulness of the outfit, her flawless skin courtesy of the Capitol, and her flimsy dress make her appear sexual and beautiful, especially in contrast with Peeta’s sturdier and more masculine look in dark pants and boots. This combination of oppositely gendered appearances and the emphasis on Katniss’s sexualized presentation not only marks her as sexual but also underscores the importance of heterosexuality in the performance of ideal Capitol femininity. Heterosexuality in particular is an element that Adams & Bettis (2003) identified as crucial in the construction of ideal and normative femininity. Collins seems to critique these normative elements of femininity by both linking those elements to the shallow yet brutal Capitol citizens and through Katniss’s need to perform those traits in order to survive. Through Cinna’s calculated styling and through Katniss’s awareness of the need to perform normatively on stage, Collins seems to emphasize the power of the Capitol’s influence to construct, reinforce, and police normative ideas about gender, sexuality, and physical bodies.
In particular, Collins seems to critique the Capitol’s enforcement of rigid gender standards through her description of several tributes during their pre-Games interviews and through the way these characters are presented differently in the arena. Katniss acknowledges the similar positioning of the girls, who all appear weak and feminine, in contrast with the boys, who appear confident and masculine. She notes the girl from District 1’s overt sexuality, Rue’s innocence and naiveté, and her own Capitol-enforced frivolousness, which all stand in stark contrast to Thresh’s surly demeanor and Peeta’s easy charm and movement. When Thresh takes the stage, Katniss notes his height, build and surly demeanor. He ignores Caesar’s attempts at banter, remaining silent or answering in monosyllables. Katniss laments, “If only I were his size, I could get away with sullen and hostile and I would be just fine!” (1289). Here, Katniss makes a connection between physical size and masculine mannerisms, noting that her own feminized body limits her mannerisms and personality to those deemed acceptable by the Capitol.

In addition to establishing the limitations of the Capitol’s gendered standards, Collins also demonstrates a critique of the Capitol’s norms through the contrast between tributes on stage and in the arena. The contrast between the tributes’ authentic personalities in the arena, where survival, not pageantry or social norms is paramount, and their mostly disingenuous performances of gender on stage highlights the frivolousness of Capitol norms. In the arena, each tribute exhibits different strategies, competencies, skills, motivations, and desires, marking many of them as not only distinct from their Capitol-made personalities but also as representative of a variety of gender and sexual identities. In this way, Collins seems to reinforce the difference between the social
construction of identity through a lifetime of experiences and the construction of identity that is merely a façade designed to entertain an elitist audience.

Normative gender as social control. In having the tributes appear as highly styled and gendered spectacles on stage and in demonstrating the Capitol citizens’ emotional investment in the tributes (K. Wright, 2012), Collins demonstrates the power of the Capitol, its media, and its government to control both the tributes and the citizens of Panem, both of which are susceptible to and the primary subjects of the Capitol’s exploitation and control (K. Wright, 2012). The emotional investment of Panem’s citizens, especially the Capitol citizens, in the styling of the tributes’ bodies belies much larger issues regarding media, spectacle, reality programming, and gender and sexual norms. This emotional investment allows the Capitol to use the tributes’ bodies as a locus of social control. The Capitol’s ownership of tributes’ bodies and its construction and monitoring of the gendered and sexual performance of those bodies allows it to disperse messages about social norms, which ultimately use aesthetics to reinforce the Capitol’s political interests (K. Wright, 2012). The tributes’ bodies, through Capitol control, reflect Bordo’s (1993) understanding of the body as, “a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body” (p. 165). The tributes’ bodies, which are made doll-like and disposable, are symbols of the Capitol’s power, brutality, and of its larger desire to control and confine its district subjects; their bodies serve as markers of political hierarchy, demonstrating how little power the people have in contrast to the Capitol. By disposing of the tributes bodies in brutal ways and by
making the selection of tributes and their disposal unpredictable, the Capitol exploits those bodies as a means of social control.

This social control stems in large part from the way the tributes’ bodies are restructured on stage and post-Games to signify culturally appropriate ways of being and from the way they are punished in the arena for the expression of more authentic but non-normative identities. While the tributes are safe on stage where they perform normative gender, in the arena, they are punished by death for their gender deviance. Although the arena is a non-Capitol space, it is still regulated by Capitol Gamemakers, who Katniss notes have frequently constructed devastation in the arena to negate non-normalized and unpredictable behavior. Katniss specifically references a tribute whose brutality was likely a result of insanity; she notes that the Gamemakers engineered his death, likely in order to ensure that a non-normative tribute did not become the victor. This policing of behavior and of gender identity via symbolic physical space, a concept discussed by a variety of scholars (Acarón, 2016; Alexander, 1994; Halberstam, 2004; Koskela, 1999; S. Low, 1996; Pain, 1991; Ranade, 2007; Salamon, 2008; Valentine, 1989), allows the Capitol to shape countrywide notions of normative behavior and disseminate those norms on a large scale.

Additionally, the Capitol’s social control stems from an uneven distribution of wealth, which is clear in the removing of what Frankel (2012) described as the tributes’ “objectionable third-world origins” (p. 51) and the remaking of those objectionable bodies, like Katniss’s masculine body, into bodies that more closely resemble Capitol ideals (Frankel, 2012). The Capitol’s power is also linked to its use of mass media and technology, especially through its ability to record and broadcast its control over the
tributes and its remaking of them. Randell-Moon (2012) noted the importance of “locating the body within technologies of power” (p. 266) and identifying the “interplay between media technologies and gendered and sexualized bodies” (p. 267). In this book series, Collins recreates a mass media system like that of modern America, one in which reality television produces and features outlandish characters, luxury and wealth, pageantry, excessive grooming, and highly monitored gendered performances, all of which are ultimately framed as desirable (Franke, 2012; K. Wright, 2012). Collins seems to want readers to locate Katniss’s body within this same system of technology and power; Katniss is reworked and her Capitol image is broadcast as a means of social control. The Games, the Capitol citizens’ active support of the Games, and the district citizens’ passive compliance with the Games parallels the hegemony of modern American media. The Capitol leaders set the parameters for normal gendered behavior in the Capitol and they maintain the Games in accordance with those ideas, but it is the Citizens who perpetuate these norms through continued prizing of the system and the people of the districts through their continued compliance, both conscious and unconscious, with those norms.

The construction of gender, de Lauretis (1987) argued, is produced, promoted, and implanted through the various technologies of gender and of institutional discourses; these technologies (mass media) and institutions (media and government), control social meaning. One way in which the Capitol controls social meaning and replicates specific gender and sexual norms is through the victory tour. The winner of that year’s Games is restyled to fit the norms of the Capitol and is paraded around the country in publicly televised performances. Through this system, the Capitol makes the tributes more
predictable and pliable and uses them to ensure predictability in the districts as well. Donaldson (1993) argued that crucial to the continuation of hegemonic masculinity in particular is the production of exemplars of that masculinity as well as the celebration of those exemplars as heroes. As K. Wright (2012) noted about the reality television format of the Games, the tributes and the victors are revered as these exemplars; in recognizing them as such and in celebrating them on the tour and on television, the Capitol produces gender and sexual norms and creates a connection between the tributes and the people in the districts that reinforces the Capitol’s hold over its people. In creating this system, Collins seems to critique modern American media, especially media that encourages limiting gender and sexual identities by shaping exemplars that promote institutional ideals rather than individuality.

**Gender in the Districts**

This book series presents the Capitol and its strict enforcement of a rigid and normative gender system as a cautionary tale and it complicates the Capitol’s normative gender by establishing a more authentic performance of gender in the districts, which is derived from complex social relationships, practices, and discourses – elements that Friedman (2006) identified as emblematic of social construction. In the districts, gender is still performative and socially constructed, like it is in the Capitol, but it is conceptualized significantly differently. While in the Capitol, outward appearance is a key signifier of gender performativity, in the districts, the performativity of identity is associated less with the way a person looks and much more with what scholars (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Friedman, 2006; Haslanger, 1995) have identified as elements of the social construction of identity – a person’s skills and personality, which
are cultivated through a person’s surroundings, daily practices, and social interactions.

This type of social construction of identity is made clear in the differences between the tributes’ abilities. Katniss, who had access to the woods, is a hunter and can identify edible plants. Johanna, who lived in the lumber district can throw and wield an axe. Finnick, who lived in a coastal district can swim, fish, and is deadly with a trident. Mags, also from Finnick’s district, is adept at making fish hooks out of any material. Rue, who lived in the farming district is a skilled tree climber from working in the orchard. And Beetee and Wiress, from the district that produces new technologies, are adept at inventing and utilizing scientific reasoning. The mix of masculine and feminine skills across differently sexed bodies demonstrates a more fluid understanding of gender in the districts and highlights the connection of gender performance with environments, upbringings, and life experiences.

These tributes’ environment specific skills establish the idea that gender is still performative in the districts but that this performativity is a more natural and authentic extension of a person than it is in the Capitol. This representation distinguishes between two lifestyles and their effects on gender performance. In the districts and in the arena, the emphasis is survival, allowing district people to eschew limiting gender norms in favor of continued existence and enabling gender performances that are performed without premeditation (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014, p. 399). In the Capitol, the emphasis is on the citizens’ gendered stylization of the physical body, which is dictated by highly stressed, arbitrary, and impractical standards that are performed intentionally and with great care as a signifier of acceptable participation in that society. The unnaturalness and inauthenticity of the Capitol’s limitations on gender is epitomized by the contrast
between the image of Katniss and Gale hunting in the woods and Katniss’s first meeting with her outlandishly styled prep team. This contrast between the life and style norms in the Capitol and the districts allows Collins to distinguish between the two spaces, marking the construction of identity in the districts as morally superior to the blind acceptance and adoption of rigid and arbitrary social and gender norms in the Capitol.

**Gender fluidity.** Collins also complicates the normative gender of the Capitol through the establishment of gender fluidity whereby there is no linking between physical bodies and gender. This deconstruction of the gender-body link allows any man or woman to be masculine or feminine and allows for any individual to be both masculine and feminine simultaneously. Although Collins does limit gender to the oft criticized relational binary of male and female, the possibility of gender fluidity allows her to challenge normative gender by allowing characters to embody whichever traits most suit their lifestyles and by allowing characters to have an ambiguous gender identity. Collins establishes this fluidity through cultural expectations in the districts and through specific characters that enact masculinity and femininity concurrently or at different times but in equal measure.

**Cultural expectations.** Although some districts differentiate between men’s and women’s work, like in the coalmines of District 12, men and women in the districts can generally perform any job or role including leader, president, peacekeeper, soldier, small business owner, healer, baker, hunter, painter, or inventor among a variety of other roles. Men and women alike can be rich or poor, have families, remain single, have children or not, be good parents or bad parents, or be morally good or bad people. Men and women can be masculine or feminine. In the arena, a space more symbolically aligned with the
districts than the Capitol, both boys and girls can adopt masculinity or femininity and both sexes and genders have equal metaphorical footing. Despite different physical appearances on stage, boys and girls are ranked according to skill, not gender, and Careertributes and tributes favored to win are both girls and boys. Both girls and boys have an equal chance of winning or losing the Games and both can act in normatively masculine (violent) or feminine (non-combative) ways. Both can be perceived by others as threatening or not based on a variety of masculine and feminine traits. Both are killed, can be killers, and can be ruthless, manipulative, conniving, merciless, intelligent, brutal, caring, or heroic. These possibilities are underscored by the fact that once in the arena, all tributes are dressed identically, making their authentic personalities and skills prominent.

**Gender fluidity and ambiguity.** By creating individual characters that embody both masculinity and femininity simultaneously, Collins queers normative notions of gender and deconstructs the Capitol’s link between gender and physical bodies. Katniss, Peeta, and Finnick are the most notably gender fluid characters in the book series, with Peeta and Katniss serving as opposites. Although Katniss and Peeta both exhibit both genders in large proportion, Katniss tends to exhibit more masculine than feminine traits and Peeta tends to exhibit more feminine than masculine traits. Finnick seems to represent extreme masculinity and extreme femininity, making him a cautionary tale about balance. Out of all three of these characters, Katniss serves as the clearest example of gender fluidity and of the way gender fluidity destabilizes normative notions of gender since she is the first person narrator of the story and readers are privy to her internal monologue. Knowing Katniss’s motivations allows the reader to differentiate between times when Katniss is superficially enacting a specific gender and when she is
performing authentic gender. Her gender fluid scenes are distinct from the scenes in which she actively and calculatingly codes herself as feminine for the audience. Her active performance of femininity for the Capitol is often marked by her discomfort, her clumsiness in that role, and her disgust with the role. In Katniss’s gender fluid scenes, she vacillates between feminine and masculine in such quick succession and without premeditation or discomfort that it is clear both feminine and masculine traits are inherent to her personality. Both genders occupy a significant portion of her identity, marking her gender as ambiguous and fluid (Lem & Hassel, 2012; Mitchell, 2012). Katniss’s ability to transition seamlessly from one gender to the other (Lem & Hassel, 2012; Mitchell, 2012) is often correlated with her survival in the Capitol and arena (DeaVault, 2012; Lem & Hassel, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Montz, 2012; K. Wright, 2012), marking her gender fluidity as empowering.

Through this empowerment, Collins seems to critique the idea that gender is a static and unyielding identity. In exhibiting both masculinity and femininity, Katniss constructs her own identity that blends the strengths of both genders and that prevents limiting categorization and allows for the possibility of change and growth over time. Whereas the Capitol constructs masculinity and femininity that are static and consistent over time, the districts allow for gender to fluctuate and for characters to renegotiate gender identity. By creating this contrast, Collins seems to demonstrate that gender, as Butler noted, is a “changeable and revisable reality” (1999, p. xxiii). As Katniss experiences more, and as her understanding of the world changes, her gender identity ebbs and flows, adjusting as her outlook does and as the situation demands.
Katniss’s gender fluidity, its allowance for renegotiation of identity, and the power of that fluidity is apparent throughout the series but is most prominent in specific and important moments in the story. These moments include caring for Peeta and drugging him to attend the feast in order to get him life saving medicine (2799); her interactions with Rue from the time they meet until Rue’s tragic death during which she both mothers Rue and sees her as a worthy ally; caring for Wiress (6990) then having to fight off the careers (7078) followed by having to pry Beetee’s coil of wire from her cold dead fingers (7092); finding her prep team abused in District 13 and both comforting them and screaming at their guards (8167); her anger with Gale (8879) in their return to District 12 that shifts into her singing with Pollux (8935); and shifting so quickly from kissing Peeta to bring him back to himself when running from the muttations in the sewer (18031) to shooting an innocent woman through the heart to secure a hideout in the next moment (10844).

These scenes from throughout the series establish a wide representation of Katniss throughout the trilogy, making clear the consistency of her empowerment through gender fluidity and making clear Katniss’s ability to renegotiate her identity over time. For example, whereas shooting an innocent woman through the heart might have given Katniss pause before she entered the Games, she has no hesitation in doing it after being sent into the arena twice, where she learns that this kind of brutality is necessary for survival. Additionally, these scenes represent the ways that Katniss’s gender fluidity is dictated by her experiences, social interactions, and the culture of District 12. In District 12, she is both the provider and caretaker of her family, hunting and killing as well as mothering Prim. She must be practical and logical in order to keep her family fed and
safe, yet she also has to allow herself moments of tenderness in order to connect with her younger sister. Her sense of justice stems from her daily starvation and struggle, which is contrasted with the lavishness and wastefulness of the Capitol. Her life in District 12, her interactions with others, her losses, her struggles, and her time in the woods all contextualize her authentic self, which manifests as both masculine and feminine naturally and without premeditation and which is renegotiated as she gains new perspectives on life.

Gender fluidity as desirable. Through Katniss’s blending of masculinity and femininity, Collins seems to call into question the efficacy of normative gender roles through which only men are masculine and strong and all women are feminine, weak, and sexualized. Collins seems to privilege gender fluidity over a static and singular portrayal of either masculinity or femininity not only through the contrast of gender construction in the Capitol and districts, but also through establishing gender fluidity as an empowering balance of both genders’ strengths. Collins queers normative ideas about masculinity and femininity by imbuing both genders with strengths. Although each gender identity has separate strengths that align with normative understandings of those genders, the combination of those strengths establishes a non-normative gender fluid position and defines that position as a positive balance between these two identities that combines a variety of strengths rather than just one set of strengths.

Collins also emphasizes the significance and empowerment of a blended gender identity by pinpointing the flaws of both masculinity and femininity. She seems to suggest that when normative masculinity and normative femininity are tempered by one another’s best qualities, the result is not only a delegitimizing of limiting and static
gender roles but also a promotion of varied and changing gender identities through which individuals select a configuration of traits most suited to them. These ideas are demonstrated in Katniss’s physical, mental, and emotional growth and maturity throughout the series, which is contingent on the way that her feminine and masculine weaknesses are balanced by her feminine and masculine strengths. Katniss’s overall strength is based on her ability to be both physically strong and tender, both brutal and compassionate, both self-sufficient and emotionally vulnerable, and both pragmatic and hopeful. Collins also demonstrates this positive balance through Katniss and Peeta’s gender fluid relationship, which although still marked by emotional struggles, is the only relationship in the entire series that indicates the possibility of stability, hope, and a meaningful future.

**Masculine strengths.** Characters coded as masculine in this series are empowered by their physical ability, mental toughness, logic and tactical thinking, confidence, necessary brutality, leadership, and aggressiveness. Katniss is often coded as masculine in all of these ways at different points in the series. Katniss’s masculinity and the strength of masculinity is demonstrated in her pragmatism and tactical thinking under pressure as well as through her killer instinct, her deadly accuracy with a bow and arrow, and her constant awareness of what must be done to ensure her own survival and the survival of those she loves. Her masculinity and its strength are also solidified through the significant amount of mental, emotional, and physical trauma she endures throughout the series. Although Katniss struggles with a host of injuries, feels depression over the loss of loved ones, and feels burdened by her role in the war, Katniss always rebounds, marking herself as self-sufficient and as a consummate survivor. Katniss’s emotional endurance and her
physical and mental abilities turn her from prey to hunter, keeping her and her family alive. They make her as a survivor and a victor instead of a victim. In this way, Collins seems to suggest that women who embody masculine traits can be self-sufficient, challenge victimization, survive even the most devastating obstacles, and endure overwhelming physical, emotional, and mental pain. This renegotiation of the normative relation between gender and bodies challenges normative gender standards and reinforces the idea that “masculinity is not a monolithic or static category” (Braithwaite, 2011, p. 419), but rather a deployable and changeable set of practices that can be performed by either men or women at any given time.

**Masculine weaknesses.** One of the most notable weaknesses of masculinity is represented as emotional detachment. Katniss and Gale exemplify this trait, which is associated with masculinity and is understood in the books as a flaw. Katniss is driven by an animal instinct for survival, which is sometimes marked by fleeing before thinking. Katniss does this when running from the mutts in the Games. She stumbles blindly after Cato with no thought of anything but to save herself (3336) and only remembers Peeta after she reaches the cornucopia. This impulse to flee and fend for herself, even at the cost of her loved ones’ lives, is one that causes Katniss shame, marking her actions as flawed. In addition to emotional detachment, masculinity in this series is also associated with maintaining control over one’s emotions; however, it is that same emotional control, when not tempered by a femininity that allows for emotion, that marks masculinity as flawed. Gale’s character demonstrates this type of strict emotional control, leading to a coldness and brutality that concerns Katniss and marks Gale as inhumane. Gale becomes increasingly emotionless and calculating, admonishing feelings of sympathy or pity for
others and advocating revenge that is exacting, psychological, merciless, and final (9737). Katniss, whose own rage is exhibited in the books time and again, is balanced by femininity and is able to see Gale’s need for destruction and death as a weakness, not as a strength. It is ultimately Katniss’s ability to blend gender identities that allows her to make important moral distinctions and negotiate a life in which she feels both authentically her and able to live with her decisions.

**Feminine strengths.** Femininity is coded in this series as largely maternal and selfless, and is marked by investment in romantic love. Peeta’s character demonstrates the positive aspects of this identity in a variety of ways. He has an unmatched capacity for love and empathy. His ability to express his emotions allows him to craft beautiful and impassioned prose that inspires goodness in others. The strength of femininity is also marked by Peeta’s selflessness and self-sacrifice, like when he warns District 13 knowing he will be tortured. Through Peeta, Collins suggests that men who can embody feminine traits are able to live fuller emotional lives than their counterparts and are imbued with a compassion that tempers anger. Peeta’s strong femininity also destabilizes normative understandings of gendered bodies, marking femininity, like masculinity, as a shifting category that is adjustable and can be expressed by men or women.

Katniss’s feminine traits also demonstrate the strength of femininity. Katniss’s most powerful feminine moments are marked by her maternalism toward those in profound need, including children like Prim and Rue, childlike adults like her prep team, people physically mutilated through torture like Pollux and the red headed Avox, mentally disabled or severely depressed people like Wiress and Finnick, the elderly, like Mags, and characters who exhibit extreme physical or emotional anguish. When
interacting with these characters, Katniss’s strength is demonstrated not only in her kindness, gentleness, and compassion, but also in her ability to see these characters not necessarily as flawed, but as survivors and as people. Her ability to emotionally support Peeta, protect Prim and Rue and express sadness at their deaths, soothe her prep team and Wiress when they are scared and distraught, learn from Mags, and sing with Pollux are all moments in which she demonstrates the kind of empathy, tenderness, and respect that the predominantly masculine characters cannot. Katniss’s feminine strength is tempered by her masculine strength in these cases where she cares for people but allows for them to be complete individuals that do not need pity.

*Feminine weaknesses.* One of the most notable weaknesses of femininity is identified through Peeta’s undying emotional desire to protect Katniss because it is fueled by stubbornness and a refusal to acknowledge Katniss’s own desires. He makes decisions that he thinks are in Katniss’s best interest, yet he does not consult with her about those decisions, turning his seemingly selfless actions into selfish ones that lack consent. Collins also establishes the idea that mothering others can have personal consequences, including lack of mobility, which sometimes plays out as the inability of a character to abandon those in need for one’s personal safety or sanity. This idea is demonstrated in Katniss’s frequent desire to flee from places like District 13 in order to maintain her sanity. Instead of fleeing, Katniss remains because Peeta is still in captivity. In this sense, the compassion of femininity is sometimes illustrated in this book series as limiting, although those limitations are often the result of the expression of femininity at the exclusion of masculinity.
Expressions of Sexuality

Sexuality in this book series is complex and takes on a variety of connotations since it is encompasses sexual desire, sexual object choice, sexual identity, and bodily representations of sexuality. Like with the concept of gender, Collins utilizes the contrast between the Capitol and districts norms to identify and challenge some conceptions of normative sexuality.

Privacy and Threat

In this series, sexuality is represented as an act or a feeling that is often made public but that is meant to be private. This idea is demonstrated when Katniss and Peeta occupy the cave in the 74th Games. Katniss thinks, “I wish I could pull the shutters closed, blocking out this moment from the prying eyes of Panem. Even if it means losing food. Whatever I’m feeling, it’s no ones business but mine” (3010). Katniss’s awareness of the cameras documenting her relationship and her willingness to give up food for her privacy highlights the degree to which sexuality is made public by the Capitol and to which that monitoring is an invasion in Katniss’s life. In making sexuality public, the Capitol is able to reinforce its own conceptions of normative sexuality. The Capitol promotes the star-crossed lovers story between Katniss and Peeta by framing this story not only as the most significant development in the 74th Games, but also by highlighting the alleged authenticity of this love. In doing so, the Capitol naturalizes the link between specific iterations of sexuality and specifically sexed bodies and it privileges heterosexual relationships. It establishes heterosexuality as the only coherent and acknowledged form of sexuality and embeds the pairing of girls and boys into its political structure. The Games, the Capitol’s most utilized and effective tool in the monitoring and controlling of
its people and their identity constructions, makes the differentiation between and the pairing of boys and girls an organizing principle of Panem’s society.

Through the Capitol’s omnipresent surveillance of private sexual moments, Collins seems to suggest that a system that so rigidly controls and monitors sexuality is threatening to the people in that system because it limits sexual possibilities. Snow’s personal invasion of Katniss’s home and his surveillance of her sexual activity and romantic relationships in particular establishes the total control the Capitol has over its citizens and their expressions of sexuality. This control is also demonstrated in Snow’s use of direct threats to tributes and their loved ones to force them into abiding by the Capitol’s standards of sexuality. Collins demonstrates that this kind of strict governmental control over people’s sexuality through surveillance and threat not only places constraints of physical bodies and expressions of sexuality, but also establishes a hegemonic system in which the government coopts people’s bodies and uses those bodies to perpetuate specific ways of being and knowing.

**Bodily Hunger**

Collins, largely through Katniss, establishes the difference between authentic sexual desires and those that are manufactured for the Capitol. In order to ensure her own survival both in the arena and outside of it, Katniss actively presents herself as normatively feminine and sexual. Although her romance with Peeta does become real, its inception is borne out of Katniss’s need to abide by the Capitol’s normative standards in order to appease its citizens and receive sponsorship. These moments of premeditated sexual performativity, marked by Katniss’s indifference, are intercut with some more genuine moments in which Katniss notes a bodily hunger for sex in which she feels a
warm and curious desire. During one kiss with Peeta, she identifies her insatiability, noting, “Instead of satisfying me, the kisses have the opposite effect of making my need greater. I thought I was something of an expert on hunger, but this is an entirely new kind” (Collins, 2010, Chapter 24, 7278). Katniss’s genuine sexual desire is restricted by the Capitol’s continued surveillance, which puts limits on what Katniss is able to feel and when she is able to feel it. Collins’ distinction between Katniss’s inauthentic and emotionless kisses performed for the Capitol and her passionate kisses borne out of authentic want and need, demonstrates the idea that when a government controls individuals’ sexuality and sexual freedoms, it also denies people an essential part of themselves.

**Survival**

While Gale and Peeta both seem to understand sexuality and love in terms of pleasure and ownership, Katniss mostly sees it in terms of survival and choice. At first, Katniss makes the active choice to utilize Peeta’s confession of love as a way to procure sponsors and ensure her own physical survival. Towards the end of the series, Katniss starts to rethink the idea of survival and begins to understand it as more emotional than physical. Katniss’s choice of sexual partners is always emphasized, and when choosing between Gale and Peeta, she thinks of them in terms of their partnership with her, the traits they embody, and how those traits will enhance or clash with her own. She realizes that in choosing between Gale and Peeta, her best chance of emotional survival is to partner with the one that provides her with balance. Katniss values Gale’s masculine strengths like his honesty, his physical prowess, and his protection of her family, but also sees in him a masculine weaknesses that clashes with her own masculinity. She notes,
what I need to survive is not Gale’s fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself” (11607). Conversely, Katniss values Peeta’s feminine strengths like his ability to nurture her and support her emotionally. She recognizes that her masculine strengths and weaknesses need the balance of Peeta’s feminine warmth and gentleness, something only he can give her. She notes, “What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means rebirth instead of destruction. The promise that life can go on, no matter how bad our losses. That it can be good again.” (11607). Through Katniss’s choice, Collins establishes a variety of important ideas including the importance of consensual choice, mutual respect, and gender balance in long lasting and emotionally stable sexual relationships.

**Heterosexual Monogamy**

While sexuality takes on a variety of connotations in this series, the one consistent connotation with sexuality is its direct link with heterosexual romantic love, which is further linked to emotional survival, physical need, monogamy, partnership, and to the idea of marriage and children. Although Collins disrupts normative gender and sexuality in a variety of ways in this series, she does maintain heteronormativity as delineated by Berlant & Warner (1998), most notably through the naturalness with which men and women pair romantically and through the exclusion of any other possible romantic pairings of same-sexed bodies in any space. Sexuality is certainly a more minor concern in this series in relation to Katniss’s focus on physical survival and on the injustices of the Capitol government. In this way, there is not much room for Collins to delve into non-normative iterations of sexual identity, sexual object choice, and sexual practice; however, in making the only sexual relationships in the series normatively heterosexual,
she certainly emphasizes heterosexuality as a natural and singular option. Katniss and Peeta’s romantic relationship is certainly predicated on non-normative constructions of gender, but ultimately, the long-term success of this relationship paired with Katniss giving in to marriage and children, privileges heterosexuality, which remains unchallenged in the series.

**Recapping the Research Question**

Collins makes continued and varied distinctions between the Capitol, which reflects real world normative ideas about gender and sexuality, and the districts, which she uses to confront those norms and reconsider normative constructions of gender and sexuality. One of the most prominent distinctions between the Capitol and the districts is in the way each conceptualizes and enforces gender. The Capitol emphasizes the normative link between gender, physical bodies, and sexuality and links masculinity with man and femininity with woman; the conflation of these ideas is a topic that many feminist and queer scholars have discussed (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2004; Martin, 1994; Rich, 1980; Salamon, 2008). These distinctions are emphasized through public performance where gender, sexuality, and physical bodies are monitored and where normative behaviors are strictly enforced (DeaVault, 2012; Firestone, 2012; Lem & Hassel, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Montz, 2012; Wezner, 2012). The tributes’ strict conformism to these roles is motivated by the threat of penalty and death, both in the arena and outside of it. The juxtaposition of the deadly serious enforcement of gender and sexual norms with the outlandish and lavish ways those norms are performed in the Capitol helps Collins to establish the shallowness and danger of conceptualizing gender only as a relational binary and hierarchy whereby only
men can be masculine and only women can be feminine and whereby masculinity is only strong and femininity is only weak.

In the districts and in the arena, where survival is the primary concern, gender is not performed as a public spectacle; rather, it is a more natural and authentic extension of personality. The districts and the arena are spaces that allow for a more fluid and less restrictive understanding of gender. This understanding is marked by three ideas: gender is authentically constructed through social relationships and personal experiences (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Friedman, 2006; Haslanger, 1995); masculinity and femininity are sets of social practices that are not bound to a particular body (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Braithwaite, 2011; Consalvo, 2003; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003); and gender can be continually renegotiated (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Braithwaite, 2011; Butler, 1999; Consalvo, 2003; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003). Collins reinforces the idea that gender identity is a fluid concept by portraying characters as gender fluid and by breaking down the distinction the Capitol makes between sexes and genders. In this series, men and women in the districts can be masculine or feminine, marking a much less restricted notion of gender than in the Capitol. Katniss’s character also demonstrates that any individual can embody both masculinity and femininity in equal measure and that in doing so, that person is more balanced, more whole, and more able to weather mental, emotional, and physical strife than a person who only or predominantly embodies only one gender identity.

In terms of sexuality, the series represents this concept in a variety of ways, marking the complex nature of sexuality, which includes desires, actions, and romantic
love. Collins establishes the limitations of a system in which the government controls an individual’s sexual expression. That kind of system mobilizes people’s physical bodies, especially women’s bodies, for the larger political goal of establishing control and reifying its own power (Frankel, 2012; K. Wright, 2012). In this way, the Capitol reduces women to their bodies, a concept Alexander (1994) and Bordo (1933) have discussed in relation to state control over and political and economic use of women’s bodies; those bodies must be altered to adhere to strict physical standards of gender and beauty and are then used as tools to force other people into alignment with specific gender and sexual ideals. Sexually deviant bodies, meaning those that do not conform to the normative gender and sexual standards set by the Capitol (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014), are punished through torture and death. This punishment reinforces the importance of conforming to those standards. Katniss is only truly able to claim her own sexuality when she is outside the reach of the Capitol and its surveillance, where she can be fully present, conscious, and consenting in acts of physical and emotional intimacy. It is only outside of the Capitol’s control that Katniss’s perspective on love and sexuality change, marking sexuality as a social construction. At first, Katniss sees sexuality and love as survival mechanisms that preserve her physical existence. Once the Capitol is defeated, Katniss’s understanding of sex and love shifts from one of a more individual physical need to one of a more shared emotional need.

Although Collins disrupts normative gender and sexuality in a variety of ways, her maintenance of heteronormativity and of the normative connection between sexuality, romantic love, monogamy, marriage, and children, ultimately reinforces normative American understandings of sexuality. Although Collins’ representation of gender is a
more progressive one, there is still the unchallenged representation of sexuality as only heterosexual. While there are certainly many characters whose sexuality is undefined, there is no hint or outright statement of any sexual expression other than heterosexual, and the continued love triangle between Gale, Katniss, and Peeta marks the lasting importance of heterosexuality in this series. In the next chapter, I analyze the corresponding film series, paying particular attention to the mechanisms the films use to define masculinity and femininity and to situate Katniss as only superficially powerful while bolstering the importance and visual prominence of the men in the series.
CHAPTER 6
GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE HUNGER GAMES FILM SERIES

In this chapter, I continue to address research question one by discussing the representations of gender and sexuality in the film series. In analyzing these representations, I discuss the film series as a unique text and in relation to the original book series. I demonstrate the contrast between Collins’ challenging of and the films’ reinforcement of normative gender and sexuality. In this chapter, while I pinpoint the significant differences between the books and film adaptations, I only briefly discuss why these institutional differences may exist. In the conclusion chapter, I address these institutional concerns more fully as well as what these texts might mean for audiences.

The Contrast in Representations of Gender and Sexuality

In the books, the Capitol’s governance of the tributes’ bodies is reflective of modern American gender and sexual norms, which Collins seems to critique by contrasting the construction of gender and sexuality in the Capitol and in non-Capitol spaces. The Capitol’s reinforcement of the continuities between biological sex, gender, and sexuality are not replicated in non-Capitol spaces. Instead, Collins seems to use non-Capitol spaces in the books to challenge this link through the possibility of gender fluidity. The films however, do not abide by this same critique and instead reinforce the link between biological sex, gender, and sexuality across both Capitol and non-Capitol spaces alike. The films establish masculinity and femininity as polarized and hierarchical opposites where men’s bodies are linked with masculinity, heroism, stability, emotional strength, and physical power and are privileged as superior over women’s bodies, which are linked with femininity, sexuality, irrationality, emotional instability, and weakness.
By regulating all Capitol and non-Capitol spaces using these normative understandings of gender and sexuality, the film series blurs the distinction between active and disingenuous performances of gender and more authentic performances of gender that reflect experiences and circumstances.

In this chapter, I analyze the mechanisms the film series deploys in order to maintain these normative notions of gender and sexuality throughout the series. I also discuss these mechanisms in order to demonstrate the ways in which this film series, like the others in this study, alter the messages of the original text by systematically denying (masculine) women narrative agency. These mechanisms include framing Katniss as normatively feminine across all Capitol and non-Capitol spaces; feminizing Katniss through the limitations of her physical body, her emotional instability, her sexualized appearance, and her heterosexual love interests; reframing Peeta’s character to make him less feminine and more overtly masculine; establishing a hierarchy of multiple masculinities where dominantly masculine men are brutally yet heroically violent; and framing Katniss’s femininity and dominantly masculine men’s masculinity as ideal and natural.

**Naturalizing Normative Gender and Sexuality**

One mechanism the film series uses to perpetuate normative gender and sexuality is its situating of Katniss as authentically normatively feminine, which is achieved both through obscuring Katniss’s authentic identity as defined by the books and through blurring the distinction between Katniss’s authentic and inauthentic self in the Capitol. By blurring this distinction, the film series erases Katniss’s anger, need for vengeance, and brutality, as well as her emotional, physical, and mental endurance. The film series
also reframes Katniss as more normatively feminine than she is in the books and naturalizes Katniss’s expression of gender, sexuality, and beauty, which are hegemonic and which all appear effortless and are framed by the films as ideal.

**Obscuring Katniss’s Authentic Identity**

Similarly to the books, the films differentiate between lifestyles in the Capitol and the districts. The films mark this differentiation through visual and aural techniques, the combination of which makes the contrast between these spaces pronounced. The significant contrast between these spaces emphasizes the naturalness and authenticity of the districts in relation to the carefully structured, lavish, and inauthentic Capitol. In the books, this contrast between the highly stylized bodies and spaces in the Capitol and authentically constructed personality in the districts allows Collins to disrupt real world normative constructions of gender and sexuality as presented by the Capitol. In contrast, while the film series distinguishes between these spaces, it establishes normative gender and sexuality in both spaces. The fundamental differences between Capitol and non-Capitol spaces in the films set viewers up to understand Katniss as authentic in non-Capitol spaces, but instead of allowing for Katniss’s authentic identity construction in those spaces, it replicates normative standards across both spaces. I discuss these ideas in detail throughout this chapter.

By making Capitol and non-Capitol spaces look different but having both spaces reinforce normative gender and sexuality, the films naturalize and make invisible the hegemonic structure that situates women as feminine and weak and men as masculine and strong. Because Katniss is the first person protagonist of the books, viewers are encouraged to see Katniss as the hero of the film series and relate with her. The contrast
between the outlandish and morally repugnant Capitol and the downtrodden but spirited and seemingly authentic districts encourages viewers to relate to Katniss most when she is situated within non-Capitol spaces. In encouraging viewers to relate with Katniss’s alleged authenticity, the films are actually encouraging viewers to internalize the standards of normative gender and sexuality that the films situate as Katniss’s authentic self.

**Authentic vs. Inauthentic**

The films further blur the distinction between Katniss’s authentic and inauthentic performance of gender and sexuality through her time in the Capitol. In the books, Collins makes it clear that Katniss is actively and disingenuously performing femininity on stage in order to adhere to the gender and sexual standards of the Capitol so she can get sponsors and pacify President Snow (Montz, 2012). The films largely dissolve this distinction, making it seem like Katniss is performing gender in equally authentic ways in the Capitol and outside of it. Whereas in the books, readers are privileged to Katniss’s inner monologue, in the films, viewers have limited access to Katniss’s genuine thoughts and feelings, making it difficult to discern her active performativity. In the book interview scene with Caesar before her first Games, Katniss giggles, she twirls in her pretty dress, she abides by Capitol standards of femininity, but she also expresses her authentic self, a predator, through her inner monologue; her inner thoughts also demonstrate her awareness of the need to perform in inauthentic ways for the audience (Montz, 2012). In the films, she expresses her discomfort with her feminine appearance when prepping with Cinna, but her protests are meager and once on stage there is no distinction between her active performativity and her authentic, more masculine self.
By dissolving this distinction, the films deny Katniss’s masculinity and represent her as wholly and authentically feminine on stage. The film series structures Katniss’s identity in this way through what Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) called performing not-performing (p. 396). Dubrofsky and Ryalls noted, “Katniss’s performance of not-performing is what situates her as authentic and true (not willful or guileful), positioning her as the film’s hero. The value of not-performing and behaving in a natural-seeming manner is transposed onto the body” (p. 396). Katniss’s proposed authenticity in the films stems directly from an inauthentic construction of her character; Katniss appears naturally and effortlessly normatively feminine and beautiful because Jennifer Lawrence, the actress, is highly styled off screen in order to achieve this effect. Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) argued that the films highlight, often through lighting and actress styling, Katniss’s “seamless embodiment of natural feminine white beauty” (p. 401). The seemingly natural and effortless embodiment of these standards—her “skin free of blemishes, her lips naturally red and slightly bee-stung, cheekbones high and usually flushed, hair lustrous and shiny, teeth white and straight” (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014, p. 401)—is remarkable given the context of Katniss’s situation. Although the films’ narrative foregrounds her impoverishment and malnourishment, as well as her active role in two Games and in war, her body in the films shows few signs of damage (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014).

Even when her body does show physical signs of distress, her physical appearance remains largely, if not wholly, unaltered and still “naturally” and normatively beautiful. For example, in Mockingjay Part 1, while in District 13, Katniss is frequently featured with her hair down, long, flowing, and perfectly styled, even in scenes in which
she experiences anguish or physical struggle. This emphasis on Katniss’s effortless and natural beauty, as exemplified through her hair, is demonstrated when Peeta and Johanna are rescued. Katniss runs up to Johanna, her hair bouncing behind her; Katniss’s lush hair is juxtaposed with Johanna’s bald head and bruised face. Katniss’s beauty, even after the trauma of talking with Snow and Coin only moments prior, is paramount, even in the following scene where Peeta chokes Katniss. As she lies in her hospital bed post-choking, she wears a neck brace, but her hair, seemingly untouched despite her recent physical struggle, is parted and fans out around her, framing her sleeping and peaceful face, shot as a close up. Even when she wakes, confused and panicked with bloodshot eyes, her hair continues to mark her as naturally beautiful. This effortlessness is more pronounced in this moment of terror because of her hair, her still smooth skin, her slightly blushed cheeks, and her perfectly plucked eyebrows. This kind of styling not only reinforces Katniss’s normative and effortless beauty, it also obscures the struggles and strength of her physical body and frames her as authentically feminine even and especially during times of duress.

Katniss’s apparent authenticity in her performance of femininity both in these kinds of non-Capitol spaces and in the Capitol makes her expressions of normative femininity, especially physical ones, appear natural and desirable. Muddling Katniss’s book identity in this way allows the films to perpetuate normative standards of gender and sexual appropriateness whereby women are largely incapable of expressing normatively masculine traits and whereby women are reduced to sexual and sexually suggestive bodies designed for heterosexual men’s consumption, an idea that feminist scholars have discussed in relation to these kinds of pop culture representations
(Alexander, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Griffin, 2015). The performing not-performing that Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) discussed is especially significant when interpreting pop culture texts that express post-feminist sentiments or are produced in a post-feminist culture. Scholars like Bordo (1993) and R. Gill (2007b, 2008) identified the way that post-feminist culture encourages women to identify constant self-surveillance and body modifications as an empowering choice rather than as media dictated oppression. In terms of this film series and the others in this study, the protagonist’s performing not-performing, which is achieved through the rigorous styling of the actresses’ bodies, encourages female audiences to understand beauty, gender identity, and sexuality only in normative terms and to identify Katniss, Tris, and Rose as ideally feminine.

The translation of Katniss’s character from book to film demonstrates a significant shift away from the book series’ representation of Katniss as a complex character with authentic identity construction and narrative agency to the film series’ representation, which places significant limitations on her physical body. These limitations include the prominence of Katniss’s body as a sexualized and normatively beautiful body as well as the external regulation of her body by the Capitol and dominantly masculine men. In particular, Dworkin (1974) noted that standards of beauty, as identified and disseminated by media, dictate, “in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have to her own body” (p. 113). She also argued that these terms, “prescribe her motility, spontaneity, posture, gait, the uses to which she can put her body. They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom” (p. 113). In this sense, the film series’ representation of Katniss’ beauty, gender, and sexuality define her narrative agency and her ability to move in certain ways and through certain spaces. In collapsing
Katniss’s identity down to just her body and in placing limitations on her body the film turns Katniss into a docile body. This idea, which I discuss throughout this chapter, is most pronounced when Katniss does demonstrate masculine traits in the films because it is during those moments that her masculinity is punished, undercut, and diminished, thereby negating her power and agency. I argue that Katniss’s body in this film series does not just represent the ideals of the Capitol, it also represents the social and cultural ideals of the film industry. These ideals are positioned as the standard against which a viewer should measure herself, an idea Bordo (1993) discussed about mass media in general. She also noted that if viewers internalize this kind of message and standard of beauty, gender, and sexuality, and if they self-monitor in order to achieve this standard, then they too are made into docile bodies.

**Multiple Masculinities**

In addition to obscuring the distinction between Katniss’s authentic self (her gender fluidity and masculinity) and her inauthentic self (actively adhering to the Capitol’s norms), and limiting that authentic self to a replication of normative gender and sexuality, the films use another key mechanism to establish regulative gender and sexual norms that link biological sex, gender, and sexuality and situate men as masculine and powerful and women as feminine and weak. The films construct these ideals through a system of multiple masculinities. Although the film series seems progressive in allowing for a variety of different masculinities to coexist, it ultimately subordinates those masculinities in order to solidify a dominant and ideal masculinity that is characterized by what Alison (2007) identified as the enduring attributes of hegemonic masculinity, notably, “physical strength, practical competence, sexual performance, and protecting
and supporting women” (p. 76). In order to establish this type of masculinity as dominant, the films must perpetually re-center that expression of masculinity, define it in relation to subordinate masculinities and to femininity, and continually privilege it over any other masculinity and over femininity. These three building blocks for establishing one type of masculinity as dominant is discussed by a variety of scholars (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Braithwaite, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009) and is clearly demonstrated in this film series. In particular, this film series establishes subordinate masculinities through men and women characters that are mentally unstable, physically weak, emotionally uncontrolled, effeminate, cowardly, addicts, and immoral. The film establishes femininity as sexual, sexualized, irrational, mentally unstable, and physically weak. Below, I elaborate on how the films accomplish each of these distinctions, which ultimately work in service of defining dominant masculinity as physically powerful, mentally stable, heroic, and heterosexual as well as superior to femininity.

Establishing dominant masculinity. The film series establishes Gale, Peeta, and Finnick as frontrunners for dominant masculinity, and in fact, these three characters challenge each other for that position throughout the series, reinforcing the idea that dominant masculinity is continually contested and renegotiated over time, especially in relation to changing social mores and circumstances (Braithwaite, 2011; Consalvo, 2003; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003). At different moments in the series, each of these characters expresses dominant masculinity through physical power and prowess, mental stability, and a penchant and skill for saving Katniss. Ultimately, the films establish Gale and Peeta, Katniss’s romantic possibilities, as the two
most prominent rivals for dominant masculinity and positions each as the dominant
masculine figure when the other is not featured in the story. In the films, Peeta’s
feminization from the books is downplayed and he is made markedly more normatively
masculine, allowing him to occupy the dominant masculine spot when featured with
Katniss when Gale is not around. Gale, whose character is already established as
normatively masculine in the books, is made more so by the visual emphasis placed on
his physical strength and invulnerability, two qualities that Jamel (2014) noted are
integral to the establishment of power and control.

