THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH: AN ANALYSIS OF RACE AND GENDER REPRESENTATIONS AND THEIR SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS IN YOUNG ADULT FILM ADAPTATIONS

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Abstract

Today's theaters are full of film adaptations of popular novels, in particular from the budding genre of Young Adult (YA) literature. These films tend to come under fire from accusations of unoriginality and poor popular taste, and are even seen as an indicator of the death of Hollywood creativity. This view fails to see the potential that this genre holds to redefine the landscape of social representation in film and address issues that have been at the heart of cinema since its founding over a century ago.

Hollywood has long been troubled by problematic depictions of society and individuals—from explicit and implicit racism to social exclusion, from sexism and stereotypes to the overwhelming persistence of the singular "white heterosexual male hero," movies have been plagued by under- and mis-representation of minority groups. Often this has been attributed to the double pressures of a mostly white, male dominated industry producing the content, and the financial pressures to adhere to existing formulas of "what works." This paper aims to reveal, through the in-depth analysis of representations of gender and race in *The Hunger Games* (Gary Ross, 2012) and *Divergent* (Neil Burger, 2014)*, how YA adaptations have the power to combat this problematic representation due to its diverse, complex characters, as well as its increased likelihood for financial success, as demonstrated by their passionate fans and high book sales.

In short, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how YA adaptations, rather than sounding the death knell of cinema, are a trumpeting call to arms for a more socially conscientious and inclusive media environment—*if* the potential for diversity found in the novels is effectively translated to film.

Introduction

This paper will examine the film adaptations of two bestselling novels, *The Hunger Games* (Gary Ross, 2012) and *Divergent* (Neil Burger, 2014)*,* in order to analyze the successes, failures, and social implications of adaptations from the emerging Young Adult (YA) genre.

YA literature is aimed towards teenagers, roughly 12-18 (although there is no specific age range assigned to it), and is a complex genre that will be defined in more depth in the next section. Generally speaking, however, Nilsen and Donelson define the "young adult" social category as "students in junior high as well as those graduating from high school and still finding their way into adult life" while YA literature is simply the books this group chooses to read (3). A more specific definition, as stated in *The Guardian* article "What Are YA books? And Who is Reading Them?" comes from writers at the Young Adult Literature Convention who "agreed that the sine qua non of YA is an adolescent protagonist, who will probably face significant difficulties and crises, and grow and develop to some degree" (Williams). For the purposes of this paper, the concept of the Young Adult genre will pull from both definitions and consider YA texts to be those with adolescent characters and themes, which are specifically being marketed towards (or were originally intended for) the YA demographic.

With the genre's broad audiences and bestselling status, it is no surprise that Hollywood has fixated on these popular stories. The focus of this paper will be where this rising genre intercepts with a not new, but growing, trend: film adaptation.

The nature of each respective medium requires change. A book is not a film script. A film is not a performed novel. Even when the story translates well to the screen, "one finds the differentia infinitely more startling. More important, one finds the differentia infinitely more

problematic to the film-maker" (Bluestone viii). Even relatively early studies recognize this gaping crevasse between these media; Bluestone goes on to say that the primary problematic difference is that "the novel is a linguistic medium, the film essentially visual" (viii). He eventually comes to the conclusion that the filmic representation of a story cannot compare to quality of the original text. Discourse in this field tends to follow that trend and focus on the formalistic differences between adaptations, or judgement calls on which source is "better." Mireia Aragay points out a critique of earlier analysis, in which "the literary work was conceived of as the valued original, while the film adaptation was merely a copy, and where fidelity emerged as the central category of adaptation studies" (12). The focus of this paper will also be on issues of fidelity and deviations from the book, *not* with the presupposed notion that the written text is superior but rather to identify the positive and negative social messages both texts are either producing or silencing in the public sphere of conversation. Within this lens of analysis, two successful and well-known modern YA adaptations will be the focus of this study.

The Hunger Games, first published in 2008 by Suzanne Collins, is set in a dystopian future in the nation of Panem, which is divided into the ruling Capitol and its twelve districts. As punishment for a past rebellion attempt and as a symbol of their control, the Capitol dictates that every year each district must offer up one randomly selected boy and girl to fight to the death in a televised event called the Hunger Games. The book follows the story of a sixteen-year-old girl named Katniss Everdeen, resident of the impoverished District 12. When Katniss' little sister Primrose is selected for the Games, Katniss volunteers in her place, fully expecting to die in the competition. The other competitor from District 12 is Peeta Mellark, a baker's son who once saved her from starvation and, as she later discovers, has been deeply, secretly in love with her for years. In order to gain public favor (earning sponsors that send food and medicine during the

competition), Katniss must maneuver a complex web of politics, carefully maintained public image, and a façade of being a star-crossed lover madly in love with Peeta, while also struggling to survive the severe physical conditions of the arena—and, of course, fighting against the healthier and better-trained competitors who are all trying to kill her.

During the Games, the Capitol temporarily claims that for the first time they would allow two victors from the same district, allowing Peeta and Katniss to form an alliance, only to rescind that rule at the last minute when the pair are the sole survivors. Katniss recognizes that the Capitol must have a victor in order to maintain its image of control, and so she convinces Peeta to eat some poison berries with her in an apparent act of love, to deny the Capitol a winner. Ultimately, rather than allow the two to commit suicide, the Capitol hastily allows the two be joint victors and brings the year's Games to a close. Katniss' rebellious actions throughout the Games and eventual perception as a symbol of hope and defiance, as well as rising dissatisfaction with the Capitol's cruelty and control in the districts, leads to political unrest and eventually triggers a full-scale rebellion, which is the story of the next two books in the trilogy, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*.

In an interview with Rick Margolis, editor of the *School Library Journal*, Collins states that story draws heavily from myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, in which Athens had to send their children to Crete to be eaten by the Minotaur as a punishment. She also says she was inspired to write the book when "channel surfing between reality TV programs and actual war coverage" and mentally blurring the lines between "young people competing" on reality TV and "young people fighting in an actual war" in reality itself (Collins). These influences are also seen in the focus Collins places on the televised sporting nature of the Games: the emphasis on

physical appearance, the fake media persona, and performing for a viewing audience are all key themes in the book.

Divergent (written by Veronica Roth in 2011) also features a post-apocalyptic dystopian society with a female protagonist. For the purposes of comparison, similar subgenres and styles of books were chosen, although it is worth noting again that YA also spans the genres of realistic fiction, romance, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and many others. The society in *Divergent* divides people into factions, groups based on philosophy and disposition, with their own cultures and social functions. The five factions are Amity (peaceful and friendly farmers), Candor (brutally honest justice and law workers), Erudite (intellectual scholars and scientific researchers), Dauntless (brave soldiers and guards), and Abnegation (selfless charity workers and governing body). Children are born into their parents' factions and at the age of sixteen they take a test that tells them which faction they are best suited for, although they are ultimately allowed to choose any of the five factions, either abandoning their family for a new life or staying true to their original home faction.

The sixteen-year-old protagonist Beatrice Prior is Abnegation-born but struggles with their selfless philosophy. When she takes the test, she receives inconclusive results, testing positive for three different factions—a dangerous condition known as Divergent which she must keep a secret. At the choosing ceremony she decides to switch to Dauntless, and immediately undergoes a rigorous series of initiation tests. Should she fail, she will be exiled from Dauntless and forbidden to return to her home faction, instead becoming a member of the homeless, impoverished Factionless. The story follows Beatrice, who now goes by Tris, through the struggles of her training, adapting to a new life, making new friends and dealing with new enemies, hiding her Divergent status, and falling in love with her mentor, Four. While she

struggles with the first phase of training, physical combat, she excels at the second stage, meant to train bravery. This stage involves initiates being injected with simulation serums that give them hallucinations, forcing them to live out their personal "fear landscapes" and overcome each of their terrors individually. Due to Tris' unique Divergent mind, she is able to manipulate the rules within the simulations and master the fear landscapes quickly.

The day after officially being accepted into the faction, Tris wakes up to find her fellow Dauntless members all silently marching and arming themselves, trapped in a trancelike state to which she is immune as a Divergent. She realizes that the Dauntless faction leaders have partnered with the Erudite faction, the makers of the simulation serums, with the intent to control the Dauntless soldiers into attacking the ruling Abnegation faction. There has been serious unrest regarding who should rule; Abnegation, being selfless, was originally perceived as the best choice, but the Erudite community lead by Jeanine wants to seize control, claiming to be more intelligent and thus more fit to rule. Tris plays along, pretending to be one of the mindless soldiers just long enough to attempt to save her Abnegation family from the attack. However, her Divergence is revealed and she is captured. Her mother comes to rescue her and dies trying to protect Tris, and immediately after Tris is forced to shoot and kill Will, one of her now-brainwashed friends, in self-defense. Tris locates her father and others, and they return to Dauntless headquarters to shut down the simulation controlling the Dauntless; her father dies protecting her. She is forced to confront Four, who is also under simulation and guarding the controls, and manages to talk him out of the simulation through an act of self-sacrifice. They shut down the simulation and are forced to flee together in search of sanctuary as the faction system succumbs to chaos. The next two books in this trilogy follow Tris being hunted by Erudite and experimented on as a Divergent, meeting growing rebellion of Factionless who take control of

the city, uncovering the truth of Divergence and the war that spawned the faction system, and

eventually dying in self-sacrifice before peace is ultimately restored.

In an interview at the end of *Divergent,* Roth states that she was inspired by elements of

psychology: the idea of exposure therapy (forcing someone to confront stimuli that frighten

them) in treating phobias, and the Milgram experiment (a 1960s social psychology test exploring

how far obedience to an authority figure will go when it conflicts with personal morals) ("Bonus

Materials" 6). She also explores the idea of utopia and dystopia, and personal choice. The book

constantly grapples with themes of how to define and understand selflessness, love, forgiveness,

death, and bravery—concerns which are carried over, along with the characters and plot, into the

film.

As with all adaptations of books, comics, historical tales and autobiographical stories,

film adaptations help draw attention to their underlying issues and expose those stories and

messages to a new and wider audience. However, a content analysis of YA film adaptations

suggests that they are being underutilized in their potential to diversify the types of stories being

told. This is based on the practices of whitewashing and reduction in the translation of the each

film, and is not to say that the entire genre should be forced into a more socially conscious

direction, or that film's primary function is to produce pro-social messages.

Film's purpose in society is by no means clear. Since its invention, theorists have

assigned the medium to a variety of roles, from propaganda and nation-building to a mirror or

window of society, from recording reality to simple entertainment. Some media theories suggest

film and television have a social responsibility—as reflected, for example, in the "Six Public

Purposes" of the BBC, set by the Royal Charter: Sustaining citizenship and civil society,

promoting education and learning, stimulating creativity and cultural excellence, representing the

UK, its nations, regions and communities, bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK, and delivering to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services. These ideals suggest that visual communication media should be held to a higher standard in the social messages it carries. It is possible that there will never be a consensus as to its one purpose, or perhaps it should be considered that such a multifaceted medium fulfills many purposes at once.

But no matter which media theory reigns the times, films are undeniably a piece of media culture, carrying larger societal conversations within them, ranging from perpetuations of sociocultural expectations and norms to explorations of ethics and morals. A film is a story, and as novelist Chimamanda Adichie says in a TED talk, stories "matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity." The way in which stories represent people, such as race and gender groups, impacts its audience in a variety of complex ways, from establishing or combatting stereotypes to creating diverse role models to contributing to implicit bias. In this paper, the ways in which these human representations in stories, specifically YA novels and their subsequent film adaptations, will be examined to see in what ways these films are presenting more socially conscientious and positive messages that combat racism and sexism, and in what ways they fail.

In short, this paper will examine the significant social effects, roles, and messages of YA adaptations through the differences between the original and celluloid versions of the story, through the lens of two recent representative adaptations.

PART 1: THE ADAPTATION LANDSCAPE

The Intersection of the YA Genre and the Film Industry

As mentioned, the Young Adult literature genre is broad and difficult to define. Usually, as its name suggests, the first description of the genre comes not from its content but from its readership: "literature written for readers between the ages of 12 and 20" (Alsup 1). It contains a variety of subgenres, from realistic drama to fantasy to comedy, and are generally targeted towards teens, although there is no specific age range attributed to it (notice how Alsup's definition has a different age range than Nilsen and Donelson) and its audience varies from older children through adults. According to NPR's list of "100 Best-Ever Teen Novels," "it's almost a cliché at this point to say that teen fiction isn't just for teens anymore. Just last year, the Association of American Publishers ranked Children's/Young Adult books as the single fastest-growing publishing category."

Despite its diversity, however, there are many commonalities that characterize the genre beyond just its target audience. Nilsen and Donelson identify seven defining characteristics of YA: it is written from the viewpoint/voice of a young person (and is very often in first person); the young person "solves the problem" and takes credit for their own accomplishments rather than relying on parental aid; the story is fast-paced; it "includes a variety of genres and subjects"; its books tend to have characters making worthy accomplishments, especially personal growth; and it deals "with emotions that are important to young adults" psychologically, such as sexuality, preparing for the future, social skills, personal ideologies, and community (20-36). YA book motifs tend to include coming of age, self-discovery/self-creation, sexuality and relationships, and overcoming obstacles. These books also tend to deal with more complex and disturbing content than children's books; for example, *The Hunger Games* depicts children

fighting to the death in a televised arena, and *Divergent* deals with issues of romance, intimacy, and violence.

As NPR stated, the genre is gaining ground, and YA texts are not uncommon to find amongst nationally ranked bestseller lists. In fact, in December of 2012 the *New York Times* Bestseller List broke their original category of "Children's Chapter Book" into "Middle Grade" and "YA," and now includes 3 separate subcategories of "Young Adult" (hardcover, paperback, and e-book). *The Hunger Games* has been in the #1 spot for the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestseller lists, as well as landing on the *Wall Street Journal* and *Publishers Weekly* lists, according to the book's official website on suzannecollinsbooks.com. *Divergent* sat on the *New York Times* YA bestseller list for 47 weeks, as its November 3, 2013 list declares. Their sales alone demonstrate their widespread popularity and financial success. According to the Young Adult Library Services Association, *The Hunger Games* had an original print run of only 200,000 when the book first came out in 2008; in 2010 the book sold 4.3 million copies in the US alone. *Divergent* and its two sequels, *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* sold a combined 6.7 million copies in 2013, according to a *Publisher's Weekly* article by Diane Roback.

