Dystopian Love: A Look at Romance in Young Adult Dystopian Novels

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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May 2013

Expected Date of Graduation
May 4, 2013
Abstract

Research in young adult literature lacks a specific focus on romance within the increasingly popular genre of young adult dystopian novels. This paper provides an analysis of four popular young adult dystopian series, each of which have a significant focus on romance, to examine the trends and relationship between problems in dystopian societies and the romantic relationships developing within them. The following series (each containing three books) are discussed: The *Uglies* series by Scott Westerfeld, the *Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, the *Delirium* Series by Lauren Oliver, the *Matched* Series by Ally Condie.
Acknowledgements

I would to extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Benko for advising me through this project. Her continued help and support throughout this project has been invaluable and is just a small part of all the encouragement and guidance I have received throughout my time at Ball State.

I would also like to thank my parents, Lynn and Jack Wolf, and my roommates, Cassy, Kelsie, and Emily for being so supportive even when I locked myself away to work on this project.
Young adults today read widely in many different subjects and genres. As a result, in order to appeal to a larger demographic and perhaps make the books more interesting and exciting, many books have been published that are creating new genres or combining genres to create hybrid genres. Dystopian novels have been around for a while, but the introduction of romance into these novels is a somewhat new and increasingly popular phenomenon. I am interested in how romances and romantic relationships in young adult dystopian novels relate to the societal problems within these novels. Romance has become a large part of young adult dystopian fiction; in this paper, I analyze how these relationships affect the way these young adult dystopian novels might be read and the messages that one might take away from these novels. In studying this, I explore potential problems with conflating young adult dystopia and romance, and I comment on the appropriateness of such messages for teenagers.

This study analyzes four young adult dystopian trilogies (twelve books in all), all of which have different kinds of romantic relationships, in order to understand how the romantic relationships in these series affect and are affected by the problems in the dystopian societies. In order to do this, I first provide an overview of the history of the young adult genre and review research about young adult literature that relates to my analysis. Then, I evaluate the four series and analyze them based on my research questions. Finally, I compare my findings to those of other studies and to the genres of young adult fiction, romance, and dystopian literature.

**Defining Appropriate Terms**

**Young Adult Literature as a Genre**

The category of young adult literature was not conceptualized until the 1930s when Professor Dora V. Smith began promoting the idea that children’s books and books for teens
were different and should be categorized differently (Cole). It wasn’t until much later that young adult literature was actually separated from children’s books in libraries and bookstores and treated as a separate genre of fiction.

To define young adult literature simply, it is literature written for, marketed to, and read by people between the ages of twelve and eighteen (Cole), but as Welch points out in *A Core Collection for Young Adults*, there are very few books that would interest both a twelve year old and an eighteen year old, let alone all the ages in between. Thus, young adult literature has been adapted to include a large variety of books for teenagers looking for characters with whom they can identify and that share some of their life experiences (Welch). It is also often referred to as teen fiction, adolescent literature, juvenile literature, children’s literature, books for teens, and junior books (Cole). Young adult literature is not what young adults are required to read in school, but instead what they choose to read outside of the classroom. The novels young adults have chosen to read have historically been very different from the novels they are required to read or those that adults might encourage them to read. There is not an agreed upon definition or even a set age group for young adult literature because it appeals to audience that is larger than just teenagers. Especially in recent years with the popularity of series such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*, young adult literature has gained popularity with audiences of all ages.

One way to identify young adult literature is by some of the common trends as outlined in *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century* by Pam Cole. These characteristics help to define the young adult genre:

1. The protagonist is a teenager.

2. Events revolve around the protagonist and his/her struggle to resolve conflict.
3. The story is told from the viewpoint and in the voice of a young adult.

4. The genre is written by and for young adults.

5. The genre is marketed to the young adult audience.

6. Stories don’t have “storybook” or “happily-ever-after” endings—characteristic of children’s books.

7. Parents are noticeably absent or at odds with young adults.

8. The genre addresses coming of age issues (e.g. maturity, sexuality, relationships, drugs).

9. The books contain under 300 pages, closer to 200.

(Cole 49)

These defining characteristics are by no means set in stone and have received various criticisms though Literature for Today’s Young Adults by Nielsen, Blasigame, Donelson, and Nielsen lists similar characteristics. The last rule, for example, states that the books have fewer than 300 pages, but the Harry Potter series fits almost all the other criteria and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows has more than double that at 759 pages. Twilight is another popular novel that defies that rule at 498 pages. Stephen Chbosky’s The Perks of Being a Wallflower was originally marketed to adults, but it fits at least five of the other criteria—including being quite short, having a young adult protagonist, and addressing coming of age issues (Koelling). Others like Welch and Koelling, who study the young adult genre, might add one characteristic missing from this list: books in series and companion novels are becoming increasingly popular in young adult literature.

Jonathan Stephens, a former high school teacher and graduate student at California State University, complicates these characteristics of young adult literature by relating them to
adult literature. The only difference Stephens seems to see between young adult and adult books is that young adult books include a search for identity that is not always included in adult books. Stephens also recognizes the importance of the age and situation of the main characters, which has a profound effect on the ways that young adults relate to the characters. These characteristics act as guidelines when separating young adult literature as a genre from children's literature and adult literature.

There was an obvious need for a genre of fiction between children's books and adult literature, but, in many literary circles, young adult literature has yet to gain the literary merit that it deserves. Like all literary genres, young adult literature includes some novels that seem to lack substance and some genuinely dynamic and influential literature. Unfortunately, there is still some criticism of young adult literature as “worthless and inferior to classical texts and adult literature” (Cole 50). Despite the criticisms, others argue that young adult literature has merit as a literary genre and is incredibly relevant to a discussion of literature in general because of its popularity and recent growth. Publishers are receiving an increasing number of young adult and crossover manuscripts and young adult literature is growing as a genre even as adult and children's literature seem to decline (Koelling). Young adult novels have been at the top of bestseller lists and won various impressive awards. Much of the young adult literature being published today is high quality writing that deserves the same respect as other genres of fiction. Groenke and Scherff show through extensive examples and analysis of different novels that much of young adult literature shows “potential literary sophistication” and the “treatment of complex social issues” make young adult literature an important genre to critique. (Groenke and Scherff 2).
The increasing popularity of series books is acknowledged by Nielsen in *Literature for Today's Young Adults* and by Deborah Koelling in her book, *Best Books for Young Adults*, which attributes the change to the recent popularity of the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. Other popular series include: Phillip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* Series and Gath Nix’s *Sabriel* series. Series have helped shaped the history of young adult literature. Novels in a series are often able to communicate more of the problem in the novels and develop them further in sequels or companion novels (Koelling). Some of the earliest young adult series were novels involving the trials of high school and the quest for romantic relationships like the Sweet Valley High series and later books like *The A-List* by Zoey Dean and *Gossip Girl* by Cecily Von Ziegesar (Cart).

**Genre within Genre: Types of Young Adult Literature**

Within young adult literature there are a wide variety of genres. Because I am studying the romantic relationships within young adult dystopian novels, I will provide a brief history of the genre of romance within young adult fiction because it varies greatly from adult fiction. Then I will provide an overview of science fiction and fantasy because these two genres within young adult fiction include dystopian fiction.

Even in the young adult genre, romance is associated with certain stereotypes. Romances are stereotypically thought of as lacking much substance with more sexual encounters than an actual plot (Cole). Young adult romances are often dynamic reads with heartbreak, loss, comedy, satire, and serious relationships. They include classics like *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and newer stories like *An Abundance of Katherines* by John Green and *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer (Nielsen). In the 21st century, romance has changed to include the genre known as "chick lit" has become increasingly popular. These novels are often part of
series and feature the protagonist working through and adapting to a variety of problems and situations in the pursuit of romantic relationships (Cart). The protagonists have to deal with varying situations from accepting the fact that their boyfriend is a vampire to winning the boy or girl of their dreams. The climax in these novels is often when the couple is united without any remaining obstacles to their relationship. These characteristics carry over into other genres when romance plays a less central role in a novel like in historical fiction, fantasy, or dystopian fiction novels (Cole).

Romance appeals especially to young readers because many of the female classic protagonists in classic stories like Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, and Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights are in their teens or early twenties and romance relates messages of hope and youthfulness (Nielsen). It is the age when one leaves home and steps out on their own and has their first romantic relationship. Young adult romance appeals to adolescents’ needs to understand their own romantic relationships and the often exaggerated emotions they might be feeling related to these relationships (Cole).

Two other popular genres within young adult literature are fantasy and science fiction, which include dystopian novels. These types of novels meet an almost opposite need than young adult romance: rather than helping teens understand their own lives, science fiction and fantasy appeal to the need to escape the problems of their normal, everyday lives (Nielsen). As books like Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games and Stephanie Meyers’ Twilight became popular, publishers took their popularity as a sign of new trends and publish more books like it. When the Twilight novels became popular, publishers chose to print more books about vampires (Welch). Books like the Vampire Academy series by Rachelle Mead and the House of Night series by P.C. Cast were published after the Twilight series first gained prominence.
Science fiction and fantasy are two distinct genres within young adult fiction that are constantly associated with one another. Science fiction is often imagined as aliens and spaceships, but that is only one of the many subjects and plots within the science fiction genre. Science fiction questions “What if...?” offering different perspectives about the reality of life or humanity’s possible future and has some basis in science. In other words, in order for a book to be classified as science fiction it must be possible in either the present or in the future, often incorporating advanced technologies. Where science fiction is grounded in science, not all fantasy novels have to be scientifically possible. Authors of young adult fantasy can create entire worlds and situations with magic, enchantments, wizards, and anything else the author conjures in his or her mind (Welch). Author Orson Scott Card explained it perfectly in 1990 when he said, “Science fiction is about what could be; fantasy is about what couldn’t be” (Cole 365).

Dystopian fiction is a subgenre of science fiction and fantasy within both young adult and adult literature. Dystopian fiction is by no means a new genre, though it is often categorized as science fiction or fantasy instead of as dystopian fiction. This genre is most often associated with science fiction because many dystopian novels involve technology and events that could conceivably happen in the future. Joseph Campbell, a psychology professor at the University of Illinois, identifies the difference between these two very similar genres by categorizing the genres by use-value. Young adult dystopia and young adult science fiction are distinct genres because “Science fiction for young adults has its use-value in clearly demonstrating the concept of othering to the adolescent; dystopian fiction for adolescents has its use-value in requiring the young adult to question the ideological apparatuses of the culture being critiqued” (Campbell). A science fiction novel might show a society situated many years
in the future or in a completely different universe, but it is not dystopian unless the society is being critiqued. Dystopian fiction has the same problem when it is categorized as fantasy. Though the characteristics might be similar, the purpose of the novel is different in a fantasy novel as opposed to a dystopian novel. Ultimately, young adult dystopia is a hybrid genre or a combination of many genre and many dystopian novels have elements of both science fiction and fantasy.

