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*University of Texas at Brownsville*

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Deconstructing the Rhetoric of Fear  
in Post 9/11 Young Adult Literature

By

Ronald Dean Straight

A Thesis presented to the

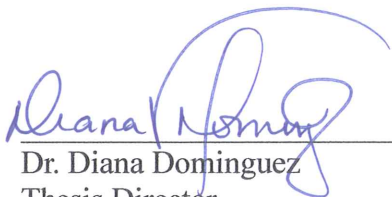
Graduate Faculty of the

English Department at the University of Texas in Brownsville

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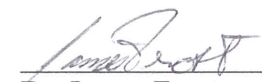
Of the Requirements for a Master's Degree in English

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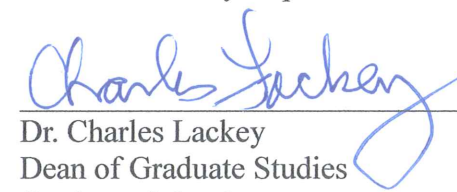
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OCTOBER 2014

Deconstructing the Rhetoric of Fear in Post 9/11 Young Adult Literature

A Thesis presented to the  
Graduate Faculty of the  
College of Liberal Arts  
The University of Texas in Brownsville  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

October 31, 2014

Copyright

By

Ronald Dean Straight

October 31, 2014

**Dedicated to Floyd and Edna LaMaster**

“If, as they say, some dust thrown in my eyes

Will keep my talk from getting overwise,

I'm not the one for putting off the proof.”

Robert Frost

## **Acknowledgments**

The process for creating a work of this size goes beyond a simple year. It is a culmination of decades of people having to listen to bad ideas and good—and being willing to point out, not just the great lines, but the ones that should never see the light of day. Without the support of a community of crazy, loveable, and brilliant people—this thesis would still be sitting at the bottom of a pint of ale. I would like to personally thank my wife, Melanie, who spent many a night asking herself “what is he going on about?” as I talked about mediated reality, Derrida’s deconstruction, and rhetoric in my sleep. I would also like to acknowledge the following: My children, Logan, Sebastian, Dean James, and Evelyn—who heard the words “quiet! Dad is working on his thesis still” so often, they all have decided to become mimes. Jean Nordstrom, Margaret Brewster, William Roberts, Richard D. Straight Jr., Louis Falk, James Frost, Diana Dominguez, Teresa Murden. Professors Rathbun, Stephenson, Gallegos, Stiles-Cox and Joseph Taberlet (from UMHB). I would also like to thank Ray Stupin, who told me that I had a gift for words in high school, and Mr. Keonig—who told my father I was “worthless and would never amount to anything of value.” Ultimately, there has been a sea of amazing people who have touched my life in the last 41 years to whom I owe my successful execution of this state of academia; they may be unmentioned by name, but not forgotten in my heart. Thank you, a thousand fold statements of appreciation cannot adequately convey my debt to you all. Thank you. *Res ipsa loquitur*.

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#### Abstract

This study demonstrates how M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2006), and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011) offer young adult readers alternative messages through tropes and rhetorical devices within a mediated reality. The outcome of these messages offers mixed messages about rebellion and conformity to young adults living in a post 9/11 global community.

The development of this message begins with teens in *Feed* exploring a dystopian future where society is tied together through technology that eliminates boundaries. The teens within the story explore a world, for a week, where those boundaries are reestablished due to an act of terror, resulting in their being exposed to a new understanding—or clinging furtively to the old. In the second novel, *Uglies*, another dystopian society is deconstructed to examine the messages young adults are receiving when they are told that being pretty and compliant are safer alternatives to being an individual and taking risks to improve society. The third novel is *Divergent*, which further examines the rebellion motif prominent in contemporary young adult fiction, but, ultimately and ironically conveying a message that conformity is the only safe route.

The text has been viewed through the theoretical lens of the works Kenneth Burke, specifically his theory of motives and identity, along with Ulrich Beck, a professor of sociology at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, whose 'risk society' model compliments the ideas of Edmund Husserl's study into the field of phenomenology.

The first chapter introduces my theoretical framework and the rhetorical laboratory, which includes socio-historical data about the concepts I use to establish my rhetorical analysis. I also have included secondary information about false memory syndrome and mediated reality to establish a baseline from which to explore third-party shared experiences in teenagers through literature. In the second through fourth chapters I have summarized the stories and offer rhetorical analysis that offers reconstructed alternative messages for readers. The fifth chapter offers my conclusion about the significance of the study. I also explore potential steps and other methods of research to help continue research in this field.

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## **Chapter I: Mediating Reality**

After years of sitting at a desk, reading countless stories about humanity from the viewpoint of a journalist, I felt compelled to explore the idea that the media was controlling the message received by its audience. The idea bandied about in conversations, Internet forums and chat rooms, and in alternative media circles is that the authors, media, and producers who work daily to prove the news are the agency which causes the problems needed to be examined. If a question posed to me in the early 1990s could be answered—I sought to do so. That question was ‘who is in control?’ I think, from a literary and rhetorical standpoint, the answer is not as clear as we, the punk rock generation, thought. However, I feel that this examination of the tropes and literary images through the lens of rhetorical analysis and deconstruction, offers a solid beginning to a literary field that is growing, rapidly, and offers a clear view of the message being conveyed to and received by young adults in a world that has been galvanized by terror, even if we cannot yet definitively determine who is capable of controlling that message. The abundance of research that has been conducted in feminism, socio-historical, and other literary analysis affords me the opportunity to explore a concept that skirts near ideas that could be the launching point for conspiracy theorists, but that I hope opens doors to conversations about what is being conveyed to young adults even when the intentions are positive.

## Introduction

The issues associated with the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, will continue to be disputed, revised and countered for as long as history keeps track of the events surrounding this tragedy; the one variable that cannot be questioned is that it created a unilateral fear across the United States, and many would argue even throughout the world. Debatably, it is that fear, based on the desire to secure against future threats, which some groups insist should be cultivated and continued through future generations in the hopes that the youth of tomorrow are able to avoid similar tragedies. I would argue that one of the mechanisms used to help nurture that fear in young adults is through the mediated realities found in the literature they are exposed to in and out of the classroom. To support this assertion, this study undertakes an examination of three contemporary young adult dystopian novels using a combination of post-structural literary criticism and rhetorical analysis. The three novels, *Feed* by M. T. Anderson (2002), *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld (2005), and *Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2011), are a small sampling of young adult literature written in a post-9/11 environment that depicts worlds in the aftermath of events symbolically analogous to 9/11, which the target audience may have lived through, but may not have comprehended the full magnitude of how the event impacted them. I would argue, however, that these novels do not only provide young readers with a deeper comprehension of how 9/11 changed their society, but also model how they should feel and behave in such a changed world. These authors use tropes, rhetorical devices, and literary imagery to help move children through experiences they have not fully synthesized by using dystopian worlds that help isolate the experience from reality while reading; the outcome is either designed to train children

to question authority or to embrace conformity. This thesis examines concepts like mediated reality, modified for use in a literary format, traditional rhetorical analysis and deconstructive criticism to evaluate possible answers based exclusively on these novels; in two of the three examples (*Uglies* and *Divergent*), the books are the beginning of a series, but the sequels are explicitly avoided for the purposes of this study. The majority of the evidence gained in this thesis comes from deconstructing words, terms, and the overall environments within the novels through the lens of rhetorical analysis. The research is focused on the definitions of rebellion and its antonym, conformity, as depicted and reflected in each of the works. The data shows that the meanings of these concepts found on the surface of these stories fall apart under closer examination of their connotations, which suggests there is a greater symbolic message conveyed by the novels. By deconstructing these works on a microscopic (word) level and then focusing that lens outward, the symbolic nature of each novel shifts from one possible conclusion to a multitude of interpretations; the symbolism is usually built around establishing fear, in the case of this study, as a response to post 9/11 concerns, and eliciting a controlled response from the reader by manipulating experiences and emotion. Such an analysis shows that the perceived interpretation may not always be directly tied to the author's intentions.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Has fear become the defining characteristic of our society since 9/11? It would appear, on the surface, that the only way to offer an answer to that question would be a broad examination of the society that has developed beyond that singularity. However,

the benefits of a smaller examination of the literature and, more specifically, the rhetoric that has grown out of the moment offers a much better understanding of the influence of persuasion on young readers, specifically. The ability to persuade others must tie to society from the beginning of two people existing; even simple tasks like hunting and gathering would have required the ability for someone to convince another person that their request was motivated by the need to acquire resources that benefited both individuals as a community. *Rhetoric*, written by Aristotle around 350 B.C.E., begins with the assertion that “[rhetoric and dialect] are concerned with such things as come ... within the general ken of all men and belong to no definite science” (Aristotle para. 1). He goes on to explain that people use both in every aspect of their lives without requiring any formal education or special skills; he defines them specifically as “ordinary people.”

It would seem logical to then believe that persuasion has a critical role in society, as generations continued; the appeals of persuasion between adults would be passed on to their offspring, and future generations would be marked by the experiences of their predecessors. At some point, schools would be established and teachers would pass on those skills to an audience of young adults; that eventuality would culminate in experts in communication and philosophy becoming the cornerstone of that learning.

For this rhetoric analysis, the connection between contemporary ideas of persuasion and their origins begins with Aristotle. The philosopher explains that persuasion, “the arousing of prejudice, pity, anger, and similar emotions, has nothing to do with the essential facts, but is merely a personal appeal to the man who is judging the case” (para. 2). He also posits that “persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated” (para. 5).

Unfortunately, Aristotle also felt that rhetoric was about truth, and the natural tendency for truth and justice to prevail; time and mankind have proven that to be an inaccurate assessment and, while the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states, “Aristotle’s works shaped centuries of philosophy from Late Antiquity through the Renaissance, and even today continues to be studied with keen, non-antiquarian interest” (Shields), the reality is that we must examine the line between then and contemporary rhetoric to establish a more balanced view of the effects of persuasion. While the idea of persuasion has not changed, the examination of rhetoric as a mode, and the moving parts that facilitate why and how we are persuaded as a community has.

Kenneth Burke takes the idea of persuasion, through a modern lens, and connects the idea of a literature of use as nothing more than a form of propaganda. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke establishes one of the key facets of his philosophy: identification. He shows, through examples including an analysis of Milton’s *Sampson*, where Milton is able to persuade an audience of readers to overlook murder, instead seeing Sampson as a hero, despite the fact that the character committed murder and suicide under the mode of identification. Burke explains that this “literature of use” is difficult to grasp for a technologically-minded society that sees rhetoric “wholly in the order of ritual and magic” (5). He further infers that death plays a critical role in human motivation because there is “an ultimate ‘grammatical’ incentive behind such imagery (death), since a history’s end is a formal way of proclaiming its essence or nature, as with those who distinguish between a tragedy and a comedy by the outcome alone” (13). While Aristotle asserts, “The use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs” (Shields para. 7), Burke extrapolates the idea by indicating that “man is a



‘rational animal,’” but further indicates that this does not protect humans from having motives of an irrational nature (Burke 14). Burke also explains that part of growing up in a modern world includes the “mediation” of imagery through motion pictures—specifically toward brutality and murder. He asserts that these images are, taken at face value, the most “noteworthy signs of action in an ideal or imaginary adult world” (18). He continues by explaining that by fifteen, an adolescent “has ‘witnessed’ more violence than most soldiers or gunmen experience in a lifetime” (18). If Burke is asserting that academics need to be able to categorize rhetorical appeals and the motives behind them through the formula of identification—and that identification means nothing more than a group of people who have a common goal or objective—then it would suggest that the societal model has moved from a group based on a goal, such as war, and now thrives on an emotional or mental state—specifically fear.

External influence on young readers is high; substantial sociological studies have been conducted which have examined the ability to manage, program or guide young readers to believe or emulate certain ideas. Ulrich Beck, a professor of sociology at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, has offered the idea of “risk society” to define dystopian literature being introduced to young adults. Ulrich Beck summarizes the concept he created in “The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited” by asserting that global risk society consists of examining “the gulf between the world of quantifiable risks in which we think and act, and the world of non-quantifiable risk that we are creating” (40). Beck looks to answer three questions in the article: he first seeks to define what world risk society means, then attempts to frame the politics, especially those pertaining to a terrorist threat, and finally, what “the methodological consequences of a

world risk society [are] for the social sciences” (40). The conclusion reached by Beck in his third question connects well with the methodology being employed to dissect young adult literature, specifically the three being examined in this article, offering another tool to extricate the various meanings behind the rhetoric. Beck asserts that social sciences gather all empirical evidence through methodological nationalism: the idea that “humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations, which, on the inside, organize themselves as nation-states and, on the outside, set boundaries to distinguish themselves from other nation-states” (51). Because of the model associated with world risk society, the de-bounding of these nation-states changes identification, defrays the ideas of nation-state and international and leaves society to examine threats from a cosmopolitan angle: the fear of outsiders is no longer viable because nobody is an outsider in an international setting. Beck asserts that the model of identification has suffered a significant paradigm shift because of 9/11 and that the categories society has built itself into are no longer viable options in a world where trust has been replaced with mistrust of outsiders, which is even further conflicted by the elimination of the concepts of “insider” versus “outsider” (53).

The idea of sovereignty—a self-governing state—has so polarized the global landscape in a post-9/11 world that Beck’s assertion seems to seamlessly blend itself into the aporia — a logical impasse or contradiction in the import of a text or theory that is seen in deconstruction as inevitable (“aporia”) — examined within Jacques Derrida’s *Rogues*. Before examining the final evolution of deconstruction, according to Michael Naas, a philosophy professor at DePaul University, an understanding of deconstruction itself must be touched upon. Peter Barry, a professor of English at Aberystwyth

University, asserts that deconstruction, as a literary theory, can be defined as “[uncovering] the unconscious rather than the conscious dimension of the text” (69); he further indicates that the method utilizes “oppositional reading, reading with the aim of unmasking internal contradictions or inconsistencies in the text” (69). Toward the end of his life, Derrida allowed for the transition of the ideas associated with deconstruction to come to fruition under the biologically-inspired autoimmunity. Naas ascribes a definition to this development by explaining that where deconstruction “often lent itself to being (mis)understood as a ‘method’ or ‘textual strategy’ of reading ... ‘autoimmunity’ appears to name a process that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere” (18). It is the culmination of the idea of deconstruction, tied directly to autoimmunity that lends itself as a key to unlock the appeals made through literature in a post-9/11 literary world. Derrida’s concept allows for the examination of the text, the rhetoric, and the appeals being made directly toward young readers. The inevitable context found within the three novels being deconstructed ties directly with the experiences the characters, the readers, and the society have to draw upon to make contextual connections. The easiest way to understand Derrida’s theorem, deconstruction, is to think of all elements within literature being modified by those various experiences combined with the potential grammatical and linguistic alternatives of the elements’ meanings. The one variable that is never constant is the experience, which is what ties deconstruction to phenomenology.

According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, phenomenology is defined as “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Smith par. 1). As a philosophical discipline, phenomenology has ties to logic, ethics, ontology and epistemology. The discipline has direct ties to Edmund Husserl,

Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and others who worked to develop a better understanding of how to use the tool to measure experience. For contextual purposes, this study will reflect on phenomenology as a lens under the definition of a study of “the structure of various types of experiences ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity” (par. 7). The other variable to consider beyond the simple experience is the understanding, or interpretation, of how that experience plays out as a cause and effect. Immediate experiences, as defined by Husserl, cannot be taken by themselves, but must also include prior experience and contacts to associate with the new experience. They also do not require form because people “impose the forms on the raw data of experience that are needed to make that experience into experience of objects, their properties, reactions, etc.” (qtd. in Overgaard 284). In short, Husserl asserted that being there wasn’t nearly as important as the experience acquired from contact. The world as it appears to us, as individuals, is much more important because it is the phenomena that we experience directly.

Michel Foucault actively tried to discredit Husserl’s philosophical discipline by indicating that “man is cut off from the origin that would make him contemporaneous with his own existence: amid all the things that are born in time and no doubt die in time, he, cut off from all origin, is already there” (qtd. in Dreyfus and Rabinow 332), a statement offered by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* as a direct response to Husserl; Foucault’s principle of phenomenology is summarized by Dreyfus and Rabinow as such:

Specifically, he claims that by means of a transcendental reduction which places the phenomenologist outside the horizon of his own thought, he can analyze the background that originally appears to be unthought and unthinkable as “truly” a sedimented set of beliefs which the phenomenologist has only to “reawaken” in order to be able to treat them as a belief system. (36)

Phenomenology, as a philosophy, is asking the individual to assert his/her own experience on objects and ideas, not through steps, but through the phenomena that can be compared to new data; it means that some part of the data itself can be influenced by external stimuli helping to supplement how that experience should feel or would feel had the reader experienced it first-hand. An example would be when someone asks a person with a tattoo if it hurts. While the experience could have hurt, or not hurt, the person being asked has the ability to create a future state of pain for the experience of the individual asking about the experience; saying “it only hurts in certain spots,” for example, leaves the pain and experience up to the person getting the tattoo in the future. But the person asking about the pain will derive some benefit of information supplanted by the conversation.

To be able to gather some logical information about that experience, heuristics must also be considered as a tool for evaluation of the textual enigma being resolved. Readers must apply hard coded rules to find resolutions for experiences they have not had. Lacking common ground for certain experiences means that young adults will look to rules of thumb or common sense to attempt to fill in the gap about how that experience should be reacted to. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* offers an in-depth

explication of semantics and pragmatics which covers presumptive meanings; the value asserted in this thesis is specifically the effect of heuristics when applied to written discourse using the linguistic model subsumed by pragmatics. The three values of heuristics specifically are “‘what is said, isn’t,’ ‘what is expressed simply is stereotypically exemplified’ and ‘what is said in an abnormal way isn’t normal’” (Jaszczolt par. 11). The one variable that always is in flux is the experience of the reader and what that experience does to the message.

Husserl’s study into the field of phenomenology supports my assertion that, while literature itself may not be an agent, it is definitely a tool used by an adult society, through storytelling, to help guide and, to some degree, manipulate certain emotional subtexts in young readers. This philosophy, combined with the possibility that fictional literature does not simply mirror the societal norms and conditions of the time, but instead, magnifies them, allows for a better understanding of how children are potentially pushed toward Beck’s “risk society” model. The examination and deconstruction through literary analysis of literature of this time frame should reflect a combination of fallacies of logic and rhetoric designed to build on an appeal to fear that offers “hope” to readers about a future that is anything but dysfunctional. In a foreword to *Utopian and Dystopian: Writing for Children and young Adults* edited by Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, Jack Zipes writes “Utopian and dystopian literature form a great discourse about hope” (xi). Zipes asserts that the work of young adult authors is to guide young readers toward more humane achievements and less consumerist goals (ix); this idea is problematic because the current trend builds on ideas of fear about outsiders in such a

manner that the only logical conclusion for young readers is to be filled with mistrust as per Beck's model for a modern society indicates.

That model directly corroborates Derrida's conclusion that the organism is consuming itself. Another aspect that must be considered is the idea of manufactured consent proposed by Noam Chomsky. Setting aside his political contention, Chomsky's concept of "manufactured consent" is "lifted ... from the prose of Walter Lippman, once a mighty voice of liberal journalism" (Mattick para. 2). Chomsky asserts that consent in a government "must be manufactured by controlling information on the basis of which political opinions are formed" (qtd. in Mattick para. 2). This aporia -- that the government must control the message to properly indoctrinate the society which placed it in power and of which it upholds the values -- mixed with the concept of mediated reality offers a direct assertion to the refraction within art examined in young adult literature. Burke's pointed attribution to a "literature of use" is easily tied to technology -- which encompasses various devices including text -- that is mediated for a specific purpose.

Mediated reality is a term coined by Steve Mann, a professor at the University of Toronto, who defines it as "referring to a general framework for artificial modification of human perception by way of devices for augmenting, deliberately diminishing, and more generally, for otherwise altering sensory input." Mann indicates that mediated reality is a point where wearable technology and the human mind are "inextricably intertwined." If technology can be defined as "a capability given by the practical application of knowledge" ("Technology"), then novels would be considered part of the parameters of Mann's definition.

This idea could be modified to assume that the technology itself is a book, literature, or simply text being held and manipulated by the reader; while the intention of the term is being used by Mann to offer concepts beyond artificial intelligence or other technological devices, I believe that it is rooted in the linguistic dialect as meaning a reality that is being mediated or manufactured, as Lippman posits, offering not only a variety of outcomes, but also coming from a variety of input that is built up directly through experience. In the absence of experience, that input is being built up by the reflection of the culture and society in which the experience has been manufactured or borrowed—intrinsically from the authors themselves. The synergy associated with this dynamic interpretation makes Mann's usage tout court.

An aspect to consider when deconstructing dystopian literature is that “dystopian fiction is not ... anti-utopian ... since the underlying political or allegorical purpose of its creation of a dystopian world achieves the utopian function of offering the reader a radical alternative that reflects upon contemporary society” (Edwards 766); however, the nature of the trope associated with dystopias is that they are open to interpretation and offer a multitude of paths that weave an intricate society which is opaque and flexible enough for readers to create their own opinions.

In the field of children's literature “there is a real strong ‘dystopian’ tendency in ... consumer society to make ‘better’ consumers out of children” (Zipes xi), setting the stage for writing that “examines the roots of social behavior and encourages the child to question his or her own society” (Hintz and Ostry 1) But those questions are directed by a “variety of reasons ... from play and escape to sustained political reflection” (1). Carrie Hintz, an associate professor of English at Queens College/CUNY, and Elaine Ostry,



associate professor of English at SUNY Plattsburgh, explain in their introduction to *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* that the importance of young adult writing is that it offers lessons that change over time because of the use of cross writing: ““a dialogic mix of older and younger voices”” (7). This combination is designed to offer lessons to youth and adults through repetition and revisiting of the literature at different points in the reader’s lifetime (7). Hintz and Ostry also state that this specific form of literature is designed to “[encourage] young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing or predisposing them to political action” (7). The biggest conundrum, they establish, is that there is a fine line between cooperation and conformity, and young readers may not see the transition from one to the other (7). Kay Sambell, a professor in Childhood Studies at Northumbria University, U.K., writes that the challenge of writing dystopian fiction for young adults is “[t]he problems of reconciling the aim of presenting the dark truth of the values against which one cautions, whilst simultaneously maintaining a sharp focus of hope” (164). The meanings arising from that balancing act between conformity and cooperation, between reality and hope will have almost infinite variations because, as Derrida explains, the experiences of each reader offer unique interpretations of the characters, situations, and environment. The inevitable desire to maintain a sense of hope means that, in a world based on Burke’s premise of group identity, fear must be created to protect readers from the dark truth if there is to be social change. Sambell asserts that even the concept of unhappy endings found in some young adult novels is designed to highlight a point of no return where the reader should begin to assimilate the idea that the current trends in their society will only lead to “the dire consequences of the extinction of moral belief” (166).