This financial trend is seen in many YA books chosen to become adaptations. John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* held a spot in the bestseller list for 78 weeks and is on the *New York Times* top ten list of YA paperbacks at the time of this writing (October 25, 2015). *The Scorpio Races* has been nominated or won in 25 different book awards and "best book/reader's choice" lists, according to its official book page on maggiestiefvater.com. *USA Today's* 2009 list of the top 100 best-selling book titles listed the four top slots to each of the YA *Twilight* saga books. By selecting these popular books, filmmakers already know there is a large audience who enjoy the story and characters.

Appealing for its broad audience and the low risk due to the story's proven financial success in sales, this genre has become a popular resource for Hollywood to draw upon and adapt into film. In a PBS Frontline interview, entertainment writer Michael Cieply comments on the modern conglomerate corporate industry:

> There's a tendency to move toward what is already pre-sold, what the public already knows. Because what corporations need to do is sell predictability. … And in the movie business, the only way you can begin to manage earnings that way is to trade on what's already worked. And so it really makes risk almost impossible.

This echoes the observations of many film critics and theorists; overall people are seeing Hollywood resort to more existing stories as a tactic of risk-aversion. This is unsurprising given the concerns about the economy; a Film School Rejects article by Scott Beggs draws parallels between Jeffrey Katzenberg's 1991 "The World is Changing: Some Thoughts on Our Business," memo about the state of the movie industry and today, including the country in recession, the industry feeling pressured into a blockbuster mentality, and that the movie industry "isn't recession-proof." The industry is likened to a poker game; when the players have plenty of chips they can afford some creative, risky plays, but when the stacks are low they have to play it safe (Beggs).

As mentioned, these YA novels have a proven success and a dedicated fan base. By adapting a popular book, the filmmakers essentially have a "test drive" of how the story will be received, and some guaranteed audience numbers from fans interested in seeing the book come to life. As Beggs comments, "Studios can no longer afford to create name recognition – it has to

come built-in" through sequels, reboots, and adaptations. Many are also trilogies or short series, a phenomenon which lends itself well to the possibility of a "cash cow" franchise.

Overall, then, adaptations of YA films are particularly appealing to the industry. Film adaptations tend to be profitable; *The Fault in Our Stars,* the previously mentioned YA novel by John Green, grossed $124,872,350 (according to Box Office Mojo) and Fandango stated that the film broke the record for the "biggest pre-selling love story in the company's 14-year history, and is also the ticket service's biggest pre-selling drama of the year" (qtd. in Gilman). The *Twilight* franchise, despite suffering heavy criticism in everything from acting to content, still grossed $2.5 billion dollars in the global box office according to Forbes.com's "Twilight by the Numbers." The two films analyzed in this paper, *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* grossed $408,010,692 and $150,947,895 respectively according to Box Office Mojo.

These YA adaptations are also a rich resource for merchandising, as the contents of any Barnes and Noble or Hot Topic store can attest on any given day. Peter Bart, an ex-studio executive and writer for *Variety* magazine, brings attention to the increased importance of this business element of filmmaking by comparing the green-light film approval process from his early working days to today. He comments in a Frontline interview that a modern meeting will have 30 to 40 people mostly discussing business, adding "There's one group there to discuss the marketing tie-ins. How much will McDonald's or Burger King put up? There's somebody else there to discuss merchandising, toy companies and so forth" (Bart). YA adaptations target a market likely to spend on this kind of merchandising, and often the material leads itself well to it—such as *Divergent*'s symbols for every faction or the iconic mockingjay pin from *The Hunger Games.*

YA film adaptations also resonate with an important demographic of the movie industry, the "frequent moviegoer." According to the MPAA "Theatrical Market Statistics" study of 2014, "Frequent moviegoers who go to the cinema once a month or more continue to drive the movie industry. Although they account for only 11% of the population, frequent moviegoers account for 51% of all tickets sold in the U.S./Canada" (12). The three largest age categories of those frequent moviegoers are 12-17, 18-24, and 25-39—an age window primed for the YA genre (MPAA 12).

Recent YA adaptations in 2015 alone include: *The Scorch Trials* (following the 2014 adaptation of the first in the series, *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner), *The Mockingjay Part 2* (based on book 3 of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series), *Paper Towns* (based on John Green's novel), *Insurgent* (the sequel to Veronica Roth's *Divergent*), *Seventh Son* (based on *The Spook's Apprentice* by Joseph Delaney), *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* (by Jesse Andrews), and *The DUFF* (based on Kody Keplinger's book by the same title).

According to the Christian Science Monitor and Readbreatherelax.com, still to come this same year are: *Fallen* (based on Lauren Kate's novel of the same name), *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (by Eva Green), *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (by Libba Bray), *The Diviners* (also by Libba Bray) *The Scorpio Races* (from Maggie Stiefvater's book by the same name), *Wicked Lovely* (by Melissa Marr), *Wither* (based on Lauren DeStefano's novel), *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* (the first in Laini Taylor's trilogy), *Matched* (by Ally Condie), *The Night Circus* (based off Erin Morgenstern's book), and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (by Seth Grahame-Smith).

These exhaustive lists indicate just how pervasive YA adaptations are becoming. Even as adaptations of classic works (such as a re-envisioning of *Frankenstein* or *Planet of the Apes*)

continue to come out, it is clear that the dominating force in text-based book adaptations

(excluding graphic novels) is leaning more and more towards the Young Adult genre. With this

comes questions about how these popular stories get adapted, what pop culture gains from

adaptation, and what gets "lost in translation" along the way.

A Brief History of Film Adaptation

"Where has the creativity gone? …Creativity has lost its function in movie making. Movies need to be original" (Silver). The popular opinion often mirrors this view from Sam Silver of MoviePilot—frustrated critics bemoaning the loss of originality as the next hit book flies from page to screen. They curse modern Hollywood for its dependence on retelling existing stories and mourn the death of creativity. The sources in the previous section certainly seem to speak to that sentiment. However, the historical truths of film tell a very different story. Literary adaptations into film are almost as old as the film medium itself.

The first films produced at the turn of the 20th century bear little resemblance to our understanding of what "movies" are today. In the early history of cinema, film could have taken many forms: as a nonfiction recording practice, a scientific tool, a brief vaudeville amusement, a children's toy, a way to reproduce plays, or any number of other roles. Literary adaptations, along with theatrical influences, helped develop content, style and editing practices which shaped films into what they are now.

The cinema was officially born in December of 1895 when the Lumière brothers presented the work of their *Cinèmatographe* (a camera, projector, and film printing device) in the Grand Café in Paris. Edison followed soon after with his Kinetograph camera. Despite being "moving pictures," the films these inventions produced were far from the modern blockbuster. Films were short, not hours but mere minutes long. The content was also dramatically different from modern movies; the earliest films focused on showcasing the new technology's possibilities to capture movement rather than unfold a story.

These films set the standard for motion picture content:

The kind of documentary recording practice by Edison and the Lumières was to become the mainstream tendency of the cinema until the turn of the century because there was as yet no notion that the camera might be used to tell a story— i.e., to *create* a narrative reality rather than simply *record* some real or staged event. (Cook 13)

Film seemed to be an extension of photography, a tool to capture and display reality. While some early films did have an idea of a plot, like the Lumière brothers' *The Sprinkler Sprinkled* (1895), they were shot identical to the more common documentary films, as if to imitate a spontaneous narrative moment captured by the camera.

However, not all early films were non-narrative. The most famous example of this is the magician-turned-director George Méliès. Unlike Edison and the Lumière brothers, his films were narrative from the start, captivating short stories that served as a framework for the illusions renowned in his trick films. Despite the emphasis on cinematic visual effects like disappearing, transforming, and objects moving on their own, "the presence of spectacle in no way detracts from the films' narrative content" in which elaborate fantasies were played out (Ezra 5).

But even Méliès, a cinematic icon of imagination and creativity, utilized adaptation. In 1898 he made a film called *Guillaume Tell et le Clown* (*Adventures of William Tell*) inspired by William Tell (a folk hero whose exploits were recorded in manuscripts). His *Cendrillon* (*Cinderella*) followed in 1899 from the Brothers Grimm tale, and Jonathan Swift's writing was reimagined in 1902 as *Le Voyage de Gulliver à Lilliput et chez les Géants* (*Gulliver's Travels Among the Lilliputians and the Giants*) (Ezra 152-154). He even attributed the works of Jules Verne (among other conscious and unconscious sources) as inspiration for his iconic film *A Trip to the Moon* (Solomon 15). Méliès was not alone in this tendency—many early narratives drew

inspiration for characters and storylines from literature, including the mostly-lost 1899 *King John* (William Dickinson and Walter Dando) which was the earliest known film adaptation of Shakespeare (according to the openculture.com archives), Arthur Marvin's *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* (1900), the 1903 adaptation of Lews Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (Cecil M. Hepworth and Percy Stow), and many others. This trend continued across cinematic history, as shown by classic films like *Greed* (Stroheim, 1924) from the 1899 Norris novel *McTeague* and *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958) which was based on *D'entre les Morts* by Boileau-Narcejac, among many other milestone works in film.

The cinema owes literature more than just narrative content; modern editing structure and style have distant roots in adaptations. In the beginning, in regards to structure, "the earliest Lumiere and Edison films are precisely the same—the camera and point of view are static (except when moved functionally, to reframe action) and the action continues from beginning to end, as if editing 'reality' was unthinkable to their makers" (Cook 11). Literary adaptation helped to change this approach to filmmaking.

As mentioned, visionaries like Méliès advanced visual storytelling through unique cinematic effects while simultaneously drawing from and adapting literature. However, it was D.W. Griffith, the individual often accredited as "the father of film technique," who is best known for laying the foundation of modern film language (Cook 51). He introduced many now-commonplace techniques, including subjective camera "point of view" shots and flashbacks (Cook 55-56). It is said that Dickens' work "is generally credited for inspiring the innovations—the use of the close-up, parallel editing, montage, and even the dissolve—which helped earn Griffith the epithet 'father of film technique'" (Boyum 3). In some respects, then, literature is to

thank for these filmic developments. Even Griffith explicitly states it when he defends his new filmmaking style in an interview:

> "How can you tell a story jumping about like that? The people won't know what it's about."
>
> "Well," said Mr. Griffith, "doesn't Dickens write that way?"
>
> "Yes, but that's Dickens; that's novel writing; that's different."
>
> "Oh, not so much, these are picture stories; not so different." (qtd. in Cook 56)
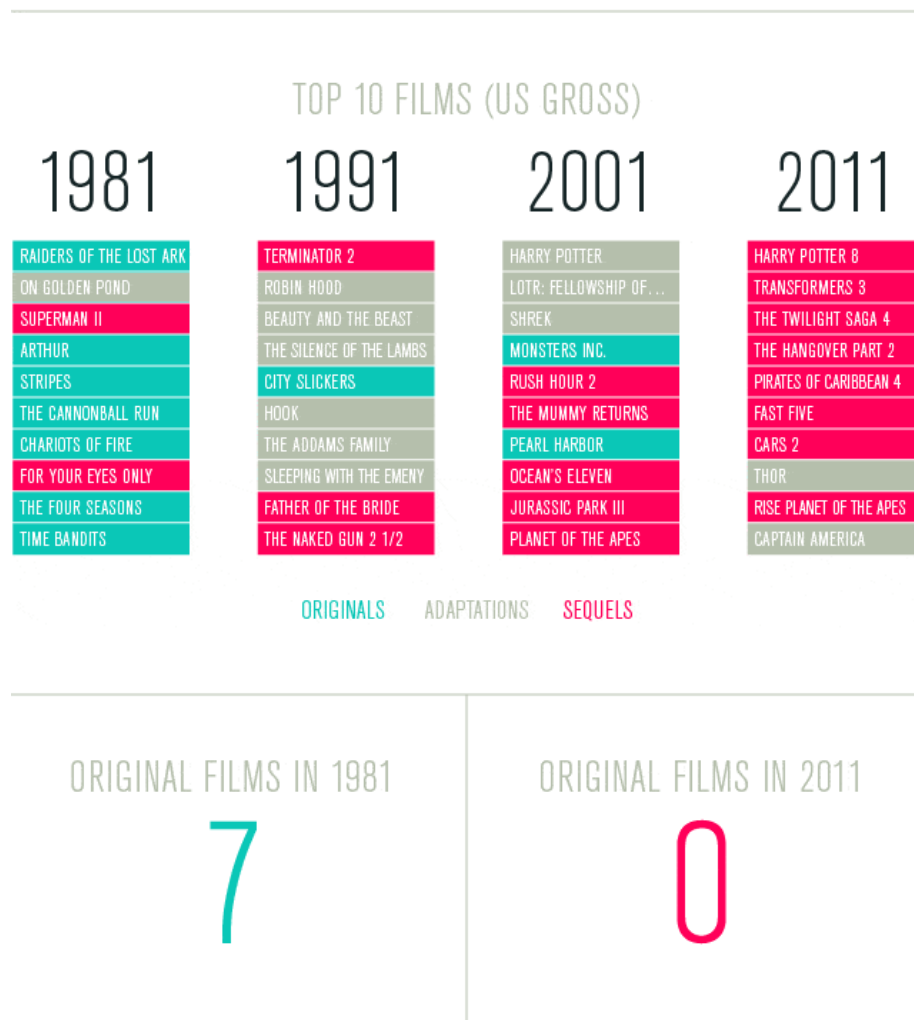
Griffith also opposed the one-reel (10-16 minute) structure, chaffing under its limitations. David Cook in *A History of Narrative Film* opinions that, along with theatrical stage influences, "The narrative devices of the Victorian novels that Griffith had loved in his youth also provided models for his innovations" (54).

The tie was so strong between Griffith's work and Dickens' novels, and Griffith himself was so outspoken about this inspiration, that the film theorist Sergei Eisenstein dedicated an entire paper to "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," stating in no uncertain terms that "Griffith arrived at montage [editing] through the method of parallel action, and he was led to the idea of parallel action by—Dickens!" (205). And in addition to the editing techniques, he goes on to say that "Dickens may have given and did give to cinematography far more guidance than that which led to the montage of parallel action alone," including the powerful allure of character design, humor, and the use of psychology (Eisenstein 206).

