

Identity Formation in Young Adult Fantasy Literature

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Abstract

Adolescence is the stage of life during which an individual is most occupied with who they are. The literature aimed at this age group reflects this in its treatment of identity, which is often a much larger part of the story than it is in literature aimed at adults. In recent years, academic discussions of Young Adult (YA) literature have become more numerous. Many of these discussions take only one or two YA series as their objects of analysis. This thesis aimed to outline how the process of identity formation occurs in and around Young Adult novels through a combination of general analysis, close reading, and fandom analysis. The selection of novels was limited to series within the fantasy genre. Three types of novels were distinguished on the basis of their treatment of identity: in the first type a character is categorised on the basis of their identity, the second type contain categories into which a character is born, and the third type forgoes categorisation altogether. Instead, the identity of these characters is formed only through the society they live in, the people they engage with, and the events in the novel. Type one novels were found to emphasise community through like-mindedness, showing the reader that they can find a community of people that resemble them. Type two novels are less concerned with agency, and more with acceptance of what one is born as. Type three novels tell the reader that their choices, informed by the people around them, will shape their identity.

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Introduction

The widely-read and popular genre of Young Adult novels has only come up as a distinct genre from the second world war onwards, as the concept of adolescence only was not used before: children became adults as they went into the workforce (Cart 3). At first, according to Michael Cart, the genre consisted mostly of depictions of real-life occupations. But as businesses started taking adolescents, especially girls, seriously as consumers, romance novels began being published for teenagers as well (Cart 14-15). The 1960s and 1970s were the age of “problem literature”, novels which featured all kinds of serious problems that young people could have. In the 1980s, romantic novels as well as horror stories with teenagers as the targeted consumers returned. The 1980s were also the time in which multiculturalism became an issue in YA literature (Cart 48). Readers’ platform *Goodreads* defines Young Adult fiction as “fiction written for, published for, or marketed to adolescents and young adults, roughly ages 13 to 18” with the “majority of YA stories portray[ing] an adolescent as the protagonist, rather than an adult or a child”. Even with this general age range, many YA novels cater more heavily towards either a younger segment (from the age of 10) or an older segment (up until the mid-twenties). This lack of focus may be a result of the fact that the genre has only been a popular marketable genre since the publication of *Harry Potter*, and has evolved drastically over the years. Though YA encompasses many genres, the type of YA fiction discussed in this thesis will be from the fantasy genre, since this genre allows for the creation of different worlds with different ways of identifying. Fitzgerald acknowledges that fantasy literature is not easily defined due to the variety within the genre, but describes it as “literature which contains elements that do not or cannot exist in reality” (3), though it has connotations of being “heavily based on the roots of folklore and mythology, and contains archetypes that are universal” (3-4). Both the elements that do not exist in reality and the treatment of elements that do are interesting for this thesis.

Fantasy as a subgenre of Young Adult novels did not come into being until the end of the twentieth century, far preceded by science fiction novels such as the ones by Robert A. Heinlein, the first of which appeared in 1953 (Cart 20). After a brief YA slump in the early 1990s, the success of *Harry Potter* (1997) “helped turn young adult literature into an increasingly global phenomenon and also sparked a new interest in fantasy as a genre [...] for young adults”, stimulating an “outpouring of new fantasy titles” and rediscovery of previously published fantasy novels (Cart 118). The phenomenon around the series also created a search in publishing to find “the next *Harry Potter*” (119). Since *Harry Potter* had been a fantasy series, many of these new works were also fantasy novels or series, giving birth to the first wave of YA fantasy literature. In her book about fanfiction and fan communities, Anne Jamison writes that “*Harry Potter* was in great part responsible for the explosion of YA as a book marketing category” (151). This surge was helped by the online fan communities; as Chris Rankin, the actor playing Percy Weasley in the *Harry Potter* films, writes in Jamison’s book, the wide accessibility of the Internet coinciding with the massive interest in *Harry Potter* very much influenced the creation of fan communities online (157). YA fantasy had become a lucrative market for publishers. The next big YA series was Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series (2005), which gave rise to a paranormal romance subgenre which was mostly aimed at teenage girls, while the earlier more adventure-based fantasy series had not been marketed towards either boys or girls (Cart 119). The last *Harry Potter* novel appeared in 2007, and the last instalment of the *Twilight* saga in 2008. To fill the void left by these major series, and creating a new popular subgenre, came Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008). Mixing the adventure with a bit of romance in a dystopian setting, these novels were accessible for adolescents regardless of gender, and they gave rise to a flood of dystopian novels, among which Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* trilogy is most notable (Cart 122), although James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner* (2009) deserves a mention as well.

After the dystopia craze died down, hardly any singular novel or series has managed to capture mass attention the way *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, or *The Hunger Games* has, perhaps because a return to non-fantasy works was spurred by John Green's 2005 novel *Looking for Alaska* (Cart 126). In fantasy, Leigh Bardugo's *Shadow and Bone* trilogy (2013), combined with the *Six of Crows* duology (2015), is set to be adapted by Netflix, but it remains to be seen whether this will attract many more readers or fail to make any impact. Novels that keep doing well are prequels or sequels to the big aforementioned series, with Rowling releasing the script of the stage musical *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016), Meyer publishing *Midnight Sun* (2020), a retelling of the *Twilight* saga from the vampire's perspective, and Collins coming out with an origin-story prequel to *The Hunger Games: A Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020). Since the publication of *Harry Potter*, the market has existed mostly as a series of very popular publications which each create a surge in similar texts until the next big publication came along, slightly shifting the focus of the genre.

Readers' identities are not just mirrored by the identity formation of characters in YA novels, but they are shaped by them as well. Balaka Basu begins her text about the readers' pleasure of being sorted in *Divergent* (2011) stating that the heroes "and by extension, [...] readers" of Young Adult (YA) fiction are asked two questions: "Who am I now? And who do I want to be when I grow up?" (19). Basu locates this quest for a tangible identity at the core of the YA genre, often ending with the heroes finding a collective identity "defined mainly by membership in a particular group" (19). Readers of these novels are, according to Meghan Fitzgerald, developmentally "in the process of creating a 'positive identity,'" which characters who encounter "adversity that represents real-life conflict" can help shape (11). It has not always been seen this way; in the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of narrativity was reconceptualised; whereas narrative used to be interpreted as a representational form (in which the process of identity formation was only represented, but did not affect the reader),

an ontological interpretation of narrative posits that “it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (Somers 606). We become who we are as we locate ourselves in social narratives. Stories for young adults, who are actively searching for their identity, are likely instrumental in their identity formation. This thesis seeks to map the process of identity formation both inside and outside of the story worlds in YA fantasy fiction.

Young Adult fantasy literature has been chosen for this thesis, firstly because some fantasy novels make use of identity categories which are interesting for this research, such as factions in *Divergent*. Even if they do not, fantasy novels are interesting because they are not bound to the same rules as the real world, and their exploration of identity can be more diverse. Furthermore, to make valid comparisons and analyses all the novels discussed should be the same genre. Lastly, while other genres within YA fiction are undoubtedly interesting to discuss in the context of identity, limiting this thesis to fantasy will allow for a closer and more focused investigation.

Another element of many of these novels, which Basu explores as part of the identity-formation in *Divergent*, is what this thesis will refer to as the sorting mechanism. This is the mechanism in many YA novels that sorts characters in identity categories. Alexander and Black refer to this as “high-stakes testing” because these identity categories often determine the fate of the person being sorted or tested (214), especially in dystopias (208). In sorting, too, fan communities play a role, since fans often enjoy being sorted (Basu 30) through sorting quizzes or “Sort and Ship” games in which a fan submits a picture of themselves and is sorted in categories from various novel or film worlds, as well as paired romantically with a fictional character (“shipped”). The sorting happens not only in established personality categories such as factions and houses, but also into categories that are only imbued with personality inside of the fandom, such as Districts (from *The Hunger Games*), Godly Parents

(based on Rick Riordan's depiction of the Greek gods in the *Percy Jackson* series) or species (from *The Mortal Instruments*). Readers' identities are therefore not only influenced when reading these novels, but they also engage with the texts and their identity further outside of them.

These fan activities are also important to consider when discussing novels. Whereas literary critics may close read a novel, this is done from an academic distance. According to Pierre Bourdieu, "the intellectual reader of popular texts focuses less on their emotional qualities or narrative interests than upon those aspects which "are only appreciated rationally through a comparison with other works", an approach "incompatible with immersion in the singularity of the work immediately given" (239, qtd in Jenkins 61). Henry Jenkins writes that "[r]ecent work in cultural studies directs attention to the meanings texts accumulate through their use. The reader's activity is no longer seen simply as the task of recovering the author's meanings but also as reworking borrowed materials to fit them into the context of lived experience" (52). Fans' experiences and interpretations of these novels may therefore be different to those unearthed by close reading. Especially in a thesis about identity formation in Young Adult novels, which often have very active fanbases in an age group that is occupied with their own identity, attention must be paid to fan interpretations.