Some popular dystopian classics include *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, George Orwell's *1984*, and Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, but of the three of these only *The Giver* can really be classified as a young adult novel. There was not a real boom in young adult dystopian fiction until more recently after the publication of *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. *The Hunger Games* was on the New York Bestseller's list for three years. The series has more than 35 million copies in print and with the anticipated popularity of the films; those numbers will continue to rise (Garrow). Young adults are not the only people reading these novels—dystopian novels appeal to a wide range of readers. People that are young, adult, male, female, and from vastly different places and situations enjoy dystopian novels. The novels appeal to both genders' emotions with strong lead characters like Katniss in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. The characters are relatable and have realistic flaws and problems. Though many of them live in corrupt or controlling societies, they have more normal and relatable problems like navigating romantic relationships. Perhaps the strongest argument for their popularity that Gander mentions is that dystopian novels demonstrate the reality of human struggle (Gander). No matter the situation, many people can relate to different struggles shown in young adult dystopia whether the issue is depression, the loss of a friend or family member, or something else entirely.
Review of Relevant Research

Though young adult literature has been discussed and analyzed more as a genre in recent years, there have been few quantitative and qualitative studies of what young adults like to read and why. The Commission on English Education’s Conference session found 27 peer-reviewed studies published on the topic of young adult literature from 1999 to 2009. (Hazlett, Johnson, and Hayn). Koss and Teale also maintain that there is not enough explicit examination of the novels that teenagers read and the significance of those novels. Many still view young adult literature as an inferior body of literature that is perhaps not worth studying. (Cole). In a study published in the ALAN Review, students assigned to read young adult novels noticed negative reactions from others and academics researching young adult literature said their colleagues did not find young adult literature to be research appropriate (Hazlett, Johnson, and Hayn).

Despite these critiques, there are many individuals who recognize the significance of young adult genre and have analyzed and studied different aspects and trends within the larger body of work. Many of these articles focus on specific books or series or they are focused more on teaching young adult literature rather than studying different genres within young adult literature. In the following sections, I review scholarly research about romance and dystopian young adult literature. This review is provided in order to set the stage for my own exploration of texts within these genres.

Romance

Romance in young adult literature comes in many forms and with hidden messages about femininity and individuality. In a study about the portrayals of love in young adult novels, Cheryl Dickson is concerned with the amount of realism in the portrayals of the
romantic relationships. She suggests relationships should be portrayed in a more realistic way in young adult romance novels. The novel she refers to, *A Walk to Remember*, by Nicolas Sparks is perhaps not written for young adults, but it has many of the other characteristics that define young adult literature. The novel shows the main characters reacting in ways that Dickson claims teenagers would not normally act and it shows unrealistic development of intimacy. The idea that Landon would love Jamie despite his friend’s opinions and marry her without gaining anything from it personally is much more desirable to teenage readers. A less popular novel, *Hard Love* by Ellen Wittlinger shows a much more believable depiction of love when the main character’s feelings for his best friend are shown to be one sided, a much less romantic depiction of teenage love. Though unrealistic, Dickson concludes that the novels are at least somewhat helpful to the development of good morals and decision making capabilities because they “bridge the gap between real life and media fantasy” (Dickson 43).

Though Daly also seems concerned with the realistic portrayal of relationships in young adult novels, she concerns herself with the seriousness of the relationships and the lack of humor in the texts. She analyses novels including Joanna Campbell’s *True Love* and the Francine Pascal’s *Sweet Valley High* series by looking at the way the girl and the boy in the relationship relate to each other. She claims that the relationships and the novels themselves should include more humor. Daly also analyses the agency of the female heroines in these novels and concludes that gender stereotypes are far too prevalent in young adult romance. The female is put into a situation where she must be rescued by her love interest. Daly is fearful that the ultimate goal of these novels is simply the romance; the female protagonist can be an individual until she is in a relationship and then she must fulfill her stereotypical role as a wife and mother.
In *Female Characters as Role Models in Young Adult Literature*, Julia Stamper analyses the agency of the female protagonists in young adult romance, fantasy, science fiction, and realistic fiction. Stamper analyzes a large group of texts including popular titles like J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer, *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld, and *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. Her findings indicate that novels with stronger heroines like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and the *Harry Potter* books are marketed towards males and females and the novels that are marketed primarily to a female audience like Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* and *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging* by Louise Rennison have weaker heroines. Young adult romance is primarily marketed toward females and can have female protagonists with less agency than books in other genres that seem to showcase stronger, more self-reliant protagonists (Stamper).

Johnson argues that the female heroines are not just weaker as characters, but that young adult romance trivializes the agency, romance, and sexuality of female characters. He studies the view of femininity and the commercialism within the popular romance series *Gossip Girl* by Cecily Von Ziegesar, *A-List* by Zoey Dean, and *The Clique* by Lisi Harrison. In these series, the characters seem to be empowered by having or using highly expensive and commercialized products like designer bags and luxury cars rather than through their own intelligence, creativity, or strength of character. Johnson sees these trends as a part of all young adult literature, but primarily seen in romance. He claims that these books, and many books in the young adult genre, present “limited and limiting understanding of femininity” (Johnson 54). These novels in contrast show female protagonists with very little agency and teach female readers that empowerment comes from outside forces like money and fame rather than from their own unique character traits.
Holly Koelling, author of *Best Books for Young Adults* argues that these heroines are not weak at all, but compelling, and action-oriented. The women and girls in these stories are more in control of their lives. This is more on par with Stamper’s analysis, but contradicts both Johnson and Daly’s analyses. Though young adult heroines are still dealing with the same issues of insecurity, romantic attachments, familial problems, and other serious problems, they are dealing with these issues in ways that are different from young adult novels in the past. Koelling argues that the women in many recent young adult novels face hardship, but are stronger for it. Koelling offers books like Sarah Dessen’s *Keeping the Moon* and *This Lullaby* and Tanuja Desai Hidier’s *Born Confused* as examples of novels with female heroines that are indomitable despite their issues with relationships, self-esteem, and growing up.

**Dystopia**

Unlike romance, dystopian novels can be quite realistic (Gander). Dystopian novels appeal to girls and boys because they are emotional and the emotions, characters and situations draw the readers into the novels. Young adult dystopian novels and the characters within them are popular not only because the novels show the character dealing with realistic contemporary problems, but also because the characters like Katniss, Peeta, and Gale in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* or Tally and Shay in *Uglies* are flawed and complex characters. Young adult dystopian novels promote the idea that anyone can make a difference and everyone has the power to affect change, which is in itself not very realistic – but it does inspire hope. In *Monica Hughes, Lois Lowry, and Young Adult Dystopias*, Hintz explains that novels are popular because the characters have a certain amount of agency. The protagonists are forced to make difficult decisions and there is a strong emphasis on independence. Like most young adult fiction, what distinguishes dystopian books for teens from books for adults seems to be this
idea of a transition from adolescence to adulthood as Stephens also mentions in his slightly broader study of young adult literature.

Kirtley claims that the changes in the popularity of young adult dystopia are due to current events and the pessimistic nature of the present. She theorizes that the reason that dystopia novels have become so popular is because people are more concerned with problems like war, global-warming, and cloning. Dystopian novels appeal to young adults because they encourage readers to examine problems in fictional worlds and that reasoning can be applied to similar problems in their own societies. Kirtley looks specifically at the Hunger Games trilogy and looks at Collins motivation and inspiration for writing the series. Collins wrote *The Hunger Games* trilogy to “intentionally characterize current and past world events” (Kirtley 122) and included themes like the elimination of individual rights and using hunger to control populations to relate her dystopian novel to the problems in other countries today (Kirtley).

In *The Worst is Yet to Come*, Reeve examines reasons for the popularity of young adult dystopia, but unlike the other individuals previously mentioned, he does not view the popularity of dystopia as an entirely good thing. Reeve highlights strengths of the genre, like strong protagonists and the theme that an individual can make a difference, but he is concerned with the pessimism of dystopia and the lack of humor. The young adult dystopian novels that he examines are *The Hunger Game* by Suzanne Collins, *Ship Breaker* by Paolo Bacigalupi, *Blood Red Road* by Moira Young, and *Ashes, Ashes* by Jo Treggiari seem almost too dark with their grim depictions of the future. Reeve contrasts today’s dystopian novels with novels published earlier like *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams and *Dr. Strangelove* by Peter George which have a certain dark comedy to them that makes the reading of the novels more upbeat and enjoyable. Reeve also seems to belittle the reasons that dystopia
might be popular within young adult fiction, arguing that the purpose may be more to rebel against authority than an attempt to bridge the gap between fictional tragedy and the tragedies of real life.

Bullen and Parsons look at young adult dystopia from a different angle in their article published in *Children's Literature in Education*. They closely examine the dystopian novels, *Mortal Engines* by Phillip Reeve and *Feed* by M.T. Anderson. Bullen and Parsons are interested in the individual characters and what kind of individuals survive in dystopian societies. Like the other articles, they put a lot of emphasis on the necessity of maintaining one’s individuality and thinking clearly in difficult situations. Through their analysis, they concluded that in order to survive in these societies one must “stand outside culture and ideology” (Bullen and Parsons). At the end of *Feed*, for example, everyone seems to be dying because almost everyone has had a chip inserted into their brains. It is those that did not get the chip initially who have a greater chance of survival.

Bethune has similar ideas. His study looks at the popularity of young adult dystopia, but focuses more on the common themes within young adult dystopian. He examines and analyzes the trends in novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Matched*, *Brave New World*, *The Way we Fall*, and *Uglies*. He concludes that many of the novels have strong female characters and that males and females are equal to each other in most of the societies. The novels are empowering for both females and males and the societal problems in the novels can be related to the tragedy, war, and injustices experienced all over the world. In the novels that Bethune references, the focus seems to not be on the society, but rather on the “love interest and what kind of person I [the character] will grow into” (Bethune), though he does not elaborate much on this idea of the love interest except to acknowledge that it includes one.
All of these studies focusing on young adult dystopian novels and young adult romance novels, will help me frame my study of romantic relationships within young adult dystopian novels. They also provide a useful background of the various genres that I am looking at and the research that has been done within them.

**Dystopian Love: A Look at Romance in Young Adult Dystopian Novels**

Recently, I have noticed that most of the popular young adult dystopian novels have a considerable amount of romance in them as Bethune briefly mentioned. In fact, romance is a central focus in many of the dystopian novels to a point where the romance becomes just as important if not more important than the problem in the society. In the past, this was not a characteristic of dystopia, but the recent popularity seems to have sparked this trend. There is also little critical examination of this type of text, with the exception being *The Hunger Games*. Although other authors (e.g., Kirtley, Henthrone) have examined *The Hunger Games*, both Kirtley and Henthrone fail to address the issue of romantic relationships extensively, though the romances make up a significant portion of the novels. I hope to contribute to the conversation about young adult literature – specifically of dystopian young adult literature – by examining trends and characteristics of the romances in four contemporary young adult dystopian series that have been popular in the last seven years. These trilogies were chosen because they are all completed series that all feature a strong romantic element. Briefly, I will summarize these. Extended summaries are available in the appendix.

**The Uglies trilogy by Scott Westerfeld**

The *Uglies* series is set in the future where all citizens are surgically altered at sixteen to fit ideal standards of beauty so people will not be unfairly judged or criticized based on their looks. Before a person turns sixteen they are known as an “Ugly.” After the person turns 16,
they move from the Ugly City to the Prettyville and are known as “Pretties.” There they attend parties and have fun all the time. People in a group known as the “Smokies” have escaped from the city to live in the wild at a place they call “The Smoke” because they believe the operation is wrong. A unit of the Pretties known as the “Specials” was created to find and capture the rebel Smokies. Tally, the main character, is about to turn sixteen when her friend Shay escapes to go live at The Smoke. The Specials want to catch all the Smokies so they blackmail Tally into finding the Smoke and betraying her friend. When Tally finds the Smoke she meets David who tells her the truth about how the surgery that changes a person into a Pretty also makes people unable to think for themselves. She falls in love with David, but when she is recaptured and turned into a Pretty she mostly forgets about him. Then she meets a Pretty named Zane who helps her think for herself again and she falls in love with him. When Zane dies, Tally goes back to David, but their relationship is not romantic. She only wants to help the world.