So while it is true that today's Hollywood is relying more on adaptations, sequels, and remakes than in other points in its relatively short history as an American mass medium, as Andrew Allen of *Short of the Week* points out in the chart below, which pulls from Box Office Mojo data, it has never *not* been a cornerstone of cinema.

HOLLYWOOD'S WANING CREATIVITY

Short of the Week.com

TOP 10 FILMS (US GROSS)

1981	1991	2001	2011
RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK	TERMINATOR 2	HARRY POTTER	HARRY POTTER 8
ON GOLDEN POND	ROBIN HOOD	LOTR: FELLOWSHIP OF...	TRANSFORMERS 3
SUPERMAN II	BEAUTY AND THE BEAST	SHREK	THE TWILIGHT SAGA 4
ARTHUR	THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS	MONSTERS INC.	THE HANGOVER PART 2
STRIPES	CITY SLICKERS	RUSH HOUR 2	PIRATES OF CARIBBEAN 4
THE CANNONBALL RUN	HOOK	THE MUMMY RETURNS	FAST FIVE
CHARIOTS OF FIRE	THE ADDAMS FAMILY	PEARL HARBOR	CARS 2
FOR YOUR EYES ONLY	SLEEPING WITH THE EMENY	OCEAN'S ELEVEN	THOR
THE FOUR SEASONS	FATHER OF THE BRIDE	JURASSIC PARK III	RISE PLANET OF THE APES
TIME BANDITS	THE NAKED GUN 2 1/2	PLANET OF THE APES	CAPTAIN AMERICA

ORIGINALS   ADAPTATIONS   SEQUELS

ORIGINAL FILMS IN 1981	ORIGINAL FILMS IN 2011
7	0

In any study of adaptation, it's important to recognize the contributions that adaptations have made in influencing how we tell cinematic stories. In time literature and film have come to share many titles among their formative, classic works—texts like *Dracula*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *the Wizard of Oz*, to name but a few. So before we proceed in our analysis of these modern films, we must dispel the myth that book-to-movie adaptations are an indicator of a new trend of unoriginality in filmmaking. Adaptations have been with us for as long as movies have, and in

many ways are the reason we have the movies as we know them. They have given us culturally

iconic characters, classic plots, and specific visual literacy.

However, as the chart above indicates, for better or for worse adaptations (and adaptation

sequels, which are represented in the chart as red rather than grey) are on the rise. Given how

historically adaptations have had an important role in shaping the film medium and its audience,

the question becomes: Exactly what are these increasingly prolific films doing to shape our

world today?

Omissions and Additions: Differences between the Novels and Films

Books unfold in the mind, but movies unfold in the senses. Books are mental and based on written language, films are visual and aural. Even early theorists like George Bluestone comment on the basic structural difference in communication, in which "the moving picture comes to us directly through perception" but "language must be filtered through the screen of conceptual apprehension" (21). These are just two of the many differences between a novel and a film. Given these differences, it would be ludicrous to expect an adaptation to perfectly re-present its source material, and to assume the text would have the same emotional and psychological impact.

Omission and alteration are arguably impossible to avoid in any YA or lengthy novel adaptation. The source material is so dense, and the resulting film so constrained by standard viewing time, that it is expected that something must be cut in the process. To compare, the Harper Audio audiobook of Divergent lasts 671 minutes (eleven hours and eleven minutes), whereas the running time of the film is 139 minutes (or two hours, nineteen minutes) according to IMDB. Even with the addition of visual information to help condense the story, it is clear that not everything can make its way into a piece that is only about twenty percent of the original size.

Some of the necessary exclusions include minor characters, lengthy dialogue, and unnecessary scenes and events. For example, in *Divergent,* when the initiates receive their rankings, a vicious boy named Peter scores second place behind another initiate, Edward; that night, Tris wakes up to screaming and a horrific sight: "Edward lies on the floor next to his bed, clutching at his face. Surrounding his head is a halo of blood, and jutting between his fingers is a

silver knife handle… I recognize it as a butter knife from the dining hall. The blade is stuck in Edward's eye" (Roth 202). Tris attempts to comfort him, and realizes that Peter is responsible.

This scene was excluded from the final film, although it was shot and the deleted scene can be viewed online. There are many significant layers in this scene that are therefore lost in the movie: the atmosphere of fear, risk, and violence in Dauntless training; Tris' multifaceted personality as both caretaker and fighter; the shock value of violence; and the cruelty Peter is capable of. But ultimately all those messages are easily translated across other scenes in the film, and while the "butter knife scene" is a favorite among fans it is clearly not necessary to overarching (and complex) plot. As the director Burger explains in regards to the cut, "even though it's a good scene, that's really the art of trying to figure out where the movie is working and sometimes what's slowing it down is one of your favorite scenes, and you've got to cut it out" (qtd. in West).

Proceeding forward with this analysis, we recognize that it is impossible to exactly transfer the book into movie form due to time and medium restrictions—nor should the ideal of an adaptation be to simply illustrate the book into a motion picture. Scenes like the one above, although important to characterization and metaphorically resonant, need to be excluded in order for the story to flow smoothly and quickly.

However, the overall damage caused by some omissions can be far greater than a disgruntled fan upset over a missing line of dialogue or cut scene. Sometimes, these omissions can redefine a character, destroy agency and voice, and eliminate crucial conversations from the public sphere. It is often in these changes that the movie fails to uphold the positive social contributions that the book forged. Alternatively, however, the ways in which the film media

differs from text—its wide reach, its uniquely visual elements, its emotional power—hold the most potential for instigating positive societal change.

It is a mistake to attribute too much power to one film, however. One can imagine each film as a single dot of paint on a canvas. Alone, each one has minimal impact and importance. But when the entire canvas is viewed, each dot is contributing to a larger whole—the color and texture of the overall message. So it is with films and the media landscape. No one film or genre can be held "responsible" for how race or women are represented on screen, but each film is contributing to the overarching messages that are ultimately consumed. Whether each piece of media information echoes the others, perpetuating similar messages, or provides a new understanding or interpretation, will change the final outlook of how something—race and gender, for example—is socially understood and perceived through the lens of films in pop culture.

The following sections will analyze some of the consistencies, omissions, and formalistically-driven changes found in *Divergent* and *The Hunger Games* and seek to explore the significance of those choices, as well as how they can impact the audience. As noted in the introduction, this paper will be a comparison study between the original texts and the adapted films. This is not necessarily traditional of modern adaptation studies, which often voice (perfectly valid) opinions that "the most basic and banal focus in evaluating adaptations is the issue of 'fidelity,' usually leading to the notion that 'the book was better'" and ignoring the creative possibilities the cinema offers (Welsh and Lev xiv).

However, the point is not to claim that the filmic medium's unique properties doom it to always be inherently inferior to literature, as an early adaptation study by George Bluestone concludes (Aragay 13). Nor is it the intent of this paper to evaluate each medium's creative or

aesthetic value. The purpose of these comparisons are to explore, if adaptation is "a cultural practice… to be approached as acts of discourse partaking of a particular era's cultural and aesthetic needs and pressures," which cultural messages are being promoted and silenced through the films (Aragay 19). These comparisons are effective in showing how the YA adaptation genre is uniquely positioned to counter problematic representations of race and gender in modern Hollywood, and where these specific films succeed and fail in that respect.

PART 2: RACIAL REPRESENTATION IN ADAPTATION

One of the most prominent shifts between the book and movie is in the perception of character appearance. In the process of adaptation, a character is made "visible" by assigning that character an actor. Of course, books also include character descriptions. If that is the case, why would the exact physical appearance of the character in the film matter?

William Mitchell, in pondering the difference between a painting and a picture, considers the nature of representation in photographic media: "The existence of horses means that you can take a photograph of some particular horse, but it does not prevent a horse painting from showing no horse in particular. You cannot, however, take a photograph of no horse in particular" (29). Like photography, a film cannot have a character without assigning that character to a particular human, and based on that person's characteristics (race, body type, etc.) certain associative meanings are highlighted. This section will focus specifically on the racial meanings created and emphasized through the casting choices made in *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent,* and what broader societal impacts these have had.

The Impact of a Visible Protagonist

In a YA adaptation the casting, in which an abstract understanding of a character's physical appearance is solidified to a very particular face and image, is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, physical appearance is closely tied to a concept which I will call "media heroes." Protagonist diversity is crucial in providing a diverse audience with heroes they can identify with. In analyzing ethnic diversity in Canadian film and television production, Paul de Silva writes, "an accurate portrayal of our increasing diverse society is critical to our sense of

belonging and inclusion" (1). Studies like this one demonstrate the concern for representing and accepting the breadth of human experience and appearance.

There are also many first-person accounts of individuals who are searching the media for people like them. The anonymous creator of hungergamestweets.com, described later on in this segment, states that he immediately notices race in literature, in part because "whenever I read something, I wonder, 'where can I find the character who represents ME?'" (qtd. in Holmes). Sherman Alexie comments in "I Hated Tonto (Still Do)" how the lack of positive film representations of Native Americans influenced his upbringing and worldview:

> In the movies, Indians are always accompanied by ominous music. And I've seen
> so many Indian movies that I feel like I'm constantly accompanied by ominous
> music. I always feel that something bad is about to happen. I am always aware of
> how my whole life is shaped by my hatred of Tonto. (Alexie 95)

Not all portrayals are negative, however. An uplifting perspective comes from a girl's story about how her autistic brother related to a *Guardians of the Galaxy* character, Drax, who is too literal and blunt to understand metaphors:

> I took my little brother (who falls on the autism spectrum) to see *Guardians of the
> Galaxy* and after this scene, he lit up like a Christmas tree and screamed 'He's like
> me! He can't do metaphors!' And for the rest of the film my brother stared at Drax
> in a state of rapture.

> So while I adored Guardians of the Galaxy as a great fun loving film with cool
> characters I can do nothing but thank Marvel Studios and Dave Bautista for

finally bringing a superhero to the screen that my little brother can relate to. (qtd.

in Autism Speaks)

This boy went on to "tell everyone he knows that people with autism can be superheroes"

(Reyes). Similar stories are told in regards to other superheroes, like Hawkeye being partially

deaf or Professor X in his wheelchair. These examples are just a few of the scores of people

voicing how heroes in the media (superheroes, "good guys," and protagonists) directly impact

their understanding of themselves and their place in the world—as does the representation of

who the villains and "bad guys" are. And yet, despite the good diversity can do when integrated

and the harm many people admit to experiencing without it, adaptations tend to lean towards

"default whiteness" and deny many people of a personal hero.

Consider a specific example from the controversial casting of Jennifer Lawrence as *The

Hunger Games* protagonist Katniss Everdeen. In the book, Katniss is described somewhat

ambiguously, by saying that the character Gale "could be my brother. Straight black hair, olive

skin, we even have the same gray eyes" (Collins 8). Under that description, fan theories have

explored multiple possibilities of Katniss' race. Some have cited common internet definitions,

such as Wikipedia's "Olive Skin" article, stating that it is frequent among "the Mediterranean

and parts of Latin America" as well as "the Middle East, the Mediterranean, parts of Latin

America, parts of Africa, and the Indian subcontinent" depending on the shade. Others look at

her location in District 12, which correlates with the Appalachian Mountains, and suggest she

might be Melungeon or Native American, such as Racebending.com explores. *The Huffington

Post* sums up that in her ambiguity, "Katniss was someone that everyone could relate to,

regardless of race. Whether Caucasian or Hispanic or Indian or biracial, this was a character to

whom people could relate. With dark hair, olive skin and gray eyes, Katniss fit the appearance of various different people" (Schueler).

Overall, there is quite a bit of evidence suggesting that Katniss could be cast as a "woman of color." However, there are also arguments to be made for Katniss being Caucasian. The regions from the "Olive Skin" Wikipedia article that some fans cite include Caucasian and non-Caucasian backgrounds and the term itself can apply to shades of whiteness; the trait of "grey eyes" can be found in Northern and Eastern Europe as well as North Africa and the Middle East; and the Appalachia region of West Virginia is currently predominantly (93.9%) white (Hartmann). Ultimately "olive skin" is an ambiguous term that provides no clear answer. As such, many people defend the casting.

The Huffington Post (echoing many popular sentiments) finds several issues wrong with casting Katniss with a white actress, including that it is unfair to minority actors, is emblematic of systematic whitewashing in the industry, and is uncomfortably similar to historically racist films that used makeup and special effects to represent race (such as blackface practices). Most of all, the article highlights that "young women of color who read this book rejoiced at finally finding a book with a main character to whom they could relate, especially readers of biracial or Native American descent, who have a particularly hard time finding characters of a similar background. *The Hunger Games* were a step in a right direction," whereas the movie denied them of that idol.

Again, the idea of the media hero surfaces, and it is not a singular one. An author, Shannon Riffe, speaks to the desire for diversified heroes on Racialicious.com, "as a woman of color who reads and writes YA, I'm committed to seeing more characters of color in stories where their race isn't the issue… And that's why I am so disappointed with this casting choice,

even though it's just a movie." Even stronger opinions exist, suggesting that *The Hunger Games* is "the kind of book that would allow women and YA of color (olive or otherwise) to envision their struggles differently. They could see themselves as heroes, as agents for change, as people who can resist instead of merely struggling to exist…" (qtd. in Racebending.com). More resistance can be seen in the group effort of a public blog that cropped up soon after the casting was announced, katnissisoliveskinneddealwithit.tumblr.com, which features non-white Katniss (and other characters) art and writing, and proclaims in its heading: "We do not condone. All of this is wrong." But these opinions and their like, from *The Huffington Post* to anonymous blogs, are not backed up by specific facts.

What is fact, however, and is the true problematic element of Katniss' casting was not that the ultimate choice turned out to be white—it was that Katniss was preconceived to be white. A *Wall Street Journal* article describing the process of casting the role mentioned the qualifications for their digital auditions:

> Ms. Zane's staff has posted the single paragraph laying out the filmmakers' broad criteria for Katniss. She should be Caucasian, between ages 15 and 20, who could portray someone "underfed but strong," and "naturally pretty underneath her tomboyishness" (Jurgensen).