Both Peeta and Gale represent dominant masculinity at different moments in the
story, but each displays similar traits, marking those traits as dominantly masculine.
Integral to each one’s dominance is his heterosexual desire, an element that scholars
identified as a central factor in the establishment of dominant masculinity (Alison, 2007;
Bird, 1996; Consalvo, 2003; Donaldson, 1993; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009, p. 282) and
that scholars have identified as a key component in reframing feminine men as
normatively masculine and masculine women as normatively feminine (Adams & Bettis,
2003; Boyle, 2005; Linder, 2011). This idea in particular is salient in all three film series
in this study. These series undercut Katniss, Tris, and Rose’s masculine power by
contextualizing them within a heterosexual romantic relationship, which undermines their
masculinity making that masculinity less threatening and grounding them as normatively
feminine. The importance of heterosexual desire in constructing dominant masculinity in
particular is evident in the film series’ visual emphasis on both Gale and Peeta’s romantic
relationship with Katniss. Despite the director’s recognition of sexuality as a secondary
interest to Katniss in the books (Hayes, 2014), the films linger on her kissing scenes with both Gale and Peeta, making them visually prominent within the story.

The five scenes featuring Katniss and Gale kissing and the six scenes featuring Katniss and Peeta kissing throughout the series are visually and aurally highlighted through close ups, triumphant music, or a lack of any music, marking them as significant within the story. This visual emphasis on kissing scenes also highlights a major plot line running through the series – Peeta and Gale’s driving desire to secure Katniss as their romantic partner. This plot line emphasizes the importance of heterosexual desire and conquest in the construction of dominant and ideal masculinity. Also, this continued emphasis on Katniss as an object of dominant men’s heterosexual desire feminizes Katniss and reduces her to a largely sexualized body and a conquest. According to the framework laid out by Butler (1993) and Linder (2011), this kind of presentation of Katniss’s body as almost exclusively sexual undermines Katniss’s athleticism in the books as well as her narrative agency, establishing her not just as a subordinate masculinity but also as an inferior femininity who is incapable of occupying the dominant masculinity and is instead a tool through which dominant men establish their prominence.

**Subordinate masculinities.** Heroism, mental stability, and morality are all key to the film series’ construction of dominant and ideal masculinity. It often has man characters challenge each other directly and question one another’s character traits. Because Peeta and Gale each serve as contenders for dominant masculinity and for Katniss’s love, Gale’s subordination of Peeta in *Mockingjay: Part 1* when a Capitol interview with Peeta is broadcast live, is particularly telling in terms of the film’s definitions of dominant and subordinate masculinities and in terms of the way the
original message of this scene is changed during adaptation. In the original book scene, Katniss and Finnick see the broadcast. Peeta has deteriorated significantly and implores Katniss to ask herself if she trusts the people around her. Finnick and Katniss pretend they did not see it in order to protect themselves. In the film, this scene features only Gale and Katniss. When they watch Peeta’s second interview, the film distinguishes between Gale and Peeta visually and also has Gale challenge Peeta’s character directly. Gale is immediately coded and contextualized as dominant when the beginning and end of the scene call attention to his military status through the summons on his military issued communicator. Beal (1996) noted that the U.S. military is an institution that specifically upholds and encourages the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and Alison (2007) noted that historically, soldiering has been constitutive of masculinity. In this scene, and in the last two films, Gale’s military affiliation is visually prominent and aligns him with the military and hegemonic attributes of “individualism, aggression, power, competitiveness, strength, stoicism, and protector” (Beal, 1996, p. 206).

In this particular scene, Gale’s stoicism, general muscularity, physical strength, and control over his body and mental faculties are contrasted with Peeta’s clear lack of those traits. When Peeta is shown in his interview, he is feminized through his tears, his holding of a white rose, his bedraggled appearance, his clear mental infirmity, and his call for the end of war. The visual contrast between these two figures and the clear distinction between Gale’s military affiliation and Peeta’s pacifism asserts Gale’s dominance and subordinates Peeta’s masculinity, ultimately feminizing him. What makes this scene so telling in terms of the establishment of dominant masculinity is the way Gale denigrates Peeta and asserts his own dominance. When Gale challenges Peeta
directly, he identifies himself as an ideal soldier – heroic, stoic, brave, and loyal. He
denigrates Peeta, calling him a coward and insinuating Peeta has deliberately chosen to
betray his own people. When Katniss defends Peeta by saying, “You don’t have any idea
what he’s going through,” Gale interrupts her and responds, “I don’t care, I would never
say what he just said. Not if they tortured me, not with a gun to my head” (Lawrence,
2014). Gale’s denouncement of Peeta not only cites Peeta’s selfishness, his emotional
weakness, and his cowardice, but it also legitimizes Gale’s own dominant masculinity,
which he identifies as brave in comparison. Also, by establishing Peeta’s cowardice as a
choice, he subordinates Peeta, marking him as immoral and deviant, especially in relation
to Gale’s own self proclaimed morality and agency.

In having Gale challenge Peeta outright, the film utilizes what Schrock and
Schwalbe (2009) identified as common tactics through which boys assert their own
manhood and masculinity, especially in relation to others and over others. They noted
that boys use clothes and toys, regulation of emotion, strength and endurance,
expressions of heterosexual desire, homophobic taunting, aggression and violence, and
evoking fear in others as ways to assert their manhood and confirm their dominant
masculinity. The films situate Gale’s appearance (clothes and toys) as militaristic and
powerful and Gale himself utilizes several of these tactics in bolstering his own
dominance and challenging Peeta’s. Through Gale’s representation in this scene, which
does not occur in the book, the film series defines dominant and ideal masculinity as
physically powerful, moral, heroic, mentally stable, as having agency and as particular to
men. Through Peeta, the film demonstrates that subordinated masculinities are those that
express emotional, mental, and physical weakness, cowardice, immorality, and
femininity. This scene in particular is significant in the film series’ construction of dominant masculinity because it condemns Peeta for his femininity and marks that femininity as undesirable. *In Mockingjay: Part 2*, the film series seems to deliberately rectify Peeta’s femininity, demonstrating that by aligning himself with Gale’s hegemonic masculine traits, Peeta can regain his superior masculine position.

**Masculinizing feminine men.** The films place a strong emphasis on mental and physical wholeness and on physical power and proficiency in constructing dominant masculinity. Peeta’s character, through much of the film series, demonstrates the representation of ideal masculinity as both mentally and physically whole and this representation privileges masculinity over femininity. There is a clear contrast between Peeta’s characterization in the books and films. In the books, Peeta’s femininity is marked as a strength, especially in its ability to ground Katniss and provide her hope and emotional support. In order to elevate Peeta to a dominant masculine status in the films, the film series largely eliminates Peeta’s femininity, and when it does code him as feminine it does so in ways that mark his femininity as a weakness to overcome. Additionally, it reframes Peeta as masculine through his individual defeat over his own femininity.

Peeta’s femininity in the films is most notably marked by his mental instability, which is a product of the Capitol’s hijacking, a psychological torture involving hallucinogenic drugs and fear conditioning. Although Peeta is a victim, he is not coded as one in the films like Katniss is. When mentally unstable, Peeta’s rage terrifies others, seeming to explode out of his body. In contrast, Katniss’s mental instability is characterized in the last two films by hysterical sobbing, compulsive behavior, and
continual sedation. This representation solidifies Peeta as a more masculine figure than Katniss, even in his most feminine moments. Peeta’s mental instability marks him as feminine in his utter dependence and lack of mobility, yet the film limits this femininity by minimizing Peeta’s scenes of emotional weakness and by characterizing his mental instability most frequently with body-driven anger and violence rather than with emotion-driven sadness and tears. The limits on Peeta’s femininity are also demonstrated in the way that while Peeta is mentally unstable and weak, he is still dangerous and is still able to subordinate Katniss, marking her as a victim when he brutally chokes her upon being reunited. Peeta’s mental instability is largely marked in the films by this kind of aggression, and unlike in the books, where Peeta is utterly inconsolable once out on the battlefield, in the films, he appears only slightly agitated, and remains largely stoic.

Peeta’s individual triumph over his feminine weakness is also made a prominent focus in the last film, which emphasizes the importance of mental wholeness and physical prowess in constructing dominant masculinity. Peeta’s recovery in the books is largely attributed to Katniss and the gender balance she provides. His recovery process is long and continues through the epilogue, which is set 15 years in the future. In the films, Peeta still struggles and Katniss still helps, but it is clear that he is the most powerful agent in his own rapid and full recovery, which is solidified in Tigris’s shop where he gives Katniss an eloquent and poignant rallying speech. The films also make it clear that his return to dominant masculinity is contingent on overcoming his femininity and is contingent on physical power and proficiency. Peeta’s full recovery is predicated on his savage yet heroic acts of physical violence in the muttation fight scene including snapping a mutt’s neck while handcuffed. The assertion of his dominant masculinity in
this scene is reliant upon what Beal (1996) identified as the cornerstones of hegemonic masculinity – aggression and domination and participation in military and sport(like) activity. It is also further solidified by a kiss from Katniss, marking the importance of heterosexuality in the establishment of men’s mental wholeness and dominant masculinity.

*Mutation fight scene.* The added muttation fight scene is particularly significant when analyzing gender, especially dominant masculinity and its representation in this film series. In the original book scene, Collins emphasizes Katniss’s leadership as well as the sacrifices and the teamwork of the group as a whole. In the adaptation, an entire fight scene is added, which visually emphasizes Peeta, Gale, and Finnick’s physical strength and Katniss’s weakness. This added scene perfectly demonstrates the mechanisms the film series uses to establish dominant masculinity and to reinforce particular sex and gender combinations, privilege masculinity over femininity, and reiterate normatively gendered behavior. A key component of dominant masculinity is that it exists in comparison to femininity, which is understood as weak and subordinate (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Throughout the series, Katniss’s masculinity is reduced and she is reframed as more normatively feminine. In this scene, there is a clear downgrading of Katniss’s masculinity to femininity, which is achieved by showing Katniss’s defeat, visually highlighting the physical prowess of Peeta, Gale, and Finnick, and through the men saving Katniss repeatedly.

Katniss is certainly featured as masculine in this scene. She is proficient with her bow and arrows, taking out mutts in all directions and in rapid succession, as well as with
her knife, which she uses to stab a mutt in the head. While the first part of the scene features this masculine strength, that strength is diminished when a mutt easily hurls her across the room into a metal rampart. Her body falls rag doll like into the water where she remains for a large portion of the scene, unconscious and out of view. When she is featured in the scene, her masculinity is also diminished by Peeta, Gale, and Finnick repeatedly saving her. A significant portion of this scene not only features the men saving Katniss, but it also foregrounds the skill with which they save her and with which they generally perform. Gale and Finnick in particular slaughter multiple mutts in rapid succession with precision. The visual depiction of their power coupled with the dramatic music and the cut away shots to an endangered Katniss frame the men as heroic and skilled. One of the most striking moments in this scene is one where Katniss is backed up against a wall as Finnick spears the mutt about to kill her, his trident ripping through its chest in the viewer’s eye line. The music is triumphant and Finnick is shot from below, emphasizing his power. Even when Finnick is eventually overcome by the mutts, his death is heroic, since he saves Katniss, allowing her to escape. It is also clear that Finnick’s power could only be overcome by a horde of mutts, subtly emphasizing the extent of his power.

While the film scene focuses on masculine heroics and the differentiation between dominant masculinity and subordinate femininity, this section of the narrative in the book focuses on life and death, on Katniss’s leadership, and on Katniss’s masculinity. While in the book, the conclusion of this scene features Katniss emerging into a house and shooting an innocent woman through the heart without hesitation, the film erases that act, making the visual conclusion of the mutt fight scene the close up image of Katniss’s
terrified, screaming, and then hopeless face. This kind of erasing of women’s brutality occurs across all three film adaptations; while Katniss, Tris, and Rose are sometimes featured as physically adept, that skill is always undercut and their true brutality is always absent and often replaced by men’s, signifying the idea that men’s physical brutality, especially when framed as heroic, is more common, more natural, and more acceptable than women’s. The films’ diminishing of women’s rage, vengeance, and ferocity shifts these characters from complex and fully realized to one-dimensional. This kind of systematic diminishing of Katniss, Tris, and Rose’s agency throughout each film series is indicative of the ideological difference between the films and books, which I will discuss further in the conclusion chapter.

**Physical proficiency and wholeness.** Peeta’s character also demonstrates the association of ideal masculinity with physical wholeness and physical ability especially through the importance the film places on elevating his masculinity in relation to his own femininity in the books and in relation to Katniss’s femininity in the films. In the films, Peeta’s femininity is largely absent, and in its place is a much more physically adept masculinity that is often marked by success in hand-to-hand combat, physical endurance, and agility. There are a variety of book scenes that are altered with the result of making Peeta stand out in this way. One of the most prominent examples of this alteration is demonstrated in a scene in *Catching Fire*. The alterations to this scene assert Peeta’s dominant physical masculinity, showing him as significantly more powerful and agile than his own character in the books and than Katniss in this scene. The alterations also downgrade Katniss from a dominantly masculine role, as featured in the books, to a normatively feminine one, which is used to prop up Peeta’s masculinity.
In the book when Katniss, Peeta, Finnick, and Mags flee the poison fog, Peeta is clumsy and bewildered. His clumsiness is partially innate, partially related to his artificial leg, and partially borne out of his recent electrocution, all of which mark him as physically infirm. In this scene, after Katniss rouses Peeta, she notices he is “slow, much slower than usual. And the tangle of vines and undergrowth, which unbalance me occasionally, trip him at every step” (6712). She grabs his hand and tells him to step where she steps but his artificial leg causes him to fall. As Katniss helps him up, she realizes the fog has overtaken them, causing the left side of Peeta’s face to sag and her arms to spasm (6725). While the book situates Katniss as masculine through her intellectual and physical strength and Peeta as feminine in his physical weaknesses, the films swap those roles, making Peeta appear physically whole and proficient, while Katniss stumbles. In the film, when Katniss sounds the alarm, Peeta alertly jumps to his feet and agilely sprints past the others. Katniss follows Peeta through the jungle. Instead of perpetually falling to the ground, Peeta runs, pivots, and changes direction with ease. In the middle of the scene, Katniss is the one who trips and falls to the ground. Peeta asserts his heroism and physical wholeness, turning and coming back to help her.

While in the book, he is affected by the fog because of his own inability to traverse the jungle, in the film, Peeta is burned when he goes back to help Katniss. In this scene, like in many scenes in the film series, Peeta’s body, according to the framework of Åkerström, Burcar, Veronika, and Wästerfors (2011) and Beal (1996) is classified as physically competent; he is powerful and in control. His body exemplifies strength and endurance, two traits Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) identified as normatively masculine. In contrast, Katniss has a normatively feminine body that needs rescuing and is
physically weak. This translation of Katniss’s character in particular demonstrates how the films fundamentally alter the messages of the books, especially messages about Katniss’s and other women’s strengths and abilities. Firestone, (2012) noted that in the books, Katniss is “athletic and nimble, accustomed to moving through forested areas quietly and efficiently” (p. 212), yet in this film scene, she is clumsy and desperate. In dissolving Katniss’s physical abilities, the films also deny Katniss narrative agency. Koenig (2012) argued that Katniss’s comfort and skill in the woods marks that setting as a place where Katniss has the ability to write her own story. When the films take that power away (and they do so repeatedly), Katniss loses the ability to dictate her own story, making her a pawn of not only the Capitol, but of the film itself.

**Establishing dominant masculinity in relation to femininity.** This film series makes a clear distinction between masculinity and femininity; many scholars (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009) have noted that these kinds of distinctions are particularly important to the establishment of dominant masculinity. The film series feminizes women in a variety of ways, making women characters seem more normatively feminine in appearance and demeanor, and by punishing masculine women and downgrading or making deviant their masculinity. When the film series does feature women like Katniss or Johanna as masculine, it immediately subordinates that masculinity and further feminizes these women in a variety of ways: it sexualizes women, marking their bodies as sexual objects; it features them losing in combat; it alters scenes so that Katniss appears feminine instead of masculine while the men appear more masculine, and in the case of Peeta, much less
feminine; it marks masculine women as irrational and mentally unstable; it makes women victims at the hands of men; and it emphasizes heterosexual romantic pairings.

**Restricting the agency of women’s athletic bodies.** Katniss’s agency, demonstrated through the physical strength and proficiency of her body in the books, must be subverted in the films in order to establish Gale and Peeta as dominant in relation to her. Linder (2011) noted that “depictions of female athleticism open up possibilities for articulations of bodily and narrative agency and present a challenge to common-sense understandings of the gendered body, what it looks like, and what it is capable of” (p. 321). According to the ideas of Linder (2011), MacKinnon (1987) and Young (1980), in the books, Katniss’s athletic activity is empowering because it situates her body as capable and competent and defines her body in terms of agency rather than primarily as an instrument to communicate sexual availability. The films must counteract the books’ portrayal of Katniss because her athletic body is endowed with a, “‘troubling’ sense of transgressive agency” (Linder, 2011, p. 322) that, if shown in the films, would contest “normative assumptions about the ‘natural’ female body” (Linder, 2011, p. 322) and thereby undermine the men’s dominant masculinity. The films restrict Katniss’s and other masculine women’s bodies most notably through sexualization and victimization.

**Sexualizing masculine women.** One of the most significant ways in which women in this film series are feminized is through their appearance, which is largely sexualized, patently flawless, and which appears effortlessly beautiful. Katniss’s effortless beauty obscures her masculinity, which is marked in the books by her physical combat and physical suffering, including her starved body, her singed and disintegrating hair after the fireball attack, and her patchwork of severely burned flesh after the bomb.
The films wholly replace these representations of Katniss’s body with a naturalized and normalized feminine beauty. While there are some moments in the films where Katniss appears marred by battle, that marring is insubstantial, especially in comparison with how consistently and fully her body is brutalized in the books.

In addition to naturalizing and making Katniss’s beauty prominent through the elimination of bodily damage, the films present Katniss’s body as normatively attractive by western standards. While in the books, Katniss is described as having olive skin, straight black hair, gray eyes, and as smaller than most of tributes, in the films, Katniss is distinctly white, has wavy brown highlighted hair, has blue eyes, and is taller than most of the tributes. This specific standard of beauty is marked by what Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) identified as strategic whiteness. They noted:

Casting a white actor in a role that might have been played by a person of color…recenters whiteness without calling explicit attention to this fact. Whiteness in popular media functions through its seamless taken-for-grantedness, the mundane ways in which it gains salience. (p. 400)

This kind of representation, which also relies on the relegation of non-white characters to secondary roles and to roles that center the white hero (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014, p. 401; Moore & Coleman, 2015), emphasizes a standard of beauty, gender, and sexuality that privileges heterosexuality, whiteness, and normatively feminine physical attributes. This representation also establishes non-white identities as other (Moore & Coleman, 2015). This film series not only privileges Lawrence’s effortless and normative beauty – her height, build, weight, hair color, eye color, and skin color – as ideally beautiful and ideally feminine, it also sexualizes her through this continuous and seemingly effortless
beauty. Instead of a warrior, Katniss is distilled down to a beautiful object, perpetually on show for both Capitol audiences and theatergoers.

In addition to sexualizing masculine women like Katniss through physical appearance, the films also make masculine women less threatening to dominantly masculine men by framing masculine women’s bodies only in terms of sexuality and beauty, turning them into sexualized objects designed for men’s consumption. In the film version of *Catching Fire*, Johanna saunters into the elevator with Katniss, Peeta, and Haymitch and performs a coquettish strip tease. While Katniss reacts with disgust, the two men objectify her, looking her up and down, smiling wryly, and exchanging pleased glances. Her striptease, marked by her inclusion of Peeta in the stripping and by her seductive wink, codes Johanna as a sexual object with no real agency. Because there are few moments of overt sexuality in the book or film series, and most of that sexuality is demonstrated in the form of romantic love through kisses and gentle touches, this one scene is pronounced. This scene is also pronounced through its alterations from the original scene in which her stripping is an act of aggression toward Katniss, not a seduction of Haymitch or Peeta. The overt sexualization of Johanna’s body in this scene and of masculine women’s bodies in general in this series, establishes men and dominantly masculine men in particular as heterosexual. This kind of sexualization, argued Schrock and Schwalbe (2009, p. 285) demarcates gender boundaries and challenges women’s authority.

**Instability and irrationality.** Masculine women in this series are also feminized through their characterization as unstable and irrational. In *Mockingjay: Part 1*, Katniss’s mental instability is contrasted to Peeta’s which is violent and masculine, and to
Finnick’s, which is portrayed as significantly more stable than hers and than his in the book. The film still shows Finnick as depressed, but there is no sense of the desperation so apparent in the book and so apparent in Katniss when the film opens with a shot of darkness and the sound of her hushed and panicked voice. Her speech is frantic, her body rocks back and forth as she talks to herself. When someone shines a light on her face, she is feral – her eyes wide and piercing like a cornered animal. She tries to bargain with the voice, tapping her head in frustration against a pipe. She is belligerent when two men grab her from behind and start pulling her out of the space. In contrast, Finnick is much saner and much more stable. His speech is not interrupted by long silences, he doesn’t have any emotional outbursts, and he doesn’t appear feral or unhinged. While in the books, both characters struggle with mental illness, Finnick’s control in the film calls Katniss’s into question, marking her as significantly weaker in her emotional moments and as borderline insane, which undermines Katniss’s heroism and authority.

Johanna’s character also demonstrates the film’s emphasis on the link between irrationality and femininity. Johanna is angry in the books, but she is calculating and deliberate with her words; she is restrained and calm. She is rational. In the film, she is featured as unhinged as she screams and curses at the Capitol audience during her interview. Her portrayal and Caesar’s reactions in this scene are reminiscent of a Jerry Springer episode. Johanna starts as irritated but calm then launches into a diatribe in which she screams “well you know what, fuck that, and fuck everybody that had anything to do with it.” Her curse words, the only ones in the entire series, are bleeped, censoring her masculine aggression and making her seem fanatical. Caesar’s reaction to Johanna cements her irrationality and its connection with her femininity. He grimaces
embarrassment and shifts uncomfortably as he states, “alright then,” then glances up, raises an eyebrow and says “one woman’s opinion.” He then cheerily asks who’s next. Caesar dismisses her literally and figuratively as he calls for the next tribute and through his discomfort when she rants on stage. Johanna’s masculinity is threatening to the dominant masculinity of the men in the series. That threat is neutralized by her apparent irrationality, which codes her as feminine and weak. Caesar’s dismissal of her as just a woman and as just an outlier solidifies her deviance and her subordinate position.

**Defeat, role swapping, and victimization.** The film series also makes masculine women less threatening to dominantly masculine men by feminizing them through defeat and victimization and by swapping masculine women’s roles with feminine men’s roles. In the book version of *The Hunger Games*, when Katniss, Cato, and Peeta are on the cornucopia, she outpaces Peeta to the cornucopia, hoists him up onto it, fends off multiple mutts, shoots Cato in the hand, saves Peeta as Cato tumbles to his eventual death, then applies a tourniquet to Peeta’s leg so he will survive. In this book scene, Peeta is feminine in his vulnerability, his lack of physical ability, and in his complete dependence on Katniss. Katniss is authentically masculine in this scene, marked so by her agency, her physical prowess, her tactical thinking, her emotional control, her saving of the feminized Peeta, and her decisive defeat over the most dominantly masculine tribute. In the films, Peeta and Katniss’s roles are reversed with Peeta outrunning Katniss, helping her up and saving her repeatedly, including once when Cato is savagely choking her. When Cato goes over, he doesn’t tumble or bring Peeta with him, instead, Peeta kicks Cato and shoves him forcefully over the edge.
Whereas in the original scene, Katniss’s masculinity is dominant, in the films, Peeta’s masculinity is dominant and Katniss’s is subordinated. In this scene Katniss is not only situated as a subordinate masculinity but also as inferior and feminine. In this scene, Katniss’s body and Cato’s defeat of it is symbolic, especially given the war like context and the sexualized nature of Cato’s violence against Katniss. This scene frames Katniss as a victim, with Cato savagely choking her and seeming to derive a perverse pleasure in it. Katniss is fully immobile, her terror written clearly on her face, which is shot from above, situating the viewer as Cato. Her victimization is solidified by Peeta’s saving of her, which requires him to physically remove Cato from her. Cato’s show of strength over Katniss and Peeta’s show of strength over Cato, both of which revolve around Katniss’s prone body, demonstrates what Alison (2007) discussed in terms of wartime sexual violence. She noted that it often “functions as a form of communication between men and a measure of victory and of masculinity, with women’s bodies the vehicle of communication, the sign of battle and the conquered territory” (p. 81). The communicative function of violence against women, one that clearly pinpoints and differentiates between masculine and feminine (Alison, 2007), especially in a wartime context, demonstrates the way women’s bodies become objects through which men demonstrate power over women and over each other (Alison, 2007). In this particular scene, Katniss’s masculinity and Peeta’s femininity from the book are erased, establishing both characters as fundamentally different from the original texts and reframing the messages of the original texts, making Katniss’s narrative of strength into one of perpetual weakness and turning Katniss’s body into a tool.
Recapping the Research Question

While the book series challenges gender and sexual norms, the film series upholds them by establishing men as masculine and strong, and by establishing women as feminine, physically weak, mentally unstable, irrational, sexualized, and in need of rescue. While women in the films are still capable of violence and aggression, the films uphold the normative condemnation of that aggressiveness by undercutting women’s masculinity and reframing them as normatively feminine. The films establish all of these ideas by blurring the books’ distinction between authentic and inauthentic spaces and between Katniss’s authentic and inauthentic gender performativity. The films also establish masculinity and femininity as polarized and hierarchal opposites through a system of multiple masculinities; many scholars (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Braithwaite, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009) have noted how this system establishes a single expression of masculinity as dominant and ideal.

While overall, the film series connects men to masculinity and marks masculinity as powerful, it specifically privileges dominant masculinity, marking that form of masculinity as heroic, moral, physically powerful, mentally stable, heterosexual, and as protective of women. These depictions are established through Gale and Peeta’s characters, who jockey for the dominant position; their jockeying throughout the film, which is often influenced by Katniss’s changing mindset, demonstrates what scholars have identified as the continually contestable nature of dominant masculinity (Braithwaite, 2011; Consalvo, 2003; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003). In order to establish Gale and Peeta’s expressions of masculinity as
dominant, the film series must continually re-center and privilege that form of expression over all other versions of masculinity and over femininity, a process that scholars have noted is key in preserving specific expressions of dominant masculinity (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). In order to do this, the films establish subordinate masculinities through characters like Haymitch (a drunk), Cinna (effeminate), Beetee (physically inept), Pollux (physically mutilated), and Cato and President Snow (immoral and deviant).

The films also privilege Gale and Peeta’s masculinity as dominant by setting it in opposition to femininity, another tactic scholars have identified as integral to the maintenance of dominant masculinity (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). In order to solidify their masculine dominance, the film series must diminish Katniss and other masculine women characters’ masculinity and power. The series diminishes women’s masculine power by feminizing them; this feminization is accomplished through sexualizing women’s bodies, having men victimize their bodies, making their masculine traits seem irrational, making women seem unstable, and by altering scenes so that women’s masculine power becomes men’s masculine power. Whereas in the book series, Katniss’s masculinity is often contrasted with her mother, Prim, and Peeta’s femininity (Lem and Hassel, 2012) and is paralleled to other masculine characters like Gale, Haymitch, and Johanna’s masculinity, in the films, Katniss is used as a model of subordinate masculinity and femininity, thereby making dominantly masculine men and their physical power pronounced and centering a white, heterosexual, normatively beautiful femininity. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the *Divergent* trilogy. I address the book series in chapter 7 and the
film series in chapter 8. Like with the *Hunger Games* chapters, I identify the ways in which the books empower Tris’s character and the ways the film series subordinates her, especially in relation to dominantly masculine men.
CHAPTER 7

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE DIVERGENT BOOK SERIES

In my analysis of the Divergent trilogy (see Appendix C for book summaries, vocab, and character list), I discuss the full book series and the first two film adaptations. The third book in the series is being made into two separate films, both of which were not released in time for use in this study. In this chapter, I discuss the book series’ representations of gender and sexuality. In chapter 8, I discuss the films’ representations of those ideas and address major differences between representations. Although I do briefly address these texts in terms of implications for audiences in these two chapters, I speak at length about audiences, institutional imperatives, and the Divergent series in Chapter 11.

Research Question One

How do these books and films represent gender and sexuality? How do these texts define and reinforce the concepts of masculinity and femininity? To what degree do these texts directly link masculinity and femininity with biological sex? To what degree do these texts link gender and sexuality? To what degree do these texts present the possibility of fluid gender identity?

Gender and Sexuality in the Book Series

Like in The Hunger Games book series, the Divergent trilogy distinguishes between boys’ and girls’ bodies and establishes a clear binary between masculinity and femininity. Also like with The Hunger Games, there is a distinction between authentic and inauthentic performances of gender, where inauthentic performances are marked by a character’s awareness of cultural norms and active adoption of those norms, and
authentic performances are marked by what Haslanger (1995) and Sullivan (2003) identified as ingrained behaviors that stem from a lifetime of past experiences and social interactions. Like Collins, Roth queers the gender binary and the normative link between biological sex, gender, and sexuality by allowing men and women to embody masculinity or femininity, or both simultaneously. Both series also make prominent the symbolic importance of physical space in the construction and policing of normative gender and sexuality. Physical space, including place and architecture, often reinforces and enforces culturally normative behaviors, including gender norms (Nettleton, 2016; Ranade, 2007; Sanders, 1996; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). Massey (1994) argued that “space and place are important in the construction of gender relations and in struggles to change them” (p. 179) because of the symbolic messages about gender in those spaces, the physical, architectural limitations placed on women’s mobility in particular spaces, and because of the policing of those spaces through violence. This dynamic is demonstrated in each series’ construction of settings and the infrastructure of those settings.

In The Hunger Games, Panem’s infrastructure relies on technology (surveillance and mass media) to disseminate appropriate norms and to make visual the way spaces are gendered and the way gender is reinforced in those spaces. In the Divergent trilogy, government surveillance is prevalent, but it is the construction of the society’s infrastructure that demonstrates the ways in which, “gendered bodies produce and are produced by particular spatio-temporal configurations” (Ranade, 2007, p. 1524) and the ways in which spaces and their physical construction play a significant role in the development of gender norms. Additionally, Collins makes social constructionism an important element of the series, but her emphasis on social construction is couched in
Katniss’s dislike of the Capitol’s regulations on her body and sexuality. Roth makes social constructionism a prominent feature in the series, one that she tackles directly and one that is continuously established through the faction spaces and through her condemnation of the Bureau of Genetic Welfare’s biological determinism.

**Social Constructions of Gender and Sexuality**

Roth creates a government system and infrastructure within the series that demonstrates what scholars have identified as the spatial production of gender and the gendered production of space (Halberstam, 2004; Nettleton, 2016; Ranade, 2007, p. 1525, Salamon, 2008); the construction of this infrastructure disrupts normative understandings of gender and sexuality. The city is divided into five factions, each of which occupies a different space within the city. While these factions share some communal spaces, like primary schools and hospitals, they are largely segregated. There are also people that have been denied faction life and are forced to live on the streets; this group, known as the factionless, has established its own communal living space independent of the factions. Each of the five factions is characterized by a specific trait; that trait establishes the beliefs, values, opinions, and lifestyles of that group of people. Each faction’s defining trait also aligns with either normative masculinity or normative femininity as defined in this study. Abnegation and Amity, who avoid conflict, serve others, and embody peace and passivity, are coded as feminine. The remaining three factions are coded as masculine, Candor for its propensity to cause conflict, Dauntless through its emphasis on physical aggression and Erudite for its pursuit of power. Under the original faction charter, Erudite could have been coded as feminine since it was situated as passive and communal, seeking knowledge in order to help the greater good.
However, in this community’s present, Erudite’s original principals have become warped and now represent the more masculinized (violent) pursuit of power.

Roth dispels the normative notion that specific gender and specifically sexed bodies are linked since all of the factions contain both men and women and none of the factions distinguish between the ability of men or women to embody that faction’s ideals. Although each faction allows for men or women to perform either gender, each faction does privilege one gender over the other, with Abnegation and Amity privileging femininity and Candor, Erudite, and Dauntless privileging masculinity. Roth seems to critique this system of gender privileging by destabilizing normative constructions of gender and sexuality in several ways: through demonstrating that each faction has strengths and weaknesses, through the breakdown of gender as socially constructed and not biologically determined, and through establishing the possibility of gender fluidity. She also establishes the symbolic importance of physical spaces in identity construction by having Tris navigate through a variety of differently gendered spaces and having Tris actively engage in cross-cultural code-switching (Molinsky, 2007). Through these mechanisms, Roth seems to align her series with an idea discussed by many scholars, that human beings can alter restrictive and discriminatory norms and actively invent new ways of knowing and being (Bean & Harper, 2007; Butler, 1999; Epstein, 1994; Martin, 1994; Ranade, 2007). In this series, Roth seems to suggest that new ways of knowing and being stem from active contemplation of the current or traditional ways of knowing. For Tris, the drastic differences between Abnegation and Dauntless cause her to reflect on each faction’s social norms and determine which, if any, of those behaviors and beliefs she wants to embody. The new ways of knowing that Roth presents through this text for
both the characters and the audience are centered on a person’s active evaluation of current norms, self-exploration, an active contemplation of what one wants to become, and the idea that one can shed one identity and select another.

**The Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Faction**

Roth establishes that no single faction is morally superior to any of the others as each is marked by positive and negative qualities. Abnegation is coded as positively feminine through its dedication to selflessness, teamwork, and peacefulness and is coded as negatively feminine in its championing of losing oneself to blend into the herd, its pursuit of purity through an active denial of personal desires including sexual needs, and in its general passivity. Amity is coded as positively feminine in its value of peace, friendship, and democracy and is coded as negatively feminine in its passivity, its abstaining from involvement in major political conflicts, and its nonconsensual use of drugs to keep its people pliable, compliant, and submissive. Candor is coded as positively masculine in its dedication to total honesty, which eliminates deceptiveness and allows for a person to live without the emotional weight of guilt or lies. It is coded as negatively masculine in its invasive pursuit of honesty at the cost of people’s feelings and at the cost of a person’s right to his or her own private thoughts. Erudite is coded as positively masculine in its desire for knowledge and in its use of logic and tactics and is coded as negatively masculine in its lust for power, driven by greed and violence and in its unethical practices. Dauntless is coded as positively masculine in its dedication to preparation and control of the mind, body, and emotions, and in its promotion of courage and bravery, even in the face of adversity. It is coded as negatively masculine in its brutality, its physical aggression, its lack of restraint, and its lack of empathy.
Each faction represents one gender and represents both good and bad traits, marking both masculinity and femininity as both strong and weak. The establishment of the strengths and weaknesses of each faction’s gendered trait destabilizes normative understandings of gender that link only men with masculinity, only women with femininity, and marks masculinity as superior to femininity. This kind of script is significant, especially for young adult women readers given that “popular culture texts are central sites of meaning-making…they constitute how we know ourselves and how we believe ourselves to be valid” (Griffin, 2015, p. 67). Pop culture texts are saturated “with ideas about how men and women should behave and what they have the right to do” (Milestone & Meyer, 2012, p. 211). When pop culture texts offer scripts about gender that only reinforce gender as a relational and hierarchical binary, those scripts reinforce existing and highly regulative power relations and social narratives that limit the way readers “know’ the world and how they then choose (or are able to) act within it” (Griffin, 2015, p. 62). By proposing and validating understandings of gender and sexuality that undermine traditional and restrictive social narratives and assumptions and by disrupting scripts that only legitimate certain kinds of identities (R. Gill, 2007b, 2008; Griffin, 2015), Roth creates a script that offers readers opportunities to reimagine and validate their own gender and sexual identities and self image. In the conclusion chapter of this study, I will continue to discuss the importance of these kinds of scripts for adolescent readers.

**Gender Fluidity**

Like in *The Hunger Games*, this series allows for gender fluidity. The gender fluidity presented in each series still retains what Butler (1999) identified as a dichotomy
that upholds the notion of a gender binary, but this representation also disrupts normative understandings of these two genders as hierarchical and allows for individual characters to construct non-normative, ambiguous gender identities. Like Collins, Roth presents two types of gender fluidity. The first is that men or women can enact either masculinity or femininity. The second is that any single individual man or woman can enact both masculinity and femininity at different times or simultaneously. Tris, whose first person account drives the series, and Tobias, Tris’s instructor turned boyfriend, are the two most vivid examples of this kind of gender fluidity as demonstrated through each one’s individual personality and through the combination of their personalities in a romantic partnership. Both Tris and Tobias demonstrate masculinity and femininity, and both embody the strengths and weaknesses of both of those genders. This idea of gender fluidity is also physically embodied in the format of the last book in the series, which splits the first person narrative evenly between Tris and Tobias. By asking the reader to enter into both character’s minds, Roth invites each individual reader to embody both characters’ sexes and genders, thereby enabling readers to explore a gender fluid identity.

While Katniss’s gender fluidity is represented as the rapid and unpremeditated switching between masculine and feminine in a single moment or scene, Tris’s unpremeditated enactment of gender does not seem to switch as rapidly. Rather, her gender fluidity is clear when looking at the series as a whole. Tris embodies masculinity and femininity at different times throughout the series, often occupying one identity for a long period of time. Tris also expresses gender fluidity as a simultaneous expression of both masculinity and femininity. This identity becomes evident when Tobias notes that bravery (masculine) and selflessness (feminine) are essentially the same trait (3282).
Tris’s simultaneous embodiment of masculinity and femininity marks her as strong and capable, portraying this expression of her gender fluidity as even more successful than when she enacts either masculinity or femininity alone. The idea that an individual can enact a trait like bravery that is simultaneously masculine and feminine destabilizes the notion that masculinity and femininity are fundamentally different and that one is superior to the other. Roth still differentiates between masculinity and femininity, marking each as different and as having different strengths and weaknesses, but even the suggestion of overlap between these traits queers normative notions of gender.

This type of gender fluidity also breaks down restrictive normative understandings of gender by allowing for Tris’s androgyny. In this series, androgyny takes shape as an identity that Michaelson & Aaland (1976) defined as a balance between and a simultaneous embodiment of both masculine and feminine traits. This kind of identity ultimately works to disrupt anatomy/gender links and expand the possibilities for identity construction since it allows for the possibility of situational flexibility (Bem, 1974, 1975; Vonk & Ashmore, 1993) and for integration (Sedney, 1989; Vonk & Ashmore, 1993). Both of these possible understandings of androgyny rely on a social constructionist perspective. The social flexibility perspective identifies human beings as multifaceted and an androgynous person as one who “possesses both M and F attributes in potential, and manifests these depending on situational requirements – that is, on different occasions” (Vonk & Ashmore, 1993). The integration perspective posits that an androgynous person blends masculinity and femininity into one identity (Vonk & Ashmore, 1993). Both Tris and Tobias embody situational flexibility, altering their gender identity as required in different spaces and around different people.
both integrate masculine and feminine traits, enacting them simultaneously. In presenting Tris and Tobias as androgynous in these ways, this book series allows readers to see the combination of traditionally male and female traits as empowering, encourages readers to blend the strengths of both genders in their own identities, presents the possibility for understanding a human being not in terms of gender but in terms of characteristics, and highlights the idea that any given person is multifaceted, capable of manifesting different attributes at different times.

**Cross-Cultural Code-Switching**

Through the faction system and Tris’s engagement with it, Roth defines gender and sexuality as socially constructed, challenging “traditional assumptions about what is ‘natural’” (Haslanger, 1995, p. 95) and allowing for the possibility of what scholars identified as the ability of human beings to actively re-imagine social spaces and cultural norms (Butler, 1999; Bean & Harper, 2007; Epstein, 1994; Martin, 1994; Ranade, 2007, p. 1524). Tris’s ability to knowingly utilize cross-cultural code-switching, is indicative of her ability to reimagine the relationship between physical space and identity. Molinsky (2007) identified cross-cultural code-switching as “the act of purposefully modifying one’s behavior, in a specific interaction in a foreign setting, to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior” (p. 623). Cross-cultural code-switching occurs when a switcher enters into situations that are unfamiliar or are in conflict with the core values central to the switcher’s identity (p. 625). Through this kind of code-switching, a switcher, through purposeful effort, consciously overrides her “dominant, culturally ingrained response” (p. 623), in order to execute culturally consistent behavior that aids assimilation into that foreign culture (p. 623). Tris recognizes both the superficial and
ideological differences between the factions and understands that in order to pass in a particular faction’s space, she must replicate those differences, even when they fundamentally conflict with her own core values. Tris’s ability to recognize these differences and to evaluate different factions’ ideologies not only enables her to modify her own identity but also indicates that she is capable of confronting or eschewing culturally specific behaviors and values at any given time.

Tris’s recognition of these ideas is evident in her active code-switching, which occurs when the Erudite come searching for her and her friends at the Amity compound in *Insurgent*. Tris understands that each faction establishes cultural differences through what scholars identified as physical signifiers, including appearance and mannerisms (Burns-Ardolino, 2003; DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Haslanger, 1995; Molinsky, 2007), and instructs the others in her group to alter their appearance and mannerisms in order to pass as Amity and evade arrest. She tells the people in her group to alter their clothing, hairstyles, and behaviors in order to mimic the playfulness and warmth of the Amity, which stands in direct contrast to Abengation’s meek and restricted personalities and conservative clothing and Dauntless’s overtly aggressive personalities and revealing clothing. Tris’s ability to actively identify the cultural differences between each faction and mimic those differences effectively solidifies the idea that mannerisms, clothing, hair styles, body adornments, styles of movement, and rituals are all expressive of gender identity and the idea solidified by many scholars – that masculinity and femininity are not monolithic categories, but rather are each a constellation of changeable social practices through which gender identity is expressed (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Bean & Harper, 2007; Braithwaite, 2011; Burns-Ardolino, 2003; Butler, 1999; Dutro, 2003; Schrock &
Schwalbe, 2009). Additionally, in establishing Tris’s ability to knowingly code-switch, Roth seems to suggest that identity signifiers and the associations with those signifiers are superficial and challengeable.

**Spatial Construction of Identity**

Physical spaces can be symbolically important in the construction of gender and sexual identity (Halberstam, 2004; Nettleton, 2016; Ranade, 2007; Salamon, 2008). The architecture of physical spaces, the purpose of that space, and the constructs of gender within that space places limitations on how bodies can act and be perceived (Nettleton, 2016; Ranade, 2007; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). Tris’s cross-cultural code-switching and her movement through differently cultured spaces highlights these ideas. Her sometimes restricted, sometimes easy movement through these spaces and the way she is perceived by others in these spaces emphasizes the idea that, “different bodies experience space differently depending on, amongst other things, their gender, class, age, sexuality and physical ability” (Ranade, p. 1520), and emphasizes the ways in which gendered spaces “both reflect and affect the way in which gender is constructed and understood” (Massey, 1994, p. 179). When Tris transfers from Abnegation to Dauntless, people assume she is prudish, weak, and accommodating based on her space of origin and the outward presentation of that faction. When she enters into the Erudite compound as a Dauntless, she notices the way people give her a wide birth due to assumptions they make about her penchant for aggression based on her clothing, her muscles, and the way she walks. In both cases, clothing color and style, gait, mannerisms, and body size and musculature denote identity and her faction/space of origin. This idea demonstrates that the body, both in its physicality and its culturally constructed gender, becomes a central
locus within physical spaces, symbolically reflecting the norms of that space through the way it is allowed to and able to move through and occupy that space (Nettleton; 2016; Ranade, 2007, p. 1524; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007).

**Spatial Segregation, Faction Transfers, and Enforcing Faction Norms**

Spatial segregation creates a specific social order (Nettleton, 2016; Hayden, 1997); in this series, the spatial segregation of factions and gender identities creates a social order in which the spaces, lives, and social norms of people in each faction are dramatically different from one another and in which each faction’s construction of space and gender places limits on what Nettleton (2016) and Katz and Monk (1993) identified as the kinds of spatial and gendered experiences people can have. The limits placed on each faction, limits that correspond to expressions of either femininity or masculinity, and which correspond to specific values, actions, beliefs, and traditions, are pronounced when faction members choose to transfer. Each faction’s expectations about its people’s adherence to faction norms are solidified through external means – actions, appearances, movements, and disposition. The “faction before blood” motto demonstrates not only the importance of adherence to faction norms but also the way that physical appearance and actions authenticate membership in a faction and replicate the existing faction structure through visual difference. Transfers are asked to actively eschew the biological connection to their faction of origin and adopt the actions, appearances, movements, and dispositions that are acceptable in the new faction space.