**The Hunger Games Trilogy by Suzanne Collins**

The *Hunger Games* series is set in the United States after a future war. The President and the Capital control the twelve (formerly thirteen) districts. In order to remember the war and what was lost, each year a boy and a girl from each district are chosen in a drawing to fight to the death in an arena controlled by people in the capital. The main character, Katniss takes her sister’s place when Prim is chosen. The other tribute chosen from District Twelve is Peeta, who Katniss later finds out is in love with her. They are forced to act like they are a couple in the arena as a way to get sponsors that can help them survive in the arena. Meanwhile, Katniss’ friend from District Twelve is also in love with her.

**The Matched Trilogy by Ally Condie**
The *Matched* trilogy is set in a world where “The Society” controls everything its citizens do from who they marry to what they eat each day using scientific formulas and calculations based on the personal characteristics and habits of the citizens. Each option, choice, and even the anomalies are accounted for in the perfectly controlled society. There is, however, a rebellion known as “The Rising” located outside of the society that wants to take down the society. The main character, Cassia, is originally matched, or assigned to marry her best friend Xander, but she starts to look at Ky more when she sees his picture on the card saying who she is matched with instead of Xander’s picture. As the novel progresses she starts to fall for both boys, but eventually chooses Ky.

**The Delirium Trilogy by Lauren Oliver**

The *Delirium* series is set in a society where love (known as the disease Amor Deliria Nervosa) has been outlawed because it causes people to make irrational decisions. After a young adult turns eighteen, they are cured of Amor Deliria Nervosa and become rationale members of the society. A revolution exists in the wilds (outside the borders of the society) that claims that love is not a disease. The main character, Lena, meets Alex when he is posing as a guard. She does not know until later that he is part of the rebellion that wants to put an end to the cure. Lena falls in love with him, but when they are trying to escape Lena thinks that Alex has been killed. In the second book, Pandemonium, Lena becomes a part of the rebellion and she and the son of the leader promoting the cure, Julian, fall in love while she is posing as a citizen within the society. When she returns to the Wilds with Julian, she finds out that Alex is still alive and realizes that she still loves him more than Julian. She thinks that Alex does not love her anymore, but when she finds out that he does, she chooses to be with him over Julian.
The two research questions I have developed will target the key features of the romantic relationships between the main characters and help me to analyze these relationships in relation to the overarching societal problems in the books. I will also attempt to characterize these relationships and determine how much of these dystopian novels are characterized by the romantic relationships within them. Specifically, these two questions guided my critical analyses of these young adult trilogies: The Uglies series, The Hunger Games series, The Matched Series, and the Delirium Series.

1. What are the ways in which these (current/contemporary) dystopian series novels depict and develop romantic relationships between characters?
2. How do (or don't) the romances in the text relate to larger societal issues being wrestled with in the series

After developing my research questions, I conducted a thorough investigation of these texts. I read and reread all twelve texts, took notes about various themes and the ways that the romantic relationships on the books related to the larger societal problems. I organized my notes, looking for themes and trends surrounding the romantic relationships within the trilogies. In the section that follows, I discuss my findings.

**Findings**

In this section, I explore the findings to each research question. I begin with my first question, then explore that question through each series individually, and repeat this pattern with the second research question. I conclude each section with a discussion of all twelve texts relative to each research question.

**Question 1: Depicting and Developing Romantic Relationships**
The *Uglies* series (*Uglies, Pretties, Specials*). The *Uglies* series depicts the main character, Tally as involved in two different romantic relationships. The first relationship is with David, a member of the rebel Smokies, a group that does not believe in the operation that makes everyone beautiful and unable to think for themselves; in the second book she enters into a serious relationship with Zane.

Tally does not start feeling close to David until he reveals that he is not a runaway as she thought he was, but was born outside of the Prettyville. Tally has been blackmailed by the Specials into revealing the location of the Smokies’ base, known as the Smoke. If she does not tell the Specials where the Smoke is, she will not become a Pretty. She decides not to reveal the location of the Smokies and betray her best friend Shay, who has chosen to escape to the Smoke, because she would be taking David’s home away from him. When David confides in Tally, it marks the beginning of their friendship, but it is not until they have spent more time together the Tally develops any sort of romantic feelings for him. She is always aware that he does not fit the ideals for prettiness, which she has always valued, but when she is out in the wilderness that changes. “It was as if something changed inside of Tally’s head, something turned his face pretty to her” (*Uglies* 2869). When Tally is with David, she sees his as attractive because she likes him even though he does not fit the standards for physical attractiveness. David is the first person that makes Tally question what she thinks is pretty and what she thinks is right. Ultimately, David and Tally do not have a romantic relationship until they can both be honest with one another. When Tally finds out that becoming Pretty “changes the way you think” (*Uglies* 3068), she has no more loyalty to the Specials and can be with David. It is only when they are betrayed and the other Smokies are captured that Tally has to face her guilt she feels for her accident betrayal of them and of David.
Tally reenters Pretty world in order to save Shay and David’s parents because she feels guilty. “I have to. To make it up to you [David]” (Uglies 3704) she thinks. When David tries to kiss Tally, she turns her face away because of that guilt and it is her part in the betrayal of the Smoke that leads to her separation from David. David and Tally’s relationship essentially ends when David finds out that Tally lied and Tally leaves to become a Pretty to ultimately save everyone she has grown to care for in the Smoke and to make up for her mistakes. Though David’s mother believes that David would have forgiven her and they would have been able to be together even after Tally’s betrayal, their separation and Tally’s later relationship with Zane effectively end the romantic relationship between Tally and David.

When Tally is Pretty she starts a relationship with Zane because, despite the changes to their brains that came with the surgery, both of them want to be able to think. Zane is part of the Crims, a popular group within Prettyville who pull crazy stunts in order to keep their minds sharp and fight the lesions that changed their brains when they become pretty. Tally first decides to be with Zane because his actions made him “prettier than the others” (Pretties 749). Their relationship is entirely physical at the beginning because Tally still has feelings for David. “I just want to forget David” (Pretties 1193). She engages in this relationship in order to do just that—forget. Tally tells Zane everything that happened with David and her lingering feelings for him, but eventually it becomes difficult for her to thin about her feelings and relationship with David. Tally decides to enter into a romantic relationship with Zane because “He [David] was ugly, and Zane was beautiful, and bubbly, and he was here” (Pretties 1229). At the beginning, this is the only reason that Tally stays with Zane, for purely superficial reasons and she was feeling abandoned by David, a boy that she still loves, but can hardly remember.
Westerfeld shows that the relationship between David and Tally was real and Tally still loved David even when her brain had been altered to find him ugly. It was easier for her to fall in love with Zane because “when everyone was beautiful you could end up falling in love with the first pretty you kissed” (Pretties 755). Tally’s feelings for David started because of his personality and later she finds him more attractive. With Zane, Tally enters into a relationship with him because of his beauty; later, when he is cured and allowed to return to thinking on his own, she falls in love with his personality. She believes that Zane himself cured her and helped her learn the truth, similar to the way that David changed the way she thought about the operation when he told her the truth and she fell in love with him. Both boys made Tally a better version of herself. In fact, Tally’s reality changes when she kisses the two boys and they cure her magically like sleeping beauty. Tally realizes that David changed the first time that they kissed. In this way, Westerfeld sets up Tally’s two relationships as somewhat magical. Tally does not need medicine to cure her like the other characters do; she just needs her two princes. Both ultimately fulfill the same purpose at different times. She needed David to first save her from the propaganda and lies that she was constantly fed by the Pretties until she turned sixteen and she needs Zane to later help her see through the same lies when her mind is changed to that of a Pretty. Eventually, Tally chooses Zane because she cannot remember being with David and Zane needs her. It is not clear, however, whether Tally has been programmed to choose Zane because of his beauty like David believes or because she really loves him more.

When Tally is captured by the Specials, a group of special Pretties created to find the Smokies, she becomes one of them and she is again reprogrammed to think the Uglies and the Pretties are weak and basically useless. She follows the Smokies because it is her job and she
no longer has any romantic feelings for David. She has been programmed to think that he lied to her about any feelings he had for her. She remembers her love of Zane, but she has been programmed to think of him as more of a child in need of protection than an equal. “Tally tried to imagine kissing his child-like lips, stroking his shaking hands, and the thought disgusted her” (Specials 907). Even when Tally has changed enough to remember what is wrong about the Specials, the Uglies and normal human reactions repulse her. “Tally could smell his [David’s] fear, all the weakness leaking out of him” (Specials 3135). The operation changes the way Tally is, making it difficult for her to have feelings for anyone. Zane dies and Tally does not feel pain of his death because she is a Special. Tally only sees “how maddening death really was, how colossally pointless in every way” (Specials 3010). Tally chooses to stay a Special because she realizes that to keep people from destroying the environment and making more mistakes, she must think like a Special. She chooses her duty to protect the world from destruction and the mistakes that humans consistently make over love.

_Uglies_ is not ultimately about the romance, though romance does play a large part in the story. The _Uglies_ Trilogy explores individuality and freedom of thought, though the way that the characters achieve this freedom of thought is often strongly linked to love. Tally would not be able to grow as a person and retain her individuality without first David and then Zane, but in the end, Tally is able to change her own mind and reject the thoughts and feelings created by the operations. It is because she is capable of a strong feeling of love that she is able to look beyond what she is told and see the world in a different way.

Through the development of the romance in the trilogy, Westerfeld shows that love plays an important role in the development of the characters, but the romantic relationships are ultimately not as important as to problems within the society. In order to accomplish all that
she did, Tally needed that love and the way the loves changed her into a different and perhaps
can accept the person she has become and take responsibility for herself. Westerfeld shows that
even the death of love can have a profound effect on a character. Tally asks David for his help
at the very end of the book, but she does not really need him. The books give the impression
that the romantic relationships helped Tally become the person that she is at the end of the
book, but at some point she outgrows them and becomes her own person. She is no longer
fighting for any cause for a reason other than her own personal beliefs.

**The Hunger Games series** *(The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, Mockingjay)*. During
the *Hunger Games* series, Katniss Everdeen is involved in romantic relationships with Peeta
Mellark and Gale Hawthorne. Katniss’ relationship with Gale begins as a friendship before the
Hunger Games that Katniss participates in. They meet because they both hunt illegally outside
of District 12, a district impoverished by the Capitol. Katniss does not have any romantic
feelings for Gale before she is chosen to compete in the games. In contrast, Peeta and Katniss
do not speak before they are both chosen to compete in the games as tributes for District 12.
The first hint of a relationship between them is when Peeta publically announces his feelings
for Katniss during televised interviews prior to the Games, but Katniss dismisses this as a tactic
to gain supporters until and even after they are reunited in the arena. Katniss and Peeta are
forced to be together to gain supporters in the arena and this is perhaps why she is conflicted
about her feelings for him. Katniss only pretends she is in a relationship with Peeta in the arena
to gain sponsors, but this fake relationship forces her to consider her relationship with Gale.
“Gale’s not my boyfriend, but would he be if I opened that door?” *(The Hunger Games 3456)*.
Her thoughts about a relationship with Gale in the middle of the Games shows that on some level she feels like the fake relationship with Peeta could be a betrayal to Gale. “I wonder what he [Gale] makes of all this kissing?” (The Hunger Games 3456) she asks herself. Katniss does not kiss Peeta out of romantic feelings, she does it because she knows that a pretend relationship with Peeta will gain her sponsors in the arena and make her a favorite of the viewers. When Katniss and Peeta are able to work together in the arena, Katniss begins to care for Peeta for reasons other than how it benefits her own survival and how it will look to viewers. “I realize how much I don’t want him to die... it’s not just that I don’t want to be alone. It’s him” (The Hunger Games 3685). When the Hunger Games is over Katniss is not really in a romantic relationship with either of the boys, she does not know what she feels for either of the boys, but feels like she has been lying to both of them. “I feel like I’ve been lying to someone that trusts me. Or more accurately, two people” (The Hunger Games 4614). Katniss does not know until the end of the novel how either Gale or Peeta really feels about her and then she does not know how she feels about them.