In other words, the conception of the film character of Katniss was assumed to be some level of white, ignoring the ambiguity of the source text and closing the door on a variety of other skin tones represented in film, ultimately shutting out many talented minority actors from the part.

Why is there so much public concern? One might ask why it matters what race a character is portrayed as; their main importance is their personality, not their hair color or skin

tone. On an individual level, considering just one particular character (Katniss is who she is because of her determination and sarcasm, not how tan her skin is), this might be argued for. But again, that argument presumes that her race is not a key factor in her character—yet the casting specifications for a Caucasian woman indicate otherwise. Beyond that, the larger issue with casting a racially ambiguous character as white is that it contributes to a larger tendency of white protagonists in film.

This leads into the second issue of racial representation in literary adaptations, which Chimamanda Adichie calls "the danger of the single story" in a TED talk. This is the concept that when an audience consumes only variations of one "story" about a place or group of people (for example, "Africans are poor") they begin to perceive that story as the only truth and stereotype its subjects, when in reality there are many diverse and complex stories that can be told. As an author, she is referring to written literature, but the idea that to "show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" can be easily translated to film (Adichie). Show diversity only in secondary roles and minorities become secondary, less complex. Show an action hero only as white, and that is the only thing an action hero can be. Again, no one film can be held responsible for the weight of the single story, for the entirety of a media message. But it is a part of the greater whole and thus is not absent from responsibility either. If, in the media, we have only a singular representation of what a complex protagonist looks like, or of what a person of a certain skin color can be, films are contributing to the danger of a single story.

After the 2015 realization of the "The Whitest Oscars Since 1998," in which *Selma* was "snubbed" and no person of color earned an acting nomination, there have been serious questions about the issues of diversity both in the Academy and in the industry (Fallon). Filmmakers are

asking how they can fight this problematic facet of the industry and diversify modern media. It is by no means a solution, but a clear and easy step towards addressing the issue would be to stop making unfounded and restrictive casting choices and respect the diversity found in the source text. There are many creative liberties a filmmaker can (and should) take in adapting a book into a film, but they would be hard-pressed to defend racial whitewashing as one of them. A novel's ambiguity in character descriptions is, in theory, a built-in door-opener for diversity.

The problems (and potential) don't stop at the representation of the main character, however. In the next section we will explore the impact of the racial representation of minor and background characters, and the opportunities that adaptations provide in fighting stereotypes and implicit bias through more than just their protagonists.

Minor and Background Characters

In situations like the casting of *The Hunger Games*, a lot of attention in the media is given to the protagonist. However in this section I will argue that, as important as diversity in "media heroes" is, the representation of minor and even nameless characters carries just as much social importance and racial meaning.

Returning again to the public debate over Katniss' race, an alternative interpretation suggests Katniss is biracial. Again, this is a valid reading based on the information given in the book, with her "black hair, olive skin… gray eyes" (Collins 8). Now it's worth noting that, had Katniss been biracial, it's completely possible for her to have had Lawrence's pale skin (even before the added tanning). But interestingly, even the deceased father is apparently cast as white

in the film. Notice the pictures depicted below, from a hallucinated memory Katniss has of her

father's death.

This seems to clash with the suggestions the book made that Katniss' mother and father had very

different appearances: "My mother and Prim, with their light hair and blue eyes, always look out

of place" whereas "most of the families who work in the mines resemble one another" as Gale

and Katniss do, with darker hair, and eyes (Collins 2). Yet again, this is an ambiguity—the only

commentary here is on hair and eye color, and the father shown above technically could meet

that description.

But why should this matter? The third reason why casting in adaptations is crucial is

because regular representation can help normalize societal understanding of what is considered

acceptable and common. For example, some attribute the Supreme Court ruling which legalized

gay marriage as a significantly influenced by the normalizing effect of representing these

relationships in greater numbers on television:

> Gay characters, and openly-gay performers, didn't suddenly take over television,
>
> but they were present in far greater numbers than ever before, in virtually every
>
> type of programming available. Those shows not only made straight viewers more

familiar and comfortable with gay culture, but inspired many gay men and women

in their audiences to come out to the world around them. (Sepinwall)

While opinions such as these should always be treated with a healthy skepticism, given the lack

of clear scientific evidence, the prevalence and popularity of this belief suggests that society

itself largely believes in media's power to normalize. Certainly parental discussions around

censoring violence and sexuality from youth reflect this as well.

Overall, serious depictions of any relationship where two individuals are of different

races are sorely lacking in any of our media. Consider the controversy-stirring Cheerios

advertisement of 2013 (which came out soon after *The Hunger Games*), where a cute curly-

haired girl is talking to her white mother about whether Cheerios is good for your heart, then

hastens off to cover her black father's chest with Cheerios while he sleeps. The ad was attacked

by racist commentary on an interracial marriage, though the Cheerios brand stood by their

commercial and even brought the family back for the following year's Super Bowl ad. In a

Today article on the topic, one woman voices her opinion on the matter:

Meagan Hatcher-Mays, the daughter of a black mother and a white father,

believes the Cheerios commercial represents progress. "I think this commercial is

a really big step for interracial families,'' Hatcher-Mays said on TODAY

Monday. "The commercial represents that we exist." (Stump)

Asking just to "exist" on the screen, even in a thirty second advertisement, is a relatively small

thing to demand of our visual media. And yet the casting of Katniss' parents represents the

atmosphere of exclusion even in today's "progressive" times. Regardless of how Katniss was

cast, her father's white representation silenced an opportunity to diversify our media and start

real conversations about broadening the perception of what a relationship, or a family, can look like. When adding visual elements through casting, these adaptations need to be much more conscientious about what messages they've ignored or are silencing.

Happily, this is not the case in *Divergent,* where Christina and Will have a budding relationship. This contrast demonstrates that adaptations are capable of representing diversity, simply by noting and using the details already found in the source text. They are described as

"opposite," with "Christina dark and lean, Will pale and solid, but alike in their easy smiles" (Roth 88-89). Their relationship, while subtle to the overall plot (especially compared to the book), is normalized and happy. The two flirt and enjoy each other's company as any couple would, up until Will's death.

Peggy McIntosh, in her iconic essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" wrote a list to identify privilege, including number six: "I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented." Along those lines, when I say that this genre is prone to whitewashing, it doesn't mean there *aren't* non-white characters (like those depicted below).

But, while important to the plot, they are rarely characters whose interiority is explored to the same extent as our white protagonists, like Katniss, Peeta, and Haymitch. And across both these films, and most recent YA adaptations, it's still quite a jump between a few non-white characters and seeing "people of my race widely represented." Look at the spread of movie posters below for these YA adaptations to see just how far the lack of "wide representation" goes.

One might argue that this is an unfair comparison, as these book characters have been given specific descriptions to how they look. We have already addressed the issue of Katniss in the previous section, but depending on the source text, the level of ambiguity can vary. Tris, for example, has "dull, blond" hair, which is made clear right away (Roth 1). However, book descriptions also lean towards ambiguity—Tris' other features are "a narrow face, wide, round eyes, and a long, thin nose… like a little girl" which can apply to many different people (Roth 2). Minor characters vary in how much detail they have, and as such the same ambiguity offered to Katniss can often be found in supporting characters. In Divergent, the antagonist Eric, for example, is described: "His face is pierced in so many places I lose count, and his hair is long, dark, and greasy" with cold eyes (Roth 66). Such a description could fit a wide variety of people,

as does the description of another initiate, Molly, who "has broad shoulders, bronze skin, and a bulbous nose" (Roth 92). Eric and Molly were both cast as white. Furthermore, these small details are sometimes ignored completely in the final film (Eric is shown here, sporting only two eyebrow piercings and earrings, and short slicked-back hair). Yet they are rarely ignored in favor of opting for minority casting.
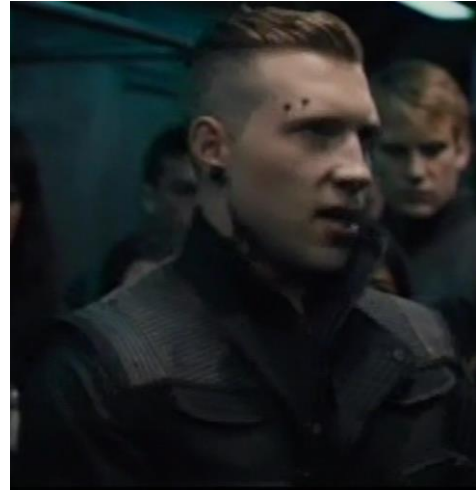
Moving past minor characters, there is another group of characters in these films that need to be addressed: background or "crowd" characters. These characters are the nameless extras who fill and populate the cinematic space. This discussion leads into another key formalistic difference between the novel and film. In a book, action and character can exist in a kind of void; readers can follow the story and the protagonist's thoughts without always having a full description of the exact setting. For example, when training for the Games, Katniss and Peeta "cross to an empty station where the trainer seems pleased to have students…he shows us a simple, excellent trap that will leave a human competitor dangling by a leg from a tree. We concentrate on this one skill for an hour" (Collins 95). This action takes place without a clear picture of the station, the trainer, or the background. Films cannot do this. They must have a background, and all events and characters must be contained within in a particular and exactly defined space.

Specifically, an author can use the expression "crowd" and the reader can visualize any group of people they so choose. But a director must *show* the crowd visually, built of specific people with specific traits. Within this unique element of film, new meaning is added. In

Divergent, for example, each faction is attributed a particular characteristic, and the Erudite, as the film defines them, wear blue and are "The smart ones, the ones value knowledge and logic…They know everything." Consider the images of the crowds of Erudite members.

While at first the larger crowds seem to have some diversity, the composition is primarily white; when Tris visits the Erudite compound, and when she encounters Erudite leadership, whiteness is the overwhelming majority. Erudite is also one of the few places that has Asian members. In this way, *Divergent* is contributing subtly adhering to implicit biases on intelligence

and race, and participating in the formation of how society envisions scientists. Returning to the idea of the single story, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (Adichie). In this case, the single story is that scientists and intelligent scholars are predominantly white—even in this fictional setting where factions are chosen based on personality and inherent qualities.

The fourth reason why racial casting matters is closely related to the single story, and that is the issue of implicit bias. The National Center for State Courts, in a study on how to help courts address implicit bias, defines it as follows:

> Unlike explicit bias (which reflects the attitudes or beliefs that one endorses at a conscious level), implicit bias is the bias in judgment and/or behavior that results from subtle cognitive processes (e.g., implicit attitudes and implicit stereotypes) that often operate at a level below conscious awareness and without intentional control.

Implicit bias is pervasive and affects everyone, even those who on a conscious level act impartially, such as judges, police officers, and hiring managers. The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity states that implicit bias develops "over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. In addition to early life experiences, the media and news programming are often-cited origins of implicit associations." Books may not necessarily have as strong an effect on this phenomenon because they are primarily text-based, not image-based; as will be demonstrated at the end of this section, racial descriptions in books can go unnoticed, or forgotten, but race in films is generally

immediately evident and thus has a more powerful effect. Whether or not the filmmakers of

Divergent intended to embed messages of whiteness (and to a lesser extent Asianness) associated

with intelligence, or (more likely) they themselves were subject to this unconscious bias while

filling the crowd, the final product is producing a piece that subconsciously supports these

stereotypes.

Perhaps one could point out that yes, Erudite favors white casting, but this is not

stereotyping or an implicit bias if every faction also favors white casting; it's just the

demographics of this society. It is true that the film has a high percentage of whites in every

crowd (which is problematic in other ways), but one faction does show slightly more diversity:

Dauntless. Consider these crowd and minor character shots:
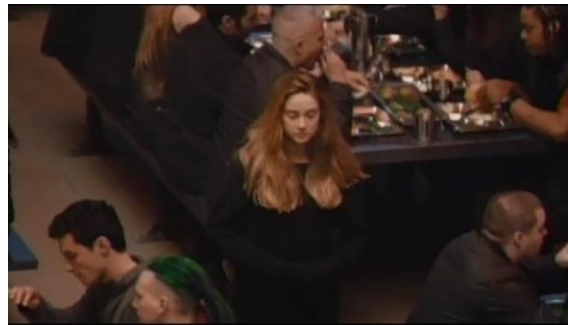
There are some positive readings to be made here: Dauntless, the faction that gets the most

screen time, and which the protagonist herself chooses as the best, is also the most diverse. But

there are also negative readings to be made: the most violent faction, the loudest, deadliest

faction, the one that ultimately (albeit under mind control) murders innocent Abnegation

members, also has the most non-whites. Compare that to the crowd of selfless, innocent, terrified

Abnegation members who are about to be shot by Dauntless at the end of the film: They are *all*

white or very light-skinned.

Similarly, during the Choosing Ceremony when each teen selects their faction, the first Erudite is

a white boy with neat slicked-back hair; the first time a black boy steps forward, he selects

Dauntless. Implicit biases associating race with intelligence, violence and brute strength, and

innocence are all at work in the subtle details of crowds in film.

Finally, even if a crowd is not associated with other inherent meanings (like what "types"

of people are scholars, warriors, poor, etc.), representing racial diversity as a distinct minority in

a larger group of people is participating in the longstanding issue of symbolic annihilation. The

term comes from George Gerbner and Larry Gross in the 1970s and describes the

> "absence" "condemnation," or "trivialization" of a particular group in the media.
>
> Generally applied to women and racial and sexual minorities, symbolic

annihilation points to the ways in which poor media treatment can contribute to

social disempowerment and in which symbolic absence in the media can erase

groups and individuals from public consciousness. (Coleman and Yochim)

This should be taken with a grain of salt, as this is part of the larger cultivation theory (a theory

that the long-term effects of television strongly influences the viewer's perception of the world)

which has been critiqued by subsequent media theorists for its methods, its general over-

simplification, and the amount of power it attributes to television (Chandler). Nevertheless, it is a

useful lens through which to explore the phenomenon of not just negative representation, but of

absence of representation altogether, as well as the "relationship between representations of race,

media ownership, and racial groups' participation in image-making" (Coleman and Yochim).