This thesis will analyse how the process of identity formation occurs in and around Young Adult fantasy novels. As discussed, it is relevant for this project to consider both the content of the novels and the ways in which fans interpret this content and use it for their own identity. There are many academic works on fan culture, and a growing number of analyses of Young Adult novels, but a project of this scope, including the content of the novels as well as fan engagement with them, is still lacking. Identity is a prevalent theme in Young Adult fiction, so this thesis will also provide a guide for future analyses of this theme.

In order to see how YA fantasy novels treat and influence the process of identity formation, four subquestions have been formulated:

1. How is identity formed in and around literature?
2. Based on identity formation in the novel, which types of novels can be distinguished?
3. How do the ways these novels shape identity within the story differ from each other?
4. To what extent can these same types be found in fan culture?

The first subquestion concerns the interplay between readers' identity and YA fiction, to establish a framework of theory on identity formation and literature. The second question is aimed at establishing various ways in which identity is treated in a large number of novels, in order to form distinct types. The third question compares these types to each other to find out how the contents of these stories differ from one another as pertains to identity formation. The last question intends to find out to what extent these types hold up as it pertains to fan culture.

Chapter one will answer subquestion 1 using academic literature on the topic of identity formation in YA novels. To answer subquestion 2 in chapter two, the previously established information on identity formation in YA will be used to distinguish three types of YA fantasy novels based on the way they treat identity formation, each of which has similarities in manner of identity formation. Since this thesis is meant to be a survey of the larger field, a relatively large number of works will be analysed. The analysis will use novels published from 1990 onwards, with the requirement that they are demonstrably popular, having appeared on bestseller lists or been adapted into films or TV series. The novels used are written in English, though since the analysis will use only very popular novels, the nationality of the author is not relevant.¹ To keep the thesis focused and the analysis grounded

¹ The topic of identity formation can, of course, be discussed in reference to the nationality of the authors, especially when their culture of origin is very different. However, this thesis is not concerned with a cultural exploration of identity as conceived by the author. It will take the texts at face value and is only concerned with its connection with the readers. Instead of exploring why the text explores identity the way it does, the discussion here will find out what the effect is of the text, and therefore author nationality is not relevant. In

in the source material, one series for each type will be used as a case study for close reading in chapter three in a comparative analysis to illustrate what distinguishes these types from one another. Subquestion 3 will be answered in chapter three by analysing the content of these three series. A variety of angles will be discussed, such as themes and power structures in the world of the story. Subquestion 4 will be answered in chapter four through online quizzes, to see whether the established types work the same in fandoms.

chapter four, when fan culture is discussed, place of origin of any particular piece of fan culture is also not important, since the fan culture under discussion is international, by virtue of its taking place online.

Chapter One: Who am I? Identity Formation and Fiction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis will discuss identity formation in Young Adult novels. Much has been written about identity and literature already, so this chapter will explore academic views on how readers' identities are formed within Young Adult fantasy novels. Narratives are a relevant part of identity formation, as discussed in the introduction; one's identity is shaped when one locates oneself in a narrative. Identity formation will first be addressed outside of literature; how is identity formed? Next, this chapter will look at identity formation through reading, and through YA novels in particular. Previous research into this topic, in combination with analytical observations about specific novels, will provide a theoretical answer to the question "How is identity formed in and around YA fiction?". The chapter will consider both the way the novels show their characters' identities being shaped, and the way a reader's identity is influenced by reading.

1.2 Identity Development in Adolescents

There are two broad categories into which approaches to identity formation fall, according to Jane Kroger: linear and developmental. "Linear views of identity see change as quantitative in nature [and] tend to divide people into various types" (Kroger, discussed in Iversen 72). Developmental views "see identity formation as a series of different stages" (72), which are the same for everyone. Erik Erikson's stages of identity formation would fit into the developmental view. Erikson defined identity as "a person's sense of who he or she is [which] provides the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly" (Iversen 72). As examples of what belongs to one's personality, Kroger gives such "aspects as personal values and beliefs, sex role identification, how one

communicates with and feels close to others, decisions about what profession to pursue, sexual orientation, and whether one wants to marry and start a family and with whom” (Iversen 72). Ideas of identity are prevalent within Young Adult literature, and Erikson’s theory that identity and personality development take place in eight stages which span an individual’s life has often been used to analyse identity in these types of novels (Caggia, Seppänen).

In each of Erikson’s stages, a crisis must be resolved to continue to the next stage. The crisis in adolescence is Identity versus Role Confusion. According to Peter Caggia: “[t]his stage marks the crossroads between childhood and adulthood in which adolescents are wrestling with the question of ‘Who am I?’” (20). Using this theory, Caggia analyses several YA fantasy stories to find how adolescents in these stories try to resolve the crisis. He discerns three ways: the protagonist discovers something about themselves (for example, Harry Potter discovering that he is a wizard), the protagonist finds out something about their purpose (which can be through a prophecy) and the protagonist discovers an ability they have, (such as Lyra being a good storyteller/liar in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy) (Caggia 30, 69). Of course, in many stories, these three ways overlap. After the discovery of these facets of their identity, protagonists may go through several stages (Caggia 32-34): *denial* (Harry not wanting to accept his fame), *doubt* (Katniss doubting she can lead the rebellion after failing to save Peeta from the Capitol in *Mockingjay*), *awareness of change* (Kaz realizing that he wants Inej to live for more than just her skills in *Six of Crows* and *Crooked Kingdom*) and lastly, *acceptance* (Katniss understanding that she can contribute to the revolution by becoming the Mockingjay in *Mockingjay*). Although Caggia analyses *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* using Erikson’s theory, the worlds of these novels adhere much more to a linear conception of identity, since identity categories are used to place characters in. Marianne Seppänen analyses *The Hunger Games* (2008) and *Divergent* (2011)

in light of Erikson's theory as well, and finds that the question of identity is related to characters' environments, especially when the relatively safe environment that the protagonist started in is changed, as when Tris changes factions in *Divergent*. In literature, the so-called "inciting incident" takes place at the start of many novels; it is a way for the author to displace a character from their stable environment to an unstable or unfamiliar one. As can be seen in the novels under scrutiny in this thesis, each series begins with the protagonist being confronted with a new situation, either by choice or forcibly.

Interestingly, while Erikson's developmental model tends to be used to analyse novels, especially for an adolescent readership, some novels seem to lean towards a linear model of identity, with a tendency to divide people into types. For adolescents especially, these types feel comfortable, as Basu also describes. A character's identity is located in categories in these novels; Tris' choice to join the Dauntless faction in *Divergent* is accompanied by an identification with the Dauntless values and a rejection of the selflessness of her previous faction Abnegation: "I am selfish. I am brave" (Roth, *Div* 47). Even if there are virtually unlimited options, such as in *His Dark Materials*, the question of what shape a character's daemon (an animal-shaped representation of their personality) will take is prevalent throughout the story. The developmental stages, on the other hand, can be seen in narratives with less clear identity categories, such as *The Hunger Games*, in which Katniss has much to learn about herself and the power structures in her life before she can decide to be the figurehead of the rebellion, and then even more until she can decide whether the rebellious regime would really be better than the one that was overthrown. She feels like she has to choose between the two, but because of her changed values she chooses a third option, killing the rebel president to end the cycle of revenge.

Another way of looking at identity formation is brought up by Robyn McCallum, following theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan. McCallum describes the formation

of subjectivity (defined as the “sense of a personal identity an individual has of her/his self as distinct from other selves”) as dialogical, meaning that “an individual’s consciousness and sense of identity is formed in dialogue with others and with the discourses constituting the society and culture s/he inhabits” (3). This dialogical definition resembles the one by James P. Gee, who sees identity formed in discourse: “the individual brings certain subjectivities to a discursive act, while, at the same time, the discourse affects the individual engaging in it [...] how one communicates determines the person one becomes” (Gee qtd in Alsup 2). Alsup connects Gee’s definition to YA literature, arguing that discourse could also be the narrative discourse that is read, and that especially in adolescents, this narrative discourse can impact self-definition (3). These theories, unlike Erikson’s environmental development, position identity formation as a more active process through dialogue and interaction with others.

1.3 Reading and Identity

Reading a novel is often a very personal experience that can affect the reader’s identity in various ways, such as through parasocial relationships, identification, and performative citation, which will be discussed in this paragraph. Although readers cannot form actual relationships with characters, young adult readers especially tend to form one-sided, parasocial relationships with their favourite characters, in the sense that they think they would be friends with the character if they were real (Kokesh and Sternadori 143). Identification occurs when the reader feels as if the events in a story are or could be happening to them, with the characters acting the way the reader would (Cohen 245, qtd in Kokesh and Sternadori 142). This process, according to Kokesh and Sternadori, is “one of the main mechanisms through which people [...] construct their identities” (142). While Kokesh and Sternadori link identification with self-perception, as when young women read about other young women being capable of doing certain things, and therefore believe that they themselves can also do

them, they do not consider any other ways in which identification can contribute to identity formation of the reader. However, identification with characters could also help adolescents think about what kind of group they (would like to) belong to. Through identification, teenagers use fictional characters to build their identity. Looking at identity and identification from a performativity standpoint, Jay Lemke argues that young people choose building blocks from popular culture to form their identities. Every choice someone makes “marks us by the conventions of a community” as a certain type of person. An example of this from YA fan communities is that someone can choose to wear a red-and-gold scarf, marking them as Gryffindor instead of Slytherin. Performative identity as conceived by Judith Butler sees identity as “the actions we take to enact or perform our various public and private selves” (Lemke 147). This view of identity sees young people using (or “citing”) elements of characters or movements in popular culture to build their own identity, and to display their identity.