The second book starts nearly six months after the first book ends and Katniss is still trying to figure out how she feels. She is not talking to Peeta because he did not realize that she was not being truthful in her affections during the Games and she is being forced by the Capital to be in a relationship with him. Katniss is unable to explore a relationship with Gale because she has to pretend to be in a relationship with Peeta. Katniss gets an idea of the feelings that Gale has for her when he surprises her by kissing her in the woods after she comes back from the Capital. This kiss makes things different between Katniss and Gale; however Katniss effectively ignores it to train to go into the arena for a second time. She believes that she will die in the arena so she will never have a romantic relationship with Gale. Meanwhile,
Katniss and Peeta become friends and allies even though Katniss knows that Peeta is in love with her and she is not sure how she really feels about him. It is not until Gale is whipped for poaching that Katniss decides that she belongs with him. “Gale is mine. I am his” (*Catching Fire* 1486). Katniss seems to only choose Gale when he is suffering. This sentiment is echoed in *Mockingjay*, when she kisses him again when Gale sees the ruins of his home. “I knew you’d kiss me… because I’m in pain” (*Mockingjay* 1717). Gale tells her. Katniss does not seem to know how she feels. She is more concerned with keeping everyone physically safe and when she kisses Gale, she does it more to help him than she does because of her own feelings.

Katniss basically forgets about a relationship with Gale when she and Peeta enter the arena for the second time. She is still charged with keeping up the charade that she and Peeta are completely in love, but most of her actions are because she legitimately has feelings for Peeta and she does not have to feel guilty about Gale any longer. “I’ll never see him again that’s for certain. Nothing I do now can hurt him” (*Catching Fire* 2380). Free from that guilt, Katniss realizes that she does love Peeta if she separates her feelings about Gale. “I realize only one person will be damaged beyond repair if Peeta dies. Me” (*Catching Fire* 4341). Katniss allows herself to feel for Peeta because she has accepted the idea that she will die and never see Gale or her family again. She cares about Peeta and because Gale will not know, she allows herself to show her feelings for him. She protects Peeta in the arena not just out of duty, but also out of love. When the arena is blown up and Katniss wakes up in the hover craft her first thought is of Peeta. Katniss is inconsolable when she finds out that Peeta has been captured and there is nothing she can do to save him.
The absence of Peeta at the beginning of the third book gives Katniss a way to be with Gale, but she does not start up a romantic relationship with him. They become friends again and Katniss feels she cannot have a romantic relationship because “it’s too cruel with Peeta in the hands of the capital” (Mockingjay 395). When Peeta is retrieved, he has been brainwashed into not loving Katniss any longer. Katniss cannot be around Peeta when he does not love her and with his so changed, she finds it difficult to feel the same things for him. It is only when Katniss accepts that “deep down he will never come back to [her],” (Mockingjay 2544) that she even thinks about having a romantic relationship with Gale. “I kiss Gale to make up for all the kisses I’ve withheld, and because it doesn’t matter anymore, and because I’m so desperately lonely I can’t stand it” (Mockingjay 2544). She does not kiss Gale because she loves him, but because she knows that she cannot be with Peeta and she’s upset about it. When Gale realizes this, he refuses to be with her. Gale and Katniss never really get another chance at romance because Gale knows that Katniss will “never be able to let him [Peeta] go” (Mockingjay 2535). Despite the fact that Peeta hates her, Katniss continues to protect him. The moment that Katniss finally walks away from any possible relationship with Gale is when she learns that Gale could have created the bombs that killed her sister; she knows with certainty after this event that she can never be with him. “I will never be able to separate that moment from Gale” (Mockingjay 4647). Katniss will never be able to separate her sister’s death from Gale and so when she leaves, he doesn’t go with her. After the end of the war, thought they are both damaged, Peeta and Katniss grow back together and Katniss finds that Peeta is what she needed all along. “What I need to survive is not fire, kindled with rage and hatred. I have plenty of fire myself. What I need is the dandelion in the spring. The bright yellow that means
rebirth instead of destruction... and only Peeta can give me that” (*Mockingjay* 4914). Katniss finally chooses a quiet life away from the politics and destruction.

The development of the relationships in *The Hunger Games* trilogy is not the ultimate point or focus of the novels. Katniss often seems more confused about the relationships and what she wants than anything else. She ignores the developing feeling she has for Peeta and Gale both because it complicates her ultimate desires. She does not want the romantic relationships because she does not want to bring a child into District Twelve where a child would have to live as she does. The over complication of the relationships and the way that her relationships with Gale and with Peeta are so convoluted could perhaps give the message that love just complicates things or it is not as important as other issues. Katniss, more than any of the other characters, seems to be happier when she does not have to worry about hurting anyone herself or the Capital hurting the people she loves.

Are the romances written in such a way that it makes it seem like the romantic relationships are ultimately not important? One might suggest that Collins wrote the novel this way to show a more complex and realistic view of relationships like the kind that Cheryl Dickson thinks should be the status quo. There is not a definitive or happy ending to the series: Katniss chooses Peeta at the end because he is the one that is there and only seems to conclude later that he is the one she should have been with all along. This ending seems more about comfort and security than an all-consuming love or passion, perhaps this is a more realistic and thus less romantic portrayal of love. Collins keeps the emphasis on the dystopian themes and reinforces the idea that something like what is portrayed in the *Hunger Games* could happen in real life.
A contrary idea could be that Suzanne Collins explores the relationships in the book in a way that suggests that the relationships develop without much effort on Katniss’ part. This suggests that love can come from anywhere at any time which is a much more hopeful message. By choosing Peeta, Katniss may not be choosing the default, but could instead be choosing the boy that balances her rather than one more like her. However, the rather dismal ending suggests that there are no happily ever after’s even if the main character does find love and accomplishes the things they set out to do.

The *Matched* series (*Matched, Crossed, Reached*). The *Matched* series focuses on the protagonist, Cassia, and her romantic relationships with Ky and Xander. When the society first matches Cassia with Xander, basically assigning Xander to be Cassia’s future husband, Cassia seems happy be matched with him because she trusts the society to choose the ideal husband for her and Cassia and Xander had been best friends since childhood. When she sees Ky’s picture on the microcard that is supposed to show her future husband’s face, however, Cassia starts to notice him more. Ky and Cassia’s relationship seems to develop because they can share knowledge and secrets with one another. “He’s the one that taught me how to write my name, how to keep the poems” (*Matched* 2649). The writing and the poems bring Cassia and Ky closer together because they share a secret. Perhaps part of the reason Cassia falls in love with Ky is because it was her choice and the society did not pick him for her. When she finds out that Ky showing up on her microcard and telling Ky that he was matched with Cassia was a test she is upset because she believes that the society’s test is the only reason he noticed her. “Don’t say that it was me, because then I will know that you saw me because they told you to look” (*Matched* 3484). She is upset because she wants to make her own choices and she feels that she and Ky falling in love was another thing controlled by the society. She eventually
realizes that not everything in her and Ky's relationship was arranged and analyzed by the Society and they cannot control the love between her and Ky. When the society tries to control their relationship by taking Ky away, Cassia rebels against the society and gets sent to a work camp in order to find him at the expense of her relationship with Xander.

In the second book, *Crossed*, Cassia has been relocated from her home, assigned to work in the farmlands, and is trying to find Ky. Xander helps her find him even though he is upset that Cassia chooses Ky over him. Xander makes it clear that he loves Cassia, but Cassia still loves Ky and has to find him above all else. When Ky escapes from the fighting the society puts him in the middle of and ends up traveling toward the mysterious 'Pilot' that is leading a rebellion called the Rising against the society from afar, Cassia follows him. This book shows Cassia and Ky working together and being allowed to be together outside of the society. Cassia sees Ky as he really is when he does to have to hide his skills to blend in with other people in the society. Though Ky has more of a reason to rebel against the society, it is Cassia that wants to join the Rising, a movement taking place in the outer regions away from the cities that opposes the Society. Ky does not want to join the Rising, but he agrees to do it for Cassia, showing his love for her in his sacrifice. Later, Ky and Cassia are separated when going toward the Rising. Cassia and Ky are assigned to different cities in their work for the Rising and so they are separated once again.

In the conclusion to the *Matched* Trilogy, Cassia is separated from both Ky and Xander. All three are focused on their jobs for the Rising and are trying to be a part of overthrowing the Society, but Cassia is distracted by her separation from Ky. The three are all reunited when the Pilot needs them in order to cure the sickness that is killing much of the population of the Society. Cassia is loyal to Ky and she is worried when he contracts the
sickness. Though Xander does still love Cassia, he seems to accept the love between her and Ky. “I lift up his hand and put it on hers. I help him to reach her” (Reached 5126). Xander helps Cassia and Ky be together because both of them are his friends. Ky and Cassia have spent enough time together that they know each other and Cassia has no doubts about choosing Ky. Cassia regrets that she cannot be for Xander what Ky is for her. “I do love him back. I failed him because I cannot do for him what Ky does for me. I can’t help Xander sing” (Reached 5232).

The development of romantic relationships in the Matched Trilogy is a large focus early in the series, but as the relationship becomes more stable, societal issues take precedence. Cassia’s love of Ky drives the first and second novels of the series and it is the ultimate reason for many of the decisions she makes. It is not until later that the relationship is overshadowed by the other concerns addressed in the book. This shows that the relationships are important, but ultimately the characters must fight for what they believe is right even if that means going against the one they love. If Cassia had not chosen to join the Rising originally, she would be the girl that Ky and Xander fell in love with.

Cassia chooses Ky because she gets more from him than love. He helps her grow as a person and be an individual. Cassia is also very focused on her fight against the society in later novels and Ky is a symbol of her desire to fight back. Ky is the person that the society did not choose for her and who she was not supposed to be with. The romantic relationship with Xander could not have worked later in the novels because Cassia was aware of the problems in the society and she could not be with someone that the Society chose for her, even if they choose someone that she may have otherwise come to love, in a free world. Her choice echoes and reinforces the message of the trilogy of choosing one’s own path.
The Delirium series (Delirium, Pandemonium, Requiem). The Delirium series shows relationships between Lena and two boys: Alex and Julian. Lena first meets Alex because he is posing as a guard to the Wilds, the lands outside of the government’s control. She thinks he is safe because she thinks he has had the operation that removes a person’s ability to feel love, but he has not. It is only because she thinks Alex has been “cured” that Lena even spends any time with him. “Cureds are safe... Even though Alex is only a year older than I am, we’re separated, irreparably and totally, by the procedure” (Delirium 849). Lena develops feelings for Alex when she thinks that he cannot have feelings for her. When she finds out that he lied about having the operation that keeps people from falling in love, she is afraid and she runs from him. When he saves her from being discovered at an illegal concert, Lena truly realizes and gives into her feelings for Alex, perhaps because he is the only one that has cared about her for a while. The cure means that all love disappears, not just romantic love so Lena has not experienced anyone caring about her in a long time. When Alex admits to liking her, she does not believe him because she has been constantly discarded by other members of her family because they cannot love her. As a result, she does not feel that she is worthy of love. “I’m nobody special” (Delirium 2664), she tells him, revealing her insecurities. Lena is desperate for love and acceptance after her mother leaves and Alex provides that. After the kiss, Alex and Lena’s relationship is set and Lena does not her feelings anymore. They spend time together getting to know each other and eventually they fall in love. When they are discovered, Lena is heartbroken and wants to go to the Wilds not just to find her mother, but so she can be with Alex. “That’s all I want just you and me. Always” (Delirium 4412). Lena decides that she would rather die than be without Alex. When they try to escape, Alex sacrifices himself to the
guards so she can escape to the Wilds without him, Lena only leaves him because he asks her to and she cannot deny him when she knows that he will likely be killed.