Both films can be accused of this; *The Hunger Games* "uses white as the default race,

casting not only the rich and powerful characters as white, but almost everyone. Instead of the

"multi-racial" film the director promised, we get a film that, like the vast majority of films,

depicts the world as predominantly white" (Wilson). The lack of diversity is even more startling

than that in *Divergent,* as seen in these crowd shots:

From the poverty of District 12 to the exuberant wealth of the Capitol, whitewashing is evident in almost every crowd. The only exception to this is seen in a brief cut to District 11, the farming district (home of two black tributes, Rue and Thresh) as they riot after Rue's death and Katniss' mourning. This district is primarily black. All the Peacekeepers that violently subdue the riot are white, reinforcing racial messages of power and poverty.

The book has complicated racial commentary interwoven in its world building, but as the film chooses to ignore this point while simultaneously whitewashing named and unnamed characters alike, its final function serves instead to perpetuate inherent bias and symbolic annihilation.

It's equally difficult to see widespread diversity anywhere in *Divergent,* in any of the factions. This is also problematic because *Divergent* takes place in a futuristic Chicago, a city which (as of the 2010 census from the United States Census Bureau) has a white population of 45%. While recognizing that this sort of check-the-box racial identification is an oversimplification of many individual's experiences, it does still serve to help paint a picture of a city where the "default" is *not* presumed white. The city of the film, as shown below and in past images, paints an entirely different picture.

Ultimately the treatment in adaptations is to assume that if a character is not specifically described, they are considered white. Treating "white" as a default for all minor characters and most crowds is an inherently problematic system, restricting the film industry in these adaptations to only one type of representation. In addressing this problem, the point is not to add diversity for diversity's sake. The point is to recognize that in a book, many characters can be anything, can be envisioned in a variety of complex and unique ways, and that generally speaking the adaptations ignore this fact and fall back on a default assumption of whiteness unless otherwise specified. These adaptations have power to represent new stories and reach new audiences; their financial "cushion" from having a likely successful product and large fan base means that they could easily be taking more risks than almost any other media in progressive representation. If any film genre should be engaging in more diverse representation, it is YA adaptations. When they do not, in some ways they are failing their audience, whether that audience has read the books or not.

Thus far this paper has primarily attacked moments in which these adaptations have failed in representing diversity. It's worthwhile to address the ways in which they are succeeding, such as the relationship of Christina and Will pushing back against the symbolic annihilation of mixed-race couples.

One significant example is in *The Hunger Games,* where there is a young girl named Rue who is chosen for the games at the age of twelve. Despite her age, she is clever and determined, saving Katniss' life by giving her the idea to drop dangerous insects on other competitors who have trapped her in a tree. Rue and Katniss become allies, working to destroy the food stores of the other competitors, but Rue is hit in the chest with a spear and dies in Katniss' arms (Collins 233-237). In the film, Rue is played by Amandla Stenberg, who certainly matches Roth's description of Rue as "a twelve-year-old girl from District 11. She has dark brown skin and eyes, but other than that, she's very like Prim in size and demeanor" (Collins 45).

When the casting was announced, a series of tweets (in alarming numbers) rose in protest. Anna Holmes, writer for *The New Yorker*, describes the commentary: "The a-hundred-and-forty-character-long outbursts were microcosms of the ways in which the humanity of minorities is often denied and thwarted, and they underscored how infuriatingly conditional empathy can be." Consider the following comments (grammatical errors not corrected) pulled from hungergamestweets.com:

> "yea I didn't picture any character in #thehungergames to be African American, especially Rue" (@laurenclarfield)

> "why does rue have to be black not gonna lie kinda ruined the movie" (@maggie_mcd11)

> "why did the producer make all the good characters black smh" (@inspect0rfagg0t, who went on to add "all in favor of having me redirect hunger games")

> "Uuuuhhhhh Rue looks NOTHING like I imagined her. Isn't she supposed to be a pale readhead (or was that just in MY head?)? Why is she black?!" (@AmsyyLeSavage)

> "On the real though, rue was not supposed to be a little black girl" (@TylerKlose)

"I was pumped about the Hunger Games. Until I learned that a black girl was playing Rue." (@johnnyknoxIV)

"WHY IS RUE BLACK SIGH" (@pinkmartini_1D)

"I was like Rue was supposed to be a replica of Prim only w/ brown eyes and hair… and in the movie she's fuckin black o.o" (@Emaan24).

"Im annoyed with the kid they cast as rue. Shes described as a little blonde in every book" (@jammieelynn)

There are many more, but general reoccurring themes include indignant and confused statements that Rue was not supposed to be black, and beliefs that because she reminded Katniss of Prim (Katniss' white, blonde sister) she should look similar. The comments above were chosen specifically because they did not demonstrate explicit racism (associating blackness with ugliness, or using the n-word) but nevertheless demonstrates heavy implicit racism through their negative emotional reaction to her racial casting and presumption of white as normative.

This situation highlights how important casting is. In the books, Collins describes Rue as dark-skinned and dark-eyed, but clearly many of the outraged tweets above, despite having read the books, didn't pick up on that fact, or had selective recall on her physical description. This calls into question how powerful a written description can be versus an image. In the books, the reader has the freedom to skim, ignore, and outright reject visual descriptions in favor of their mental imagery; in film, such a thing is impossible. In the case of Katniss' casting, this fact was problematic as it limited the diversity of what a hero can be in media. In the case of Rue's, it helps call attention to a larger issue and challenge the idea that innocence (and tragic death) are solely the domain of whiteness.

Rue's character embodies the innocent child's tragic death trope—her death, by the hands of an unjust and uncaring society, is a breaking point in Katniss, who openly rebels against the Games by taking the time to mourn Rue, sing her a lullaby, and cover her body in flowers. However, many viewers struggled with the idea that this trope can be represented by any child, rather than a specifically white one. The idea that this innocent character is "not supposed to be" black is shown in the tweets above. Furthermore, as reposted on *hungergamestweets.com*, @sw4q said, "Awkward moment when Rue is some black girl and not the little blonde innocent girl you picture" as though implying that, by nature of being black, a child is any less innocent, or her death any less tragic. *The New Yorker* responded to such commentary with the article "Little, Blonde, Innocent, and Dead," by pointing out a long history of this trope, from Christ to Little Eva of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Tatar).

Rue's casting did more than just highlight insensitive fans' racist commentary; it also illuminated a larger societal problem of perceiving black deaths differently from white deaths. This is made explicit in another *hungergamestweets.com* comment by @jashperparas, "Kk call me racist but when I found out rue was black her death wasn't as sad #ihatemyself." *The New Yorker* also pointed out how,

> The deaths of blonde girls and women have a way of monopolizing the media limelight, as the frenzied press coverage of Jon-Benet Ramsey and Natalie Holloway makes all too clear. Their murders are emphasized far more than the deaths of "some black girl" (that "some" packs a dehumanizing punch) or, for that matter, anyone living below the poverty line without a halo of blonde hair. (Tatar)

It is exactly this kind of existing societal racism that movements like Black Lives Matter is trying to fight back against. Some *Hunger Games* comments online even drew parallels to the tragedy

of Trevor Martin's death, or pointed out on hungergamestweets.com society's internalized

racism by challenging: "Black children don't have innocence. We're guilty from birth." Through

the book's description and the film's casting, this fictional character's race challenges inherent

biases and modern societal racism, while expanding the type of character a young black girl can

portray. Rue's character "enlarges the myth about girl saviors to include multiple ethnic

identities. Suddenly, we have equal-opportunity suffering that enables a girl with 'dark skin and

eyes' to assume a role once occupied by 'little blonde innocents'" (Tatar).

Briefly, other examples of defied stereotypes through minority casting include Max, a

tough and capable black Dauntless leader, and Cinna, Katniss' designer, moral support, and

revolutionary figure. Both characters are described in the book as being dark-skinned, but as the

details of Eric's hair and Molly's skin show, films do not always respect these descriptions. In

the case of Cinna and Max, their original descriptions were maintained, crafting images that

break racial stereotypes and fight against the annihilation of absence in primarily white films.

These films also have nearly unlimited freedom in the formation of crowds and background

characters, just as they do with set and costume design, so even if these two example films failed

to adequately represent diversity and reinforced implicit biases, future adaptations (especially

those envisioning American present and futures, or purely fantasy settings) still have the

opportunity to address and improve upon this type of representation.

We need a range of stories, a range of heroes, to inspire us and teach us, to help us

understand ourselves and, more importantly, others. Storytelling media help us walk in the shoes

of another life, giving us empathy, but these media can also silences the voices and experiences

of others. YA adaptations can help combat this tendency in films, by providing existing

opportunities through its named and unnamed characters to better represent a more diverse media

landscape.

PART 3: FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ADAPTATION

While these YA film adaptations struggle in showing diverse racial representation, they

are quickly excelling at diversifying the role of women in film. Hollywood has long been

critiqued for being a "boy's club." Media analyst Paul Dergarabedian explains the history of

male-dominated films as partly that conventional thinking "has always [tended toward the idea]

that the male audience, 18-24 year old males, drive the box office, particularly in the summer," a

belief that is slowly being revised as women's box office power is being reevaluated (qtd. in

Brook). Both of the films in this study are attributed as a significant part of that shift. According

to the BBC, "women made up at least 60% of the audience for three films: *Fifty Shades of Grey*,

Cinderella and *The Divergent Series: Insurgent*," all three of which are technically adaptations,

including the YA sequel of *Divergent,* and "together the movies have brought in more than

$480m to date in North America" (Brook). Actress Carey Mulligan points out that Hollywood is

finally realizing that female-driven films are successful, which has been "proven over and over

in the last couple of years, particularly with Jennifer Lawrence and *The Hunger Games*." (qtd. in

Brook). The impact of these adaptations on the landscape of Hollywood is certainly not

inconsequential.

Both *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* feature a young woman not only as the

protagonist, but as the star in an action-based dystopian setting. This is a shift from the fact that

"traditionally, the action genre has been among Hollywood's most sexist," not only in regards to

who are the stars in such films, but also in how other women in the film are treated and

represented (Meslow). In classics from Bond to *Indiana Jones*, women (regardless of their

fighting prowess) are on the fringes of the story, and are often involved only to integrate a

romantic subplot with the protagonist. Limited in both screen time and internal character

complexity, the resulting media portrayal of female characters is a one-dimensional plot accessory at best, and thoughtless "eye candy" at worst.

However, when Hollywood turns to many popular YA novels for adaptation, they are drawing from a source that has a much higher rate of female leads, with complex motivations and unique characterization. Representing women as brave, physically and intellectually capable, as a leader with a strong sense of independence, and with complex interiority can change public perception on women's roles in today's society. Authorship is also more frequently female (Veronica Roth and Suzanne Collins are two such examples) and thus offers up a different lens through which to view women and the human experience as a whole.

Sometimes the feminist messages embedded in the source text are celebrated—or even improved upon—in the film, and sometimes these messages are lost along the way. The following sections will analyze the ways in which women are represented in these adaptations and how that impacts the public discourse and perception of women and femininity through media.

The Female Hero as Role Model

In the earlier discussion about racial representations in film, the importance of having a variety of "media heroes" was discussed, as well as the impact that a single media story can have. This holds true for gender as well as race.

Firstly, the two main texts discussed in this thesis both feature a female protagonist—in fact, many of the YA adaptations made into films do, and it is not uncommon to have significant female secondary/supporting characters as well. This trend battles against the existing landscape of today's media, where according to a recent 2015 study, "From 2007 through 2014, women

made up only 30.2 percent of all speaking or named characters in the 100 top-grossing fictional films released in the United States" (Dargis). And that study only looks at *all* female representation, not the percentage of female protagonists and leads.

But the landscape is different in the YA genre, where many of the top-selling books star young women. Katniss and Tris are two examples, joining the ranks with protagonists from past adaptations like Hazel Grace Lancaster (*The Fault in Our Stars*), Rose Hathaway (*Vampire Academy)*, Clary Fray (*The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones),* Carmen, Tibby, Bridget and Lena (*Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants)*, Mia Thermopolis (*The Princess Diaries),* and many others. In addition, many of the 2015 films listed earlier—including *Daughter of Smoke and Bone*, *Matched*, *The DUFF,* and *The Scorpio Races*, to name a few—also feature strong female characters.

Based on the characters in those books, many of the films hold more promise in passing the Bechdel test, a simple set of criteria asking whether a film (1) has at least two women in it (2) who talk to each other (3) about something besides a man. The test originated from the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* by cartoonist Alison Bechdel; the cartoon, called "The Rule," features one woman saying she only watches film that meets those criteria. The concept became popularized and is a common informal measurement used today on a variety of films. Because YA novels like those listed above have female protagonists who generally have at least one female friend, enemy, mentor, or acquaintance, two of the three aspects of the test are generally met in both the novels and thus the adaptations.

The test itself has some problematic elements; many films with complex and progressive female characters fail, while films that reinforce negative female stereotypes or represent women in regressive ways can pass. *The Telegraph* film critic Robbie Collin argues that "It's all very

simple – too simple, in fact, and on closer inspection, the Bechdel test turns out to be not only next-to-useless, but also damaging to the way we think about film." The danger lies in using the test as a singular measurement for whether films are "feminist," or to apply the test to a single film as the sole indicator of its overall worth. Still, the Bechdel test can be useful for identifying overall trends of sexism and lack of female representation in film, questioning to what extent maleness is perceived as the norm, and for pointing out narrative tendencies which reduce female characters to their interactions with men.

A survey by ESPN blog FiveThirtyEight using the Bechdel test to determine financial success (ultimately those that pass the test are just as likely to earn money as those that fail) also found "that more movies are passing the test over time. In the past few years, adaptations of young adult novels such as *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, have found huge box-office success with female-fronted material" (Child). So, while the Bechdel test can be a problematic criteria to use alone when examining media, this study is also suggesting that YA adaptations are a significant influence on the increased pass rate of films, working slowly to bump up that 30.2% representation.

This is an important contribution given that, despite the statistics above regarding the few female roles in major films, women account for an even half of the ticket-buying audience according to the MPAA's 2014 study. Furthermore, this same research states, "Females have comprised a larger share of moviegoers (people who went to a movie at the cinema at least once in the year) consistently since 2010, this trend remains unchanged in 2014. In fact, the number of female moviegoers increased slightly in 2014, while the number of male moviegoers remained flat" (MPAA).