In this way, an initiate’s body becomes a text and what scholars identified as an instrument through which power structures and cultural norms are replicated (Alexander, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1999; Linder 2011). A transfer’s transition out of one faction
and into another demonstrates how the body and its appearance, actions, and movements are integral to the replication of faction norms as well as how the norms of a particularly gendered space, illustrated through the physical body, is “a key axis around which society structures itself” (Ranade, 2007, p. 1525). Additionally, the way each faction formally and informally policies its norms demonstrates the importance of external adherence to those norms and of what Ranade (2007) identified as the continuous replication and regulation of gendered bodies. This idea becomes clear during Tris’s initiation when she is in the dorm, the cafeteria, the pit, and in training. Tris is particularly aware of her Abnegation upbringing in the dorm, where she realizes that she is the only one who has difficulty exposing her body while changing. In the cafeteria, her faction’s abstaining from foods like hamburgers makes her the butt of a joke. In the pit, her Abnegation behavior stands in stark contrast to that of the Dauntless, who wear black, have piercings and tattoos, and who shop for their own clothes. The pit’s construction – steep, cavernous walls replete with narrow paths and no railings – and the way people move within it by racing across those high, narrow, railing-less paths, also demonstrates the fundamental ideological differences between the factions and between the ways that bodies move within those spaces. During her initiation, Tris must not only become used to these differences, she must also adopt them, which she does through her purchase of new clothing, through getting tattoos, through eating new foods, and through adopting the reckless behavior of the Dauntless.

Tris, Tobias, and Caleb’s transfer out of Abnegation and into Dauntless and Erudite respectively establishes the ways in which the gendered factions’ spaces are carefully policed in order for that particular system to be replicated and illustrates the
ways in which identity is negotiated differently in different spaces. These characters’ choice to transfer also demonstrates the idea that even though these three characters have agency in their decision and ability to leave one space for another, those spaces still put stringent limits on expressions of their identities and acculturate them, encouraging them to adopt not only the outward expressions of that faction, but also its ideals, beliefs, and values. This enculturation is achieved in part through the enforcement of boundaries, like when Eric chastises Tris for leaving the compound unattended to enter another; Eric, as faction leader, dolls out punishment, demonstrating the power each faction has to police its people. It is also in part achieved through the overt enforcement of faction ideals, which occurs through outright statement of expected behavior, through public shaming, a tactic Nettleton (2016) identified as particularly effective, and in this case is effective when initiates fail to assimilate properly, and in some cases, through drugging. This idea plays out most clearly in Dauntless and Amity. Tris is often ridiculed, underestimated, and pitied for her small stature, which is normatively feminine and does not align Dauntless’s values of physical fighting. Tris is also drugged at Amity after starting a physical altercation with Peter. The drug, which unbeknownst to the Amity people is laced into all of their bread, is designed to alleviate aggressive behavior, thereby forcing an individual to adhere to faction norms. Through this idea, through Tris’s destabilization of the entire faction system at the end of the series, and through Caleb’s indoctrination into Jeanine’s unethical system, Roth seems to suggest that the gendered construction of spaces both puts significant limits on an individuals’ agency and encourages unethical means of coercing people to adhere to specific and arbitrary norms.
In demonstrating this idea, Roth seems to utilize the factionless as a symbol; the factionless represent what happens when a person cannot conform to a particular identity. At first, Tris is afraid of the factionless people and of their lifestyle. She believes, and readers understand through her inner monologue, that to live without a faction, without a physical communal space, is to be without an identity. When Tris discovers that the factionless, former members of all factions, have united and established their own space, she comes to realize that there are a variety of ways one can construct gendered and spatial identity. Through the factionless, Roth seems to suggest that the construction of gendered spaces, when created mutually by differently gendered people, can be unregulated, can accommodate people of varied gender identity, and can provide for a renegotiation of identity more generally. Evelyn’s character in particular demonstrates this idea and the way that the strict policing of each faction’s norms creates a system in which people have no agency. Evelyn, who is regularly beaten by her husband Marcus, must fake her death in order to escape Abnegation. She is able to reimagine her own gender identity as a factionless, shifting from demure and feminine to aggressive and masculine. Her shift to a more masculinized identity and to the leader of the factionless is symbolic of her reclaiming her own agency and of her ability to challenge Marcus, her former abuser and leader of Abnegation, as well as the restrictive space and norms Marcus represents.

While the films (which I discuss in depth in the following chapter) utilize control over women’s bodies and movements in order to reinforce gender and sexual norms, the books allow for Tris to move through these spaces fluidly and with relative ease, enabling Tris to challenge normative perceptions of her body and the way it is read. Linder (2011)
argued that the physical capability and competency of women’s bodies endows those bodies with a sense of transgressive agency, providing athletic women with the potential to destabilize normative understandings of gender. Tris’s ability to adapt her body in order to adjust to the norms of each space, the use of her physical strength in these spaces, and her physical capability and competency in these spaces grant Tris’s non-normatively gendered body visibility, enabling Tris to undermine the rigid gender and sexual norms of these spaces. Unlike Katniss, who is unable to disrupt gender and sexual norms in the Capitol, Tris’s dismantling of the government mandated gender norms in each space allows Tris to reconstitute gender identity within these spaces and marks her transgressive agency as empowering. Although Tris is repeatedly targeted with gendered and sexual violence in the Dauntless compound, she defies this kind of gender regulation and by the end of the series, she successfully dismantles the entire faction system, enabling individuals to construct their own gender and sexual identities without the confines of physical spaces that strictly reinforce selected normative behavior. Ultimately, Roth’s construction of Tris’s gender fluidity and Tris’s ability to code-switch demonstrates the idea that socio-cultural norms, as differentiated by physical spaces, are “constantly being brought into being through the everyday actions of men and women” in those spaces (Ranade, 2007, p. 1524), allowing for the possibility of human beings to alter norms within a given space. Tris’s gender fluidity and her awareness of the construction of different norms in different factions provides Tris with the agency to disrupt the continual reproduction of specific norms by the people living in these differentiated spaces.
Biological Determinism

The establishment of the social construction of gender and sexuality allows Roth to not only deconstruct normative notions of gender and sexuality, but to challenge biological determinism, which proposes that identity factors like gender and sexuality are genetically predetermined (Lewontin, 1982), and which reinforces institutional discrimination (Segal & Kilty, 1998; S. Rose, 1999). Roth introduces and then undercuts biological determinism through the Bureau of Genetic Welfare. The people at the Bureau believe that there are two types of people, those who are genetically pure and those who are genetically defective. They believe that genetically defective people are predisposed to being mean, selfish, violent, dishonest, greedy, and disloyal and that divergents, through the genetic capacity to embody multiple personality traits, do not fall prey to genetically defective traits, making them genetically pure. Tris is bothered by the idea that personality is predestined and unchangeable and is skeptical of the Bureau’s teachings. Roth seems to denounce biological determinism through Tris’s condemnation of the Bureau and her questioning of it. This denouncement takes place specifically through a conversation between Tris and Tobias in which Tris makes a distinction between biological determinism and social constructionism. When Tobias learns he is not generically divergent, he is crushed. Tris responds, “you’re the same person you were five minutes ago and four months ago and eighteen years ago! This doesn’t change anything about you…I see you and I know who you are” (1968). Here, Tris solidifies that genes do not change a person’s beliefs and values or fundamentally change someone’s personality, all of which are based on a lifetime of experiences.
In a similar discussion with Christina, Tris identifies the arbitrary nature of the assignment of genetic deficiency and identifies the hypocrisy of the Bureau, whose own beliefs are socially constructed. She notes,

I’m not saying your genes aren’t different. I’m just saying that doesn’t mean one set is damaged and one set isn’t. The genes for blue eyes and brown eyes are different too, but are blue eyes ‘damaged’? It’s like they just arbitrarily decided that one kind of DNA was bad and the other was good (2837)...no matter how smart, people usually see what they’re already looking for. (2845)

Tris’s thorough undercutting of biological determinism emphasizes what scholars noted as the importance of social factors in the construction of the self and the agency a person has to renegotiate his or her gender identity over time (Bean & Harper, 2007; Butler, 1999; Epstein, 1994; Martin, 1994; Ranade, 2007). Through Tris’s rejection of biological determinism and her ability to actively code-switch, Roth demonstrates scholars’ argument that bodies, although genetically different, are merely texts on which identity is performed (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Alexander, 1994; Bean & Harper, 2007; & Braithwaite, 2011; Butler, 1999; Consalvo, 2003; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003;) and that those performances are “socially scripted but amenable to change,” rather than “a fixed set of biologically determined behaviors” (Bean & Harper, 2007, p. 12). Through Tris’s beliefs, Roth seems to challenge biological determinism, situating identity as a “complex developmental outcome” (Epstein, 1994, p. 193) that can be, as Epstein (1994) argued, actively renegotiated through self-identification. Additionally, through Tris’s beliefs and experiences at the Bureau, Roth reinforces the potential for biological determinists to use science as a way to institutionalize a variety of social inequalities, reinforce oppressive social values, and
rationalize unethical experiments (Segal & Kilty, 1998, p. 62), like the one in Chicago that Tris came from.

**Sexuality**

Sexuality is addressed in this series significantly more than in *The Hunger Games* series. Although survival is important to Tris, and although she often acknowledges that she cannot let her romantic relationship distract her from more important conflicts, her story is still largely affected by romance. Tris’s sexuality is entwined with her entire personality; her growth in physical intimacy mirrors her larger personal growth and maturity. Implicit in Tris’s ability to shift her understanding of physical intimacy is Epstein’s (1994) argument that like gender, sexuality is socially constructed. Coming from Abnegation, Tris fears physical intimacy. She notes that she has only seen her parents hold hands, and even that action was rare. Roth suggests, through Tris’s exploration of sexuality and romantic love, that Abnegation’s conservative views on sexuality are confining and deny an essential part of human existence, sexual desire. Tris’s development of her sexuality is also significant in this series because she is not forced into sexual definition like Katniss is by Peeta and Gale’s claims over her. Instead, Tris’s development of her sexuality is self-motivated.

**Sexuality as a Social Construction**

Through Tris and Tobias, Roth seems to suggest that sexuality, like gender, is socially constructed in that the domain of sexuality is, “a domain of elaborate and nuanced behavior, potent and highly charged belief systems, and thickly woven connections with other arenas of social life” (Epstein, 1994, p. 189). Both Tris and Tobias’s fear of physical intimaecy largely stems from the Abnegation belief system,
which denies its members self-indulgent pleasure. Tris and Tobias’s Abnegation born conceptions of sexuality emphasize a key difference in the way this series conceptualizes the social construction of sexuality differently than *The Hunger Games* series does. In *The Hunger Games*, sexuality is conceptualized most notably through physical appearance and through the way the Capitol constructs beauty standards that characters either do or do not adopt. In the *Divergent* trilogy, sexuality is socially constructed in terms of appropriate and faction-mandated sexual gestures and practices. Roth seems to critique this system of faction-mandated sexual practice norms by emphasizing the idea that state controlled bodies and sex deny mobility, innate bodily desires, and the ability of people to actively express and adjust those desires.

Through Tris’s changing belief system, Roth also identifies sexuality as a revisable identity that can be renegotiated. Moreover, through the differences in the way people from other factions express sexuality, Roth identifies that expressions of sexuality, like Mohanty (1988) argued, are not universal. Additionally, by having both Tris and Tobias come from Abnegation, by having them talk openly about their Abnegation-bred fears about sex, and by having them celebrate one another’s sexuality and bodies, Roth seems to suggest that renegotiating sexual identity is best done consciously, through open communication, with self acceptance, and with mutual partner respect. Also, through Tris and Tobias’s consensual coupling and through their discussions about their fears of physical intimacy, Roth demonstrates the idea that exploring one’s sexuality and romantic love requires bravery and honesty, as well as the idea that sex is a shared emotional and physical connection that requires mutual respect and trust. Although Tris and Tobias find it uncomfortable to share their fears, memories, and desires, their
physical intimacy is made more vibrant and urgent through their emotional vulnerability. Roth indicates that Tris and Tobias’s mutual respect for one another kindles a warmth and safety between them that trumps the strict Abnegation rules about physical intimacy and allows each one, both virgins, to engage in sexual acts without fear.

**Challenging Normative Standards of Physical Beauty**

Through Tris and Tobias’s relationship, Roth also challenges normative standards of physical beauty and emphasizes the idea that self-love and partner respect, not physical appearance, dictate love and sex. Although Tris revels in the strength of her body, and although she does not actively care about her society’s beauty standards, she still understands her body’s physical attractiveness in terms of the cultural standards of her world, which reflect modern American beauty norms. Through Tobias, Tris learns to accept and love her own body and to see herself in terms of personality rather than in terms of arbitrary standards of physical attractiveness. This idea takes shape when Tobias tells Tris he likes her. Her response is one of slight shock since she considers her body to be childlike and small, making her self-conscious about its attractiveness. In wondering how he could like her she notes, “I’m not trying to be self-deprecating. I just don’t get it. I’m younger. I’m not pretty…don’t pretend. You know I’m not. I’m not ugly, but I am certainly not pretty” (3299). He responds saying, “Fine. You’re not pretty. So? I like how you look. You’re deadly smart. You’re brave. And even though you found out about Marcus…you aren’t giving me that look. Like I’m a kicked puppy or something (3299). Tobias’s attraction to Tris is not motivated by culturally confining beauty standards, but by her body’s strength and power and by her bravery and intellect. Through Tobias’s attraction, Roth suggests that the foundation for a healthy romantic relationship is not
confinement to normative expectations, but rather mutual respect for one another’s’

bodies, personalities, experiences, and fears, and that open and honest communication are

integral to successful, long-term, sexual relationships.

**Love is Challenging**

Through Tris and Tobias’s changing relationship, Roth also demonstrates that

romantic love is difficult. Romantic relationships are marked not simply by desire and

physical touches but by arguments and disagreements, mistakes and apologies,

embarrassment and tension and changing understandings of one’s personal self and

sexuality. These ideas are all embodied through Tris when she tells Tobias,

> If we stay together, I’ll have to forgive you over and over again, and if

you’re still in this, you’ll have to forgive me over and over again too. So

forgiveness isn’t the point. What I really should have been trying to figure

out is whether we were still good for each other or not. (4069)

Through Tris’s acknowledgment of the active and continual work it takes to maintain a

healthy romantic relationship, Roth resists normative pop culture scripts that feature

romantic relationships as only worthwhile if easy and non-complicated. Through her

disruption of these normative scripts, Roth challenges readers to resist those scripts and

negotiate their own relationships from a place of self-love, mutual respect, and an

understanding that sexuality and sexual relationships are continuously renegotiated.

**Reinforcing Heteronormativity**

Although Roth complicates some normative scripts about sexuality by noting its

social construction and through establishing the work it takes to maintain sexual

relationships, she ultimately reinforces heteronormativity, which is characterized as,

“institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make
heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548). Berlant and Warner (1998) suggested that heteronormativity is a concept that while attending to heterosexuality, is distinct from it. So while Tris and Tobias’s physical sexual encounters mark them as heterosexual, their physical coupling is not necessarily heteronormative, given that they are both non-normative in gender identity. Despite the potential of this coupling to resist the label of heteronormative, overall Roth perpetuates heteronormativity by privileging heterosexuality as seemingly natural and as the, “tacit but central organizing index of social membership” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 555), making heterosexuality requisite for full participation in this society.

Roth does acknowledge gayness; however, gayness is rendered mostly invisible and when it is acknowledged, it is established in a way that Doty (1993) and Rich (1980) argued against – as an alternative to the preferred, privileged, and assumed heterosexuality. Roth first alludes to gayness during Lynn’s death scene. Prior to this scene, Tris has noticed Lynn’s increasing agitation at Uriah and Marlene’s romantic relationship. After Marlene’s death and after Lynn is shot, Lynn tells Uriah that she also loved Marlene. When he says, “Yeah, we all loved Marlene” she responds, just before taking her last breath, “No, that’s not what I mean” (5282). Lynn’s allusion to her gayness on her deathbed frames her gayness as a confession, marking her love as deviant, especially since she never fully states her gayness and since no characters comment on or ever bring up her confession again in the series, making her gayness invisible. Also, her unfulfilled desires reflect the confining social norms of Dauntless.
In the final book, Amar, a divergent former Dauntless living at the Bureau, talks about Tobias with Tris. Knowing that Amar was Tobias’s initiation instructor, she asks if they were good friends. Amar responds, “I wouldn’t say we were good friends. Not as good as I wanted to be” (3909). He leans his head back, closes his eyes, and smiles. Tris realizes Amar means that he liked Tobias romantically. He tells her he doesn’t like Tobias anymore, but that at one time he did. Amar realized that Tobias didn’t feel the same and backed off (3918). Amar then reveals that he and George, Tori’s brother, are together. He asks Tris to keep that fact quiet since, “entanglement that can’t produce a stronger genetic code” is not encouraged by the Bureau (3918). Amar’s request notes a systematic disparaging of gayness within the Bureau, which is also reflected in the invisibility gayness seems to have within the series. This sense of invisibility is demonstrated in the fact that in both instances of gayness in the text, the subject switches immediately away from Marlene and Amar and back toward Tris and in the second case, her heterosexual romance with Tobias. Additionally, gayness is veiled in careful language – so careful that it never states outright the word boyfriend between Amar and George, or gayness at all in either case. When gayness is not made entirely invisible, it is marked by tragic death and by government condemnation, marking gayness as dangerous and deviant. In this way, Roth, while allowing for non-normative gender identity construction, places limits on the configurations of characters’ sex acts and on their expressions of sexualities outside of heterosexual.

Recapping the Research Question

This book series represents gender as a social construction, one that can be performed authentically or disingenuously. It reinforces the idea of gender as a social
construction through the faction system, Tris’s cross-cultural code-switching, and through Tris’s negation of the Bureau’s biological determinism. Roth solidifies the social construction of gender identity in this series by marking it as what Bean and Harper (2007) and Braithwaite (2011) identified as a revisable identity based on a constellation of social practices and informed by established norms in specific physical spaces (Ranade, 2007). She differentiates between authentic and inauthentic performances of gender through Tris’s code-switching and her gender fluidity. Roth establishes the two possibilities for the configuration of gender fluidity, both of which challenge normative and essentialist conceptions of a link between man and masculinity and woman and femininity. In this series, both men and women can be either masculine or feminine and an individual can embody both masculinity and femininity at different times or simultaneously.

Through the factions, the possibility of gender fluidity, and Tris’s movement through differently cultured spaces, Roth emphasizes that both masculinity and femininity have both strengths and weaknesses. While she does situate masculinity and femininity as polarized, she challenges the normative construction of masculinity and femininity as hierarchical, whereby masculinity is always strong and superior to a weak and inferior femininity. She achieves this idea by identifying the strengths of each gender identity. She characterizes masculinity in positive ways as being brave, courageous, and self-sufficient, and through masculine characters’ protection of the helpless and refusal to quit. She characterizes femininity in positive ways as selfless, maternal, loving, and supportive, and through feminine characters’ attention to the greater good, and propensity toward peace.
Roth represents sexuality in this series as predominantly heterosexual, and although she does acknowledge gayness through two characters, the acknowledgement ultimately marks gayness as deviant and invisible, thereby reinforcing heteronormativity. Through Tris and Tobias’s relationship, Roth’s representation of sexuality aligns with Epstein’s (1994) understanding of sexuality as socially constructed and as a revisable identity that can be actively renegotiated. Additionally, she represents sexuality as representative of both physical and emotional desire and as a consensual choice that should be made out of mutual respect. She also seems to challenge normative pop culture conceptions of romantic relationships by suggesting that sexual and romantic relationships can be difficult and require work and forgiveness. In chapter 11, I will return to the discussion of the theoretical implications of the series in this study and of the implications for audiences.
CHAPTER 8

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE DIVERGENT FILM SERIES

In this chapter, I address my first research question by discussing the representations of gender and sexuality in the first two film adaptations in the series, *Divergent* and *Insurgent*. In this chapter, I demonstrate the mechanisms through which this film series limits Tris to a one-dimensional portrayal that ultimately situates her as submissive and weak and through which the film series establishes Tobias as dominantly and ideally masculine.

Representations of Gender in the Films

In the book series, although Roth presents gender as a relational binary, she challenges normative assumptions about gender identity by classifying gender as a social construction, through her portrayal of gender fluidity, and by situating both masculinity and femininity as both strong and weak. In contrast, the *Divergent* film series, like *The Hunger Games* film series, upholds the highly regulative American cultural gender norms that privilege men’s masculinity over women’s femininity. This perpetuation of normative gender is demonstrated by the emphasis in the film series on men’s physical power, on women’s physical weakness, and on the general downgrading of masculine women’s masculinity in order to privilege men’s masculinity. This process occurs in these films through a hierarchy of multiple masculinities, a concept that many scholars have discussed (Beal, 1996; Braithwaite, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Like in *The Hunger Games* film series, this hierarchy plays out in the *Divergent* film series, and through this system,
the films subordinate women, limiting masculine women in particular to expressions of subordinate masculinity or submissive and sexualized femininity.

This kind of hierarchy establishes dominant masculinity in relation to men’s and women’s subordinated masculinities and women’s femininities (Beal, 1996; Braithwaite, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). In replicating this hierarchy, the films present Tobias’s masculinity as the ideal version of masculinity by which all other masculinities and femininities, including viewers’, should be measured. In establishing Tobias as dominantly masculine, the films repeatedly feminize Tris and other masculine women in a variety of ways. In this chapter, I discuss the feminization of Tris and the dominance of Tobias. I also highlight the ways the films punish Tris for her masculinity and restrict Tris’s mobility in different physical spaces through her victimization at the hands of dominantly masculine men as well as how the films reinforce Tris’s normative femininity through her relationship with Tobias, which frames Tris as non-threatening and subordinate.

**Tobias’s Dominant Masculinity**

The *Divergent* book series, like *The Hunger Games* book series, allows for multiple masculinities, but does so in significantly different ways than the films. In both book series, women and men can perform masculinity and that masculinity is performed in a variety of ways, many of which are celebrated. The *Divergent* book series features Tris and Tobias’s expressions of masculinity as superior to other immoral and therefore subordinated masculinities. Immoral masculinity is situated in the books as deviant and classified through a character’s lust for power, greed, and perpetrating of sexual and gendered violence. Tris and Tobias’s masculinity is contrasted to this deviance through
their respect for one another and each other’s bodies, through their devotion to the greater good, and through their willingness to sacrifice for others. In the films, deviant masculinity includes women’s masculinity as well as immoral men’s masculinity, signifying that women’s masculinity is in fact immoral. The films also tend to frame men’s immorality in terms of their disloyalty rather than in terms of their sexual misconduct. Additionally, the books clearly establish Tris and Tobias as gender fluid, marking their dominant masculinity as an identity that includes the strengths of femininity while the films privilege a strictly masculine gender identity. The books also clearly identify Tris and Tobias as equals. In the film series, Tobias embodies dominant masculinity while Tris is feminized and subordinated. They are never equals.

Tobias’s expression of dominant masculinity, which is characterized by physical power, physical capability and proficiency, sexual prowess, heroism, and the rescuing of women, collective traits that denote hegemonic masculinity (Bird, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993), is both normalized as ideal masculinity and naturalized through his seemingly effortless display of all of these traits. His dominant masculinity is highly visible in the films, yet that persistent visibility and the films’ perpetual reestablishing of Tobias as ideally and dominantly masculine also makes his normative masculinity invisible by making it appear natural and inevitable. This naturalizing and privileging of particular identities has been discussed by many feminist scholars who have identified this process occurring across pop culture texts and sociocultural interactions (Alexander, 1994; Barry, 1979; Berlant & Warner, 1998; Bordo, 1993; Rich, 1980). In the same way that Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) argued Katniss’s whiteness is naturalized in The Hunger Games films, the Divergent films re-
center Tobias’s masculinity without calling explicit attention to that re-centering, enabling his masculinity to function “through its seamless taken-for-grantedness, the mundane ways in which it gains salience” (Dubrofsky and Ryalls, 2014, p. 400). Tobias is repeatedly featured chastising, cutting off, demeaning, leading, and saving Tris, all of which frame her as weak and him as strong and dominant. When saving Tris, Tobias repeatedly annihilates her victimizers, asserting his dominance over them and her. Although the films prioritize these moments visually, these moments are so routine within the films that their visual prominence becomes subtle rather than overtly pronounced. The systematic recurrence of these actions and situations and the repetition of the films framing Tobias’s actions as heroic subtly naturalize and privilege his expressions of gender and sexuality, which are played out on and through his physically dominant body.

**Tris’s Subordinate Femininity**

In the same way that Tobias’s dominant masculinity is normalized and naturalized, Tris’s femininity too is made to appear natural and inevitable. The films largely construct the normalization of both characters’ gender identity through each of these characters’ physical bodies. Tobias’s dominance gains prominence through the repetition of his heroic and aggressive physical acts while Tris’s weaknesses become prominent through the repetition of the denial of her physical movement and ability. The films clearly identify Tobias’s body as a body that, in Butler’s (1993) terms, matters culturally since his physical power enables him to assert dominance over others, while Tris’s body is brutally and repeatedly violated as a plot device through which the films reassert Tobias’s dominant masculinity. This kind of plot device, as Griffin (2015) noted,
is a frequent mechanism used in popular culture to downgrade women’s characters and provide leading men with a reason and excuse for vengeance and violence. The repetition of this plot device frames Tris as perpetually in need of rescue, even when she displays moments of physical prowess. Linder (2011) noted that often, films that feature athletic women undercut the transgressive power of women’s bodies by containing those bodies, most notably through a hetero-normative narrative and generic structures (p. 336). The Divergent films replicate this idea, often featuring Tris losing in fights, some of which she wins in the books, featuring Tobias saving Tris, and framing Tris in terms of her romantic relationship with Tobias.

The representation of Tris’s athletic body in the books and films is drastically different, namely in terms of Tris’s agency. Linder (2011) argued that the powerful athletic female body can be understood in terms of empowerment and agency. Athletic engagement allows for the body to move capably and competently through space and in its relation to people and objects in that space (Linder, 2009, 2011; Young, 1980). In the books, Tris’s engagement in athletic activities aligns with this idea. Her athletic body allows her to move capably and competently through different spaces, providing her with the ability to resist normative cultural understandings of gender and sexuality within her world. While Tris’s athletic and mobile body provides her character with narrative agency in the books, her athletic body in the films is punished for its gender transgressions and is diminished in a variety of ways. In the books, Tris’s body expresses MacKinnon’s (1987) idea that athletic activity can provide women with a sense of actuality and ownership over their bodies and it can disrupt traditional understandings in which women’s bodies are seen primarily as, “an instrument to communicate sexual
availability” (p. 122). In the books, Tris’s body is not simply an instrument that communicates sexual availability but rather, her body is a conduit for her to perform heroic acts and to act as her own savior. However, in the films, her body is sexualized and contextualized by her romantic relationship with Tobias. In this way, the films are, “uniquely endowed with the capacity for deploying the body in such a way as to represent and reproduce social relationships in a preferred [i.e., dominant, heteropatriarchal] way” (Hargreaves, 1987, p. 142). The films use the differences in Tris’s and Tobias’s physical bodies and capabilities to “materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (Butler, 1993, p. 2).

The restrictions the films place on Tris’s physical body are indicative of the larger and less visible restrictions placed on Tris’s overall agency and expressions of gender and sexual identity by the films. While the books portray Tris as a complex and fully developed character, one with physical, mental, and emotional endurance, the films portray her as always and inevitably weak. Although Tris is granted some moments of masculine power in the films, that power, like Katniss’s, is often undercut. Tris’s most physically powerful and dominant acts are erased entirely from the film. For example, the first film alters a fight scene between Tris and Molly. In the book, Peter, Molly and their friends sexually harass and humiliate Tris in the dorm. Shortly after this scene, Tris is slated to fight Molly. Tris savagely defeats Molly, demonstrating Tris’s ferocity and masculine physical power. In the film, Molly defeats Tris during this fight, marking Tris as physically weak. Although the film adds a second fight scene between Tris and Molly where Tris wins, the scene fails to capture Tris’s masculine hostility and savagery, demonstrated in the book when she kicks Molly’s face while Molly is on the ground and
through Tris’s lack of guilt. This kind of alteration highlights the ways in which this film series downplays Tris’s masculine and violent behaviors, denying her body physical power and marking her as more normatively feminine than she is in the books.

The films also place an emphasis on the feminization of masculine women’s appearances, especially Tris’s. In the films, Tris, Natalie, Evelyn, Johanna Reyes, and Jeanine all appear significantly more normatively feminine than they do in the books. Like Katniss, who appears naturally glowing and well fed, these women appear naturally beautiful at all times despite war time conditions. Tris has perfectly styled and highlighted hair even though she cut it herself, Johanna’s scar that blinds her in one eye in the book is barely noticeable in the films, and even Evelyn, who is homeless, appears to wear makeup and has her hair styled. While the visual effects of the films cannot necessarily dictate what G. Rose (2007, p. 12) noted are the social context of viewing or the visualities spectators bring to their viewing, the films certainly do mobilize specific ways of seeing that “are crucial in the production and reproduction of visions of social difference” (G. Rose, 2007, p. 12), and that assert the importance of Tobias’s dominant masculinity and the limitations of Tris’s (and other masculine women’s) bodies and identity construction. The repeated visual emphasis on Tris’s and other masculine women’s physical weakness and normative physical beauty and on Tobias’s dominant masculinity makes these expressions of gender appear naturally and inevitably normal, suggesting these versions of masculinity and femininity are ideal. Tris’s athletic body is also punished, undercut, and contained through the physical restriction of her movement through different spaces, which I discuss in a later section.
Shifting the Narrative Focus

By foregrounding Tobias’s masculinity as dominant, especially in a highly visible way, this film series shifts the focus of the narrative from one of Tris’s personal journey, strength, and development of self, to one of Tobias’s dominant and normative masculinity. The foregrounding of Tobias’s story also factors into the shift in the focus of Tris’s individual story. Not only is Tris not the central figure of the film’s plot, but her original story is also altered so that her motivations largely shift from familial love to romantic love. The focus of her story also shifts from addressing her physical, emotional, and mental endurance to a story that downplays these ideas and instead emphasizes her helplessness, irrationality, and physical weakness. Also, where the books seem to critique gendered and sexualized violence, the films seem to condone and encourage men’s violence against women and naturalize the victimization of women, ultimately denying women, particularly masculine women, agency.

While the books seem to condemn the perpetuation of normative constructions of women as only feminine and only weak, the films uphold this construction. The films utilize similar mechanisms to those that The Hunger Games film series uses in order to establish a relational gender hierarchy where men are masculine and superior to women who are feminine. These mechanisms include: eliminating scenes in which women are physically dominant; diminishing women’s power when they do exhibit physical dominance by featuring them as losing fights they otherwise win in the books; framing women who express masculine traits as irrational and mentally unstable; sexualizing women in appearance and demeanor; softening masculine women in appearance and demeanor; emphasizing heterosexuality and its grounding of women as feminine through
a relationship with a dominantly masculine man; having dominant men victimize masculine women as a show of power and as a way to police gender deviance; and the establishment and maintenance of symbolically gendered spaces, most notably through the aforementioned victimization.

While *The Hunger Games* and the *Divergent* film series both utilize these mechanisms to reinforce normative understandings of gender and sexuality, the *Divergent* film series in particular makes prominent the last three mechanisms, grounding Tris in terms of her heterosexual and unequal relationship with Tobias, feminizing her through victimization at the hands of men, and utilizing the construction of gendered spaces as a way to police Tris’s gender identity and sexuality. All three of these mechanisms focus heavily on placing physical limitations on Tris’s body, which allows the films to restrict Tris’s overall agency. Although the books certainly seem to utilize these same mechanisms, I argue that the books actually feature the policing of Tris’s body in order to critique the normative construction of gender and sexuality and the victimization of women by men. Although the books do reinforce heteronormativity, the films make this kind of relationship ultra visible and assert Tobias as the dominant figure in the relationship, both in terms of physical power and agency, by altering his interactions with Tris, by asserting him as significantly more masculine than Tris, by minimizing Tobias’s fear, and by granting Tobias power over Tris in all spaces throughout the films.

This kind of visual representation and this translation of the relationship between Tobias and Tris are most noticeable in Tobias’s fear landscape scene in the first film. In the book, Tobias invites Tris into his landscape as an act of emotional vulnerability.
During the simulation, he forces breath in and out through clenched teeth, he groans and grimaces, speaks in a tight, tense and desperate voice, has dread in his eyes, and afterwards, Tris notes how vulnerable he looks. In contrast, Tris is calm and collected, she is rational, reciting back to him the logistics of a fear landscape, finding solutions to his fears so he can complete the simulation. In this book scene, Tris’s physical, emotional, and mental capability and Tobias’s vulnerability are pronounced. In the film, Tobias frames entering his fear landscape as an exercise to help Tris learn how to hide her divergence, which initially situates Tobias as a teacher and Tris as a student, a relationship marked by an inherent power hierarchy. Tobias’s and Tris’s roles in the film scene are reversed as he calmly explains what she needs to do in order to complete the simulation. He leads her through it, instead of her leading him. He is generally calm. Even when expressing fear, that expression is limited to slightly elevated breathing or to remorse. Tris has a perpetual look of concern throughout the scene as she relies on his guidance and asks questions. This translation minimizes Tobias’s original fear and highlights his control.

Although Tobias seems troubled by killing the woman in his fear landscape, the film frames his reaction in terms of love by morphing the woman into Tris, which simultaneously emphasizes the power dynamic in their relationship, making him an aggressor and her a victim of his violence. The film also later negates this fear when in Tobias’s real life, he does not look away when shooting Eric in the head. In the book, during the last fear, a beating by Tobias’s abusive father, Tobias seems frozen, his posture sags, and he appears young and vulnerable (3230). When Marcus raises a belt to hit him, Tris intervenes, taking the blow, pulling the belt from Marcus’s hand, and hitting
Marcus. Tobias moves to stand in front of Tris to prevent his father’s attack and the simulation ends. The film alters this scene significantly, highlighting Tris’s physical vulnerability and Tobias’s strength. The music announces Marcus as a villain; it crescendos, its tempo and tone suggesting a moment of decision making for Tobias. Although Tris intervenes, Marcus tosses her easily aside and as he lunges at Tobias, Tobias punches him in the face, sending him to the floor and ending the simulation. The music imbues the scene with finality, which also reinforces Tobias’s dominant defeat of his villain father who just made a victim of Tris. This marked difference in the portrayal of Tris and Tobias’s physical capability reflects the film’s overarching hegemonic masculinity and aligns with the women in refrigerators syndrome Griffin (2015, p. 126) discussed; the film makes Tris’s vulnerability and her incapacitation a plot device that incites Tobias to action and that centers his physical power and his control over his emotions. In framing Tris as generally weak and Tobis as generally strong, the films shift the original narrative focus of the books, making the story largely one of Tobias’s dominant masculinity instead of Tris’s personal journey, exploration of self, and strength.

**The Construction of Policed Gendered Spaces**

The social production and social construction of physical spaces as defined by S. Low (1996), is prominent in this series of films, is crucial to the way the films establish dominant masculinity and subordinate femininity, and helps to illuminate the ideological underpinnings of this film series. In the books, Roth seems to present physical space as described by Michael (2009) – as a “dynamic entity constituted out of a shifting ensemble of meanings, practices, and interrelationships (p. 46)” allowing for the symbolic meaning of spaces to shift over time through social construction. She also
seems to establish the idea that the construction of physical spaces’ symbolic and cultural meanings, as Ranade (2007) argued, can be broken down and reconstituted. In establishing the social construction of spaces’ meanings, Roth enables Tris to traverse gendered spaces. Although Tris does have her movements restricted in the differently gendered spaces in the books, she is always able to overcome or break down those restrictions, including those that are applied physically by men. She is able to actively code-switch based on her understanding of the fundamental ideological differences between factions, allowing her to navigate these spaces and pass in these spaces as normative in order to achieve a larger goal, often one that supports the greater good. She also, through her individual heroism, physical capability, and bodily and mental endurance, is able to single handedly break down the city’s symbolic infrastructure. By fighting through the death serum and releasing the memory serum into the Bureau, Tris is able to reset the Bureau workers’ minds, enabling her group to alter the workers’ understanding of personality traits as biologically determined. Tris’s actions allow for the breakdown of the physical faction spaces. This breakdown enables what S. Low (1996) identified as people’s ability to reconstruct physical spaces and reinterpret and reinvent the social exchanges, processes, and norms in those spaces. Tris’s actions enable this breakdown and reconstitution to occur throughout the city, shifting people’s understanding of and experiences in those spaces.

In contrast, the films continually work to (re)establish gendered physical spaces – spaces in which dominant masculinity thrives – as having static boundaries where particular gender and sexual norms are enforced, namely those that feminize masculine women and privilege masculine men. The films establish the faction compounds and the
factionless compound as closed communities in which (masculine) women’s movement is generally restricted and in which Tris is an intruder; closed communities, Sommer (1969) noted, tend to exhibit the “clearest dominance orders” (p. 16) because of restricted movement and limited space (p. 16). Through these closed and narrowly defined spaces, the films are able to feminize masculine women like Tris and (re)assert dominant masculinity. Within these closed communities, namely Dauntless, Candor, Amity, and the factionless train car, the films frame dominant men’s victimization of masculine women as a punishment for masculine women’s gender deviance; the films use this method to limit women’s mobility through gendered spaces and place limits on women’s bodies, expressions of gender, and expressions of sexuality. These restrictions of mobility and agency mark femininity as always weak, women as always feminine, and masculine women as deviant and in need of taming, as well as normalize and naturalize men’s victimization of women as a rightful assertion of power and dominance.

**Restricting Movement**

The *Divergent* films repeatedly and consistently reify hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity through the characters’ bodies, performances of those bodies, and restrictions and movements of those bodies. The films use gendered physical spaces to restrict Tris’s portability, her ability to move freely through different spaces; her transversality, her capacity to shape the environment around her; and the social flexibility of spaces, which involves the capacity of a space to symbolically accommodate different expressions of identity. The limitations on Tris’s portability and transversality are carried out on her physical body by dominantly masculine men like Eric and Edgar who physically detain, restrain, and violate her body and by Tobias, whose physical body
takes ownership over physical space through what Acarón, (2016, p. 145) identified as the use of aggressive movements that deny others the ability to freely inhabit that same space. Tobias’s body, unlike Tris’s, is given free reign in the films. His body and movements claim physical spaces, shaping and contextualizing those spaces and altering them. He does this, for example, in the Candor compound when he reclaimed the space from Eric by saving Tris, smashing Eric’s head into a wall, and executing Eric, therefore shifting that space from one of immorality to one of (violent) heroism.

Tobias, Eric, and Edgar’s often violent restriction of Tris’s portability is an act of oppression, one that embodies what Acarón (2016, p. 142) described as hegemonic and heteronormative understandings of power, access, and ability. When Eric and Edgar victimize Tris by restraining her physical body, the films assert these men’s power over these physical spaces as well as their ability to restrict her body’s access to those spaces. The films, in demonstrating the physical and symbolic power Eric and Edgar embody and infringe on Tris’s portability emphasize Tris’s complete and utter victimization. Both characters descend upon her, putting the full weight of their body into choking her - one staring down at her with determination, the other with unadulterated pleasure. The films seem to use these kinds of violent attacks and sexual harassment to “remind women…that they are not meant to be in certain spaces” (Koskela, 1999; G. Rose, 1993) and to convey the idea that women’s masculinity is deviant and punishable, especially in masculine spaces. This kind of social construction of space, the physical construction of space, and the restrictions these constructions create limit Tris’s power and her narrative agency. These restrictions on Tris’s power align with the ways Koskela (1999) and Pain (1991) argued that women in urban spaces are often restricted and policed. The violence
Tris experiences in these places at the hands of men not only reinforces her own vulnerability and femininity, but also reinforces the film’s construction of particular spaces as masculine and as controlled by dominantly masculine men.

The physical violence perpetrated against Tris and utilized by the films as a way to assert dominant masculinity and subordinate femininity is not just used as a reminder of Tris’s physical limitations, but it is also used as a way to punish her psychologically and deprive her of her humanity. In discussing the prison system, Foucault (1979) identified the shift over time from bodily pain to the physical restriction of the body as a way to inflict psychological pain. This kind of bodily restriction and destruction is meant to inflict pain on the soul, a punishment that “acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” (Foucault, 1979, p. 16). In this same way, the films demonstrate the effectiveness of men’s violence against women’s bodies as a way to reinforce men’s physical power, reduce women to their bodies, and as a conduit through which men can damage women psychologically by denying women humanity. In reducing women, and masculine women like Tris in particular, to their (subdued) bodies, the films mobilize specific constellations of power and knowledge which specifically position women as mechanisms through which men gain power and prominence and which position women as inhuman. In establishing the importance of the construction and production of physical space, the importance of the monitoring and control of space by dominantly masculine men, and the limits placed on women’s mobility and gender construction in these spaces, the films institutionalize the violent and systematic control by men over women.
Tobias’s Control Over Tris

The imposition of spatial restrictions on Tris’s body by Eric and Edgar are significant when contextualized by the framework of the multiple masculinities hierarchy as described by a variety of scholars (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Braithwiate, 2011; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). These two characters are dominantly masculine in terms of physical prowess and power, yet are not framed as heroic like Tobias. These two characters are subordinated to Tobias because of their immorality; that immorality is in some ways connected to their victimization of Tris, yet at the same time, these characters appear warranted in the protection of masculine spaces and Eric’s immorality in particular is more connected to his disloyalty to Dauntless than to his victimization of Tris. This idea is confirmed when Tobias executes Eric for his crimes against the city, not his crimes against Tris. These moments of victimization do not seem designed to critique violence against women or necessarily pinpoint these two characters as immoral, but rather, plot-wise, these moments afford Tobias the opportunity to assert his ultimate masculine power and solidify Tris’s need for his protection in public spaces. Tris’s need in these scenes aligns with Valentine’s (1989) discussion of the way women who must navigate externally regulated gendered spaces are encouraged, via violence and threat of violence in those spaces, to seek out the protection of one man, namely a boyfriend or husband. Tris, as a product of highly regulated gendered spaces and the policing of those spaces with violence, must seek protection from Tobias. Tris serves as a plot device in these moments since she is repeatedly victimized with the result of providing Tobias with a
way to assert his physical capability, prowess, and power over others, especially over villainous men who serve as potential threats to his status as dominantly masculine.

Tobias’s control over Tris’s body and expression of gender and sexuality is asserted differently than Eric or Edgar’s; Tobias’s control of Tris is still highly visible, but is so systematic that it becomes less noticeable than the overt demonstrations of Eric or Edgar’s physical attacks on Tris. Tobias asserts his power in specific physical spaces when he cuts Tris off when she speaks, makes decisions for her, chastises her, demeans her, and invites her into his space only when she is emotionally and physically vulnerable. His power in these spaces, like the jump point, the cafeteria, and his room at Dauntless, is evident in his ability to grant or deny her access to these spaces and in his ability to allow or deny her actions in these spaces. This idea is demonstrated when he invites her to his room after his fear landscape in *Divergent*. While in the book, Tris has just helped Tobias through his fears and Tobias is emotionally vulnerable, in the film, he uses the fear landscape as instruction for Tris, framing her as incompetent and him as a master. In his film bedroom, Tris is vulnerable, not Tobias, and when she tells him she doesn’t want to move too fast sexually, he grants her permission to take it slow, an action the film frames as romantic via the setting, which bathes both characters in a soft sunset glow on a balcony overlooking the city. While their sexual decisions are mutual in the book and while both are virgins, in the films, Tobias not only appears more sexually savvy than Tris, but he also has the ability to acknowledge Tris’s consent or not.

Tris’s romantic relationship with Tobias helps to ground Tris as feminine; their heterosexuality reinforces normative understandings of masculine/feminine and man/woman sexual pairings. Tobias’s physical and sexual encounters with Tris are also
contextualized by his heroism – his savior of Tris, a victim – and those moments are visually distinct, marking Tobias and Tris’s sexualized encounters as prominent and significant within the films and as spaces in which Tobias is undoubtedly strong and Tris is weak. While this relationship is also important in the books, their mutual respect and equality allow for both characters to develop their own sense of sexuality and to enact consensual sexual acts. Tris also has ownership over her own body and sexuality in the books, even when she is physically attacked. In the films, even when she is the initiator of physical contact, it is most often framed within space that Tobias has ownership of – his bedroom, his balcony, and his mother’s compound. According to the framework defined by Sparkes, Brown, and Partington (2010), in these spaces, Tobias constructs the culture of appropriate behavior with his dominance influencing the constructs of different spaces and the consequences for others’ bodies. In his sexual encounters with Tris, his dominance has implications on how her body will be sexually used or not, abused or not. The only time when Tris is able to assert true dominance in a sexual scene happens in her fear landscape, making it an unreality, and one that is watched and scrutinized by a variety of other people; that invasion of her private thoughts also undercuts her agency in that scene. The films clearly position Tobias as a character who is always an instructor, mentor, and superior while positioning Tris as an inferior student. Through their unequal romantic relationship in the film, heterosexuality is not only emphasized, but a specific kind of heterosexual interaction is normalized; in their relationship, which is coded as romantic and loving, Tobias is the clear superior while Tris is the subordinate.
Social Flexibility

Eric and Edgar, through their physical restrictions on Tris, and Tobias, through the use of his body to control physical spaces, all limit the social flexibility of spaces like the Dauntless compound, the Amity compound, the Candor Compound, and the factionless train car. The social flexibility of a physical space relies on the symbolic quality of a physical space to allow for differing and changing sociocultural norms (Acarón, 2016, p. 144); the allowance of a space to change symbolically is driven by the people who claim ownership over that space (Ranade, 2007; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). Instead of allowing for different and non-normative verbal and nonverbal expressions of gender in different spaces (Acarón, 2016, p. 144), the films use dominant men characters and their physical aggression to reinforce the gendered norms that dictate women’s femininity and weakness and men’s masculinity and strength. The denial of the social flexibility of spaces and the denial of Tris’s portability contribute to the limits placed on Tris’s agency and her transversality – her capacity to shape or mold her environment. Acarón (2016) noted that “the body can shape a space, for example, by exerting movements that exude dominance” (p. 145); however, because Tris is denied dominant and masculinized behavior in the films, she is unable to shape the space around her, and in fact, her efforts to do so are coded as ineffectual, irrational, and weak, and in all of these spaces, whether masculine or feminine, her masculinity is framed as deviant.