Finally, on the literary front, Wayne C. Booth offers a concept of realism in fiction as a chapter within *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that sheds light on potential paradigm of an “unmediated reality” (50). Booth explains that writers of fiction all find themselves eventually having to assert chance as an agent within their work because they all are seeking “a realistic structure or shape of events, and wrestling with the question of how to make that shape seem a probable reflection of the shapes into which life itself falls” (57). The bounds of dystopian science fiction allow for unlimited fantasy to play a role in the environment that the authors are illustrating. But, the reality is that young adult writers strive to create Sambell’s model of a pedagogical message for young readers—that this is a potential world that could happen if they continue to follow a negative pattern or fail to create social changes. Booth further asserts that the author must strive to create the illusion that there is no narration, and that the story itself is purely organic in nature (59).

Another point of consideration must be directed at the work of Elizabeth Loftus in the field of false memory syndrome. While the application is clearly psychological and sociological, the effect could be created through phenomenology directly tied to manufactured experiences within young adult literature. Cara Laney and Loftus explain that at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a “newly emerging field of trauma studies, created in response to a greater understanding of the prevalence of victimization ... crashed headlong into an only slightly older field of eyewitness memory and in particular misinformation research” that concluded the human mind is prone to external and internal agents that could manipulate the value of accounts depicted through the experience of the witness or witnesses (137-138). False memory syndrome has direct examples that society has been exposed to: of note, the D.C. sniper beltway attacks in October 2002. The

circumstances surrounding the multiple shootings have limited relevance to this thesis. However, Loftus states in her 2003 essay “Our Changeable Memories: legal and practical implications”: “Witnesses reported seeing a white truck or van fleeing several of the crime scenes. It seemed that a white vehicle might have been near one of the first shootings and media repetition of this information contaminated the memories of witnesses to later attacks, making them more likely to remember white trucks” (231). Loftus raises the question about the potential of this being an example of memory contamination on a national scale. I would assert that Loftus’s question can be offered as another part of the puzzle of mediated reality—where young readers are being offered, through rhetoric, contaminated experiences. The authors themselves are not agents, or even directly tied to the contamination; they simply are reflecting that polluted value through their work.

## **Literature Review**

Cyrus Shahan, a professor at Colby College best describes 9/11 by stating that “the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, precipitated the preeminent collapse of any divide between society and spectacle” (310). The terrorist attacks on the United States were four coordinated terrorist acts committed by 19 individuals working together to fulfill an unknown agenda. The outcome, according to various sources, was staggering: more than 3,000 people were killed and the cost of damages has exceeded \$2 trillion (“How much”). Noam Chomsky offers that “it is widely argued that the September 11 terrorist attacks have changed the world dramatically, that nothing will be the same as the world enters into a new and frightening ‘age of terror’”

(para. 1). Shahan speculates that “the effects of postmodern simulacra—a condition in which reality is transformed into images forewarned by numerous critical thinkers—powerfully dominate[d] the media and reality rubble of the twin towers and the so-called ‘war on terror’ that erupted out of Manhattan in September” (310). The effects, according to Ulrich Beck, a sociology professor at Munich University and the London School of Economics, are actually incalculable because of the world that formed after the attack. Beck asserts that the terrorist act does not qualify as a criminal act, or a military strike; it is the cognitive dissonance created by the inability to categorize the event as a terrorist act by variables that are, or were at the time, understood to be stereotypical (39). The mistrust that was formed in the aftermath is the only tool available, Beck explains, that allows for the U.S. society to move beyond the experience (44).

Two aspects of Beck’s “The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited” are relevant to use as resources and tools to measure the potential effects of literary works in a post 9/11 society. His definition of a “world risk society” is a primary philosophical concept that is borrowed and applied to a literary format for the purposes of this thesis. Beck posits that world risk society does not “arise from the fact that everyday life has generally become dangerous”; he further argues that “this model is not a matter of increase, but rather the de-bounding of uncontrolled risks” (41), which establishes a distinct definition and purpose for applying the “world risk society” concept in a literary format. This theory is magnified into a global setting because the aftermath has global implications. Beck further asserts that global problems require global solutions, and, since the economic fallout that transpired after the attacks was felt on a world-wide stage, then the problems, and effects, are global in nature (42). A secondary emphasis must be

placed on the idea associated to risk and trust, specifically. Beck states, “Much of the literature on risk [in economic settings] ... treats risk as a positive element within investment decisions, and risk-taking as a dynamic aspect linked to the essence of markets. But investing in the face of risk presupposes trust” (44); this means that if the model has switched due to the attacks to one of mistrust, then risk is even further decoupled from the social standards that are expected in economic, political, and societal applications. He indicates, “The perception of terrorist threats replaces active trust with active mistrust” (45), which translates to a society where outsiders are a continuous threat because they are now unknown variables. These ideas can be seen and identified in all three of the novels studied within this thesis.

Another philosophy to be applied in this study is phenomenology. From a purely philosophical standpoint, literature and phenomenology seem unable to be married to each other. In “Introduction: Phenomenology and Literature,” Delia Popa, a professor at Université catholique de Louvain, asserts that Husserl’s work offers merely a “frail bridge, joining two mountains which conceal from each other the volcanic spark of their vitality” (9). Instead of accepting the idea of mutual exclusivity, Popa looks at the models and ascribes that, for academic purposes, the “two spaces of the mind [literature and phenomenology]” encourage academics to look at the two as complementary of each other—not in contrasting positions (9). Popa further asserts that, while the two fields appear to be separate, at their core, they are “rooted in the same soil” and, therefore, can be used when accepted under Husserl’s concept of latent possibility (9); in effect, Popa is stating that both literature and phenomenology can be measured through an empirical

value, affording them a place in the tool kit for this thesis and to help substantiate my claims.

By combining the philosophy of phenomenology with the concept of mediated reality (in which it is argued that the text is a form of technology), a hybrid literary philosophy emerges that offers the perfect lens to examine the trend in contemporary young adult fiction: specifically the dystopian science fiction model. Lev Grossman, a novelist and commentator for *Time*, indicates in “Love among the Ruins” that until the 1960s dystopian science fiction was the domain of adult writers, “but from the late 1960s on, books about mankind's miserable future began to skew younger ... [n]ow young-adult dystopian fiction is a flourishing industry in its own right” (par. 5). An example of this trend in current literary circles, which will not be included in this thesis but may be referred to for context, is the *Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins, which was published in 2008. The success of the books (eventually a trilogy: 2008, 2009, 2010) and subsequent movies (2012, 2013) have guided “publishers [to respond] to its success with an extraordinary profusion of nightmarish future scenarios. *Delirium*, by Lauren Oliver, takes place in a world in which love is considered a disease and all people are given a treatment at 18 that ‘cures’ them, whereupon the government assigns them a permanent loveless spouse” (par. 8). Other examples of dystopian science fiction that have been produced since 2001 include Julianna Baggott’s *Pure* trilogy (2012, 2013, and 2014) and Dan Wells’s *Partial*s trilogy (2013, 2014)—both mentioned in the Grossman article. These apocalyptic storylines all follow the premise that humanity has pushed Beck’s model of a risk society toward a dangerous threshold where survival is built around a loss

of freedom and identity against a threat that is easily identified as being outside their communities.

It would be improbable to broach each novel as an individual product that could be easily dismantled and then built up as something new without looking at the scholarly material that exists about them in journals, reviews and blog postings. This exposure allows for a mild exploration of what has been picked up and the ideas that have formulated from other academics on the topic of young adult literature, and more specifically, the novels in question. Aside from the theoretical and socio-historical methods established earlier, there are a score of scholarly articles pertaining to each work. M.T. Anderson has created two works that deal with a dystopian setting, but only one of them is specific to this topic for the purposes of this article. Sara L. Schwebel, a professor with Harvard credentials specializing in young adult literature, explains that Anderson's *Feed* was directly impacted by the events of September 11, 2001. She says that Anderson had the "partially completed young adult novel on his hard drive" (197) in early September 2001 but that he did not complete the project until October 2002. The story hints at an America that is facing "the final days" (Anderson 297). She also points out that *Feed* is specifically not "set in New York during the first decade of the twenty-first century" (Schwebel 198). Schwebel asserts that even though Anderson has said that the novel is not a commentary on 9/11, she believes that it is. The characters seem to be disconnected from that historical event, but act in a way that implies a state of mourning about the event. Schwebel notes that "the teenage characters cannot use their understanding of the historical disconnection between national ideals and citizens' practice to advance a historically informed social critique" (199), but Schwebel posits

that Anderson is directly asking readers to make the connection between this dystopian science fiction and the events surrounding 9/11. She directly states that Anderson himself is politicizing this fiction (199).

This politicizing action, according to Schwebel, is designed to convince readers to force social change through whatever agent they have access to. The direct contact to social change for children is their parents, because they are immediately available and are seen as directly tied to the government. Parents are a tertiary step in the process because eventually these children emulate the demands of the characters within *Feed*, even if those demands are not directly theirs. Another interesting variable that Schwebel focuses on is that she posits *Feed* to be the United States' concluding chapter. It gives voice to a country that is the "pitch-perfect cadence of an American teen" (201), which allows for readers to easily identify with this group of young adults in the year 2070; that narrative voice is set against the backdrop of corporate manipulation and an outside threat of terrorism designed to disconnect the youth of America from their culture. She indicates that "Titus's story is set in 'America in its final days,' whose implosion seems imminent by *Feed*'s end" (204). It is this journey the reader takes that is built around an idea of not being able to act on emotions because they are muted by the national realities of being an American, she concludes (206). A key fact that she reiterates in her scholarly article is that "Published in 2002, *Feed* is part of a burgeoning trend in YA fiction, the dystopia. Importantly, YA dystopias are a post-9/11 phenomenon in the United States" (204). She goes on to explain how there are two different formats for dystopias within literature—"classical, or canonical" and "critical" (204). The post-9/11 literature falls under the critical format, which attempts to offer a glimpse of utopian ideology, specifically the



seed of hope, that is available only through “an ambiguous ending ... which precludes the inevitable subjugation of the protagonist” (205). Schwebel indicates that while this genre did exist prior to the War on Terror (citing the 1996 publishing of *The Giver*), the commencement of combat campaigns after 9/11 created an atmosphere where dystopian literature moved away from children’s literature and toward a young adult audience (204). One variable that she points out connected specifically to the literature is that all adult literature written after 2001 is “almost exclusively on contemporary realism—that is, books set on and around that infamous September day” (205). On the other hand, the young adult fiction and criticism has been focused on science fiction that offers alternate realities.

The *Washington Post* journalist Veronica Toney offered a shallow examination of *Divergent*, focusing on the real life interaction between author Veronica Roth and her fans. However, a key point Toney makes in her review is that Roth suffers from anxiety and her writing comes from a place where she strives to overcome that emotional overload (para. 3). Roth explains in an interview with Toney that “[t]he idea of having them really trapped in a faction is something I’m familiar with because I struggle with anxiety. Tris does what I’m always working to do. She makes the bold move. That’s where the inspiration came from” (para. 3). Unfortunately, other reviews of Roth’s first-in-a-series fiction are shallow and seem to be more interested in readability over valid literary criticisms; this is problematic because it appears that the result is young adults who are pointed toward reading something without seeing more than a story. For example, many, if not most, of the reviewers on *Goodreads.com* offered inane attempts at reviews. However, one excellent sample from that site points out that *Divergent*, *The Hunger*

*Games*, and *Harry Potter* all end with a train sequence. This is a device which I will discuss in subsequent chapters involving all three novels being deconstructed for this thesis. Alice Jenkins, a lecturer at the University of Glasgow, explains in “Getting to Utopia: Railways and Heterotopia in Children’s Literature” that conveyances, such as “railways [function] as ... protean, paradoxical space, not merely instrumental but active” (23) tools used in young adult literature that help readers make the transition from real to imaginary because “[r]ailway trains in utopian fantasy literature operate like alternative worlds, allowing space and time within the narrative for establishment, subversion, and clashing of logics and values of the other realms of the text” (23). In short, transportation mediums are common in all utopian fiction, and by proxy, are used to the same effect in dystopian literature; as Jenkins states in the title of her article, these transportation mediums serve as instruments of heterotopia, a term coined by Michel Foucault as a concept “in human geography to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions” (“Heterotopia”). Unfortunately, many of the comments on blog posts made by the novels’ target readership of young adults point to a less critical examination within popular culture audiences of the underlying connotations and themes contained within the novels. Ironically, this is one of the central messages that can be found in all three of these novels: asking too many questions can lead to being ostracized, a fate worse than death for most teens.

*Uglies* has similar review issues as *Divergent*, with one gleaming post on *Goodreads.com* by a user named Sparrow. The review summarizes the story, and even threatens Scott Westerfeld, which almost makes a cursory examination of the review worthless; however, Sparrow does point out an interesting problem—mediated reality.

The reviewer says that he/she felt compelled to apply many of the criticisms Westerfeld illustrates in the book—specifically in grocery stores; this implies that rhetoric works to convince readers to have a reaction that leaves the dystopian literature and becomes part of their day-to-day activities (Sparrow).

My study of each novel is focused on the rhetorical element of pathos, specifically the appeal to fear, which has ties to a variety of different origins within the field of rhetorical theory. According to Michael William Pfau, a professor in communication at the University of Minnesota Duluth, “philosophers have often condemned emotions in general, and fear in particular” (216); his assertion connects the principles of Plato with contemporary societies when applied to political deliberation and policy-making in historical contexts. If his further assertion that “such states of mind ... run counter to reason and logic” (216) and, therefore, deviate from a model of thinking that is based on rational ideas and are simply tools used to “manipulate their audiences” (216), then, I would posit that any evidence of attempts at this formula of pathos would qualify as magnification of the idea of fear—and not simply a reflection being cast by the authors through their work. The importance to this research is that young adult readers are particularly subject to manipulation and “group think” and, therefore, everyone involved in the process—from authors and publishers to teachers, parents and other adults -- that are guiding them should be aware of their influence on this group of individuals. Segments of society seem to be directing children and young adults to question, to effect changes that should be beneficial to their community, but, on further examination, much of this rhetoric smacks of lip service. Mass media and educational institutions have undue power to promote true cooperation and change, but all too often what they encourage is

conformity and fear. Young adults could be driven to continue the cyclical categorization of othering and mistrust that has become the cornerstone of a post-9/11 world that is driven by fear, and through that fear, unnecessary prejudice built around false assumptions and stereotypes that are symptomatic of Derrida's autoimmunity.

### **The Road Ahead**

The next chapter begins the process of exploration of the three novels I have chosen to review and deconstruct for the purpose of establishing the evidence for my premise. Chapter two applies the tools and methodologies to M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002) with a focus on the economic and global situation established in Anderson's novel. The third chapter transitions from the economic model in *Feed* to look at the dichotomy between Anderson's dystopian society and the environment Scott Westerfeld creates in *Uglies* (2005). Westerfeld's novel does not have a primary economic connection; instead, the focus is on being accepted into a community with rigid standards of behavior and appearance and the risks associated with rebelling and stepping outside the expected norms of that society. This modeling of society and the diametrical opposition found in *Uglies* is explored in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011) in the fourth chapter. The community aspect in *Divergent* is deconstructed to show the inability to create a society based on current United States' structure as seems to be the template at work in Roth's novel.

Aside from analyzing elements specific to each novel, throughout these three chapters secondary emphasis is placed on looking at Jacques Derrida's deconstructive theory as applied to literary analysis to show that all three novels lack a finite categorical

model of society or behavior for readers to follow; instead, in keeping with Derrida's claims, the novels lend themselves to a potentially infinite number of interpretations and messages. However, there is one constant in all three novels: the characters are all continuously being affected by fear of the current societal format or model and express a desire to enact change, even if, paradoxically, that change is a loop reinforcing the existing society within each novel. A possible effect, and the focus of this thesis, is that that fear becomes emulated by the reader—indirectly (or perhaps even directly) allowing the literature to take on a more active role in the lives of future generations, ceasing to be merely a static object of entertainment.

My thesis ends with a concluding fifth chapter, where I summarize my findings and consider the significance of the study. I also suggest possible next steps and other methods of research that help build the bridge between children's and young adult literature and sociological formulas that help expand the understanding of rhetoric and discourse outside of the academic setting.

## **Chapter 2: Feeding Frenzy**

*Feed* exists in a dystopian future where humanity is dialed in, tied together via wetware that allows for instantaneous gratification to become, not just a catchphrase, but a reality for teens in M.T. Anderson's world. Life is good for Titus and his friends, who are the new middle class American stereotype for high school students. Violet, a homeschooled observer to the phenomena of being a teen, catches the eye of Titus. Violet is a 'late bloomer' from a technological standpoint in that she was not born of the technology - nor connected with it until she was 7. This creates unique problems for the young woman. The experience of being personally connected with another human shows Titus a different form of social networking that requires him to change his views.

The novel takes young adult readers through the growing pains of young love, teenage rebellion, and the trials and consequences of fighting to be on the outside. Anderson's tale follows the lives of young teens who are exposed to a single toxic moment that offers, ironically, a break from the Internet and the world of social media, which is seen as a painful experience that ends with a tragic flaw. Amid the backdrop of perfection offered by the corporations that have taken control of the United States - the world is coming undone. As Titus grows as an individual through his relationship with Violet, he begins to see the inability to control his own life—or help his friend gain a sense of control of her own.

## **Globally-Minded Citizens**

Young adults born after 1991 have always been connected to an identity that is digitally managed (Berners-Lee 11); they are not cognizant of an analog humanity, isolated and struggling to communicate through antediluvian networks of disconnected individuals. This beneficial identity has allowed them to always be able to be more globally-minded citizens; they are enabled scholars who have information constantly available through the World Wide Web: news, sales, driving directions, historical archives, contemporary criticism. They are blasted with a stream of 24/7 data that bathes them in information that also helps to camouflage potentially threatening ideas that are outdated, or worse, terminal. The information is braided into every facet of their lives, from the cradle to the grave. In a post 9/11 world where mistrust has become expected and embraced as the only safe mode that terminal idea is the catalyst for stagnation (Beck); it is a rhetorical gospel of fear endorsed by today's adult society which is xenophobic. That model of stagnation is exemplified in *Feed*.

*Feed*, by M.T. Anderson, is a dystopian science fiction novel written with a young adult audience in mind; he explains that the setting is "a future time when most Americans get their news, entertainment, and shopping tips from electronic transmitters implanted into their brains" (299). This should not feel disconnected or foreign to a contemporary audience which has never been disconnected from electronic transmitters which are always within arm's reach. In post-script notes within the novel, Anderson explains that his intention was not "to predict future tech" (299), but, instead, offer a view of the current state of technology and its grasp on society—"to think about cultural

conditions as they already ... [are] all around us” (304). He further explains that it is a “saturated media world ... we are all suspended in a sphere of imagery and voices vying for attention” (299), where persuasion is all part of marketing ploys which are specifically designed to create consumers who are not “informed and intelligent” (299), but simply duped purchasers of an experience. Anderson closes by explaining that people always tell him that the feed is becoming a reality; a significant portion of the technology explored within the story, which he started writing in September 2001, has already become commercially available in 2014. His response is bold, “I believe it already was the reality when I was writing. I was already dreaming in advertisements” (299). This setting allows Anderson to create a story that appeals to fear through several techniques and sociological paradigms—which must be deconstructed to establish alternative messages which change the purpose of the novel.

To begin to deconstruct *Feed* and look at the moving parts of rhetoric which frame the story, an explanation of the story itself must be afforded.

*Feed* is a story that takes place in a dystopian future where corporate-sponsored internet devices are implanted into humans at birth, providing a constant “feed” to information both important and trivial; while it is not a government mandate to be connected to the feed, people rarely reject the implant, as this would render them disconnected from the rest of their society. The feed is not only a form of social media, but also a direct link tying every element within this future world into a consumer-driven culture. The sacrifice for direct consumerism means that thought is directly impacted by



advertising banners; this changes how the process is supplemented by images and, ultimately, language regresses.

### **To the Moon**

Titus, an average teen, along with his friends are on spring break, on the moon, “because there was shit-all to do at home” (3). This trip introduces him to Violet, his future love interest, and the one character Anderson has created that actively works against the hyper-connected and consumer-driven society they live in; she will fulfill the role of ‘othering’ as required for modeling Ulrich Beck’s concept of threats within the nation-state. Anderson explains that she is a “brainy girl who has decided to try to fight the feed” (13) which leads to her death, ultimately. By beginning the story on the moon and describing the trip there and contexts that are recognizable to a teen audience, as well as language that is age appropriate, Anderson immediately helps young adults to identify with Titus, Marty, Link, Calista, Loga, and Quendy; the teens are using a shuttle to arrive on the moon, which helps establish Foucault’s heterotopia. Alice Jenkins’s assertion that (heterotopia) vehicles offer “a protean, paradoxical space, not merely instrumental but active” (Jenkins 23) allows for readers to not only begin to identify with language and the characters, but also to disconnect from reality and accept that what is transpiring does not violate the laws which govern young adult lives on earth. However, this also creates potential new rules for them to consider as they suspend disbelief and immerse themselves into this alternate space. This identification with the group is built around the common-place antics that Marty and Link exhibit during the trip; the two are in a battle to see who can be more annoying by bashing chairs into each other. Even when they hurt

each other, they find humor in the activity. “Link would slam his seat back like meg hard and it would go bam on Marty’s face, and they would start laughing” (Anderson 5).