The percentages of women watching a screen versus women *on* the screen is widely disproportionate, and much of this has to do with Hollywood preferences for a male protagonist. One recent example of this was when producers of the new thriller *Sicario* tried to change the female lead role (played by Emily Blunt) into a man, although the filmmakers ultimately stuck with the original story (Pulver). In the case of YA heroines, however, this type of pressure is alleviated. There are many things that can change from book to movie—as we've seen, even racial representations can be fluid—but the gender of the protagonist is not one of these things. That aspect of the central character's identity is heavily woven into all aspects of the story, from their point of view and choices to their interactions with others, and it is defended by the presence of an existing fan base, who would likely protest the choice and limit the film's final box office success if the film re-gendered the characters.

In the earlier discussion on symbolic annihilation, the definition included "women" as a minority group suffering from poor media treatment and subsequent social disempowerment (Coleman and Yochim). Although *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* seemed to contribute to rather than battle against symbolic annihilation of racial minorities, regardless of the racial messages or ambiguity in the novels, both make significant strides when applied to female representation. Not only are women not erased from the screen and social consciousness, they are actually being put in the forefront, instigators of change, leaders, and at the center of their own stories instead of hovering on the sidelines.

In addition to bringing more female characters to the screen, these films are also diversifying the *types* of women's stories being told. "Female protagonist" often correlates with the drama or "chick flick" genres, thus limiting women's characters to concepts of romance (and thus, being primarily preoccupied with men) and focusing on psychological rather than physical

action. For example, the genre of the two films under study is post-apocalyptic with heavy emphasis on action and combat. Most traditional Hollywood films of this genre—*The Matrix, Elysium, I Robot, 12 Monkeys, Book of Eli,* the original *Mad Max*—feature men as the main characters with agency and women (regardless of their own ability to fight or strategize) primarily as a romantic interest or plot device, and rarely as the hero. "It's long been accepted in popular culture that that the traditional "action film" is the gender-reversed mirror image of the "chick flick": a film made by men, starring men, for men" and thus the genre (through repeated themes) begins to make visualizing female action heroes difficult (Meslow).

However, YA novels inherently help diversify what types of stories women star in, because there are many female protagonists in a genre that (as mentioned in the earlier section on YA) spans a breadth of story types, from paranormal to science fiction to high school dramas. The genre is also not defined by the gender of its protagonist but by their age and experiences. For example, in both *Divergent* and *The Hunger Games* the action centers around the struggles and actions of a young woman. Katniss is shown engaging in survival skills (hunting, making fire), complicated war strategy (using Rue's help to distract a larger alliance and destroy their food supplies during the Games), political maneuvering (to avoid punishment for challenging the Games), and physical combat. Tris learns and applies a variety of fighting skills, overcomes her greatest fears, discovers a plot to kill her old faction, works to save her family and ultimately undermines the mind-control device used for the coup. Both characters discover inherent flaws within their society and help orchestrate active rebellion against it, not in a supportive "helper" role but as instigators and leaders.

And this empowerment of women, as individuals capable of handling themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally, is reflected in the content the audience creates. Consider these fan-made inspirational mashups, all from female YA adaptations:
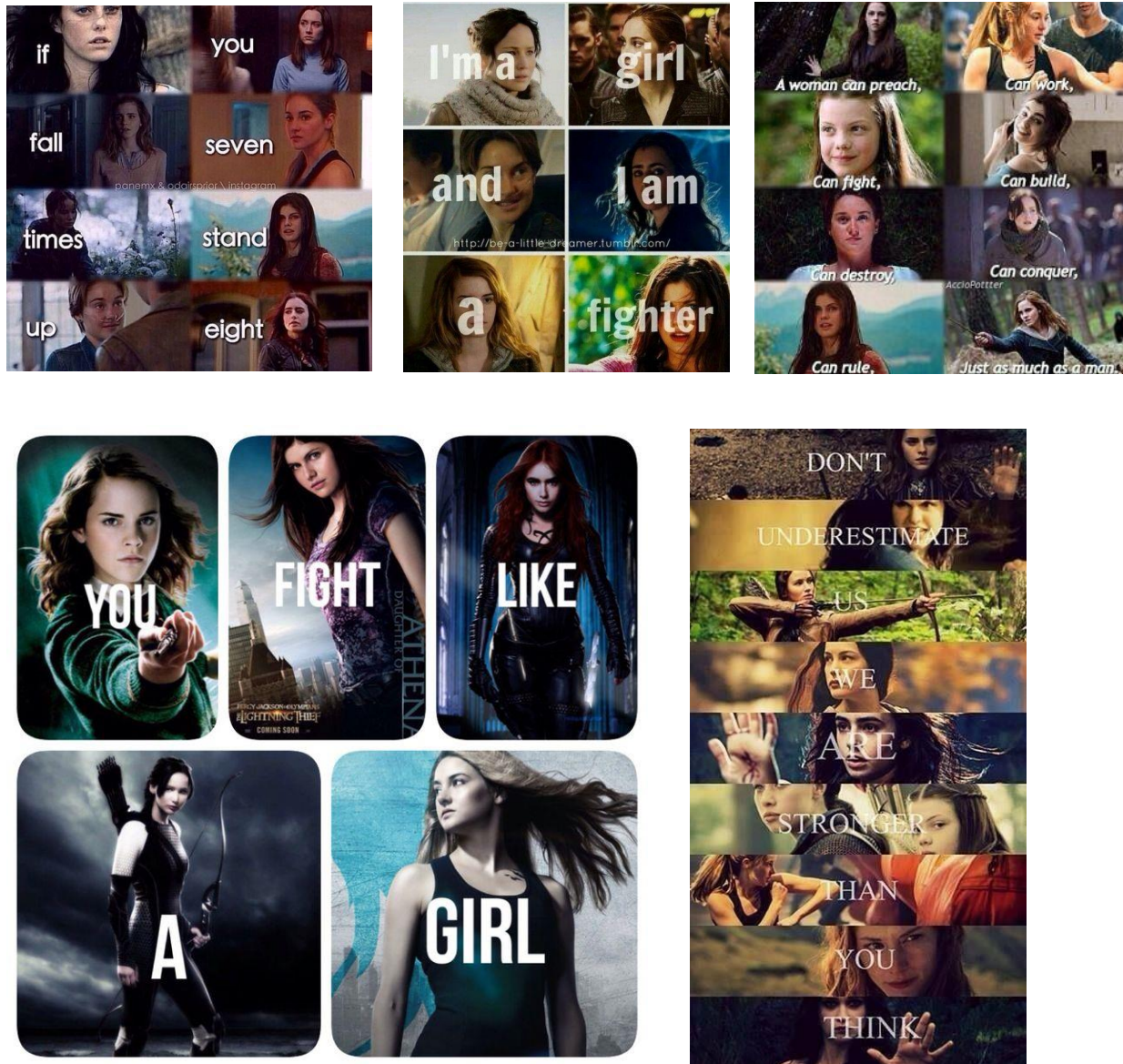
These images are representative of the way in which fans absorb these fictional characters as media heroes and personal role models for what is possible. These characters are also used subversively to combat limiting expectations for women (for example, challenging and reclaiming the insult "You fight like a girl"). Perhaps such sentiments are also trickling into other

channels—alongside the release of *The Hunger Games* sequel *Catching Fire* was the release of a new girl's toy: the Nerf Rebelle series, featuring a blaster, crossbow, and bow (much like Katniss') (Martinson). While the toys have received criticism for their stylizing and marketing (pink and dainty, with names like "Heartbreaker Bow") and deserve a study all to themselves on their feminist implications, it nevertheless demonstrates a shift from past understanding of normative female pastimes and acceptable behavior.

As with race, these media representations are not necessarily successful or progressive simply by having a female as the protagonist. The next step, after getting on the screen, is *how* these characters are portrayed. And while YA is relatively strong platform to get more women protagonists on the screen in a variety of story types, because of its wide selection of female characters, there are varying levels in success in the overall representation of the character.

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to visualize female action heroes. However, once they reach the screen, as actress Emily Blunt puts it, "a tough woman is such a screen anomaly…that [toughness] would become her sole defining characteristic" in a film (qtd. in Bunbury). This results in another (albeit different) one-dimensional representation, when a more desirable outcome might be "to do what guys do in these movies, which is to play a complicated, multi-faceted character" (Bunbury). Representing a character's full complexity is one area of difficulty that YA adaptations, and adaptations as a whole, can encounter.

Part of the struggle with this representation is related to the inherent change in media characteristics from the novel to the film. Books often offer an interiority that is inaccessible in films through the first-person perspective writing technique, or the narrator's voice. Readers are granted access to Tris and Katniss' thoughts and motivations, and see the story's world through the eyes of these protagonists. For example, Tris' adjustment from the self-denying Abnegation

to the open and bold Dauntless is regularly explored through thoughts such as "It will be difficult to break the habits of thinking Abnegation instilled in me, like tugging a single thread from a complex work of embroidery. But I will find new habits, new thoughts, new rules. I will become something else" (Roth 87). Her internal workings, and her understanding of her own identity, are captured in these thoughts that never are expressed explicitly in the film. Similarly Katniss' hard survival-driven perspective on life is more evident in the books—for example, when she mentally appraises the iconic Mockingjay pin as "Real gold. Beautifully crafted. It could keep a family in bread for months" and receives it later as a gift from the wealthier mayor's daughter (Collins 12). This internal dialogue gives insight to her poverty and her survivalist motivations, immediately equating the accessory to food, whereas in the film she contemplates buying it from a vendor (who gives it to her for free).

Movies can attempt to recover this internalization through narrative voiceover, and this is a common practice in adaptations. However, it can only be used sparingly. Otherwise, the film is not so much a film as it is an animated audiobook, and the intensity of the action would be less immediate and therefore less powerful. For example, while Tris' constant mental comparisons of Abnegation and Dauntless cultures in the book are interesting and relevant to her character development, they would seem jarringly out of place and interrupt the action of the training sessions while also adding unnecessary length to the film. To some extent actors can portray emotions that translate their characters' thoughts, but there is a threshold of understanding that limits this from being effective—no matter how expressive, no one can ever really comprehend the inner workings of someone else's mind.

Anita Sarkeesian of *Feminist Frequency* explores how the film version of *The Hunger Games* wrestles with the translation of this complicated internal world:

While reading the book we are inhabiting Katniss' mind, via first person narrative. We're following her inner dialogue so we know her fears, her desires, and her needs, in a much more intimate way than the film can deliver… However, on screen we are given some hints and clues into the complex feelings of Katniss via Jennifer Lawrence's incredible acting, and because the camera was able to linger long enough for the non-verbal expressions to come through.

This acknowledges the power of cinema to portray subtle messages through cinematography and acting, while simultaneously addressing its shortcomings. Sarkeesian also does not comment on the lack of universality in a visual representation—what she opinions as "incredible acting" that is illustrated through long takes on Lawrence's expressions is mocked by Screen Junkies satire writers Brett Weiner, Jason Matthews, Dan Perrault and Andy Signore as a "stupid face… and completely emotionless delivery" in their "Honest Trailers" version of the film. Audience interpretation holds more sway when a film can only provide "hints and clues" versus the explicit insight into a character's thoughts that a novel can provide. The complexities of Katniss' character therefore, if not completely lost, can be hidden and ambiguous.

For example, in the novel version of *The Hunger Games,* Katniss is very aware of the televised nature of the games, and must constantly be performing in order to earn the support (and thus food and medical supplies) of sponsors watching her. Part of her persona in the competition is a doomed romance with Peeta, and while his feelings are genuine, hers begin as a calculated act to earn audience support and grow complicated as the story progresses. As the *Feminist Frequency* video says, "in the book it's made clear that Katniss is faking her affection for Peeta in order to solicit medical supplies, while in the movie it's more ambiguous and we are lead to believe that she may be genuine in her feelings for him" (Sarkeesian). This is

demonstrated, for example, during Katniss and Peeta's alliance in the arena: "I'm about to leave when I remember the importance of sustaining the star-crossed lover routine and I lean over and give Peeta a long, lingering kiss. I imagine the teary sighs emanating from the Capitol and pretend to brush away a tear of my own" (Collins 281). Here, her motivations here are clearly focused on her image rather than her feelings. In the film, while Katniss does equate expressing affection with receiving food and supplies, this entire internal facet of her actions is lost. Her motivations are simplified from survival to attraction, and while there is nothing wrong with romance in and of itself, Katniss' character is reduced to some degree as another love-struck girl of the cinema.

In the film, having an actor act a character who is acting a role is understandably confusing and difficult to portray visually—having that character then be conflicted about how much of her acting is fake and how much is becoming real becomes nearly impossible. Nonetheless, this change warrants some consideration. Earlier it was observed that having a strong female character can backfire if that character's only defining feature is her toughness—much like the danger of a single story, the portrayal can be limited to either tough or complex, but not both. In Katniss' case, by reducing the fake romance into an ambiguously real one, her actions and her character are subsequently simplified. Perception of her strategic intellect suffers—her carefully calculated manipulation of the Games, the audience, and Peeta's emotions in order to increase her odds of survival is supplanted by a simplified ideal of love. Her character becomes more reactive to the Games; her agency and ability to actively control her future is decreased. For example, when discovering that Peeta has allied himself with a group of people hunting her down, Katniss' reaction in the novel is very calculated:

Until I work out exactly how I want to play that, I'd better at least act on top of

things. Not perplexed. Certainly not confused or frightened. No, I need to look

one step ahead of the game. So as I slide out of the foliage and into the dawn

light, I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me. Then I cock my

head slightly to the side and give a knowing smile. There! Let them figure out

what that means! (Collins 164)

In the film, she simply gives a sigh, lets her head fall back against the tree, and stares

emotionally off into the distance (in disappointment or disbelief, perhaps). Within the film's

ambiguity she is perceived as a love-struck girl who has been badly hurt by a betrayal but must

soldier on—a trope that, while not necessarily damaging, is still a trope, a simplified stereotype

to a complex series of emotions. It should be noted again that the film is inherently more

ambiguous, and therefore this is just one of many readings of this scene, but it is difficult to

conjure a reading of Lawrence's facial expressions that equates to the same level of power and

control explicit in the text version of the scene. By changing the reasoning behind her

interactions with Peeta from survival to love, the film continues the trend (the stereotype, even)

of representing women's motivations as primarily based on emotion rather than logic, and is

therefore somewhat limiting her representation as a heroine.