According to Basu, YA literature often concerns a “quest for identity”, which results in the heroes finding “a collective [identity], defined mainly by membership in a particular group” (19). A reason for the popularity of quick and easy identification of readers to characters in novels might be that readers hope to be similarly defined so that their identities are no longer “so alarmingly fluid” (20). Categories such as the factions in *Divergent* are helpful in this process, but in worlds lacking clear-cut personality categories there are other groups the protagonist (and reader) can identify with. For example, YA literature often portrays adolescents who are trying to establish their identity as rebels: being a rebel is a way of identifying with a group, against the establishment that they do not fit into (Seppänen 11). Identity in YA novels, as in Erikson’s and McCallum’s theories, is not formed in a vacuum, but in a social environment.

Chapter Two: What am I? Three Types

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, various ways of viewing identity formation were discussed. This chapter will explore these concepts in the context of some specific YA fantasy series, and show why it makes sense to divide Young Adult fantasy novels into three types. First, the differences between story worlds in which identity is viewed as linear and story worlds in which it is viewed as developmental will be discussed. The linear stories are not all the same in their treatment of identity. In some of them, characters have more agency over their categorisation than in others. Therefore, after this first division into two groups, the linear stories will be more closely examined, and a distinction will be made between the stories which emphasise identity as a way to categorise and those who emphasise birth as a way to categorise. This will lead to the establishment of three types of YA fantasy based on how they treat identity: one with categories that a character is placed in based on their identity, the second with identity categories that a character is placed in by birth, and the third without any categories.

2.2 Linear and Developmental Types

Identity formation has a strong social component, so when looking at identity in YA novels, the world of the story must be considered. In this section, a number of YA fantasy worlds will be discussed in order to see whether they are closer to linear or developmental conceptions of identity. The clearest example of identity playing a large role in a story world can be found in the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth. In the world of *Divergent* every sixteen-year-old chooses one of the five *factions*: Dauntless (the brave), Erudite (the smart), Amity (the kind), Candor (the honest), or Abnegation (the selfless). The chosen faction will become their home, and they are expected to choose faction over family, which is emphasised in the slogan “Faction Before Blood,” which shows up multiple times in the series. There is a test on the

day before the Choosing Ceremony that tells every teen in which faction they would fit best, but they are free to choose. However, since it is believed that every person truly belongs in only one faction, and the teenagers are not allowed to talk about the test, most people choose the faction they are told to choose by the test. The protagonist, Tris, is told she is not only fit for Abnegation, where her parents come from and where she has grown up, but also for Dauntless and Erudite. This makes her different from most others: 'Divergent'. The woman who takes her test tells her that Divergent people are hunted, and that she should not tell anyone what she is. In the third novel, *Allegiant*, Tris learns that non-Divergent people were genetically damaged by the government to have one dominant characteristic in order to create a better society, and that Divergent people's genes are healed. The faction system in the city of Chicago was one of various testing locations to find out how best to control non-Divergent people.

Lemke's idea of identity being made out of building blocks taken from people or characters that one identifies with is nicely reflected in the faction system; every faction has traits that offer building blocks for a personality. The Dauntless are brave and reckless, whereas the Abnegation are self-effacing and careful not to draw attention to themselves. Throughout the series, Tris places her own actions and behaviours into categories of Dauntless and Abnegation behaviours, and other characters do the same. When playing capture the flag, the trainer says: "We may not be Erudite, but mental preparedness is one aspect of your Dauntless training" (Roth, *Div* 139). In the same way, when Tris' strategy wins the game she is called not just smart, but "Erudite smart" (155). In the *Harry Potter* series, the categories (in the form of houses) are less intertwined with the worldbuilding, but they are still an important part of the story; the house someone is sorted in represents their values and character traits, which can be used both for building their own identity and broadcasting their traits and values to others.

The sorting system in *Harry Potter* is based on character traits as well. At eleven, when children go to Hogwarts, the magic school, for the first time, they put on the Sorting Hat, which shouts out to which house they belong. The four options are Gryffindor (bravery and chivalry), Hufflepuff (hard work and loyalty), Ravenclaw (cleverness and creativity), and Slytherin (ambition and cunning). Harry himself is sorted into Gryffindor, together with his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, while the most obnoxious person that Harry has come across so far, Draco Malfoy, is sorted into Slytherin. Throughout the series, Gryffindor and Slytherin are the most relevant; the main characters all come from either of these two houses, which are in constant rivalry with one another. Like in *Divergent*, the world of the story assumes that people can be defined mostly by one personality type. Although both story worlds acknowledge that some people will not fit into any one category (through Divergence in *Divergent* and, for some people, being sorted into Hufflepuff in *Harry Potter*) their systems are based on the idea that people can be categorised. In *Harry Potter*, there is only very little criticism of the sorting present in the story. The only point of critique in the series happens when professor Dumbledore says “I sometimes think we Sort too soon,” in reference to Severus Snape’s bravery despite his being sorted into Slytherin (Rowling, *DH* 555).² Other than that, the series does not question the use and accuracy of sorting at all. *Divergent*, on the other hand, is full of critique of the system. The faction system is criticised as part of the plot when it is revealed that the only reason it worked at all was that those within the system had damaged genes which primed them for only one main virtue. Divergence, then, occurs when the genes have healed. This shows that the faction system could not work in reality. Both these story worlds place their characters in categories, which aligns with a linear way of thinking about identity.

² This quote is also an example of character traits being categorised, just like they are in *Divergent*. Snape’s bravery is not just a part of his personality; it is part of his Gryffindor side.

There is also a characterisation system in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, a five-part series about eleven-year-old Percy, who discovers that the Greek Gods are real and that he is a son of sea-god Poseidon. The categorisation in these novels happens by giving each character a Godly parent. Percy's father is Poseidon, his friend Annabeth's mother is Athena, and most of the other characters in the series have a Godly parent. Although the connection is not made as obvious as in *Harry Potter* and *Divergent*, and the characters in the novels cannot influence their parentage at all, Godly parents and personality are linked. When preparing for a game of capture the flag in the first novel, Percy's observations about his teammates and his enemies in particular highlight this:

Dionysus's kids were actually good athletes [...] Demeter's kids had the edge with nature skills and outdoor stuff, but they weren't very aggressive [which is relevant for the game of capture the flag they are about to play]. Aphrodite's sons and daughters [...] mostly sat out every activity and checked their reflections in the lake and did their hair and gossiped. Hephaestus's kids weren't pretty [...] but they were big and burly from working in the metal shop all day [...] Ares's cabin: a dozen of the biggest, ugliest, meanest kids on Long Island, or anywhere else on the planet. (Riordan, *LT* 117-118)

A particular god's children will have traits which correspond to what that god represents: As Athena's daughter, Annabeth is smart and tactical; Clarissa, a daughter of Ares, has a short fuse and is competitive. There are only twelve recognised gods, the Olympians, at the camp when the story starts; any child who does not know their parent, or whose parent is a minor god, stays with Hermes's children. The link between gods and their children goes so far that they are textually equated by Percy when he is trying to find out whose child he is in this quote: "I wasn't as strong as the Ares kids, or as good at archery as the Apollo kids. I didn't have Hephaestus's skill with metalwork or – gods forbid – Dionysus's way with vine plants"

(Riordan, *LT* 108). While the first line still refers to the people at camp as Ares kids and Apollo kids, the second leaves out any distinction between the god and their children's skills. Unlike in *Divergent* and *Harry Potter*, the characters in *Percy Jackson* are born a certain way, not sorted.

The parts of identity that are linked to the godly parents are not based on values, but on innate skills and behavioural tendencies; as a child of Poseidon, Percy is prone to unruly behaviour, because the sea (Poseidon's domain) is also unruly. He can also breathe under water. What he values in others and himself, though, is not linked to his parentage; his dislike of Ares's children, for example, comes from their resemblance to the bullies that he has had to put up with his entire life, even as he admires them for their strength. On the other hand, the children's godly parents influence their behaviour toward other demigods. In the novels, certain characters have rivalries by virtue of their parentage: Annabeth is doubtful about befriending Percy, because Poseidon and Athena rivalled for patronage of the city of Athens. Likewise, when Percy disgraces the god Ares, his children try to hurt him in revenge. Categories in this series influence actions and abilities, which are part of identity, but not so much any values or traits.