In feminine spaces like the Amity compound, where she fights Peter, Tris’s masculinity is coded as deviant because she is regarded as aggressive and irrational, causing Tobias to restrain and chastise her, but not Peter. In this scene, Tris reacts emotionally to Peter suggesting she was the cause of her parents’ deaths whereas in the
related scene in the book, Tris fights Peter because he attempts to steal the hard drive with the attack simulation on it. This alteration in the meaning and function of this scene erases Tris’s noble intent and replaces it with irrational emotion. In this scene in particular, Tobias’s intervention is a direct challenge to Tris’s athleticism and therefore, it is what Linder (2011) established as a challenge to her narrative and bodily agency. When Tobias pulls Tris off of Peter, his actions are a way for the film to visually represent Tobias as rational and effortlessly dominant while at the same time counteracting the visibility of Tris’s non-normatively gendered body. Although Tris breaks away from Tobias, who attempts to calm her, he asserts his ownership over her and the other men in Johanna’s office. While Tris, Caleb, and Peter sit, Tobias stands. While the others are silent, Tobias responds to Johanna. While Tris appears juvenile, Tobias is stoic. While Johanna contextualizes Tris as emotional and damaged, Tobias is clearheaded and rational. Tobias polices Tris’s deviance in this space, claiming ownership over the physical space with his body, his comportment, and his voice, thereby denying Tris’s transversality.

In masculine spaces like Dauntless, Candor, and the factionless train car, Tris’s masculinity is framed as deviant through her attempted performances of masculinity; she is punished in these spaces for her deviance from the “sets of valued, legitimized, and practical functions” (Sparkes et al., 2010, p. 335) that define these spaces. In Candor in particular, the film perpetually reframes Tris as feminine in order to situate her as gender appropriate in these masculine spaces with the result of denying Tris the ability to alter or safely navigate these spaces like she does in the book. When she is forced to take the truth serum in the book, she has the power to thwart the serum and she remains in control
of her mind and body. In the films, Tris clutches her arms to her chest, breathes heavily, cries, and emits strangled high pitched whines, all visual and aural cues that frame her as utterly weak and deny her the ability to actively alter the space around her. In a later scene in Candor, Tris is denied her brutal stabbing of Eric, which is replaced by her ineffectual nudging of him and his savage choking of her. In denying Tris’s portability and transversality, which ultimately limit the social flexibility of gendered spaces as described by Acarón (2016), the films reinforce the idea that while dominant men are granted access to and control over physical spaces and their symbolic meanings, women, especially masculine women, are actively denied agency and control over any physical spaces and are unable to alter the cultural understandings of those spaces.

This dual condemnation of Tris’s masculinity in both feminine and masculine spaces and dominant men’s control over feminine and masculine spaces demonstrates what many scholars identified as the ways in which bodies and their movement through particular spaces construct the boundaries and acceptable actions within those spaces and the way that once constructed, those spaces facilitate the future construction of bodies within that space (Acarón, 2016; Koskela, 1999; S. Low, 1996; Pain, 1991; Ranade, 2007; Valentine, 1989) in a “mutually reinforcing cycle of social regeneration” (Sparkes et al., 2010, p. 343). Gender and space are both constructed and in a constant state of becoming (Ranade, 2007, p. 1519), so in order to establish a particular ideology, the films must continuously reproduce specific representations of gender and sexuality in specific spaces. Performances of dominant masculinity, subordinate masculinity, and subservient femininity must be, “constantly replicated and strictly regulated” (Ranade, 2007, p. 1525), which the films do through establishing and reinforcing a system of multiple
masculinities in which a physically dominant masculine man dictates Tris’s use of her body, her movement through physical spaces, and her ability to interact with and affect the social construction of those spaces. Each film itself becomes a symbolic physical space that, in reinforcing these kinds of normative ideas, makes it difficult for viewers to claim ownership over the films and garner empowering meanings from the characters’ actions.

**Recapping the Research Question**

The *Divergent* film series, like *The Hunger Games* film series, utilizes a variety of mechanisms in order to reinforce normative conceptions of gender and sexuality whereby gender, sexuality, and the physical body are linked in specific ways. Each film series makes clear the continuities between man, masculine, sexually dominant and woman, femininity, and sexual submission. The films also reinforce the normative understanding that men should embody masculinity, women should embody femininity, and that men’s masculinity is physically, culturally, and symbolically superior to women’s femininity. In reinforcing these concepts, both film series feminize women, specifically masculine women, in a variety of ways, which include: softening women’s appearance and demeanor, sexualizing women, eliminating or altering women’s fight scenes to show women losing; having dominantly masculine men victimize and physically restrain and brutalize masculine women; utilizing victimization to restrict women’s movement through specifically gendered spaces, marking women’s masculinity as irrational and unstable; and by contextualizing Tris in terms of her heterosexual relationship with the most dominantly masculine man. The combination of these mechanism has the effect of clearly designating Tobias as the most dominantly masculine character, most notably
through his bodily power and his ability to control all spaces and the people, both men and women, in those spaces. The combination of these mechanisms, in feminizing masculine women, also obscures women’s bodily and narrative agency (Linder, 2011), turning powerful women in the book series into non-threatening victims that are unable to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

This film series in particular emphasizes the social production and construction of physical spaces and the importance of those spaces in the establishment and perpetuation of particular cultural gender and sexual norms (S. Low, 1996). The construction of physical spaces is also important in *The Hunger Games* and *Vampire Academy*; however, in the *Divergent* series, the faction system creates a more prominent visual emphasis on the construction of gendered and segregated spaces and on the normative behavior within those spaces. While, in the books, Tris is able to move through differently gendered spaces through the use of her physically powerful body, her intellect, and her cross-cultural code-switching, in the films, Tris’s movements, especially between factions, are restricted and she is punished for her deviant expressions of masculinity in both feminine and masculine spaces. Tris’s punishment often takes the form of physical violence at the hands of men. She is also clearly diminished through her relationship with Tobias, who always acts as her instructor and superior, not her equal. Following Ranade (2007) and Viswanath and Mehrotra (2007), the power dynamic in Tris’s relationship with Eric, Edgar, and Tobias is one that prevents Tris from actively constructing her own gender and sexual identity and provides each of these men with the physical and cultural power to claim the spaces around them and prevent others from reconstituting those spaces.
Overall, the films naturalize violence against women, men’s masculinity, and women’s femininity. In doing so, the films encourage viewers to model their own gender identity on that of the ideal masculine and feminine characters, Tobias and Tris respectively. The films make clear that transgressions of gender and sexual identity are forcefully punished and are therefore dangerous. In controlling the messages embedded in the films, each film and the series as a whole acts as a physical space that viewers are unable to claim ownership over, dismantle, or reconstruct. The films’ ways of knowing and being reduce women to sexualized, deviant, or otherwise weak objects and allow for the elevation of men to hero status, marking the films themselves not as potential sites for viewer interpretation and renegotiation of meaning, but rather as reinforcements of limiting gender and sexual norms.

In the following chapter, I discuss the Vampire Academy book series and film adaptation in regard to research question 1. I discuss the ways in which that book and film series align with my findings in chapters 5-8 as well as the ways in which the book series constructs Rose as a contemporary gothic heroine and in which the film undercuts that portrayal, framing Rose and other masculine women as sexualized objects. Following that chapter, I discuss the way each book and film series represents sexual violence. In that chapter, I attend to some of the ideological elements of each industry through the ways the books and films provide a drastically different representation of sexual violence. In chapter 11, I discuss the institutional aspects of this study, particularly the institutional imperatives that guide the film industry’s choices in the adaptation process, and I discuss the implications of my findings for audiences of each series, both book and film.
CHAPTER 9
GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE VAMPIRE ACADEMY BOOKS AND FILMS

In this chapter, I discuss the six-book Vampire Academy series (see Appendix D for vocabulary and summaries) and its single film adaptation, Vampire Academy: Blood Sisters. I address my first research question by pinpointing the ways in which this book series is similar to the others in this study in order to demonstrate the significant thematic redundancies that occur across all three series. I also briefly address the main thematic redundancies that occur across all three film series. I demonstrate the ways in which Richelle Mead, the author, challenges the conventions of traditional gothic vampire fiction and contemporary vampire fiction, subverting the normative gender roles and expectations of these styles by creating a host of strong and fully realized women characters of different races (vampire, human, dhampir) and by presenting Rose as an empowered, contemporary gothic heroine. I also discuss the significant contrast between the book series and film adaptation, specifically the film’s overt sexualization of women and the film’s blending of melodrama, horror, and pornography to contextualize masculine women as victims and as sexual objects.

Similarities Between the Three Book Series

Like the other two book series, Vampire Academy makes a distinction between men’s and women’s physical anatomy but also demonstrates that gender is performative and revisable, a concept discussed by a variety of scholars (Bean & Harper, 2007; Braithwaite, 2011; Butler, 1999). In identifying gender as a social construction, Mead, like Collins and Roth, allows for gender fluidity, thereby disrupting normative
understandings of gender and allowing for what many scholars (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Beal, 1996; Burns-Ardolino, 2003; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; Dutro 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe) identified as the possibility for multiple masculinities and femininities, any of which can be embodied by a man or a woman and both of which can be combined into a single individual’s expression of gender. Rose and Dimitri, Katniss and Peeta, and Tris and Tobias all represent gender fluid characters that benefit in the narrative from their combined expressions of masculinity and femininity, most notably through each character’s ability to be both emotionally expressive and controlled, physically aggressive and gentle, and demanding and compassionate. Each author seems to critique normative gender through this portrayal of gender fluidity as well as through the condemnation of staunchly and singularly masculine or feminine characters. Gilbert-Hickey (2014) discussed this idea in reference to The Hunger Games specifically, noting that Collins demonstrates the fallibility of rigid gender norms as well as ultra-masculine men and ultra-feminine women, a concept I discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

While Katniss and Tris are not always conscious of gender roles within their respective societies, Rose often actively contemplates the ideas of gender, sexuality, physical anatomy, and genetics. This active contemplation stems from the biological and social limitations in this fictional society whose existence revolves around the genetics of different races and the specific biologically limited reproductive combinations between different races. Throughout the series, Rose engages in taboo sexual relationships and contemplates her role within these relationships and the stigma attached to them. While Katniss and Tris’s gender fluidity is a more subtle disruption of normative gender, Rose’s gender fluidity and her sexual choices, namely those that are taboo, are a much more
overt challenge to her society’s political and social beliefs. Rose’s gender and sexual expression frequently disrupt a patriarchal class system that privileges Moroi men, denigrates dhampir women, and dictates “appropriate” sexual and romantic combinations. Rose’s active contemplation of gender and sexual roles within her society and her continual and active dismissal and challenging of those roles encourages readers to also actively engage in contemplation of the limits society places on women’s expressions of gender and sexuality.

Like the other series, this series also addresses the external regulation of women’s bodies, namely by men and political entities. Mead demonstrates how, as feminist scholars have noted, (Alexander, 1991, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Frankel, 2012; Salamon, 2008) women’s bodies are used as pawns in larger political conflicts and as sites on which political and cultural conflict is played out. Rose’s body, like Katniss’s and Tris’s, bears the physical effects of others’ power. These effects most notably include limits on her sexual choices, the restraint of her physical body, and the damage done to her physical body as a guardian. In addressing this type of conflict, each author imbues her protagonist with the mental, emotional, and physical endurance and power to alter the societal and political infrastructure that dictates a variety of regulations on people’s personalities, identities, bodies, and abilities within the society. Most notably, each book series critiques the caste-like socioeconomic system present in each society and the victimization of women within that system.

Rose in particular deconstructs her society’s political and social infrastructure through acts like dating another dhampir and a Moroi, by dating out of her social class, by feeding Lissa blood, by initiating and willingly engaging in biting as sexual pleasure,
by actively seeking and killing Strigoi, by advocating teaching Moroi how to use magic offensively, and by uncovering Eric Dragomir’s illegitimate child in order to help Lissa claim the throne. Rose’s agency and her active contestation of oppressive social norms, traditions, and rules demonstrate Rose’s complexity as a character and her self-directed nature. This kind of protagonist self-direction and agency is also demonstrated in each book series through the protagonists’ emotional maturity, physical strength, and sexual awakening. Day (2014) argued that for dystopian women characters, sexual awakening in particular and the experiencing of their bodies in new and empowering ways is often linked with the possibility of social resistance. Additionally, these women’s choices about their sexual experiences within romantic relationships marks them as “active, empowered subjects rather than passive, subjugated objects” (Green-Barteet, 2014, p. 37). Importantly, while romance and burgeoning sexuality is a significant element in Rose, Katniss, and Tris’s narrative arcs, it is not the only element. Each woman navigates a complex social world in which she builds meaningful relationships, develops a sense of self and identity, comes to understand the enormity of social injustice, understands the world differently as a result of near-death experiences, becomes more emotionally and physically able to approach conflict, and in which each demonstrates the importance and power of intellect, wit, bravery, selflessness, ownership over one’s body, and a refusal to classify oneself as a victim.

The idea that romance is only one part of a much larger narrative arc for these protagonists is important both in the establishment of their agency and in the separation of these texts from what N. Johnson (2010) identified as more classic past and contemporary teen romance novels in which girls’ physical beauty is correlated with
social power and in which willing self-objectification for male approval and pleasure is
glamorized (p. 68). N. Johnson (2010) discussed this idea in relation to contemporary
romance texts *A-List, Gossip Girl*, and *Clique*, arguing that in these texts, girls seek a
post-feminist empowerment through personal ornamentation, body modifications, and
product consumption in order to earn male affection; in these texts, heterosexual romance
as achieved through purchasing power is positioned as the driving force and often only
element of the women protagonists’ narratives (N. Johnson, 2010). Unlike the narratives
N. Johnson (2010) analyzed, the protagonists’ personal development in the books in this
study is only partially tied to their romantic life. Cummins (2015) discussed this idea in
relation to Rose, who she noted is not dominated by romance and instead is “smart,
active, strong, and protective of others” (p. 64). Mukherjea (2011) also discussed this
kind of narrative development in relation to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, suggesting Buffy’s
agency is linked to the development of a multifaceted self that does not rely on or seek
romance above all other things.

While all three book series situate the women protagonists as complex characters
with complex narrative arcs, the films subvert these women’s power, reducing their
narratives to ones of physical attractiveness, heterosexual romance, and dependence on
men. In featuring highly sexualized and commodified women and their heterosexual
romance, the film series reinforce Riordan’s (2001) argument that western media
representations almost exclusively feature women and girls as only able to “gain access
to power in society through the way they look and their sexuality” (p. 290), and that these
kinds of representations socialize girls to participate in activities “that cannot give them
direct access to economic or political power” (p. 291). I argue in this study that the
original book series in many ways challenge what feminist scholars (R. Gill, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; N. Johnson, 2010, Riordan, 2001) identify as post-feminist values, allowing for narratives that encourage young women readers to engage with their own sexuality while still attending to their other personal needs, developing a variety of skill sets, engaging in physical activity, developing non-sexual relationships, engaging in leadership, and disrupting social, political, and economic power relations.

**Similarities Between the Three Film Series**

The *Vampire Academy* film, like the other series’ film adaptations, establishes gender as relational and hierarchical, with men embodying masculinity, women embodying femininity, and men’s power trumping women’s, all concepts discussed at length by a variety of scholars (Alison, 2007; Beal, 1996; Bean & Harper, 2007; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). All three film series create what scholars (Alison, 2007; Braithwaite, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Consalvo, 2003; & Dutro, 2003; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009) identified as a hierarchy of multiple masculinities through which the films continually frame physically powerful, mentally stable, emotionally controlled, sexually aggressive, and violent men as dominantly masculine and heroic. In addition to utilizing this mechanism to subordinate (masculine) women, all three film series feminize women through their appearances, through sexualizing them, and by having dominantly masculine men either save or victimize masculine women. All three film series, in continually establishing dominantly masculine men and in subordinating masculine women also obscure women’s shared strength and support of one another, diminish women’s emotional, physical, and
intellectual strength, and generally underscore normative understandings of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence.

In this study, I have identified how there are thematic redundancies across all three book series and across all three film series. I have also pinpointed the nuances of each book and film series, demonstrating that although each book series challenges gender and sexual norms in similar ways and each film series utilizes similar mechanisms to reinforce normative gender and sexuality and victimize women, each book series and film series also features unique or emphasized elements to achieve these representations. In terms of the films, *The Hunger Games* series blurs the distinction between Katniss’s authentic and inauthentic performances (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014) of gender and sexuality and emphasizes distinctions between gender by masculinizing feminine men and feminizing masculine women. The *Divergent* film series also emphasizes this gendered distinction but does so by placing emphasis on the gendered construction of spaces, a concept discussed by urban studies and feminist scholars (Acarón, 2016; Halberstam, 1998; Koskela, 1999; Kwan, 2010; Nettleton, 2016; Ranade, 2007; G. Rose, 1993; Sommer, 1969; Valentine 1989; Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). *Divergent* also makes dominant men’s policing of those spaces visible through the victimization of women and through general physical violence; Acarón (2016), Koskela (1999), Kwan (2010), and G. Rose (1993) all discussed the ways that physical violence and the threat of violence, like the kind utilized in these series, are particularly effective for regulating social roles and spaces and for reinforcing power relations between men and women. The victimization of women that occurs in these films through this policing of gendered spaces and of gender itself is not merely symbolic. As Adams and Bettis (2003) argued,
discourses of any kind are meant to “normalize and regulate what is considered appropriate or normal behavior” (p. 76) and those ideas become situated as truth (p. 75). The consistency with which the three film series objectify and victimize masculine women establishes a discourse in which violence against women becomes normalized and in which women’s sexuality becomes highly regulated.

The *Vampire Academy* film sexualizes women more overtly than any other film in the study, framing masculine women as sexual objects and victims and fetishizing the brutalization of these women. This film makes masculine women’s sexuality and sexual appeal prominent and features these women in terms of emotional, bodily, and sexual excess, a concept Williams (1991) linked to melodramas, horror films, and pornography, three genres that the *Vampire Academy* film merges. In merging the elements of these genres, the *Vampire Academy* film dissolves Rose’s agency, situating her as a sexualized object whose empowerment is superficial and whose physical prowess and agency is continually undercut by dominantly masculine men. This film ultimately positions women’s bodies as spectacles, as defined by Mulvey (1975) and Williams (1991), turning Rose and Lissa into post-feminist vessels, as defined by R. Gill (2007a, 2007b, 2008). Their sexual attractiveness is clearly valued over any other quality by the film, creating a discourse that R. Gill (2007a) argued portrays women as only powerful and independent while fulfilling traditional feminine roles and that seductively repackages pre-feminist ideals as postfeminist freedoms “in ways that do nothing to question normative heterosexual femininity” (p. 270). In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the *Vampire Academy* book series features Rose as a contemporary gothic heroine mainly by establishing her physical, emotional, and mental strength, celebrating her
sexuality instead of framing it as deviant, and establishing Rose as a complex and fully realized character. I also discuss how the film adaptation generally sexualizes, victimizes, and restricts women and how this reduction of strong women to superficially empowered objects reinforces longstanding pop culture rhetoric that encourages girls and women to “seek limited forms of agency through commodified beauty rather than communal, political change that challenges power balances” (N. Johnson, 2010).

**Vampire Academy: Not Your Average Vampire Fiction**

Many scholars (Ames, 2010; Auerbach, 1995; Boyer, 2011; Callander, 2001; Doane & Hodges, 1990; J. Johnson, 1993; Mukherjea, 2011) have noted that throughout the history of gothic vampire fiction, it has been a genre that often reflects the political and social landscape of the time period and place in which it is produced and that the vampire narrative, particularly written by women, is a useful tool for both contemplating the power structures that establish gender, race, and class bias, and for redefining those power structures (J. Johnson, 1993). Mead’s series does align with other vampire fiction in this way, reflecting contemporary concerns, particularly surrounding gender, class, race, and sexuality. Although Mead’s series aligns with traditional gothic literature in this way, it deviates from it in others, which I elaborate on below. In particular, Mead seems to critique the way gothic literature often reinforces traditional gender roles for men and women and encourages power relationships that feature men as dominant and women as subordinate; she does this by calling on these conventions and then subverting them. In challenging these conventions, she creates a young adult vampire narrative that alters the normative scripts of traditional gothic vampire narratives that feature monstrous undead man20 villains and passive women (Backstein, 2009; Callander, 2001) and contemporary
vampire narratives that feature the perfect vampire boyfriend and passive women (Boyer, 2011; Mukherjea, 2011; Platt, 2010; Wilson, 2010).

Mead disrupts traditional and contemporary vampire fiction tropes in a variety of ways including through the breakdown of normative masculine/feminine and monster/victim binaries, as detailed by Burns (2012); through the creation of a woman protagonist who is physically, emotionally, and intellectually strong; through the celebration of women’s sexuality; through the creation of a lead vampire woman character who does not merely exist as a monstrous or sexually depraved other, as described by Ames (2010) and Callander (2001); through the egalitarian romantic relationships between Rose and Dimitri and Lissa and Christian; and through establishing consensual vampire bites as positively emotionally transformative, as described by J. Johnson (1993). Also important to the disruption of the normative gender and sexuality of traditional and contemporary vampire fiction is the way Mead presents a complex world in which there are a variety of fully realized and multifaceted women characters who have agency, have the power to save themselves and other women, and who defy the conventions of traditional gothic heroines, serving instead as empowered, contemporary gothic heroines, as defined by Harbin (2005). In the following sections, I demonstrate how Mead challenges traditional and contemporary gothic fiction tropes and gender relations. I analyze Rose as a contemporary and empowered gothic heroine in the books. I address these concerns both in terms of the book series and in relation to the film series, the comparison of which enables me to identify alterations during adaptation and better understand the kinds of institutional realities that may have necessitated the major
differences in the books and films, specifically in terms of how power, gender, sexuality, and violence is constructed and represented by each industry.

**Challenging Traditional Narratives**

Mead seems to call on the conventions of traditional vampire mythology in order to critique that mythology, which often served as a “warning about what would happen to the pure Victorian woman who succumbed to the lure of the mercurial and seductive man” (Backstein, 2009, p. 38), and which commonly depicted woman vampires as demonic and sexually depraved others whose fictional behavior was a clear warning about the dangers of real life women’s unchecked sexuality (Ames, 2010; Callander, 2001). In Mead’s series, sexuality is prominent; however, unlike with traditional lore, there is not a condemnation of women’s sexuality. Her series features women whose sexuality is framed not as depraved or threatening, as many dystopian protagonists’ sexuality is (Day, 2014), but as empowering through both body acceptance and through active choice in sexual partners and activities. There is certainly a push toward normative heterosexual identities in this series, as there is in many contemporary dystopian novels (Day, 2014); however, there is also a strong emphasis on the intimate physical, emotional, and mental bonds between women, the championing of which runs counter to the more heteronormative messages in the series. Lissa brings Rose back from the dead and heals her multiple times; Rose siphons Lissa’s anger and depression away from her, keeping her from the throes of mental illness; Rose feeds Lissa while they are on the run and after Lissa is kidnapped, thereby keeping her alive; Rose makes it possible for Lissa to become queen and therefore alter the oppressive social and political norms of their society; and both women frequently prioritize each other’s safety and happiness. These
examples demonstrate that Rose and Lissa’s characters are not only intimate and deeply
invested in one another’s success and survival, but they also demonstrate the idea that
romance and heterosexual love does not dominate their lives like it does in the lives of
many contemporary teen romance novel protagonists. Rose and Lissa are the multifaceted
selves that Cummins (2015) and Mukherjea (2011) identified as empowered.

In traditional gothic literature, the heroine is also frequently victimized and is
subject to the ever-present threat of a violent masculine power (Rives, 2006) represented
sometimes as a lover, a monstrous vampire other, or both (Callander, 2001; Harbin, 2005;
Rives, 2006). She frequently needs rescue from these sexually aggressive and violent
villains by paternal protectors (Callander, 2001); her reliance on a man, whether father,
brother, or lover, restricts her agency, marking her as passive and co-dependent
(Callander, 2001). The threat of men’s violence is made more immediate by the gothic
heroine’s restriction in the home, an element of traditional gothic fiction that parallels the
real life social restrictions placed on women at that time (Rives, 2006). This spatial
isolation emphasizes patriarchal power within heterosexual relationships; the home
structure metaphorically and physically limits women’s privacy, freedom, and safety
(Rives, 2006), confirming the way women are controlled by society at large.

Mead does situate Rose as a traditional gothic heroine in many of these ways in
one particularly prominent point in the story – when she is held captive and sexually
abused by Strigoi Dimitri. In this part of the series, Rose is both confined in a physical
domestic space and subject to the violent, cruel, and unpredictable whims of Strigoi
Dimitri, who fills the role of the traditional vampire, who Crawford (2014) and J.
Johnson (1993) described as predatory and animal, gorging violently on the blood of his
(often woman) victim in scenes that parallel rape and carry the subtext of erotic desire, control, and lust for power. Also, like the traditional vampire, Strigoi Dimitri’s narrative is one of “violation, exploitation, and pursuit” (J. Johnson, 1993, p. 75) and one in which he views Rose as property, and controls and abuses her partly in an effort to “control and abuse other men” (J. Johnson, 1993, p. 76). However, I argue that Mead situates Rose and Strigoi Dimitri as such in order to disrupt the traditional gothic heroine trope, replacing that traditional heroine with a more empowered contemporary version. Rose, unlike her traditional predecessor, is not delicate and pure, but powerful and complex, she is not helpless or passive in her relationships with men and instead develops an equal alliance with them, often rescuing them. Early (2004) and Harbin (2005) established all of these qualities, which Rose embodies, as representative of a contemporary gothic heroine. Like the contemporary gothic heroine Harbin (2005) described, Rose does not fear or flee from monsters; instead, she is drawn to the danger and “subversive power of the creatures she fights,” her relationship with the monster shifting from “hunter/quarry toward that of ally/lover” (Harbin, 2005, p. 27). Although Rose is trapped and violated, turned physically and mentally soft by her confinement and Strigoi Dimitri’s drug-like bite, Rose does not succumb to victimhood. Unlike her traditional predecessors who needed saving from monstrous evil, Rose saves herself. Rather than feature her as a passive and love besotted schoolgirl who is powerless to resist the charms of a man or needs a man to rescue her, Mead instead presents Rose as capable, independent, as a savior of herself and others, and as the most powerful agent in her own narrative.

Tangible restrictions. Rose’s power to escape Dimitri is symbolically tied to her clothing, which becomes a representation of both her confinement and her strength. At
the beginning of the series, Rose has stereotypical girlish concerns about clothing, dances, and popularity; she in many ways represents the post-feminist woman that R. Gill (2007a, 2007b, 2008), N. Johnson (2010), and Riordan (2001) discussed given that a large portion of her sense of empowerment stems from her physical attractiveness. Rose’s post-feminist “empowerment” and her concerns about physical beauty are quickly diminished in the series as she comes to understand the real life threat of mental illness, royal politics and policies, and death. However, when she is with Strigoi Dimitri, his limitations on her clothing combined with her captivity and the ecstasy of his bites retard Rose’s growth, situating her as a sappy, love-struck heroine. Strigoi Dimitri only brings her items that are normatively feminine and extravagant and that are unsuited for physical combat. In restricting Rose’s clothing choices, he not only restricts her movement and ability to fight, but he also establishes a relationship in which he is masculine and powerful and she is feminine and weak. Rose has a startling moment of clarity when she glimpses herself in the mirror and realizes how passive she has become. The clothing Dimitri has provided for her reminds her of the danger of her situation and of the danger she is in of losing the fundamental elements of her personality. This impressive moment of clarity fuels more, allowing her to snap out of her drugged haze and escape. In breaking away from Strigoi Dimitri, she negates the restrictive feminine clothing that both binds her and leaves her exposed, a trait that Harbin (2005) identified as integral to the contemporary gothic heroine’s narrative. Through her mobility and physical, mental, and emotional strength, Rose both confronts and rejects the patriarchal control Strigoi Dimitri represents.
Even during her captivity, Rose, unlike her predecessors, does not run from danger, she runs toward it. She is not prey; she is the hunter of evil monsters. She is not the protected; she is the protector. Early (2004) and Harbin (2005) identified these kinds of traits as indicative of empowered contemporary gothic heroines. Through this characterization and through the way Mead at first establishes Rose as a traditional gothic heroine and then has her shatter that identification, Mead seems to situate Rose as fundamentally different than and superior to her traditional gothic heroine predecessors. Perhaps the most important mark of the contemporary gothic heroine that Rose embodies is her refusal to play the victim. She is certainly victimized by Strigoi Dimitri, but that victimization is always contextualized not in terms of her weakness, but in terms of her strength – her strength to escape his mental and emotional hold, to physically fight him after escaping, to enter Lissa’s mind and help her to fight off another spirit user only hours after Rose’s own escape, and to rescue Dimitri in his most mentally and emotionally dark moments after being restored. Like the other women protagonists in this study, Rose is never permanently crippled by her victimization or by depression and anxiety, instead she acts as the contemporary gothic heroine and “repeatedly shatters any external attempt to define her as damaged” (Harbin, 2005, p. 31).

This idea is solidified in the final book in the series when Rose breaks up with Adrian and he confronts her about the collateral damage she has left in her wake. Rose notes,

Victim, that’s the difference between you and me…you said you were a victim. That’s why…that’s why ultimately, you and I aren’t matched for each other. In spite of everything that’s happened, I’ve never thought of myself that way. Being a victim means you’re powerless. That you won’t
take action. Always…always I’ve done something to fight for myself…for others. No matter what. (34537)

It is Rose’s definition of agency and this belief that ultimately fuel her ability to challenge the status quo and that marks her as a resilient, self-sufficient, and empowered contemporary gothic heroine, as per Harbin’s (2005) definition. Like Katniss and Tris, Rose is able to recreate herself after trauma, defy oppression, claim and embrace her own body and sexuality, and live a full life that includes but is not ruled by romantic love. It is these qualities that imbue Rose with what Riordan (2001) deemed individual agency, a form of both active resistance and independent action, both of which enhance Rose’s ability to control her own life and helps her to move beyond individual self-interest and toward actions that aid collective social and political transformations, an achievement Riordan (2001) identified as both empowering and agentic.

**The Practice of Biting: Celebrating Consensual Sexuality**

Another way that this series challenges and resists traditional gothic tropes and empowers Rose is through the celebration of women’s sexuality, sexual consent, and safe sex practices as well as through the condemnation of the tendency of traditional gothic literature to feature sexually depraved women vampires. In celebrating women’s sexuality, Mead highlights the importance of consent and choice in sexual activity. With Lissa and with Adrian, readers see an active and agent Rose engaging in empowering and pleasurable sexualized biting encounters that she initiates. These acts of biting, so unlike those in traditional gothic vampire fiction and contemporary young adult vampire fiction, are not only consensual, but they are sensual, pleasurable, emotionally transformative, and empowering, connoting profound intimacy. In Adrian and Rose’s case, the act of
bitching is also framed as sexually responsible since Rose, who does not want to get pregnant or contract an STD, asks for a bite as a substitute intimate physical encounter when they cannot find a condom. Additionally, Mead presents consent as a crucial element in meaningful and equal sexual encounters. Despite Adrian’s disappointment in not getting to have sex with Rose, he is clear that he respects her wishes and would never compel her to have sex with him (26663). Through this presentation of pleasurable and sexual consensual biting, Mead not only reinterprets vampire lore, but she also disrupts that lore’s tendency to feature hapless women victims who are helplessly seduced by a sensual yet demonic vampire man, who do not own or claim their own sexuality, or who themselves are turned into vampires that are identified as morally objectionable and sexually devious monsters themselves, a positioning that denigrates female sexuality.

Rose’s choice to engage in biting with Adrian is particularly significant in terms of Rose’s agency and rebellion against constrictive social norms. Initially, Rose’s understanding of biting during sex is predicated on what she is taught from childhood—dhampir women that give blood during sex are whores. Rose even comments that this act is dirty, humiliating (29018), and disgraceful (26678), feeling vehemently that dhampir women should not give blood during sex. Although this limiting understanding of dhampir women’s sexuality is deeply engrained in the fabric of Rose’s society and even though Rose herself subscribes to this understanding, Rose comes to understand how oppressive the blood whore label is and rebels against it by engaging in consensual biting. When Rose initiates a sexual encounter with Adrian and when she invites his bite, Rose demonstrates not only powerful and pleasure filled sexual desire but also a direct challenge to her society’s social rules and regulations that restrict her and other women’s
physical agency and desire. Day (2014) argued that in contemporary dystopian fiction, when women protagonists overcome “cultural conditioning regarding their sexuality” they can gain “the agency required to become women, leaders, and heroes” (p. 75).

Rose’s sexual choices, many of which conflict with social norms, are indicative of Mead’s own resistance to perceived notions of acceptable sexuality and limitations on women’s sexual power and choice in modern western culture. Rose’s choice to engage in intimate relationships that fall outside the accepted norm in her society and her pleasure in those relationships is also indicative of Rose’s agency, which is both self-oriented and works to achieve what Green-Barteet (2014) and Brown and St. Clair (2002) identified as subjectivity and the power to challenge oppressive social structures.

**Vampire Academy: Blood Sisters**

While the book series presents Rose as a challenge to the traditional, passive, and dependent gothic heroine, and therefore as a challenge to normative gender and sexuality, the film adaptation of the first book utilizes elements of melodrama, horror, and pornography to translate Rose and the other women in the series into sexual objects and victims. Visually, these genres all center on the emotional and bodily excess of the female body (Williams, 1991), and in these genres, “the bodies of women figured on the screen have functioned traditionally as the primary *embodiments* of pleasure, fear, and pain” (Williams, 1991, p. 4). In reducing women to their (excessive) bodies, these genres, and this particular film, frames women’s bodies as spectacles, as defined by Williams (1991) and encourages audiences to engage in erotic ways of looking, a concept discussed by Mulvey (1975), turning the women in the film into objectified others. The *Vampire Academy* film, more so than any other in this study, is a story of women’s
excess. Specifically, it is a story featuring “the gratuitous presence of the sexually ecstatic
woman, the tortured woman, the weeping woman” (Williams, 1991, p. 5), all of which
work in conjunction to solidify representations of women as sexual objects, as victims,
and as monstrous and depraved others, a representation that aligns with those in
traditional gothic literature. The film achieves these representations in a variety of ways,
including through Dimitri’s masculine power, through Dimitri’s undercutting of Rose’s
physical and sexual power, through the coupling of women’s sexual pleasure with pain,
through the visually erotic coding of masculine women, through women’s emotional
excess, and through Natalie’s awakening as a Strigoí.

**Phallic Power**

One mechanism the film uses to situate Dimitri’s masculine power and undercut
Rose’s is the highlighting of the woman-as-victim-man-as-hero trope, as defined by
Flitterman-Lewis (1994). This trope, a frequent element of melodrama (Anker, 2005,
2012) and of American film (Dennis, 2010), is achieved in part through Dimitri’s
character, who is featured as visually commanding, taking up a majority of the physical
space in a frame, specifically in relation to Rose. Dimitri is frequently featured actively
performing physically powerful acts that demonstrate his dominance over other men and
assert him as a savior of helpless women, traits he shares with film characters like Gale,
Peeta, and Tobias. These scenes occur throughout the film like when he snaps the neck of
a rogue Guardian who kidnapped Lissa, when he kicks a random falling ceiling brick into
Victor, and when he stakes Natalie. In these examples, Dimitri’s skill is shown in
melodramatic excess with ornate flourishes and quips that stand in stark contrast to the
somber deaths of his foes and the horror stricken faces of the women he saves.
He is also shown as sexually aggressive as well as staunchly heterosexual and as sexually dominant, traits that not only solidify him as dominantly masculine but also as the film’s hero. In particular, Dimitri’s dominant sexuality and his heroism are linked to stakes, a phallic symbol that doubles as a subtle reminder of not only masculine virility and power but also of the way the film is framed in terms of men’s power, men’s sexuality, and men’s pleasure, as it is in horror and pornography (J. Johnson, 1993; Williams, 1999). Like these two genres, the *Vampire Academy* film, despite featuring a woman protagonist whose book character narrates the story and exhibits physical and sexual agency, frames the narrative in terms of masculine pleasure. Williams (1999) questioned this kind of framing in pornography, wondering how female pleasure could ever be authenticated in a genre that is symbolically dominated by the phallus, even when it is not visually represented (p. 247). Dimitri’s stripping other men of their phallic power and his use of his own phallic power to punish and destroy what the film labels as monstrous femininity, and its replacement of Rose’s physical prowess and sexual agency, highlights William’s question.

Dimitri’s dominant masculinity, as demonstrated through the phallus, is particularly visible when fighting Spiridon. Dimitri dodges Spiridon’s phallic gun, which has just easily blasted a woman guardian onto her back. Dimitri disables Spiridon’s gun phallus and shortly after, when Spiridon pulls out his own stake, Dimitri disarms him and snaps his neck. In killing this prominent masculine challenger, Dimitri asserts his power, defeating yet another villain, affirming the hero-villain trope that aligns with what Anker (2012) identified as a classic melodrama narrative “of victimization and retribution, and a character triad of villain, victim and hero” (p. 136). Later, during a fight with Strigoi
Natalie, Dimitri’s stake becomes an extension of his own phallus. He thrusts out violently, penetrating her, his stake sinking into her chest amid the blood on her heaving breasts, and killing her. Christensen (2011) noted that in horror films, the “violent, penetrating weapons of the killers are meant to operate as phallic symbols, showing how the one who thrusts the phallus is the one who is superior” (p. 26). Although Dimitri is not the villain, he is certainly a powerful killer; his acts are monstrous and decisive, and his phallic weapon solidifies his superiority, both physical and sexual. Dimitri’s violent actions, like those of the men in the other films in this study, are marked as heroic not villainous. This framing separates him from his horror movie killer counterparts, allowing the film to promote sexualized violence while still condemning women’s sexuality. While Dimitri is positioned as the hero, Natalie represents the kind of dangerous femininity that Christensen (2011) identified as subordinate to men’s hypermasculinity in horror films.

**Masculine Heroes, Sexual Damsels**

Although Rose asserts sexual and physical dominance in some scenes, that dominance, unlike Dimitri’s, is always undercut. Dennis (2010) noted that in many Hollywood films, even the women who have “previously been a valued member of the team, displaying strength, courage, and superb fighting skills” (p. 24) are relegated to the role of damsel, awaiting rescue by a man. This situation plays out in the *Vampire Academy* film as Rose, who is clearly capable, is undercut by Dimitri repeatedly. When Rose first encounters Dimitri, she fells several guardians with ease, only to be taken down by Dimitri with a single hit. He catches her semi-unconscious body, cradling it like a small child, and in doing so, pronounces her weakness and ineffectual physical body.
Later, when she initiates a sexual encounter with Jesse, Dimitri must save her when she is unable to stop Jesse from biting her. In these kinds of moments, especially the ones in which Rose is defeated by or saved by Dimitri, the film equates Rose’s defeat and her victimization with her sexuality. In the first example, she is dressed in tight black clothing, her hair flowing and makeup done despite having just awakened. In the second example, she straddles Jesse, initiating sexual contact, but is unable to stave off his bite attempts despite her status as a novice guardian. Like the horror heroine who is sexualized and then killed (Lizardi, 2010; Weaver, 1991; Wee, 2006), Rose is visually presented as titillating in defeat. In these scenes her physical power and skill are reframed in terms of weakness and Dimitri’s power and dominance are reified.

The film’s framing of Dimitri as the hero and its framing of Rose’s normatively feminine sexuality as her most identifiable and important feature, are most prominent in a sex scene between them. The melodramatic excess is so abundant in this scene it is almost parodic, making their roles as masculine hero and feminine sex object pronounced. The soft focus and lighting, the crooning music, the fire burning in the hearth of Dimitri’s small dorm room, the over-the-top love laced dialogue, Dimitri unzipping Rose’s dress and throwing it in the fire, their matching black underwear including Rose’s lingerie, Dimitri lifting Rose up and throwing her on the bed, and the close up shots of the enchanted necklace that rests gently on Rose’s tan, supple, and heaving breasts all frame this scene as ideally romantic and emphasize Dimitri’s power and Rose’s sexuality. All of these elements combine to orchestrate a scene of emotional excess as defined by Stewart (2007) and Williams (1991). The mis-en-scene of this moment creates an overall seduction of Rose and the audience; while Dimitri’s body is
certainly featured, the scene most clearly and prominently positions Rose alone as the desired object through the repeated dissecting of her body in different shots and through the conclusion of the scene where viewers look down on her as Dimitri. The overwrought emotionalism and sensationalism, two of the defining features of melodrama (Singer, 2001), in scenes like this one, situate the film as one that fetishizes women’s bodies and idealizes specific kinds of women’s bodies – thin, white, toned, tan, and heterosexual – both in moments of pleasure and pain.

This film’s positioning of only certain types of bodies, sexualities, genders, and power relations as normal has ideological consequences. Because the film incorporates elements of melodrama, a genre that often features romance, and because “many young female readers regard teen romance novels as both reflections of how life works and guides for how to be happy and successful” (N. Johnson, 2010, p. 55), this film has the potential to glamorize non-consensual sexualized acts, women’s victimization, women’s overt sexualization, and women’s subordination to men. These films, like many teen romance novels, “represent a very selective rendering of the possibilities of feminine life experience” (Christian-Smith, 1987), featuring only beautiful women who are able to attract a man as ideal and situating this ideal as a guide for how women viewers should behave. In particular, the film’s fetishizing of Rose’s body aligns with what Bordo (1993) identified as a “network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination” (Bordo, 1993, p. 167) through the “continuing historical power and pervasiveness of certain cultural images and ideology” (p. 8). These representations of Rose’s normatively beautiful, sexualized, objectified, and often victimized body encourage women viewers to subordinate themselves and encourages
self-oppression through the adoption of homogenized and normalized mediated representations of ideal, normal, and natural bodies, gendered traits, and sexuality.

**Pleasure and Pain, Horror and Porn: Punishing Women’s Sexuality**

In this film in particular, the audience’s gaze is drawn to women in both moments of sexualization and victimization, too types of scenes that feature women’s excess, creating a narrative told through women’s faces that feature on them the film’s “alternating brutalization and idealization” (Flitterman-Lewis, 1994, p. 5) of these women. This kind of connection embodies what Mulvey (1975) identified as to-be-looked-at-ness; women serve as objects of a male gaze (an oddity given the largely female spectatorship). Women are situated as what Wee (2006) described as “imperiled sexually attractive women” (p. 52) that are looked at through a fetishistic or sadistic/voyeuristic gaze through which female characters are “rescued” from or punished for their sexuality and desire (Mulvey, 1975; Rieser, 2001). This idea most frequently plays out as the victimization of strikingly beautiful women, like when Lissa is tortured by Victor’s henchmen and when Rose is attacked by Strigoi Natalie.

In Lissa’s case, the scene features long close up shots of her flawless and terrified face, her body flanked by men when the shot pans out. J. Johnson (1993) identified these kinds of facial close ups as one of several key pornography shots to depict women’s sexual pleasure; in this scene, Lissa’s face, the expressions on it, and the unwanted touching of it by older and powerful men, situates Lissa as both a sexual object and a victim, equating the two. Victor, a close family friend who has served as a surrogate father figure, establishes his own power in framing Lissa as a sexual object, leaning close to her head and stroking her hair as he whispers to her, explaining the devastating effects
healing him will have on her body. During this scene, Victor’s henchman, an air user, tortures Lissa in a sexualized fashion, blowing air into her mouth and sucking it away, standing with a post-coital expression on his face. Not only is Lissa the subject of the male gaze within the film itself, but the film positions her as an object of the audiences’ gaze, her body both sexualized and victimized. This scene, which follows one in which Lissa is kissing her boyfriend and Rose and Dimitri’s sex scene, seems to punish both girls for their sexuality—Lissa through her sexualized torture and Rose, through the vicarious torture she experiences through Lissa’s brain. Like in slasher films, this kind of victimization of overtly sexual women is used to both police women’s sexuality and to condemn that sexuality, situating it as dangerous (Christensen, 2011) as well as wholly owned, used, and restricted by men. Like in slasher films, where sexually active girls are often “slaughtered like lambs in drawn-out voyeuristic scenes” (Rieser, 2001), this film lingers on the victimization of women, giving men characters the time and opportunity to draw out the torture of women. By featuring women’s sexuality in this way, slasher films tend to position women’s sexuality itself as monstrous, punishable, and in need of control (Rieser, 2001). Like the women in slasher films, whose sexuality is deviant and whose promiscuity is punished (Rieser, 2001), Rose and Lissa’s characters are marked as both deviant and punishable—Lissa through her connection with a powerful and unruly spirit magic and Rose in her sexual congress with multiple men as well as sexualized encounters with other women including Lissa’s feeding.