Because the teens are part of the same group identity, the action is seen as harmless and non-threatening thanks to the accepted identification being portrayed in the story. Another interesting variable that we see early on is the use of ordinary people as protagonists and supporting characters that are juxtaposed against faceless corporations; the two anomalies within the system are a hacker on the moon who causes trouble for the teens and Violet’s father. In these opening scenes, Anderson paints a picture of all-American teens on vacation, watching football, looking for trouble and hoping to find “unettes on the moon, at the hotel, if any of them were youch” (4)—behaviors and activities the target teen audience understand very well.

### **“Slam the Ones You Love!”**

Violet is introduced when the group is playing on the moon, and Titus is not drawn to her because she is beautiful - although he does point out in his narration that “she was the most beautiful girl like, ever” (13) - but rather, because she is different. It is that difference, “[t]he feed suggest[s] ‘supple’” (14), that creates an ‘othering’ precedence by Anderson. During the introduction to group, Violet is shown to be intelligent, explaining the principle of bifurcated framing of the face to help Quendy deal with the lesion on her face; it clearly should be a concern for all of the kids, because it is the first sign that the one thing that draws them together, that helps them communicate and be part of a group, is also killing them. Yet they do not fear the lesions, which they regard as fashion statements, but, instead, are stunned by the outsider, Violet, who has been

approached by them to answer a rhetorical question. Titus explains that Violet's lesion is more like a necklace than a pimple or visible blemish on her face; this is against the 'othering' statement that follows. He states "[w]e were all just kind of staring at her like she was an alien. She smiled. We kept staring at her" (23). Other descriptions offered by Titus include that she was liked by all the boys, but not the girls and that he "thought she was the most amazing person [he] had ever seen in [his] life, even if she was weird as shit" (23). Violet's clothing choice is interesting because she is continuously defined as the "girl in gray" (25); this neutral color sets her apart from the group who arrive to a burst of messages from the feed which are golden, sparkling and overwhelming to them. She is an observer (29) who arrives alone, simply watching and wandering through the crowds of spring breakers. It is when she becomes a participant in the group that things change.

Anderson points out on their trip to the club that there is resistance to the feed. "[Eurotrash] were protesting all these things, some of them even were protesting the feed. They were like shouting, 'Chip in my head? I'm better off dead!'" (32).

### **Look at the Guy in the, You Know, That Thing**

Amid a backdrop of lights, bass, dancing, gyrating "ripplechicks" (35) and "fugue-joy ... my feed was like going fried" (34), Titus is drawn to a character who is plain and average. An old man is described wearing a bow tie, in "a dirty old tweed jacket and he had this long white hair that looked kind of yellow" (35). Titus narrates that he looked like he was on drugs — mal which is short for malfunctioning — another technology reference. This man begins to do things which are the opposite of the crowd's

actions; they float while he stands, and he floats when gravity is returned to the night club. The safety of technology affords many things in this culture. Without it, they are 'null,' alone. When a hacker at the club connects their feeds to his device into "a time of calamity!" (38), they lose control, begin disconnecting and losing touch with reality. This act of terror has shredded their world, their community, and left them alone to face an unknown future that is felt, through pathos, by the reader as Titus is bombarded first with images of an amazing night at a dance club, and then by becoming helpless, "[w]e enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity! I couldn't stop" (38). The children's chorus is broken by the refrain:

We enter a time of calamity. Blood on the tarmac. Fingers in the juicer.  
Towers of air frozen in the lunar wastes. Models dead on the runways,  
with their legs facing backward. Children with smiles that can't be  
undone. Chick shall rot in the aisles. See the pillars fall (39).

Anderson has brought his readers to ground zero. Seven teens are manipulated by a madman poised to accept his fate; the police bludgeon him into submission on the dance floor (39). The teens are simply shut off—"[a]nd they touched us, and bodies fell, and there was nothing else" (40). Anderson's word choices are meant to inspire feelings of fear and powerlessness. To magnify that sense of powerlessness, Anderson removes the group identity required for safety—the net—which is now unavailable to Titus and his friends. Distinctive word choices allow for the realization of having no control to begin to be asserted on Titus—and the reader. "The first thing I felt was no credit" (43) shows a mindset that is not grounded in mortality, but consumerism; it is this consumerism that is continuously touched upon in Anderson's novel that helps establish

Kenneth Burke's appeal to identity as a motive for persuasion. The one thing that can be appreciated by children and young adults is a feeling of powerlessness associated with being alone—unable to contact anybody—especially parents; Anderson illustrates this experience for Titus when showing him becoming conscious at the hospital, without giving readers the benefit of grounding for a location, or even context that would help them to feel as if the setting could be established; this literary cognitive dissonance cannot be resolved and the chapter ends quickly, leaving unanswered questions.

## **Bored**

When the teens are no longer connected to the feednet, they begin to become aware of the society they live in, or at least in the hospital they are staying in to recover; it offers them an opportunity to experience life — disconnected — and it clearly does not appeal to them. The description of a five wall room immediately creates disharmony with readers because “the room was irregular” (45). Anderson focuses on a painting in the room which causes distress for Titus; he cannot see a reason to paint something like a boat on the water because there is nothing going on, or potentially, because there is no value (consumer or otherwise) in it. Titus is showing that without a guide to purchasing, to ownership and control, the world is valueless—and he is alone in it. Titus seems relieved to find out that the hacker will be punished and the rhetoric used by the police is to define him as “a hacker and a naysayer of the worst kind” (46). It is the ambiguous nature of that statement that seems to be an appeal to young adults to trust that the authorities are able to identify right and wrong for them; it is even more disturbing to realize that the one variable never introduced in the dialogue is a question of why or what

he has done other than make them think and react as individuals. It is that group connection that continues to substantiate the concept of identity alongside the world risk society model that grows from this event. The feed is a strong element within the story because of the establishment of the importance of technology as a backbone for society.

Anderson's vision of a future where technology has advanced to the point of being an organ required for existence offers young adult readers a direct connection to the devices they already have in their palms. The familial nature of the Internet — of on-demand shows, instant news, and feedcasts — helps to whitewash the threatening nature of allowing corporations or government to take away individuality and free thinking and replace it with "a special profile, one that's keyed just to you, and then they give it to their branch companies, or other companies buy them, and they can get to know what it is we need, so all you have to do is want something and there's a chance it will be yours" (48). Anderson openly states that there is an understanding of control and problems that are associated with giving corporations more control than the communities they serve, but points out that teens are not worried about that because getting 'stuff' is more important than the long-term ramifications (299). He does an excellent job of connecting the feeling of teens being powerless against consumerism when looking at a world which they do not feel they can directly affect. It is this connection between worlds, Anderson's world juxtaposed against the contemporary one, which further establishes this rhetoric of identity for young readers. Another method that can be applied to the story up to this point is Beck's assertion that the teens were taking risks that were magnified by the unlimited access to the moon during spring break; this would be introduced by the idea that the hacker is there, freely moving among the teens, without raising suspicion or

concern with any of the partygoers. He was clearly an outsider, yet they did not see a quantifiable risk associated with his presence—other than Loga. In Titus’s narration, he explains that she refused to let him touch her because “he looked really creepy to her, so she stood way far away” (46). This labeling of the hacker as ‘creepy’ is compared to Loga visiting the victims of the attack (Violet, Titus, and the others in their group) while still being connected to the feednet. Titus explains that while she was there physically with them, her mind was clearly engaged with a variety of conversations on the feed that were about them, but disconnected from them. They are now the outsiders, and more interestingly, they do not regard her as creepy when she is mumbling and having outbursts that are not part of their banter within the hospital. Anderson writes that “[o]ccasionally, she’d forget and she’d say out loud ... whatever it was she was saying in her head. She would laugh at jokes we couldn’t hear” (51).

### **You Try to Have Fun Like a Real Person and You’re Screwed**

Violet’s visit with Titus in the hospital is the vehicle which drives readers back to seeing the teens as ‘normal’ and Violet as the outsider. The ability to converse outside the Internet setting, disconnected and anonymous, is a challenge for Titus. This seems to be another identity factor between the teens in the story and the teens reading Anderson’s story. They are disconnected from the first-person experience of being hospitalized in an attack by terrorists; it is disconnected from the experience of knowing what to say to a young woman who is distressed. Titus, like any other teen raised in the ‘light of his brain,’ is at a loss for words when confronting real emotions and instead hopes that a smile can convey his empathy. He is disconnected further from his own experience of

distress because he cannot relate to Violet's distress over the attack. His initial reaction is to seek support from the feed which is not there to guide him to an appropriate purchase to relieve his state of distress. This disconnection is further illustrated in Titus's father.

Young adult readers should be able to connect to, and appreciate, the idea that the father (and potentially mother who hasn't been introduced at this point) is just a big teen himself. He is just as disconnected as his son and the teens, and exhibits the same tendency to mumble and talk incoherently because he is in a number of conversations through 'm-chat' on the feed. Violet's parents do not come to the hospital, further showing her as isolated and somehow different from the other teens in the hospital. The disconnection offered by the hacker affords the teens an opportunity to be 'normal' in ways that are not recognized by the characters; it should be easily picked up by the reader and it is this familial state of play among teens that should help them stay connected with the story. Loga becomes a television for the teens' entertainment at some point—which is indicative of the mindset outsiders in this world must have of U.S. citizens.

From the perspective of a world risk society, the corporations employ everybody (49) except Violet's father. Young adult readers would see him, as a college professor, as an anomaly that is not relevant to their existence; Violet explains that he "teaches the dead languages" (64). Those languages, she explains, include FORTRAN and BASIC, which are the root of all computer programming. This is another experience that young adult readers would not potentially have been exposed to, and therefore is interesting when it is juxtaposed against the idea that he is connected with historians, not language arts. He is, again, an outsider and seen in a negative light by Titus and the community they live in. This alternative to expected values associated with professions eliminates



ideas of categorization because being a college professor isn't as relevant as being a fashion designer in Anderson's world. This change in paradigm illustrates Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, and, further, his concept of autoimmunity because intelligence and scholarship are degraded in the name of looking good.

### **Now a Word from Our Sponsors**

Before following Titus, et al, back to earth, a further deconstruction can be undertaken dealing with the moon. Anderson has indicated the moon is analogous to South Padre Island or Fort Lauderdale (today's most popular spring break destinations) for the timeline in the story. College and high school students flock to a location during the spring semester break to relax; this hasn't changed in the future posited by Anderson. Although set in a place unimagined in today's society—the moon—the descriptions and behaviors are couched in familiar enough terms that allows readers to live vicariously through the text, whether they have experienced such spring break activities themselves or just know of them. This allows for further identification and acceptance that the group is made up of like-minded young men and women to readers. Anderson uses strong descriptions in three specific instances to focus the reader on those moments while the group is on the moon. 'We came, we saw, we conquered' could be conveyed in a reconstructed understanding of the first part of the story, during the rising action, to establish an idea that humanity has now effectively taken over the moon. The teens' arrival at their destination is marked by chaos: "when we got off the ship, our feeds were going fugue with all the banners ... bannered so hard ... blinking and trying to walk forward .... I can't hardly remember any of it. I just remember that everything in the

banners looked goldy and sparkling, but as we walked down to the luggage, all the air vents were streaked with black” (8). The middle of their adventure on the moon is punctuated by the attack by the hacker, as mentioned earlier, which is embedded in a description of the nightclub where images include “tribal dances, stuff with gourds, salsa, houses under breaking dams, women grinning, women oiling men with their fingertips, women taking out their teeth, girls’ stomachs, boys calves, rockets from old ‘movies’ flaring, bikini tops, fingers creeping into nostrils, silos, [and] suns” (37)—descriptions very similar to what the teen readers of the book see on an almost daily basis on reality shows and YouTube videos.

The section closes out with Violet and Titus kissing in the garden at the hospital. Titus narrates that “[t]he vines beat against each other out in the gray, dead garden, they were all writhing against the spine of the Milky Way on its edge, and for the first time, I felt her spine” (63). This idea of contact, of having a physical experience with Violet that is unregulated by the feed, shows a transition of phenomena from being offered as ‘supple’ by the feed when he sees Violet in the Ricochet Lounge to their current location in the hospital. It could be conveyed as a coming-of-age moment, a development in their relationship, or the implementation of Titus’ expectations to find a girl when he arrived from earth. From the perspective of alternate meanings or interpretations, so much a part of Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, this part of the novel offers a myriad of possible readings on the part of readers. Violet could be a member of the *Coalition of Pity* — the organized resistance. Titus’s experience on the moon could be all part of the hack in his head, first introduced at the space port, where he was inundated with light and sounds and which potentially ‘altered’ his perception of everything he experienced on the moon from

that point on. The introduction of the outsider, Violet, could have been directly connected to the hacker at the club; after all, why would Violet—a self-avowed resistor against the feed - have traveled by herself to a spring break destination so promoted by the feed? This would mean that the potential experience in the night club was part of a more elaborate plan established by Anderson during the writing, or, in keeping with deconstruction, readers might come up with an almost endless variety of interpretations based on their own experiences and ideologies.

The use of titles before the return to earth offers yet another meaning to consider, outside the storyline, when deconstructing the early chapters. The titles include *Impact*, *Eden*, *Salad Days*, *w/ Sneeze Guard*, *The Garden*, and ultimately *Release*. One potential explanation could be that Anderson saw this in connection with the Biblical definition of the Garden of Eden. By showing a young man and woman in Eden, in their “salad days” (60), Anderson is able to show them in the Garden of Eden, disconnected from the feed, where they are allowed to be ‘without sin’ and protected. It is only when Violet is informed of the impact of her outsider status, which is not revealed until later and therefore not admissible for deconstruction at this point, that we see her offer Titus physical contact—the forbidden fruit. The connection between drugs, sex and violence is further built upon through the plot in *Feed*. The value for contemporary teens is that they

are continuously exposed to the idea of these three elements that they are innocuous to this generation of readers.

### **Return Your Seats to Their Upright Positions**

Violence continuously has a place in the novel; it opens the story and follows them on their return to earth, under the title of *Release*. During the attack, there is no indication of violence on the part of the old man; rather, the only violence appears to have been perpetuated on him by law enforcement authorities. The teens seem indifferent to the ideas of violence throughout the first half of the book. Link and Marty are engaged in horseplay that is, by description, extremely painful and damaging. On the flight they bash the seats into each other, throw objects into the air which harm others, and repeatedly get in trouble for damaging property. The moon itself, as an active character in the story, does nothing aggressive at all. Anderson illustrates characters that move from horseplay to intimate contact all under the influence of violence. That violence has environmental impacts that the teens are continuously encountering. Their acceptance of the destruction helps to build on the idea that they openly accept the consequences of violence and destruction. This acceptance is required to facilitate the requirements of Burke's theory as a lens to deconstruct Anderson's work.

### **Released from Eden**

The return to earth is written in a manner that provides the antithesis of the Garden of Eden. The assault of sensory input "came down on us like water" (70) Titus explains, and they celebrate deliriously—even Violet, the outsider (71). The reconnection

to their society, to the feednet, is an exhilarating moment in the story. It is written in a language of happiness, and even the feed itself appears happy for them to have returned. “Celebrate fun. Celebrate friends. You’ve just come through something difficult, and this is the time for a table full of love and friendship and the exciting entrees you can only find at ...” (70) the feednet prompts. Their return is defined as ‘Utopia’ by chapter. The feed knows what they want, how they want it, and can offer it to them instantly without consequence—it has embraced them in its familial role and Violet and Titus move through it, “[h]and in hand, we danced” (72). The alternative is to see Titus has reconnected with his love, the feed, and that he is holding hands with the feed itself. There is a spectrum of believable options here, based on the writing style, and the rhetoric is focused on the persuasion of consumerism and acceptance. There is not a clearly defined series of events taking place at this juncture in the story; it is as vague as the arrival to the moon, an explosion of information under which Titus does not struggle, but rather, to which he offers a mental show of affection. This would be comparable to a child in 2014 being given his personal smartphone back after being grounded; it is a direct tie that relies on the experience of being disconnected from technology that Anderson has created by using pathos specifically to recreate the feeling in his readers—and characters. (And how does this tie in to your overall argument about the book? What

ultimate “message” are readers “being fed” through this scenario, as per your argument in this thesis?)

### **Racing to Get to Nowhere**

This concept of acceptance, of identity, is offered in the fact that Titus is not aware of going out and doing nothing; rather, he continuously travels great distances via his parents’ car simply for the sake of going out—another tie between contemporary teens and the teens in Anderson’s world. The symmetry created between the communities is also a rhetorical device that allows for readers to fill the gaps created through the paradox of science fiction and buy into the idea that this is how the world will be; it is so familiar that there should be a sense of *déjà vu*.

Normalcy is trapped within the confines of neighborhoods, where “all the houses and the lawns, each one in its own pod, and everything was ... neat” (77), which offers a mindset that is distinctively conservative and middle-classed, “everything seemed normal” (77). This illusion is continued through the remaining descriptions of the towns themselves, but does not carry through into other parts of the city or country. Violet meets Titus routinely to go on dates at the mall; Titus sees this as an opportunity to show off that he has access to a car—his parents’ car. Her father does not live in an affluent community, even though he is in an occupation that should be respected and pay well. Instead, he lives in a lower-class neighborhood that is conspicuously disconnected; his residence is another example of being outside the community—unattached.

Violet struggles to maintain the connections that she has gained through meeting Titus and his friends. When he takes her to her first ‘group’ party, her impression is that it

should be better than what she had experienced with other outsiders. In the car, the two discuss what it should be like at the party, but the dialogue takes a twist. Violet asks if Titus “think[s] things are going to be different?” (79), leaving readers to identify what point of origin she is talking about—different from what, readers are prompted to ponder. To deconstruct this moment, a reader could come up with many options. The conversation has been based on her experiences with homeschooled children and their gatherings versus Titus and his friends’ gatherings. She could be pondering if her new group of friends will offer her a better experience, or wondering if they (Titus and Violet) will be happier as a couple back in the normalcy of earth. The other option is whether they will be okay in a post-hacker world that closely resembles a post 9/11 world; will it be all right for her, as an outsider, because she is now safely part of their community? Titus’s bisected world is still mixed between the mental and physical continuously; this implies that there is a constant battle within him that is based on natural reactions to her versus what society has told him about her. He is clearly affected by her, and his instinct is to care for her and love her; that may not be the case in his community. The importance of this relationship is that the characters themselves illustrate Ulrich Beck’s global risk society model; they form a community and yet, even with a small group must contend with threats that exist within that paradigm; the definition of threat or terrorist does not have to be directly tied to Muslims, bombings or physical consequences. Instead, in the

case of the relationship—the threat could be to the status quo. Violet represent an attempt to change the values within this novel’s teenage society.

### **Global Risk Society**

In a world where risk is zero, there is so much happening that the idea of community within the feed is overwhelming. The teens are immersed in music, conversations, and dancing—all within their minds. On the outside, the illusion is broken, and it is clear that nothing is happening. Titus describes the scene by indicating that “[e]veryone was nodding their heads to music, or had their eyes just blank with feedcast” (83). In this society, the risk is minimized because people are sedated physically, but allowed to run wild in their minds. The understanding of changing risks is first introduced by Titus; he points out that Loga is at the party, laughing and having fun, indifferent to the one variable that Titus specifically identifies as making her different: “as if she’d never been different from the rest of us, the one left with the feed when the rest of us didn’t have it” (84). This identification offers a new equation in the rhetoric being offered by Anderson; it shows that even those within the community cannot be trusted; they are a potential threat that must be monitored and accounted for because they did not experience the event in the same manner as the others. The ‘event’ that continues to come up is a variable that ties Titus and Violet together, in their minds, as they look on as society tries to return to normal. The two discuss the way the world has continued revolving even though they feel like it must stop to accommodate their need to find a resolution for the attack. Titus says, “I feel like we’re the only two of us who like remember the, like, the thing” (89). While for Violet this is an extension of her status as



an outsider and even encourages her to work at resisting the feed even more, it is a seriously uncomfortable and unfamiliar place for Titus to inhabit, ultimately leading him to reject Violet, sending the message to teen readers—unwittingly or not—that resistance and being on the outside is so disorienting and isolating that it must be avoided at all costs. As such, the novel conveys a rhetoric of conformity and a rhetoric of fear of not fitting in.

### **Inside Our Heads**

Titus has a memory, although disconnected from the story, where the police have entered his mind through the feed at night, and he cannot tell whether they are truly the authorities, or the Coalition of Pity. They are there to check something, and they do not want him snooping around their actions; this is identified through Violet's interaction in the mall with him later. Her revelation about how they are being manipulated to think and act in a manner that allows for the corporations to dictate and predict what their purchasing choices will be ties into the idea of sneaking around in the night, sifting through the mind, picking away at the ideas that have built there; "it's all streamlining our personalities so we're easier to sell to" (97) she posits. The idea of marketing through categories is nothing new, and the ability to understand what is taking place, and attempts to subvert the agenda all eventually result in Violet's death. However, until that moment, she continues to show signs that could be seen as either sympathetic or directly tied to the agenda of the Coalition of Pity. Her plan is to "create a customer profile that's so screwed" (97) that the corporations will not be able to create a marketing strategy that works with her. "I'm not going to let them catalog me" (97) directly goes against the

modern concepts of how the world thinks, but is the general mindset of teenagers; it isn't until they reach adulthood that they begin to accept the idea that society must be catalogued in order for things to continue working as usual. There is no way to become anonymous in a consumer model because everybody must survive, and survival is directly tied to earning and possessing. Violet identifies the process as 'complicating,' 'resisting.' The connection is for readers is that she must accept the consequences of resisting and complicating her role in the system; ultimately, she gets what she was seeking initially because the system rejects her. The message persuades readers to understand that rebellion, even for a short time, can have terminal consequences. The rhetoric of fear is established if the cost of action is too high for the participant; Anderson illustrates death as the end result of breaking free from society to be independent.