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy is quite the opposite to *Percy Jackson* in that sense; the categories in that series, daemon shapes, are determined by values and traits much more than by actions and abilities. Pullman's trilogy tells the story of eleven-year-old Lyra Belacqua and her daemon Pantalaimon who go on a journey to save Lyra's best friend. Although they fail in this endeavour, they manage to save their own and other worlds together with Will, a boy from another world. In the world of *His Dark Materials*, daemons are animal-shaped parts of a human's identity that can act relatively autonomously, though they cannot move far from the human. Daemons can change their shape during childhood, but somewhere around puberty they settle into a final shape, which they keep for the rest of their

life. Since Lyra is only eleven, Pantalaimon can change his shape throughout the whole trilogy. The shape the daemon takes is related to the identity of the person, which is illustrated clearly in the fact that all people in serving jobs (such as butlers) have dogs as their daemons (Pullman, *GC* 11).

While, technically, there is an immense number of options in both Pullman's and Riordan's category systems, Leigh Bardugo's *Grishaverse* novels (the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy and *Six of Crows* duology) contain only seven common categories. In the *Grishaverse*, some humans, called Grisha, are born with special abilities. There are three orders, and each order has two or three types of powers. First, there are the Corporalki, which contain Healers and Heartrenders. Both can manipulate bodies, but while Healers can make them whole, Heartrenders can restrict the flow of air and lower the heartbeat. The order of the Etherealki consists of Squallers, who can manipulate air; Inferni, who can manipulate fire; and Tidemakers, who can manipulate water. Lastly, the Materialki have Durasts, who can manipulate steel, armour, textiles, and glass; and Alkemi, who work with poisons and blasting powders. The stories contain variants of the Etherealki called Shadow Summoners and Sun Summoners, as well as a Corporalki variant called a Tailor, but there are very few characters that have the powers associated with these orders.

Like in the *Grishaverse*, the characters in Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* are born into a certain category. In *The Mortal Instruments*, Clary Fray finds out that there is a whole world of supernatural beings that was hidden from her: Faeries, Warlocks, Vampires, Werewolves, Demons, and the Shadowhunters, half human half angel, that act as the supernatural police. The categories in this world are determined by birth: for example, any child of a demon and a human becomes a warlock. In another series taking place in Cassandra Clare's world, *The Dark Artifices*, two characters who are half-faerie and half Shadowhunter

are discriminated against because of their faerie blood. Categories cannot be changed, since the characters have their categories from birth.

One of the most popular YA series, *Twilight* is a four-part series which depicts the slow evolution of a romantic relationship between human protagonist Bella and vampire Edward. Anna Silver argues that *Twilight* positions identity not individually but in membership of a family or group: “[u]nlike many bildungsromanen that validate individual accomplishment and autonomy, Meyer’s novel all but ignores individualism in favor of affiliation” (124). Examples of this can be found throughout the series: “[e]ach of the Cullen vampires has both a family unit and a ‘partner’ to whom he or she is primarily devoted. The werewolves belong to a pack, in which they can read each other's thoughts” (Silver 133), but Bella’s chosen family and her marriage to Edward can also be read in this light: in *Twilight*, identity is formed in the context of relationships, mostly romantic and familial relationships. Charity Fowler suggests that not only *Twilight*, but many YA vampire stories contain this element (10).

Twilight does not make use of any categorisation as it pertains to identity, just like Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*. *The Hunger Games* is a trilogy about a girl called Katniss who grows up poor in a country called Panem, with an all-powerful Capitol surrounded by twelve districts which each provide one main product necessary for life: technology, clothes, timber, meat, seafood, and coals among them. To keep the Districts down, every year the Capitol organizes Hunger Games, essentially a battle royale in an arena between a boy and a girl between 12 and 17 years old from each district. Katniss’s sister’s lot is drawn but Katniss volunteers to go to save her. In the first instalment, Katniss wins the Hunger Games together with District 12 boy Peeta, who is in love with her. In *Catching Fire*, the second part, they are forced into the arena again, but this time the Games are ended prematurely by rebels, who take Katniss with them. In *Mockingjay*, the third novel, Katniss

becomes the symbolic figurehead of the rebellion, defeating the Capitol, in an attempt to create a better society.

Collins' novels show their protagonist in a crisis of identity, partially brought on by expectations and the need to be a certain person: "she tries to sort out not only her personal issues but her own interests as an individual, as a member of a family, as part of a community, and as a citizen of a nation involved in a civil war" (Henthorne 4) having to find her place as "not only a daughter, sister, lover, and friend but 'the girl on fire,' a 'love-crazed schoolgirl,' and the Mockingjay" (Henthorne 5). This crisis goes so far that at the beginning of *Mockingjay*, the third novel in the series, Katniss lists things she knows for sure: her name, her age, followed by her participation in the Hunger Games and subsequent escape. The Capitol hates her, and Peeta has been captured (Collins, *MJ* 7). The list changes throughout the novel to adapt to the circumstances (38, 322, 344). It helps Katniss make sense of who she is and what is happening to her.

Another aspect of identity which has often been considered in combination with the trilogy is that of gender and gender roles. The Capitol uses gender and gender roles to make Katniss into a persona which she has never been (Pulliam 177-178). All the characters responsible for helping Katniss try to make her seem more conventionally feminine, both in behaviour and appearance. Effie trains her how to walk in a dress and heels, Haymitch tries to make the public love her (instead of, for example, fear or respect her). Peeta, in his confession of love for her, makes Katniss seem desirable, an object of the male gaze: "You were about as romantic as dirt until he said he wanted you. Now they all do" (Collins, *THG* 135).

The distinction between linear and developmental perceptions of identity was discussed in Chapter One. An example of a linear perception of identity can be found in Hippocrates' four temperament theory, in which four fundamental personality types were distinguished; sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. One's personality type was

related to one's bodily relationship with various fluids (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm), and therefore biologically determined. A more recent example of a linear conception of identity can be found in the distinction between extroverted and introverted people.

Developmental perceptions of identity do not work with categories, but see people go through stages in which they develop their identity. In the discussion above, the two conceptions of identity can be found; novels with categories (*Divergent*, *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*, *His Dark Materials*, *The Mortal Instruments* and *Shadow and Bone*) fit more into the linear conception of identity, all of them with categories that you cannot change between. On the other hand, developmental ideas about identity are clearer in *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*, which do not have personality categories.

2.3 Born This Way or Sorted This Way?

Although the novels that can be linked to linear conceptions of identity seem broadly similar, they differ in one specific way; how the characters are placed in categories. *Divergent* is the only novel that fully gives its characters full agency about which faction they choose to go to although there is pressure to choose either the faction of your parents or the faction your test resulted in. Tris could have just as easily chosen Amity, a faction that does not fit her personality at all, as Dauntless. It is interesting to note about the sorting system in *Harry Potter* that at first glance, it seems that the sorting hat decides for the student where they go. However, in the first novel, the reader is inside Harry's head during the sorting, and when he hears the sorting hat whisper that he has qualities of a Slytherin, he resists: his friends have been sorted into Gryffindor already, and his nemesis into Slytherin. On top of that, he has heard from multiple sources that Gryffindor is the best house and that all evil wizards come from Slytherin. So, Harry squeezes his eyes shut and thinks "Not Slytherin, not Slytherin" (Rowling, *PS* 133). The hat takes Harry's dislike of Slytherin into account and places him in

Gryffindor. The student can apparently influence, though not dictate, the result. Harry's case was a relatively unique one, which is apparent from the fact that a fellow student, Neville Longbottom, absolutely did not think he was fit for Gryffindor and begged the Sorting Hat for Hufflepuff, yet was still sorted into Gryffindor.

When and how a daemon exactly settles is not shown in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, nor in the two novels of the *Book of Dust* series that were published in 2017 and 2019. Lyra believes that she has no control whatsoever on the shape Pan will settle in, but a daemon in *The Book of Dust Volume One: La Belle Sauvage* tells its main character Malcolm that he can affect what his daemon settles as: “[y]ou can help all right, but you don’t know you’re doing it” (240). This is not elaborated on further, but like in *Harry Potter*, it seems the individual can have some influence. Since the daemon is a representation of their identity, and can settle as any animal in the world, they have much more influence on its shape than a Hogwarts student has on their house. In contrast to the systems in *Harry Potter* and *Divergent*, there are seemingly unlimited options for a daemon to settle as.

However, the other linear novels turn the sorting mechanism around; whereas *Harry Potter*, *Divergent*, and *His Dark Materials* characters are sorted based on their identity, in *Shadow and Bone*, *The Mortal Instruments*, and *Percy Jackson*, they are born as a certain type; Percy has had no hand in being born a demigod, and cannot change the fact that it completely alters his life. In the same way, Clary cannot ignore the existence of Faeries and Warlocks when the block on her mind that kept her from seeing them is gone. These novels start with inciting incidents that reveal something inherent about their main character, not a quality or a value, but a central part of their identity; Percy is a demigod, Clary a Shadowhunter, and Alina a Grisha.