This idea also plays out prominently in scenes where Rose is bitten like in the opening scene of the film where Lissa feeds from Rose. Rose’s pain and pleasure are conflated. The camera zooms in on Lissa’s fangs and then Rose’s face, filled with both
pain and ecstasy; in the style of pornography, this shot and others like it are less about Rose’s individual experience of pleasure and more about the titillation of the act. J. Johnson (1993) noted that in pornography, often, techniques like facial close ups are not designed to “reveal the orgasmic nature of the female body” but instead are designed to “exteriorize the fantasy of a multiorgasmic female body as a characteristic of the text itself” (p. 33). Like porn shots that do not intend to convey the interiority of the woman’s experience (J. Johnson, 1993) and instead seek to produce a fantasy of insatiable female sexuality (J. Johnson, 1993), the shots of Rose’s and Lissa’s faces in moments of sexualized pleasure and pain seem designed to deny them individual identities and pleasure and instead reframe them as objects of a straight male gaze. Additionally, close ups of women’s faces and especially of their mouths, links women with excess – screams in horror films, weeping in melodramas, and moaning in pornography (J. Johnson, 1993), the moans (or the implication of a moan) in particular framing women in terms of sex. In Rose’s moment of excess, of pleasure and pain, the audience is encouraged to look on with masochistic pleasure as Rose’s own pleasure and pain are conflated in an erotic agony that from the start of the film frames Rose’s pleasure in terms of pain.

**Encouraging the victimization of women.** By featuring women in this way, the film, like many horror and pornography films (Lizardi, 2010; Wee, 2006), encourages the victimization of women, demonstrating that for women, pain and pleasure are inexorably linked. By creating this connection between Rose’s pleasure and pain, the film establishes that Rose’s narrative and the narratives of other women in this film are meant to brutalize, sexualize, and idealize masculine women, in that order, thereby situating ideal women as sexual victims whose sexuality is not their own. In shaping this kind of
narrative through the elements of horror, pornography, and melodrama, this film frames women, even women who are supposed to be powerful and unafraid, as terror stricken and weak, a concept Lizardi (2010), Weaver (1991) and Wee (2006) discussed in relation to the presentation of women characters in slasher films. Weaver (1991) noted that even though there are scenes of violence against men in slasher films, the violence in these films is overwhelmingly directed at women, and Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod (1988) argued that these sexually violent slasher films frequently feature “scenes of explicit violence primarily directed toward women, often occurring during or juxtaposed to mildly erotic scenes” (p. 759). This link between violence against women and eroticism is featured in the Vampire Academy film where the elements of pornography and horror are utilized to make masculine women appear both seductive and seduced, always highlighting their sexual desirability while preventing them from maintaining control over it.

The strongly erotic coding of women in the film, an eroticism designed for the heterosexual male gaze, speaks to the kind of erotic abundance so prominent in pornography (Klein, 2006, p. 249) including abundant sexual desire, responsivity, erotic connection, and erotic expertise (Klein, 2006, p. 249). While the Rose and Dimitri sex scene is certainly one of the most prominent moments of erotic abundance in the film, there is also a clear excess of women’s sexuality and women’s seduction of other women, which calls on the lesbianism porn trope that Williams (2006) discussed. These women are not just sexualized though, they are also featured as highly and volatily emotional and as vindictive and sexually depraved. All of these representations allude to horror, where women’s sexuality is policed (Lizardi, 2010; Weaver, 1991; Wee, 2006) or labeled
as deviant other (Lizardi, 2010; Weaver, 1991; Wee, 2006), and pornography, where women’s sexuality is presented excessively at all moments at the exclusion of all other traits. Mia, Ms. Karp, and Headmistress Kirova are examples of this kind of coding: Mia’s blood drenched threesome and images of her tryst with Lissa’s brother are featured prominently within her narrative arc; Kirova’s sexuality is foregrounded in her style of dress, her tone, her exaggerated facial expressions, and through her sexually charged and sexually threatening interactions with Rose; and Ms. Karp’s compulsion, which hypnotizes Rose, combined with her urgent touches, read as forcefully seductive. All three of these characters are coded as sexually deviant, with Mia and Kirova serving as unethical antagonists and Ms. Karp represented as mentally unstable.

These characters, especially in their interactions with Rose, reinforce the link in this film between violence and sex and reinforce the idea that women’s sexuality is deviant and dangerous. Additionally, while most men in the film are featured as strong, intelligent, sexually empowered, and in control, women are largely featured as ineffectual, depraved, unintelligent, frivolous, mentally unstable, easily duped, and unethical and are largely framed in terms of their sexualized bodies. Rich (1980) argued that it is important to validate positive relationships between women and to embrace the erotic power of women’s relationships. This film negates Rich’s ideas, framing women and their relationships with each other in terms of straight male pleasure, and as largely negative, superficial, or unimportant, especially in relation to women’s romantic relationships with men or men’s physical power. Additionally, as Bordo (1993) argued, in reducing women to their bodies, in particular sexual bodies and sexually suggestive bodies, their voices and desires disappear (Bordo, 1993, p. 6-7). This reduction of women
to sexual bodies and the clear differentiation between (positive) men and (negative) women in this film validates the notion that women deserve to be objectified and victimized and that women should be blamed for their own victimization.

**Women’s monstrous sexuality.** Natalie’s character in particular demonstrates the above ideas and calls on conventions of horror and pornography; her character embodies pleasure, fear, and pain and is a clear demonstration of excess. She is gothic horror’s monstrous and sexually depraved other and porn’s nerd turned sexual predator, her shocking change in clothing from demure to sexy marking her sexual change from good girl to bad. Her motivations for turning Strigoi are based both on a desire for her father’s love and on her prior abuses as an unpopular Moroi. In becoming Strigoi, she selects her first victim as an act of revenge for previous perceived offenses against her and she revels in his bloodshed. The film equates the killing of her first victim with losing her virginity. Briefel (2005) identified the act of revenge for previous offenses as one that “female monsters” (p. 20) undertake before sadistic rages in horror films, and she noted the connection horror films make between blood, menstruation, femininity, sexuality, bloodlust, and impurity. The *Vampire Academy* film frames Natalie in both of these terms when Natalie, covered in blood, remarks that it was more fun to take Ray’s life than lose her virginity to him to which Rose responds that there would certainly be more blood. This reference to vaginal blood calls on the horror genre’s marking of the female monster as abhorrent and demonic (Briefel, 2005) and frames Natalie’s femininity and sexuality as shameful, unethical, and depraved. This kind of allusion is certainly called upon in a shot of Natalie “post-coital,” her victim between her thighs as she raises her blood soaked face in monstrous triumph. The blood of her victims continues to flow from her lips down
onto her heaving breasts as she taunts Rose and explains the trauma of being a high school loser. Her tirade calls up visions of Carrie dripping menstrual blood in the locker room showers and later destroying the school (Briefiel, 2005), situating Natalie as the vengeful nerd, once taunted and now supernaturally powerful. Natalie’s stalking of Rose during their fight and her threats of turning Rose so they can be bff’s forever is reminiscent of Kirova’s sadistic seduction, further framing Natalie as depraved and also calling on an erotic subtext that reframes Natalie in terms of her sexuality.

Natalie’s kills and her own violent death by choking and staking serve as images of abjection, images that feature blood and viscera, the sickening and the horrific, all images that Creed (1986) associated with the monstrous feminine in horror films. In horror films, these kinds of images are situated as perversely pleasurable; this film features Natalie’s character as such – she is sexy and monstrous, desirable and dangerous. In constructing Natalie as monstrous, the film situates her at the crux of a variety of different borders that are used in horror films to construct monsters, according to Creed (1986). As a Strigoi, Natalie’s monstrous being is produced at the border between human and inhuman, man and beast, normal and supernatural, good and evil, properly gendered and not, and between normal and abnormal sexual desire. The situation of Strigoi Natalie at the intersection of these borders marks Natalie, her femininity, and her sexuality as an abomination that must be eradicated by a more normatively sexual (and easily controlled) Rose and her hero rescuer, Dimitri. The representation of Natalie’s character as a, “jarring juxtaposition of the moral and the monstrous, the sexual and the grotesque, the virtuous and the violent” (P. Gill, 2002, p. 16) epitomizes the way women are represented in this film. Masculine women are not simply feminized, they are brutalized, their sexual
pleasure conflated with pain. They are transformed into monstrous and sexually depraved others. They are portrayed as, “hypersexual and are punished regularly for their strength and independence” (Magoullick, 2006, p. 750). These portrayals are especially prominent and degrading when contrasted with the stoic and powerful hero, Dimitri, who in the melodrama tradition (Flitterman-Lewis, 1994; Stewart, 2007; Williams, 1991) thwarts the evil villain to save the suffering heroine and who himself undercuts these women’s power repeatedly throughout the film.

Recapping the Research Question

The Vampire Academy book series utilizes conventions of traditional and contemporary gothic vampire literature in order to deconstruct those conventions and reimagine a more empowering vampire narrative and heroine. Through Rose’s character and through a variety of women characters, Mead challenges the traditional gothic heroine character and the confining and normative gender and sexual roles she represents. This series is particularly unique in terms of the others in this study due to its use of supernatural elements and also due to the prominent focus on sexuality. More so than any other book in this study, this series of books presents frank discussions of sexuality. It depicts Rose’s sexual awakening, which in many ways coincides with her personal growth and maturity and with her ability to enact real social and political change. Rose contemplates her relationships with loved ones, actively thinking through her relationship choices and through what those choices mean for her and for others. Her ability to actively contemplate her sexual choices, to challenge her society’s sexual conventions, and the fact that her sexual choices are a part of her narrative arc, but not all of it, marks Rose as a empowered character as defined by Cummins (2015), Day (2014), Green-
Barteet (2014), Harbin (2005), and Mukherjea (2011). While the book series reimagines women’s sexuality, specifically in reference to gothic vampire literature, the film adaptation reaffirms normative understandings of women’s sexuality and promotes the victimization of women. Through that victimization, women in this film are sexualized, creating a link between women’s pain and pleasure. The film utilizes elements of melodrama, horror, and pornography to solidify this idea and generally features women’s bodies in terms of excess. In positioning women’s bodies in this way, the film encourages audiences to understand the women in this film as generally weak and helpless and to see them in terms of only their sexuality.

While book readers might understand Rose’s empowerment in terms of her body acceptance, her ownership over her sexuality and sexual choices, the strength of her physical body honed by years of training, her emotional and mental strength, and the strength of her friendships, the film audience might understand Rose’s empowerment in post-feminist terms, equating her sexualization with agency and choice. The film viewers might identify Rose’s sexualized body as both an ideal body, due to its alignment with western beauty norms, and as one of her own making rather than of the film’s making, which makes her conventional beauty seem natural, desirable, and yet also potentially achievable. Additionally, Rose’s sexuality, although seemingly empowering, is framed by the film in terms of men’s pleasure and not her own. This kind of discourse not only suppresses individual female sexuality and desire but also identifies men’s acts of (sexual) violence against women as acceptable and inevitable and encourages women to understand their own bodies as potential victims to male sexuality.
This film’s discourse also feigns women’s empowerment by situating women as active subjects and initiators of their own sexuality; however, that kind of sexuality, as Amy-Chinn (2006) argued, caters to heterosexual men and in fact relies on the heterosexual male gaze. By framing Rose in terms of this gaze but situating her conformism to this gaze as empowering, the film celebrates women’s “‘equality’ and their access to ‘choice’ (feminism), while marketing commodities that call for and support constant body maintenance (femininity)” (Projansky, 2001b, p. 80). This film, unlike the book series, conflates this kind of superficial empowerment gained through commodified beauty with self-directed action that challenges oppressive social and political systems. The presentation of Rose as empowered when she is not and in situations where her character and her actions are significantly altered from the book, invites the largely female audience to identify with Rose and to idealize the way her body is regarded by herself and others in the film, which in turn encourages that audience to replicate her beauty and sexuality. In the conclusion chapter, I will discuss the implications of this book and film series for audiences and for the field both theoretically and practically. I will also discuss all three series in this study and address the institutional mandates that account for the alterations from book to film as well as address the cultural significance of the changes made.
CHAPTER 10
SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE HUNGER GAMES, DIVERGENT, AND VAMPIRE ACADEMY BOOKS AND FILMS

In chapters 5-9, I analyzed the book and film versions of each series in this study in order to address my first research question about representations of gender and sexuality. In this chapter, I discuss the representations of sexual violence in the three book series and the three film series, and I demonstrate the pronounced differences between representations. I also demonstrate the ways in which the three book series rescript popular culture rape narratives, particularly those in visual media, by highlighting the power dynamics and intersectionality of this kind of violence and addressing sexual violence as an institutionalized practice. I also address the ways that the three film series express neoliberal postfeminist sensibilities, featuring women largely in terms of their bodies, eroticizing women’s bodies during victimization, and privileging men’s violence by creating a hero and damsel dynamic between the lead man and woman. In addressing these ideas, I also discuss the larger implications of these kinds of representations, specifically for audiences; I address these ideas at length in the conclusion.

Research Question Two

How do these books and films represent sexual violence; what are the norms established by each text? Is sexual violence referenced or portrayed indirectly or directly? What are the intended messages about sexual violence in the book? To what degree are moments of sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexualized violence, and gendered violence in the book cut from the film or altered in a way that changes the original
intended message of the scene in the book or significantly alters perceptions of the protagonist?

**The Difficulty of Analyzing Sexual Violence**

The topic of sexual violence is a difficult one to analyze and discuss due to the varied legal (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992; Shelby & Hatch, 2014) and theoretical understandings (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992) and definitions of what acts constitute sexual violence and what mental, emotional, psychological, and physical elements comprise a victim, a survivor, and a perpetrator. Even within feminist theory, there is little agreement about how to define these concepts and ideas, and feminists in different academic fields have engaged with these topics differently across time and place (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992). The topic of sexual violence is also made more complicated by news media (Anderson & Beattie, 2001; Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Deffenbacher, 2014; Meyers, 1994; Shelby & Hatch, 2014) and popular media (Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Conolly-Smith, 2013; Enck & McDaniel, 2012; R. Gill, 2007b; Patterson & Sears, 2011; & Rodier, Meagher, Nixon, 2012) representations of sexual and gendered violence, which often propagate rape myths and rape narratives that situate women as responsible for their own victimization (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-MacDonald, 2002; Moor, 2007; Patterson and Sears, 2011; Rodier et al., 2012); normalize men’s violent behavior (Alison, 2007; Deffenbacher, 2014; Enck & McDaniel, 2012; Rodier, et al, 2012); reframe gendered and sexual violence as an individual problem facing women rather than as a pervasive social and systemic issue (Enck & McDaniel, 2012; Patterson & Sears, 2011); downplay the myriad ways in which women experience abuse (Patterson & Sears, 2011); downplay the long term
psychological, emotional, and physical consequences victims of sexual violence experience (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen, & Stevens, 2011; Moor, 2007; Schulman, 1999); reinforce the assumed male aggressor/female victim dichotomy (Alison, 2007; Shelby & Hatch, 2014); frame perpetrators almost exclusively as psychotically violent male strangers (Deffenbacher, 2014; Shelby & Hatch, 2014); and neglect the intersectionality of sexual violence (Allard, 1991; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Crenshaw, 1991; Projansky, 2001a; Schulman, 1999).

In part, these types of rape narratives have persisted in recent decades due to a cultural shift toward neoliberal postfeminism (Baker, 2010; R. Gill, 2007b, 2008; Keenan, 2015; Patterson & Sears, 2011; Projansky, 2001a; Rodier et al., 2012), a shift reflected in modern media and pop culture, which places emphasis on individual selfhood (Baker, 2010) and on an individual’s responsibility for her own adaptation and progress (Baker, 2010). This neoliberal postfeminist emphasis on individualism, choice, and autonomy, “deflects notions of social and political forces constraining individuals” (Baker, 2010), thereby denying sexual violence as a pervasive social issue that reflects and cultivates masculine power (Rodier, et al., 2012) and requires long-term political and social solutions. This sensibility encourages victim blaming (Baker, 2010; R. Gill, 2008; Patterson & Sears, 2011; Rodier et al., 2012) and encourages women to internalize the male gaze and heteronormative understandings of beauty, gender, and sexuality through self-surveillance and consistent body modifications (R. Gill 2007a, 2007b, 2008; N. Johnson, 2010; Riordan, 2001). This sensibility reduces women to their bodies and equates women’s adherence to normative standards of physical attractiveness with women’s power and choice (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; R. Gill 2007a, 2007b, 2008;
N. Johnson, 2010; Riordan, 2001). This neoliberal postfeminist sensibility encourages women to “treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 177; Griffin, 2015), thereby reinforcing an illusion of empowerment and situating women’s bodies as eroticized and desirable sexual objects, prepped and ready for men’s sexual advances (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

This kind of representation in mass media pop culture texts, which frames women’s empowerment and independence only in terms of sexuality, equating their agency with commodified beauty (R. Gill, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; N. Johnson, 2010; Riordan, 2001), confuses issues of consent. The idea of consent and choice become complicated in this climate because:

frequently, even when women are silent (or verbalizing exactly the opposite), their bodies are seen as ‘speaking’ a language of provocation. When female bodies do not efface their femaleness, they may be seen as inviting, ‘ flaunting’…When these inviting female bodies are inaccessible or unresponsive to male overtures, this may be interpreted as teasing, taunting, mocking. (Bordo, 1993, p. 6)

This interpretation of women’s bodies within the context of a post-feminist culture that encourages women to ornament themselves to appeal to a straight male gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; R. Gill 2007a, 2007b, 2008; N. Johnson, 2010; Riordan, 2001) and frames women’s empowerment in terms of sexual commodity, can incite violence against women who are seen as simultaneously “asking for it” and denying men’s sexual advances (Bordo, 1993). This climate not only encourages sexual violence and victim blaming, it also results in what Bordo (1993) identified as women, “holding themselves to blame for unwanted advances and sexual assaults” (p. 8), resulting in the internalization of shame over one’s body and of self loathing (p. 8). In discussing the
book and film representations of sexual and gendered violence, and in framing them in terms of this post-feminist climate, it is important to revisit the concept of agency and define it in relation to violence against women.

**Defining Agency**

Neoliberal postfeminism frames agency in terms of a woman’s active choice to adhere to a specific sexualized persona and image (R. Gill, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; N. Johnson, 2010; Riordan, 2001), situating women as “active, desiring sexual subjects” (R. Gill, 2008, p. 42). This definition not only frames women only in terms of their bodies, but it also attributes agency to only certain kinds of bodies, those that align with normative understandings of femininity, sexuality, and beauty. As R. Gill (2008) noted, this definition excludes the bodies of Black women, older women, disabled women, fat women, and “any woman who is unable to live up to increasingly narrow standards of female beauty and sex appeal that are normatively required” (p. 44). In this study, I define agency much differently, recognizing the possibility that agency can be achieved through different means. As noted in chapter 3, agency is epitomized through the shirking of passivity and the active participation in rebellious acts (Green-Barteet, 2014), as well as through an individual’s refusal to “internalize the machinations of her society’s governing bodies” (Fritz, 2014, p. 20), which further aids an individual’s ability to utilize individual agency to aid collective social and political transformation (Riordan, 2001). These definitions of agency are illustrated by Katniss, Tris, and Rose’s characters in a variety of ways throughout each book series. In terms of sexual and gendered violence, collectively, the authors provide a variety of ways for women and feminine characters to express agency, which I discuss in this chapter.
Additionally, agency in this study is encompassed by the words *selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, and choice* and as the interplay between these ideas (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962). In discussing this interplay of ideas, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) noted that these concepts’ meanings overlap, influence one another, and are affected by one another. These words and their definitions not only encapsulate the active decision making of a character, but they also collectively demonstrate a character’s active contemplation and understanding of the self and of the forces that work to put limits on expressions of the self. Agency in this study is also best understood as a process; Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argued that the complexity of human agency in social action can only truly be captured if agency is situated within the flow of time, specifically in terms of being informed by the past (habit), being oriented toward the future (imagining alternative possibilities), and being oriented toward the present (contextualizing the past and present within the moment)” (p. 963).

This understanding, they argued, allows for the dynamic possibilities of human agency; in a social constructionist sense, *selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, and choice* are concepts that can be defined differently in different contexts and are changeable feelings that can be revised over time according to newly acquired information and experiences. This definition of agency suggests that empowerment stems from an individual’s consistent and active evaluation of the past and thinking about the future in order to operate in the present moment and that agency is developed through an evolution through which an individual learns to exercise independent thought, act autonomously, and recognize the self as an agent of social and political change. The protagonists in all three book series reflect this definition; they
engage in the process of consistently reflecting on past and future events, specifically in terms of sexual violence and institutional oppression, ultimately imagining new possibilities for their worlds and using that information to make informed decisions in the present. Katniss reevaluates her own ability to affect political change after witnessing Finnick share his story of abuse; Tris recognizes her own emotional and physical strength post-trauma and defines her sexual relationship with Tobias in accordance with that strength; and Rose evaluates her individual needs post-trauma, defining her relationship with restored Dimitri in terms of those needs. These women’s resistance of institutionally ascribed roles as victims – demonstrated through verbalizing stories of abuse, recognizing the abuse of others, identifying abuse as institutionally condoned, and physical acts of revenge, as well as their romantic partners’ respect of their power, strength, and individuality – can be understood as the creation of a new kind of myth. This myth creates hybrid heroines who “not only resist gender expectations to realize their ‘true nature,’ but also often find romantic love with men who appreciate their power” (Seely, 2007, p. 186). This kind of myth could help readers to imagine both a society in which “girls and women would know their strength, believe in their worth, and not internalize fear-based assumptions about their ability and safety” (Seely, 2007, p. 186) and in which women and men of all gender identities could serve as equal partners in romantic relationships.

**Books Series: Disrupting Rape Myths**

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the three book series disrupt rape myths in a variety of ways, including providing a variety of definitions of agency that include subtle and non-physical acts of resistance; demonstrating the significant impact sexual violence
has on the protagonists while allowing for the protagonists to still have full and complex narratives; limiting readers’ voyeuristic pleasure; creating an empathetic narrative of sexual violence through the protagonist’s first person narration; presenting true to life sexual violence scenarios and consequences of sexual violence; demonstrating the complex and intersectional nature of sexual violence; and demonstrating and critiquing the ways in which sexual violence is institutionalized, which privileges men’s violence and holds women accountable for their own victimization. In discussing the book representations of sexual violence, I first discuss prevalent representations in film in order to demonstrate the way that these book series rescript those kinds of visual rape narratives.

**Prevailing Rape Myths and Narratives: Contrasting Visual and Written Media**

In order to discuss the representations in the books in relation to those in the films, it is important to identify how rape narratives are commonly depicted in visual media. In discussing representations of sexual violence in American combat films, a type of film that aligns in many ways with the nature and content of the series in this study, Conolly-Smith (2013) noted that these kinds of films frequently feature women as erotic spectacles and eroticized others, thereby marking women as sexual objects. Often, these films present graphic rape scenes shown through the eyes of an uninvolved witness, which encourages viewers to share in the disgust that witness feels about the rape he watches but also simultaneously allows viewers to “consume the spectacle of sexual violence unburdened by any sense of direct complicity” (Conolly-Smith, 2013p. 235). Conolly-Smith argued that in using this kind of narrational stance and in creating a critical distance between the viewer and the rape, these films absolve the viewers and
“themselves of any responsibility for the images they show, yet simultaneously re-enact to an excessive degree the very type of violence they ostensibly condemn” (p. 235). By shooting rape scenes in this way, Conolly-Smith argued, directors reify hegemonic masculinity, reinforce prevailing modes of power, and frame rape as an erotic spectacle in that “the rape has to be witnessed by the characters (and, therefore, by the audience) in order for it to have its redemptive effect” (p. 241).

Representations of sexual violence and the victimization of women by men is also often used in films as a plot device that motivates heroic men to take action, often against perpetrators of evil (Conolly-Smith, 2013; Griffin, 2015); this idea takes shape in all three film series. Cato’s choking of Katniss prompts Peeta’s violence against Cato, Eric and Edgar’s choking of Tris prompts Tobias’s violence, and Strogoi Natalie’s brutlization of Rose, including a slap that sends her across the room, prompts Dimitri’s violence.

Featuring women and violence against women in this way reduces women to one-sided, one-dimensional, archetypal roles (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006; Griffin, 2015; A. Kessler, 2012). Additionally, television and film representations of rape have historically situated women as silenced and marginalized (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006); these representations often exclude victims voices and perspectives (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006; Conolly-Smith, 2013), resulting in a narrative that reframes women’s victimization in terms of spectatorship and voyeurism. As noted in chapter 9, melodramas, horror films, and pornography in particular feature women in terms of excess, and horror films specifically often sexualize women in scenes meant to titillate then show them being violently killed (Lizardi, 2010; Rieser, 2001; Weaver, 1991; Wee, 2006). Both horror and porn films
often frame women’s victimization in terms of men’s pleasure and power, reinforcing a sadistic and fetishistic voyeurism (Rieser, 2001).

The book series in this study disrupt traditional pop culture rape narratives, particularly televisual and film narratives like those discussed above, by placing readers in the heads of the protagonists who experience sexual violence both directly and indirectly and by presenting true to life sexual violence scenarios and consequences. Unlike the films Conolly-Smith (2013) discussed, these book series include scenes of sexual and gendered violence that are graphic without being gratuitous and that feature the victim’s perspective, a perspective that is frequently ignored in popular media (Conolly-Smith, 2013; Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006). These series do not position the reader as a voyeuristic spectator, as viewers are in many western film audiences, nor do they present instances of sexual violence as erotic spectacles through which women are silent victims reduced to their bodies. Even in scenes like those between Strigoi Dimitri and Rose, which are erotically charged, Mead is careful to make clear distinctions about the abusive nature of this relationship, and Rose is never reduced to her body alone.

**True To Life Representations**

All three book series work to counter the portrayals of sexual violence that Conolly-Smith (2013) discussed by denying voyeuristic pleasure during scenes of sexual violence and by creating a less exploitative and more empathetic narrative than those in many visual pop culture texts. By writing the narrative in first person, the authors force readers to engage intimately with the protagonists’ character since readers experience events in real time as they unfold for each protagonist. When the protagonists encounter or experience sexual and gendered violence in the book, readers, unlike the viewers
Conolly-Smith (2013) described, must experience that violence through the protagonists directly. This direct relation of sexual violence from the victim’s perspective limits the voyeurism of the reader by putting readers inside the heads of the protagonists rather than situating readers as uninvolved witnesses, and it provides insight into the effects of sexual and gendered violence that the protagonists deal with.

This kind of positioning of readers and instances of sexual violence is clear in *Divergent*, when Peter attacks Tris in the dorm room and again when Peter, Drew, and Al attack Tris near the chasm. In this book, Roth engages readers in a first person sexual violence narrative from the victim’s perspective and features a perpetrator and victim that are realistic, reinforcing real world power dynamics of gendered and sexual violence and reflecting the psychological, emotional, and physical consequences of this kind of violence. Throughout the first book, Peter serves as the main antagonist, sexually harassing and bullying Tris consistently. Peter at first uses abusive language to verbally demean, intimidate, and humiliate Tris, tactics Jamel (2014) noted victimizers often use. His behavior escalates throughout the first book, to non-contact unwanted sexual experience, an escalation that Black et al. (2011) identified as common in cases of sexual violence. This contact occurs when he traps Tris in the dorm room, uses words and body language in a threatening manner, and snatches away her towel to expose her naked body to a group of their peers. This humiliation is particularly insidious given Tris’s almost puritanical upbringing, and her feelings of humiliation, violation, and defilement align with what Moor (2007) identified as common rape victim responses during and post-trauma. Tris flees to the bathroom where she cycles through a series of emotions in quick succession, with vengeance prevailing. Hesford (1999) noted that this kind of revenge
fantasy “provides an example of how women negotiate, resist, or reproduce rape scripts with their bodies, actions, and narratives” (p. 193). In Tris’s case, her anger, pain, and humiliation, and later her PTSD, reflect real women’s narratives about being victims of sexual violence. Her PTSD in particular manifests itself in ways that align with Rothbaum, Foa, Riggs, Murdock, and Walsh’s (1992) findings, which noted that women victims of rape often experience depression, anxiety, flashbacks of the assault, avoidance, sleep disturbance including nightmares and insomnia, and difficulty concentrating (p. 456).

Peter’s continued and escalating violation of Tris culminates in a brutal scene in which Peter, Drew, and Al capture Tris, blindfold her, cover her mouth, punch her, kick her, slam her head into the ground, yank her hair, and attempt to push her over the edge of the chasm to her death. During this scene Peter’s actions correspond with Black et al. (2010) and Jamel’s (2014) research on the actions of perpetrators of sexual violence. Peter infuses unwanted sexual contact, as defined by Black et al. (2010) and Jamel (2014), into this encounter by feeling her breasts, and he uses an objectifying gaze, which is accompanied by sexually evaluative commentary that is meant to objectify Tris and demonstrate Peter’s power over her. Tris responds in accordance with what Jamel (2014) found to be some of the most common victim responses in situations of sexual violence, which include screaming and struggling with the offender. Peter reacts to Tris’s resistance by escalating the violence; he chokes her, holding her body aloft over the chasm. In this scene Peter is framed in terms of anger-retaliation and anger-excitation, ideas that Jamel (2014) discussed in relation to perpetrators of sexual violence. Peter’s violence against Tris is motivated by her outperforming him during initiation, leading to
anger-retaliation, and his clear joy in humiliating her during both encounters speaks to his anger-excitation.

Stranger danger. This sexual violence narrative not only provides a realistic depiction of sexual violence from a victim’s perspective, it also helps to dispel the pervasive myth about the majority of sexual violence offenders being psychopathic strangers; disrupting this myth is particularly important since most sexual offenders are acquaintances of or are intimately connected to the victim (Black et al., 2010; Shelby & Hatch, 2014). The persistence of the stranger-danger myth diminishes the role of gender, race, sexual orientation, and cultural values that facilitate a culture of sexual assault (Deffenbacher, 2014; Shelby & Hatch, 2014) and contributes to the notion that perpetrators of sexual assault are individually flawed and pathological, which excuses perpetrator culpability and further grounds the issue in individual terms rather than social and cultural terms (Shelby & Hatch, 2014). In Divergent, Roth presents a juxtaposition between stranger danger and acquaintance violence through a scene where Tris encounters an older factionless man when walking home to the Abnegation compound and through the development of Tris and Peter’s relationship.

In the encounter with the factionless man, there is clearly a sense of danger as Tris tries to free herself and as the man makes sexual insinuations. However, Roth does not repeat the “classic rape script” in which “a male stranger suddenly and violently attacks a woman in a deserted, public place” (Shelby & Hatch, 2014). Instead, it is Peter, who does not appear outwardly threatening like the factionless man does, who is a persistent and immediate threat to Tris. He continually humiliates, denigrates, and defiles her through aggressive acts meant to emphasize her vulnerability and his control. Through this
narrative, Roth seems to situate sexual violence as an assertion of power, not sex, a representation that aligns with what scholars have argued in relation to catalysts of sexual assault (Alison, 2007; Rodier et al., 2012). Through Tris, Roth demonstrates the power dynamic that drives sexual and gendered violence, she challenges the stranger danger myth, and she challenges prevalent myths that victims deserve to be violated or enjoy being violated.

**First Person Narratives**

Throughout this sexual violence narrative, Roth positions readers in Tris’s head, ensuring that readers experience Tris’s continued anxiety, her humiliation, her anger, and her desire for vengeance. They experience her post-traumatic stress, which includes anxiety, depression, nightmares, and suicidal thoughts. By showing sexual violence and its effects from Tris’s perspective, Roth undercuts the male gaze that is so frequently pandered to in visual representations of sexual violence, as Conolly-Smith (2013) argued; in presenting the narrative from Tris’s perspective, Roth does not grant the reader voyeuristic pleasure, and instead captures the “visceral horror of rape” (Conolly-Smith, 2013, p. 250) without exploiting Tris as a character. This kind of narrative is also present in *The Hunger Games* series and *The Vampire Academy Series*. Although Katniss is not directly involved in the main instances of sexual violence, she contemplates those instances in reference to her own life and potential victimization. Her contemplation of the sexual violence against others and her immediacy to the victims, specifically Finnick, forces the reader to also contemplate the consequences and catalysts for sexual violence. Katniss is also repeatedly victimized, namely through continued sedation. In one scene, she is in a state of paralysis as she is pulled from the arena. Plutarch appears above her
and slides her eyelids closed. Katniss, completely vulnerable, thinks: “They can do anything to me now and I will not even see it coming” (7564). These scenes position the viewer as Katniss and demonstrate the helplessness sexual violence victims often feel, as defined by Jamel (2014) and Moor (2007). In *Vampire Academy*, Rose not only experiences sexual violence indirectly, specifically when she witness several Moroi men feeding together off of a clearly high human women feeder, she also experiences sexual violence first hand when she is kidnapped by Strigoi Dimitri. Readers are privy to Rose’s conflicting emotions, which mirror those of victims in abusive relationships, specifically in terms of her being trapped in the cycle of tension-explosion-remorse-honeymoon, a concept explored by Allard (1991) and Enck and McDaniel (2012). Experiencing this cycle through Rose as it happens encourages readers to develop an understanding of the complexity of real world abusive relationships and empathize with Rose rather than blame her for her own victimization.

**Institutionalized Violence and Intersectionality**

In addition to grounding these sexual violence narratives in reality, these book series also demonstrate and critique the ways in which sexual violence is institutionalized and they demonstrate the intersectionality of sexual violence, a concept discussed by many scholars (Allard, 1991; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Projansky, 2001a, 2001b; Schulman, 1999), as well as the complexity of catalysts and effects of sexual violence, a concept discussed by Donat and D’Emilio (1992) and Schulman (1999). In particular, these texts align with scholars (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992; Projansky, 2001a, 2001b; Schulman, 1999) arguments that socioeconomic class and politics are elements that both contribute to and are affected by sexual violence. These texts demonstrate these ideas in
large part by framing sexual violence as both institutionally constructed and as a mechanism through which political entities maintain power, a concept that Alexander (1994) discussed at length.

These ideas are evident in The Hunger Games series when Katniss contemplates District 12’s Head Peacekeeper Cray’s sexual abuse of women and when she learns the truth about Finnick’s Capitol-forced prostitution. Cray is a minor character, but a symbolic one; he represents the Capitol’s power and its extension out into the districts. Cray actively takes advantage of women who are vulnerable and desperate. His victimization of these characters is repeated and serves as a reinforcement of his power and of the Capitol’s. While Cray is hated district-wide, he is never stopped; his position as Head Peacekeeper makes him untouchable. Through Cray’s perpetual unchecked abuse of desperate and starving women in District 12, enabled by his government job, Collins establishes the idea that under the Capitol government, women in particular are reduced to their bodies and those bodies are used as a kind of currency, a tactic that Alexander (1994) and Terry (2004) discussed. The Capitol’s ownership over women’s bodies is inescapable; the Capitol’s maintenance of its ownership and power is predicated on the perpetuation of poverty, which ensures that victims are permanently desperate. Collins demonstrates that impoverished women in particular are vulnerable to sexual violence, especially when they are supporting children, a concern noted by Terry (2004).

Collins’ representation of sexual violence in District 12 is particularly interesting given that she has created a world in which gender fluidity exists and in which men and women have no real restrictions on abilities or jobs. Collins imagines the possibility of a more flexible gender and sexual script, but also demonstrates the ways in which
institutionally created socioeconomic caste systems situate women as vulnerable and in which these government systems, run by men or masculinized bodies, work to deny women’s power by coopting women’s bodies, especially through sexual violence, in order to maintain political power, a concept discussed by Patterson & Sears (2011). Collins seems to comment on the difficulty of overturning this kind of system and on the insidious effectiveness of the use of mass media to propagate government oppression and instill a sense of hopelessness in its impoverished citizens. In this way, Collins highlights the intersectional nature of sexual violence. In this case, it is fueled by economic disparity, by political power, and by the historical context of the Capitol and district relations.

**Finnick’s narrative.** Important to her critique of a government system that institutionalizes sexual violence is Finnick’s sexual violence narrative. Finnick reveals that President Snow has repeatedly prostituted him and other victors, threatening to kill the victors’ families if they did not comply. When Katniss hears Finnick’s story, she makes the connection between Finnick and the women of District 12, between President Snow and Cray. In linking both of these instances of sexual violence and linking both with the Capitol, Collins situates sexual abuse as an institutional mechanism through which the Capitol controls people and regulates feminine sexuality for its own purposes. In this way, women’s bodies and feminized bodies, like Finnick’s in the book, serve as “sites for the production and reproduction of state power” (Alexander, 1994, p. 6). Collins creates a rape narrative that demonstrates the idea that “individual acts of violence against women are not simply isolated outbursts but practices that are structurally enabled by a rape culture” (Rodier, Meagher, & Nixon, 2012, p. 64) and by
the state, which acts as a perpetrator, protector, and manager of gendered violence (Schulman, 1999) through which rape serves as an expression of masculine power (Donat & D’Emilio, 1992; Rodier, et. al, 2012).

**Challenging Rape Myths**

Although the two scenes discussed above only take up a small portion of the overall narrative, they are poignant, each demonstrating the effects of institutionalized sexual violence and each addressing the idea of victimization. Although Katniss is only indirectly linked to the sexual violence in these scenes, she recognizes that under slightly different circumstances, she too could have resorted to selling her body to Cray in order to keep her family alive or could have been prostituted by President Snow. Implicit in her recognition is the acknowledgement of victimization and an understanding that when sexual violence is institutionally condoned and when sexual violence is a product of a government that deliberately keeps people impoverished, victimization is also a product of circumstance. Katniss does not condemn these women, but rather acknowledges that they are victims of the Capitol. There is no sense of disgust with the women in Katniss’s reaction, but rather with Cray and with the system that not only allows this abuse, but is also the reason for it.

These scenes, like others throughout all three book series, work to disrupt rape myths by situating sexual violence and women’s victimization not as women’s responsibility but as a pervasive social and systemic issue, by locating this kind of violence at the intersection of gender, class, and political power, and by demonstrating that men and women can be victims or perpetrators of sexual violence. The disruption of rape myths in these young adult texts is particularly significant when situated within the
context of contemporary young adult romance books that feature passive heroines (Christian-Smith, 1987), situate boys in positions of power within romantic relationships (Christian-Smith, 1987), encourage girls to defer to boys’ sexual desires (Christian-Smith, 1987), encourage girls to adhere to normative versions of beauty in order to attract boys (Christian-Smith, 1987; N. Johnson, 2010), and define girls’ agency in terms of purchases and body modifications that attract male romantic partners (N. Johnson, 2010). The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Vampire Academy book series, although certainly not ideal given their focus on largely white and straight characters, are series that work to undercut these kinds of romance narratives that reinforce women’s passivity, reframing contemporary young adult heroines as active subjects rather than passive victims whose existence revolves around patriarchal norms of femininity and men’s sexual pleasure. Analyzing these texts specifically is particularly important given their crossover into film. What is particularly disturbing is that the positive messages about women’s agency and the messages that rescript popular rape myths are completely lost through adaptation as the films for all three series embody post feminist sentiments that frame women as willing victims and that situate women in terms of their physical beauty and sexuality rather than as complex characters. In the conclusion, I discuss the implications of this change and address the institutional imperatives that may be the cause of these different representations.

Narratives of Agency

Important to Collins’ representation of sexual violence and the narrative’s disruption of prevalent sexual violence myths, is the way she distinguishes agency. Katniss recognizes that her own agency stems in part from the luck of having a father
who taught her to hunt, but is also, in large part, based on her own perseverance and skill, marking her as separate from the other women, who are victims. So, although there is no victim blaming, there is a definite distinction made about the role of physical action in survivor agency. This idea is again confirmed after one of many moments in which Katniss is sedated and altered physically without her knowledge or consent. When she wakes after being pulled from the second Games, she lunges at Haymitch, raking her nails, her only weapon, down his face. In this scene, Katniss, although victimized and without a real weapon, uses physical force to assert her agency.

While representations of agency as physically skilled and aggressive might seem alienating to some sexual assault victims, it is presented as only one possible option for agency. Katniss’s agency is also connected to her active contemplation of the victimization of others and her understanding that institutionalized sexual violence dehumanizes people and can affect any person at any time, regardless of ability. In this recognition, and in her recognition of Finnick’s strength in voicing his abuse, Collins seems to suggest that agency is defined by one’s ability to think for oneself and one’s ability to see through the veil of power defined by government institutions. Another option Collins presents for survivor agency is through the sharing of one’s sexual violence narrative. Finnick’s agency is not predicated on an act of physical aggression but on his bravery in verbalizing and sharing the truth of his abuse. Finnick’s sharing of his story encourages readers who may have experienced sexual abuse to share their own story, and in doing so, liberate themselves and begin a process of emotional healing.

The *Divergent* trilogy and the *Vampire Academy* series also offer varied definitions of agency through Tris and Rose respectively. In *Divergent*, Roth defines
agency in terms of Tris’s active fighting back against her attackers. Much like Katniss, Tris is empowered by her physical actions; however, unlike Katniss’s physical agency, which is often predicated on her resourcefulness, Tris’s physical agency is demonstrated through her willingness to learn proper offensive and defensive fighting techniques. In this series, it is not so much the ability to physically fight that marks Tris’s agency, but rather it is her desire to fight for herself that marks her agency. In the *Vampire Academy* series, agency is defined in a variety of ways including through forgiveness, self-love and acceptance, and through the drive to fight for oneself mentally, emotionally, and physically. This kind of agency is perhaps most pronounced when Rose is able to forgive Dimitri for his abuse of her when he was Strigoi and in her ability to determine what is best for her emotionally in terms of her relationship with Dimitri. Rose gives him an ultimatum, telling him that he must forgive himself and sort through his own victimization of being turned against his will before she will commit to a relationship with him. Rose’s choice to remove herself from the relationship until Dimitri can become whole again demonstrates that Rose’s agency is predicated on a deep understanding and acceptance of the self.

Collectively, these three series demonstrate different versions of agency, providing readers with a variety of scripts for recovering from victimization. Although these texts present a world that is unrealistic in many ways, they can still offer readers a chance to contemplate the self in important ways. Dystopian literature in particular often reflects the “central fears and concerns of the contemporary world” (Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013, p. 1) and simultaneously “has the power to help readers reimagine the world” (Dean-Ruzicka, 2014, p. 72). Basu, Broad, and Hintz (2013) argued that this kind
of literature, which addresses young readers who are “trying to understand the world and their place in it” (p. 1) engages with and presents “pressing global concerns: liberty and self determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and self” (Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013, p. 1). They also argued that while the far-fetched concepts and worlds in these texts might seem too fantastical to allow readers to imagine a projection of a possible future, these books “wildly fantastic premises may provide young people with an entry point into real-world problems, encouraging them to think about social and political issues in new ways, or even for the first time” (p. 4-5). Additionally, these types of narratives, with their “blatant didacticism” not only pinpoint problems with society but offer “something like a training manual on how to overcome the dilemma, reverse the damage, and start anew” (p. 5). By presenting sexual and gendered violence in ways that are honest and in ways that allow readers to identify different kinds of agency, the three book series in this study allow readers to safely project into the lives of the characters and test out the new scripts presented.

**Victims**

What is perhaps most important about these book series’ representations of sexual violence and the scripts presented is that these authors do not collapse a sexual abuse victim’s identity into only his or her body like the film adaptations do. Finnick’s character in *The Hunger Games* series is an example of this idea. Despite how sexualized Finnick is when he is introduced in the series and despite his victimization, Finnick’s character remains complex. His sexuality and his sexual abuse are an important part of his character, but they do not define his character. When Katniss learns the truth about
Finnick, she feels shame for her misjudgment of him. Despite her shame, there is a distinct sense that Katniss does not pity Finnick, and rather respects him, inherently knowing that his choice to share his story is an important one both in terms of the rescue mission and for his mental health. Katniss’s shock at what Finnick has suffered is a recognition of his suffering and of his experiences, while at the same time her enduring respect for Finnick and her love for his whole personality reinforce the idea that sexual assault and sexuality are significant parts of a person, but those parts do not limit or define who that person can be in the future.