### **Back to School™**

Part of the process of indoctrination built around Anderson's United States is the fact that the government no longer is in control; instead, institutions that contemporary society expects to be regulated by state and federal agencies are now owned by corporations. The explanation offered by Titus as narration is that schools no longer are built around science, math, and history. Schools are now built around shopping patterns, trends, and consumerism; it is challenging for him to succeed in school even though it is simply based on wants. Titus believes that the changes in school are good because "we know that the big corps are made up of real human beings, and not just jerks out for money" (109). All of the draws for teens to attend school have been facilitated by corporations so that they can help streamline them into better consumers. They are being

taught “how to work technology and how to find bargains and what’s the best way to get a job and how to decorate our bedrooms” (110) while being fed free pizza. Titus’s experience is juxtaposed against Violet’s homeschool experience. She is introduced to ‘liberal’ ideas dealing with global economic concerns and environmental damage. A variable that is introduced during her education is the reality that the outside world hates the United States; there are direct threats and concerns about the safety of U.S. citizens in a global society. When she attempts to gain further information about the dangers, she finds that the media has been forced to take a positive stance on the threat associated with South America (110). She is absolutely aware that the government is “not a democracy” (111). Titus’s reaction is to immediately take a stance of sarcasm, directing that if the government is not beneficial to him, then the alternative is that Violet is simply wrong. She explains to him that the government would be identified as a Republic because “we elect people to vote for us” (112) rather than having a direct hand in the day-to-day activities of government. This has direct ties to contemporary government; it has been identified in the media and general public as a democracy. However, it is clearly a representative Republic where the public elects representation for the populous. The United States does not have a simple democracy where every citizen has a vote. The theory is apolitical because no single political party has an absolute statement attributing this theory to the dogma supported by the organizations. It is her outside mentality that bothers Titus and causes him to look at her as a member of the fringe element of society.

To fit in, one must be engineered, internally and externally, to buy into the idea of being controlled, and to emulate the characteristics of ‘identity.’

### **Built Like DelGlacey Murdoch**

Anderson paints a world where children are designed and produced, not by parents, but in conceptionariums by geneticists; this means that people who are trusted are all modeled after this form of reproduction. Titus finds that not only did his parents go with their own genetic traits, but also wanted added features built around a minor celebrity—DelGlacey Murdoch. While the actor is not relevant to rhetoric, the idea that to be accepted, to identify with the group, requires the addition of an accepted celebrity endorsement does specifically tie into rhetoric of establishing trust through identity. Violet is not a product of the conceptionarium. Rather, she is a product of traditional reproduction and delivery by a midwife; she is an outsider, again. The decisions made by her parents, to wait until she was seven to have the feed technology implanted, along with her decision to continue to resist consumerism all play a critical role in how Titus, and society, sees her—and reacts to her distress. Violet could also be seen as symbolic of the earth; her slow spiral toward death is mirroring the death of the planet at the hands of Anderson’s fictional United States. He further shows Violet and her circumstances to be a problem for Titus’ father which can be solved by offering him material possessions to replace her loss for the teen. For Titus’s dad, she is simply a problem. The solution means that she, as a teen, is easily replaceable in the community; her attempt to be an

independent member of the society has direct impacts on her value within that community.

### **I Bought the Dodge**

The traditional dinner with a girlfriend is a time of bonding; however, in Titus' case, the joy of a new car purchase is shaded by the realization that the hacker was killed the night of the attack, and the non-reaction to that incident shows a very conditioned response toward violence. That conditioning continues to reactions about the environment being null, and even when evidence of ecological catastrophe is presented, the threat is ignored. The distraction of consumerism is offered to continuously camouflage what is going on around the teens. Violet has revealed that she is having significant medical issues that should be concerning to Titus. Instead, he is worried about whether he made the right car purchase, and whether it is the right color, but specifically not about how she is showing signs of dying. Even death seems to take a back seat to purchasing decisions.

### **The Professor**

Titus is introduced to Violet's father in a way that seems trivial; he is picking her up for a date to take her in his new car to the country. It is the description of the man, showing him as being too intelligent, which leaves readers feeling like he is foreign. Anderson explains that the father got his feedscanner at a different time, when the technology was much more antiquated and required glasses and hardware to function (135). The transition from the introduction of the college professor to the arrival in the country affords readers the ability to gather that Violet has a non-traditional family;

according to Violet, her mother and father are not married and her mother lives in South America. The country includes illustrations of steak mazes, air factories versus trees, and filet mignon growing like plants; “the tissue spread for miles around the paths where we were walking. It was like these huge hedges of red all around us, with these beautiful marble patterns running through them” (142). The world has been destroyed by the society which is worried more about spending than saving what remains of it. The oceans are toxic, clouds are simply weather balloons and most homes have their own seasonal control built within the pods. For a society that is so well connected mentally, they are physically isolated and unaware of the global crisis which is forming around them.

### **Back into the Mind of Terror**

Titus realizes that the nightmares he is having are connected to an outside agent that is introducing images of violence mixed with consumerism to him and it doesn't bother him. There is no identification of who the agent is, but it appears that it could be signals from the hack. The interesting correlation between his dream and contemporary young adult readers is that the images are symbolic of foreign ideas: “praying over missiles ... a kid from another culture, where they wear dresses ... shadows ... bruises ... guns” (152). The deconstruction combined with Burke's ideas of teens being exposed to violence all lead to ideas associating mistrust of outsiders with terrorism. The ideas of terrorism continue into fashion trends that Titus is exposed to after the dreams. His friends are wearing ‘Riot Gear:’ clothing that is worn out and torn and “beat up to look like one of the big twentieth-century riots” (158). The clothing collections are even broken down by the specific riot they are connected to. The lack of understanding of what

the riots mean historically is played out well when Calista and Loga discuss the Watts Riot top Calista is wearing. Violet asks her about the historical events that led to the riot, and she realizes that she sounds pretentious because she knows something about history (163). It is at this moment of realization that she is intelligent when Violet truly becomes an outsider and is isolated from the group because she isn't vapid or duped into consumerism. Titus points out during a fight with Violet that it feels like "[she]'s watching us, instead of being us" (167).

### **Dying Flowers**

Anderson makes a strong statement by showing that Violet is an outsider, and that she received her wetware connecting her to the feed later in life than the other teens. This becomes the main reason for her deterioration and, ultimately, her death. She continues to go to technicians as she begins her decline, but the decision is made by the corporations not to help her because she is a trouble maker, an outsider, who refuses to accept and embrace consumerism. The society in which these teens exist is dying; they have lesions from the effects of their manufactured lives, and yet, they still are only concerned with buying. Titus is exposed to ideas that are broad, relevant, and beneficial; yet, he chooses to ignore them to continue purchasing pants to mourn the death of Violet. The story is a vast sea of gray, and ultimately, Violet stands out, but only momentarily, as Titus continues to walk along a path of indecision, a member of a community so wired to the feed and its consumer mentality it cannot break away—even if it wanted to, as demonstrated by Violet's ill-fated attempt to resist the feed. The ending of the novel, therefore, seems to send contradictory messages to teen readers: work toward changing

the world before it truly becomes like the world painted in the novel, but this may bring dire personal consequences. Resistance equals being shunned and possible physical death; conformity equals survival and being accepted by the “right” crowd. Belonging is the ultimate goal and reward for teens; will teen readers understand, sympathize, and agree with Violet or follow Titus’s example?

As a whole, *Feed* offers young adult readers an idea; it builds on an event that is similar to 9/11 for a group of teenagers on Spring Break. The outcome and the stories which tie their lives together led down the road to confirmation. Readers who are targeted by Anderson as the audience for this novel will not have an understanding of critical analysis, and more than likely, will struggle to understand that this story is a satire. Anderson is not acting as an agent with an agenda to persuade young adults to live in a perpetual state of fear and demand for conformity; rather, his work acts as a magnifying lens—refracting and expanding on the culture itself—producing a story that reflects the culture of fear and confirmation that teens are bombarded with on a daily basis. There is always the potential intent for Anderson to be prodding teenage readers to become more aware of the rhetoric in order to break the cycle of fear that has developed in a post 9/11 America. However, he may, unwittingly, be reinforcing and perpetuating rhetoric, possibly leading teen readers to conclude that, yes, the world is in a state of self-destruction, but that they are not likely to make an impact that is makeable enough to



accept the consequences. Worse—they may ask if they are capable of really making an impact at all.

### **Experiencing Phenomena**

Readers of *Feed* cannot have an authentic sensory connection with this dystopian world because it is fiction; it is that disconnection that leads them to fill the gaps with what they know now. The technology available, combined with corporate modeling and government control existing today, affords for young adult readers to attempt to make sense of a future world they have not experienced by applying their current experiences. This creates a déjà vu moment for them when technology or events occur in their own future that is similar to what Anderson has predicted. Teens are further offered an experience where hackers are bad, being different has risks, and not getting along with corporations could be fatal. This idea of group thinking, of being part of the safety of a crowd is explored further in Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*. The continuing model of finding acceptance within the group — identity of association — which allows for success in life and the community is explored further in the next chapter.

### Chapter 3: Skin Deep

#### The Ugly Truth

*Uglies* is the first novel in a series of dystopian science fiction written by Scott Westerfeld. Like *Feed*, the story explores ideas which cannot be actively experienced by contemporary readers. Therefore, a young adult audience would have to rely on prior experiences and input about this future world provided by Westerfeld to make conclusions about the novel and what they should take from the experience of visiting this model of Earth; it is established that the story is 100 years in the future (31). The setting in both *Uglies* and *Feed* is the same, but the moment of terror, when readers are introduced to the story itself, has already occurred in *Uglies*. This is an alternative point of view than the one offered in *Feed*, where the event is on the horizon and has not occurred in the storyline. Westerfeld has taken a post-apocalyptic approach to the placement of his society within the world; it is a recovering society which has changed the model of government and community to attempt to not only improve, but also avoid future acts of terror by individuals or groups who do not agree with the leadership. In *Uglies*, the world is built around the remaining resources and power, and identification and grouping is used actively to help control and restrain humanity. Westerfeld has created a story that seemingly encourages the idea that it is okay to be different, that individuality is a good thing, and that questioning an authority intent on demanding conformity in order to erase differences that contribute to inequality is critical in order to build a successful world that is embracing of every person; however, when deconstructed

and examined further, the potential for appeals to fear of “others” (i.e. anyone outside the approved “norm”) immediately rises to the top of the list of possible lessons learned from his novel. This attempt to persuade through identity and fear continues to illustrate the world risk society model and the use of phenomenology to help supplant ideas that could easily be seen as a continuation of stereotyping and othering individuals who are not accepted into the community; this ostracizing of people who choose to rebel sets a precedence of fear of being irrelevant, or worse, it militates ideas of terrorism under outdated models that are not relevant or fact based, but knee-jerk reactions to 9/11. *Feed* takes a perspective of the United States, as contemporary readers know it, beginning the transition into something else—a terminal state—while *Uglies* presents readers with a United States that has formed in the wake of that change; this is how the world will be according to Westerfeld. Technology is another rhetorical device used in *Uglies* that helps young adult readers connect well with characters in Westerfeld’s novel. *Feed* offers ideas about how technology will become part of humanity; it will be involved in the creation, education, and existence of society. This is juxtaposed against technology within the world of *Uglies*, where the modifications of applying technology to society are undertaken in stages. Readers are introduced to the idea in a beneficial manner that eventually is illustrated as something that cannot be categorized. Westerfeld never comes out and says that the United States defined in his novel is based around dangerous or evil paradigms; instead, the story ascribes ideas about the threatening state of the modern world through the eyes of teenage protagonists inside and outside of the community. The ability to identify with a character that is ordinary fits into the model Aristotle associates with rhetoric.

### **Old Bridge (synopsis)**

In the world of Westerfeld's novel, physical appearance based on a scientifically-charted model, designed with the intention of eliminating racism or aesthetic values, is the demarcation between childhood and the entrance into adulthood; it is also the tool used to help establish, both geographically and psychologically, a sense of community and isolation. Those under the age of sixteen—the age established as the transition into adulthood—are called “uglies” because they have not yet undergone the government mandated cosmetic surgery to make them “pretty” and, therefore, part of the “accepted” population. Anyone past the age of sixteen who is still an “ugly” is seen as the worst kind of outsider, for that person is unable to belong with any group, children, teen, or adult. Along with the surgery that anatomically creates specific life stages (pre- and post-op), this world is geographically divided up to establish clear boundaries between the different groups according to their life stages. Uglyville is situated across a river, which is forded by an “old bridge stretched massively across the water, its huge iron frame as black as the sky” (13). The narrative goes on to explain that “it had been built so long ago that it held up its own weight, without” (13) the use of technology that is found throughout the community. The enclave is separated from the rest of society, and parental authority, to help students become indoctrinated with concepts that are specifically monitored and regulated by the government within Westerfeld's America. This is contrasted with New Pretty Town, which lies in view of the dorms at the school for the uglies. They are exposed, nightly, to the parties and other rabbleroising that occurs just within earshot of

them. This helps, psychologically, to acclimatize them to what awaits them if they follow the rules established by the agents in control.

This environment is divided by age group and, ultimately, purpose within society. The youngest children are littlies, who live with the older generation (usually middle to late pretties), their parents. As they progress, they become uglies and then new pretties. The transition to becoming a new pretty means that they have access to nightly parties, fancy clothing, and sexual experiences (54). This segment of society lives in mansions and drinks and lives the life of celebrities. They eventually continue the process, surgically, of becoming middle pretties. These are the civil servants of the community and “always [know] what to do” (58) in situations; they are the role models the uglies seem to look up to and are considered wise. They are also seen as authority figures for the community. The next step in the transition for this community is the late pretties who represent parents and beyond. Defined as “crumbly,” this group is made up of the working middle class on up through retirees (205). The one element of the society that is not part of the life cycle are the specials. These are the agents who dictate what happens and how things occur within the community. They are synonymous with conspiracy theory and “gremlins” because people “blame them when anything weird happens” (254). Tally describes them as not pretty, but they are clearly surgically enhanced. They are faster than other humans, meaner, and appear to be super human in nature. Outside of the community, Tally is introduced to the society known as The Smoke. Shay explains the community as being “like a city, only smaller. And no one was in charge there, and no one was pretty” (267). The people there are connected with David, a mysterious character who was born and raised outside of the pretty society. His parents are doctors who

developed and performed surgeries that were the original experiments for the current mandated operations in Tally's world; when they find out why the surgeries were taking place and what, specifically was being done during the surgery, it led them to leave and establish the ultimate outsider community, The Smoke. Members of this society work in the wild, live hard lives, and appreciate their physical differences. Dr. Cable and the agency she works for consider them at best misguided, and at worst, a major threat to the system they have established; the mission against them is to rehabilitate them and reintroduce them, after the operation, to the society they shunned.

### **Cat Vomit**

Young adult readers are immediately bombarded with imagery that focuses on color versus the rebellion that is the introduction to Tally Youngblood. Tally is a teen on the verge of becoming a young adult in the society staged by Westerfeld. The use of identity and group thinking are immediately employed by establishing that being pretty, having fun, and finding young love are critical for teens to be content; this is juxtaposed against the backdrop of freedom earned through deception. New Pretty Town is established as the transition from the school dorms to a life of happiness. Tally and the other uglies are virtually encouraged to sneak across the river that divided Pretty Town from the Uglyville to witness the spectacle of living that they will eventually become part of by the placement of landmarks within this society. Tally observes that "hot-air balloons pulled at their tethers ... passengers shooting safety fireworks at other balloons and passing parasailers ... laughter and music skipped across the water like rocks thrown with just the right spin" (Westerfeld 11). The analogy of skipping stones could mean that the

agents that run New Pretty Town actively seek to draw the attention of the younger members of the society, enticing them to join this community. Other early word choices designed to help establish that the reader would follow Tally out the window includes the idea that “[e]veryone ugly was in bed now” (11) and when Tally leaves the dormitory through the window, she “instantly felt better” (12). This is aided with rhetoric that has been established, in the novel, about how the new pretties are allowed to behave versus the restrictions imposed on uglies. Tally points out that her friend Peris can now routinely sleep in as late as he wishes because it is one of the perks of having the surgery performed (13). Something that is not set forth in the character introductions is what is being defined as ugly or pretty; it is secondary to the idea of rebellion, of childhood indiscretion. This allows readers to follow along and establish an identity with Tally and the uglies before having to understand what it means to be labeled as such within Westerfeld’s society. The strongest variable set by the author early on is the battle between being ugly and achieving a state of pretty. In *Uglies*, all young adults eventually get to experience being pretty; it is critical to the establishment of fear later because it is a matter of fact that the surgery will happen and the experiences observed by the children in the dorms are a constant state of revelry and happiness within the community across the river. Tally is smart enough to be able to decode information sent from electronic mail, memorize locations through a map she has only examined (17) and even move among the pretties without being detected—yet the focus is still on being accepted into a community based on aesthetics—not the previously mentioned intellectual capacities. She has a genuine fear of being caught, not because she will be punished, but because she is ugly. Westerfeld closes the first chapter of this story by adding insult to injury—Tally

disguises herself by wearing a pig mask. Her mission from Uglyville is not so simple. She has been ostracized from her love interest because of her appearance; his transformation has afforded him a new life, and she is desperate to know if she is still relevant to him. The risks she is willing to take, unknown punishment, simply to have him say that he still accepts her and she still is important are key in helping build the model of group identity at this stage. Westerfeld appears to be showing a critical flaw in the society—an absurd focus on aesthetics. Instead, what emerges under the deconstructive lens is a society that is worried about maintaining group cohesion and systematically creates ‘othering’ models. The bisected aspect of this process unfolds as individuals break the rules simply to maintain the group identity. The ruling leadership within Westerfeld’s novel is attempting to allow a managed form of rebellion to help facilitate conformity, but that rebellion is only spreading into Uglyville, outside of the control and management of the agency in charge. Everyone wants to be pretty because “unlike ugly part[ies], there’d never be any fights, or even arguments [in New Pretty Town]” (30).

### **Falling into Space**

The introduction of heterotopic devices begins with the crossing of the bridge via a rope; the clandestine nature of sneaking across an ancient bridge into a new world provides readers with an escape from being ugly, alongside Tally, into a world where parades, drinking, sexual prowess, and fun all take center stage; this is not enough to help disassociate readers from the fiction—to immerse them in the dystopian nature of this future Earth. Technology within New Pretty Town is the secondary heterotopic device



used to move readers further into Westerfeld's world. Hover technology is used in almost every facet of life within the community. Tally witnesses a person jump from the buildings wearing a jacket designed to act like a bungee cord. The device will eventually allow her to escape when she is detected and flees from New Pretty Town, and eventually be used to help infiltrate other areas of the community later in the novel. It is a device that repeatedly allows for access into spaces the reader cannot directly enter on his or her own. The architecture is also controlled by this technology; Tally describes the view of Garbo Mansion as a "fat, bright, and loud" (26) structure that is straddled by two slender towers; [e]ach of the towers rested on a single column no wider than an elevator" (26). The top of the tower branched out into five stories that were big enough to support parties on their "circular balconies" (26). The illusion of champagne glasses is directly remarked upon by Tally (27); it is also important to note that Westerfeld points out through narration that if the technology that allowed for the new pretties to enjoy life and party was to fail, the community itself would be destroyed. A secondary meaning behind the obvious foreshadowing could be that conformity within the city allows for them to live the carefree lifestyle they are enjoying, and any anomaly, such as an ugly infiltrating their sanctuary, could make "everything in New Pretty Town ... come tumbling down" (28). The journey that Tally makes, using a hoverboard, connects her, and readers, with the idea of freedom associated with air travel. This is, according to Fred Erisman, connected with America's "zeal of messianic fervor" (38) connected with air travel and early young adult writers. The variable that has changed is that the heterotopic device—air power—is directly tied to young men during World War II. The other devices that help transport Tally to the Smoke include the river, the rollercoaster, the railway lines, and even the

Ranger's helicopter that ultimately leaves her on a hill to await David and the other outcasts. All of these devices actively help the reader see that Tally is moving from a culture that is bound by the restrictions of the audience to a world that is free of obligations and boundaries. Her return trip to Uglyville to face the Specials takes another path of heterotopic contexts that help create an atmosphere that is distinctly separate from the wilderness she is in with David. A secondary attribution connected with the technology in Tally's world is the juxtaposition between beneficial science and technology being used in a manner that would be fear-inducing in contemporary readers. Teens would not be comfortable with sacrificing their individuality to gain perfection.

### **A Pig in Zen**

The continued use of the word pig throughout the chapter helps to establish how Tally feels, and the society she is masquerading in, as well. She wears the mask which is juxtaposed against the mask of prettiness that this segment of her society employs. "Have you seen the piggy? ... There's a piggy on the loose!" is stated during the party she is crashing because it is a 'white tie' affair (31). The fact that she is wearing a mask is not nearly as important to this group as is her poor choice of costume. This further helps build on the idea of 'othering' Tally. This society has created an idea of pretty that is based on their biological belief system. It is an ascribed value that is at the root of their society. Tally's concept of what it is to be ugly and pretty has been indoctrinated to her through the education system. Westerfeld defines this as:

There was a certain kind of beauty, a prettiness that everyone could see.

Big eyes and full lips like a kid's; smooth, clear skin; symmetrical

features; and a thousand other little clues. Somewhere in the backs of their minds, people were always looking for these markers. ... A million years of evolution had made it part of the human brain. (38)

She is not pretty in comparison to Peris; her love interest has rejected her and removed the markers that made them a group—the scar on each of their hands—as a testament to her being outside his safe community. Upon noticing that his palm is perfect, she realizes that the surgeons had removed it and she takes it as an insult to who they are as a couple—as a group.

### **Not in Paris Anymore**

The final contact between Tally and Peris is broken by the fact that she is getting her mud onto his tuxedo; it is analogous to her getting her filth onto his pristine cleanliness. He is now pure, and she is not pure by the standards of their society. “His distress [at being sullied] made Tally want to hug him again” (45), to make him better, but he rejects her advances tout court. The rejection is downplayed immediately by the revelation that Tally’s rebellion is putting her future as a pretty at risk. She notes to herself that “she would really be in trouble if they caught her now. She’d never even heard of anyone doing anything this bad” (53). She does not get into trouble for this adventure; rather, she is simply conforming to the idea of rules that have been established through her indoctrination in school; it has set her up to never question, avoid problems, and follow directions. The fear of remaining ugly has persuaded her to risk her life to see a young man, and jump off a building to avoid consequences in a society built around aesthetics. The value of the surgery is apparent to readers; freedom and control are gained

when someone goes from being a teenager to an adult; it is this transition that is important to young readers. Another variable in the process is introduced as Tally escapes New Pretty Town and finds that middle pretty wardens are looking for her; she explains that they look and act like the teachers she encounters in school. This means that the third part of the surgery is designed to establish authority over the new pretties, uglies and littlies. She is compelled to turn herself in, but fights the urge, because the importance of joining Peris as a pretty overpowers her programming to always tell the middle pretties everything she's done wrong. Tally almost turns herself in to the authorities to maintain her place within the group until she finds that there is another ugly hiding in the community as well. The addition of Shay (another sixteen-year-old) allows her to feel that she is part of a group again immediately, and both individuals are relieved to find that they are not alone—their fear is conquered by identity again.