These categories come with abilities rather than character traits. Percy learns that he can swordfight and read Ancient Greek by virtue of the ADHD and dyslexia that all demigods

have. When he finds out his father is Poseidon, he also discovers that he has water powers: he can hold his breath under water, keep himself and his clothes from getting wet, and heal even deadly wounds when he is in contact with water. Although the novels show that children of certain gods tend to have certain character traits, these traits are caused by their parentage rather than the other way around. When Alina finds out that she is Grisha, this does not change her character traits but only the way she perceives herself. The novels do not show any connection between certain Grisha powers and personality traits; there are three fleshed-out Heartrender characters in the Grishaverse and they are very different people with hardly any commonalities. Clary's discovery that she is a Shadowhunter is preceded by a sudden ability to see the supernatural world, and the ability to survive the runes that give Shadowhunters superhuman powers, but not accompanied by any character traits. Whereas *Harry Potter*, *Divergent*, and *His Dark Materials* establish a character's category based on their identity, *Percy Jackson*, *The Mortal Instruments*, and *Shadow and Bone* reveal a character's identity category based on who they are; they are born that way, and have no choice in the matter. These first three series also give their characters more agency, both to naturally develop their identity and to then be categorised.

2.4 Conclusion

Linear conceptions of identity work with categories, such as introvert and extravert. In the discussion above, it became clear that many novels under discussion work with categories, though they do not all treat them the same way. Some novels let their characters reach a certain age or maturity level before they are sorted into categories, whereas others place their characters in categories from birth. There are also novels which do not contain identity categories, but rather treat identity more in a developmental way. Based on the way these novels treat identity, three types can be established:

- Type one includes *Harry Potter*, *Divergent*, and *His Dark Materials*, and works according to a linear conception of identity, in which a person's category is determined by their personality. The characters in these novels also have varying degrees of agency over their sorting.
- Type two includes *Shadow and Bone*, *Percy Jackson*, and *The Mortal Instruments*, and works according to a linear conception of identity, in which a person's identity and personality may be affected by their category, but their category cannot be changed.
- Type three includes *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* and works according to a developmental conception of identity, in which characters do not fall into any categories.

In the next chapter, one series for each of these types will be analysed more closely in order to determine what makes these types different from each other in content. The way readers engage differently with each of these types will be discussed in chapter four.

Linear or developmental?

Linear
Categorisation based on:

Developmental

Personality:

Type 1

(*Divergent*, *Harry Potter*, *His Dark Materials*)

Birth:

Type 2

(*Shadow and Bone*, *Percy Jackson*, *Mortal Instruments*)

Type 3

(*Hunger Games*, *Twilight*)

Chapter Three: What Does That Mean? Content Comparison

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, three types of YA novels concerning identity formation were distinguished. This chapter will analyse the stories in these types through a close reading and identify the specific ways in which their treatment of identity differs. To keep this chapter focused, one series will be analysed for each type: *Divergent* for type one, *Shadow and Bone* for type two, and *The Hunger Games* for type three. *Divergent* was chosen to represent the first type because the faction system has a clearer influence on the lives of the characters than the systems in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*. *The Hunger Games* was chosen because it is more firmly in the genre of fantasy; *Twilight* takes place in contemporary Washington, with the only fantastic element being the paranormal creatures; *The Hunger Games* is therefore a better representative of novels without categories. Both *Divergent* and *The Hunger Games* were published in the early 2010s, so *Shadow and Bone* was selected to represent type two, as the first novel came out around the same time. This makes for a fairer comparison between the three types. The system in *Shadow and Bone* is representative of novels in type two, since all the novels have categories its characters belong to by virtue of their birth, yet which they only discover later in life. The fact that all the series are first-person narratives from the perspectives of teenage girls, whose stories play out over three novels, allows for detailed comparison without having to consider differences in gender, point of view, or length of time spent developing.

This chapter will look at two elements concerning the content of the novels: the protagonist and systems of oppression. The question this chapter will answer is: how do the ways these novels shape identity within the story differ from each other? Each section will answer one part of this question: how important is identity to the protagonist (3.2), and how does their society treat identity (3.3). This first question was selected because an analysis of

the protagonist's identity can shed light on how the story treats identity formation. The second question was selected because the division in types was made based upon only a brief discussion of the story worlds, so it is useful to dive deeper into them. To keep the analysis of both themes clear and focused, they have been divided over two sections. It will become clear that type one novels, since they based their characters' categorisation on their identity, concern themselves with identity more than the others, and their protagonists are more focused on labelling their identity. Type two novels, in which identity categories are inherent and determined at birth, are more plot-focused and use the identity category as an inciting incident. Type three novels are the least focused on identity, both within their protagonists and in their worlds.

3.2 Protagonists

In this section, the importance of identity for the narrator will be discussed: does the narrator (which, in all the novels under consideration, is also the protagonist) worry about their identity? How is their identity formed in the novel, through an active search or passively, during the events of the plot? As this chapter consist of comparative analyses, this section is divided into three subsections, each of which will discuss one series. The major themes of a novel are often established in the first chapter, so these will be discussed first. Next, the prevalence of identity formation will be analysed: do the protagonists spend time worrying about their identity? Lastly, the protagonists' character arcs will be compared. According to Stephen Duncan, who has written extensively on writing screenplays, the concept of character arc "means that all your characters – your protagonist, antagonist and key pivotal characters – grow or change over the course of the story" (5-6). Although this concept is often referred to in literature on screenwriting, characters in literature also go through growth. This section will

discuss how Tris, Alina, and Katniss grow and change, and to what extent their arcs concern identity.

3.2.1 *Divergent*

In the first chapter of *Divergent*, Tris (then called Beatrice) receives a haircut from her mother, after which she goes to school. It becomes apparent that today is Test day, the day on which she will go through the faction test. Already in the third line of the chapter, the faction system is introduced: “Our faction allows me to stand in front of [the mirror] on the second day of every third month, the day my mother cuts my hair” (1). Already in its introduction, Tris’ faction is framed as restrictive; it “allows” her to stand in front of the mirror only on a very specific day and only when it has a function. A theme of being restricted by her faction, or perhaps by the faction system, a constraining system of narrow identity, is established here. Since the title of the novel, *Divergent*, denotes a position of not being defined by any single faction, this theme is important throughout the story, even throughout the trilogy.

When Tris looks into the mirror (or “sneak[s] a look”), she defends this urge immediately: it is “not for the sake of vanity, but out of curiosity” (1). Though she might not be as “well-practiced in the art of losing herself” as her mother, she seems to have had much practice in defending any actions that her faction might be against. Reflecting on the Test and the Choosing Ceremony the next day, Tris makes clear how important the faction system is: “I will decide the rest of my life; I will decide to stay with my family or abandon them” (2). At the end of this episode, Tris admits to “wanting to leave” her family, her faction. Tris’ inability to fit in with Abnegation is emphasised during the rest of the chapter in her comparisons of herself and her brother Caleb, who “inherited my mother’s talent for selflessness” (3), and spends the bus ride to school “watching the people around us – striving to see only them and to forget himself” (4). Instead of forgetting herself, Tris is trying to

satisfy her curiosity for Dauntless: “I pause [...] and wait for the Dauntless to arrive. I do this every morning. At exactly 7:25, the Dauntless prove their bravery by jumping from a moving train”. Though she knows “they should perplex” her, her “eyes cling to them wherever they go” (7). The chapter ends with Tris admitting that “[w]atching them is a foolish practice” (7) and turning away.

The first chapter sets up the identity conflict in Tris already, establishing exactly what choice she will have to make and what the effect of this choice will be: she has to choose between Abnegation and Dauntless, and the chapter foreshadows that she will leave her family and join Dauntless. She is not only positive about Dauntless, however; she displays some doubts about their conception of bravery as well, admitting that there is really no connection between “courage – which is the virtue they most value [and] a metal ring through your nostril” (7). None of the factions are perfect, especially not for Tris. The conflict between factions is set against the larger theme of restrictive identities in the faction system, which will play a large role throughout the trilogy. The question of whether factions make for a good system or not appears in the whole trilogy as well.

As seen from the first chapters, Tris’ story is focused on her identity. In all three parts of the trilogy, Tris spends time thinking about her identity. The first novel is mostly concerned with Tris’ switch from her family’s faction, Abnegation, to Dauntless, and her ability to fit in there. The first chapter starts with a mirror scene which shows the restrictions of Abnegation life, but in a second mirror scene after her transfer to Dauntless, Tris does not have to “sneak” a look:

I open my eyes and for the first time *stare openly* at my own reflection. My heart rate picks up as I do, like I am breaking the rules and will be scolded for it. It will be difficult to break the habits of thinking Abnegation instilled in me, like tugging a

single thread from a complex work of embroidery. But I will find new habits, new thoughts, new rules. I will become something else. (Roth, *Div* 87 emphasis mine)

Instead of her mother, her friend Christina has just changed her appearance, and she is the one who meets her eyes in the mirror and smiles. The scenes mirror each other and highlight the changes in Tris: “[f]or the first time, the idea of leaving my Abnegation identity behind doesn’t make me nervous; it gives me hope” (88). Tris does not just leave her family behind, or her habits (as she suggests in the earlier quote), but her “Abnegation identity”, a part of her that, even though the first chapter showed that she did not fit in Abnegation, was still there. At the end of the novel, when Dauntless and Abnegation have been broken, Tris has to find a new way to frame herself: “I am no longer Tris, the selfless, or Tris, the brave. I suppose that now, I must become more than either” (487).