Collins in particular also subtly dispels the perpetually reinforced myth that only men are perpetrators of sexual violence and only women are victims of it. In Finnick’s scene, it is clear that both men and women can be victimizers, predators, and perpetrators of sexual violence and that both men and women can be the victims of it, a concept discussed by Shelby and Hatch (2014, p. 404). Finnick clearly states that he and other victors were given as prizes and sold. Although he does not identify anyone by name, the term victors, as demonstrated in previous chapters, can mean man or woman, since both have an equal chance of winning the games. Katniss reinforces this idea when she wonders if Snow would have sold her too. Finnick’s story is also told through a careful selection of pronouns. He never says man or woman, he or she. Instead he uses the terms people, themselves, and patrons. These pronouns indicate that both men and women bought Finnick for their pleasures. Through the notion that men can be victims of sexual assault and that women can be perpetrators of sexual assault, Collins challenges normative understandings of sexual violence as a violation that only happens to women and is only perpetrated by men.
The Complexity of Sexual Violence and Abusive Relationships

An important way that these three book series contribute to meaningful sexual violence narratives is by demonstrating the complexity of sexual violence and of abusive relationships. The *Vampire Academy* series in particular devotes a significant portion of the series to delving into an abusive relationship between Rose and Strigoi Dimitri. Rose and Strigoi Dimitri’s relationship is one that adheres to a cycle of abuse that includes tension, explosion, remorse, and honeymoon phases as identified by Allard (1991) and Enck and McDaniel (2012) and that aligns with a variety of actions that qualify as relationship abuse (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015; “Intimate Partner Violence”), particularly when performed in combination. These actions include Rose’s fear of Dimitri, her avoidance of particular topics so as not to anger him, her confinement, and Strigoi Dimitri’s criticizing of Rose, his blaming her for his actions, his treating her as his property, his possessiveness, his unpredictable temper, his threats of physical violence, his threats to kill her, and his forcing Rose into sexual acts. Strigoi Dimitri’s behavior combines physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse, all of which categorize intimate partner violence.

Mead dispels common myths about relationship abuse through the Strigoi Dimitri/Rose scenes, namely those that situate women who stay in abuse relationships as masochistic, as provoking a partner’s violence, as deserving of rape, and as enjoying rape (Meyers, 1994), as well as those that identify women in abusive relationships as “very emotional, very submissive, very excitable in a minor crisis, very passive, very uncomfortable about being aggressive, very dependent, very gentle” (Allard, 1991, p. 196). Rose’s character is the antithesis of this description. By featuring Rose is this kind
of relationship, Mead demonstrates the real life complexities of abuse and the ways in which the cycle of abuse in intimate partner relationships is difficult for any woman to break free from, particularly when there is legitimate love involved in some portion of the relationship and when the abuser utilizes strategies to convince the woman to stay, whether they be apologies or threats.

So far in this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which the book series challenge popular rape myths and narratives and are able to feature sexual and gendered violence in ways that do not promote reader voyeurism and instead present realistic representations that allow for different kinds of agency. In the second half of this chapter, I address the film series representations of sexual and gendered violence and demonstrate the drastic differences between these two representations.

**Film Series: Eroticizing Women’s Victimization**

One of the most significant differences between the representations of sexual violence in the book series and the film series is that all three film series embody a neoliberal postfeminist sensibility. This kind of sensibility warps the books’ messages of empowerment in translation. The films seem to attempt to represent women, particularly Katniss, Tris, and Rose as empowered, yet the translation of these characters equates their (sexualized) bodies with agency, making them only superficially empowered. This kind of sexualization, which is most notably demonstrated through (masculine) women’s highly stylized appearances, equates women’s bodies almost exclusively with sexuality, a sexuality designed for a straight male gaze. Presenting women’s bodies as consistently conforming to normative gender, sexuality, and beauty creates scenes in which women are both sexualized and victimized simultaneously. In many of these moments, the films
romanticize women’s victimization by repeatedly creating a villain-victim-hero system. In this system, villain men physically abuse women who are made helpless by that abuse. Dominantly masculine men, who are also the victim’s love interests, save the protagonists from these villains. In these situations in particular, the films privilege men’s violence both by displaying it prominently and by framing dominantly masculine men’s violence as heroic. In framing men’s violence as heroic and in representing women in terms of their sexualized bodies, all three film series eroticize women’s victimization, which is not displayed as overt sexual violence but is instead replaced with surrogate scenes of sexual violence in which women are brutally abused.

**Neoliberal Postfeminism**

In demonstrating how these films align with a neoliberal postfeminist sentiment, I elaborate on my earlier definition. R. Gill (2007b) noted that postfeminist discourse situates women’s bodies both as women’s only source of power and as “always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgments of female attractiveness” (p. 149). As noted in chapter 9, this standard of attractiveness is one that aligns with hegemonic ideals that “closely resemble the heterosexual male fantasy found in pornography” (R. Gill, 2007b, p. 152) and is one that privileges only white, slim, young, heterosexual women. This kind of sensibility, especially as represented in contemporary media, collapses women’s identities into their bodies and confines women’s agentic capabilities to the “aestheticization of their physical appearance” (R. Gill, 2008, p. 44). Although neoliberal postfeminism posits autonomous self-determination (R. Gill, 2008) and individual choice (Baker, 2010; R. Gill, 2007b), it actually only encourages free
choice for women in terms of body surveillance and modification. This kind of emphasis on illusory individual choice frames individuals as responsible for avoiding vulnerability (Baker, 2010), thereby encouraging victim blaming (Baker, 2010; R. Gill, 2007b, 2008; Patterson & Sears, 2011; Rodier et al., 2012). The film series in this study encourage audiences, especially young women, to align their identities and physical bodies with the ones of the women onscreen. In doing so, the films also encourage young women viewers to see the victimization of women as a personal choice and as a romanticized and empowering one. In the following sections, I demonstrate the ways in which these film series promote neoliberal postfeminist understandings of gender and sexuality, both of which affect the messages about sexual violence and violence against women in these films.

**Collapsing Women’s Identities: Women’s Bodies as Sexy Bodies**

These films situate women’s bodies and body parts as the “primary source of women’s capital” (R. Gill, 2008, p. 42), placing emphasis on the normalization of women’s bodies through women’s strict adherence to narrow standards of female beauty and sex appeal (R. Gill, 2008). This adherence is not always overt, but rather aligns with the concept of performing not-performing that Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) identified in terms of Katniss’s consistent beauty despite the circumstances of Katniss’s poverty and exposure to violence. In presenting women throughout each film series, even malnourished, homeless, of battle-embroiled women, as highly stylized and effortlessly beautiful, in making this beauty visually prominent, and in connecting this beauty with sexuality, these films demonstrate that women’s bodies, and in particular specific kinds of women’s bodies – white, slim, young, and heterosexual – are empowered by sexual
attractiveness (R. Gill, 2008). These bodies are featured as eroticized, making women, specifically the protagonists and other masculine women seem “alluring, provocative, and mysterious as well as passive, yielding, and vulnerable – reconciling the impossible duality of unobtainable Madonna and sexually available whore” (Marchetti, 1993, p. 105). In creating this ever-present beauty and the Madonna/whore dichotomy, the films all sexualize women’s bodies, even in scenes of victimization. By featuring victimized women as perpetually and effortlessly normatively beautiful, women take on an erotic quality during victimization, especially in scenes in which they are being savagely choked, which happens across all three series in scenes that do not exist in the books.

Nowhere are these neoliberal postfeminist ideas more clear than in the translation of Natalie’s character in the *Vampire Academy* film. Natalie’s character and her transformation at the end of the film serve as a degrading and seemingly unintentional parody of female empowerment. Natalie’s character in the film is framed always in terms of her body. She is at first framed as unattractive. She hovers in Rose and Lissa’s shadow, continually talking about her desire to have a boyfriend and her invisibility to boys. When she turns Strigoi, Natalie frames her turning in terms of empowerment and personal choice, an explanation that fully aligns with neoliberal postfeminist discourses. Although Natalie does turn in the book, her transformation is understood purely in terms of her father’s emotional neglect of her and her desire for her father’s love. In the film, Natalie offhandedly mentions her father as one catalyst for her change, but even more prominently identifies her unattractiveness and her loser status in school as the major motivation for her change. Natalie states:
You don’t know what high school is like for a loser like me. I was so scared all the time. So weak. So sad. So lame. Now, my eyesight is perfect, my skin is clear, and so is my mind. I may be dead, but I have never felt so alive. (Waters, 2014)

Natalie equates her weakness with her unattractiveness and highlights her choice to modify her body in order to become more powerful and less fearful. Her body becomes a literal hard body that does not yield when Rose punches it. Her new powerful and femininely attractive body is accessorized by a short, low cut dress that reveals her blood drenched heaving breasts and her high heels. Natalie derives power from her now normative feminine appearance, which is not only made sexual by its stylization but also by her sexualized conquest of Ray, a former crush turned victim. In these ways, Natalie represents both what R. Gill (2008) coined the midriff and vengeful woman figures that are staples of postfeminist advertising. Natalie also invokes the hot lesbian figure (R. Gill, 2008), a heteroflexible figure (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012), in her battle with Rose, who is also highly stylized, dressed in tight black clothing, her flowing hair draped around her shoulders. This scene fetishizes both women, both of whom are victimized.

What makes Natalie’s Strigoi transformation so important in the context of this study and in the context of sexual violence, is the way this transformation is framed both in terms of her body and by her brutal death. She is made into a sexual object, designed, under the misleading notion of self-empowerment, for the male gaze, then she is choked and stabbed in the chest. This scene sexualizes her and then kills her. In doing so, this scene situates Natalie as responsible for her own death due to her active choice to turn Strigoi. It also, despite her relinquishing her soul to become Strigoi and her brutal death, suggests that her transformation from weak nerd to powerful and sexy Strigoi was worth
it, implying that for women, no action is too extreme when it comes to becoming more
normatively feminine as well as the idea that death is preferable to not adhering to
normative femininity.

**Normalizing Men’s Violence**

All three films remove the actual scenes of sexual violence, instead substituting
surrogate scenes of sexual violence that appear as scenes of men’s brutal violence against
women. These scenes often situate a man as a villain, a woman as a victim, and the
dominantly masculine man as the hero. Through this system, the films naturalize violence
against women by both indicating that women are to blame for their own victimization,
thereby alleviating the perpetrator of responsibility, and through the naturalization of
dominantly masculine men’s violence when saving women victims from villain men.
Dominantly masculine men’s violence, specifically Peeta, Gale, Tobias, and Dimitri’s, is
framed as heroic and romantic and is thereby normalized and even celebrated. The
romanticization of women’s victimization is created through this heroism, which justifies
men’s use of violence to save their victimized women love interests. These instances
occur repeatedly throughout each film series, serving to normalize this behavior, the link
between women’s sexualized bodies and their victimization, and the link between
women’s victimization and men’s heroic action.

In *The Hunger Games*, Peeta saves Katniss from being choked by Cato, the
villain. He is justified in his violence towards Cato in his saving of Katniss. In *Vampire
Academy*, Dimitri saves an injured, cringing, gasping Rose from Natalie, his killing of
Natalie justified by her choice to turn Strigoi. Victor, who makes his daughter turn,
serves as the main villain, which is asserted when Dimitri kicks a falling brick into his
face. In *Divergent*, this villain-victim-hero dynamic and the normalization and romanticization of men’s violence is especially prominent and is a consistent theme throughout the first two films. In the first film, the sexual violence scene with Peter, Drew, Al, and Tris is significantly transformed. There is no sexual aspect of the violence and Tris barely struggles. Unlike the book, which centers on Tris’s experience, the film centers on Tobias’s heroics. A large portion of this scene features Tobias singlehandedly defeating three other men while Tris cowers behind a wall. In this scene, Tris is a clear victim and her agency from the book is dissolved while Tobias is framed as justified in his violence against her attackers.

In *Insurgent*, there are two scenes of surrogate sexual violence, scenes that were added to the film during adaptation, that are particularly violent, and that justify both the villain and hero’s violence. When Tris, Tobias, and Caleb ride the factionless train car, Tris provokes a fight, a fight that seems to justify Edgar’s vicious choking of her, which is largely shot from a spectator’s perspective, positioning viewers as inculpable witnesses. When Tobias enters, he is the hero, saving a helpless Tris by pulling Edgar off of her and head-butting him to the ground. Tobias’s violence continues to escalate as the series progresses and culminates in a particularly ruthless scene in the Candor Compound where Tris is handcuffed and held captive by Eric. In this scene, Tris is again framed as the victim, and her actions seem to justify Eric’s violence when she tries to shove him over. Eric comes down on top of a fallen Tris and chokes her forcefully, his face filling the screen. Although the angle is shot from Tris’s perspective, the scene undercuts the importance of her perspective through Eric’s gratuitous violence. As Tris is escorted away in handcuffs, Tobias interferes, saving Tris. Eric provokes Tobias into a fight,
which is now justified by Tris’s victimization and Eric’s temper. When Tobias takes
down Eric, drags him into the next room, and executes him point blank with a bullet in
the head, his violence is not framed as cold hearted and callous, but as heroic. Each of
these scenes reinforces hegemonic masculinity by adhering to the idea that “masculinity
is protecting and providing for women” (Enck & McDaniel, 2012, p. 635), and in the way
that “a controlled use of force, or the threat of force, has been widely accepted as part of
men’s repertoire in dealing with women and children…as well as with other men”
(Connell, 2002, p. 94).

**Shifting the Focus Away from Women’s Perpetual Victimization**

What is perhaps most striking about the representations of gendered and
sexualized violence in these film series is the perpetual presentation of women as victims
as well as the way the films present disturbing scenes of victimization but then quickly
shift into different elements of the narrative, diminishing the victimization and
normalizing it. Katniss is continually sedated in the films. She is frequently sedated in the
books, but Collins spends time with Katniss in the moments during and after sedation,
prompting the readers to take in the inherent violation of Katniss. The films however
perpetually show Katniss’s sedation in terms of her weakness and shift the narrative away
from the physical, emotional, and psychological aftermath of this kind of violation by
shifting her focus to men’s and communities’ stories. At the end of *Catching Fire*,
Katniss wakes after a particularly disturbing sedation scene to Gale’s face - handsome,
slightly bruised, hair coifed, looking down at her, smiling. He minimizes her ordeal,
saying “you’re okay, you’ve just been asleep for a few days” (Lawrence, 2013). The film
continues to minimize her victimization by having Gale discuss his own tragedy and by
shifting Katniss’s focus immediately away from her assault to the decimation of District 12. The repeated shifting of focus from a victim’s trauma to a group’s trauma not only marks the victim as insignificant, but it also inherently reduces the severity and seriousness of the individual trauma itself.

*The Hunger Games* films also shift focus away from Finnick’s victimization and in doing so both masculinize him and shift viewer attention to the rescue mission for Peeta, of which Gale is a part. The limiting of Finnick’s story to a single screen in the control room or a disembodied voice deemphasizes his story and dissolves the immediacy with which Katniss and readers experience his abuse in the books. Finnick’s sexual violence narrative is completely forgotten when President Snow, in an added scene, appears suddenly on screen. In making the scene’s focus Snow’s discussion with Katniss and her love story with both Peeta and Gale, the film obscures Finnick’s abuse. Snow’s menacing demeanor and the clear pleasure he takes in taunting and hurting Katniss marks Snow as a predator and victimizer. The physical disappearance of Finnick and the appearance of Snow, Finnick’s abuser, essentially repeats Finnick’s abuse by silencing him and making Snow’s power the most dominant element in the scene. This same shifting of topics and scenes happens in the *Divergent* series as Tris’s victimizations are repeatedly merged into Tobias’s victories and problems. In *Vampire Academy*, Rose’s and Natalie’s victimization is quickly shifted into Dimitri’s saving of Rose, his love for Rose, and the dawning of a new day, symbolizing the complete resolution to the previous violence.
Recapping the Research Question

The representations of sexual and gendered violence in the three book series and three film series are particularly significant given that sexual violence is intersectional (Allard, 1991; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Projansky, 2001b; Schulman, 1999), making it the nexus of a variety of important issues, including gender and sexuality, both of which are topics discussed throughout this study. Overall, the three book series provide similar scripts about sexual violence. The books recognize what scholars (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen, & Stevens, 2011; Enck & McDaniel, 2012; Moor, 2007; Patterson & Sears, 2011; Schulman, 1999) have identified as the complexity of sexual violence, the intersectionality of it, and the far-reaching consequences for victims of sexual violence. While the films adhere to a straight male gaze, featuring women’s victimization as eroticized, the books situate readers inside of the protagonists’ heads where readers encounter sexual and gendered violence both directly and indirectly. By positioning readers in this way, the books encourage readers to empathize with victims of sexual violence but not pity them. The books also disrupt what scholars (Anderson & Beattie, 2001; Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Conolly-Smith, 2013; Deffenbacher, 2014; Enck & McDaniel, 2012; R. Gill, 2007b; Meyers, 1994; Patterson & Sears, 2011; Shelby & Hatch, 2014; Rodier, Meagher, & Nixon, 2012) have identified as a variety of rape myths that are often propagated by popular media, including those myths that identify psychotic man strangers as the most prominent perpetrators of sexual violence (Deffenbacher, 2014), that suggest women deserve and enjoy being raped (Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; & Meyers, 1994), and that blame women for their own victimization (Moor, 2007; Patterson and Sears, 2011; Rodier et al., 2012). These kinds
of scripts are particularly significant given the large female readership of these books (Deffenbacher, 2014) and given the target age group of these books. Women under the age of 18 are the most likely group to experience sexual violence (Black et al, 2010), making them an important demographic to engage in scripts that feature sexual violence in ways that demonstrate a variety of agencies, avoid victim blame, condemn institutionalized violence against women, and demonstrate that victims of sexual violence are profoundly affected by that violence but are not defined by it.

The film adaptations of these series do not offer positive scripts about women’s sexuality or the sexual violence perpetrated against them. The films reiterate hegemonic and heteronormative understandings of sexual violence as described by Connell (2002), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Enck and McDaniel (2012), including those that condone and even celebrate men’s violence and at the very least justify men’s violence against women and other men. These films also reiterate a neoliberal postfeminist ideal as described by a variety of scholars (Baker, 2010; R. Gill, 2007b, 2008; Patterson & Sears, 2011; Projansky, 2001a; Riordan, 2001; Rodier et al., 2012), which encourages young women to actively engage in self-surveillance and body modifications that conform to limiting American beauty ideals that specifically do not include non-white, fat, disabled, and non-straight women (R. Gill, 2008) and for the purpose of attracting a romantic partner. In encouraging this kind of postfeminist sensibility, all three films, and the Vampire Academy film in particular, also suggest that the choice to reduce oneself to the aesthetics of the body, specifically for the pleasure of others, is empowering and desirable. Despite attempting to empower the women protagonists through action sequences and witty dialogue, the films actually frame the protagonists and other
masculine women as both negatively feminine and as ineffectual. Not only are these women continuously undercut by men, but they are also victimized by men throughout each series in added scenes that make them appear not only physically weak but also as deserving of abuse. Through all of these mechanisms, all three film series significantly alter the original books’ messages and encourage women audiences to embody neoliberal postfeminist ideals and to internalize hegemonic understandings of gender, sexuality, and beauty.

In the final chapter of this study, I address the characteristics of the film industry specifically that may account for the differences in representations of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence in these series. In addressing these characteristics, I identify logistical elements that dictate alterations when adapting books to films. I also address the cultural and theoretical implications of these texts within the field and for audiences.
CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

In this study, I address the cultural phenomenon of young adult fantasy literature and films, specifically *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the *Divergent* trilogy, and the *Vampire Academy* series. Using social constructionist feminist and queer theory, I analyzed these book and film series in order to better understand how they represent gender, sexuality, and sexual violence and how these texts might cultivate particular attitudes and beliefs in regard to these topics. Narrative analysis helped to illuminate how these texts both legitimate and reproduce dominant forms of oppression and how the books in particular contest dominant ideologies while the films replicate normative understandings of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. Although focusing on the texts themselves yielded meaningful data, these data need context, both in terms of production and audience. The ideal research, as Kellner and Durham (2006) noted, addresses production, text, and audience, allowing for “a more complex sense of how culture and media actually operate in everyday life” (p. xii). Following Kellner and Durham (2006), this chapter addresses both audiences and industry. I speak to what my findings and the content of these texts might mean for audiences, especially young adult women. I also establish the importance of understanding a media text as a product of a historically, culturally, politically, and economically specific system and moment (Taffel, 2013). In this chapter, I demonstrate how the institutional and economic imperatives of the film industry might account for the alterations in content during adaptation. In particular, I speculate on how institutional mandates in the film industry – logistical, economic, and cultural – may influence the films and their presentation of such a damaging illustration of women characters and
women’s sexuality, a narrow representation of gender identity, and an overall condoning of violence against women.

Throughout this chapter, I address my third research question. Some parts of this question have already been addressed in previous chapters. Here I focus on the second half of this question, which asks: Which major themes, plot points, conflicts, scenes of violence, and character traits are significantly altered or cut entirely from the film adaptations? Factoring in logistical filmmaking procedures and concerns could any of these cuts or alterations have feasibly been retained during adaptation? What are the implications of significant alterations or cuts, specifically in terms of messages about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence? What are the theoretical implications of these texts and what meaning might they have for audiences?

In the following sections, I recap my findings, demonstrating the most significant thematic redundancies found during the study, and I discuss what these findings might mean for audiences. I address logistical, financial, and cultural elements that contribute to not just the alterations in adaptation, but to the ideologies presented through those changes and the overall films. At the conclusion of this chapter, I discuss how my study fits into and advances the current dialogue on young adult texts, and I discuss ideas for future studies.

**Thematic Redundancies**

The narratives produced in these texts, like any other media text, offer what Kellner and Durham (2006) identified as “patterns of proper and improper behavior, moral messages, and ideological conditioning” (p. ix). Griffin (2015) described the most frequent messages of pop culture texts when she noted: 

273
popular culture often and broadly depends on certain hierarchies of human behavior that are gendered: it represents women, men and children in certain ways (for example, as white, able-bodied, middle class, heterosexual), and it reproduces versions of the world that create and sustain certain ideas about what people can, or should, do according to a variety of (physical and psychological) attributes. (p. 10-11)

One major aim of this study was to determine what kinds of ideologies are embedded in each text, series, and industry. Specifically, I wanted to address how each text framed and represented the ideal man and woman, ideal masculinity and femininity, ideal sexuality for men and women, and sexual violence norms. My findings aligned with what Griffin (2015) identified as normative pop culture representations; the book and film series all generally privilege whiteness, able-bodiedness, and heterosexuality, and in doing so, these texts reproduce a narrow worldview and privilege normative ways of knowing and being. Below, I address the books and films separately, demonstrating how although the books do privilege certain identities, they also reimagine gender in important ways, while the films only seem to reinforce normative understandings of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence.

**Book Series: Messages of Empowerment**

Each of these three book series disrupts normative constructions of gender identity as well as feature frank and celebratory depictions of women’s sexuality and provide graphic but not exploitative scenes of sexual violence that portray the real life complexity of that violence. While the concepts of normative femininity and masculinity are maintained within these series, all three series present worlds in which men and women can embody either gender or gender fluidity. The mechanisms through which the books collectively empower the women protagonists and disrupt normative western
scripts about gender and sexuality include: featuring women and men as gender fluid and able to embody masculinity, femininity or both simultaneously; establishing romantic relationships in which the women and men have equal power and have shared mutual respect for one another; establishing that while each woman is in a romantic relationship with a man, each woman is owned by no one other than herself; imbuing women with the ability to cross-cultural code-switch, allowing for survival in disparate physical spaces; featuring the trauma of sexual violence without exploiting the women characters while also featuring the real life consequences of sexual violence including post traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and rage; demonstrating a variety of definitions of agency in relation to sexual violence including physical resistance, physical combat, mental resistance, sharing one’s trauma aloud, and recovering from trauma; providing the women protagonists with narrative agency, marking them as the driving figure of the plot not as a passive actor within it; having each protagonist act and think independently and grow emotionally over time; and imbuing each woman protagonist with mental, emotional, and physical strength that matches or exceeds that of her man and woman peers.

It is important to note that although I speak largely in terms of what I believe to be positive attributes across these collective series, all three book series also replicate some (alarming) dominant ideologies, specifically heteronormativity. These series’ privileging of both straightness and whiteness is not established in any overt denigration of non-straight or non-white characters, but rather in the virtual non-existence of them or in the use of them as minor characters. In the case of The Hunger Games, the Black characters seem to incite Katniss into action in similar ways as the women in refrigerators.
tropes that Griffin (2015) discussed; Rue’s death in particular provides Katniss with a reason to seek vengeance and to win the games. In the other two series, there are virtually no non-white characters at all, and those that are featured have little import within the narrative trajectory of the story, with the exception of Christina in the *Divergent* trilogy. In terms of non-straight characters, in *Vampire Academy*, there is certainly a strong and intimate bond between Lissa and Rose; however, Rose is always careful to distinguish that she and Lissa are not involved sexually. In *Divergent*, when minor non-straight characters reveal their sexuality, that revelation is corrupted by the narrative’s shift away from that revelation or through the tone of the revelation, which is framed in both cases as a confession and in relation to straight relationships. So, although these book series are progressive in terms of representations of gender identity, representations of women’s ownership over their sexuality, and representations of sexual violence, they also lack diversity, especially in terms of major characters. Although I do not address this issue further, I do want to make note of its importance and of the possibility to look at this issue more fully in a follow up study.

Though these texts proffer mixed messages, I argue that the ways in which they represent gender, sexuality, and sexual violence is potentially empowering to young adult readers both through the books’ use of dystopian settings and their alignment with feminist values. As Basu, Broad, & Hintz (2013) argued, fantasy and dystopian novels are suited to helping young adult readers engage with ideas of liberty, self-determination, and questions of identity. This process is aided by the use of first person narratives, which allows an author to insert the reader inside the mind of the protagonist, further allowing the reader to directly engage with the protagonists’ experiences including sexual
violence, first time sexual encounters, identity construction, emotions, and inner monologue. Young adult dystopian texts also combine an unflinching engagement with the problems of adolescence while at the same time adhering to the general hopefulness of the larger tradition of children’s literature (Basu et al., 2013). The weaving of these divergent threads allows for readers, through the protagonist, to envision a hopeful future despite bleak circumstances. Basu et al (2013) also noted, “writing for young people tends to balance the desire to please and instruct. (p. 5). While Katniss, Tris, and Rose grapple with intense suffering and while they carry a great burden throughout their respective journeys, they also undergo clear emotional growth and are expressed as fully realized characters with hopes, dreams, flaws, likes, dislikes, relationships, struggles, and most importantly, narrative agency. Because these characters are full and agent, and because they experience difficulty but are able to surmount those difficulties through their strength of will, personal skill, fortitude, and relationships with other strong women, the instruction given in these three series has the potential to empower young adult women readers.

**Feminist values.** These books also collectively represent the protagonists as empowered in ways that align with feminist scholarship, specifically in their representation of women’s bodies as powerful and agent bodies and as one part of a larger whole that defines the self. The representations in the books challenge those in pop culture media that feature women as “largely confined to a life centered on the body” in terms of both “the beautification of one’s own body and the reproduction, care, and maintenance of the bodies of others” (Bordo, 1993, p. 17). Katniss, Tris, and Rose shirk conventions of beauty, both conventions within their worlds and within modern
American culture, and instead, see their bodies in terms of, and actively develop their bodies into, capable, adept, talented bodies framed in terms of fitness, health, skill, and agency and utilized in resisting oppressive and unethical government regimes. Even when Katniss’s body is made over by the Capitol, she adamantly maintains her sense of self, finding solace in her natural body and in its endurance, as marked by scars that serve as reminders of her experiences, lessons learned, and triumphs. Also, although Katniss, Tris, and Rose are certainly concerned with the care and maintenance of others’ bodies, they take on more masculinized roles as protectors rather than as nurturers. Additionally, they put their own bodies, minds, and sense of self ahead of others in important cases, like when Katniss outruns Peeta to the cornucopia to survive the mutt attack, when Tris abandons her family, transferring to Dauntless to fulfill her own desires, and when Rose abandons Lissa in order to hunt Strigoi Dimitri and find closure.

While the films, following what Linder (2009) identified as traditional portrayals of women in action films, directly link female athleticism and physicality with passivity, to-be-looked-at-ness, and with “excessive displays of female sexuality, realigning the female image with established and restrictive notions of femininity” (Linder, 2009, p. 6), the books frame these women’s bodies in terms of independence and power. In the books, athletic bodies allow for these women’s “active acquisition of embodied subjectivity, a subjectivity created through the experience of being ‘in touch’ with one’s body, and the experience of the body as capable and competent in moving through and relating to people and objects in the space surrounding it” (Linder, 2009, p. 8). The ability of these characters to be in touch with their bodies, to see their own bodies as capable, and the way their sense of self is connected to their powerful bodies aligns with Howe’s (2003)
argument that “the self is inextricably rooted in the body” (p. 95) and that ownership over one’s body is intertwined with one’s psychological self-awareness and “capacity for understanding, reflection, and choice” (Howe, p. 95).

In order for a person to become what Howe identified as a fully integrated, well-adjusted self with full ownership over one’s own body and self, one has to consciously, accept the fact (the facticity) of one’s particular, concrete, physical existence – not just that one has a body, but that one has this body, with its specific limitations and possibilities, that one has a certain set of desires, a definite history, and so on. Becoming a self involves recognizing who one is (up to) now even as it may involve reconfiguring one’s future identity. And this is, not just metaphorically, but in a real sense, taking possession of who one is, of oneself as oneself. (p. 96)

Howe’s (2003) understanding of self-identification and self-possession aligns with Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) definition of agency, discussed in chapter 10, which identifies the importance of reflecting on the past and contemplating the future in order to determine one’s present course of action. Howe’s understanding also aligns with feminist scholarship that identifies the fundamental importance of recognizing differences between women and embracing those differences in history, experience, and identity (Butler, 1990; de Lauretis, 1986; Lorde, 1984). By Howe’s (2003) definition, in portraying women’s bodies as almost exclusively sexually viable, sexually suggestive, as an object, as victimized, and as passive, or as a combination of these, the films present women characters whose sense of self can only take shape in accordance with those roles. Although the books do not reflect the full extent of women’s differences, especially in terms of race and sexuality, they do allow for women characters’ self-possession; Katniss, Tris, and Rose are presented as self-directed, as engaged in different and meaningful relationships with women and men, as embodying different traits, abilities,
and skills, and as respecting and nourishing the power of their bodies. All three protagonists engage in reflection on their past selves and on what they want their future selves to be; in accordance with that reflection, they shape their course of action, often enriching their physical bodies through contact with nature, mutual sexual contact with a partner, and physical combat training. In these ways, the books make clear connections between these women’s minds, capable bodies, narrative agency, and sense of self. This complex and full representation of these characters encourages young women readers to see Katniss, Tris, and Rose as self-directed and self-possessed and to in turn imagine themselves as such.

**Film Series: Disempowering Women Through Point of View**

While the books both advance some important representations of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence and reinforce dominant ideologies, the films only seem to do the latter. The films, in translating the original narratives, fundamentally alter the women protagonists’ characters, reducing them from gender fluid and empowered characters with narrative agency to normatively feminine and sexualized characters who often defer to men’s intellect and physical power. The films portray the women protagonists and other masculine women characters from the book in accordance with traditional western beauty norms, presenting them as always and inherently sexual and as designed for a straight male gaze, even when these characters are under extreme duress within the film, including during times of war, poverty, homelessness, and malnourishment. These scenarios in particular reinforce what R. Gill (2007b) identified about post-feminist culture when she noted “girls and women are invited to become a particular kind of self, and are endowed with agency on condition that it is used to
construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy found in pornography” (p. 152). These films, through a variety of mechanisms, align women’s agency with physical beauty and with sexuality designed for a straight male gaze, cultivating a model of ideal femininity that encourages young women viewers to see their own agency in terms of physical appearance. This construction not only encourages viewers’ self-surveillance and passivity (disguised as agency), but it also situates the protagonists as subordinate to men and as only superficially empowered.

The mechanisms that produce this construction include: eliminating scenes in which women are physically dominant and violent; reducing women characters’ complexity by eliminating their more potentially disturbing features and actions, their flaws, and their humanity, which include selfishness, rage, suicidal tendencies and a thirst for vengeance; diminishing women characters’ mental, emotional, and physical endurance and power; undercutting women’s power when they do exhibit physical dominance by featuring them as losing fights they otherwise win in the books; masculinizing feminine men through displays of physical power and heterosexuality; framing women who express masculine traits as irrational and mentally unstable; sexualizing women in appearance and demeanor; softening masculine women’s appearance and demeanor to more closely resemble normative femininity; emphasizing heterosexuality and its grounding of women as feminine through a relationship with a dominantly masculine man; establishing a hierarchy of multiple masculinities where dominantly masculine men are brutally yet heroically violent, mentally and emotionally controlled, and sexually savvy; establishing subordinate masculinity by linking it with femininity; having dominant men victimize masculine women as a show of power and as
a way to police gender deviance; fetishizing the brutalization of women at the hands of 
men; establishing and maintaining symbolically gendered spaces through gendered 
violece; placing physical and symbolic limitations on women’s bodies and mobility; and 
framing the protagonists and their love interests’ respective femininity and masculinity as 
ideal and natural. These mechanisms are highly visual and are emphasized in the ways 
that the films translate the protagonists’ first person perspectives, which I discuss below.

**Translating first person narratives.** One major barrier to translating a book to 
film is that books use verbal modes, which are conceptual and discursive and follow a 
linear progression while films combine visual, aural, and verbal modes, which are 
perceptual and presentational (Bluestone, 1961, p. ix; McFarlane, 1996, p. 26). While the 
linear progression of a book directs readers in specific ways and offers direct insight into 
characters’ minds, the spatial orientation of a film bombards viewers with several 
simultaneous visual, aural, and verbal claims to their attention (MacFarlane, 1996), most 
of which cannot directly or consistently convey the first person psychological viewpoint 
of a character (McFarlane, 1996). In books, readers come to understand characters not 
necessarily through dialogue, but through their thoughts and what is said about them in 
narration (‘Adaptation: From Novel to Film’). In film, narrators largely disappear and 
although voiceover may be used, “generally the director, cast, and crew must rely on the 
other tools of film to reproduce what was felt, thought, and described on the page” 
(‘Adaptation: From Novel to Film’). Films must lead viewers to infer thought by 
illustrating the protagonist’s perspective through an arranging of external signs achieved 
through dialogue, characters’ body language and facial expressions, settings, costumes, 
music, a variety of shots including point of view shots, close-ups, over-the-shoulder
shots, high and low angle shots, fade ins and outs, and framing, and through editing (McFarlane, 1996; G. Rose, 2007). These techniques can shift the construction of a character by simultaneously reducing the original voice of the character and by adding layers of meaning through cinematic techniques including shooting the protagonist from an objective, exterior observer point of view.

All three films in this study significantly alter the original books’ messages by translating these characters’ first person perspectives in highly restricted ways that shift focus away from the protagonists’ direct point of view, except in moments of vulnerability and sexualization, and toward scenes in which the protagonist is presented as an object, especially in terms of physical beauty. I argue that the alteration of the books’ original messages is a product of logistical factors but also of institutional ideologies that dictate specific kinds of women’s roles in action films. In the following sections, I discuss the post-feminist sentiment embodied by the films and the ways that particular camera angles make this perspective clear. I also discuss the way that these techniques encourage particular kinds of audience identification, which in turn encourages consumerism. I also discuss the generic elements of Hollywood action films, identifying the ways in which this genre typically and historically relegates women to marginal, romantic, or domestic roles. I then discuss the cultural and financial elements of the film industry that converge to create films that generally denigrate or marginalize women and minorities, especially in order to center white men.

**Post-feminist sentiment.** The ways in which these films present the protagonist’s perspective, especially through certain types of shots, combine to construct post-feminist messages where previously there were none. These messages include what R. Gill
(2007b) identified as cornerstones of a post-feminist sentiment, including an obsessive preoccupation with the body, a pronunciation of “natural” sexual difference, and the strict regulation of women’s bodies, all of which are framed as empowering. These films align with what R. Gill (2007b) noted in terms of western media’s tendency to present the body as “women’s source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgments of female attractiveness” (p. 149), making the possession of a sexy body “women’s key (if not sole) source of identity” (R. Gill, 2007b, p. 149).

Although the books also feature women’s bodies as unruly, Katniss, Tris, and Rose do not subscribe to that classification and instead fight against the systems that seek to remake and define them, systems that seem to represent American culture and politics. In the films, the women’s bodies are a focal point, not in terms of power, but in terms of weakness, sexualization, and control by others. Katniss’s constant sedation and physical remaking is met with little objection on her part and her remade body, bound by fanciful dresses and the tight leather Mockingjay costume, is positioned as attractive and powerful. Tris’s body, which is slight but muscled in the books, is continually softened through lighting that highlights her styled hair and blemish free skin, especially in scenes where she is positioned as Tobias’s love interest, as well as through the way her body remains unblemished after brutal beatings. Rose’s slim figure and large breasts are paramount, always featured under tight, sometimes see-through clothing, even and especially when she is fighting.

The films’ shift of focus away from the strength of these women’s bodies, especially in terms of physical endurance of pain, and onto their consistently naturalized
(yet highly stylized) beauty both constructs these women’s bodies as ideally attractive, even in times of physical altercations, victimization, and in times of fear and vulnerability, and features their bodies as a key source of their identity, but one that is designed for others’ pleasure. The films’s framing of women’s empowerment in terms of their sexuality and physical bodies is achieved in large part through shooting these characters using objective exterior shots. These types of shots situate the viewer as a voyeur, especially during fight scenes or scenes of victimization, when women are enduring physical pain but remain sexualized through their naturalized beauty. These types of scenes present women as objects of a straight-male gaze both in the framing of women as fetishized warrior women and as victims of masculine violence and power. Additionally, the films objectify these women by limiting first person point of view shots and having those shots largely feature these women as vulnerable. This framing constructs a template for the ideal woman as thin, white, young, beautiful, sexual, and vulnerable. This construction is particularly concerning given the fact that these protagonists are framed by the books as heroes and are generally beloved by readers, indicating that film audiences will be primed to see the film versions of these characters as heroes. In reducing these protagonists largely to the role of damsel, victim, and sexual object, especially through point of view shots, the films encourage viewers to identify with these protagonists and see them as models of ideal femininity and sexuality.

**Point of view shots.** One of the most interesting and disturbing findings in this study is the repeated sexualization and victimization of women in the films. Katniss, Tris, and Rose, arguably the most empowered characters in their respective series, are often featured as helpless, vulnerable, and in danger in the films. As demonstrated in previous
chapters, the films, although not featuring sexual violation outright, repeatedly sexualize and then victimize and brutalize (masculine) women. This link between violence against women and the titillating, thrilling, or beautiful images of women, a link I discussed in chapter 9 in reference to horror films and pornography, encourages audiences to see women as objects of straight male pleasure and as titillating when violated or vulnerable. This kind of sexual objectification, which is framed as an empowering choice, is illustrated clearly in *Vampire Academy* when Rose climbs onto Jesse’s lap, initiating kissing and redirecting him back to kissing when he gets distracted or when she enters Dimitri’s room under a love charm and presents herself to him in lingerie. In these scenes, it at first appears that Rose is in control, using her sexuality to her own ends and her own desires. However, in these scenes, Rose lacks the ability to stop Jesse from biting her and must be saved by Dimitri, and in the sex scene, her body is on display, her heaving breasts a focal point of the scene. In the first example, Rose is sexualized then victimized as Jesse attempts to bite her without her consent. In the second, she serves as an object of Dimitri’s desires.

Despite the fact that all three books are written in first person from the protagonists’ point of view, the films rarely feature shots from the protagonists’ direct perspective or from tight, over-the-shoulder point of view shots. When Katniss, Tris, and Rose’s first person perspective is shown in this way, it is almost exclusively in moments of their weakness, fear, sexualization, or victimization. Katniss’s perspective is shown briefly when she is being waxed by her stylists; before she takes the stage for her first interview with Caesar; when she enters the arena; when she is pinned down by Clove; when Peeta applies medicine to her forehead wound; when she is ambushed by President
Snow in her own home; when she witness a man from District 11 get shot in the head; when she witnesses Cinna being beaten; when she awakens from sedation to Gale’s story of District 12’s destruction; when she steps on a skull while taking in the ruins of District 12; and when hijacked Peeta chokes her. Tris’s perspective is shown when she looks at her reflection while being comforted by her mother before her aptitude test; when she first meets Jeanine; when she looks down at the hole in the roof she must jump through at Dauntless; when Tobias taunts her after the jump; when Peter beats her and she watches Tobias walk away before Peter stomps on her face; in the moment when Tobias initiates their first kiss; during her fear landscape when Tobias approaches her to have sex then forces her onto the bed and pins her down; when she sobs over her mother’s dead body; when Tobias, trapped in a simulation, towers over her ready to kill her; when Peter taunts her about her parents’ deaths; when Edgar chokes her on the train; when she is interrogated by Jack Kang; and when Eric chokes her at Candor. Rose’s perspective is shown when a Strigoi jumps down from a tree and stalks her; when Dimitri pins her during sparing; when Ms. Karp compels her; during the sex scene with Dimitri who lies on top of her; and when Strigoi Natalie beats her up and taunts her.

These scenes represent a large portion of the small amount of direct first person and tight over-the-shoulder shots in these films, demonstrating how much of these protagonists’ first person moments occur when they are vulnerable, weak, fearful, sexualized, or victimized. Limiting these characters’ point of view to these moments seems to encourage the viewers to put themselves in the protagonists’ position mostly during moments of weakness. Conversely, these shots, during fight scenes in particular, place the viewer in an odd position. During both choking scenes in *The Hunger Games*
series and both choking scenes in the *Divergent* series, the perspective rapidly shifts between the protagonist and the attacker. In these cases, viewers are encouraged to both put themselves in the position of the protagonist who is being victimized and in the position of the attacker doing the victimizing. This kind of perspective switch seems to ask viewers to identify as both victim and victimizer, and in doing so, these scenes seem to also ask viewers to not only see themselves as victimized but to also see this violence as justified, through the eyes of the attacker. This kind of alteration during adaptation significantly alters the messages of the original books, and the point of view and objective shots that feature these women as sexual objects also reflect an ideology built by the cultural and economic history of the film industry that encourages specific kinds of audience identification, which consequently encourages consumerism.

**Audience identification.** The perspective shown in the films is significant, especially because these films adapt first person narratives, a narrative type that encourages readers to identify directly with the protagonist. Stacey (1999) defined female audience identification with onscreen characters, noting that identification means sympathizing or engaging with a character as well as relating to the point of view of a character by “watching and following the film from a character’s point of view” (p. 197). Stacey (1999) noted that this process “involves not only *visual* point of view, constructed by type of shot, editing sequences and so on, but also *narrative* point of view, produced through the sharing of knowledge, sympathy or moral values with the protagonists” (p. 197). The films in this study significantly limit each protagonist’s visual point of view, as noted above, and narrative point of view. There is no spoken narration in the *Hunger Games* films, Tris’s narration is expository and minimal, and even though Rose’s
narration is somewhat consistent throughout the film, it is expository and does not reveal any personal or profound information about her. These limitations on the protagonists’ narrative and visual points of view result in one-dimensional characters whose original first person story becomes subsumed beneath larger narrative arcs, including the stories of men’s physical dominance and heroism. These films, in limiting the protagonists’ visual and narrative perspectives, encourage audiences to identify with these characters almost exclusively in moments of weakness and sexual availability. Additionally, the objective shots of these characters, which represent a majority of the films, construct a limited view of the ideal woman, which is demonstrated through highly stylized actors who are continually positioned as titillating when vulnerable and as consistently and endlessly beautiful.

Although the translation of these first person narratives is in some ways affected by logistics, including techniques used to adapt a linear narrative into a spatially orientated one, the representation of these protagonists is also reflective of industry ideologies, which are in many ways contingent on the cultural history and the economic imperatives of the film industry. In the following section, I discuss how these films align with the traditional elements of Hollywood action films, specifically in terms of men and women’s roles. I also discuss the bottom-line mentality of the industry and its longstanding belief that strong women characters, or even films with women leads, do not sell. I address the way that the cultural and economic status of the industry encourages the production of action films that marginalize women characters, relegating them to largely domestic, romantic, or damsel-in-distress roles, and the production of films that construct the ideal woman as always and inherently beautiful and sexual,
further encouraging young adult women audiences to engage in consumerism of both the franchise brand and other products in order to model themselves after the physical appearance of the protagonists.

**Hollywood Action Films: Shifting Representations**

Action films in the 1980s set a precedent for contemporary action films in their systematic exclusion and marginalization of women’s perspectives (Gallagher, 2006). Gallagher (2006) noted, “with women absent or incapacitated, heroism – and effectively, the dispensation of social justice of any sort – becomes the *de facto* province of men” (p. 14). These kinds of films, made for a genre that has “historically been a ‘male’ genre, dealing with stories of male heroism, produced by male filmmakers for principally male audiences” (Gallagher, 2006, p. 45), reinforce “patriarchal structures of white male authority, privilege, and omnipotence (Gallagher, 2006, p. 46). Gallagher noted that the action films of the 1990s and early 2000s, in an appeal to women audiences, blended action, melodrama, and comedy, combining the traditionally male spaces of action with traditionally female spaces of romance and domesticity (p. 48). These blended genre films produced male leads that were more emotive and concerned with issues of family; however, these films still featured male mastery and men’s “ability to assert control over threatening situations” (Gallagher, 2006, p. 50) and privileged the power of the male body and its phallic extensions in the form of weapons and machines (p. 55). In an effort to attract larger audiences, many contemporary action films have offered sexy action heroines in an appeal to the genre’s traditional adolescent boy fan base as well as to women (p. 193). Women leads in films like *Charlie’s Angels* and *Lara Croft: Tomb*
*Raider* illustrate a modern tradition of protagonists that “combine martial-arts prowess, facility with weapons, and conventional female sexual attractiveness” (p. 195).