### **Shay**

The introduction of Shay allows for Tally to mourn her disconnection with her prior group and find connections with a new one. This establishes an even stronger sense of identity with readers because they can associate with their friends aging and moving on. Tally explains that if Peris had been her boyfriend, she would never have gone over (68), but because they were simply friends she thought he would accept her unconditionally. Her realization that he is distancing himself from her because he has moved on and she hasn't indicates to her that the bonds of true friendship can be broken. This sets up the rhetorical device of establishing a new friendship with Shay, a friendship based on the fact that they are both alone and isolated from their previous peer group—

something teen readers of this novel will explicitly understand and maybe have even experienced personally. Shay also allows for the introduction of technology and travel devices that help further establish heterotopia on a larger scale. Tally learns to use hoverboards through her friendship with Shay. Rather than having to deal with the consequences of falling down and learning—and being potentially damaged by the experience—the hoverboards utilize safety features through bracelets that keep riders from being injured. This idea that even risky behavior is safe helps to desensitize readers through the phenomenological experience being established through the text. Technology continues to be presented as a safety net that protects individuals; this trend continues throughout Westerfeld's novel. Shay also offers Tally her first experience in growing up. Identification by name, instead of the nicknames which had been the norm up this point, means that Tally is seen as a person in the novel, without the surgery, which potentially helps destabilize the concept of conformity early on with Shay. The two girls also share an identical birthday; it is a point of contention that will be used as a form of persuasion by Shay later in the book. It is evident to readers that Shay is not as excited about having her birthday, and by proxy the surgery, as Tally is.

### **Behind the Mask**

Westerfeld has created two characters that are diametrically opposite; their stance about the surgery, conformity, and change are bisected by their first conversation about the surgery. Tally is excited, expressing her desire to be changed and values Shay's input about which surgery enhances her features. The idea of rebellion does not exist in her to the same degree as Shay. Tally has used the technology made available to all uglies to

create profiles of what they want to look like; Shay has not. This desire not to change immediately begins to make Shay an outsider versus Tally. “Everyone made morphos, even littlies ... [i]t was a great waste of a day, figuring out all the different ways you could look when you finally became pretty” (87). Through badgering, Tally convinces Shay to allow a morpho to be created of her—opening up the science behind the technology to readers. The concept of symmetry immediately comes into play in this chapter. Tally and Shay offer symmetry through their duality as they explore the potential outcomes of the surgery together; neither of them has the same desire to look a certain way, and more specifically, neither of them feels the same way about the surgery. This division begins the process of directing Tally back toward a conformity model within her original group at the expense of her friendship with Shay. Shay is an outsider who refuses to change and is too focused on “hoverboarding” at this stage of the novel. The definition of Shay’s skin as olive and the desire for Tally to lighten her skin and make her blonde also offers another potential variable about trusting people who look the same; she wants to eliminate the values that make Shay different and, potentially, therefore not directly tied to Tally’s idea of the nation-state within which they exist. The catalyst for change appears to be summarized in Shay’s explanation of why the surgery exists; she indicates that “[e]veryone judged everyone else based on their appearance. People who were taller got better jobs, and people even voted for some politicians just because they weren’t quite as ugly as everybody else” (95). It is the statement made afterward that directly ties to a post-9/11 world. She indicates that people killed each other over the color of their skin; this group identity marker is directly attributed to Shay being “olive skinned” (94). When the two are leaving to go outside and practice hoverboarding again, a literary device that

represents freedom, Tally asks Shay if she thinks that the image of a pretty-version of Shay is an improvement. Shay states that it isn't her. Rather, it is a "committee's idea of me" (95). There is a direct statement of conformity found in looking alike; it is relevant to establish that those who look different cannot be trusted, or advance in society.

### **Off-Limits**

Shay offers the first connection with the outside world when she approaches Tally with the idea of breaking free from the group, even momentarily, and traveling to places beyond the confines of their known "world"; this is defined as off-limits, and it is clear that the technology designed to monitor the children is set up to stop them from leaving their play area. One area of note in the off-limits sector of their geographical area is the ruins. It is defined as "The Rusty Ruins" and it is "a hulking reminder of back when there'd been way too many people, and everyone was incredibly stupid. And ugly" (102). The trip to get out to The Rusty Ruins requires Tally and Shay to cross the river where the white water rapids are part of the experience. This combination of exciting fun, surfing a river, along with the risks of the boards not working means that young adult readers are offered the final heterotopic device that helps move them away from the contemporary world into the 23<sup>rd</sup> century proposed by Westerfeld. Their trip to the pre-apocalyptic city ruins is a combination of riding and walking through various terrains. Distances are not really explained other than in imagery that affords no quantifiable data; however, one point that is absolute is that Shay does not want to go there alone, and Tally "shivered at the thought of being there alone" (122). This directly ties into the need for a group identity for security within the towns, and in the wilderness. The experience also offers

Tally a better understanding of how the city “fools you about how things really work” (124) because during the walk she must carry the hoverboard; it does not benefit from the metal grid that exists within the prescribed community. The Rusty Ruins is used still by the community to take children on school trips and for museum purposes (133). Westerfeld alludes to what has happened “on that last, horrible day” (134), but avoids giving much information about what catastrophic incident occurred. At this point, it could be posited through the text that this antiquated society fell due to a combination of economic and environmental factors that culminated in a singular event that brought about the downfall of humanity. While people continued to exist, the event itself helped shape the future world that evolved. This is Westerfeld’s ground zero. In context, Tally continuously refers to civilization before hers as the Rusties and the “not-as-crazy pre-Rusties” (150). This seems to be the demarcation line for the catastrophic event on this earth. The introduction of another outsider through the character of David opens up the door for Tally to find a group to identify with that is not part of her original identity. This offers an experience to young adult readers to realize that, as people move out of their communities and grow up and move on in life, it is not the end, but merely part of a bigger process.

### **Having Fun**

Tally learns from her experience to the ruined city. She identifies that those things she has grown up with, that she trusts, are not real; they are artificial experiences designed to maximize pleasure and imitate risk. The city was fake in less than obvious ways; “the buildings and bridges held up by hoverstruts, or jumping off a rooftop with a



bungee jacket on, nothing was quite real there” (154). The rhetorical message passed along to readers is that if society doesn’t do what is best for itself, then it will fall to chaos and ruin. This idea of needing to be careful and environmentally conscious is built around the idea that there are people who are not acting in the best interest of a global society and they need to be contained. In Tally’s world, everything that is not within the protection of the community is an outsider and a terror risk that must be subjugated to the community’s will—or deleted. One tool used to control the population is fear; it is propagated and reinforced by the uglies themselves; the idea of bullying is lost on this society; rather, they see it as a rite-of-passage that helps create legends. What is transpiring is a society built around fear of true and permanent non-conformity which is passed down from one generation of students to the next.

### **Perfect Programming**

The transitions in the uglies’ society are at twelve (when they first become uglies) and sixteen (when they become pretties through surgery). Tally’s internal narrative specifically defines the four years between those transition points as “a stage of life she was glad to be leaving behind” (159). She promises Peris that she would avoid trouble, but the last few weeks before the operation are marked by pulling bigger stunts against the incoming freshmen students. Shay and Tally work out a plan to use the bungee jackets to pretend that they’ve been in a fight in the library and Shay has fallen; this is all secondary to the fact that they are wearing fake noses, “penciled-in eyebrows (153)” and extra clothing to look fat. The impression is that they are hiding who they are for security purposes—they don’t want to get in trouble. However, another interpretation that could

be made is that they are making a mockery of those things they fear, specifically aesthetic, during the last few days of their existence in an ugly society. It is when they are escaping from their trick in the library that Shay reveals to Tally that she does not see her as ugly. Tally's response only validates the indoctrination working. She points out that "I'm an ugly, you're an ugly. We will be for two more weeks" (167). She also points out that it isn't a big deal—but it clearly is. The reintroduction of David into the conversation leads into reformed identity because Tally immediately wants to make him an outsider; she is hoping that Shay is just nervous about having the operation and any furtive attempt at convincing Tally to run away is met with threats of isolation from the newly formed group. Tally is threatened by the idea that she is not truly "ugly" and that the need for the surgery is only for the benefit of those who choose to make her another "hyped-up Barbie doll" (170). Since she has never met David, Tally continues to act as if he's a fictional character that Shay has created. She tells her that Shay has deluded herself into thinking that David and his community are real, in the same way she has deluded herself into thinking that the surgery is not needed, and that being or staying ugly is not only okay, but even desired. She states, serving as a mouthpiece for the dogma of "ugly is bad" and only a temporary stage with a solution: "You can't change it just by wishing, or by telling yourself that you're pretty. That's why they invented the operation" (171). The rhetoric of fear has been firmly implanted in Tally, telling her that she will be ugly until she has the surgery—and she accepts that wholeheartedly. Shay repeatedly attempts to convince Tally that it is not a natural reaction to expect beauty; it is a programmed response created by their society (perhaps echoing the countless beauty ads that the teen readers are exposed to on a daily basis). Ultimately, Tally argues in support of the operation because

“it’s fair” (171). She does not like the nature of randomness that comes with appearance. She is afraid of the alternative. Tally points out that because of the surgery, there are “no losers” (171).

### **Setting a Bad Example**

Shay explains for the benefit of readers that there are, in fact, losers in the operation process. People who cannot undergo the procedure for unidentified reasons are forced to remain uglies for life; this sets up readers to understand the fear associated with the possibility of not having a “fair” shake at life through aesthetics. The conclusion of this conversation is that Tally believes that being pretty, having the operation, is part of growing up, that society only fights because people who are ugly are not “happy with who they are” (174) and, that, ultimately, “she was sick of this whole ugly business, and just wanted it to end” (175). Shay merely ends the conversation because she sees the process as a boundary designed to control who she will become. This is a turning point for the pair, and changes the dynamic the reader is exposed to through the rhetoric of conformity offered by Tally. The sheer violence attributed to the operation itself is minimized by Tally as the cost of being pretty—even if that means looking like everybody else. After the fight, Shay returns to make one last plea for Tally to change her mind.

### **Under Pressure**

Shay explains that she is leaving the community, that she will not be getting the operation, and that Tally should go with her. She tells Tally that her own friends

abandoned her, and that it was the ability to rejoin a group, with Tally, that allowed her to find the courage to resist the operation and go out and find David. This idea of true and permanent rebellion shocks Tally because she has convinced herself that all of their antics were part of the process of growing up, of conforming—the world she lives in offers “safe” rebellion in order to promote future conformity. Shay’s leaving is a major event within the story. She leaves Tally behind, not because she thinks it is the right decision, but because she is unable to convince her to leave and live in the Smoke. All the things that Tally fears come to fruition through her friendship with Shay; she finds herself being isolated and alone from both communities she is attached to. This problem is also experienced by young adult readers because they see that neither answer is the right one. In a society where children are told that if they do as they are told, things will go well, an odd paradox emerges; it is even more damaging to know that the decision not to do what should seem as natural is also the wrong choice. If Tally goes with Shay, the possibility of a better outcome is offered, but one that Tally is not prepared to risk because of her indoctrinated obsession with becoming a pretty. Tally’s decision to stay and follow through with the next stage in life is short lived, however. Tally is forced to become an “undercover agent” and chase down Shay and the outsider community she has escaped to if she ever wants to become pretty—she is denied the surgery until she fulfills her “traitorous” mission; in effect, she does the right thing—conforms to her community’s rules—only to have her community punish her by withholding her right to ‘equality’ in New Pretty Town until she helps those in power eliminate the threat of individuality and non-conformity—a confusing and ironic message for readers who consistently face the conflicting messages of “be yourself” and “follow the rules.”

## **Creating Fear**

Before being tasked to root out the dangerous rebellious element that Shay and the others living in the Smoke (a kind of commune of dissenters) represent, Westerfeld shows readers the doubt Shay has planted into Tally's mind. Upon her initial visit to the place where the surgery is supposed to take place, Westerfeld describes Tally as scared of the experience of having the operation; she walks alone down the halls of the clinic, and realizes that the procedure involves having "her body ... opened up, the bones ground down to the right shape, some of them stretched or padded, her nose cartilage and cheekbones stripped out and replaced with programmable plastic, skin sanded off and reseeded like a soccer field in spring" (200). This idea of complete destruction for the value of looking like everybody else no longer absolutely appeals to her because Shay has made her face the reality of the physical surgery—it is no longer an abstract concept of "becoming pretty," but, rather, a physical ordeal that has the potential of doing real harm. Teen readers could take this understanding in stride because they are part of a society that is desensitized to the concept of violence, but not terror. Tally even muses that the surgery wouldn't even be necessary if society accepted people as they were, even ugly; having a teen character that readers can relate to wonder about the need for aesthetic perfection would certainly make those readers pause and reflect on the aesthetic values of their own society. Statements made about the driver that comes to take her to the hospital are built around respect for authority and control. She indicates that she feels compelled to treat him with enough reverence for his position in life that she wishes she had dressed more formally for the trip (204). During her trip, the river comes up again as

she crosses it; it is a definitive tool designed to keep readers moving along. The river acts like a roadmap because, no matter where readers go in the story, a river runs through the environment Tally is in contact with. It is only when she gets near the Smoke that she is no longer connected with the river of her youth. She arrives at the hospital only to be exposed to a new adult—one that inspires fear in her. It is evident that this individual had an operation that was designed to create a commanding presence over the members of Westerfeld's society. This "special" (a member of a special forces-like group of adults) takes her to another location, without any information other than she will not be having the operation (which itself inspires the fear of never being able to truly belong in her world), where she sees another part of the community she lives in. The buildings are painted "the color of dried grass" (211) which she thinks may be "designed to make its occupants vaguely nauseated" (212). The characteristics of a military or government installation are not pretty—and the people that work within that system are not worried about looking attractive. Rather, they are all designed to have an image of control and power. Tally observes that they all are wearing formal uniforms, and their "faces ha[ve] the same cold, hawkish look" (212). She defines them as "predatory forms" (212). Readers will not have been exposed to people who have been surgically modified to elicit specific responses to their features or physical characteristics; however, they will be able to draw upon experiences in their past that connect adults with being dominant figures through facial gestures, imposing size, or other types of body language that communicate control and possibly threatening authority.

## **Chasing Shadows**

Tally finds out that she did not sneak anything by the adults she deals with; she will not get her surgery unless she is willing to act as an agent to track down Shay and the other runaways who are now occupying the Smoke (215). The introduction of Dr. Cable shows that control is definitely in place within this society; Tally has unwittingly allowed herself to become a tool to help force conformity on the members of society that have become physical and symbolic outsiders (they live outside the approved community and have remained “ugly”) with the goal of maintaining their independence. Cable explains to Tally that the city “is a paradise ... it feeds you, educates you, keeps you safe. It makes you pretty” (219). This idea of the city being more important than friends is fully comprehensible to (and likely accepted by) a fair percentage of the contemporary audience because they have been trained to mistrust outsiders. Cable illustrates values of control and fear of anything foreign to the nation-state when she expresses that “occasionally bad things come from outside the city” (220). Cable explains that the agency she is connected with, Special Circumstances, is designed to protect the city from other cities that sometimes “pose a challenge” (220) to their society. There is a message that bringing things into the community from the outside is bad or dangerous because these elements cannot be purified. Tally’s expulsion from her “safe” community and the postponement of her operation affords Tally exposure those very elements which Cable is attempting to convince her are negative and dangerous. Ironically, it is that exposure that allows Tally to see that other groups are not as threatening as the mistrust built into New Pretty Town implies. The organization’s use of Tally’s parents to help attempt to force her

cooperation is an interesting touch; readers sit alongside the sixteen-year-old ugly as she explains that she is keeping a promise to a friend. It is her parents that explain to her that promises are meant to be broken as adults, that it is okay to throw away trust in the interest of forwarding the community's cause. This idea—that it is acceptable to take advantage of someone by teaching them to be untrustworthy toward outsiders - helps to build on the global risk society model.

### **Striking Out Alone**

Dr. Cable sends Tally out alone, and in that experience, she learns that she does not need to rely on a community to achieve happiness in her life. While she has several close calls, none of them are directly related to her own actions. If she had not been indoctrinated into the idea that outsiders are to be mistrusted and dangerous to her existence, then, she would have accepted assistance earlier from the Ranger crew she connected with earlier in her solitary travels, and without being singled (placed in danger of being burned by the Rangers she encounters). Tally's experiences in the wild allow her to see the world as much bigger than she believed as a child. She sees the sunset, and readers can relate to the idea of living in a city and never seeing the horizon at sunrise because of the buildings and highways that filter out the natural beauty of the world in exchange for convenience. As she moves on, it becomes readily apparent that Westerfeld wants readers to see this dystopian world as one where communities did not share or work well with each other, constantly finding themselves in a state of war (304); it is the mistrust and global risks which this new community has not avoided, but embraced. These were the worst traits of past civilizations, and they are the strongest ones emulated



in a modern society that has structured itself as the model of perfection. The isolation afforded to Tally within Uglyville has not kept her from understanding the historical context of military vehicles from the Rusties through “history lessons” and field trips to the Rusty Ruins; however, she is confused and frightened to see a “relic” from the past in use in her present world when she has an encounter with a Ranger helicopter when she is bathing in the river. The experience allows her to understand that she is not alone, even with the knowledge that somewhere ahead of her is the Smoke. There is an ironic duality between the helicopter team of rangers who are burning down the flowers (an invasive species, she finds out later, that has choked out most native flora and must be controlled through deliberate fires in order to promote the regrowth of native plants) and the runaway camp being identified as smoke. There is symmetry between the fire and smoke because the rangers are the last step in the journey to the rebel faction. Contemporary readers will comprehend the idea of dated technology being misunderstood; this will help them to further establish the identity of a group of people who do not understand the problems of 100-year-old technology. An example of readers applying this understanding to “historical” artifacts would be the rotary phone versus modern smart phones. A young adult being exposed to the rotary phone might be unable to understand dialing through the device, but would have some general knowledge about how the cradle held a receiver which was used to speak and hear. They could learn what it was over time, but initially they might be confused by the archaic device.

## **Burning Pretties**

The burning of the flowers, phragmipedium panther or tiger orchid, is a rhetorical and literary device designed to show that pretty things are not always the best option. Tally is mildly burned as the Rangers from another community work with 200-year-old helicopters to attempt to control the rampant plant. The explanation offered to her is that the plant is about 300-years-old and, at one point, was invaluable. Tonk, a member of the crew, explains that the flower was once “one of the most beautiful plants in the world. But too successful. They turned into the ultimate weed” (353). This transition from sought-after beauty to problematic weed is a metaphor for the community within which Tally is living, and contextually, Tally herself. The idea of a monoculture is explained during this experience; it is the same problem that is being developed within New Pretty Town. The “monoculture” the community is creating through the surgery is a result of the catastrophe they experienced—a misguided attempt at avoiding another catastrophe caused (according to them) because of too many inequalities in the previous society. Like the tiger orchid, however, too much of a “good” thing ends up becoming invasive and has the potential for creating the circumstances for the extinction of everything else—leading, ironically, to the destruction of the ecosystem/society they believe they are trying to protect. The Rangers define this as “biological zero” (364). The tiger orchid is a unique metaphor; yet, it is the only physical example Westerfeld offers condemning assimilation and conformity. Even this is a rhetoric of fear built around the idea that conformity is just as threatening as rebellion; the message is a catch-22 being offered to young adult readers. If society works to improve the biological nature of one element, the risks of that improvement are still high. The outcome could still be that the “beautiful,

delicate ... unthreatening [elements] ... choke everything around them” (368). There is a global connection to this outcome because nation-states that are allowed to impede on other nation-states run the risk of choking out others. This means that it is not in the best interest of any one group to allow outsiders to manipulate their community for fear of being eradicated or assimilated. The threat of the flowers is only contained by the Rangers, never eliminated because it is beyond their ability to eradicate or fully control it at this stage of Westerfeld’s story (379). After being left on her own to sort out the last part of the puzzle in finding Shay and the Smoke, Tally realizes that there is another issue to overcome; it is more immediate than the flowers. She must now lie to a group of strangers and hope they believe her. This places her as the outsider in a community that she is infiltrating, a community that is “outside” of the accepted community Tally comes from and wishes to return to in order to be fully integrated into it. It puts Tally into an ironic “double outsider” position: she is threatened with being a permanent outsider of her own community (denied the surgery), so she must pretend to want to join an already permanent outsider community (the Smoke) in order to help bring them “back into the fold” and, therefore, assure her “insider” status. The message to teen readers is complex and confusing: belonging to an accepted group is the desired goal, and one must achieve it by any means possible, even if it means lying to one’s friends about rebelling against the status quo. True teen rebellion and individuality, therefore, take a back seat to conformity with the status quo—at any cost.

## **The Real Danger**

There is a definitive bifurcation of society in the Smoke. The majority of people there are from communities similar to Tally's home; they are hiding from the mandatory operation and conformity of living within a city. In contrast, the Smoke is a camp site, where people live off the land, mature naturally, and strive to live a sustainable existence. Tally is the anomaly because she is pretending to value the same priorities as the members of this new society, but her intention is to destroy it for the purposes of going back to her sanctuary—and being made pretty. (391). There is a risk in her being within the community, getting caught with a tracking device, and losing her friendship with Shay. However, that risk is minimal compared to the idea of being left behind by her people—and remaining ugly for the rest of her life. It is only when she becomes connected with David romantically that she feels like she has a direct connection with the people living in the Smoke. It is then when her tracker creates chaos and results in her friends being returned to New Pretty Town.