The second book shows Lena’s recovery after the escape and finding out that Alex is probably dead. She eventually accepts that Alex is dead and though she mourns him, she takes up the fight against the government. It is during her assignment that she meets Julian. Lena does not want to like Julian, as the son of the President he is all that Lena stands against. When Lena starts to think about Julian romantically, she feels guilty for liking him when Alex is dead. “He is not Alex. You don’t want Julian. You want Alex. And Alex is dead” (Pandemonium 4026). Lena seems to accept the relationship with Julian because she wants the feeling of love again and she cares about Julian, but she never feels the same love for Julian that she felt for Alex. When Julian is taken by his family and scheduled for the operation, Lena rescues him not only because she cares about him, but because she does not want him to be sacrificed for the cause. She wants him to be safe more because she feels responsible for him and she would not want anyone to go through that than because she loves him. Because she has some feelings for Julian, Lena vies her relationship with him as a new start even if she does not feel as strongly for him as she did for Alex. When they are safe she thinks “my life is beginning again” (Pandemonium 5060). Because she has love again, her life is worth living. Lena seems to be saying that her life stopped after she lost Alex, but now that she has the opportunity to love freely again, she can really live again. This peace is shattered when she finds out that Alex is still alive.

It quickly becomes clear that Lena wants to be with Alex more than she wants to be with Julian. Alex is she admits “a boy I loved better” (Requiem 414). She stays away from Julian until she is rejected by Alex. She still wants to be with him and tries to rekindle their
relationship until he tells her that their love was not real. “I don’t love you, Lena… I never loved you” (Requiem 361). She goes to Julian and stays with him after because she was rejected by her first love. She does not let go of this relationship, however, and that is why she cannot go any farther with Julian. Though he says that he loves her, she will not say it back. After Alex leaves, Lena is free to be with Julian again until she realizes that he left because he loves her still. When Lena realizes this, she cannot be with Julian anymore. “I’ve accepted that I will never love Julian as much as I love Alex. But now that idea is overwhelming, like a wall between us. I will never love Julian like I love Alex.” Lena finally chooses to be with Alex and when she finds him they choose to be together.

The Delirium trilogy is an anomaly because the romantic relationships within the novel are acts of rebellion. Though the rebellion is about more than love that is what it is ultimately about: the freedom to love. I would argue that the main focus of Delirium is love. All of the important decisions that Lena makes in the novel are in pursuit of love. Even when she thinks that Alex is dead, she still completes tasks for him and because that is what he would want her to do. Later when she enters into a romantic relationship with Julian, she follows him in what he wants to do for the rebellion. She values his love more than she values the rebellion and would rather keep both Alex and Julian safe than fight against the oppression of the society. Her ultimate choice is in itself a rebellion against the society, but that is not Lena’s purpose. She does not seek love because it is against the society; instead she falls into an opposition with society when she falls in love.

Lena’s choice to find her cousin Grace rather than fight for the rebellion says much about her character and the message that Lauren Oliver is sending. In the beginning, Lena seems almost too reliant and desperate for love. She depends on Alex and Julian and is only
happy when she is in a relationship with them. This can be seen as very dependent and contrary to the message of individualism and free thought which is the focus of many dystopian novels. Lena’s one mission for herself is to find Grace and that is the only thing that makes her a strong character. At that one point, she is not depending on others and she does not the approval and strength of her love to accomplish her task. Oliver’s message seems to be that some things are more important than the oppression of the society. Lena places more importance on her love of Alex, Julian, and her love for her cousin, Grace than she does on the rebellion.

Discussion

These series have a lot in common in the development of romantic relationships. They all feature a love triangle that is often very convoluted with characters loving more than one person at a time. This shows the confusion and intense feelings of the teenage years. In all four of the series, the relationships are ultimately bad for the society, but some are tolerated for what the union presents. For instance, in the Hunger Games, Matched, and the Uglies trilogies there is one relationship that the society tolerates either because of the image that it presents or because that society does not regulate love or relationships. Ultimately, however, none of these relationships end up being good for the society that the couples are fighting against. In the Hunger Games trilogy, for example, the capital wants Katniss and Peeta to be together because it presents a certain image of the society to the general public, but the societies use of this relationship ends up working against them as the characters decide to seek retribution. By forcing Peeta and Katniss together, the Capital gave them another reason to fight against the Capital even if they wanted to be together.
Though some of the relationships are tolerated by the societies, most of the relationships in the novels are themselves a form of rebellion against the society. Neither relationship in *Delirium* is tolerated and ultimately Lena ends up choosing what to the society probably would have been considered the lesser of two evils. If Lena had chosen Julian, a public figure formerly in support of the operation, it would have been that much worse, but Lena also does not care as much about fighting against society. Katniss chooses the person that the Capital made her stay in a relationship with and the one that was less a part of the rebellion against the Capital. In doing this, Katniss rebels by actually falling on love with the person she was originally forced to be with when Snow would have rather she suffered more. Ky falls in love not with the boy that the Society matched her with, but instead with an Anomaly, which are essentially lower-class citizens. Finally, Tally loves two boys that support the rebellion against her society. Though Tally’s relationship with Zane was more allowable in Prettyville, both relationships gave tally the strength to rebel against her society.

The protagonists in these stories are rarely looking for love and some are against it entirely even when they find it. Katniss is one such character that does not want to be involved in romantic relationships, but she has to deal with the romantic feelings of two boys for her nonetheless. Lena certainly did not want to fall in love and go against the society, but she ended up falling for two boys and getting more involved in the rebellion than she perhaps wanted to. In *Matched*, Cassia is looking for love, but ends up ultimately falling in love with someone she is not supposed to. At first she too tries to avoid the relationship. Tally is not looking for love and she resists falling in love with David because she starts on the opposite side from him. She also resists her connection with Zane because she still feels a lingering love for David. All of the characters are first against falling in love and further complicating their
lives, but they all eventually find love and it changes them and challenges their views of how their society should be run.

The Relation of Romantic Relationships to Larger Societal Issues

The *Uglies Series* (*Uglies, Pretties, Specials*). The first person that really tells Tally that there is something wrong with the society they live in is her friend Shay, but Tally believes everything the society says. “I don’t want to be ugly all my life. I want those perfect eyes and lips, and for everyone to look at me and gasp” (*Uglies* 1113). This is all Tally has ever wanted and she agrees to betray her friend in order to get that. It is not until Tally meets David that she really realizes that everything she has always been told has been wrong. He is the one that introduces her to the problems with the society she lives in when he introduces Tally to his parents. Tally still believes that being beautiful is what is fair for everyone, but David makes her see past people’s appearances. “I would hate it if you got the operation... Even if they didn’t do your brain I mean.” David is the first person that she decides is better without the operation because of who he is. Tally choices to fight against the society not only because it is wrong, but also for David. It is not that the operation changes people’s appearance that bothers her, but the way that it changes people’s minds. So when she reenters the city to become a Pretty, Tally does not do it for herself, she does it for Shay and all the others that do not know that their minds are being messed with. “Don’t leave me like Shay” (*Uglies* 4794). Tally does not want to become like Shay, someone whose mind has been changed. She chooses to fight and to leave David because she feels that she is to blame for Shay becoming a Pretty and David’s father losing his life. “I’m the reason that Shay is pretty. It’s my fault your father is dead” (*Uglies* 4763) she tells David. At this point, she knows that the society is wrong, but I do not think she has quite taken up the cause against the Specials and the Pretty Society. David
has helped her to realize the problems of the society and to see things for how they really are, but she is not ready yet to make her own decision about what to do against them.

Later it is the Crims and Zane that help Tally fight against the society and retain her individuality. Tally might have been content to be an empty headed Pretty if Zane had not helped her to remember her past and told her something was wrong with them. “Help me figure out what’s wrong with us” (Uglies 840). He asks her to help him and she later repays him by giving him a pill to remove the lesions that change the Pretties’ brains. Zane is the reason that they take the pills in the first place, even though they find out later that the pill Tally takes has no effect on the lesions. Zane has the benefit of being able to think without the lesions, but Tally manages to think clearly despite the lesions in her brain because Zane helps her to see the way she is acting and thinking. They escape because they want to think for themselves and because Zane needs to see the doctor at the New Smoke, but at this point they are not really fighting the society. Tally realizes what they are doing is wrong though. When asked why she is unhappy being in Prettyville, Tally replies, “the city makes you the way they want you to be...And I want to be myself” (Uglies 2827).

When Tally is changed into a Special, the operation again changes the way she thinks and she completely sides with the Specials. Her romantic relationships in this book do not really relate to the society and the ways that Tally later chooses to fight against the society until the very end of the book. Tally is able to fight the affects that the operations have had on her brain and finally finds a cause that she absolutely believes in. Tally discovers that another city is expanding into the wilds and killing the environment. “Whatever else was happening in Random Town, that had to be stopped. Cities couldn’t just start grabbing up land whenever they wanted” (Specials 2849). When the operations stop changing people’s brains, Tally finds
that humans are naturally selfish and finds that she has to protect the environment from all the people that can now think for themselves. The series ends with Tally and David’s promise to “be out here somewhere- watching. Ready to remind you of the price the Rusties paid for going too far” (Specials 3675).

In the Uglies series, the romantic relationships play a large part in the fight against the other societal problems because the relationships are what allow Tally to consider the societal problems. Both Zane and David are involved and want to help with a revolution against the Pretties and their involvement is related to why Tally falls in love with them in the first place. At the Smoke, Tally falls in love with David partially because he reveals the truth to her and helps her see beyond what she originally thought. In part, Tally loves him because he is different. Zane is also different. He figures out how the operations change the Uglies and make them stupider when they become pretty and he finds ways to fight against that. Westerfeld could be interpreted as saying that love changes you and make you see things differently, but one cannot rely on that love and love is not the most important thing.

The Hunger Games Series (The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, Mockingjay).

Though Katniss knows there are problems in the society she lives in she is ultimately powerless in the first novel. Gale certainly wants to rebel against the society, but Katniss does not bother thinking about it because she does not believe that she could make a difference. “It’s not that I don’t agree with him. I do. But what good is yelling about the Capital in the middle of the woods? It doesn’t change anything” (The Hunger Games 173). Katniss displays rebellious tendencies, but only when she gets emotional and often when she is not thinking about the consequences. Some examples of this are when Rue dies and she covers her with flowers and when she and Peeta choose to eat the berries and die instead of giving the Capital
their winner. When she goes along with what the Capital and President Snow want, it is because she wants to protect the ones she loves. Her choice to play up the romance with Peeta even though she is not sure what she feels is an example of this. "I'll convince everyone in the capital that I wasn't defying the capital, that I was crazy with love" (Catching Fire 345) she tells President Snow. Even when she finds out that she will have to be with Peeta forever, she does not change her mind. "I will never have a life with Gale, even if I want to. I will never be allowed to live alone. I will have to be forever in love with Peeta" (Catching Fire 545). Katniss still chooses not to fight the Capital because their hold over her loved ones keeps her from acting against the Capital. It is only when they are out of danger that she decides to fight against them.