It is this shift that sets the stage for the representations of Katniss, Tris, and Rose as generally competent fighters whose skill must be tempered and ultimately trumped by their inherent beauty and sexuality and by their romantic interest. Gallagher (2006) demonstrates this idea using an example from *The Matrix*. He noted that “the film initially showcases Trinity’s fighting prowess” but once Neo’s abilities are manifest, “the film redefines Trinity’s character as insufficiently skilled to overcome the film’s powerful male villains and relegates her to a largely decorative and romantic role” (p. 202). Following this tradition, Katniss, Tris, and Rose are just skilled enough to look sexy while fighting, but must yield to men’s power, often falling prey to and cowering before men villain’s power and serving as the damsel-in-distress for dominantly masculine men to save. These films reinforce Stacey’s (1999) argument that popular cinema offers women audiences “idealized images of femininity” (p. 198) that contribute to “the construction of the ideals of feminine attractiveness” (p. 201); these ideals are largely constructed around women’s bodies and vulnerability, contributing to representations that construct women’s power and access to power not in terms of women’s skill or intelligence, but in terms of their looks and sexuality (Riordan, 2001, p. 290). This tradition of featuring women, especially those in action films, as femme fatales, romantic interests, or domestic entities, is profitable, as opposed to featuring empowered women who respect their bodies, because insecurity is lucrative (Sanchez, 2012) and sex sells (R. Gill, 2008). These films, like so many other contemporary action films, construct and define what is conventionally sexy and beautiful, which often appears as thin, white,
young, and heterosexual, and in doing so, encourages young adult women viewers to replicate that model, specifically through self-surveillance and through consumerism aimed at body modification, both of which are framed as empowering.

This construction of women in Hollywood action films is in part a product of the resoundingly white, male stakeholders in the film industry (Hunt & Ramón, 2015) who not only surround themselves with similar individuals (Hunt & Ramón, 2015) but who tend to green light stories that reflect their own world views, cater to largely male audiences (Griffin, 2015), and reflect an entrenched way of thinking that ignores the profitability of women audiences (Griffin, 2015). Griffin, in discussing women film writers, found that even though women are profitable audiences, writers are often instructed to cater to male audiences and write secondary women characters whose purposes never threaten “to distract the audience from the purposes of the men” (J. Kessler, 2008). Griffin (2015) argued that although Hollywood rationalizes male leads in economic terms, its exclusion of prominent women characters is purely sexist (p. 121). She noted that Hollywood, although allowing for male-led action flops, see female driven action flops, like *Sucker Punch*, as evidence that women cannot carry lead roles in action films, and as a result, “actresses who find themselves in the unfortunate position of leading a big budget failure find themselves on Hollywood’s discard pile much sooner than their male peers in similar positions” (Griffin, 2015). She also noted that even when Hollywood takes notice of women audiences it cuts corners with film-making in order to turn a bigger profit “by producing less high-quality films for female fans (something that the B-grade effects in the *Twilight* movies may attest to)” (Griffin, p. 123).
The construction of women as unendingly sexual and beautiful is also lucrative for film studios because they can license franchise merchandise that not only includes items like toys, games, concession items, and posters, but also clothing, cosmetics, and accessories, all of which hinge on the beauty and commoditization of the protagonists. Clothing, cosmetics, and accessories in particular provide audiences with ways to pretend, resemble, imitate, and copy these characters, all processes Stacey (1999) identified as ways in which female audiences identify with and reshape their own identities in accordance with the stars and characters on screen. This process of commodification, Riordan (2001) argued, is particularly important in communication because in addition to media commodities’ being able to produce surplus value for corporations or owners, they help shape consciousness through the circulation of ideological meaning” (p. 285). In the case of these films, Riordan’s (2001) argument about commodification is apt. She argued that the idea of girl power becomes “reified into tangible commodities bought and sold most notably by entertainment corporations,” which take “a use value, the idea of valuing girls” and change it into “an exchange value, commodities intended to ‘empower’ girls” (p. 290), ultimately diluting messages of agency and encouraging women to only see themselves as empowered when they adhere to the films’ constructions of ideal femininity and sexuality, constructions largely built by men (Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2014; Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Gillig, Lee, & DeLuca, 2015; Hunt & Ramón, 2015; Women’s Media Center, 2015).

This idea is demonstrated through the Divergent cosmetics line at Sephora, whose description of a multi-piece kit states: “Divergent – what makes you different makes you dangerous. This enormous multi-piece kit allows you to be brave, selfless, intelligent,
honest, and kind all at once” (“Divergent Cosmetics”). This and other descriptions for the line highlight the transformative quality of the cosmetics and the ways in which they can be mixed and matched for unique looks. *The Hunger Games* cosmetics line offers similar themes. Shiro cosmetics boasts *The Tributes Collection* of eye make up, so lovely “even the Capitol stylists would be impressed!” (“Shiro Cosmetics”). This collection offers shades titled “Huntress,” “Girl on Fire,” “Rebellion,” and “Remake.” The tone of these lines not only demonstrates the ways in which these franchises encourage women to transform their image, but it also demonstrates the clear alteration of the books’ original messages. Consumers are prompted to adopt the superficiality Collins and Roth denigrate and to be unique and empowered through the use of cosmetics and consumerism. In the next section, I discuss the ways in which this ideology is both financial and cultural and is deeply engrained in the history of Hollywood.

**Cultural Influences on Economic Decisions**

I argue that economic decisions, which engender the aforementioned ideologies, are deeply intertwined with cultural beliefs and with the historical inner workings of the film industry, an industry that consists largely of a “bottom-line mentality” (Wasko, 2008) and that reproduces the same kinds of films because “agents of profit-seeking multinational corporations,” in order to produce popular texts, “often proceed cautiously, aligning themselves closely with perceived gender norms and ideals” (Gallagher, 2006, p. 13). This profit-seeking mentality was cultivated throughout the history of film studios, but became especially clear in the mid 70s and the early 90s due to the success of *Jaws* in 1975, which became “a prototype for the modern blockbuster: a high-cost, high-speed, high-concept entertainment machine propelled by a nationwide ‘saturation’ release
campaign” (Schatz, 2008 p. 19-20) and *Star Wars* in 1977, which established the model for New Hollywood franchises, “i.e., the blockbuster-spawning entertainment machine that exploited and expanded the original hit in an ever-widening range of entertainment products” (Schatz, 2008, p. 20). Throughout the 90s, a series of high profile media mergers created several vertically and horizontally integrated multifaceted, media corporations. This oligopoly, comprised of Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, Sony, News Corp, and General Electric (Schatz, 2008, p. 27), took in over 85 percent of movie revenues in the early 2000s (Schatz, 2008, p. 27). These major historical industry changes have set the stage for present day film and marketing culture, in which a small number of media giants control the production and distribution of most global media content and in which a few conglomerates produce one third to one half of all theatrical releases which in turn account for 75-85% of all box-office revenue (Schatz, 2008). This kind of system allows for a small number of companies to dictate not simply what passes as entertainment, but what is constructed as normal in terms of gender, sexuality, race, ability, age, beauty, and violence.

Embedded deeply within this Hollywood history is the prevalence of men both on screen and behind the camera, a prevalence that has significantly contributed to the kinds of stories that get told in cinema (Griffin, 2015). In a longitudinal study by Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Gillig, Lee, and DeLuca (2015), which examined gender on screen and behind the camera in the 700 top-grossing films of 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2014, Smith et al found that women were drastically underrepresented both in top grossing films and behind the scenes. They found that out of 30,835 speaking characters in the top 700 films between 2007-2014, only 30.2% were female. In 2014, only 21.8%
of speaking characters in action and adventure films were girls and women. Their 2014 study revealed that female characters, and in particular female teens and young adult females, were more likely than males to be shown in sexy attire (27.9% vs. 8%), with some nudity (26.4% vs. 9.1%) and referenced as physically attractive (12.6% vs. 3.1%) (p. 1) and that female characters were more likely than males to be shown in domestic roles (p. 11). Their findings remained largely similar over this seven year study and when compared with one of their previous studies about films in the 1990s and other scholars’ work on representations of female characters in films from 1946-1955, Smith et al (2015) found “the prevalence of females on screen has not changed for more than a half of a century” (p. 5).

This study correlated these findings with the underrepresentation of women in content creator roles, revealing that in 2014, across the top 100 films, only 15.8% of 1,326 content creators working as directors, writers, and producers, were women (p. 13). These findings were in line with the findings of their previous studies. Additionally, across the top 700 films from 2007-2014, only 28 women have been directors. They found a correlation between female writers and producers and on screen representations, noting that films with at least one female writer had a significantly higher percentage of girls and women on screen than when films only had male writers (p. 13) and that when there was at least one female producer, on screen females were less likely to be depicted in sexually revealing clothing or with some nudity (p. 14). These findings indicate a significant cultural, institutional barrier of the film industry that affects how contemporary films are made and explains why so many films reflect a white, male perspective. Women have a much more difficult time finding meaningful roles as both
actors and content creators, meaning they have much less say in the way characters, especially women characters, are represented and in what situations they are placed within a story. The result of this lack of influence, according to Smith et al (2015) and Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper (2014) is that “females fill fewer roles and wear fewer clothes than males – communicating important information to viewers about their value to the story (Smith et al., 2014, p. 12). The value that *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Vampire Academy* film series give to women characters is that of damsel, sexual object, fantasy, and victim. These films communicate to young women audiences that these roles are natural, normal, inevitable, and desirable.

**Author Involvement Behind the Scenes**

Both *The Hunger Games* film series and the *Divergent* films included women in content creation roles, including the respective authors, while *The Vampire Academy* film did not. All three film series were directed by men, and in the case of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, both series were directed by multiple men. In accordance with Smith et al’s (2015) findings, out of the three series, the film with no women in content creating roles was the film that most sexualized women and did so significantly more than the other films. When considering the roles of Collins and Roth behind the scenes, it is important to remember that their presence does not necessarily correlate directly with more positive onscreen portrayals of women or with a faithful adaptation of their original messages. Although Collins publicly praised the first film and Gary Ross’s faithful adaptation in narrative and theme, her praise is centered on Ross’s world building and on the artistry of the designers, not on the translation of Katniss’s character (@Hollywood, 2012). It is also important to remember that financially, it behooves authors to promote
the films for several reasons. *The Hunger Games* in particular was so successful as a book that it spawned an unusual amount of merchandise for a book series (Carpenter, 2012). Collins’ support of the adaptations makes financial sense given that the more popular the films become, the more popular the books and book merchandise line will become.

In terms of *Divergent*, Roth states in an interview that she deliberately included a variety of strong female characters, noting “I didn’t just want heroines, but I wanted antagonists who were women also, just to show that women could really be anything, could be complicated and have strong ambitions” (The Guardian, 2013). Despite this statement, and her involvement behind the scenes, the films did not feature strong women characters, or rather, featured them but frequently undercut their power. In spite of this deviation from her original texts, Roth, across a variety of interviews, expresses her love for the films and repeatedly reminds readers that books and films are not “exact replicas of each other and they shouldn’t be they’re different mediums, they should communicate in different ways” (PagetoPremiere, 2014). She also praises the films on her own website, where she responded to seeing *Insurgent*, saying “Guys, *Insurgent* is great— and fun to watch. It is a tense, action-packed adventure of a movie. At certain points, my muscles were so clenched I felt like I had just done a series of push-ups. When I left, I immediately wanted to go back in and see it again. (I still do!)” (Roth, 2015). In this same post, she goes on to remind readers that changes are inevitable in adaptations and that she supports the changes made.

I argue that a variety of factors make Roth’s promotion of the adaptations important for her career as an author. Though Roth did not seem to intend to write the
book for the purpose of its adaptation, she did sell the rights to *Divergent* a month before it was published (Pearson, 2015), making the future of the book series largely contingent on the success of the first film, especially since the third installment of the book series was being written while *Divergent* was being filmed. Additionally, book sales often spike after the release of a film, making it important for her to publically support that film. At the time of *Divergent*’s release on March 21, 2014, the trilogy had sold around 17 million copies. In the two-year span since the first film’s release, the trilogy doubled its sales worldwide (Lesnick, 2016). If Roth had discredited the films, she would have risked this significant rise in book sales and would have jeopardized her future role as a producer in the series. Based on reports by Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper (2014), Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Gillig, Lee, and DeLuca (2015), Hunt and Ramón (2015), and the Women’s Media Center (2015), both authors’ promotions of the films, whether heartfelt or not, had implications on their future work in the film industry. Whereas in the book industry, they are virtually indispensible in terms of future series production, in the film industry, an industry that must “accommodate the needs and wishes of a huge number of people, from actors and crew members to financiers and executives at film companies, each of whom helps shape the movie the audience sees” (Bourne, 2015), they are simply one piece in a much larger whole. The authors’ key contribution to the film has already been made. Bourne (2015), in discussing book adaptations, noted, “the author has already done much of the hard work of honing the story and fleshing out the characters and if a book is popular, there’s always the chance that a good adaptation will draw fans of the original.” This fact makes these women authors’ complicity in the promotion of the film adaptations likely integral to their continued access to work in film and on their
adaptations. These institutional realities, which dictate women’s limited access to work in the film industry, have clear ideological implications. Women’s roles behind the scenes, according to Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper (2014) and Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Gillig, Lee, and DeLuca (2015), have significant effects on the kinds of messages that are produced in films. The industry’s relegation of women to non-creative roles and its push (whether clearly stated or unspoken) for women creatives to produce stories about strong men and supporting women, reinforces white men’s ideological viewpoints, restricts women’s access to shaping those viewpoints, and puts pressure on women involved in film to adhere to strict regulations. In terms of the films in this study, this industry ideology, contingent on not simply film logistics, but on cultural history, stagnant views about men’s and women’s larger societal roles, and profit, dulls the feminist messages of the original books and encourages not simply consumerism in women audiences, but an adopting of industry constructed ideals of women’s worth.

Contributions to the Field and Future Research

This study contributes to the field of writing on young adult texts by addressing three popular book and film texts using specific methodology and theory. So little of what has been and is being written about young adult texts, outside of the realm of pedagogy, uses theory to excavate texts. Much of the writing I found on young adult texts stems from the fields of literature or film, with little crossover between the two fields or consideration for comparing literary and film texts, specifically adaptations. Research that only addresses a book or film text in isolation ignores the larger cultural, historical, political, technological, and economic context in which these texts are produced. All of these factors contribute to why texts are produced, how they are produced, what
ideologies they contain, and how audiences consume and understand these texts. This study acknowledges the possibilities for texts to not just be polysemic, but to be understood and consumed differently across time and space by different audiences or by the same audience. While this study focuses largely on content, it also takes into consideration the production and consumption of these texts, allowing for a more complex understanding of how these texts came to be embued with particular messages and how audiences might receive or be influenced by these messages.

This study is unique in that it utilizes theory and a diverse set of literature to analyze these texts, and it addresses the original books and their film adaptations. This study also compares similar books and films, identifying thematic redundancies, which helps to address the larger culture of the genre both in book and film form. This study contributes to the scholarship on young adult literature and fantasy texts by addressing gender, sexuality, and sexual violence in tandem, connecting these issues and pinpointing the ways that the books and films shape narratives about these topics. Unlike most scholarship on young adult fantasy books and specifically on these books, this study fleshes out an analysis of how the books and the films represent sexual and gendered violence. I address sexual and gendered violence through an indepth discussion of victims, survivors, perpetrators, narrative agency, and intersectionality. I also utilized a body of research on sexual violence that helped me to address the ways in which the books feature true to life depictions of that kind of violence and the ways the films undercut women’s agency, both sexual and otherwise. In discussing sexual violence and narrative agency, I also address the differences in the literary and film use of point of view and how the use of a specific point of view contributes significantly to the
representations of sexual and gendered violence. This study is also unique because my writing about *Divergent*, and the *Vampire Academy* series in particular, is some of the only academic writing in existence on these texts.

This study is an important contribution to media and communication studies because it works toward a holistic approach to media analysis by incorporating research from a variety of fields and by addressing the construction of meaning across multiple media institutions. In this study, I brought together a diverse set of literature including literature that addresses the gendered construction of spaces, the political use of women’s bodies, horror films and pornography, war films, traditional gothic literature, multiple masculinities, teen romance novels, post-feminism, consumerism, convergence culture, and media institutions. Though these concepts may seem unconnected, the use of them in conjunction helps to create a unique understanding of the texts in this study and draw on and bring together book publishing and film production histories that help to uncover the complex network out of which specific ideologies are born, cultivated, perpetuated, institutionalized, and altered. By analyzing and comparing three different series, all of which shared common generic threads and commercial success, I was able to pinpoint some of the institutional ideologies of the book and film industries. Through this study, I was able to demonstrate that in large part, both the book publishing and film production industries largely reinforce the privileging of white, heterosexual stories. However, I also pinpointed the ways in which these book texts, and in particular, these specific authors, in the tradition of young adult fantasy literature, challenge social norms, especially those related to gender, women’s sexuality, and sexual violence. This study is also significant in its discussion of the transformation of texts and their meanings across media platforms;
the differences in messages between the books and films and the thematic redundancy across each industry’s texts suggests important implications for how young adult women might understand themselves and their place in the world as a result of interacting with the books or films. This study suggests that the ways in which popular culture texts, and in this case visual texts, construct narratives of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence can contribute to a hegemonic system that not only helps to shape young women’s understanding of themselves and their place in the world but that also has far reaching political, cultural, social, and economic implications for women.

This study has raised a variety of interesting issues and has laid the groundwork for future research endeavors, including those that explore the aforementioned implications for women audiences. In future research, it will be important to see if my findings are replicated across other similar young adult fantasy texts. In performing a similar study, I would open up the criteria to books written by men and books that feature men protagonists. I would utilize similar methods, paying careful attention to both how the men characters are constructed in those texts but also to how the women characters, major or minor, are represented, especially in terms of gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. It would be particularly important in that kind of study to make sure the original books were translated into at least one film. Possible contenders for a follow up study include Laini Taylor’s Daughter of Smoke and Bone trilogy, which features a strong woman protagonist and a graphic rape scene; Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson the Olympians series, which is commercially successful, has spawned several movie installments, and has been followed up by another full series; and The Maze Runner trilogy, a series that has been adapted to film and features an unusual segregation of boys
and girls throughout much of the series. Another possible direction for future study would be to analyze the texts in this study and these similar texts using theory that more directly addresses race and ethnicity and socioeconomic class.

Another possible focus for a future study would include more institutional research starting with an analysis of the marketing and advertising strategies for the books and films in this study as well as an in-depth political economy analysis of the companies that produced these texts. In that kind of study, I would trace company ownership, identify that company’s past forays into young adult texts, try to discern who is making funding and green-light decisions, and how these texts fit into the overall scheme of the parent company and its subsidiaries.

**Final Thoughts**

In performing this study, I have not lost my love of the original book series, though I have learned a great deal about how these series both deconstruct and reinforce particular norms. In doing this study, it became clear how little serious academic research is being performed regarding young adult texts and how high the need is to continue this kind of work. Also, in writing about gender and sexuality, and in actively excluding looking at categories like race/ethnicity, ability/disability, and class, it became clear that addressing these issues is of paramount importance. In continuing my work on young adult texts in the future, I hope to address some of my proposed research topics and help to provide insightful and meaningful academic work on a genre that has inspired me as both a fan and a scholar.
NOTES


2 Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children (Ransom Riggs), Daughter of Smoke and Bone (Laini Taylor), Grasshopper Jungle (Andrew Smith), The Immortal Rules (Julie Kagawa), Legend (Marie Lu), Monument 14 (Emmy Laybourne), Red Rising (Pierce Brown), Shadow and Bone (Leigh Bardugo), and An Ember in the Ashes (Sabaa Tahir) (Chen, 2015).

3 I address these concepts more fully in chapter 3, providing sources for these claims.

4 G. Stanley hall was “the first American to hold a doctorate in psychology and the first president of the American Psychological Association” (Cart, 2010, p. 4). He authored Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education in 1904 in which he established the concept of adolescence as a developmental stage. Although widely discredited, his views on adolescence were highly influential to the burgeoning group of youth workers in the early 1900s (Cart, 2010, p. 4).

5 The Babysitter’s Club series was created and outlined by Ann M. Martin. She hired a series of ghostwriters to flesh out the series. The most prominent of these ghostwriters is Peter Lerangis. He also worked as a ghostwriter on the Sweet Valley High series (Gavino, 2013). The Sweet Valley High series was created by Francine Pascal but penned by several ghostwriters under the assumed name Kate William (Allen, 2012, p. 262; Boesky, 2010; Patte, 2006a, p. 156). Authorial credit for the Gossip Girl series goes to Cecily von Ziegesar; however, she has no conceptual ownership over her series since the rights to the series and all intellectual property associated with it are owned by 17th Street Productions, a division of Alloy Inc. (Pattee, 2006a, p. 163). Although L. J. Smith’s name appears prominently on each of the 16 books in the Vampire Diaries franchise, every series beyond the original is ghostwritten (L. Smith, 2011) and Harper owns the rights to the entire franchise.

6 John Newbery (1713-1767) was an English publisher and recognized as the first person to create and market books specifically for children. His success was due in part to the changing beliefs in Britain that children were not simply miniature adults, but rather they were a group that had their own interests and abilities. In his later life, Newbery produced
a variety of children’s books aimed at educating and entertaining children readers, including the 1744 book *A Pretty Little Pocket Book* and *The Newtonian System of Philosophy Adapted to the Capacities of Young Gentlemen and Ladies* (“John Newbery,” n.d.).

7 The award, proposed in 1921 by Frederic G. Melcher and given annually since 1922, is given to a United States citizen or resident author who has produced that year’s “most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” (“Newbery Medal Terms and Criteria,” n.d.). Melcher proposed the award idea to the American Library Association meeting of the Children's Librarians' Section, and it was approved by the ALA executive board in 1922, making it the first children’s book award in the world (“The John Newbery Medal,” n.d.). The purpose of this award is to: “encourage original creative work in the field of books for children. To emphasize to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels. To give those librarians, who make it their life work to serve children's reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field” (“The John Newbery Medal”, n.d.).

8 While this book is generally recognized as the official origin of young adult literature in the U.S. (Cart, 2001, p. 96; Strickland, 2015, para. 5), there were a variety of texts published prior to 1942 that served as precursors to young adult literature, some of which could be considered early young adult literature’s beginning. Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and Hortio Alger Jr.’s *Ragged Dick*, both published in 1868, served as a catalyst for dime adventure novels for boys and girls (Cart, 2010, p. 8). Rose Wilder Lane’s *Let the Hurricane Roar* (1933) became one of the first books marketed at juniors (Cart, 2010, p. 9). Howard Pease’s *The Tattooed Man* in 1926 and Helen Boylston’s *Sue Barton Student Nurse* in 1936 marked the prominence of a literary subgenre of vocational fiction, inspired by authors’ real life experiences (Cart, 2010, p. 9-10).

9 This brand of hard-edged realism also spawned a variety of copycat books in the late 70s that were later labeled problem novels. Although problem novels were hugely popular with teens, these novels, in an effort at depicting realism, often lacked the artistry of their predecessors and focused more on intense, single subject issues rather than the telling of the story (Cart, 2010, p. 32).

10 *The Horn Book Magazine* and *School Library Journal*


12 Spin offs include *A-List*, *Clique*, and *The It Girl*. *A-List* and *Clique* featured 1,533 brand-name references in the book’s collective 1,431 pages (Cart, 2010, p. 94)

13 In the case of *Divergent*, Roth sold the film rights to her first book a month before it was published (Pearson, 2015). Despite this development, I maintain that her series was
not written for the purpose of film adaptation given the fact that it was fully produced before film production.

14 The numbers in parentheses following citations from the books in this study correlate to the locations in the ebook editions that appear in the reference list.

15 The original concept of the docile body comes from Foucault and his seminal work, Discipline and Punish. In this particular instance, I am drawing on Bordo’s (1993) use of the term, which is predicated on Foucault’s work.

16 “The social production of space includes all those factors – social, economic, ideological, and technological – the intended goal of which is the physical creation of the material setting” (Low, 1996, p. 861).

17 The term social construction may then be conveniently reserved for the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict, and control. Thus the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space – through people’s social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning” (S. Low, 1996, p. 861)

18 See Acarón (2016) for definitions of these terms.

19 Rose explains that only certain types of unions result in dhampir children. Vampire-human and vampire-dhampir combinations yield dhampir children. Only vampire-vampire unions result in vampire children. The bulk of this society sees vampire-human romance as fundamentally wrong despite its potential to yield more guardians who are high in demand and low in numbers. The bulk of this society also frowns upon dhampir-dhampir unions because in most cases, for this relationship to work, each dhampir would have to abandon their Moroi charge. The bulk of this society also frowns upon vampire-dhampir relationships. The society generally accepts that Moroi men will seek out dhampir women for sexual congress but will ultimately marry Moroi women. Communes of dhampir women left pregnant and alone by Moroi men are taboo, and the dhampir women are thought to be blood-whores. The term blood-whore is derogatory and is based on the rumor that dhampir women give blood to Moroi men during sex. Although the Moroi men seek out these women for sex, often cheating on their spouses, it is the dhampir women that are considered impure.

20 As noted in chapter 1, although the wording may sound odd, I utilize man instead of male in discussing vampire fiction in order to distinguish between sex and gender. This distinction allows me to discuss man or woman vampires as embodying male or female gender identities.

21 The contemporary vampire, especially those featured in young adult fiction, tend to construct modern men vampire characters with a mix of traditional vampire traits and
modern sensibilities, infusing the man lead vampire’s narrative with a human woman love interest, a desire to control his bloodlust, a mix of sensitivity and danger, and a profound guilt over the kills of his past (Backstein, 2009; Mukherjea, 2011; Platt, 2010; Wilson, 2010). The modern day vampire, like Edward Cullen of Twilight, is often a picture of self-restraint and morality, embodying the sexual experience, patience, affluence, intellect, and wisdom of an older man (Crawford, 2014; Mukherjea, 2011) as well as the boyish charm and innocence of a teenager (Mukherjea, 2011). Unlike his predecessors, this modern day vampire is often “benevolently paternal” (Mukherjea, 2011, p. 16), protecting and caring for the narrative’s heroine and exercising his powers of self-control over his violent sexuality and bloodlust (Backstein, 2009). Although the modern vampire and the traditional vampire interact with women differently, each interacts with women in ways that make women appear helpless and childlike, ultimately situating women as weak and inferior. Although typically written as first person accounts from a woman’s perspective (Backstein, 2009), the woman protagonist is frequently subsumed beneath the power of her vampire lover, and is contextualized in terms of her own seemingly contradictory mix of unrestrained sexual desire and passivity (Ames, 2010; Platt, 2010).

22 The passage reads: Cray would have been disliked, anyway, because of the uniform he wore, but it was his habit of luring starving young women into his bed for money that made him an object of loathing in the district. In really bad times, the hungriest would gather at his door at nightfall, vying for the chance to earn a few coins to feed their families by selling their bodies. Had I been older when my father died, I might have been among them. Instead I learned to hunt (4933).

23 “A young, attractive, heterosexual woman who knowingly and deliberately plays with her sexual power and is always ‘up for it’ (that is, sex)…Midriff advertising has four central themes: an emphasis upon the body, a shift from objectification to sexual subjectification, a pronounced discourse of choice and autonomy, and an emphasis upon empowerment” (R. Gill, 2008, p. 41).

24 “Closely related to the midriff is the figure of the vengeful sexy woman who has become another standard character in advertising, a novel way for advertisers to move away from representations of women as ‘dumb’ or ‘unintelligent’ to being constructed as powerful, feisty, and in control…A key theme of revenge adverts is the representation of a woman gaining the upper hand by punishing a man who has transgressed in some way” (R. Gill, 2008, p. 46).

25 “The figure of the ‘luscious lesbian’ within advertising is notable for her extraordinarily attractive, conventionally feminine appearance. Women depicted in this way are almost always slim yet curvaceous, with long flowing hair and makeup…The packaging of ‘lesbians’ within conventional normal of heterosexual feminine attractiveness is one way in which the figure appears to be constructed primary for the straight male gaze. The manner in which the hot lesbian is presented also seems designed for male titillation” (R. Gill, 2008, p. 50).
“A fictional character, almost always a female, who identifies and/or has been identified to the audience primarily as heterosexual but has a brief sexual encounter with a character of the same gender...these moments of female-female intimacy are acceptable because they are reversible...for heteroflexible women, same-sex intimacy is clearly temporary, and heteroflexible storylines typically end with the protagonist reaffirming her heterosexuality” (Frohard-Dourlent, 2012, p. 719-722).

See Stacey (1999) for discussion of these concepts and her findings

This particular study uses woman and female interchangeably. In order to accurately report the results of this study, I use the word female, as per the study’s wording.
REFERENCES CITED


Acarón, T. (2016). Shape-in(g) space: Body, boundaries, and violence. *Space and Culture, 19*(2), 139-149.


Burns, K. (2012). Lesbian mothers, two-headed monsters and the televisual machine. In K. H. Robinson, & C. Davies (Eds.), *Rethinking research and professional


@Hollywood (2012, March 2). The Hunger Games: Author Suzanne Collins speaks out about film adaptation. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3IGSroATG8


326


Sheridan, S. (1997). Feminism and cultural studies: Same or different?. *Australian Feminist Studies, 12*(25), 147-149.


Taber, N., Woloshyn, V., & Lane, L. (2013). ‘She’s more like a guy’ and ‘he’s more like a teddy bear’: Girl’s perceptions of violence and gender in The Hunger Games. *Journal of youth Studies, 16*(8), 1022-1037.


APPENDIX A

PUBLISHING AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

*The Hunger Games* trilogy, written by Suzanne Collins, consists of three books: *The Hunger Games* (September 2008), *Catching Fire* (September 2009), and *Mockingjay* (August 2010). Collins also wrote two children’s books and a series of young adult books titled *The Underland Chronicles*. *The Underland Chronicles* and *The Hunger Games* were published in rapid succession with *The Underland Chronicles* books published in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007, and *The Hunger Games* books published in 2008, 2009, and 2010, marking Collins as a prolific and successful writer. *The Hunger Games* trilogy has sold over 65 million copies in digital and print including over 28 million copies of *The Hunger Games*, Over 19 million copies of *Catching Fire*, and over 18 million copies of *Mockingjay* (“Scholastic News Room,” n.d.). All three books in the series were *USA Today*, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal* number one best sellers, and *The Hunger Games* has spent more than 260 consecutive weeks (more than five consecutive years) on the New York Times bestseller list since publication in 2008 (“Scholastic News Room,” n.d.). The trilogy has been sold in 56 territories in 51 different languages.

*The Hunger Games* trilogy was published by Scholastic INC, a publicly traded company that identifies itself as the largest publisher and distributor of children’s books in the world. Scholastic has 8,400 employees across the world and a reach into over 165 countries through books published in 45 different languages (“Scholastic About Us,” n.d.). Scholastic boasts an impressive list of book franchises including *Harry Potter*, *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, *Captain Underpants*, *The Magic School Bus*, *Goosebumps*, *The
39 Clues, and I Spy. Its brand also extends into Scholastic Trade Publishing, which releases about 600 original titles a year in the U.S. under 18 different publishing imprints; Scholastic Entertainment, which adapts its most popular series into educational and entertainment media; and Scholastic Education, which includes Scholastic Classroom Magazine, a publication that has 14 million subscribers to its 30 print and digital magazines (“Scholastic Our Business,” n.d.).

*The Hunger Games* trilogy was released as four film adaptations, including a two-part release for the final book in the series. Lionsgate Entertainment Corp. produced all four film installments of *The Hunger Games*, all of which have been rated PG-13, have had a run time of over two hours, and have each earned approximately 700,000,000 dollars at the world wide box office. Lionsgate, incorporated in 1997 in British Columbia, was the result of a merger between Lionsgate Entertainment Corp and Beringer Gold Corp. Lionsgate is not only involved in motion picture production and distribution but also in television programming and syndication, home entertainment, digital distribution, video games, channel platforms, and international distribution and sales (“Lions Gate Entertainment Corp,” n.d.). Lionsgate has 650 employees across its worldwide operations (“Lionsgate FAQ,” n.d., para. 3), and it has produced one of the most successful young adult franchises, *The Twilight Saga*. It also operates a billion dollar a year home entertainment division and has 10 branded channels worldwide (“Lionsgate Company,” n.d., para. 35).

The *Divergent* trilogy, written by Veronica Roth, consists of three books: *Divergent* (April 2011), *Insurgent* (May 2012), and *Allegiant* (October 2013). Roth also released a series of short stories about the lead male character, Four, as ebooks, between

The *Divergent* trilogy was published by HarperCollins Publishers through its children’s and teens’ book imprint, Katherine Tegen Books. HarperCollins Publishers, founded in 1817 as J. and J. Harper print shop, became Harper & Row in 1987, and was acquired by News Corporation in 1990 (“Harper Collins: Company Profile,” n.d., para. 4). HarperCollins, now the second-largest consumer book publisher in the world, has publishing operations in 18 countries, operates more than 120 branded imprints worldwide, publishes approximately 10,000 new titles annually in 17 different languages and owns a print and digital catalog of more than 200,000 titles (“Harper Collins: Company Profile,” n.d., para. 2). During its 2014 fiscal year, HarperCollins U.S. published 158 titles that appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list, including 17 titles that hit number 1, one of which was Roth’s *Divergent*.

The *Divergent* trilogy, like the *Hunger Games* trilogy, has been adapted into four films, with the final installment being split into two films. *Divergent*, released in March 2014, was rated PG-13, had a run time of 2 hours and 23 minutes, and grossed $288,885,818 worldwide (“Divergent,” n.d.). *Insurgent*, released in March 2015, was also rated PG-13, had a run time of 1 hour and 59 minutes, $297,002,527 at the world wide
box office (“The Divergent Series: Insurgent,” n.d.). The final book, Allegiant, is split into two films; Allegiant was released in March 2016 and Ascendant, is slated for a March 2017 release. All four films are produced and distributed by Lionsgate through Summit Entertainment.

The Vampire Academy series, written by Richelle Mead, consists of six books: Vampire Academy (2007), Frostbite (April 2008), Shadow Kiss (November 2008), Blood Promise (August 2009), Spirit Bound (May 2010), and Last Sacrifice (December 2010). Mead also produced a follow up series of six books to the Vampire Academy series titled Bloodlines, and is the author of several other book series, most of which are marketed as adult fiction. By 2013, the Vampire Academy series had sold nine million copies in 35 countries (Burnett, 2014, para. 2), and the first three books in the series have been turned into graphic novels, while the first has been repackaged for movie tie in. All six Vampire Academy books and all six Bloodlines books were published by Razorbill, an imprint of a Penguin Random House that publishes middle grades books.

Penguin and Random House’s merger on July 1, 2013 set the new conglomerate up to control more than 25 percent of the book business. The company employs more than 10,000, owns 250 independent publishing imprints, publishes about 15,000 new titles annually, and makes about 3.9 billion dollars in annual revenue (Bosman, 2013, para. 9). Penguin Random House’s parent company, Bertelsmann AG is a German multinational mass media corporation founded in 1835. It has a presence in 50 countries, with its core markets in Germany, France, Britain, Spain and the United States with China, India, and Brazil as important growth regions (“Bertelsmann Company Profile,”
Bertelsmann AG’s divisions include television, radio, book publishing, and media printing and packaging ("Bertelsmann Company Profile," n.d.).

The first and only film adaptation for this series, *Vampire Academy: Blood Sisters*, was rated PG-13, had a run time of one hour and 44 minutes, and was released on February 7, 2014. The film, distributed by the Weinstein Company, was a flop, bringing in only $15,391,979 worldwide ("Vampire Academy," n.d.). The Weinstein Company (TWC) is a multimedia production and distribution company launched in October 2005 by Bob and Harvey Weinstein, the founders of Miramax Films in 1979 ("About the Weinstein Company," n.d., para. 1). TWC encompasses Dimension Films and is active in television production.
### APPENDIX B

**THE HUNGER GAMES VOCABULARY, CHARACTER LIST, AND SUMMARIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Tributes</td>
<td>Known as the careers, these tributes are born in the wealthier districts and are trained from childhood for the Games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornucopia</td>
<td>A literal cornucopia in the center of each arena. It is filled with supplies and weapons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 13</td>
<td>An oft-touted example of the Capitol’s power. It is the district that the Capitol wiped off the map in the last rebellion. Katniss learns it still exists and has a large population living underground where they also have nuclear weapons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamemakers</td>
<td>The group that devises the Games each year. This group is led by a Head Gamemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijacked</td>
<td>A psychological fear conditioning technique that utilizes hallucinogenic drugs made from tracker jacker muttation venom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>A past winner of the Games who travels with the tributes, coaches them and secures them sponsorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muttations</td>
<td>Capitol created deadly monstrosities including mutated bees, monkeys, reptiles, and birds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors</td>
<td>Mostly wealthy capitol citizens who offer to buy particular tributes gifts including food, weapons, and medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arena</td>
<td>A specially crafted area built by the Gamemakers. The arena is contained by a force field and contains within it a complex surveillance system that live streams the Games as well as Capitol created monstrosities devised to injure and kill tributes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hunger Games</td>
<td>A yearly, televised, battle royale between 24 children. They fight to the death until there is only one winner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reaping</td>
<td>The annual random lottery where one boy and girl from each district is selected to enter the Games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribute</td>
<td>Any person selected during the reaping and sent to the Games. Typically, tributes are aged 12-18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>The tribute who wins the Games each year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor’s Village</td>
<td>A special area in each district where the victors from that district live in luxury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Tour</td>
<td>The Capitol makes the victor visit each district halfway between the Games they won and the next Games to keep the Games on people’s minds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caesar Flickerman</strong></td>
<td>The mouthpiece of the Capitol. Caesar is the host of the Games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cato</strong></td>
<td>A career tribute. He is the most dominant tribute in the 74th Games. Katniss and Peeta face Cato in a final showdown at the cornucopia. Katniss defeats him and later shoots him in the head to end his suffering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cinna</strong></td>
<td>Katniss’s soft-spoken stylist who defies Capitol norms. His brilliant design creations make Katniss appear stunning and symbolic of the rebellion. He is killed during the second book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effie Trinket</strong></td>
<td>Serves as Katniss and Peeta’s scheduler. She keeps them on time and in check before the Games. She is high maintenance due to a life in the Capitol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finnick Odair</strong></td>
<td>The handsome and athletic victor from District 4 who allies with Katniss in the 75th Games. He and Katniss develop a friendship over their mutual depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gale Hawthorne</strong></td>
<td>Katniss’s best friend and hunting partner. Gale, slightly older, works in the mines to support his family, which includes a mother and several younger siblings. Like Katniss, his father was killed in a mine explosion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haymitch Abernathy</strong></td>
<td>The only living and one of only two tributes (prior to Katniss and Peeta) from District 12 to win the Games. Haymitch is a lifelong alcoholic as a result of the Games. He is surly and snarky, but genuinely cares for Katniss and Peeta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Johanna Mason</strong></td>
<td>The aggressive and calculating victor from District 7 who allies with Katniss in the 75th Games. Katniss and Johanna bond in District 13 over their mutual morbid sense of humor and rugged determination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Katniss Everdeen</strong></td>
<td>The 16-year-old woman protagonist and first person narrator. She is an excellent shot with a bow and arrow. She took over for her dead father as the family’s protector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Katniss’s Mother – Unnamed</strong></td>
<td>Characterized as vulnerable and weak. After the death of Katniss’s father, she fell into a deep depression, leaving the girls to fend for themselves. She is also a strong healer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mags</strong></td>
<td>Katniss’s elderly ally from District 4. She is known to be Finnick’s mentor and a mother figure to him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peeta Mellark</strong></td>
<td>Peeta, the baker’s son, is in Katniss’s class at school. As an adolescent, he noticed Katniss huddled under a tree starving and threw her bread at the cost of abuse from his mother. Peeta serves as ally, friend, boyfriend, and later husband to Katniss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plutarch Heavensbee</strong></td>
<td>Head Gamemaker and Capitol defector. Runs the rebels propaganda campaign in District 13.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>President Coin</strong></td>
<td>District 13’s ruthless woman president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>President Snow</strong></td>
<td>The Capitol’s ruthless man president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primrose “Prim” Everdeen</td>
<td>Katniss’s 12-year-old sister. Katniss takes her place in the Games when Prim is selected at the reaping. She has a penchant for healing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rue</td>
<td>The twelve-year-old tribute from District 11 in the 74th Games. Katniss allies herself with Rue. They make a plan to destroy the careers supplies. Later, Katniss watches Rue die.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Book 1: The Hunger Games

This trilogy is set in post-apocalyptic North America, which has been reduced by natural disasters and war to a country called Panem, consisting of twelve districts and a Capitol. The Capitol, a lavish, outlandish, and wasteful city, governs Panem while each district produces a different good or service that allows the Capitol’s extravagance. This trilogy is written in the first person point of view from the perspective of the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. Katniss, a sixteen-year-old girl living in the impoverished coalmining District, District 12, has taken on the head of house role after the death of her father in a coal mine explosion. Katniss staves off her, her mother, and her younger sister Prim’s starvation by hunting in the forbidden woods around the district with her best friend Gale.

The Capitol’s governance of Panem is marked by its annual production of The Hunger Games, where a 12-18 year old boy and girl from each district is randomly selected to be sent to the Games to fight to the death. The Games take place in a man-made arena that harbors death traps and hidden cameras. When Katniss’s younger sister Prim is selected for the Games, Katniss volunteers to take her place. Peeta Mellark, a boy Katniss barely knows but who once saved her from starvation, accompanies her to the Games. Katniss and Peeta are assigned a mentor, Haymitch Abernathy, and a prep team on their way to the Games. Prior to the Games, Katniss and Peeta are styled, train with the other tributes, have individual sessions with the Gamemakers, are ranked, and have a televised interview. During this time, Katniss is wary of Peeta. He confesses his love for her on television, she reacts aggressively, and they enter the arena as opponents, not friends. When dropped into the arena, Katniss survives a variety of terrifying situations and eventually meets up with the youngest tribute, Rue. They devise a plan to destroy the
careers’ food supply. After successfully completing that mission, Katniss returns to Rue, who is immediately killed, sparking a rage in Katniss that serves as the catalyst for rebellion against the Capitol.

After a rule change in the Games that allows two tributes from the same district to win together, Katniss searches for Peeta, finding him close to death. She nurses him back to health, all the while pretending to love him in order to win sponsors. Eventually, the pair is pitted against Cato, the final tribute. After they defeat him, the Gamemakers revoke the rule change. Instead of killing Peeta to win, Katniss pulls out poison berries and they take them together, forcing the Gamemakers to allow both to win. With Peeta near death, they are airlifted out of the arena and are remade for their final interview. Haymitch tells Katniss that the Capitol is not happy with her and that she must tread carefully. He impresses upon her the importance of acting so in love with Peeta as to appear irrational. On the train home, Peeta realizes that Katniss does not love him, and their relationship turns icy.

**Book 2: Catching Fire**

Katniss, now wealthy from the Games, her mother, Prim, and Peeta relocate to Victor’s Village, where Haymitch also resides. Katniss deals with the fallout from the Games, including attempting to mend her friendship with Gale, who is clearly jealous of Peeta. Although Katniss is not sure if she loves Gale romantically, she knows she needs him in her life. Before leaving for the victory tour, President Snow visits Katniss at her home unexpectedly and threatens her. He tells her that her ploy to win the Games has stirred uprisings in the districts. He forces her to play out the star-crossed lovers angle on the tour. On the Victory Tour train, Peeta apologizes to Katniss and their friendship
resumes. Katniss confides in Haymitch about President Snow’s threat. Haymitch tells her that she will always have to be with Peeta, that the Games never end. At the first stop on their tour in District 11, Katniss and Peeta see the uprisings first hand and witness the execution of an innocent man. They regroup with Haymitch and follow through with the rest of the tour, trying to appear helpless and in love. Katniss learns from Snow directly that she did not do enough to quell the uprisings.

After the tour, President Snow announces the quarter quell, a special Games marking every 25th year. In the first quarter quell, the districts were forced to vote on thetributes. In the second, Haymitch’s Games, there were twice as many tributes selected. In the 75th Games, the tributes are reaped from the existing pool of victors, meaning that Katniss and either Peeta or Haymitch are headed back to the Games. Peeta suggests that they train like careers so that one of them will be able to win. In the meantime, the Capitol cracks down on the district uprisings and sends a new and brutal peacekeeping force to District 12. In a show of brutality and power, the new head Peacekeeper whips Gale nearly to death. While he recovers at her house, Katniss realizes she loves him. During the reaping, Peeta volunteers to go and he and Katniss start on their second journey back to the arena.