## **Fallout**

For all the establishment of rebellion, from the beginning to the end of this first novel in this series, Westerfeld sets up an idea that it is good to question authority. At least, this is the impression offered on the surface. Lacking specific incidents in their lives that mirror Tally's and Shay's, readers must rely on their own experiences and attempt to supplant what they know with how the two girls' reactions affect them. Ultimately, the facts speak for themselves; Shay undergoes the operation and, at the end of the novel, Tally is set to have the surgery as well. David loses his community of

outsiders (the Smoke is destroyed), and his father falls victim to Dr. Cable. The message conveyed is that being on the outside the price of standing up for beliefs have consequences that are, potentially, too high to be acceptable to a teenager. Another conclusion that could be reached is that the only valuable people are within the community.

There is a real and constant threat looming over Tally and her new group (even after she switches her allegiance) because she must rejoin the community she grew up in—in one way or another, it turns out. The exposure to the operation and the change in personality connected with the brain augmentation during that surgery that is revealed mean that readers should still see assimilation as a threatening concept—but the only viable option available to both the characters and the reader. No matter how much they try to rebel, teens (readers/characters) cannot avoid being assimilated. This would be a contradictory message than what appears to be the author's intended message but the potential for that alternative understanding could be reached by a young adult audience. This combination of rhetorical and literary devices opens up a number of possible meanings that do not specifically indicate that the author is actively seeking to engage and educate young adult readers; however, the matrix of variables does mean that contemporary readers could see a monoculture as the only safe option for the United States. Overall, democracy does not exist within this future dystopian earth; Derrida's autoimmunity is actively working, as we see that the agents with power—a government—are clearly sacrificing the freedoms that contemporary readers would associate with the United States. Westerfeld is painting a picture of a U.S. without freedoms governed by the Constitution and Bill of Rights; they have been sacrificed for a

greater aesthetic good. The broadest idea associated with identity, experience, and mistrust continues through into Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, where we see a shift in focus from consumerism and monoculturalism toward categorized nationalism.

## Chapter 4: Chasing Trains of Thought

### Cataloging Society

Veronica Roth's *Divergent* unfolds in a dystopian world where society has found a way to function after a significant catastrophic event caused by, in some part, the society and government of the United States; there are five classes that comprise the ruling factions within this community. The moveable nature of the symbols within the story lend themselves to a critical analysis that is based on deconstructing those symbols, and finding an alternative meaning behind them. In *Feed*, readers experience a futuristic United States on the brink of collapse. However, in *Uglies* and again in *Divergent*, readers are exposed to a post-apocalyptic nation that has risen from the ashes of a tragic event. Up until this point, the novels examined have looked at ordinary people who are striving to remain ordinary; it is the extraordinary circumstances that surround them that mold their future, and they are immutable at the end of each book. Titus remains a young man who is consciously continuing as another cog in a digital network of people; Tally still ends at her beginning, with Shay and herself having been operated on—becoming pretty. Without looking at the rest of Westerfeld's series, it is impossible to see development or growth in Tally. In *Divergent*, the cyclical model continues because of the limited nature of this literary analysis and the way Roth has used subsequent novels to establish forward movement of character types. This means readers are already limited to the experience provided in this novel unless they have access to the entire collection. The limits could act as a tool that immediately sets the stage for unexpected outcomes associated with appeals set forth by Roth. She has offered a version of Chicago that is

segregated from the continent by a fence, alienating the characters within the story from the outside world and, because of the nature of availability of other books, a novel which could alienate readers from the complete picture.

Veronica Roth's *Divergent* follows the life of Beatrice Prior and her development into adulthood through a post-apocalyptic Chicago. Roth's dystopian story examines Prior's connection to the five factions that have formed as the social order for her world. Each faction has been built around a singular virtue that exemplifies the value that group feels was a missing element that led to the fall of the United States. The factions include Candor, Abnegation, Dauntless, Amity, and Erudite. Candor is built around honesty. Abnegation focuses on being selfless. Dauntless is a group built around the idea of being brave, while Amity focuses on peacefulness. The final group is the Erudite faction—which is built around intellect and the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge's sake. The existence of this social order does not restrict the children raised in these factions to only be affiliated with their birth faction. Instead, an annual ceremony is used for sixteen-year-olds to move into adulthood and select the faction that they will devote the rest of their lives to supporting and advancing. For Prior, the decision is between her family's connections with Abnegation and her instinct to be brave; however, she cannot return if she makes the wrong choice because there is a society of those who failed to pass the initiation rituals of their chosen faction who are known as the faction-less. Her fear of being a social outcast, along with other variables propels her through Roth's story.



## **Finding a Community**

In *Divergent*, young adults must pick their societal affiliation, at the age of 16, when the community is absolved of furthering their education; it is markedly different than contemporary society where the community is responsible for the education of all children up until they graduate from high school. Roth does not establish whether this transition is the equivalent of the milestone which young readers would be familiar with now, or generally symbolic of the process of growing up. For the purposes of this thesis, the evidence will be valued as the choosing ceremony being the final step toward adulthood. The children still receive further education through their new groups; it seems evident that this would qualify as technical training or post-secondary education. The five classes of affiliation are Abnegation, Erudite, Amity, Dauntless, and Candor. There is also a subculture of faction-less individuals that exists. At the Choosing Ceremony, the teens pick their faction (they either stay with the faction they were born into or choose a new one) and through that group gain the remaining education required to succeed in this society. Abnegation fills the role of government; Erudite fills the role of the scientific community; Amity is responsible for farming and food production and distribution; Dauntless offers physical security as both a military unit and police force; and Candor is undefined in this novel but appears to be connected with law. Being candid doesn't hold a high point in the story, and lacks a concise occupation within the community established in Roth's novel. The government is quasi-totalitarianism masked as a utopian environment where "the city is ruled by a council of fifty people, composed entirely of representatives from Abnegation, because our faction is regarded as incorruptible, due to our commitment to selflessness" (Roth 33). The model of government appears to be a

form of socialism where each party within the system is equal, but has different responsibilities to the entire population. The nature of each group is built on a singularity that identifies the group with its name. Abnegation and Candor share the ability to tell the truth on the surface, but then so would each class within the society based on variables that are evolving and fall into non-categorized potentials; this means that one symbol can mean multiple things even if the word choice for that group's identity cannot be pinned down to one immovable identity.

The nature of the title itself, *Divergent*, lends itself to such a multitude of meanings that the concept falls under a spectrum of diffused variables; the story is built around the idea that a young 16-year-old girl has been found to be an anomaly because she cannot be placed specifically within one single faction; rather, she is only able to be eliminated from two possibilities of the five available to her. Technically, there is a sixth option, to become part of the faction-less society that does exist. While Roth may have sought to create a coming-of-age fiction for young adults built around the idea that children must learn to make their own decisions, even if they are not the choices adults would make, the potential alternatives include a story where everybody is, in fact, divergent, and only a segment of that society is working to keep categories in place; another option is that there is no divergent action taking place at all within the story, since it is exactly what is expected in contemporary America of teenagers as they reach a point in their lives where they must make decisions. Finally, but not exhaustively, another option for the meaning behind the title itself could be the divergent paths the different members of this society take from what is expected of them; the sheer number of members from factions that leave for alternative factions during the Choosing Ceremony

indicates that nobody is following a standard sequence of path within the society. The novel, and the society within it, illustrates Derrida's autoimmunity. Derrida allowed for the transition of the ideas associated with deconstruction to come to fruition under the biologically-inspired autoimmunity. Michael Naas ascribes a definition to this development by explaining that where deconstruction "often lent itself to being (mis)understood as a 'method' or 'textual strategy' of reading ... 'autoimmunity' appears to name a process that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere" (18). The society is defeating itself through its own self-identity; specifically, this could be applied to the five factions that make up the world within *Divergent*. At the very core of the social structure of the novel, there is an appeal toward fear; specifically a fear of taking action or making decisions as young adults about where they should fit in within society.

### **No One Trait**

This society is based on the absolute categorization of five personality traits into five segregated groups; the idea is immediately subject to disqualification as an absolute. The characters and their environment are not psychologically capable of being single-trait in nature. G.W. Allport and H.S. Odbert conducted research in 1936 and established a comprehensive list of approximately 18,000 personality-trait descriptors associated with humans that could be categorized into four trait groups; however, Lawrence Herringer and Stephen Haws indicate in "Perception of Personality Traits in Oneself and Others," an article published in the *Journal of Psychology*, that "methodologies that employ artificial conditions do not adequately measure the process by which actual personality

judgments are made” (Herringer and Haws 33). This point, combined with the fact that the research also was built around the idea that “spontaneous ascription of idiosyncratically relevant traits” could change outside of a vacuum (38) would indicate that the factions offered in Roth’s novel really mean nothing outside of a simple label when one takes into account that the factions are based on flawed and changeable human characteristics. An example of this comes into play when Beatrice Prior, the protagonist in the novel, undergoes her initial faction aptitude testing and the conductor of her examination indicates that “people who tell the truth are Candor ... and the Abnegation” (Roth 21). The fact that the symbolic nature of the names assigned to the tribes does not allow them to be categorized means that all five factions are limited in title only; their personality traits can span a spectrum of more than 18,000 actual personality traits. The traits themselves offer categorization that is open to interpretation and alternative meanings based on the way the members of this society can move from one faction to another as they enter adulthood.

### **Self-Denial**

Abnegation, according to *Merriam-Webster* Online, means “self-denial” (“Abnegation”). The synonyms associated with this include, but are not limited to relinquishment, resignation, and surrender. They are the ruling political organization because of their selflessness; but their primary trait is not honesty, but surrender. Given the initial understanding of the story, the message appears to be that a society’s leadership can only be successful if those leaders are willing to completely surrender their own interests for the good of the others in their society. However, among those leaders are

individuals who were raised in other factions, bringing into question the true “selfless” nature of those leaders. Beatrice’s mother is actually a born member of the Dauntless faction; yet she is an example of abnegation. Mirrors are symbols within Abnegation representing vanity, yet they simply reflect what is seen in the image; therefore, if members of the faction were truly humble and lived a life of ‘self-denial,’ the mirror image would only reflect that –not vanity. The potential for them to see themselves as self-involved is always there, regardless of the image’s unmodified reflection. However, the mirror is not capable of agency, and therefore, is only a symbolic reference to self-sacrifice. Beatrice is a member of Abnegation, yet she decides to join Dauntless because she is defined as Divergent. Her bold decision is what leads into the story.

### **Altered Images**

Readers are immediately introduced to Beatrice, the protagonist, and her mother; the opening sequence of a mirror allows for vanity to become a critical element of control within the story. Beatrice is concerned about outward appearances; this plays a critical role in her choices throughout the story and is her source of courage. To a young adult audience, this would be a reasonable mindset because showing fear or cowardice is seen as a sign of weakness; this is something that the dominant culture in the United States openly preaches against. The first appeal made to readers is a fear of being seen as anything but perfect and bold. This is juxtaposed against the conventions of spirituality that govern theology in contemporary society. Abnegation, as a group, believes in self-sacrifice for the greater good, which could be seen as a form of bravery. However, young adult readers would not necessarily see the connection when offered the option of being

bold and forthright in their convictions. Beatrice personifies that misunderstanding as she grapples with her decision to join the Dauntless faction. She explains that it is at the moment where her family is most tranquil, when “my brother makes breakfast, and my father’s hand skims my hair as he reads the newspaper, and my mother hums as she clears the table—it is on these mornings that I feel guiltiest for wanting to leave them” (Roth 3). The narration offered by the young woman shows that those outside of this community have the least value; Abnegation has volunteers who repave the roads and they are smoothest near the hub of the city. Beatrice and her family do not own a car because the roads are not safe for travel (4). She points out that the train travels everywhere, but only the Dauntless have access to it. There is an immediate identification with heterotopic rhetorical devices because, on a social level riding a train means that members of Abnegation do not own cars; therefore, they are modest and have no direct impact on the environment. This is exemplified earlier by their choice to ride buses allowing for the roads in their community to go unrepaired. However, the train becomes a device for freedom when it is used by Beatrice as a member of the Dauntless faction. It is a self-contained universe that travels throughout Chicago and is outside the rules of the factions. While it seems to be contradictory, the train acts much like the mirror in Abnegation; it only reflects what is presented before it for self-examination. The metaphor changes over time because Beatrice herself changes. In that context, the train also represents the journey of changing. According to Alice Jenkins, Michael Foucault notes that “a train is an extraordinary bundle of relations because it is something through which one goes, it is also something by means of which one can go from one point to another, and then it is also something that goes by” (qtd. in Jenkins 27). Jenkins further

illustrates that “a train is a miniature world that is both part of and distinct from the larger world surrounding it” (27). They are elevated trains and travel above the world Beatrice lives in before the Choosing Ceremony (4).

The second rhetorical device unveiled within *Divergent* is the use of color to establish a sense of neutrality; Abnegation surrounds itself in grey in an effort to “make it easier for [them] to forget [themselves], and easier for everyone else to forget them too,” but the effect is that it makes them a target in the current state of politics established by Roth (6). In this dystopian world, Abnegation has been tasked with the responsibility of running the government because the assumption is that by having self-sacrificing political leadership, there is no opportunity for the cataclysmic events that have befallen the United States to occur again. (33). As Beatrice explains, the city is made up of a council of members who are “composed entirely of representatives from Abnegation, because our faction is regarded as incorruptible” (33). The Erudite faction, however, has started a campaign discrediting Abnegation as a self-serving faction; they are implying that the political group based on self-sacrifice is simply acting to maintain political power and is instead, actually self-centered and no better than failed political factions that existed in the past, which conveys the idea that the government that this society has agreed should lead them because they exemplify trust and integrity, are the least trustworthy, according to the Erudite leadership. This is an example of a global risk society because mistrust is built around the threat of insiders; the twist in this novel is that the threat is not coming from the politicians, but instead the society rising up to wrestle control away from Abnegation. An interesting observation afforded to readers about the establishment of politics within Roth’s society is that the political system was in place “since the

beginning of the great peace, where the factions were formed. [Beatrice thinks] the system persists because [they are] afraid of what might happen if it didn't: war" (33).

## **Letting Go**

Roth's rhetorical message of defeating fear through confrontation shines through early on. After undergoing the aptitude test, Beatrice finds that she is a member of a small segment of society that is defined as "divergent." However, she is also informed by the Dauntless test administrator that she should not divulge that information (23). An interesting conversation transpires between Beatrice and the tester where the test administrator explains that she was afraid of the dark, but now looks back on that moment as a reminder of how she triumphed over fear (20). This sets up the idea that the Dauntless are continuously fearless; readers will easily connect with the tattooed and more fun-spirited group over the educated Erudites or other factions within this dystopian Chicago. Roth describes them as "'hellions' [who] are pierced, tattooed, and black-clothed" (7). They repeatedly are shown to be superior because of their fearlessness and bravery. There is a dialectic opposition created by Roth to show how Abnegation's self-sacrifice toward community is different from the Dauntless resolve to act as the police and military for the community; they are both visibly self-sacrificing factions that place themselves second to the societal needs of the people. An interaction that Beatrice has with a faction-less man after the test helps her to make the decision to join Dauntless because she realizes that she is not afraid; her attitude and demeanor are more about repressing her fear through aggression when she throws down the apple slices she is



holding and tells the faction-less man holding her wrist to let go, leaving the impression that 'or else' is a possibility (26).

### **Fearing Power**

Beatrice's father points out problems exist within other factions as a means to help create an impression on both of his children about what they choose to do with their futures; he points out that the Erudite faction cannot be trusted because they want to seize power from the Abnegation faction because "we have something they want. Valuing knowledge above all else results in a lust for power, and that leads men into dark and empty places" (35). This idea also offers a rhetoric of persuasion to readers, telling them that a desire for knowledge is to be feared over self-service to community. Roth further establishes the idea of identity for young readers by showing that Beatrice is afraid, terrified, about the decisions she will make which will guide her life beyond childhood (38). Young adult readers will make a strong connection between the Choosing Ceremony and coming to parents with a decision about what university or future teens about to graduate want for themselves; those readers will also understand clearly the disappointment of parents who have children that do not follow the faction they grew up in, something they may have experienced themselves. By showing Beatrice's father reacting with anger, Roth is able to show that he is unable to allow his children the freedom to make decisions about their lives because he does not want them to be outsiders from his community. His decision to ostracize them at the end of the ceremony helps to build fear about the future; all the people involved who are left behind are unable to remain trustworthy. This reflects back on a society that has taken risks by allowing the

children to make their own decisions and has mistrust about them remaining loyal to the society. Both of the children, Caleb and Beatrice Prior, switch factions. She declares herself to be “selfish [and] ... brave” (47) in her decision to join the Dauntless. The moment is framed in heterotopic devices through the arrival to the Choosing Ceremony by bus, in grey and neutral. When Beatrice leaves, she takes the readers away from a world they can relate to—contemporary Americana—and delivers them to a society built around games, horseplay, and daring via the train (50). She explains how upon their explosive exit from the building, the “Dauntless sprawl across the street, blocking the path of a bus” and dive headlong toward the sound of the oncoming train; they are daredevils who will offer her, and readers, the first test of being part of the new crowd—they will jump onto a moving train (50). It is during this transfer from one world to another that Beatrice explains that she would rather be dead than faction-less (54); in this society, it is better to be in a group, to have an identity, than to be alone and independent thinking, but unable to access the resources that the factions provide their members. There are great leaps of faith that must be taken, and because readers cannot experience these moments from a first-person perspective, they can only go along for the ride alongside Beatrice. The trip toward her new home is marked first by jumping onto a moving train, and then jumping off that train onto the roof of a seven-story building (54). This is a frightening experience for all the new members of Dauntless, but it is how they cull the herd of people whom they do not want to associate with. From this point on, she must make another leap of faith—one down into the unknown which leads toward her new world—and readers must experience this through Roth’s alternative reality—not their own contemporary understanding.

## A New Place

Beatrice is the first to jump out of the old world she lived in and embrace the new world. She literally jumps into her new faction through an opening in the roof of the building—it is a leap of faith, again, because she does not know what awaits her at the bottom. Her faith is rewarded when she is caught by a safety net (59). The ritual of jumping affords her the ability to show bravery, and readers are able to understand that they can also face and conquer their own fears and look for their own safety nets.

Beatrice took the risk because she figured—correctly—that there had to be some kind of protection because to simply jump to one's death would be meritless and did not require bravery. This new world she joins is clearly different from the one she grew up in; the streets of Abnegation are lined with people walking in an orderly fashion, heads bowed, and expressing politeness, which is juxtaposed to the chaos of 'the pit' where the Dauntless live (64). The process of becoming Dauntless offers another instance of the rhetorical device related to the need for belonging at any cost (as was used in both *Feed* and *Uglies* because the assumption that any individual can become a member of that faction is misleading. While the teens have the option to pick their path for a future, it is not required of that faction to accept the people who join them. During the tour of their new home, the initiates who wish to become members of Dauntless are informed that there are only a few spots available within the community, and they must compete through a series of trials and exercises that will help them be ranked—and eventually move on or move out of the compound. As Eric, a former Erudite and current leader of the Dauntless faction, explains, “‘You chose us,’ he says. ‘Now we have to choose you’”

(73). Another element of the faction initiation that is an appeal toward identity is the idea of group-think indoctrination. Four, another member of the Dauntless and the instructor for the new initiates, explains that the Dauntless ““believe that preparation eradicates cowardice, which we define as failure to act in the midst of fear”” (77). The Dauntless want the team to work together, but also strive to compete against each other by dealing with physical, emotional and mental obstacles that will eliminate those who are scared. Contemporary readers will relate to this concept as a form of military training where soldiers are made into a unit through training and preparation to overcome threats to the nation-state, or, even more relatable to the teen target audience, the competition found in intense team sports—the team must work together, but there is certainly competition to become the “star” within that team environment. Beatrice understands that there is “power in controlling something that can do so much damage—in controlling something, period” (79). It is in this moment that she realizes she is no longer self-sacrificing, but a tool of violence. The rhetorical implication is that young adults belong to the group, and they are capable of controlling any threat, which comes from outside that group or faction. The mediated reality for readers is that they may have been exposed to virtual reality or other technical ‘experiences’ with a firearm. As mentioned in the methods section of Chapter One, mediated reality is defined as “referring to a general framework for artificial modification of human perception by way of devices for augmenting, deliberately diminishing, and more generally, for otherwise altering sensory input” (“Technology”), then the idea of shooting a gun on a range, in self-defense, and in combat all seem to be easily interchangeable based on ‘virtual contact’ with a threat. Through continuous pressure and practice, young adults become accepting of ideas like

violence if the outcome is success or profitable in some context they can correlate with. An external example of this is seen in young adults who play games like Call of Duty or NFL football games online and think that the experiences they have gained ‘in game’ are quantifiable to a skill in the real world. In Beatrice’s Chicago, there is no difference between the range practices and, ultimately, shooting a real person in combat; if there is a threat—that threat must be eliminated without fear (69). The tool to eliminate that fear, or instill it, is a shared experience offered by Roth to the characters and readers.

### **Breaking Barriers**

An interesting variable to the initiation story is the fight between Beatrice and Peter, another non-Dauntless born initiate. It is clear that Roth intends for equality to exist in this dystopian setting; it is also clear that Peter will win in a physical fight with the smaller woman. The experience of being beaten is enough to create issues for young readers because there is pain involved. The fact that Beatrice refuses to go down, unlike Al, yet another non-Dauntless born initiate who becomes friends with Beatrice, who has admitted that he will throw a fight instead of hurting another person, means that Roth is illustrating the bravery of acceptance found in Beatrice (111). This new world offered to readers is one that breaks barriers between gender roles. Al ultimately washes out and Beatrice advances to the top of her class, even though they start out in different places in the fight rankings. Readers will want to identify with a strong woman who is able to recover from the abuse suffered early on in the ring, to rise above the rest and become an important member of her community. The fights themselves are rhetorical and literary devices designed to help build an appeal of fear for readers because the loss of a place

within the group is worse than being beaten up in combat; there is no recovery from being placed outside the group. To emphasize the threat of isolation, the initiates are taken to “The Fence” as part of a field trip (123).