Similarly, Tris' intelligence and determination are also limited in the translation onto the

screen. For example, when Tris goes to Erudite to visit her brother, she is confronted by Jeanine,

who is hunting Divergents. In the film, her interaction is awkward, uncertain. However, in the

novel, to avoid suspicion, Tris works to outwit Jeanine:

The other factions see the Dauntless a certain way. Brash, aggressive, impulsive.

Cocky. I should be what she expects. I smirk at her. "I'm the best initiate they've

got … You want to know why I chose Dauntless?" I ask. "It's because I was

bored." Further, further. Lies require commitment. "I was tired of being a wussy

little do-gooder and I wanted out." (Roth 359)

As with Katniss' situation, scenes in which the protagonist is actively pretending to be something

she's not in order to manipulate the situation for her own ends is difficult to portray without

internal dialogue. However, in the resulting film scene Tris does not seem in control of the

situation, and her agency is reduced. Her internal strength is similarly hidden—when Jeanine

tells her Abnegation is breaking laws, Tris' reaction is to glance down and around nervously, and

say "No, I didn't know that," before clearing her throat and finishing "but if that's true I'm, uh,

I'm glad that I left" with a weak smile and half nod (Burger, *Divergent*). When asked whether

she will enforce the law, even if broken by her loved ones, Tris again glances uncomfortably

around before responding with a breathy "of course" (Burger, *Divergent*). While the scene

reflects the conflict between Tris' ties to Abnegation and work in Dauntless, and presents

Jeanine as a dangerous character, it also puts Tris in the position of a child in the principal's

office, fearful and utterly unconvincing. Her mental strength is also lost without the internal

monologue; when attacked on her return from Erudite, her thoughts become focused in

determination: "I will survive until tomorrow. I will" (Roth 278). In the film, all the viewer

receives is Tris flailing desperately and staring at her attackers with wide eyes. Without access to

her thoughts, the character is less in control, weaker, more foolish.

However, these observations must be tempered by how the films work around the

inability to utilize lengthy internal monologue. For example, while Katniss' first-person narrative

cannot be captured in its entirety, other plot-based aspects of the film (such as Katniss'

dedication to her family, her careful interviews, her plans to destroy other tributes' food stores,

her alliance with Rue, and other major plot elements) help make up for this lack by demonstrating emotional and intellectual complexity at other points in the film. The overall dialogue and action in the film make it clear that she has more to her character than "toughness," and while she may not seem as clever in the film compared to the novels, she certainly doesn't come across as idiotic or strategically inept. The adaptation of *Divergent* may not fully explore Tris' inner strength, but the growth of her determination and defiance are slowly revealed through the subtle nuances in Shailene Woodley's posture and facial expressions as she becomes successful in Dauntless. Ultimately the level of character complexity is a spectrum, and while scenes in the films can simplify and reduce Tris and Katniss, they do so only marginally, and still end up producing a relatively complicated and unique individual as its protagonist.

A complex female character is certainly not only possible but likely in the adaptation of a YA novel into a movie. The final representations of Katniss and Tris help diversify media perceptions of what women are capable of. The struggles of holistic and complex character representation described above are inherent in any adaptation, and are true regardless of the character's gender. So while it is important to address to what extent these female protagonists are presented as complex human beings, ultimately the fact that the question is "to what extent" and not "are women present or significant at all" signifies how YA adaptations are contributing to expanding female stories in film. It is important to examine how each characters' toughness is balanced by intelligence, willpower, social skills, emotions, and growth, but such a conversation suggests that significant strides have already been made in presenting that character as a complex and non-stereotyped individual. In this way, Katniss and (to a lesser extent, Tris) have risen both as popular characters and as media heroes.

Representation of Relationships

Earlier this paper pointed out how women in Hollywood are often pigeonholed into romantic storylines and stereotypes. It would be disingenuous to suggest that *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, or YA in general was not heavily involved with romance. However, the main difference between the relationships in these films and the one-dimensional roles found in other films is that romance is not the sole aspect of the character's motivation. As with male characters in most action films, these female protagonists are multifaceted, dealing with romantic relations alongside other issues, such as work, family, and personally resolving a serious crisis that puts others at risk. For example, Tris' relationship with Four is a large part of the *Divergent* story in both the book and the film, but it is not exclusively the way she is represented: she is also navigating training, adapting to a new culture, maneuvering social interactions with new friends and enemies, dealing with threats to her life, confronting her greatest fears, hiding her Divergence, attempting to rescue her family, and stopping the slaughter of Abnegation. As Tris tells herself when preparing to face a new challenge, "I am someone who does not let inconsequential things like boys and near-death experiences stop her" (Roth 346). *Divergent* demonstrates how romance is a facet of a young woman's life, not an all-consuming definition of her existence. This is a more authentic representation of a woman's experience—and a more authentic representation of *any* person's experience in life, in which relationships occur alongside dealing with the world and the self. By representing relationships in this way, YA adaptations are opening the conversation about the distinction between having a significant other and being defined by them.

As mentioned, in *The Hunger Games,* Katniss' relationship with Peeta is complicated by a need to perpetuate a constructed romance for the cameras. Even though the filmic representation of this interaction becomes reduced to a real relationship and removes Katniss' high-level psychological manipulation of her viewers (and her confusion between what is real and what is staged) from the story, her character is still not reduced into a supporting girlfriend role. She makes her own decisions, and occasionally ignores Peeta's advice in order to advance their position in the games. In the end, she saves Peeta when he is captured by the final tribute, by shooting his captor's hand—and again, when she develops the plan to eat poisonous berries in order to force the Capitol into letting them both live.

The way in which these relationships unfold, and how they are presented, is also significant to the media messages that are translated. Segments that are omitted and changed in this analysis can have significant ripples in the overall story. The most pressing example of this can be seen in *Divergent.* In the second stage of Dauntless training, the protagonist Tris and her fellow initiates must undergo psychological training to learn how to conquer fear. Each member is injected with a hallucinogenic serum that forces them to confront each of their worst fears consecutively until they can overcome them in some way. In her final examination in the film, Tris is attacked by birds (which she fights off with fire), finds herself tied up in the blaze (and uses the fire to burn through her restraints and escape), is trapped in a glass container rapidly filling with water (she blocks the flow with her jacket), is pinned down and accosted by Four (she fights him off), and forced to shoot her family before finally waking up. In the novel she faces similar events: attacked by birds, trapped in the tank of water, being at the mercy of the ocean, tied up in a fire, attacked by faceless men trying to kill her, confronted by Four, and told to kill her family (although she solves these situations in different ways compared to the film).

The pressing difference between these scenes is that in the movie, Four is physically threatening her, whereas in the book he is wordlessly, emotionally pressuring her into sex. As the scene below shows, Four pushes her down, pins her to the bed, and ignores Tris' repeated call of "Stop" until Tris kicks and punches him off of her.

In short, the movie transforms Tris' fear of intimacy into fear of rape. What does that tell us? The choice implies that fear of intimacy is less easy to understand or visually translate. Fear of intimacy is the fear of baring yourself raw, of vulnerability, of opening yourself up to another, emotionally and physically. Within Tris' character development at this point in the story, that minor plot change (from sex to rape) is significant, but its change to the overarching message as a whole is more important. It is easy to see why the filmmakers would alter such a scene. In a rushed and hectic montage full of terrors, it could confuse the audience to interject an emotional moment between a couple. Rape is easy to understand in this context; it is frightening and horrible. Like all the sequences before and after that moment, it inspires terror.

From a cinematic visual standpoint, the high-paced action of Tris fighting to protect herself from her boyfriend slides smoothly into the montage of fast-paced dangers, much more so than the confrontation of the scene in the book:

> His fingers find my jacket zipper and pull it down in one slow swipe until the zipper detaches. He tugs the jacket from my shoulders.
>
> *Oh,* is all I can think, as he kisses me again. *Oh.*

My fear is being with him. I have been wary of affection all my life, but I didn't know how deep that wariness went.

But this obstacle doesn't feel the same as the others. It is a different kind of fear—nervous panic rather than blind terror.

He slides his hands down my arms and then squeezes my hips, his fingers sliding over the skin just above my belt, and I shiver.

I gently push him back and press my hands to my forehead. I have been attacked by crows and men with grotesque faces; I have been set on fire by the boy who almost threw me off a ledge; I have almost drowned—*twice*—and *this* is what I can't cope with? *This* is the fear I have no solutions for—a boy I like, who wants to…have sex with me?

Simulation Tobias kisses my neck. (Roth 393)

Notice the lack of violent physical force being used; all of Tobias' actions are displayed as affectionate. And again, to relate back to the previous discussion on Tris' internal dialogue, much of the action of this scene takes place in the mind. The conflict exists in Tris' thoughts, relating back to how difficult it would be to portray in the fear landscape sequence. This does not change the fact that the final filmic representation of this fear is removing an important message.

In a society where gender expectations and tropes are being redefined, the film is voicing a positive message by teaching young girls that they can be strong emotionally and physically. However, in this scene, it is removing an important lesson: that there is nothing "wrong" with someone if they are not comfortable taking a relationship to a physical point. That they are in charge of their own bodies and consent, not just against someone who is physically forcing themselves on them, but other kinds of pressure. In a film about bravery, the adaptation

destroyed a real and important conversation about the bravery to tell someone you love no, and to trust in their love and understanding. Heather Eastwood of *Feministing* elaborates the issue, explaining, "right when capable actor Shailene Woodley should show us fear of intimacy overcome by personal sense of security and sexual desire, that key step in coming of age morphs into a fear of rape." The maturity and confidence with which Tris deals with the situation, depicted below, is silenced by the film's choice to make the scene a rape attempt:

> I try to think. I have to face the fear. I have to take control of the situation and find a way to make it less frightening.
>
> I look Simulation Tobias in the eye and say sternly, "I am *not* going to sleep with you in a hallucination. Okay?"
>
> Then I grab him by his shoulders and turn us around, pushing him against the bedpost. I feel something other than fear—a prickle in my stomach, a bubble of laughter. I press against him and kiss him, my hands wrapping around his arms. He feels strong. He feels… good.
>
> And he's gone.
>
> I laugh into my hand until my face gets hot. I must be the only initiate with this fear. (Roth 394)

The reaction to a rape attempt is socially perceived (although not necessarily experienced this way) as an obvious, or at least instinctual, one: fight. The reaction to the situation above is less clear-cut, and its exclusion removes this one example of how to handle that scenario from the public sphere of discussion.

And this scene certainly did enter into public debate. On *Medium.com* Beth Lalonde, a victim of sexual assault, wrote:

Have you ever seen anything like this? Have you ever seen a teenage girl fight off a rapist on camera, let alone be congratulated for it? I wept. Openly. Vocally. Because I had been there, in that bedroom, with someone I liked, and I had been too afraid to hit back. Too afraid to say no… Divergent marks the first time I have ever seen a teenage girl articulate, in no uncertain terms, that her body belongs to her. That she gets to decide who touches it, and how, and when. That her yes and her no are final, and unambiguous, and worthy of respect.

Divergent is important.

Lalonde's testimony points out that the rape scene is handled well; the message produced is not necessarily a bad one. It encourages ownership of one's own body, and highlights a different kind of bravery. Many others support her view, and are glad to have a heroine willing to stand up for and protect herself.

But Caitlin White, writer for *Bustle* who has also experienced sexual assault, respectfully points out some issues with Lalonde's perspective:

By saying that Tris "did exactly the right thing" or it was "the appropriate way for young women to respond," aren't we just putting the impetus on preventing sexual assault back on the women? So if someone not as strong as Tris is unable to fight off her attacker, is she not responding "appropriately"? Then, aren't we just saying she didn't do everything she could, and thus, it's partly her fault?

And while Lalonde applauds Tris' bravery and strength when put in that situation, it is true that alternative readings can put the responsibility of preventing rape on the woman. This is problematic when issues of blaming the victim are already rampant with this particular type of

crime (everything from what a woman wears to what she says is put under scrutiny). There is also the issue that "it can't be expressed enough: A fear of intimacy is not the same as a fear of sexual assault" (White). This comparison only comes through for those who are familiar with both texts, but part of the issue is that those who are unfamiliar with the novelized version are missing out on having this fear represented and discussed, and thus validated, through media. Rape and consent, while being underrepresented in media conversations around sex, is still addressed more frequently than uncertainty around consensual sex, another completely valid fear that is generally less openly discussed or publically recognized. For example, rape and sexual abuse is an issue addressed by the YA adaptations *Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012), *The Lovely Bones* (Sebold, 2009), and in the novels of other YA texts with adaptations currently under development, like Jay Asher's *13 Reasons Why.* However, fear of intimacy is rare, or is shown primarily as a cursory hesitation the protagonist soon dismisses or overcomes.

There are other problematic elements in the change as well. Within the film, the fear landscape is the occupant's greatest fears, which means Tris fears that Four will rape her (despite his consistent respect for her boundaries) and yet they still become a couple. Eastwood points out "Fearing rape is common and reasonable, but being attracted to rapists is not…We just should not show a young woman push through her fear that a young man is going to rape her." White also goes on to point out:

> Is the movie simply saying that women should always fear rape, even from men like Four who has always respected her, her choices, and her body? A fear of intimacy is not easy to relate on screen, as writers are quick to note, but couldn't they find a way? Shailene Woodley is a talented woman, I'm sure she could figure it out, instead of making this massive leap and changing her fear to rape in a

seemingly haphazard manner. Adding in this scene without much forethought is irresponsible, and though it may outwardly seem like a representation of a girl beating her attempted rapist, it's more troublesome for women than it seems under the surface.

Sexuality is a topic that American media shies away from, especially within this context of young adults, who are split between the innocence of childhood and the experiences of adulthood. Media aimed towards the YA audience is also heavily sexualized, from music to TV shows. While no one text is responsible, this media atmosphere as a whole encourages sexual behavior. Although I'm not going to argue that there is anything wrong with that, the alternative perspective of abstinence is usually portrayed in pop culture as religiously based, or (as seen in a text few people respect, *Twilight*) as a personal adherence to the tradition to wait until marriage. Stories like Tris', in which a young adult is given the choice to engage in consensual sex but is personally unwilling to take that step at that moment, usually are not found in visual media—and due to the change the film made, they still aren't.