Mockingjay shows Katniss taking more control of her own life outside of Capital control. Katniss is saved because she is the symbol of the revolution and District 13 wants her to take her place as a spokesperson against the Capital. Katniss is reluctant to take this role because at first she is worried that she will not be able to help people. "To become the Mockingjay... could any good I do possibly outweigh the damage?" (Mockingjay 186). Katniss finally becomes the Mockingjay because she needs to combat the damage Peeta is doing supporting the Capital in order to protect her. "I want to. I have to, if it will help the rebels defeat Snow" (Mockingjay 465). Later, Katniss has another crisis of conscious because protecting Peeta is more important to her than supporting the revolution. "It's impossible to be the Mockingjay. Impossible to complete even this one sentence. Because now I know that everything I say will be directly taken out on Peeta. Result in his torture" (Mockingjay 2099). Gale supports and helps with Katniss' attempts to take down the Capital the whole time, but he does not push her to be involved. When Katniss is sent out to fight she is ultimately
unpredictable and does not necessarily do what District 13 and the rebellion plans for her. Katniss is out for her own agenda and Gale and Peeta support her. Her one mission is to kill President Snow for revenge and because she believes it will end the fighting and ultimately she is willing to put both Peeta and Gale in harm’s way to attain that goal. Katniss primarily tries to protect her friends and family, but ultimately she has her own goals and thinks for herself. Gale and Peeta and her relationships with them do not seem to change her decisions at all, but they do support the decisions that she makes.

The relationships present a problem in the *Hunger Games* series because the capital uses Peeta and Gale against her. She cannot rebel after her first trip to the Games because President Snow threatens Gale’s life and then she cannot be the Mockingjay because Peeta is threatened. Besides this, the relationships ultimately have no bearing on the societal problems. Katniss never rebels based on love of either Gale or Peeta. Instead she seems the rebel based on other people she loves like her sister Prim and Rue who reminds her so much of Prim. When Gale and Peeta are in danger, it diminishes Katniss’ agency in a situation. She is unable to act because she fears for their lives and they ultimately reduce her capacity to fight against the capital. When both Gale and Peeta are gone and in danger, Katniss cannot function in *Mockingjay*. She does not do anything proactive; she simply has to wait until they return. It is only when Katniss thinks there is nothing she can do to either save them or hurt them more that she is able to act against the capital. When she cannot reach Peeta in the Quarter Quell, she shoots the arrow and defies the capital. Similarly, when Gale is taken into the house when they are trying to find President Snow in the Capital, Katniss cannot do anything to save him so she continues on with her mission. She places the importance of Snow’s death over Gale’s life. The relationships in the *Hunger Games* trilogy ultimately make it more difficult for Katniss to act.
The *Matched Series* (*Matched, Crossed, Reached*). Even after Cassia discovers that the society can make mistakes, she still believes in the power of the society and that it is the best option before she falls in love with Ky. "There’s no reason to rebel. Look what the Society gives us. Good lives. A chance at immortality. The only way it can be ruined is if we ruin it ourselves" (*Matched* 1612). When she first meets Ky and learns that he is an aberration, Cassia does not question the society, but when she sees the way he is treated and when they cannot be together she changes her opinion. Ky makes it clear that he does not agree with what the society does when he shows Cassia his drawings. "His hands are no longer open. They are clenched. Behind him, people in Official uniforms watch him. His lips curve in a smile that never touches his eyes" (*Matched* 2579). Ky is ultimately the main reason that Cassia wants to fight against the society. "This is Ky. If he is the one person who falls by the wayside while the other ninety-nine are happy and fulfilled, that is not right with me anymore" (*Matched* 2785). The feelings of the majority are no longer enough to assure Cassia that the Society is a good thing, now that she knows someone that is not happy within the society she wants to change it. Cassia decides in the beginning not to do anything because it could hurt someone she cares for. "It isn’t only myself and Ky and Xander I’ll hurt if I commit an Infraction. It’s all these other people I love" (*Matched* 2928). When the society separates Ky and Cassia and essentially sends Ky to his death, Cassia decides to fight against them. When he is gone, Cassia cannot hurt him by fighting against the society. When they send him to fight in the outer regions of the society, she knows he is not safe and she cannot live with the knowledge that she did not fight to be with him and to help him. "I know he won’t stop fighting. Even if it’s the kind of quiet fight on the inside that you can’t always see. And I won’t stop fighting either" (*Matched* 3670).
Cassia fights the society by leaving to go find Ky and bring him back. Along the way she learns about the Rising and wants to join because of the future it would provide for her and Ky. “There’s a rebellion. Something real and organized and longstanding, with a leader” 
(Crossed 691). Ky is against the Rising because they abandoned his father when his father would not join them and because Ky sees the Rising as just another oppressive body that will tell its citizens what to do. “The Rising isn’t what you imagine... It’s not Aberrations and Anomalies and rebels and rogues running free. It’s a structure. A system” (Crossed 3203).

Cassia still has hope that the Rising is the answer to all their problems. She wants to be a part of the change even if it means leaving Ky behind. “I’m sorry... This is the one thing I can’t do for you. I can’t join the Rising” (Crossed 3403) Ky tells Cassia. Ky eventually changes his mind because it is what Cassia wants and they both join the Rising. She is separated from Ky when she gets her position in the Rising, but she does it because she believes that it will bring them together in the end.

In Reached, the Rising makes itself known to the citizens within the society and begins to take over. At first, Cassia is satisfied with the work she is doing for the Rising and truly believes that it will help everyone, but as she learns more about the sickness she loses faith in the Rising and the Pilot’s ability to cure it. The sickness is “too much for one Pilot to handle” (Reached 2905). Later Cassia finds out that it was the Rising that accidently created the mutation of the sickness that is killing so many. Cassia realizes that “someone added the virus to water sources to hurry up the process” (Reached 3304). “The water supplies were contaminated by well-intentioned supporters of the Rising who felt that the rebellion wasn’t happening quickly enough and decided to move it along” (Reached 5198). Like the society, the Rising makes mistakes too. Cassia is still loyal to the Rising, but only because she feels that it
is the best chance to cure everyone and she, Xander, and Ky cannot leave their families and friends. When Ky becomes sick, it only strengthens Xander and Cassia’s resolve to find the cure. None of them really believe in the Rising anymore. “The Rising and the Society have infiltrated each other so thoroughly that they don’t even know who’s who anymore” (Reached 4146). Though the Rising claims that they will change things, they are the same as the society and Xander, Cassia, and Ky are forced to fight for what they want as individual. Cassia wants Ky to get better and for them to be together so that is what she works toward. Eventually everyone in the society is allowed to fairly vote for their leader and ultimately Cassia and Ky accomplish at least part of what they want to accomplish.

Cassia’s relationship with Ky is what ultimately convinces her to go against the Society, but it is not the reason that she joins the Rising. Ky’s situation is one of the main things that shows cassia how much is wrong with the society and she decides that she cannot condone a society that treats someone as good as Ky so badly. She goes against the Society and runs away to find Ky and decides that she wants to fight with the Rising partially because if the Rising wins she will be allowed to with Ky and also because her eyes have been opened to all the other problems in the society and she wants to help with that. When Cassia chooses to join the Rising knowing that Ky is against it, it shows the reader that the rebellion and the search for the ability to choose your own fate no matter the consequences is more important than love. The Rising was supposed to be about more than one’s ability to choose who they want to love and be with. Cassia views it as so much more than that and that is why she chooses it over the chance to be together with Ky.

The Delirium Series (Delirium, Pandemonium, Requiem). In the first book of the Delirium series, Lena believes the propaganda that the society teaches all of its citizens about
Love being a disease and she is not ready to fight against them outwardly. It takes Lena a while to view the society at all negatively. “I think I hear something hard running under his words, a current of anger or aggression. But then I tell myself I’m just being paranoid. No matter what the regulators do, they exist for our protection, for our own good” (Delirium 994). Even though Lena feels that she could be in some danger from this regulator, she ignores her instincts because she refuses to think that the society could be wrong. Alex challenges Lena’s view of the society. Being with Alex makes her realize that there things that the society lies to the about which makes her question everything. “They told us that love was a disease. They told us it would kill us in the end. For the very first time I realize that this, too, might be a lie” (Delirium 3275). Finally, though Lena is not completely comfortable disagreeing with the mandates and ideas of the society she grew up in, she tries to escape with Alex to be with him. “I’d rather die on my own terms than live on theirs. I’d rather die loving Alex than live without him” (Delirium 4914).

When Alex surrenders to the guards so Lena can get away, Lena does not seem to care about anything anymore. She thinks Alex is dead and she has enough respect for his sacrifice and enough hatred for the society that she thinks killed him to stay in the Wilds. She decides not to get the surgery even though it would numb her pain. In Pandemonium, Lena joins the Invalid’s society and joins the rebellion working within the society because they ask her to. “All of us—the Invalids, the resistance” (Pandemonium 1211); Lena’s use of the word ‘us’ shows that she has firmly become a part of the resistance. Her assignment is to follow the son of the leader of the government, Julian, who plays a vital role in the youth movement for the cure. Julian and Lena are forced to rely on one another when they are both captured. Later, she only returns to the society to break Julian out because she cares about him and she cannot leave
him there. It is obviously not for the resistance because the resistance is willing to sacrifice
Julian for the rebellion. Lena’s actual acts against the society seem to be focused around single
people that she cares about rather than to defeat the society.

In *Requiem*, with the return of Alex, Lena is forced to choose between the two guys she
loves. When she is rejected by Alex and decides to stay with Julian, Lena ends up following
Julian’s choices. Though she has her own ideas about what they should do, mainly staying
away from the cities and from government intervention, she follows Julian when he decides to
fight. Lena decides to go with Julian even though she does not feel particularly strongly about
the mission and fighting outright with the government. She chooses to go with Julian in order
to protect and support him because he is who she has chosen to be with. When Lena finally has
to choose her place in the rebellion, however, Lena cannot stay with Julian, she has to make
her own choice and take care of her responsibilities. She can no longer follow Julian. “The
resistance may have a mission in Portland, but I have a mission of my own” (*Requiem* 4024).

Lena has to find her cousin Grace and that is more important to her than the fighting for her
freedom. The book ends, however, with the idea that people should have their freedom and not
separated and that perhaps says more for the importance and the message of the book. “I will
make a pact with you: I will do it if you will do it, always and forever. Take down the walls”
(*Requiem* 4523). By ending with this line, Lauren Oliver puts the emphasis not on the love
story or even Lena’s journey, but the overarching theme and quest for freedom and equality.

In some ways the relationships in the *Delirium* series have everything to do with the
other societal problems addressed within the book. The inability to have relationships and love
is the main societal problem addressed within the novel and it is also one of Lena’s largest
personal problems. Lena, however, does not seek to go against the society. Even when she
joints the resistance after she thinks Alex is dead, it is only because those are the people she is
with and that is what they believe in. Lena in some ways is incredibly self-involved. The only
time she seems to want to help the rebellion is when she has nothing to live for. She claims that
the love of first Alex and then Julian really gave her life, but the only time she takes a
proactive stance against the society is when she is without that love, otherwise she places that
love above everything else. If it is what Alex or Julian is going to do, she follows them and
supports them, but she personally would rather that Alex and Julian were safe and away from
the action.