Insurgent is mostly concerned with Tris’ guilt over her actions in part one, when she killed one of her friends who was forced to attack her, and with political struggles between the factions. The conflict between Abnegation and Dauntless is not relevant anymore, because both factions have been broken. Tris, as the blurb says “must fully embrace her Divergence” in this instalment. In *Allegiant*, the third novel of the series, Tris learns that Divergence in the faction system was actually a sign of genetically pure people, which turns her view of herself on its head. Instead of believing that she was strange for being Divergent, as she was told in the first novel, she learns that she is actually genetically pure, and most of her friends are damaged. Tris begins to view identity in a different light:

Just after my mother died, I grabbed hold of my Divergence like it was a hand outstretched to save me. I needed that word to tell me who I was when everything else was coming apart around me. But now I’m wondering if I need it anymore, if we ever really *need* these words, ‘Dauntless,’ ‘Erudite,’ ‘Divergent,’ ‘Allegiant,’ or if we can

just be friends or lovers or siblings, defined instead by the choices we make and the love and loyalty that binds us. (*All* 134, emphasis in original)

Especially in the first and last novels of the series, identity plays a big role for Tris: in *Divergent* because of her faction switch and her Divergence, and in *Allegiant* because she discovers that “these words” are not the only things she can be.

Tris’ character arc, as seen in the paragraphs before, is clearly centred around her identity, first in the faction system and then outside it. At the end of the final novel, she bravely sacrifices herself for her brother, combining the strengths of both Abnegation and Dauntless to make the world a better place. After finding out the truth about Divergence, its relation to genes, Tris sums up her character arc: “I thought that Divergent explained everything that I am and everything that I could be. Maybe I was wrong” (*All* 125). Tris goes from trying to fit in with Abnegation to experiencing freedom as Dauntless, then holding on to her Divergence in *Insurgent* and eventually realising in *Allegiant* that she does not need these identity labels, she can just be defined by “the choices we make and the love and loyalty that binds us” (*All* 134). She puts this sentiment into practice at the end of her life, when she chooses to save her brother from certain death. In an attempt to stop anyone from being defined by their genes as they are in *Allegiant*, one person has to enter a room which is defended by a death serum. Tris is potentially able to withstand this serum, as she has not been affected by other serums throughout the series. Although Tris’ brother Caleb had been chosen to enter the room, as he had previously worked against Tris and her friends, Tris decides in a last-minute selfless act to take over and save her brother’s life. *Divergent* was placed in the group of novels that based its characters’ categories on their identity, and Tris’ preoccupation with her identity throughout the story reflects this.

3.2.2 *Shadow and Bone*

Though the *Grishaverse* novels all contain Grisha characters, *Shadow and Bone*, as the first series written in this fictional world, contains the most information on the nature of the Grisha, and has a plot centred mostly around Grisha. Therefore, its three novels (*Shadow and Bone*, *Siege and Storm*, and *Ruin and Rising*) will be used for this section. *Shadow and Bone* begins with a prologue, in which some background to the story is provided: the characters' backgrounds are introduced, as well as Alina and her best friend Mal's relationship. Mal is described as "short and stocky, shy but always smiling. [Alina] was different, and she knew it" (1). Since the prologue is not yet the start of the story, both the prologue and the first chapter will be discussed here. In both chapters, as in the trilogy, Alina and Mal's relationship features prominently, and Alina's difference, from Mal but also from other people, is emphasised. In the prologue, the servants describe her as "an ugly little thing. No child should look like that [...] and so skinny" (2). Alina does not eat much "[b]ecause everything [...] tastes like mud" (2). In the first chapter, some ten years later, Alina again describes the food in the army as "muddy stew". She does not seem to have changed much, which she is also aware of: "Mal had changed for the better. He'd gotten handsomer, braver, cockier. And I'd gotten... taller" (26). This continuity in Alina is in sharp contrast to the changes that will come in later chapters, when Alina is trained to become a powerful Grisha, a Sun Summoner, who can manipulate light.

In the first chapter, the main obstacles in the story are introduced: the Shadow Fold, a place where all light disappears, and the Darkling, a unique Grisha with the power to summon darkness. The first chapter also aligns Alina with light in multiple ways. She has a "deeper feeling of unease" about going into the Shadow Fold (12), and when Mal tries to cheer her up he links her to sunlight: "'Madam's spirits have been restored!' Mal shouted. 'The sun can once more shine!'" (14). Immediately after this, the two of them are almost run over by the

Darkling's coach, hinting at a theme of the Darkling (representing darkness) standing between Mal and Alina, as well as between Alina and her powers.

The themes brought up in the prologue and first chapter are less identity-focused than those in *Divergent*, though a stand-off between light and dark is set up, with Alina aligned with light and the Darkling with dark. This fits with this series being a type two, in which identity categories are determined by birth; Alina must discover who she is, and what that means for her. Alina's difference from others also comes up, which will throughout the trilogy develop into a theme of her finding her place in a group, with other people and friends, though Mal remains the closest to her. As discussed in Chapter One, identity "is formed in dialogue with others and with the discourses constituting the society and culture" (McCallum 3), which the first chapter already hints at being a theme.

Alina's major worry is that she is not good enough: at summoning light to destroy the Shadow Fold, at being a Grisha, and not good enough for Mal. When she discovers she is Grisha, she denies it: "There's been some kind of mistake [...] I'm not what you think I am" (52), saying multiple times that she is "not Grisha" (62, 76). When she starts training and fails to summon any light by herself "[she] still wasn't *truly* a Grisha" (174 emphasis mine). She only discovers what has been stopping her when she becomes angry at the lack of letters from Mal, even though she had been writing him every week. This leads to a realisation of why she cannot summon; if her power had been discovered, "The Grisha Examiners [...] would have taken me away from Mal [so] I'd pushed my power down" (181). After coming to this realisation, she is finally able to summon light, which changes her entire life: "It was as if that moment in Baghra [the teacher]'s cottage was my first full breath and I had awakened into a new life" (184). From that moment on, she knows that she has to use her power. The conflict in her life is between Mal and her powers, between being ordinary and special; between who she was born as and who she thought she was.

As in *Divergent*, Alina also has her mirror scene, when she is trying on dresses with her friend Genya. “[T]he girl standing next to Genya in the glass was a stranger. She had rosy cheeks and shiny hair and... a shape.” (190), whereas she always used to be a “sad, sickly girl with hollowed-out cheeks and bony shoulders” (208). The change in looks is meant to emphasise how good it is for Alina to be a Grisha, how bad it was for her to suppress her powers, even though that kept her closer to Mal. This conflict between Mal and the Grisha lasts throughout the series. At the end of *Shadow and Bone* Alina is once more hiding her Grisha nature to be with Mal, and at the end of the trilogy she manages to be with Mal without her Grisha powers getting in the way. She is “ordinary” (350) again, as her powers leave her during the last fight. However, while she finds a permanent home with Mal, helping orphans, her Grisha friends visit and let her know that she “*will always be one of us*” (Bardugo, *R&R* 349).

Alina spends some time worrying about who she is, but since it feels right to use her Grisha powers, she is unable and unwilling to hide them again for Mal, until they leave her naturally. When she has to choose with who to pursue a relationship, she has to choose which potential version of herself she wants to cultivate: the ordinary side, the Grisha side, or the powerful queen that Nikolai could make of her. In the end, the choice is clear, and hardly even a choice at all; she wants to be with Mal. Identity is relevant only to the extent that her identity allows her to be with the people she loves.

Alina, in the first novel, has to learn to accept her identity as a powerful Grisha, and let go of Mal. She is unwilling to do that completely, though, and by the end has returned to suppressing her Grisha powers to hide from the Darkling with Mal. In the next two novels, she learns that she is instrumental in defeating the Darkling, and learns to accept her importance to the fight. Her character arc is not completely focused on her developing her identity, but rather on accepting who (or what) she was born as, as well as on finding a

community. The concept of home is strong in the series, and at the end Alina returns to the only place she considered home before she became Grisha, yet not by regressing back to the sickly little girl. Instead, she returns having successfully performed roles and laid them down again: “The Saint was gone. The Summoner too. I was just a girl again” (331). The epilogue shows that she both mourns and enjoys this freedom to be who she is. Throughout the story, Alina has relatively little choices to make and a big burden on her shoulders to do what is expected of her.

3.2.3 *The Hunger Games*

The first chapter of *The Hunger Games* covers the morning of the Reaping, when two children’s lots will be drawn to choose that year’s Tributes, up until the moment that her sister’s name is drawn. The two people that Katniss cares the most about, her sister Prim and her friend Gale, are introduced in this chapter. Gale is introduced as follows: “In the woods waits the only person with whom I can *be myself*” (6, emphasis mine). Katniss, unlike Tris, already knows who she is: the person she is in the woods, with Gale, saying what she wants without having to worry if anyone hears her, and hunting. When she dresses up for the Reaping in one of her mother’s old dresses, Prim compliments her, and Katniss replies that she looks “nothing like [her]self” (15).