Also, media often show a relationship coming together at the end of many stories, especially in the YA genre, in which a love interest is generally present. It is very rare for most stories to show the in-between physical steps between the first kiss and living happily ever after—the convention is to play up the first kiss, and to allude to a perfect romantic night soon (if not immediately) after. In this depiction of romance, both parties fly through the whirlwind of new love, moving into deeper and deeper levels of intimacy without stumbling. In this book simulation, the finer details of the experience are a part of conversation, and help create a representative and more realistic example for the audience of another type of budding relationship. As mentioned in the discussion on racial casting, without a variety of stories the

(unreasonable) norms on screen become perceived as societal norms, and thus young couples might find their experiences and fears at odds with what the screens tell them is the normal progression of a relationship.

It is not a bad message, so much as the absence of a good message, which is happening in this example. Like symbolic annihilation, if this kind of scenario doesn't take place in the media, in a way it doesn't exist, or at least is not validated or normalized. Even with the most optimistic reading of the sex scene, in which Tris' ability to fight off Four is read as a celebration of female power and ownership of her own body, something is still lost in this change. A different story is silenced, one that maybe should be told.

The intricacies of relationships, in this case from the perspective of young women, is a topic that is often explored in films, regardless of whether or not they are romantic dramas; it is a particular point of interest in the human experience. Often, however, these relationships tend to fall into redundant, oversimplified, or essentialized tropes (consider every superhero's girlfriend, kidnapped by the villain and rescued at the last moment). YA novels are putting fresh new perspectives on the broad range of forms and expressions that relationships can take, prompting discussions from how one knows when love is real versus just going through the motions (*The Hunger Games*) or how to navigate the uncertain waters of intimacy (*Divergent*). These messages could be reaching wider audiences and prompting further, deeper discussions, while normalizing a broader range of experiences, through filmic adaptations, but in these two examples the films fall short.

Conclusion

Much of this paper, from a lack of racial diversity to a simplification of women and their relationships, has been focused on the failings and shortcomings of Young Adult film adaptations, compared to the potential offered up by the original novel. However, this study so far has been grossly neglecting one of the greatest successes that YA adaptations can offer: making the story as a whole more widely known. In the case of very successful adaptations like *The Hunger Games,* the plot becomes a part of pop culture and the characters become household names. So yes, while in several respects the adaptations can be lacking in how they are presenting race and gender, in several other respects (as this paper has mentioned) it is providing positive messages and stories. Smart and unique young women are battling oppressive and unjust situations. Someone who is weak can become strong. Someone who is scared can learn to brave. Someone who is trapped can rewrite the rules. The life lessons and stories of empowerment, for any individual, that are found in YA are reproduced and spread through the film adaptation.

Film adaptations can spread the story in two ways. Firstly, the films allow individuals who do not like reading or simply have not had the time or ability to read this particular story access to the characters and plot, and the underlying messages, of the story. While they might be missing out on certain details (such as the additional layer of complexity from Katniss' internal monologue, or the possibility of having a non-white lead in that role) overall these are details compared to everything that this audience does gain through the film (the conversation about this post-apocalyptic world, the injustice within it, and how that injustice is fought against, for example). Put another way: Fans of the book might begrudge the movie for missing pieces, but from another perspective, those who have not and would never have read the book gain almost

the entire whole of the story, and all the messages that come with it. Secondly, these films tend to prompt increased readership of the novels. Film marketing (from in-store promotions to television ads to celebrity social media) can reach many more people than marketing of a book, making more people aware of the story and thus the book it came from. Book sales also demonstrate how a film can increase exposure to the original story: *The Hunger Games* sales increased 55% (with 36.5 million copies) between the start of 2012 and March of that year, when the film was released (Lewis). For some people the film functions as a catalyst (wanting to read the story before the film is released) while others enjoyed the film first and want to explore the characters in story in greater depth after viewing it. Either way, the numbers don't lie: film adaptations trigger heightened popularity and awareness of the books. This is also not a new phenomenon: "back in 1939, when the film version of *Wuthering Heights* was released, more copies of the novel were sold than in the entire previous near-century of its existence" (Boyum 16).

As mentioned, however, there is more value to the adaptations than to promote awareness of the book. For all its flaws, despite all that the adaptation is forced to or chooses to leave out, the film is still providing one key function: giving this story to an audience, whether or not they are already familiar with the book, and prompting discussion simply by becoming known. Stories do more than entertain. They teach and inspire. Young adult novels, and their adaptations, give youth role models, and help formulate their understanding of the world. *The Fault in Our Stars* forced its audience to confront the brutal reality of cancer. *Twilight* started national debates in hallways and social media about what an ideal relationship should be. *If I Stay* explores what is worth living for. All address the great human questions of life, love, and

death. The heart of these stories, no matter the genre, deal with very real adult concepts, and when presented through YA, invite youth and adults alike to wrestle with their implications.

These adaptations help cast real issues further into the public sphere, and into the mediums where teens and college students are communicating: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, tumblr, Pintrest. It seems that in society it is easy to define young adults and their media use as always inferior, immature, and unformed—and thus to dismiss them altogether as academically and intellectually insignificant. Tumblr cannot compare intellectually with Socrates or Plato. However, to take this perspective would neglect to respect, for example, the structure of these philosophers' dialectic debates or the Socratic Circle method, which is defined by the Northwest Association for Biomedical Research educational materials as "collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text… to achieve a deeper understanding about the ideas and values in a text." Not all internet discussion revolving around these texts is a deep intellectual debate (just as not all conversation in ancient Greece was serious philosophical arguments) but ultimately serious issues are being questioned, considered, and defended in these spaces—just like the blog collections of racist Hunger Games posts, or the Tumblr page celebrating an olive-skinned Katniss demonstrate. It is the content of these discussions, not their packaging, which is relevant. Through this, as displayed below, we can see that these YA adaptations are leaving more of an impact on its audience than simply the narrative events of its plot. They are teaching lessons, providing heroes, and expanding worldviews.
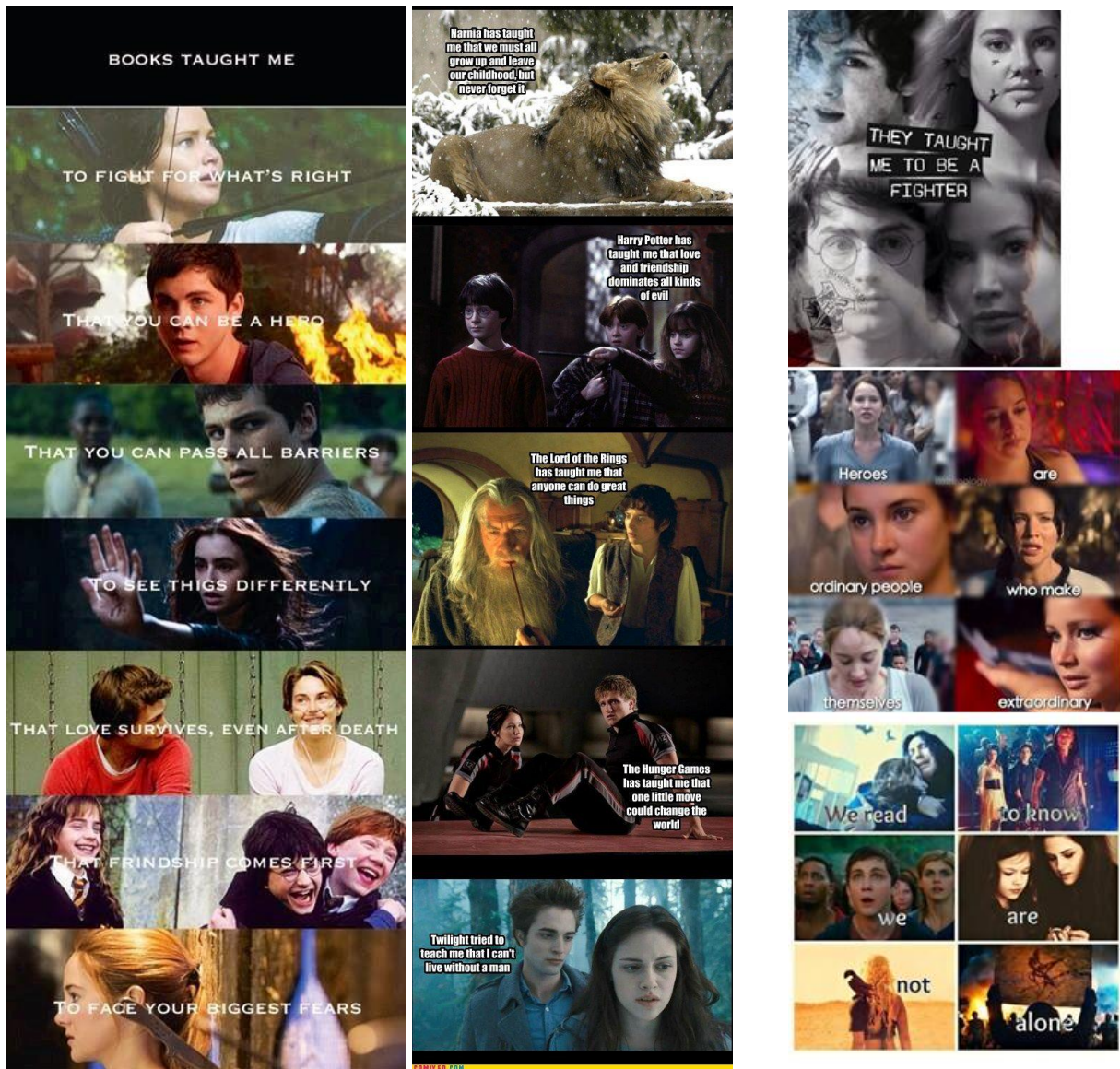
These images are made by content-consumers who are going out of their way to define and express the deep emotional and philosophical impact these stories have had on their audiences. These messages are not mindlessly absorbed—consider how *Twilight* is rejected as a source for knowledge by one anonymous maker, by saying "*Twilight* tried to teach me that I can't live without a man" and clearly implying that it failed. This demonstrates that YA consumers are thinking critically about what media beliefs they accept and reject.

Adaptations help facilitate these 21st century conversations, not only by making the basic stories and their issues more accessible, but also because they contribute visual elements for communication. Memes, likes the ones above, package an idea and spread it virally, to be consumed, considered, accepted or rejected, then spread again, but they are primarily a visual form of communication. Films can contribute the basic visual material for the formation of these memes. For example, one of the posts above declares "Books taught me" but utilizes images of the movies to demonstrate the point. As mentioned, films by nature of the medium create images for the story, so in addition to spreading the story and characters to a wider audience, a film adaptation of a book also gives the audience (and the Internet) a visual lexicon to use when discussing or thinking about the text and its implications.

Finally, it has been stated repeatedly in this essay that YA adaptations hold so much potential for the film industry precisely because the source texts can help combat the social limitations found in film today. However, while more diverse stories are found in YA as a whole, this does not indicate that every YA novel and adaptation are inherently more progressive. In the same way that YA content holds so much potential in the source text, it can also be limiting to the adaptation if the source text contains primarily negative messages. Take for example one of the most controversial and dividing YA adaptations, from Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (Hardwicke 2008). In both the novel and film, protagonist Bella Swan falls in love with a century-old vampire, Edward Cullen, who has to actively fight the desire to murder her, watches her sleep without her knowing, and is in many respects an abusive boyfriend figure. Bella meanwhile emphasizes many aspects of internalized oppression, from her conviction that she isn't good enough to be Edward's boyfriend to neglecting friendships in favor of pursing him and falling apart at the thought of being without him. Despite being a bestseller book and box-

office success, this YA story contains multiple problematic elements in representations of race and gender in the original text that are simply translated to the screen. It is the most relevant and well-known example to speak to the fact that not every YA text inherently holds promise for more socially conscientious and progressive films. But it also shouldn't be used as the standard example for the potential of all YA adaptations—for every *Twilight* there is a *Hunger Games,* for every regressive essentializing oversimplification of the teen experience, there is a stereotype-defying, universally inspiring, revolutionary book waiting on the shelf.

Similarly, even the films of this study have moments which are problematic—one final example from *Divergent* demonstrates not just this fact but also how an adaptation can take steps to improve the messages of the book. In the novel, Tris is attacked and nearly thrown off a ledge to her death:

> A heavy hand gropes along my chest. "You sure you're sixteen, Stiff? Doesn't feel like you're more than twelve." The other boys laugh. Bile rises in my throat and I swallow the bitter taste. "Wait, I think I found something!" His hand squeezes me. I bite my tongue to keep from screaming. More laughter. (Roth 279)

The scene is absent in the film, to the relief of writers like Caitlin White, who explains, "I'm tired of people using rape as a plot device, and it was unnecessary in the book from the start. The reason they tried to kill her was because they saw her as a *worthy adversary*, not because she was a woman or weak. It doesn't fit." Others echo her sentiment; the scene can be seen as an unnecessary abuse, or capitalizing on sexual violence to increase the drama of the scene, but overall the scene is made more powerful by that omission, because it puts a laser-focus on this murder attempt, partially executed by Tris' friend Al, and how Tris responds. The generally positive feedback on this choice also helps to show that a filmmaker is not creatively bound to

the restrictions of the original, if he or she is conscious of the changes they are making and how they will be interpreted.

Ultimately the argument of this paper is not that all YA adaptations are inherently a savior for film, but that this particular subgenre, armed with the financial backing and support of its fans and the existing unique and innovative representations found in the text, combined with the emotional power and reach of film, is well equipped to lead Hollywood into more diverse and positive social representations.

It is undeniable that parts of the book die in the adaptation, condemned to an inevitable yet tragic death by omission, the void made not by silence but by the absence of anything at all. Sometimes this loss is made more tragic by the fact that it could have been easily avoided, as many of the issues covered throughout this paper explore. Sometimes this is a necessary loss in order to gain even more—the music, color, motion, the *life* of the film that is unique to the medium. While some parts die, new and beautiful parts are born. Those unique losses are balanced by unique gains; some messages are silenced, others brought to light. What is important in the end is to recognize and celebrate the ways in which these adaptations positively impact culture and change, and to identify and contest the areas in which it does not, as a part of the slow move towards a more socially conscientious and inclusive media landscape.

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