Discussion

The relationships in all four series discussed above show similar dynamics when one
considers how involved the characters are in the rebellion. Usually one of the male characters
in the story is more of a revolutionary and the other male character takes longer to reach that
point of view, this creates a divide between the two boys that the female protagonist is
choosing between. In the Hunger Games series, Gale is very obviously against the Capital, but
Peeta is not nearly so eager to be involved in a rebellion even if he thinks that the Capital is
wrong. Gale comes from harder circumstances than Peeta and knows more hardship and
understandably wants to fight more against these hardships. In Delirium, Alex is an Invalid and
a part of the revolution, but Julian is very against it until he falls in love with Lena. Again we
see that the character that is more against the society comes from a harsher existence. In
Matched both Xander and Ky are against the Society, but Xander works for the Rising and Ky
does not. Ky is reluctant to join any organization even if they profess to be against the society.
Ky seems to want to fight the society more than Xander though because he has more to gain if
things change. Lastly, in the Uglies both of the boys want to rebel against the Pretties and the
operation, but David is more at the forefront of the rebellion. Unlike the other books, however, it is Zane that stands to gain more if the society is taken down because he wants what David has.

In each case, the female protagonist is influenced by both boys in her life. If she chooses the rebellion it is because one of them had more of an influence on her. I think all of the characters start out somewhat unsure and have to be introduced or reminded of the societal problems. Because each of them gets involved in a rebellion of some form, it makes sense that one of them would have influenced them in that direction. This shows that the characters in these stories are often highly influenced by one of the male characters and do not make those decisions on their own at first. As the books progress, each character becomes more confident and has more agency in their own lives and as part of a rebellion. They then influence the other male character to become involved. Though they needed help in the beginning, they make their own decisions and become influential and independent women by the end of the novel. The male character that introduced them to the problems within the society has influenced them and helped them to become more independent.

Bullen and Parsons and Gander both focus on the importance of independence in young adult dystopian novels. It is obvious that at least in these series, the romantic relationships do not negatively impact the female character’s independence and agency. Bethune considers the empowerment in dystopian novels of both male and female characters. All the main characters seem to have a good deal of agency and control in their own lives, though Koelling argues that many young adult romance novels are also heading in that direction, there seems to be more emphasis on female empowerment in the dystopian novels. None of the other male main characters oppose the rebellion, but choose instead to support the female protagonist and have
their own stake in the rebellion. Both relationships in each series help the female character maintain her independence and take a stand against oppression.

All the relationships have a profound impact on the way the female protagonist handles situations and makes decisions. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' love for Peeta and Gale is turned against her and she makes decisions based on the threats against their lives. In *Matched*, Cassia makes many of her decisions because of Ky, but it is love that motivates her and not fear that he will be hurt. In *Delirium*, almost all of Lena's decisions are because of one of her romantic relationships, she is more concerned with both boys safety so she would rather they did not fight so they would not get hurt. In *Uglies*, Tally makes her decisions largely based on guilt or duty at first and both are tied up in her romantic relationships. When she elects to be changed into a Pretty, she does it based on guilt and later when she is turned into a Special it is because she felt a sense of duty and love that made her stay with Zane. It is not until the last books of the series that many of these characters make clear decisions that are not connected to the larger problems within the society.

These books all show the character growing and fighting not for what someone else wants, but for what they have decided that they want. In many ways the characters allow themselves to be controlled in the earlier books, but as the stories progress, the characters become strong individuals. They are not controlled by anyone and they do what they think is right. This analysis again supports the claims made about young adult dystopian novels. Daly and Johnson claim that young adult romance novels are not necessarily as focused on the agency and independence of the female protagonists. The young women in young adult romance are often heavily affected by their relationship and not as independent or empowered, but are instead reliant on a boy's love or affection. Therefore, it seems that though the series do
contain many romantic elements, the relationships in the stories do not particularly affect the
dystopian roots of the novel.

None of these series features a completely happy ending. They primarily end with
warnings or with questions still unanswered. This is a common theme in dystopian fiction with
the genre often being accused of being too pessimistic or depressing. *Matched*, for instance,
probably features the happiest ending with the society out of power and the two protagonists
together, but Cassia’s best friend decides to leave. The *Hunger Games*, of course, shows
Katniss and Peeta still scarred by the past even multiple years later. Katniss no longer lives
near her family or friends. The book leaves you with the image of their children playing on a
groundyard. The *Uglies* series shows the death of Zane and Tally still as a Special. Though she
is still friends with David, it does not definitively say if they are going to be together. Tally
leaves the other characters and the readers with a warning that the cities could overstep their
bounds again and essentially destroy themselves and the rest of the world like previous
civilizations. Lastly, the *Delirium* trilogy ends with people tearing down the wall that
separates the society from the Wilds and Lena is with Alex, but things are not resolved with
Julian. Though these series offer a small bit of hope at the end, they often leave the reader
yearning for a more definitive ending. Young adult literature is usually characterized by the
presence of either a happy ending or some sort of hope. These books do not have particularly
happy endings, but that does make them more realistic especially when dealing with such
serious themes. Reeve would argue that there needs to be more humor in the stories, but the
only really upbeat parts come from the romance and the hopeful resolution of that. The lack of
a happy ending puts the emphasis more on the societal problems which is a natural and
necessary conclusion to the books.
As I have previously discussed, romance plays a significant part in all of these novels, but where some of the series seem to be primarily romance others are definitely dystopian novels with some extra romance. In general, the first novels contained more romance than their respective sequels likely because the romance was being developed a lot more in the first books. *Delirium* is the only series that could have perhaps been classified as romance because the dystopian theme was so engrained within romance. The other three series were primarily dystopian with only a subgenre of romance. Though the romance played a large role in all of the novels, it did not overwhelm the dystopian themes.

Characters in young adult dystopian novels seem to have more agency than in other genres. With the exception of perhaps Lena, the other main characters in the novel have a good deal of agency in their own lives. Though they are sometimes confined by their society, they eventually take steps against the oppressive society. Julia Stamper claimed that in the books marketed to boys and girls the characters had more agency than the books marketed only to girls. This is an interesting observation and is supported by my evaluation of series I read. The two series that would be marketed more primarily to girls were *Matched* and *Delirium* though *Delirium* would have been much more "girly" than *Matched*. The main character in *Matched* had a good amount of agency, but not until after she escapes the oppressive society. Lena in *Delirium* would be the number one book I look at that would be marketed more to girls and Lena has the least agency of all the main characters I talked about.

**Conclusions**

As far as I have researched, the academic world lacks peer critiqued analysis of this trend of romance in dystopian fiction. I hope that my analysis of just a small portion of the young adult dystopian novels out there helps to fill this hole. My study looked at the
relationship between romance and dystopian themes in the novels. I found that the dystopian themes are generally viewed with much more importance toward the end than the romantic elements. These novels all have a large emphasis on romance, the dystopian themes are still shown to be more important and the characteristics of the female protagonists in the series I analyzed are more consistent with the portrayals of females in young adult dystopian novels than in young adult romance because they are independent and for the most part they are not reliant or solely concerned with their romantic relationship.

I hope that my study will contribute to the analysis of romance in genres within young adult literature and that it will be useful in analyzing the independence and agency of characters in both young adult dystopian novels and young adult romance novels. I am also hopeful that young adult literature will continue to gain ground as an accredited subject to study especially with the growth in young adult literature and cross-over novels. I expect and hope there will be more articles with more emphasis on the young adult literature in general rather than the teaching of young adult literature, though that too is of course important. Young adult dystopias have also rarely been critically studied in the context of what young adults are reading outside of the classroom so I would like to see more research on that. I am sure all of the fields will grow in the future as young adult literature continues to grow and with it some of the popular genres of the last few years. I expect that many genres will also see an increase in female characters with agency and power in their own lives and dystopian novels are just one genre that I hope will grow to include more of those novels.
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Appendix

The Uglies Trilogy by Scott Westerfeld

The Uglies trilogy is set 300 years in the future where kids sixteen and younger are called “Uglies.” On their sixteenth birthday, each teen undergoes an operation to change them into a “pretty.” Tally is the last of her friends to turn sixteen and in the few weeks leading up to the operation she befriends another ugly named Shay who is not as certain about the procedure. Shay decides to run away to join the Smokies, a revolutionary group that is against the operation and the creation of Pretties and lives out in the wild. Tally decides not to go with Shay, but changes her mind when one of the leaders of the Pretty Society, Dr. Cable, called a “Special,” blackmails her into following Shay and betraying the Smokies so she can become a “Pretty.”

Soon after joining the Smokies, Tally meets an Ugly named David who is the son of the leaders of the Smokies. Tally begins to regret her decision to betray the Smokies when she begins to fall for David and enjoy living in the wild. He tells Tally that his parents left the Pretty society because they found out that the operation that turned Uglies pretty also changed their brain, making them less able to think for themselves by adding lesions. After learning this, Tally decides to destroy the tracker that the Specials gave her so they could find the Smokies. The tracker sends out a signal when it is destroyed, however, and the Specials come to capture the Smokies.

Tally and David manage to get away, but many of the Smokies are captured. Tally and David rescue the Smokies and bring them back into the wild, but Shay has already been made a Pretty. The Smokies had previously developed pills that would cure the lesions in Pretties’ brains, but they haven’t been tested and they are unwilling to test them without the patient’s
consent. When Shay won’t give her consent, Tally gives the Smokies permission to give her
the cure and turns herself in to Dr. Cable to be made pretty so they can test it.

After the surgery, Tally’s brain has been altered so she has trouble concentrating on
anything or remembering her time in the Wilds. Rumors of her exploits have gotten to
Prettytown, making her an automatic member of the Crims, a group of Pretties that break the
rules and do crazy stunts so that the adrenaline will make them think more clearly. Tally meets
the leader of the Crims, Zane, who helps her remember her time with the Smokies. He goes
with her when she receives a secret message from the Smokies that tells her where they left the
cure. When Tally is too afraid to take the cure by herself, Tally and Zane split it. What they do
not know is that one of the pills destroys the lesions that make it difficult for Pretties to think
and the other stops the destruction process. Zane is cured, but the medicine continues to
destroy his brain without the other pill. The pill Tally takes ends up having no effect, but with
Zane’s help she is able to fight the effects of the lesions on her own. At the same time, Tally’s
friend Shay has formed a group known as the “Cutters” that are able to fight the lesions by
cutting themselves. Eventually Zane and Shay find a way to escape to the Wilds together, but
Zane has a tracker in one of his teeth so when the Smokies flee to avoid capture, Zane cannot
go with them. Tally decides to stay with Zane and not go with David because she has fallen on
love with Zane and it is her fault that Zane’s brain has been messed up. They are captured by
the Specials and Tally finds out that all the Cutters have been changed into Specials. As
Specials they are much faster and more deadly. Since Tally has managed to fight the lesions on
her own like the Cutters, she is made into a Special against her will.

As a Special, Tally reports to Shay and her mission is to find the Smokies and capture
them. Tally and Shay help Zane and some other Crims break out of Prettyville so they can
follow him to find the Smokies. In the process, Tally and Shay end up destroying part of the Special headquarters. They have to split up to avoid detection and while Shay goes to help the Specials, Tally follows Zane and the Crims. They are being taken to another city which Tally calls Random Town. Random Town is at war with Prettyville because the Specials in Prettyville think that it was the other city that destroyed their headquarters. In this city, most of the Pretties have already been cured of the lesions and Specials do not exist. Tally finds Shay and the other Cutters who have been cured. Tally has been able to reprogram her brain again so she can think for herself. She decides to turn herself in to save the other city and her friends. She is unable to do this, but the Pretties in Prettyville end the war by overthrowing the Specials. The Pretties in the other town try to change Tally back into her former self as an Ugly, but she does not allow it because she has to remain Special to be able to protect everyone. She escapes to live in the Wilds and gets David to help her. They tell both towns that they will be watching to make sure that the towns do not make the same mistakes and destroy nature like people in the past.