### **The Fence**

The Fence is offered as a barrier that protects the community from outsiders, or contains the insiders against outsiders. Beatrice notes that when the guards lock the gate after inspecting an Amity truck carrying apples from the Amity farms that supply the city with fresh produce, the locking device is on the outside of the gate. She wonders “[w]hy would they lock the gate from the outside and not the inside? It almost seems like they don’t want to keep something out; they want to keep us in” (128). The barrier itself is manned by the Dauntless and is one of two environmental symbols within the story that offer themselves up to a multitude of meanings. In *Divergent*, the wall represents protection from the outside, but it also represents a physical barrier that keeps the factions contained. Guard duty is considered a negative and has “little room for advancement” (124). This would be counter-intuitive to the idea that the gates are important and the task of guarding them is one of protection and not simply symbolic.

### **Something to Prove**

The Dauntless have traditions built around winning—the only prize of importance (133). The introduction of the team sport of capture the flag shows that they are group oriented. The faction understands that people need to be able to rely on each other and fear is eliminated when members of a group band together with those who are willing to

overcome their fear to help defeat a common enemy or threat. This establishment of mistrust of others combined with defensive tactics further supports Ulrich Beck's theory of a global risk society and the force it would create to protect itself from external or internal threats. An example of this would be the fact that there are multiple teams within a nation-state, yet they are innately taught to mistrust and beat each other on the field of battle. This is magnified by the idea that young adults are taught that once on the 'playing field,' the rules of social conduct and contracts of friendship are void and, instead, a winner take all mentality becomes the norm. We clearly can see this is also the case of the Dauntless teams within Roth's novel. Beatrice realizes that she is close to her brother's location during the exercise, but points out that she has been assimilated into the group-think by pointing out in narrative that "[she] can't think about him any day" (137). This reinforces the idea Roth has established that factions are more important than family—"faction before blood" (43). A possible interpretation could be central to establishing a larger group identity with an understanding that segments within that community. Beck establishes this idea of decision-making, and the correlating "global risk to be central in reinforcing the desire and need for a new cosmopolitan ... expansion of democracy beyond state boundaries" (Donogue 1) as the basic premise behind globalization. This is specifically defined as the parameters of change Beck asserts through his identification of global risk societies (Beck 52). Specifically, his sociological model implies that taking risks is not beneficial to the whole; rather, it benefits individuals over the community. This eventually leads to factions developing a sense of mistrust within the global structure, which would then establish the rhetorical concept of autoimmunity because mistrust would eventually result in policing and military actions within the structure of

the community. In short, this would be exactly what Derrida asserted through the final explication of deconstruction resulting in a self-consuming disease—“we are suffering from a metaphysical AIDS” (“Derrida: Democracy After 9/11”). For readers, Derrida offers “the specter of terror and trauma lies not in a date in the past, 9-11, but in an incomprehensible future intimated by that event. Every technological advance in weapons systems, in medicine, in informatics—indeed in any field—may turn against us in some unpredictably devastating manner. The optimistic dream of modernity was that reason and technology would save us from all threats, both natural and human” (“Derrida”).

Roth has built upon an idea that families can be torn apart in an effort to promote a better community built around a singularity (the different factions, supposedly made up of people who have only one dominant personality trait) —even at the sacrifice of the entire community when exposed to those members who are divergent. Divergent is seen as a special classification of members of the society, but, in contradiction to the perceived threat of the “divergent,” members of all factions are, in fact, using various traits to accomplish a goal—as a divergent would; an example of this is the ability to think (and Erudite trait) while being brave (a Dauntless trait). Four points out that they must have a plan to hide the flag, defend their location, and take the offensive. The Dauntless believe that bravery is part of proving their self-sufficiency to such a degree that they will forgo light in the dark. Beatrice notes “[t]here is nothing especially brave about wandering dark streets with no flashlight, but [Dauntless] are not supposed to need help ... I like that” because there could be a time when she would not be able to rely on technology and wants to be “ready for it” (138). The game is designed to teach teamwork, but because of



changes within the faction, the training exercise is more focused on competition rather than working together toward a common goal. Four points out to Beatrice that there was a time when teamwork was critical, when being part of a group was necessary for success (143). However, the change in the Dauntless leadership further establishes the idea of autoimmunity working within Roth's community. Derrida asserts that there is some risk to a democracy that is "internal" because the "restriction of personal freedoms in the name of security can be seen as an attack on the very liberty upon which democracy is founded" (Haddad 29). The new focus on security, competition, and individuality is counter-productive to the ideas established by the 'founding fathers' of this dystopian society. Initiation training, fighting, and competition offer relatable rhetorical vehicles for readers because they all work to desensitize the characters from violence; this also helps to build a mediated experience for the reader. Beatrice is beaten by a male initiate bad enough to be placed in an infirmary, and it is written by Roth as a matter-of-fact scenario; it is not questioned, tout court. There are no segregated gender roles within the Dauntless society, which appears to have the mark of a feminist-centric mentality of equality. However, Roth makes it clear that not all of the initiates are absolutely equal, although the potential exists for any of them—male or female—to be ranked at the top of the list through their own merits; there are no exceptions for any of the initiates. Beatrice is introduced as a mousy figure that eventually evolves into a woman who is sexually assaulted by her enemies (174) and retaliates against Molly, another non-Dauntless born initiate who bullies Beatrice repeatedly (172-174). Roth has empowered her to be strong at the expense of her humanity; she is no longer aware of the violence she accepts and, to some degree, even embraces. Beatrice notes that at the end of her fight with Molly, with

the other young woman bleeding and defeated, she wishes “I could say I felt guilty for what I did” but “I [didn’t]” (174). The ‘mediation’ of growing up in contemporary society is the exposure to violence, Kenneth Burke explains. He says that part of growing up in a modern world includes the “mediation” of imagery through motion pictures—specifically toward brutality and murder. Burke further asserts that these images are, taken at face value, the most “noteworthy signs of action in an ideal or imaginary adult world” (18). That transition into adulthood is presented to Roth’s characters and young readers through the fight scenes and, ultimately, the knife training that “will be the last day of stage one” (157). The scene goes from Al, a former member of Candor, being chastised by Eric for failing to hit the target to Four throwing knives at Beatrice as a sign of bravery (163). The idea that violence is an everyday activity is combined with bullying to help establish the othering in the characters—specifically Al.

### **Finding Familiarity**

During the visitation ceremony, when family members come to visit the initiates, Al is further eliminated from the group by his absence from the event. His family is there to see him, and Roth makes a point of mentioning the randomness of his disappearance (183). Future events will dictate why Al is not there in the storyline, but his status as “other” has already been established through the rhetorical device. Roth uses the event as a foreshadowing moment, but it can easily be seen as something broader on the spectrum of ideas through this deconstruction. The introduction of Beatrice’s mother into the Dauntless compound during the same visitation ceremony also changes the paradigm of the young girl being an outsider. Throughout the conversation between the daughter and

mother, who gives her name for the first time in the novel as Natalie, readers are able to see that she is too familiar with the Pit, the food, and the initiation process. She is identified by her daughter as Dauntless. The fact helps to build on the group-think model; her daughter was never acting as an outsider in Abnegation. Rather, readers find that she was always part of the identity of Dauntless because of her mother (188). One of the suppositions readers will make up to this point in the storyline is that Beatrice is rebelling against Abnegation by joining the Dauntless faction. In fact, however, she is conforming to the expected standards of her family, through her mother's affiliation, by becoming a member of this group. This could be seen as another avenue of an appeal to fear because her father actively works to make her feel bad for her decision—even if it is the appropriate decision for her community. Ironically, it is her father who is now established as an outsider; he is part of the autoimmunity that is changing the community through his actions and disconnection with his daughter's identity. His disconnection erodes the core of her belief system, creating mistrust and, potentially, the belief that he is a threat to the society she now is connected with. This establishes context for the father being symbolic of Derrida's autoimmunity in the description that it "describes the contradictory process in which a self puts a partial end to itself in order to live on" (Haddad 30). If anything could be said for the Dauntless faction, its manifesto statement actually ties it easily to Abnegation— ""We believe in ordinary acts of bravery, in the courage that drives one person to stand up for another"" (206). Although members of the Abnegation faction do not engage in physically-demanding risk-taking activities, they certainly do engage in their own kind of ordinary acts of bravery in their concern for others' well-being.

Riding a zip line down from a 100-story building is part of the Dauntless identity, too. The secret ritual that Beatrice is allowed to participate in is a group-building experience because she is being allowed into the core of the Dauntless-born initiates and their families. Roth potentially intended for it to be a vehicle that shows Beatrice's transition from Abnegation to Dauntless through a show of bravery and recklessness. However, it is clear through the discussion that takes place as the group gathers above old Chicago that Beatrice is being made part of the family. Zeke and Uriah (Dauntless-born initiates) have an exchange of familial words when they discuss how their mother will “boil [Zeke] alive” if he killed Uriah by accident (220). Beatrice realizes at that moment that she has been accepted—her identity is now secure. This is a pivotal moment in a literary and rhetorical sense. There is no return to Abnegation for her from this moment—she is now a complete outsider in her home community where she was already—unknowingly—on the outside fighting to fit in. Instead, she is now accepted into her new faction through her act of confirmation. Readers are able to connect the idea of acceptance and ritual—an event they are not able to participate in directly, although they may have experienced comparable situations—through the experience offered by Beatrice. While they are plunging into the darkness with her, they are further willing to accept the idea of conformity for the sake of belonging. In order for her to get down from the ride, she must drop twenty feet into the arms of her fellow Dauntless members—“I have to trust them to catch me. I have to accept that these people are mine, and I am theirs. It is a braver act than sliding down the zip line” (222). She explains that her father indicated that this faction was filled with “madmen” (223). He was unable to comprehend the unity found in an act of bravery because he is an outsider; Roth illustrates the

comparison between Abnegation marching up stairs, in unison, their steps forming a pattern and Dauntless members taking on this task, and the moment of unity–identity–that is created in that singular act (223). Beatrice notes that from the exposure to both cultures, “peace is restrained,” where freedom is chaotic, laughing, and alive (250). She defines it as freedom.

## **Round Two**

The introduction of simulations designed to test their psychological responses to and their ability to face and conquer their fears in the second stage of the initiation training allows Roth to introduce further examples of appeals to fear. Beatrice has two distinct events occur during the simulations that help build on the idea of isolation from the group. In her first test, she encounters crows that attack her. She indicates that “there will be no help: I am alone” (234). It is only when she cannot see past the sheer volume of birds that are attacking her and accepts that she is an outsider that she escapes the simulation. In the second event, Beatrice explains that she sees all the people she identifies with as her group disconnected from her; “[n]one of them move. Their stillness makes my throat feel tight” (252) because she is responding to the fear of being ostracized from her unit. The isolation is further illustrated by a glass case she finds herself in, filling with water while the same people now mock her and laugh (253). There is a distinctive connection for Beatrice between being accepted–conforming to what is expected of her—and appearing to be on a divergent path from the rest of her peers (255).

This potentially is Roth’s attempt at showing the transition of growing up and being afraid of the decisions a person makes as he/she realizes that there are

consequences in the world directly tied with their existence; however, it could also show that there are enemies within the group, terrorists, who threaten the community from within. This would illustrate Beck's assertion that the modern threat of terrorism is autoimmunity—there is no safety within the nation-state when outsiders have easy access from other groups. Beck asserts that the model of [nation-state] identification has suffered a significant paradigm shift because of 9/11 and that the categories society has built itself into are no longer viable options in a world where trust has been replaced with mistrust of outsiders, which is even further conflicted by the elimination of the concepts of “insider” versus “outsider” (53). This globalized identity means that the value of trust is gone.

During one of the simulations, Beatrice sees Four mocking her and Christina (another non-Dauntless born initiate who has become one of Beatrice's good friends) is talking with her nemesis, Peter. She has active mistrust in the simulation of the people she most identifies with (254). The fact that Four divulges to her that he knows she is divergent because she is manipulating the simulations is a revelation to Beatrice; she finds out through Tori, the tattoo artist who administered her aptitude test in school, that she is able to mediate the experience inside the simulations (259). This makes Beatrice a threat to leadership, but that threat is not explained beyond the leadership's inability to manipulate those individuals who are identified as divergent. When Beatrice begins to let the information sink in, she points out that because of the simulations, she has learned what true fear is, but she leaves it unsaid. Instead, Roth gives narrative about several of the events, which Beatrice has been mentally exposed to. Those include being “tied to a stake and Peter set a fire beneath my feet ... drowning again, this time in the middle of an ocean . . . I watched as my family slowly bled to death ... and ... I was held at gunpoint

and forced to shoot them” (263). All of these fears tie to identity and isolation. In all instances she is unable to rely on her ties to the community she has always been conforming to join. Rather, she has found herself powerless to deal with acts of terror when she is needed most. This powerlessness does not directly tie to 9/11, but it could be seen as a side effect of the society itself, in a post 9/11 world. The inability to protect members of the society from terrorism is easily seen within the simulations offered by Roth. This mediated experience is then offered to young adult readers who cannot make direct ties to the experience of terror, but instead, can understand the fears offered by Beatrice.

### **Stuck on the Outside**

Al is an outsider because he refuses to fight for his place in Dauntless. This is an early literary device that plays against the fact that he is the biggest initiate. As established earlier, his actions have made him fall in the rankings; it is compounded by his romantic interest in Beatrice that cannot come to fruition because of her interest in Four. Al is one of three initiates who attempt to throw her off a chasm into the river that is part of the Dauntless underground community (292). Roth never explains which of the potential reasons that come to mind would be the catalyst for his attack on his friend; however, it is clear that Beatrice’s rejection, combined with her better ranking, and the very real fear of becoming faction-less all combine to allow Al to join Peter and Drew in the attempted rape and murder of Beatrice. This shows further examples of autoimmunity within her group because it is self-destructing from within; she also is facing what Beck has defined as a threat from within (Beck 53). Because of the attack on Edward (another

non-Dauntless born initiate who outranked Peter), she knows that outranking Peter would bring unwanted attention on her. Christina points out that the attack on Edward proved that Peter wasn't willing to compete fairly, because "Peter is all about what's fair. That's why he grabbed Edward in his sleep and stabbed him in the eye" (292). When Al, who has been a loyal and protective friend to Beatrice, joins her enemies to assault her, it signals a critical breakdown of the internal safety of the group, which sets the stage for an appeal to fear. Al's death in chapter twenty-four (301-304) illustrates the extent of isolation within the community. The actions of attacking Beatrice were the final step in eliminating him, leaving him without a community to return to. Roth paints a picture in his death that is even more telling; he doesn't fit in the body bag—even death does not have room for those who do not conform to standards.

### **The Correct Thoughts**

Four explains to Beatrice that "they don't want you to act a certain way. They want you to think a certain way. So you're easy to understand. So you won't pose a threat to them" (312) during the memorial service for Albert. This is the first direct statement by a character that there is an attempt to manipulate others within the society; it could also be a message from Roth to her readers about societal expectations of young adults. This idea of conformity returns when Beatrice, Will and Christina are throwing documents into the chasm as a symbol of the need to forget what the Erudite faction is implying about Abnegation and the government. The reality is that Jeanine, the leader of the Erudites, is calling for a mixed-faction government that equally represents all members of the community (318). This call for a return to the former democratic ideas of government



should easily be accepted by contemporary readers because it is the government they believe already exists in the world they live in; students in the United States have always been taught that tyranny and oppression should be fought against. It is easy to see the model of government offered in *Divergent* as anything but democratic. However, the changes made in the government would have nothing to do with a revolution (318) because it would be a retrogressive move for the community. Roth is indirectly calling for young adults to maintain the contemporary status quo. Status quo can also directly be tied to the acceptance of violence and abuse. Beatrice enters a simulation with Four so they can experience his fears together; it is an exposure to his backstory that allows for her to better understand him as Roth builds on the romantic relationship. Readers are exposed to a mediated reality, through the text, while watching Beatrice and Four encounter a mediated reality, through a virtual simulation of fear; there is no valid consequence for having the fears because the only outcome is to be able to conquer the emotional obstacles recreated through technology. This means, technically, that there is a double-layer of augmented contact with those elements of fear the reader, and the couple, are experiencing through Roth's story. Four explains that confinement was a routine part of his upbringing—"[t]his one is from my fantastic childhood. Childhood punishments. The tiny closet upstairs" (326). There is no judgment about the punishments directly, simply an acceptance as the Dauntless members work to move beyond the fear of their parents—specifically Four's father. The acceptance of violence is found in Four's third test. He must shoot a woman in the head that he cannot identify. He explains that "[it]'s okay ... I'll just ... do it. This one's not so bad" (328) and the scene moves forward as he chambers a bullet into the gun on the table and simply kills the woman without an

emotional response; he is accepting of the act, even if Roth describes him as being “filled with dread” (328). Even when they leave the simulation, Beatrice explains to Four that he can’t be fearless “because you still care about things ... about your life” (333). This implication that to have fear is a natural response and cannot be separated from caring attempts to make appeals to fear seem commonplace; they are there for the benefit of people according to Roth. Without fear, we would be lacking something. This message is directly stated to contemporary readers in a post 9/11 world who are seeing a dystopian setting—and accepting that this is the future where fear still dominates. Fear is part of the final step in the Dauntless initiation; it is a tool that helps them to be brave, and the examples of fear are used by Roth to show a world that is frighteningly dangerous to contemporary readers. Through Beatrice’s test, young adults are able to experience a feeling of being outside the group—or threatened for being outside. Beatrice explains through narration that one of her tests is “[a] man standing outside” her room in Abnegation (390). The man becomes dozens of men, “featureless—skin-covered skulls” who are there “to take me, like Peter and Drew and Al; to kill me” (391). It is this idea that the world is a dangerous place filled with faceless threats that is the strongest rhetoric combining the ideas of Derrida, Burke and Beck into a volatile association persuading young adults to see anything outside—and in—as a potential risk. This story is part of a series and incomplete when examined as a single novel; therefore, the conclusion of this story affords no value to the ideas of an appeal to fear other than the idea of being controlled by an outside influence. The rising action and dénouement all lead into a new story that begins after Beatrice and Caleb (her brother) have lost their parents when they are killed during the execution of the Erudite plan to reestablish democracy under the

guise of prosperity (360). *Divergent* is the first in a series of young adult novels that has become an assembly-line of ready-made stories built around the coming-of-age trope; it has a positive message about equality of women and men in a dystopian society and avoids, almost, the cliché mindset that young women cannot live without strong men. Derrida's poststructuralist model works well in deconstructing Roth's novel because it is clear that there are a multitude of messages and interpretations that can be recreated from the work; she built a story that allows for ideas to move along a spectrum and they are interchangeable enough that the characters seem more robust when seen unencumbered by the reigns of categorization. They are free to move and be developed in the eyes of readers instead of through concrete identities in lockstep to the author's agenda.

The combination of fear through grouping via Burke, along with ideas associated with rebellion versus conformity help build the tropes and rhetoric devices in *Divergent*. The intended message of Roth's novel, much like *Feed* and *Uglies*, is to rebel against conformity. However, this message is ironically overshadowed by the unintended message that conformity is actually the only way to survive—because true rebellion brings about isolation and even death. These novels, taken together, seem to provide contradicting concepts for teen readers already confused about how much of an individual path they should attempt when the world seems to constantly push them to following and maintaining the status quo.

## **Chapter 5: Controlling the Message**

### **Conclusion**

People are motivated in their decisions through a diverse field of input that leads them to take the correct action for themselves. The control of that input, to mediate society's reality, could be seen as mandatory for corporations to sell their product, governments to establish power and communities to establish standards. It is clear then to assume other people have a vested interest in controlling resources. Control requires not merely possession, but also the ability to motivate others to consider and accept the experiences proffered to maintain that control. Othering is both a result of that control and a tool for maintaining control within a group because the parameters are then set for everyone within that group to act appropriate to the standard. In short, persuasion is the single most critical tool for achieving success for any agent that wishes to garner an expected response; indoctrination into an idea at a young age means that indoctrination will always modify a behavior or response. The input in contemporary society comes from a variety of sources that includes social media and electronic devices. Scholars have direct contact with text, but, generally, the public at large has moved away from books toward digital resources for information and entertainment. The devices which are seen as modifying, or mediating, the experiences and reality of young adults will continue to move toward a digital platform, but to assume that books and text no longer have the power to persuade in a visual rhetoric society is dangerous.

Of the three novels used as primary source for this thesis, one has, at the time of the writing of this work, been released in theaters as a feature-length film. Even with the convenience of watching stories play out in movie theaters or on television, there is still easy access to the novel for young adult readers. It has not become obsolete, and it still has a critical role in the development of mediated information resources that people will draw upon when making other, non-related, decisions in their future. Novels are, at their core, stories of wonder and excitement for children; they are capable of being more than a passive storyteller. Looking through the lens of deconstruction, there are enough variables within all three novels to parse together a commonality that potentially shows an alternative meaning surrounding *Feed*, *Uglies*, and *Divergent*. There are a variety of devices that modify the deconstruction itself—feminism, socio-historical analysis, rhetorical reconstruction—but my conclusion is they play a minor role in the appeal to fear or persuasion that seem to be at the core of each of these novels and are only supporting characteristics of a broader tool. The use of ordinary characters within each novel means that the reader can easily establish a bond with the character. The idea that readers could be the character helps them to self-identify with them. This device, combined with the vehicles used in the stories that transport the characters, and readers, to the dystopian destination, helps resolve the cognitive dissonance of accepting some of the larger gaps in technological and sociological reality present in the environments in the stories. Heterotopias—moving environments such as trains, and planes, which offer a multifaceted paradigm shifting the reader through at least two, sometimes three different unique atmospheric experiences. Foucault explains that the trope is used to help transport readers into fantasy by helping them release from the real and accept alternatives that

cannot exist in the real –are consistently applied through hoverboards (*Uglies*), non-stop trains (*Divergent*), and the Dodge Gryphon (*Feed*) with its “larger back seat for your friends and shit” (Anderson 121). All three stories contain characters that are growing up, falling in love, and becoming members of an adult society; it is that transition that is always explored by the author. This also allows for contemporary readers to feel like they can relate to the characters themselves because these are the same experiences they are addressing in their day-to-day existence. While all the other literary and rhetorical aspects could be considered in a more diverse examination of the three novels, my conclusion is that the three variables I have focused on are critical to understanding the power of persuasion being applied toward young adults. Through phenomenology, group identity, and the model of global risk societies, the authors have helped (deliberately or unwittingly) to create a climate of fear for contemporary young adult readers.