Katniss is established as the caretaker of the family, the one making sure Prim and her mother do not starve to death: “I protect Prim in every way I can” (15). As she already seems to have a good idea of who she is and what she wants, there does not seem to be a clear way for her identity to develop, from the first chapter. She knows who she is within the society she lives in, with specific ways of taking care of herself (by hunting and trading) and her self-image (independent of her mother and any others). To allow character growth, Katniss is

placed in a different society from the second chapter onward, with people she does not know, and forced to play a character which confronts her with her own ideas of herself.

The themes that are set up concern (freedom from) a controlling government, friendship, and family. This first theme is relevant to identity, because the government influences the way Katniss sees herself and many of her actions. She desires freedom, and feels most herself when she is relatively free. Friends and family, as discussed, are relevant in the process of identity formation, and Katniss' circumstances as the eldest child and the only one able to take care of her sister after the death of her father have shaped her perception of herself as reliable and independent.

Katniss, lastly, does not start off with much concern for her identity when she is taken to the Capitol to fight in the Games. She even admits as much the night before the Games, when talking with Peeta. He tells her: "I want to die as myself [...] I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not" (141). Katniss has not thought about her identity at all, instead focusing on surviving: "[w]hile I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity" (142). Although she respects the sentiment, she does not understand why it matters, "who cares" (142). For most of the first novel, she is too occupied with staying alive and taking care of others to think much about her own identity. After winning the Games, on the journey home, she begins

transforming back into myself. Katniss Everdeen. A girl who lives in the Seam. Hunts in the woods. Trades in the Hob. I stare into the mirror as I try to remember who I am and who I am not. By the time I join the others, the pressure of Peeta's arm around my shoulders feels alien. (Collins, *THG* 370-371)

She sees her identity built around places and activities as it was before the Games, and brushes away the changes made by them, such as her feelings for Peeta. In the first chapter of the next novel, *Catching Fire*, it seems to have worked: she is hunting again in the woods, trading in the Hob. Yet she lives in the Victor's Village, and she only hunts to help Gale's family survive, and she guiltily remembers her feelings for Peeta (*CF* 16). During the Victory Tour in the first part of this novel, she has to take on the identity of Victor again, complete with dressing beautifully, being disingenuous in her speeches, and loving Peeta. Throughout this novel, too, Katniss is still doing everything to keep herself and her loved ones alive, playing a role. In *Mockingjay*, Katniss is pressured to become the symbolic leader of the rebellion (*MJ* 13).

Katniss' identity is portrayed as performative, she is constantly aware of how to act to get the best result. For example, when she finds out Peeta has formed a team with a group of tributes, she takes some time to process this before she exposes herself to the cameras: “[t]he minute I hit the ground, I’m guaranteed a close-up [...] I need to look one step ahead of the game. So [...] I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me. Then I cock my head slightly to the side and give a knowing smile.” She performs especially when she is under close scrutiny in the arena, but also when she is making sense of herself: she sees herself as the product of her actions, hunting, trading, taking care of her family. Ironically, she is at her worst when performing without pressure; in the first novel she is unable to find an angle for her interview: “I’m too ‘vulnerable’ for ferocity. I’m not witty. Funny. Sexy. Or mysterious. By the end of the session, I am no one at all” (*THG* 118). In the last novel, when she is shooting a propaganda video as the Mockingjay, she is horrible at acting the rebel leader (*MJ* 69).

Katniss' story ends with an epilogue in which she and Peeta have moved back to District 12, married, and had two children. The last chapter of the novel before the epilogue

showed her choosing to kill President Coin, the rebel leader, instead of President Snow, who would die either way. She makes this choice to stop the cycle of violence. Her choice to be with Peeta reinforces this more peace-seeking identity; instead of the destruction, “anger and hate” (MJ 356) that Gale brings, she chooses hope and new beginnings, the “dandelion in the spring” (MJ 356). As mentioned before, Katniss starts out with a good idea of who she is and what she wants, and after the destruction of the controlling government, she is able to continue pursuing this. Her experiences have scarred her forever, and she suffers from PTSD. In the end, she loses both people who were most important to her in the first chapter, and creates a new family with Peeta, having the children that she said she did not want in the first chapter (THG 9). If anything, these changes in her are the clearest, but it cannot be said to be much of an arc.

3.2.4 Comparison

Out of the three protagonists, it is interesting to see that Tris is relatively the most uncertain about her identity, even though (or likely because) her society works with rigid identity categories. The themes that appear in the first chapter of *Divergent* are also much more focused on identity than those from the other series. Both *Shadow and Bone* and *The Hunger Games* lean more towards identity being formed through their environment. In the initial chapters, though, these novels do not have many differences, since both protagonists are only being thrown into their respective issues later.

While Tris’ view of her identity is concerned with labels and which label fits her best, and Alina is concerned with balancing the two separate identities of the Sun Summoner and the ordinary girl, Katniss has a clear view of who she wants to be but is kept from this by the involvement of others and identities that are being pushed onto her. Because *Divergent* has clear identity categories, Tris’ preoccupation with these categories makes sense. Alina’s story

does not display any awareness of her identity being shaped by what kind of Grisha she is, which would be impossible, since she is the only one of her kind. Only the fact that she is Grisha, and the way this positions her with regard to other characters, are relevant. As befits a story with no identity categories, identity in *The Hunger Games* is personal. Instead of having groups of people that belong together, *The Hunger Games* has personal titles that suggest certain behaviour, but are only held by one or very few people (Tribute, Victor, Mockingjay; words that are all written with a capital in the novel). Identity can be located in the choices the characters make much more than in some essential trait or skill that they have, as in the other novels.

The theme of identity is the most important in *Divergent*, the series with the clearest identity categories; behaviours are immediately linked to larger identity labels. The themes of the novel are also related to identity in a way which is much less the case in the other novels. *Shadow and Bone* concerns itself with Alina's identity insofar as it pertains to her role in the story. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' identity does not take centre stage in the story, but the reader can see her develop her moral compass and her values.

3.3 Identity and Power

Identity is not just personal, though, it is formed in social relationships and influenced by the environment. Especially in YA fantasy novels, an oppressive regime against which the heroine has to fight is a widespread setting for a story, as it is in the three series under discussion in this chapter. As became apparent in the discussion of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*, as well as in many of the results Google Scholar gives when searching for research on these two texts, these texts lend themselves to, or inspire, analyses based on gender and race. Gender and race are just two of the categories that can give power to certain groups, and take it away from others. In the real world, various systems of oppression disadvantage groups of

people; racism disadvantages non-white people, sexism disadvantages women, capitalism works against the lower socioeconomic classes and heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia disadvantage anyone not straight and cisgender³. Texts, either explicitly or through metaphor and allegory, can display these types of oppression, as Joosten shows for *Harry Potter*; the fight against Voldemort's discrimination of muggles and muggleborn wizards is an allegory for racism and anti-semitism (48). This section will discuss whether the presence or lack of categories in any particular story influences the portrayal of gender and race. In other words: to what extent do identity categories replace the categories of race, gender, and sexuality as it pertains to advantage and disadvantage? How does a character's identity influence their power within the world of the story? Each series will be discussed in turn, looking first at whether the aforementioned categories are relevant in their world, and then at which new power dynamics are created. After doing this for each of the series, the three will be compared.

3.3.1 *Divergent*

In the world of *Divergent*, gender, race, and sexuality are generally not used as basis of discrimination. When the faction system is explained, some of these factors of oppression are even addressed: "Decades ago, our ancestors realized that it is not political ideology, religious belief, race, or nationalism that is to blame for a warring world" (42). Instead, each faction believes that one trait in humans is responsible for all the evil, and they therefore try to eliminate it in their members. This passage shows clearly that the faction system takes over the other differences between people.

³ Cisgender people have a gender identity which corresponds to the one they were assigned at birth, in other words, to their sex; someone who was born with female sex characteristics and identifies as female would be considered a cisgender woman. People who are not cisgender include transgender individuals (who are born with sex characteristics of a different gender than the one they identify as, including non-binary individuals).

There is no mention of any one faction having an overrepresentation of men or women, though in the second chapter of the first novel, two groups of fellow students are described: Amity girls and Candor boys (9). As this is the reader's first encounter with Amity, and the second with Candor (after another man on the bus), this description links Amity to femininity and Candor to masculinity. However, since male Amity and female Candor members are depicted as well, there is no reason to suspect any hierarchy between the factions to be the result of gender. There is no evidence of racism in the text either, characters are described as light-skinned, dark-skinned, or having olive skin, but there do not seem to be any consequences to that, and it is only mentioned to create an image of the character. For example, the leader of the factionless, a group that by *Insurgent* has become relatively important because of its size, has olive skin.

The only thing mentioned about discrimination on the basis of religion is that Tris' father tells her that "we should try not to see those differences because they will only divide us" (32). As for sexuality, very few non-heterosexual couples or feelings are mentioned, apart from side character Lynn's crush on her friend Marlene, which first becomes apparent from her jealous response to Marlene's relationship with a boy, and later is confirmed. This is not discussed in any way, so though there is no reason to believe Lynn would be discriminated against for her sexuality, there is also no way to establish exactly how normal these feelings are thought to be in her society.