This time around, the Games are different since all of the tributes/victors know each other and since the ages range from sixteen to elderly and the bodies range from nubile and healthy to drug addled and broken down. During training, Haymitch struggles to get Katniss to ally with some of the other victors. She refuses, only agreeing to ally with the District 3 victors nicknamed Nuts and Volts, and Mags, an elderly woman. In their individual sessions, Katniss and Peeta both make bold statements condemning the
Capitol, and on stage the tributes act rebelliously, calling the Games into question. Accordingly Snow punishes Katniss, sending in guards to brutalize Cinna before she is sent into the arena, and he has the Gamemakers wipe out half the victors in only the first two days.

Once in the arena, a giant pool of water surrounded by sickeningly hot jungle, Katniss realizes Hyamitch has secured them allies without her knowledge. Katniss, Peeta, Finnick, and Mags (both from District 4), ally and head into the jungle. Another series of disturbing events takes place, leaving Mags dead. The remaining three meet up with Johanna, Finnick’s surly friend, and Wiress and Beetee (Nuts and Volts). The group realizes that the arena is divided like a clock, each segment of which brings new Capitol-built horrors. They devise a plan to electrocute the rest of the tributes, but the plan goes awry. Unbeknownst to Katniss, the other victors were in on a plan to save Peeta and Katniss. As the electrocution plan devolves, Katniss manages to blow up the force field surrounding the arena. She is airlifted out and finds herself in a hovercraft with Beetee, Haymitch, Plutarch, and Finnick. They fill her in on what has happened and she rages against Haymitch, who tells her that Peeta and Johanna were taken to the Capitol where they will likely be tortured. The book ends with Gale telling Katniss that the Capitol firebombed District 12, obliterating it, but that he saved her mother and sister. Katniss learns that the fabled District 13 still exists underground and that is where they will reside.

**Book 3: Mockingjay**

When she is plucked from the arena and brought to the thought-to-be-extinct District 13, Katniss becomes embroiled in a high stakes political battle between the rebels
of the underground District 13 and the Capitol. Katniss finds life in District 13 stifling and regimented. She spends a significant portion of time ignoring her schedule, hiding from others, and trapped in depression. She develops a friendship with Finnick, who is also suffering from depression, and she and Haymitch patch up their relationship. Katniss becomes increasingly wary of District 13’s president, Alma Coin, especially after Katniss finds her former prep team chained to a wall deep underground and stinking of infection and urine. During this time, Katniss also has a falling out with Gale, who becomes increasingly invested in Coin’s military. Katniss also realizes that President Snow is torturing Peeta in order to affect her. The repeated televised interviews with a harried looking Peeta unhinge Katniss. She decides to take up the cause and serve as the Mockingjay, the rebels’ symbol of rebellion. Eventually, the rebels send out a rescue mission to save the remaining victors held hostage in the Capitol. They return successful, but Peeta is changed as a result of the Capitol’s hijacking. Upon arriving in District 13, he tries to kill Katniss.

Eventually, as the war progresses and the rebels enter the Capitol, Coin sends Katniss and a small group into the outskirts of the city to tape propos in relative safety. When a mentally disturbed Peeta arrives to join the group, Katniss is wary, but they work through the situation as best they can. While shooting propos one day, an unexpected attack occurs, leaving several members of their squad dead and forcing the group to run. As they flee underground, they are chased by reptilian muttations, leaving only Katniss, Gale, Peeta, Cressida, and Pollux alive. They hide out in a former stylist’s basement and concoct a plan to kill President Snow, which was always Katniss’s plan. When she and Gale set out to kill Snow, they blend into a crowd of Capitol citizens who have been
evacuated to the President’s mansion. The rebels arrive and fighting ensues. Katniss notices that the Capitol children are being herded into a safe area, which is then bombed. In the midst of the chaos, she sees rebel medics arrive, including her sister Prim. As she calls Prim’s name, a second round of explosions kills the medics and severely burns Katniss’s entire body.

As her body recovers, Katniss falls into a deep depression. When the Capitol is secured, Coin instates herself as President of Panem and she calls Katniss and the remaining victors to take a vote. Coin proposes they hold one more Hunger Games with Capitol children in order to quell the districts need for blood while still providing them satisfaction. Katniss votes yes. She is asked to execute President Snow publically as a symbolic gesture, but when she stands before him, she raises her arrow and assassinates President Coin. Katniss tries to commit suicide via nightlock pill, but Peeta stops her and she is carted off and confined. During her long confinement, she contemplates suicide. After several weeks, Haymitch shows up to take her back to District 12, telling her she has been acquitted for the murder of President Coin. They return to Victor’s Village, the only remaining part of town. Peeta shows up shortly thereafter. Katniss and Peeta begin to put back together the broken pieces of their lives, and in the epilogue, which takes place 15 years later, they are living happily together with two small children.
### APPENDIX C

**DIVERTER TRILOGY VOCABULARY, CHARACTER LIST, AND SUMMARIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abnegation</td>
<td>A faction based on the ideal of selflessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amity</td>
<td>A faction based on the ideal of peacefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aptitude test</td>
<td>Each sixteen-year-old living in the city must take a simulation that pinpoints the faction he or she is best suited for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Genetic Welfare</td>
<td>A government organization located outside the city. It runs experiments, conducted in major U.S. cities, to try to eliminate what it perceives as genetic deviance. It believes that identity traits are genetically predisposed and that in order to save humanity, it must breed out genetic impurity, allowing people with pure genes to pass down their genetic code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candor</td>
<td>A faction based on the ideal of honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing Ceremony</td>
<td>Each sixteen-year-old must choose which faction he or she will live in for the rest of his or her life. They make a decision in front of a large group. This decision cannot be unmade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dauntless</td>
<td>A faction based on the ideal of bravery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dauntless Traitors</td>
<td>The people in Dauntless who defected to Erudite after the attack on Abnegation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergence</td>
<td>At first, perceived as a threat and later as genetic purity, divergence is a person’s aptitude for more than one faction. Multiple aptitudes indicate a person’s ability to think critically and for his or herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erudite</td>
<td>A faction based on the ideal of intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faction</td>
<td>The city is divided into five factions, each of which embodies a single ideal. Each faction occupies a different living space in the city. Each contains a range of ages from babies to elderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factionless</td>
<td>A person who fails out of initiation or is kicked out of a faction. The factionless are homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faction transfer</td>
<td>A person who decides to abandon his or her faction and join another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear Landscape</td>
<td>A simulation the Dauntless use to allow their initiates to face and conquer their fears. This simulation stimulates the fear center in the brain, causing a person’s worst fears to manifest in the simulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate</td>
<td>A sixteen-year-old, either faction born or faction transfer, that is attempting the initiation process to be accepted into his or her faction of choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td>An ingestible or injectable serum that alters a person’s mind, allowing that person to enter into a virtual-reality like state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulations can be used as training exercises or can be used to coopt people’s bodies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stiff</td>
<td>A derogatory term for an Abnegation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amar</td>
<td>Tobias’s Dauntless instructor. He was snuck out of the city so that he wouldn’t be killed for his divergence. In a relationship with George.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Prior</td>
<td>Tris’s father who transferred from Erudite and serves as one of the Abnegation leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice “Tris” Prior</td>
<td>Tris is the sixteen-year-old first person narrator and protagonist. Her faction of origin is Abnegation. She transfers to Dauntless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb Prior</td>
<td>Tris’s brother who transferred from Abnegation to Erudite and who betrays Tris for his faction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Will’s sister. She later forgives Tris and names herself as a leader of the Allegiant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Tris’s best friend, a Candor to Dauntless transfer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>One of the Dauntless leaders. He was in Tobias’s initiate class but was always second best to Tobias. He and Tobias are foils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Johnson</td>
<td>Tobias’s estranged mother whom he believed to be dead. She has established herself as the leader of the factionless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Tori’s divergent brother. Although Tori thought he was murdered, he was actually snuck out of the city and to the Bureau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Kang</td>
<td>The leader of Candor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanine Matthews</td>
<td>The leader of Erudite. She is obsessed with eradicating divergence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna Reyes</td>
<td>The speaker for Amity and a co-leader of the Allegiant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus Eaton</td>
<td>Tobias’s abusive father who is also the head of the government, which is run by Abnegation leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Prior</td>
<td>Tris’s mother who originated outside the city and was placed into the experiment as a Dauntless in order to monitor the experiment from inside of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Tris’s rival, a Candor to Dauntless transfer. Peter lives a mercenary type lifestyle in which his allegiance aligns with whoever can offer him the best options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobias “Four” Eaton</td>
<td>Tobias is also an Abnegation to Dauntless transfer. He is Tris’s mentor turned boyfriend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>The Dauntless administrator of Tris’s aptitude test. She protects Tris’s divergence and gives Tris more information about it. She tells Tris her brother George was killed because of his divergence. Tori kills Jeanine and is later killed just before leaving the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>One of Tris’s friends and fellow initiates. An Erudite transfer. Tris kills him during the attack on Abnegation while he is under simulation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Book 1: Divergent

The story is set in post-apocalyptic Chicago where readers follow sixteen-year-old Tris Prior as she navigates her life. The city, which is separated from the outside world by a large wall, contains a government system in which there are five factions. Each faction represents a different ideal: Abnegation (selflessness), Dauntless (bravery), Erudite (intelligence), Amity (peacefulness), and Candor (honesty). At age 16, all citizens must decide if they will stay in their current faction or change factions for life. All people who do not choose or who fail initiation are forced to live factionless and homeless. Tris, a born and bred Abnegation discovers that she has aptitude in multiple factions. In order to be true to herself, Tris leaves her home and family, transferring to Dauntless. In Dauntless, she has a rigorous initiation period in which she and the other initiate learn how to fight, shoot guns, and face their fears in terrifying simulations. Tris is continually harassed by Peter, a Candor transfer who savagely attacks Tris after she rises in the initiation ranks. While Tris works through initiation and deals with Peter’s consistent harassment and attacks, she learns more about her multiple aptitudes and finally puts a name to it – Divergent. She learns that Divergents’ minds are difficult to control and so she is able to manipulate simulations, understanding while in them that the simulations are not real.

While Tris makes her way through initiation, she develops feelings for her mentor, Four (Tobias). Her affection is mutual. Four tries to help Tris through initiation and eventually opens up to her, revealing he was also an Abnegation and that he transferred to escape his abusive father, Marcus. As Tris and Four grow closer, they uncover Jeanine Matthews’ plot to overthrow the Abnegation government and kill all
Divergents. Tris discovers Four is Divergent like her when she wakes one night to find that everyone around her is under a simulation. Tris realizes that the simulation has programmed all of the Dauntless to act as soldiers and indiscriminately murder the entire Abnegation faction on Jeanine’s orders. When she finds Four, also awake, they try to stop the simulation but Tris is shot and they are both captured and taken to Jeanine. Jeanine injects Four with attack serum and sends him back to Dauntless to monitor the simulation. She takes Tris back to Erudite to execute her and study her simultaneously. Tris’s mother, Natalie, rescues Tris and sacrifices her life so that Tris can live and lead the remaining Abnegation. Tris finds her father, her brother Caleb, and Marcus, and takes them to Dauntless to stop the simulation. While there, they find Peter and force him to provide them with information. While Tris and her father make their way to the control room, her father sacrifices his life for hers. She finds Four running the simulation and is able to break him out of it in time for them to end the simulation and prevent more murder. Tris, Four, Caleb, Marcus, and Peter flee the compound, catching a train headed for Amity.

**Book 2: Insurgent**

The group arrives at the Amity compound and is taken in as refugees. They try to assimilate as they regroup, but Tris finds it difficult to control her anger. Tris is chastised when she engages in a fistfight with Peter, who tried to steal the attack simulation hard drive Tris took from Dauntless when they fled. The group’s stay is cut short when the Dauntless traitors show up looking for them. The group narrowly escapes and hops on a train back into the city. On the train, they encounter a group of factionless. Four stops the factionless from attacking them by revealing his full name – Tobias Eaton. They bring
Tobias to the factionless compound where Tris discovers that Tobias’s mother, Evelyn, is alive and serving as the factionless leader. Tris is wary of Evelyn’s motives, but when she tries to warn Tobias, he ignores her. Tobias wants to ally the remaining Dauntless with Evelyn and the factionless in order to overthrow Jeanine and the Dauntless traitors.

Tobias and Tris go to Candor to find the other Dauntless and discuss an alliance. At Candor, they are arrested for war crimes, but they are acquitted after being injected with truth serum. Under the serum, Tris admits that she killed her friend Will during the simulation, which shocks her best friend Christina and causes a divide in their relationship. As Tris settles into life at Candor with the remaining Dauntless, the Dauntless traitors attack the compound, shooting everyone with a device that knocks everyone except Divergents unconscious. Tris tries to help other Divergents in the building but is caught by Eric and lined up with the others. While trapped, Tris watches Eric shoot a boy in the head and when Eric comes close to her, she stabs him with a hidden butter knife. Tobias and some others are able to thwart the Dauntless traitors, free the Divergents and tend to the wounded.

Tris and some other Dauntless spy on a peace treaty meeting between Jack Kang and Jeanine. The meeting devolves quickly and results in one of Tris’s friends being shot and paralyzed. Back at Candor, the Dauntless meet, elect Tobias, Tori, and Harrison as new leaders and execute Eric as a traitor. They reclaim Dauntless headquarters, making sure to cover all of the surveillance cameras so Jeanine cannot spy on them. Once back at Dauntless, Tobias brings Tris to a meeting with Evelyn and when they return, Jeanine activates a simulation that causes three Dauntless to attempt suicide. After the people under simulation give Tris an ultimatum from Jeanine, Tris can only save one before they
jump, and her friend Marlene jumps to her death. Although Tris tells Tobias she will not turn herself in, she does anyway.

Once at Erudite headquarters, Tris is taken into custody and Jeanine experiments on her in cruel ways. Jeanine tells Tris that she will be executed at the conclusion of the testing. While confined, Tris discovers her brother has betrayed her, she encounters Peter, who has defected to Erudite, and she sees Tobias, who has intentionally gotten himself caught in order to do reconnaissance on the compound. On the day of execution, Tobias saves Tris with Peter’s help and they all flee to Abnegation. Once in Abnegation, Tris is reunited with the other Dauntless who have allied with the factionless. Evelyn explains her plan to take out Erudite. Tris, who is wary of Evelyn and her plan, meets with Marcus who tells Tris that Jeanine attacked Abnegation because they were about to reveal critical information about the outside world. Marcus fears if the factionless defeat Erudite, they will also erase the information about the outside world.

Tris feigns sickness the night of the attack in order to carry out a plan she has concocted with Marcus to save the information. Once the group leaves for the attack, Tris, Christina (who has reconciled with Tris) and Marcus meet with Johanna Reyes, the Amity leader, and some sympathetic Erudite. Together, they sneak into Erudite during the attack and Tris and Marcus make it to Jeanine’s lab on the top floor. In order to get into the lab to secure the information, Tris must fight herself in a deadly simulation. Upon finally defeating herself, she enters the room to see Tori kill Jeanine.

Tobias finds Tris and is shocked and angry. Tris is brought downstairs with the others where she tries to convince him about the importance of the information in the lab. Tobias disappears as Evelyn announces that she plans to disband the faction system.
After the announcement, a video, which Tobias activated, is played on the lobby screens that features a woman from outside the city. She explains that the group she is with has set up Chicago and the faction system in the hopes of protecting humanity from human nature itself. She also mentions that divergence is actually good and that once there are enough Divergents in the city, the Amity should unlock the gate and send the people out to help those in the outside world. She then states that she is entering into the city as Edith Prior and will have her memory erased. Tris realizes this woman is a relative and starts to contemplate the world outside.

**Book 3: Allegiant**

This book opens with Tris in confinement. She is able to lie under the truth serum in order to acquit her and her friends of any traitorous acts against the factionless. Tris is approached by a group called the Allegiant that opposes Evelyn and her plan and want to go outside the city to learn more about the world. Tris and Tobias discuss going outside the wall and when their decision is made, Tobias breaks Caleb out of prison and takes him with them. They take a train to Amity where they meet up with Johanna Reyes and Cara, both Allegiant leaders. On their way out of the city, they are attacked by the Dauntless patrol and Tori is killed.

Once outside the city, Tris, Tobias, Peter, Caleb, Christina, and Cara are met by people who take them to the Bureau of Genetic Welfare, which is housed inside of the former O’Hare airport. Tris discovers her mother’s connection to the Bureau and that the outside world isn’t much different from the city. At the Bureau, the group learns that Chicago and several other U.S. cities are experiments that are carefully monitored 24 hours a day by the Bureau. The experiment is designed to cure what the Bureau labels as
genetic damage, which takes the form of violence, greed, cowardice, dishonesty, and stupidity. At the Bureau, Tris learns that her divergence is supposedly genetic and Tobias’s is not, which makes Tobias question his whole life. In reaction to this news, Tris rails against the Bureau’s biological determinism while Tobias falls in league with a “genetically defective” woman named Nita. Nita explains that the Bureau’s beliefs create a similarly discriminatory system as the faction/factionless by creating a hierarchy of genetically pure and genetically defective.

The group watches the city devolve into violence in a war between the factions and factionless on screen at the Bureau. David, the head of the Bureau, is under pressure from the government to shut down the experiment. He plans to administer a full memory wipe of the people in the city, which Tris is uncomfortable with. She goes with Tobias to meet Nita and hear Nita’s plan to steal the memory serum so that the Bureau cannot use it. Tris bails on the plan but Tobias follows through. Tris, in learning that Nita actually wants to steal a death serum, stops Nita by shooting her. Tobias and Nita are arrested as traitors but Tobias is eventually released. Tobias’s actions cause a great rift between him and Tris, but they talk through it and determine that love requires daily work.

When the group learns that the Bureau intends to go through with the memory wipe of Chicago, Tobias volunteers to go into the city to inoculate certain people against the serum. Before Tobias and a group go back into the city, Tris decides that the best course of action is to wipe the Bureau’s memories so that she can eliminate the genetic discrimination and experiments at the source. They select Caleb to enter into the vault containing the serum knowing that he will die in the process from the vault’s security system that releases death serum to those who enter. In the city, Tobias convinces his
mother to give up her power in order to rebuild her relationship with him. Meanwhile, back at the Bureau, a lockdown is put into effect, causing Tris to speed up the plan. She decides to sacrifice herself instead of Caleb, feeling that she can beat the death serum. She miraculously manages to beat the serum but is shot by David once inside the vault. She is able to release the memory serum before she dies. The book flashes forward two and a half years to Tobias in the city. He ziplines from the Hancock building to scatter Tris’s ashes and readers learn that he is rebuilding a life in the city that is now devoid of factions and operating democratically.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>APPENDIX D</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VAMPIRE ACADEMY VOCABULARY, CHARACTER LIST, AND SUMMARIES</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Blood whore** | A derogatory term for a dhampir woman who gives blood during sex with a Moroi. The term is also used to classify those women dhampirs that do not become guardians. They often live in communes and are thought to invite Moroi men in for sex. |
| **Bonded** | Moroi spirit users are imbued with the power to resurrect others. When they do, they become bonded psychically with that person. The person who was saved is then able to share the thoughts of the Moroi, sense his or her feelings, and see through his or her eyes. This is a one-way connection, meaning only the saved person can use the psychic link. |
| **Compulsion** | Compulsion involves mind control/influence. Every Moroi has a low level control over compulsion, but some spirit users are particularly adept at it. Compulsion involves a Moroi making direct eye contact with a person and willing them to do particular things. |
| **Court** | The location of the Moroi government, which is headed by a queen. There are 12 royal families, each of which is in contention for king or queen during an election. |
| **Dhampir** | A person of mixed human and vampire anatomy. Dhampirs can only result from the union of a human or dhampir and a Moroi. There are very few women dhampirs who work as guardians because women dhampirs often opt to raise their children. |
| **Dream Walk** | When a spirit user visits people in their dreams and interacts with them in real time, only during their dreams. |
| **Elemental Magic** | The five elements of magic a Moroi can wield include earth, fire, water, air, and spirit. |
| **Feeders** | Human beings living on the fringes of society who volunteer to be feeders because of the high they get from a vampire bite. |
| **Guardians** | Dhampirs are trained to protect Moroi and are assigned to particular Moroi after graduate – usually wealthy and royal Moroi. |
| **Molnija marks** | After each Strigoi kill, a guardian has a small mark tattooed on his or her neck. When the number of kills is uncountable in a particular event, they are given a small star shape to indicate the kills were so numerous the guardian lost count. |
| **Moroi** | Morally good vampires who live among humans and live to generally be over 100. Moroi survive on human blood that is willingly given. Moroi are tall, slender and fair skinned. They |
cannot stand much direct sunlight and each one wields one of five elemental magics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirit</th>
<th>A little known and mostly forgotten magic specialty. Spirit users draw their power from their essence, causing the wielding of their magic to result in depression and eventually insanity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restored</td>
<td>Some spirit users can, with the help of a charmed spirit infused stake, return Strigoi back to their original Dhampir or Moroi state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Moroi</td>
<td>There are 12 royal families. These families are the only ones eligible to put forward a candidate for king or queen. There is a member of each family elected to serve on the council, which helps make political decisions for the entire society. Royals are mostly wealthy and elitist, looking down on all non-royals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vladimir’s Academy</td>
<td>An American school located in the Montana wilderness. The school educates Moroi and dhampirs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow-kissed</td>
<td>A term used to describe a person brought back from the dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stake</td>
<td>A silver stake infused with earth, water, fire, and wind magic. The stake is one of three ways a Strigoi can be killed. It must be driven through the heart. It can also hurt Strigoi to touch because it is infused with life-filled magic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strigoi</td>
<td>Strigoi are evil, undead, immortal vampires. Humans, dhampirs, or Moroi can be turned into Strigoi in one of two ways. The first way is done forcibly when an existing Strigoi drains a victim and forces the victim to drink Strigoi blood. The second way is for a Moroi is deliberately kill someone and drain that person of blood. Strigoi can be killed in three ways: with a charmed silver stake through the heart, decapitation, or with fire. Strigoi are characterized by their extremely pale skin and red ringed eyes. They cannot go outside during the day and cannot wield magic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turned</td>
<td>When a Moroi, dhampir, or human is turned into a Strigoi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abe Mazur</td>
<td>Rose’s estranged Moroi father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian Ivashkov</td>
<td>A spirit user. Adrian pursues Rose romantically and works with Lissa developing spirit. Adrian is a known playboy and self mediates his spirit depression with cigarettes and alcohol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Ozera</td>
<td>Lissa’s boyfriend. Christian’s parents turned Strigoi willingly, marking the family with shame and marking Christian as an outcast. He is surly and sarcastic, much like Rose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie Castile</td>
<td>Rose’s fellow novice guardian. Eddie was best friends with Mason and becomes loyal to Rose, helping her with a variety of schemes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headmistress Kirova</td>
<td>A middle aged stern woman who runs the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janine Hathaway</td>
<td>Rose’s mother. She is a renowned guardian who left Rose to be raised by the academy while she worked. Rose and her mother have a troubled relationship that is slowly mended as the series progresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Zeklos</td>
<td>A royal Moroi in Rose’s class at school. Jesse and Rose have a short tryst. Mia uses sex to convince Jesse and Ralf to say they had sex with Rose, causing damage to her reputation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason Ashford</td>
<td>Rose’s fellow novice guardian. Mason has a crush on Rose and attempts to pursue a relationship with her. He is murdered by a Strigoi in book 2 and becomes a ghost that only Rose can see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia Rinaldi</td>
<td>A poor, non-royal Moroi who works hard to join the royal clique at school. When Lissa and Rose flee school, Mia starts dating Lissa’s ex-boyfriend, Aaron and it is later revealed that she had sex with Lissa’s brother, who broke up with her because of his status as a royal. At first, she hates Lissa and Rose, but as the series progresses, they become allies and friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Dashkov</td>
<td>Victor’s teenaged daughter. She is talkative and excitable but not popular. When Lissa and Rose return to school, they befriend her. Although she bores them, they think she is nice. At the end of the first book, she willingly turns Strigoi at the request of her father so that she can release him from his holding cell. She is killed by Dimitri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Marie Hathaway</td>
<td>The protagonist of the story. Rose is a dhampir who vows to serve and protect her best friend Lissa. Lissa unknowingly brought Rose back from the dead. Rose is considered shadow-kissed and is bonded with Lissa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonya Karp</td>
<td>Ms. Karp is a teacher at the academy. She is known for her erratic behavior. Rose and Lissa come to learn that she is a spirit user. Ms. Karp turns Strigoi willingly in order to be cut off from her spirit magic, which was making her psychotic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strigoi Dimitri</td>
<td>Dimitri is captured and turned. Like all Strigoi, he is cold hearted, soulless, depraved, and violent. he plans to turn Rose, kill his mentor, and take over his mentor’s empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Sage</td>
<td>An Alchemist that helps Rose to deal with a variety of issues including cleaning up dead Strigoi and connecting her with Abe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasha Ozera</td>
<td>Christian’s aunt, also outcast. After his parents turned Strigoi, she protected him, getting cut down the length of her face in the process, leaving a large scar. She fights for the right to have Moroi defend themselves using magic and is Tatiana’s killer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana Ivashkov</td>
<td>The queen. She is Adrian’s great aunt who favors Adrian. She is characterized as fair but cold. She is murdered when she is perceived as not supporting the idea of having Moroi learn to defend themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasilisa “Lissa” Dragomir</td>
<td>The last remaining person in the Dragomir royal line. Lissa is a spirit user that can heal people, bring people back from the dead, and has super compulsion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Dashkov</td>
<td>Lissa’s unrelated uncle who was good friends with her father. He has a terminal disease that causes rapid aging. In order to counteract that aging, he kidnaps Lissa and forces her to heal him. While locked up at the school, he gets his daughter Natalie to turn Strigoi to help him escape. He is captured and imprisoned in a high security facility, which Rose later breaks him out of in exchange for information. Rose later kills Victor in an accidental rage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Book 1: Vampire Academy

The first book opens two years after Rose and Lissa have run away from St. Vladimir’s after a cryptic and disturbing warning from an unstable teacher at school, Ms. Sonya Karp. Readers learn that Rose and Lissa are psychically bonded. Rose and Lissa discover that their bond resulted from Lissa’s spirit magic and her bringing Rose back from death after a car accident that killed Lissa’s mother, father, and older brother. The bond between the girls works one way with Rose gaining access to Lissa’s thoughts and finding herself “inside” Lissa’s head living vicariously through Lissa at different moments. While at first, Rose is pulled into Lissa’s head unwillingly due to Lissa’s emotional distress or joy, Rose learns to control entering Lissa’s head and does so of her own accord. In discovering that Lissa has a rare type of forgotten magic, spirit, they also learn how dangerous that magic is. Because it draws on the essence of the person to work, it often drives users to insanity, which is prefaced by rage. Lissa struggles with depression as a result of spirit use and often inflicts self-harm.

When Rose and Lissa are caught by Dimitri and brought back to school, they must assimilate back into Moroi society and school life, which is fraught with complications. Rose begins extra training sessions with Dimitri, who is classified as a god among dhampirs. Rose’s initial crush on Dimitri turns into full blown lust and love, which she actively resists due to the moral implications of dating a teacher and one who is eight years her senior. Rose grapples with her love life and Lissa begins to date another royal Moroi, Christian Ozera. Rose disapproves of this romance given the fact that Christians’ parents willingly turned Strigoi.
Throughout the book, strange occurrences happen around Lissa. She continues to find near dead animals in her personal space. The girls later find out that Victor Dashkov, Lissa’s “uncle” has been testing Lissa to see if she is a spirit user and can heal. Victor, a man the girls love at the beginning of the first book, becomes the central villain of the story when he kidnaps Lissa in order to coerce her into healing his terminal illness so that he can run for king and change Moroi politics. Rose, Christian, and Dimitri save Lissa from Victor and lock him away. Rose goes down to see Victor, who has meddled in her love life by giving her a lust charm that was designed to distract her and Dimitri during the kidnapping. She learns from him that she is shadow kissed, meaning she was brought back from the dead but is connected to death. While Rose visits Victor in his cell, Natalie, Victor’s nerdy and talkative daughter, enters as a Strigoi to free her father. She defeats Rose but is killed by Dimitri. Victor is recaptured.

**Book 2: Frostbite**

At the beginning of this book, Rose is traveling to take her guardian qualifier exam. Dimitri drives her to meet with a well-respected guardian at the home of the family he protects. When they arrive, they find the family and the guardians slaughtered and suspect that Strigoi have been working together and with humans to attack such a large group of protected Moroi. As families of the students panic, the school arranges for a ski trip for the students and their families at a Moroi owned ski lodge. At the lodge, Rose explores the possibility of a relationship with her friend and fellow novice guardian, Mason, despite her strong feelings for Dimitri and her lukewarm romantic feelings for Mason. Rose also struggles with being sucked into Lissa’s head, particularly when Lissa and Christian are having sex.
At the lodge, Rose meets Adrian Ivashkov for the first time. Adrian, an infamous, older royal Moroi party boy, flirts with Rose, but Rose gives little credence to his advances. While at the lodge, a group of Rose’s dhampir and Moroi classmates in favor of hunting Strigoi sneak out of the lodge to hunt. Rose and Christian follow Eddie, Mason, and Mia to stop them, but all five are captured and held captive for days by several powerful Strigoi. During their captivity, Eddie is repeatedly bitten, leaving him in a drugged state. Christian and Mia, both vampires, are deprived of blood and they are all generally tortured and mocked. Rose and Christian work together to escape and the group makes it outside to the safety of the sunlight. Rose is trapped and when Mason tries to play the hero and save her, he has his neck snapped and is instantly killed. In retaliation, Rose kills the two lead Strigoi, hacking one’s head off with a dull sword. She returns to school by plane, where she sits with her mother, who uncharacteristically comforts her.

Back at school, Rose receives two molnija marks to signify her kills. Also back at school, Dimitri admits his love for her and kisses her despite his reservations about their age difference, his position as her instructor, and their guardian duties.

**Book 3: Shadow Kiss**

In the wake of Mason’s death, Rose is unsettled but prepares for her novice qualifying exam. The exam puts novice guardians in the field and tests their reactions and skills. Rose is assigned to protect Christian instead of Lissa. Rose is not pleased, and when she sees Mason’s ghost during an “attack” and freezes, her teachers think she deliberately allowed Christian to be attacked. Christian and Rose’s uneasy relationship, made a little less so by their escape from the Strigoi in the previous book, becomes a little closer as Christian tells her that he believes she did not mess up on purpose or out of
spite. As Rose deals with the new and off-putting ghosts in her life, she learns that Victor Dashkov’s trial is forthcoming and she and Lissa have not been invited to testify. Rose begs Dimitri to get them into the trial. Dimitri agrees to see what he can do. Meanwhile, Lissa and Adrian, now a known fellow spirit user, meet for frequent study sessions to practice spirit. Although Lissa and Adrian have no romantic interest in each other, these sessions make Christian jealous, driving a wedge between them. As Rose mediates one of Lissa and Christian’s arguments, Rose senses a mental and emotional change in herself, which she does not understand. Rose later realizes that she has been absorbing Lissa’s more reckless and damaging emotions like anger and depression through the bond.

As the book progresses, Christian is approached by Jesse to join a secret Moroi club called the Mana. Although Christian turns the offer down, Rose decides to learn more about the club. Her efforts are put on hold when Adrian, using his royal connections, is able to secure Lissa and Rose’s entry into Victor’s trial. On the plane ride, Rose gets a severe migraine, but is able to shake it off when they arrive at court in Pennsylvania. Before the trial, Dimitri and Rose visit Victor in his cell where Victor taunts them. Victor threatens to tell the court about the lust charm and about Dimitri and Rose’s romantic involvement. During the trial, he does reveal this secret, but the people in attendance believe he is lying. Victor is tried and found guilty; he is sent to a maximum security Moroi prison.

While at court, Lissa meets with the queen in order to discuss Lissa’s future. Although Lissa wants to go to a large university, she consents to going to Lehigh University, a small private university close to court, so that she can pursue a higher education and train as a royal Moroi. After Lissa’s meeting with the queen, Tatiana calls
Rose in and berates her for trying to start a relationship with her favorite nephew Adrian, which Rose is not. Tatiana reveals that she wants Lissa and Adrian to marry. After this bizarre conversation, Lissa takes Rose to a special spa at court where they meet a male dhampir working as a masseuse. Rose is shocked when she learns that this dhampir, Ambrose, is the queen’s secret lover and blood whore. Despite her misgivings about Ambrose’s relationship with the queen, Rose immediately likes him and she and Lissa go with Ambrose to see his fortune telling aunt. Although Rose does not believe this woman can tell fortunes, she is unsettled when Dimitri shows up and the fortune teller predicts that Dimitri will lose what he treasures most.

On the return flight home, Rose gets a debilitating migraine, drawing the attention of Dimitri and Alberta, the head of the guardians at St. Vladimir’s. When the plane makes an unscheduled stop at a human airport to refuel, Rose’s migraine gets worse and when she exits the plane, she sees a variety of ghosts, including Lissa’s parents and brother. She wakes in the academy’s infirmary and must admit that she has been seeing ghosts. She is sent to counseling and her novice exam duties are cut back. While Rose deals with her ghost sightings, Lissa is approached by the Mana and asked to join. She accepts their invite without Rose’s knowledge in order to spy on the group. When Lissa is led to the far corner of campus and attacked with magic by the group as a perverse initiation ritual, Rose rushes to her aid. Rose beats up her fellow students who are torturing Lissa and Lissa uses spirit to torture Jesse. Lissa’s calm but cruelly calculating demeanor shocks Rose. Rose can feel the twisted darkness of Lissa’s emotions, which are a sharp contrast to the warm and beautiful feeling she gets when Lissa heals. As Lissa struggles to let go of the magic and break her own spell, Rose realizes that Lissa can send the bad emotion
into her. Rose also realizes that this is what has been making her irrationally and suddenly angry all year. Lissa’s spirit rage enters into Rose, causing her to brutalize Jesse in what Rose realizes is an unfocused and primal way. As several guardians arrive on the scene and pry Rose from Jesse, Rose shouts uncontrollably. Dimitri is charged with calming her down and cleaning her up. He takes Rose to a small cabin in the woods. Dimitri tries to break Rose out of her rage as she struggles. Rose realizes she is out of control but with Dimitri’s help, she can snap out of her rage. When she does, she tells him that like Anna with St. Vladimir, she is drawing away Lissa’s anger and depression. Rose tells Dimitri she worries she will go insane and he reassures her that she is strong.

In this moment of emotional intensity, they kiss, leading to their first time having sex with one another. The experience is transformative for Rose, who realizes her love for Dimitri is real and feels right in waiting to lose her virginity until it was with someone she loved.

As Rose and Dimitri leave the cabin after sex, Rose sees Mason’s ghost, who gives her a warning about a Strigoi attack on the school. As Dimitri fights off the first wave, he sends Rose for help. When she does, she is herded into the dorms with the other students. When she realizes that Christian is in the church and unaware of the attack, she sneaks out to find him. Together, they head to the elementary school campus where Rose knows there is little protection. Christian and Rose work together to take out a large number of Strigoi using Christian’s fire magic and Rose’s fighting skills. After the long battle, Rose realizes that several students have been captured by Strigoi. The guardians decide to stage a rare rescue when Rose pinpoints the location of the hostages. Before the
group heads out, Dimitri tells Rose he is going to request a new assignment so they can be together.

During the rescue, many of the students are saved but Dimitri is captured. Rose learns the next day that Dimitri’s body was not found, meaning that he was turned Strigoi. Rose realizes that the fortune teller’s prediction came true as Dimitri has lost his soul, the part of him he values most. Now that Rose is 18, she decides to leave school and hunt Strigoi Dimitri in order to kill him, as she knew he wanted. As she leaves school grounds, Lissa confronts her, begging her and even trying to compel Rose to stay. Rose tells her that she needs to come first for once. Before heading out, Rose secures money from Adrian to fund the trip as long as she promises to give him a legitimate shot at dating when she returns. As Rose leaves, she says goodbye to a now at peace Mason, and goes to Siberia to track Dimitri.

**Book 4: Blood Promise**

This book opens with Rose in Siberia searching for Strigoi Dimitri. In order to find him, she captures Strigoi and tortures them for information. During her Strigoi killing spree, she meets a human named Sydney Sage, an Alchemist. Sydney explains that Alchemists are a group of humans that, while reviling vampires and dhampirs, help to keep those two groups secret from other humans. Sydney travels with Rose to Dimitri’s home village where they stay with Dimitri’s family, including his mother, grandmother, and sisters. While in Dimitri’s hometown, Rose meets another bonded pair, Mark and Oksana, who helps Rose to better understand her and Lissa’s connection. As the family holds a memorial service for Dimitri, Rose meets Abe, a mob-style Moroi who she later discovers is her father. When Abe helps one of Dimitri’s sisters for Rose, she
agrees to leave and go home, but instead, she travels with a group of unpromised dhampir (those without Moroi charges) to Novosibirsk to continue searching for Dimitri.

Rose encounters a Strigoi that knows Dimitri and she sends him back with a message that she is looking for him. Dimitri seeks out Rose, who hesitates to kill him, and he overpowers her. When Rose awakens, she realizes she is trapped in an apartment style room. Dimitri explains that he will hold her hostage until she agrees to let him turn her so they can be together forever and become a powerful Strigoi couple that rule over the other Strigoi. Rose refuses, but her resolve fades as she gets used to Strigoi Dimitri’s appearance and as he begins initiating sexual advances and biting. His bites keep Rose high and weak. Dimitri becomes impatient and Rose, terrified by the possibility of turning, snaps out of her haze and manages to escape. Although she is able to escape the compound, Dimitri chases her. They fight on a bridge over a rushing river. Rose is able to stake him and he falls into the water.

Rose wakes up with Sydney, Mark and Oksana, and Abe around her. When she wakes, she realizes that Lissa, who back at St. Vladimir’s has been targeted by a secret spirit user, is in danger. The spirit user, Avery, who has been compelling Lissa to act more and more crazy, which causes her and Christian to break up, attempts to kill Lissa by having her commit suicide. Avery wants to kill and heal Lissa in order to bond Lissa to her and control her powers. Rose, with the help of Mark and Oksana, is able to enter Lissa’s mind and help her to fight off Avery, her brother, and her guardian, all of who are bonded. The influx of people in Avery’s head causes her to go insane, thus saving Lissa. After saving Lissa, Oksana and Mark reluctantly tell Rose that they know of a spirit user, Robert Doru, Victor’s half brother, who allegedly restored a Strigoi.
Rose returns to St. Vladimir’s where she reunites with Lissa and shares with her all that happened in Russia, making them feel even closer. Rose’s mother, Janine, a renowned guardian, tells Rose that Abe is her father. Rose agrees to re-enroll in school in order to graduate and she slowly assimilates back into her normal life. One day, she receives a package from Strigoi Dimitri, who reveals that she staked him improperly and that he is still alive. Although he threatens to kill her, she is filled with hope and becomes determined to find Robert Doru and learn how to restore Dimitri.

**Book 5: Spirit Bound**

The book opens with Rose reading yet another love/death threat letter from Strigoi Dimitri. Rose puts his letter out of her mind because her final exam is imminent and she knows she needs to perform well in order to have a shot at becoming Lissa’s official guardian. The exam is a grueling obstacle course that pits Rose against “Strigoi” in order to test her abilities. Rose’s performance is spectacular, demonstrating that she is by far the best guardian in her class. After some fanfare for the graduates, Rose learns from Abe that Victor Dashkov, now in a high security prison, refuses Abe’s bribes to tell him where Robert is. Rose comes up with a risky plot for her, Lissa, and Eddie to break Victor out of prison. When the group travels to court, they meet up with once-enemy-now-friend, Mia Rinaldi, who helps Rose to secure crucial information about the prison’s layout and security.

Rose, Lissa, and Eddie follow through with a dangerous plan to free Victor. Once successful, they take Victor to Las Vegas, where they meet up with Robert. Adrian, thinking Rose and Lissa are on a girls’ weekend, tracks his credit card Rose is using and shows up at their hotel. When Adrian discovers what has taken place, he is enraged. The
group learns from Robert, who is clearly a bit unhinged, that he infused a stake with spirit in order to restore a Strigoi. When Strigoi Dimitri shows up to attack Rose, Victor and Robert escape. Back at court, Rose and Eddie are punished for endangering Moroi lives. While they are busied with manual labor, Strigoi Dimitri manages to kidnap Lissa and Christian in order to use them as bait for Rose.

Although Rose has risked everything in order to find a cure for Dimitri, she decides to kill him in order to save her friends. She leads a group of guardians to where they are held captive and leads the charge. Rose fights her way through a crowd of lesser Strigoi to get to Dimitri. Before she can stake him, Christian surrounds him in a ring of fire so Lissa can stake him with a stake she infused with spirit. In a profoundly powerful and life-altering exchange, which Rose feels vicariously through Lissa, Lissa saves Dimitri, restoring him to his former self. A shaken and restored Dimitri is taken into custody and locked up at court. He refuses to see Rose, and when she sneaks down to see him, he tells her he is unable to love and no longer wants to see her. Rose turns to Adrian for comfort and invites him to bite her when they can’t find a condom to have sex.

Dimitri, who is slowly being accepted back into society due to Lissa’s crusade, sees Rose at breakfast the next morning. He sees Adrian’s bite marks and realizes she is moving on. Suddenly, guardians surround Rose and Dimitri, claiming that Queen Tatiana has been murdered with Rose’s stake. They take Rose into custody and take her to a hearing, where it is decided that Rose will face an official trial. If she is found guilty, which is likely, she will be sentenced to death. As she is escorted out of the hearing, Ambrose, the queen’s dhampir lover, passes Rose a note. The note informs Rose that Lissa needs to have her voice recognized legally by the council. Tatiana implores Rose to find a secret
second Dragomir child. As Rose contemplates this new information and Tatiana’s death, Abe arrives and assures Rose he will not let her go to trial and be sentenced to death.

**Book 6: Last Sacrifice**

The book opens with Rose still in prison awaiting trial. Through Lissa, Rose is able to see Tatiana’s funeral. While watching, she sees a statue explode followed by chaos as people flee. Rose soon learns the explosion is a distraction put into motion by her father and friends, who break her out of prison and help her to escape court. Rose is handed over to Dimitri and they drive for several hours until they reach Sydney Sage, who takes them into West Virginia. Rose realizes she will be hiding out in a motel until her friends clear her name back at court. Rose tries to escape, causing a scene at the motel, and is stopped by Dimitri. Rose convinces him and Sydney to help her search for Lissa’s illegitimate half sibling. Sydney relocates them to a new safe place with the Keepers, a group of Moroi, dhampirs, and humans that live off the grid in a commune and shirk Moroi society’s condemnation of vampire-dhampir and vampire-human relationships.

As they search for Lissa’s sibling, they discover that Rose’s teacher, Sonya Karp, now Strigoi, is the only person who knows the whereabouts of that sibling. Victor and Robert dream walk into Rose’s dream and formulate a plan to meet her at Sonya’s house. Robert is able to restore Sonya and Dimitri tries to help her assimilate. After recovering, Sonya leads the group to the house of Jill Mastrano, a younger St. Vladimir’s student who idolizes Rose. They discover that Jill is Eric Dragomir’s illegitimate child. Guardians swarm the house, giving Victor and Robert the chance to kidnap Jill and escape. Sonya tracks them using spirit and also reveals to Rose that her and Dimitri’s
auras shine bright around one another, indicating their love, despite Dimitri’s vehemence that he does not love her.

Back at court, Lissa’s friends devise a plan to have her run for queen in order to stall for more time to clear Rose. Although a loophole allows Lissa to run, she cannot be voted queen unless she has another family member present. Lissa passes all of the tests, causing a huge debate about Moroi law. Meanwhile, when Rose, Dimitri, and Sonya track down Victor, Robert, and Jill, Rose flies into a spirit-induced rage and accidentally kills Victor. Dimitri comforts the distraught Rose, revealing that he still loves her but doesn’t want to take her from Adrian. She tells him she belongs only to herself and they have sex. Rose decides to break up with Adrian but he sees Dimitri and her kissing when he meets up with the group near court so they can bring Jill back. At court, Rose presents Jill as part of Lissa’s bloodline and reveals that Christian’s aunt Tasha is Tatiana’s killer. Rose realizes that Tasha’s feelings for Dimitri caused her to pin the murder on Rose. Tasha tries to run and takes Mia hostage with a gun. As Lissa tries to calm her, Tasha shoots at Lissa. Rose dives in front of her, taking a bullet to the chest.

When Rose wakes a few days later, Dimitri tells her that they have received full pardons and she has been assigned as Lissa’s guardian while he is assigned to Christian, allowing Rose and Dimitri to be together. When Lissa visits, Rose realizes they are no longer bonded. They speculate that when Rose almost died but healed without Lissa’s help, she negated the original bond. Once recovered, Adrian confronts Rose about their relationship, leaving a rift between them. The series concludes with Lissa’s coronation as queen and with Rose and Dimitri together. The story continues into a sequel series of six books that chronicles the lives of Sydney, Adrian, Jill, and Eddie.