The Hunger Games Trilogy by Suzanne Collins

The main character Katniss lives with her mother and her younger sister, Prim in District Twelve of the country known as Panem. The Capital, headed by President Snow, controls the twelve, formerly thirteen districts. Each district controls the production of a particular resource or good like coal, as in District Twelve or agriculture in District Eleven. When Panem was first created, it was decided that each of the districts would offer in tribute a boy and a girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to fight to the death in the Hunger Games arena. Only one
tribute can survive. Each tribute is drawn from a pool of all eligible boys and girls within each of the districts.

At the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss provides for her family by illegally hunting outside of the borders of District Twelve with her friend Gale because her father has been killed in a mining accident. When Katniss’ younger sister Prim is chosen as the girl tribute, Katniss immediately volunteers to take her place in the games. The second tribute that is chosen is Peeta, a boy that saved Katniss’ life when she was younger by throwing her bread when she and her family were starving. Katniss and Peeta never talked until they were both chosen for the games. Their mentor Haymitch, a former tribute of District twelve that won his games, helps to train them. When Peeta admits on television that he loves Katniss, Katniss thinks it is just a strategy for him. She does not find out until later that he was telling the truth.

During the Games, Peeta and Katniss were split up, but they continue to play the couple angle to get sponsors that will send them things to help in the arena. Both stay apart, Katniss befriends a girl named Rue who reminds her of her sister and Peeta works with the career tributes, the boys and girls from districts one and two that train to fight in the games each year. When the game makers announce that two tributes from the same district can both win, Katniss finds Peeta, who was injured when one of the career tributes turns on him. Katniss still thinks Peeta’s love for her was just a stunt, but she pretends to be in love with him too because it will help her survive. At the end of the games, Peeta and Katniss have both killed people and they threaten to eat poison berries and deprive the capital of a winner when the game makers decree that there can only be one victor. Because they need a victor, the game makers save both Katniss and Peeta, but they have defied the Capital. They return to District Twelve as champions of the 74\textsuperscript{th} Hunger Games.
The second book, *Catching Fire*, begins six months after the end of the last games and Katniss and Peeta have been ignoring each other because Peeta finds out that she was faking her love for him during the games. Gale has also confessed that he has feelings for Katniss and kisses her on one of their hunting trips. Katniss is not sure how she feels and her feelings are complicated when President Snow threatens Gale’s life. If Katniss and Peeta cannot convince everyone that they defied the capital because of their love for one another rather than a dislike of the Capital’s rule, someone Katniss loves will be killed. She learns that the Capital’s power has been threatened by her and Peeta’s show of defiance in the arena. People are no longer afraid to defy the capital and revolts have happened in other districts in the name of the Mockingjay, the pin that Katniss wore in the games. Peeta and Katniss do their best to convince everyone that they were crazy with love. They even plan to get married, but there is still a lot of unrest and it is time for the 75th hunger games. Because it is a quarter quell, a special hunger games is announced. The tributes in the 75th Hunger Games are chosen from previous game victors. Because she is the only female victor from District Twelve Katniss must enter the arena. Haymitch, Peeta, and Katniss all train for the games while all the districts get worse. Gale is whipped for being caught hunting by the new peacemakers. When Katniss and Haymitch are chosen for the games, Peeta immediately volunteers to take Haymitch’s place to protect Katniss in the arena. He also tells everyone on television that Katniss is pregnant to win her some sponsors in the games and protect her from the other contestants. When they go into the arena, Peeta and Katniss team up with Finnick and Mags from District Four. Later Johanna Mason, Wiress, and Beetee are also their allies. Katniss finds out later that they are all part of a revolution to overturn the Capital and they need her alive as symbol of the revolution. Katniss eventually blows up the force field around the Games, in an act of rebellion
when she thinks that she and Peeta are going to die. She is rescued by people from District Thirteen, a district that they did not know still existed led by President Coin. Katniss, Finnick and Beetee are rescued, but Peeta, Johanna and the other tributes that are still alive are captured by the Capital. Katniss learns from Gale that District Twelve has been bombed by the Capital and few are alive, but her sister and mother made it to District Thirteen.

In the final book of the series, Katniss helps District Thirteen fight the Capital. She realizes that the Capital is torturing Peeta to find out information and hurt her and she is upset about it. She films promos for District Thirteen that air in the capital and the remaining districts to give people hope. They eventually rescue Peeta, but he has been brainwashed into thinking that Katniss is the enemy. He tries to kill her and spends the rest of the novel acting a little bit crazy. Katniss and Gale are allowed to join a team to actively fight against the Capital, but Katniss fears that President Coin wants her dead because Peeta still does not like her and might try to kill her. When the leader of their company dies, Katniss assumes command and leads them into the heart of the city to kill President Snow. Along the way, everyone in the company is either killed or taken. The capital has just been taken over when Katniss gets to Snow’s house. Bundles of goods are dropped for children outside the house, but when the children run to them the packages explode. Katniss’ sister is one of the healers sent in to help and Katniss watches as a second round of explosions kills her. Katniss is severely burned and mentally unstable after the death of her sister. She blames Gale for Prim’s death because he helped develop similar bombs. When she is supposed to execute Snow, she kills Coin instead and then Snow dies from choking as he laughs at the scene. She returns to the remains of District Twelve and later Peeta joins her. They get married and have two children.
The Matched Trilogy by Ally Condie

The Matched trilogy is set in a world where “The Society” controls everything its citizens do from who they marry to what they eat each day using scientific formulas and calculations based on personal characteristics and habits of the citizens. Each option, choice, and even the anomalies are accounted for in the perfectly controlled society. The story starts when Cassia attends the match banquet on her seventeenth birthday where the society decides who each person is meant to marry. Cassia is matched with her best friend, Xander. When she gets a microcard that is supposed to show all of his information, however, she sees another picture. A picture of Ky Markam appears on the screen. She soon finds out that Ky has been classified as an anomaly (a second class citizen in the society) because his father played a part in a revolutionary movement against the society. This confuses Cassia because she has never seen the society make a mistake before, but because she saw him on her card she starts noticing him more. When Ky is also in her hiking activity class, Ky and Cassia get to know each other. When Cassia receives an illegal poem that hints at rebellion after her grandfather’s death, Ky helps her keep it a secret and teaches her how to write, another illegal activity. During this time, Cassia still believes in the good of the society. Even though she is falling in love with Ky, she still plans on being with Xander who has made it clear that he loves her.

Eventually the society finds out that Cassia and Ky were meeting and that they had romantic feelings for one another. An official tells Cassia that it is normal and they planned it as a test, but Cassia knows she is lying. She is upset when she finds out that Ky was also told that they were incorrectly placed together. She does not like the idea that the society arranged it as it has arranged everything else in her life, but soon decides that she would have fallen in love with him anyway. At this point, Cassia begins to doubt the society more. She cannot
support the society at all when Ky is forcibly sent to the Outer Reaches, an area at the edge of the cities within the Society that are fighting a rebel group known as The Rising. Because Cassia objects to Ky being sent away and her mother knows too much from her job, Cassia’s family is sent out of their city to work in the farmlands. It is closer to where Ky is, but Cassia does not know exactly where he is.

In the second book, *Crossed*, Cassia asks Xander to help her find and get to Ky. He helps because Ky is his friend too even though they are both in love with Cassia. Cassia escapes to find Ky, but when she gets there she realizes that he has already escaped toward the Carving, the place outside the Outer Reaches where the rebel movement known as the Rising is rumored to be stationed. She follows him to find him and also to learn about the Pilot, the leader of the Rising. They find each other in the Carving and they and a few others they brought with them continue toward the Rising, even though Ky does not want to join them. He is weary of movements like The Rising because they did not help his father before he died and because it seems too much like the Society. When they finally get close to the Rising, they have to split up to get there. Cassia arrives first and is put on a mission inside the society where she learns that Xander is also part of the Rising. Ky decides to join the Rising only because he loves Cassia and he is assigned to fly one of the aircrafts that will bring supplies to the Society when the Rising takes over. Cassia and Ky are separated.

The Rising takes over the Society in the third book when they find that the Society is weak because of a mass epidemic. They try to cure it with Xander acting as one of the doctors and they succeed until a mutated strain emerges. Because of Cassia, Xander, and Ky’s involvement and communication with one another, the Pilot thinks that they can help cure the disease. They are taken to a small village that is allied with the Rising where a doctor is already
working on the cure and find that Ky has caught the disease. Cassia and Xander help find the
cure and right before Ky dies, they find the cure and are able to help him. When Cassia
chooses Ky, Xander decides that he is going to leave and start a new life. At the same time,
everyone in what used to be the society is allowed to vote on their new leader and Ky and
Cassia are able to be together.

**The Delirium Trilogy by Lauren Oliver**

In the society of *Delirium*, love has been determined to be a disease because people in love act
irrationally. At seventeen, boys and girls are cured. Lena lives with her Aunt and Uncle
because her mother fell in love with her father and Lena thinks that she committed suicide after
her father’s death. Lena believes in the cure until she meets Alex, who is from the Wilds
outside of the society, but he is posing as a cured guard. The people in the Wilds oppose the
cure and fight against it. Because she thinks he is cured, Lena spends time with him.

Eventually they fall in love and Lena learns the truth. She runs at first, but when she
runs into him again she cannot deny her feelings and she sneaks around to be with him. It is
from Alex that Lena learns that her mother is alive. She plans to run away with him to the
Wilds because she loves him and wants to find her mother. They are found out because Lena’s
friend, Hana tells the officials of the society. Lena is put on house arrest, but she manages to
escape with Alex’s help. They run for the border and when the guards catch up to them, Alex
allows himself to be captured to save Lena. She keeps running to the Wilds because he asked
her to, but she thinks that Alex is dead.

Lena spends the first part of the second book weak and depressed. She keeps surviving
to make Alex’s sacrifice worthwhile. Eventually she joins the rebellion inside the society and is
tasked with following the leader of the society’s son, Julian, at a rally. When the rally is
attacked, Lena follows him and they are both captured by revolutionaries. Alex thinks Lena is cured until she confesses that she is not. They fall in love when they escape from the people who captured them, but Lena does not love him as she loved Alex. Julian is returned to his father, but he refuses to get the operation that will cure him of his love of Lena. They plan to do the surgery without his consent, but Lena rescues him with the help of a woman that she later finds out is her mother. When they get to the Wild and are safe, they can finally be together, but Alex has returned and he feels betrayed by Lena.

Lena tries to talk to Alex, but when he rejects her she returns to Julian. Both boys are trying to take down the rebellion, but Lena just wants them to be safe. Since Lena has decided to stay with Julian, she supports him and follows what he wants to do as a part of the rebellion. Right before they mount an attack to bring down the wall between the Wilds and the society, Alex and Julian get into a fight about Lena and Alex leaves. Lena finds out that Alex still does love her. When they finally break into the society, Lena leaves Julian to search for her cousin. She finds her cousin and then they try to go back toward where the wall between the Wilds and the society is being torn down. On the way, Lena sees Alex and confesses that she loves him more than Julian and chooses him then she goes to help with the fight. The books ends with hope, but Lena does not tell Julian that she chose Alex and the society has not been completely defeated.