### **Phenomenology**

The application of phenomenology as a rhetorical device is not unique. Edmund Husserl’s philosophy is built around ‘seeing’ phenomena. In short, Husserl posited that there are two concepts of sight—one that is based off the immanent—and one that is transcendental. This idea works in literary formats, through the lens of the agency that exists and mediates the realities of the readers exposed to that reflection of ideas. Husserl explains that “[t]he elucidation of the ways in which cognition is possible does not depend upon the ways of objective science” (5). The connection from philosophy to rhetorical device is simply that, through rhetorical reconstruction, the potential message could be misinterpreted. It allows for readers to apply their own concepts of the

emotional and physical responses to various events. In the format of literary device, phenomenology expands from resolving cognitive dissonance in first-person experiences to resolving the lack of direct reader experience of the fictional and unfamiliar circumstances in the novels by substituting a cognitive dissonance associated with other, non-linear experiences. Children do not have a broad set of experiences to fall back on to facilitate appropriate reactions toward every event they encounter; rather, they must look to their limited past to accommodate how a character should react to trauma, love, or fear. All three novels offer a traumatic experience that could be perceived as a substitute for 9/11. The point of view of that experience is limited by the dystopian nature of the fiction; it simply is impossible for a character who is a young adult, one hundred or more years in the future, to directly understand the events surrounding September 11, 2001. Instead, the authors have either supplanted another event to recreate the paradigm or have created characters that are living after an invented event occurred within the story.

In *Feed*, Titus has not experienced death. He has also not experienced a terroristic attack or even been disconnected from the feednet. Only when he experiences them for the first time through the novel does he have the ability to add them to his bank of emotions and events and make conclusions. In the case of readers, they are having a shared experience that could be manipulated by their own real life tragedies. However, I believe that M.T. Anderson is offering himself as an example of ethos—through Titus—because it is Anderson’s created experience which makes him the expert. This is a duplicated issue in *Uglies*, where a society has staged itself based on aesthetics and is controlled, not by maturity and experience, but surgery, to advance within the culture. Neither the characters nor the readers of Westerfeld’s story have experienced plastic

surgery on the scale suggested within the novel. It is fiction and the only expert is Westerfeld. In *Divergent*, teenagers are allowed seemingly unregulated control of their future within the factions available in the culture; it would be safe to assume that, at least in the United States, such a drastic break from family to join a radically different “home” environment at the age of sixteen is not a shared experience for many of the contemporary teen readers, although it could be argued that Beatrice’s situation is analogous to a young adult moving away from home to go to college, which traditionally happens a couple of years later for many. In fact, the only person who can relate to the particular situation depicted in the novel, again—and establish herself through ethos—is Roth. In all three cases, the author is easily seen as the expert on the experience; the pathos is established by the contemporary reader because there are clearly strong feelings associated with all these shared experiences. The mediated reality is established by the author, either directly or indirectly, because all of these events contribute toward a persuasion of fear. Titus is afraid of something going wrong with the feed after he is reconnected with it, and Violet clearly is affected by the terrorist attack on the feed; she is a direct example of an appeal toward fear for Titus. There is a parallelism employed to show that Violet is a physical manifestation of Titus’s fear. The final trips they make, the purchase of a vehicle by his parents for him, even the feed offering him consumer incentives are all designed to control his fears and keep him in line, to create conformity. Tally is blackmailed into following her friend, Shay, who ran from the surgery because, on some level, she is scared of it changing who she is or, worse, no longer existing as the person she is in the story—a rebellious teen. As Tally is exposed to a society that is built around uglies she becomes afraid of being forced to become pretty too. The appeals of



fear are all designed to make rebellion appealing in the face of conformity. The problem is that, at some point, when enough people are rebelling against the system—they simply become the new system. This cycle of fear against conformity leading to conformity is also found within *Divergent*. Beatrice joins Dauntless and feels like she is rebelling against the self-sacrifice that is found within Abnegation; ultimately, she finds that she is simply part of where she was all along—conforming.

All of these shared experiences are creating a new source of information for readers through phenomenology; they will eventually encounter a moment in their lives and draw upon this mediated experience to help them make decisions in the real world. Phenomenology, as a rhetorical tool, could be seen as the déjà vu moments because readers feel like they're experiencing something again—except that they only had the initial experience through mediated reality, through the text they read as teens. The one element that ties the teens to the characters is that they are all ordinary people living ordinary lives. There is a commonality between the groups (readers and fictional characters)—they have a group identity and they can relate to each other.

### **Group Think**

*Feed*, *Uglies*, and *Divergent* all have excellent examples of Kenneth Burke's identity model (identification means nothing more than a group of people who have a common goal or objective). The characters and environments in these novels exemplify this concept as they communicate a shared experience that contemporary readers can easily identify with. Anderson applies a jargon-laced dialect immediately as a tool to help tie the two groups together. By creating a new lexicon for teens in the future - and making

that dialect mirror contemporary teen's language choices—he has made a story that reads as if spoken from the mouth of a high school student in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Examples include “null,” (1) “unit,” (1) “something with nougat,” (4) and “youch” (4). These would be synonymous with bored, man, sweet, and pretty; the dialect changes from generation to generation but the meaning doesn't. The dialect within *Uglies* is not as abstract, but there is still a direct tie to contemporary teenagers in the United States. Tally explains to Shay that “[b]asically, it sucked” (66) in reference to finding out she wasn't really wanted by her friend in New Pretty Town; even the names of the cities within Tally's community are built around a teenage dialect—not an adult civilization. Beatrice's experiences within *Divergent* continues the trope of dialect more appropriate for a teenage audience, designed to help create the identity model. She is bullied throughout her training and the one variable that continues throughout her experience is the reference to her as a “stiff.”

Another device that is relied upon to establish identity is technology; there is a correlation between contemporary teens and their use of devices and the characters within the three novels. By introducing technology that offers a similar experience to the entire peer group established by the authors, they are able to create ethos because the teens see the characters as experts in new technology. The largest technological device used in *Feed* is the feednet; it is tied to the existence of all young adults in Titus's society. The parents of the teens are also connected through the cerebral Internet that is established within the story as an environment itself, perhaps implying that the parents in this novel are the teens of today—the target audience—projected into the future. The ability to communicate without external contact feels like a natural transition from the handheld mobile devices used by contemporary teens. The ability to communicate, and be active

consumers within the society is mixed with a complete lack of the reference to funds. Titus explains, through narrative, that he has substantial credit—but there is no statement of earning that credit. The careers within *Feed* are all built around the feed; there is no success for those who are disconnected from this society. This helps establish identity further for readers. It could be assumed that children believe money grows on trees—now and in Anderson’s future.

In *Uglies*, the technology is more subtle, but the ring worn by Tally that serves as a virtual caretaker (perhaps a future version of the GPS locators found on the phones used by today’s teens) (Westerfeld 11) offers insight into how connected the community is. All of the technology defined within *Uglies* has, on the surface, a positive, even entertainment value for the society. The bungee jackets are an emergency escape device to survive fires—yet they are used to facilitate base jumping (27). There is also the use of future skateboards, called hoverboards, which rely on the same technology to float as the other structures within the society (28). All of society relies on the engineering technology; it is relevant to contemporary readers because they see engineering as being required and part of their identity as well. The modern alternatives to food, shelter, and travel all help to establish identity with young adults who see this technology as the next step, and have that mentality reinforced by media. This connection with technology continues in *Divergent* through the use of the simulation devices that help the students decide which faction they intend to join (Roth 10), easily analogous to the increasingly realistic role-playing games (RPGs) that allow today’s teens to create virtual identity avatars and which they spend hours playing. The easy manipulation of the mind to battle fear, by using the simulation devices, in the Dauntless compound eventually leads to

them being turned into mind-controlled soldiers, once again analogous to reports that have emerged of young men joining the military in order to move from the virtual world of an RPG to the “real thing.”

The one consistent technological variable that crosses all three stories is transportation. In each instance, transportation is critical to the movement of the story. It is important because young adults are raised to value independence, and independence is directly tied with the ability to move away from home. In each story, vehicles are the one thing that is controlled by the adults. There is a fear associated with either the decision to get a vehicle, or having access to one. In *Feed*, Titus struggles with the decision between a sports car and an SUV. In *Uglies*, Tally is forced to use a hoverboard to find and betray her friend Shay and then to escape capture from her society. In *Divergent*, the train is the one vehicle available to Beatrice that she does not control because it never stops; it is a dangerous element. All these variables help to build characters and an environment that are designed to establish identity. Identity is required to believe, and belief is required to establish ethos.

### **Global Risk Society**

Each society within the novels is built around an attack which will happen to the community, or the effects of an attack that has already occurred; it is critical in helping to establish the final piece of the fear puzzle. In *Feed*, Titus and the other teens are unable to see the threat of the terrorist at the night club because they have become an international society—cosmopolitan. This ability to infiltrate and attack while hiding in plain sight creates an immediate fear of anybody who is different. Anderson has created a perfect

fictional environment for Ulrich Beck's global risk society to play within (Beck summarizes the concept in "The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited" by asserting that global risk society is constructed on the premise that outside threats are no longer kept outside the nation-state in a globalized community (40). The threats are self-sustaining, and inside the borders allowing for a constant state of fear of outsiders—even those who are legitimately 'inside' the community.) The environment in *Feed* is one in which mistrust should not exist, but quickly becomes an acceptable mindset among the teenagers. The corporations themselves refuse to assist Violet because she violates their consumer model by making unpredictable spending decisions. She is not trusted to make rational decisions about purchases within their society and that limits her ability to be part of the group. Tally and Shay become outsiders in a world that is attempting to mass produce perfection; the events of the past have directly influenced the agency in charge to eliminate any variable of difference from their community. David and the rebels who occupy The Smoke are outsiders in a global setting; their refusal to conform, and therefore be trusted, helps to facilitate Beck's model within Westerfeld's universe. There are secondary elements associated with the global risk society within *Uglies*. New Pretty Town is built around having fun, being rebellious and taking sanctioned, safe risks; this means that part of the community's advancement is built around an unspoken trust of each member of the young adult community. Tally and the other teens who actively work against the surgery are causing problems within the status quo and that further develops a sense of mistrust. In *Divergent*, the factions are considered the perfect model of government and therefore are safe; the revolt that is perpetuated by the Erudite faction with collaborators from Dauntless means that the elements which are required most for

safety are the biggest threat in Roth's community. Within the Dauntless faction itself, risk-taking is part of the bond of trust each member of that community builds on; by taking risks during ceremonies and daily life, the members of that society find internal strength to carry on against their own fears and threats to the overall community. However, they are always in control of the risks. When the Erudite faction actively brainwashes them and forces them to act against their own will it creates an uncontrolled risk for the society. By the conclusion of the first novel, the society itself has changed and mistrust is rampant; the divisions of faction are also fractured along unknown lines that have created new threats.

### **A New World Order**

The one consistent variable that exists in all three books is fear. Anderson, Westerfeld, and Roth all rely on it to help establish a bond between the characters and environments they have created and the young adult audience of readers they covet. Without fear, there cannot be trust built into the literary relationship, and the shared experiences of events that take place within each society are unbelievable. The strength of an appeal to fear in post 9/11 literature is the idea that outsiders have always existed within any society who intend to do harm to members of that society; this is a new paradigm caused by globalization. The transient nature of humans to follow resources and attempt to find better access to them has meant people move from one community to another in search of better jobs, schools or communities to attach themselves to. The arguably unprovoked nature of 9/11 caused dissonance around the world because society realized that threats could exist anywhere—there were no longer blatant signs or

warnings that foreshadowed a threat. That idea has been nurtured and these three and other authors, directly or indirectly, have created stories that build on the mindset that outsiders are a risk—and conformity to a society is the best measure of protection from being labeled an outsider. In effect, if an individual doesn't conform to the standards of the group identity, they are potentially a threat and mistrust is applied; it is better to err on the side of safety than risk another terrorist attack.

All of this ties directly to rhetoric because media has convinced society that it is bad to be xenophobic; the mindset has become to strive for an all-inclusive society for contemporary America. For generations, the sociological landscape has moved toward equality and understanding; however, because of the new threat of terrorism, teaching ideas of equality and understanding seems to have taken a backseat to a much stronger desire to bully those who do not comply into submission. Being a rebel with or without a cause is bad business in a post-terrorized society; instead, following the trend establishes trust, a place within the group, and limits risk. Society is filled with examples of the pattern that grows from phenomenology through *déjà vu*, and ultimately, false memory syndrome. Cara Laney and Elizabeth Loftus's research on that subject concluded the human mind is prone to external and internal agents that could manipulate the value of accounts depicted through the experience of the witness or witnesses (137-138). Young adults want to hang onto the positive emotional ties they have had with an experience, and anything that can be considered negative drives them to correct their actions—and what they consider as acceptable—to avoid being alone. At the core of this argument is simply that we are afraid of anything that doesn't fit the mold we have established as acceptable; that pattern has become replicated and passed along to another generation of

young, vulnerable readers, who are being indoctrinated into the cult of fear. There is a valid point to fear because it is part of the basic nature of all animals. Fight or flight is not abnormal; however, creating fear through the lens of fitting in or else being subject to possible permanent rejection—as is the case with Violet in *Feed*—shows a tendency to simply fear for the sake of fear; not everybody who is different, or an outsider, is a threat. The mediated reality offered in contemporary post 9/11 young adult literature is inadvertently teaching young adults that xenophobia is good in spite of the barrage of public messages about diversity enriching our society, that conforming to social norms is the only way to avoid being labeled an outsider despite the constant encouragement for teens to accept their differences and “be themselves,” which has led to an epidemic of bullying, and that the biggest risk to our society is allowing foreigners to openly access the community in spite of the public call for establishing “open borders” in the service of establishing a peaceful global cooperation.

On the surface, the overall structure of this genre appears to be nothing more than simple coming-of-age stories, teen romance, and modern-day heroic tales. The problem is that, by applying deconstruction and subsequent rhetorical reconstruction, the potential message could have a negative connotation and outcome for young adult readers. An example would be the gender roles within *Divergent*. The fights which are staged within Dauntless could be seen as offering a strong feminist message to women because Roth has created a world where men and women fight equally for ranking in physical combat; however, Four, who is Beatrice’s love interest, watches and fails to point out that needless violence is not a solution. He steps out of the ring after he has seen enough to make him upset, but he doesn’t actively stop her abuser, easily analogous to the bystander who



simply walks away in a high school corridor when he/she witnesses an act of bullying. There are enough mixed messages, all built around violence, to help further assert Burke's identity model for young adults; he posits that the age group is drawn to violence—that there is a sense of connection between violence and the group mentality (Burke 18). In *Uglies* we see the invasion of The Smoke under the same model of a feminist message; there is no quarter for females, and they are not treated better or worse; in fact, the operation to find and eliminate The Smoke is under the direction of Dr. Cable, a decidedly strong female character in a leadership role in a world that does not question her ability to be such a leader. The alternative is the understanding that Tally's society is based on a model of peace created to change drastically (and even negatively) how humans survive on Earth. The entire story is built around a dystopian world where this community has broken free from what they deem as outdated and dangerous ideas of community. Yet they openly attack and kill outsiders under the guise of helping the uglies become pretties—even if it means forcing them to accept the surgery. *Feed* offers no message of feminist equality; instead it perpetuates the idea that being verbally abusive is acceptable against women. Titus repeatedly becomes profane when dealing with Violet during the terminal stages of her medical condition. His response to the fear of losing her builds on the same pathos that fuels Beatrice's and Tally's physical attacks at the hands of the agencies in control.

The one conclusion that can be reached, overall, is that fear sells. This formula for writing has continued to advance in a post 9/11 world because young adults are looking for guidance from their elders. Authors are writing stories that are selling, which has publishing houses willing to produce and distribute the works. The three books analyzed

for this thesis are a very small sampling of a very large segment of young adult fiction today—dystopian, futuristic, and fantasy-based story lines glut the adolescent publishing market, one of the fastest growing markets in publishing, and a genre that crosses age and gender categories. One thing is clear; the persuasion does not seem to be a direct attempt to create bigotry. Instead, what seems to be the direct byproduct of the appeal to fear is a push toward conforming and assimilation into the community. Young adults believe that by rebelling, they are pathfinders who are leading unique lives that will benefit the community by highlighting problems within the society; these novels espouse this idea on the surface, as can be attested to by the thousands of blog posts by readers both adolescent and adult. The development of this trope becomes complex when those who rebel find themselves at the center of a new community that has simply conformed to a modified ideology; in the end, they find that they did nothing unique at all, but were guided through fear to conform to an evolved idea of an existing paradigm. There cannot be a rebellion if the rebellion itself is the new conformity. By focusing on fear, potentially, authors are avoiding the bigger issues and questions that should be asked about all communities.

### **Further Research**

The first direction that could be taken in expanding research into dissertation-level extrapolation would be the other novels which form the series for two of the three works examined for this thesis. *Feed* is a stand-alone story. However, Anderson has other stories that could be explored to see if there is a similar or comparable rhetorical pattern being used by him, directly or indirectly, to help create appeals to emotional states in his

audience. The language Anderson employs within *Feed* also could benefit from further research. He created a new dialect of English which takes contemporary teenage slang and adapts it to a future modification without losing the same feelings. An in-depth linguistic exploration of his word choices could allow for sociolinguistic and semantic data to be created that would shed more light on possible rhetorical implications.

*Uglies* is the first of a four-part series by Westerfeld that expands beyond the limited story told in this first novel toward a more complete experience for readers. A deconstruction of each novel within the series, and possibly a larger post-structural examination of the series as a whole could produce more evidence of rhetorical appeals within the storyline. As a franchise, Westerfeld has also allowed for the creation of side stories which allow for a broader spectrum of examination. An example of the side stories which he created is the graphic novel *Uglies: Shay's Story*. The use of a comic book format could be examined to see if the message is enhanced, or changed, by the mixed media of illustration and text, modes of storytelling which are processed and interpreted differently by readers, but must be processed at the same time in order to experience the full story. Further exploration into the society of *Uglies*, the Specials and 'the surge' itself could be undertaken to see if the lexicon established for this alternative universe is designed to further create appeals through rhetoric.

*Divergent* offers more novels in the series as well. This avenue could be examined in both text formats and film reviews as it is a franchise in transition. The film adaptation could be examined and compared for changes in the screenplay which might offer even further alternative messages that could be mediating the experience of young adult viewers. All three novels could also be examined through the social media platforms

which exist as a fan base for the characters and stories. This examination could look at what messages contemporary audiences are already receiving and conveying through chat room and forum discussions about the novels.

Additionally, each novel has a significant number of fan sites, and the authors also have personal websites with forums available for communication. This research would begin to delve into sociological or sociolinguistic formats that open the door for collaboration beyond English Studies. The potential for mass communication input could also be found within this last avenue of research as well. Researchers could also look at other novels and franchises within this genre, to include *The Hunger Games* and *The Giver*, to see if the same rhetoric can be perceived through these works. Even limiting the deconstruction to only the three variables of focus for this thesis could produce significantly more understanding of the effect of persuasion toward fear in contemporary societies.

### **Alternative Mediated Formats**

Scholarly research needs to see if, generationally, the effects of persuasion on young adults has become more pronounced, more focused—or if it has always been a powerful tool and the variable that has changed has been accessibility. The two ways that I believe this could be facilitated would be to look at data that does is not limited to a segment of time—i.e. World War II literature could be compared against Revolutionary War and even contemporary young adult literature; the variable that would need to be eliminated would be socio-economic/historic values to see if, sans these inputs, the message was the same. Secondly, research could be broadened to include social media,

television, literature and film formats to accurately attempt to assess the power of persuasion—and potentially identify agency—found within media that young adult audiences are exposed to on a daily basis. For example, over the last 30 years there have been a handful of cult classic films; the dialogue and message have become part of the lexicon of the world. The intention of this thesis was to strictly deal with the deconstruction of literature. However, by expanding future research to include films such as *Monty Python's The Search for the Holy Grail*, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Boondock Saints* and *Shaun of the Dead*, researchers could provide data about what appeals were being made during the Vietnam War, The Cold War, and even the Korean War. While they are outside the scope of literature, the ability to offer a deconstruction of the rhetorical options within each of these films would benefit a broader development of the changing landscape of audiences. This research, when combined with other media outlets, would offer a diagnostic tool of pre 9/11 media which has been created with the purpose of sending a message, even if that message is not what the creator of the product intended. This information would add to scholarly understanding of how young adults' decisions and acceptance of violence and war are directly, or indirectly, modified by the media they are exposed to in these historical moments.

For example, a possible parallel examination of how young adults responded to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent literature that was produced in a 14-year-window after December 7, 1941, versus literature that was produced in a 14-year-window after September 11, 2001, could also provide invaluable data about the mediated reality associated with novels. For the purposes of a pure rhetoric dissertation, this last

potential expansion of research could yield the most interesting results. I believe that newspapers could be included into the data pool to show an all-inclusive field of input toward young adults in these two periods of time. The question itself would not have to change because the examination of othering combined with a global threat would still exist in both instances. Both events led to the United States becoming active participants in a global conflict. The potential for sociological research combined with communications means that this last avenue would be the most beneficial to future scholars and have the largest impact on academia and society.

Young adults are, for lack of a better term, transcendental tumbleweeds—blank canvases; they are not born exposed to experience and ideas, but instead, roll along picking up the details and minutia that make up who they eventually become as a whole. While literature is not the sole agent of forming minds and ideas, it is a reflection of the agencies that do wield that power. Through literary analysis, deconstruction, and the subsequent reconstruction of a small selection of young adult dystopian literature, it seems readily apparent that there is the appearance of providing teens with literature that encourages individuality, independent thinking, fighting against injustice and ‘corporate’ control, and claims to provide them with the ‘power’ to not buy into ‘group think’ mentality. However, closer analysis reveals that the opposite message is what seems to be conveyed, and, ironically, what the readers only ‘hear’ is the message about being ‘heroes in their own lives’ at the same time that they have fully incorporated and are emulating the ‘hidden’ message—belonging at all costs is the goal and resistance is not only futile but a threat worse than death. ‘Group think’ ends up reigning even as readers celebrate

the 'strength' of these characters who rebel and try to change the world (which they don't, really).

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