Power differences exist between the factions: since Abnegation provides "selfless leaders in government" (43), this means that "[t]he city is ruled by a council of fifty people, composed entirely of representatives from Abnegation" (33). Because of this, the other factions can only bring their issues to the council and hope that the leaders are actually as selfless as they claim to be, a claim disputed in the first novel by the Erudite leader Jeanine to create mistrust for Abnegation. Due to this discord between Erudite and Abnegation, Tris is

teased worse at school. Because of the distance between the Abnegation and the other factions, and the view of Abnegation members as prudish, they are referred to as Stiffs.

However, even though there is some power difference between the factions, the biggest power difference is that between the faction members and the factionless. The factionless are clearly meant to represent the absolute lowest socioeconomic class. In charge of the worst jobs and begging for food (25), they are somewhere in between the homeless and the lower class in the real world. Even though there is no money in this world, there is still a class divide, based on the fact that the factionless do not belong anywhere. Belonging, it seems, is the most important currency.

Such a binary system (one is either factionless or not) is also in place outside the fence, as apparent from *Allegiant*. The lives of genetically damaged people are considered to be worth significantly less (*All* 248). “[T]hey’re poorer, more likely to be convicted of crimes, less likely to be hired for good jobs” (*All* 243). Even though the basis for this discrimination is a lie, the discrimination persists. Interestingly, inside the fence, the largest proportion of Divergents, or genetically pure people, is within the factionless.

The factions take over as a system of oppression only to the extent that those who do not belong in a faction are significantly worse off. This is not an entirely new type of inequality. It resembles class inequality in the real world: children born factionless do not get to choose their faction at sixteen, and therefore have no chance to escape the poverty. The power imbalance between genetically damaged and pure people outside the fence recalls racism in the ways it affects the genetically damaged, and the reasons for the discrimination persisting correspond to the reasons that racism persists: genetically damaged people are represented as more criminal and less smart, and therefore granted fewer options to escape poverty and be educated. Identity in the faction system of *Divergent* is rigid; once someone chooses a faction or becomes factionless, they cannot join another faction after that. Both

within the faction system and in the world outside the fence, this rigidity persists. The world of *Divergent* seems to imply that one's identity is unchangeable, though the plot disputes this message.

3.3.2 *Shadow and Bone*

The world of *Shadow and Bone* is much larger than that of *Divergent*. The main story of the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy takes place in Ravka, where the Grisha are an elite fighting force. However, there are other countries, some of which are explored in the *Six of Crows* duology, a spin-off series. Kerch, an island nation to the west of Ravka, is notorious for using Grisha as indentured, practically as slaves. Shu Han, to the south of Ravka, experiments on their Grisha to find the source of their power. Lastly, Fjerda, to the north, sees Grisha as unnatural and has an elite fighting force called the *drüskelle* which hunts them. Since these are all different countries, they also all have different systems of oppression; while women in Ravka are welcomed into the army, whether Grisha or not, Fjerdan women “don't want to fight [...] are to be venerated, protected” (*SoC* 239). In Kerch, women can work, but their trade-based society is mostly run by male *merchers* (the word used for rich merchant), and the gangs that run the Barrel, the poorer part of metropolis Ketterdam, are generally led by men as well. The women with the highest positions are the ones who own brothels and those married to *merchers*. Generally, then, the world of *Shadow and Bone* is relatively patriarchal, rich women tend not to work and poor women do jobs specific for women. Only in war-torn Ravka, where everyone is asked to fight, has some semblance of equality emerged (though its peasant population is still patriarchal).

Although the gender relations are straight out of the nineteenth century, race is far less of an issue. Jesper and Inej in *Six of Crows* are dark-skinned, but that no more sets them apart than someone's hair colour might. Sexuality and religion are also no basis for oppression or discrimination, as Jesper is not afraid to admit his attraction to Wylan (no more than anyone would be confessing to their crush, at least) and while Kaz occasionally ridicules Inej's steadfast belief in the Saints, neither she nor anyone else is denied opportunities because of it.



<https://www.leighbardugo.com/grishaverse/ravka-map/>

Like in *Divergent*, there is a class hierarchy, with the Grisha far above the ordinary people (called *otkazat'sya* "the abandoned" (S&B 149)). The hierarchy extends to the Grisha as well, with the Corporalki (those who can control and heal bodies) at the top, followed by Etherealki (who can control water, air, or fire) and lastly Materialki (who work with materials, such as fabrics and metal, or with poisons and explosives). However, despite this hierarchy, all the Grisha are treated well, so this cannot be said to be a true system of oppression.

Interestingly, the place of Grisha in the different societies corresponds to some of the ways Africans have historically been treated. For this comparison, the story of Sarah (or Saartje) Bartmann is especially relevant. Sara Bartmann was born in the Khoikhoi tribe in South Africa at the end of the eighteenth century, and captured to work as a household slave. She was later taken to London to be exhibited due to her body's distinctly different shape to

that of European women. After various years of this, she was later taken to Paris and sold to an animal trader, and taken to a professor of natural history who wanted to examine especially her private parts, but Sarah Bartmann refused to cooperate. When she died a year later, her body was turned over to the professor anyway, and used to “prove his point that the Hottentot belonged to an essentially different type of the human species” (Buikema 75). In Bartmann’s story, a racialised Other is used as a slave (like the indentured Grisha in Kerch) and examined by scientists to prove her difference from “normal” people (like the Grisha in Shu Han). The persecution of Grisha by Fjerdan *drüskelle* is linked to the way Black people were treated both during the years before the abolition of slavery and after; though illegal, Grisha are sometimes burned on pyres (*SoC* 231). These burnings are reminiscent of the burning crosses and lynchings of Black people by the Ku Klux Klan. The treatment and view of Grisha outside of Ravka, then, can be compared to race and racism in the real world.

3.3.3 *The Hunger Games*

Finally, in the world of *The Hunger Games*, the system of oppression is clear: the rich Capitol oppresses the poor districts, who have no way of retaliating. In order to avoid rebellions, the Capitol uses a divide-and-conquer strategy; each district is separated from the others, with the only contact between them being when the Tributes in the Hunger Games are forced to kill each other. Districts 1 and 2 are treated better than the others because of the products they supply for the Capitol (luxury items and Peacekeepers, the equivalent to soldiers, respectively), and the District 4 Tributes are often in better shape than most because they have better access to food. The divide-and-conquer strategy also extends to the people within the districts. In District 12, for example, there is a lower class that lives in the Seam, and an upper class living in the town (*THG* 14).

As for other differences, no gender or race inequality is mentioned, and though the assumed pairings are male-female, there is no evidence in the text that homosexuality would be frowned upon. Fans speculated that Cinna, Katniss' Capitol stylist, was secretly gay, but there is no textual evidence for this – in fact, compared to other Capitol men, Cinna's "close-cropped hair" and "simple black shirt and pants" (*THG* 63) is much less extravagant than preparation team Flavius' "orange corkscrew locks" and "purple lipstick" (62). In fact, Cinna's "only concession to self-alteration seems to be metallic gold eyeliner" (63), a very understated alteration according to the Capitol's standards. Many Capitol styles and traits for men can be perceived as queer coding; when characters are coded as queer in films, this means they "are not explicitly stated as homosexual but display stereotypical behaviors and traits consistent with those of queer communities" (Kim 156). Queer coding often involves femininity in appearance, both natural and consciously applied through make-up and clothes, "usually overdone and luxurious" (Kim 159). A certain way of speaking is also often associated with queer characters. Kim provides the example of Him from the Powerpuff Girls, who "is voiced by a man who is speaking in a high falsetto. He drags words and giggled giddily" (160). Cinna's voice is "somewhat lacking in the Capitol's affectations", affectations which include "a high pitch", "[o]dd vowels, clipped words, and always a hiss on the letter s" (*THG* 61). Since "a slight lisp" (Kim 156) is another trait that was often given to queer coded characters, this accent marks Cinna as decidedly less queer-coded than other Capitol men such as Flavius. At any rate, whether either of them is homosexual or not, neither is discriminated against for their chosen performance of identity. The citizens of the Capitol are encouraged to express their identity however they like, whereas this is impossible for the more impoverished districts.

The Hunger Games is centred around a class conflict, so it makes sense for that to be the most prevalent system of oppression. There does not seem to be evidence for any other

systems of oppression within the text, even though differences in race and performance of identity exist. This might have to do with the fact that people in either of the districts never encounter anyone from another districts, and in this way conflict on the basis of race is not logical; there is simply no interaction between different races.

3.3.4 Comparison

As apparent from this analysis, all three of the stories have a class conflict between a rich upper class (the faction members, genetically pure people, Grisha, and the Capitol) and a poor lower class. Both *Divergent* and the Grishaverse contain an equivalent to racism in genetically damaged people and the Grisha: since the characters are born with their genetic and Grisha identity, they are persecuted for something they cannot change. In Nina's words: "our crime is *existing*. Our crime is what we are" (Bardugo, *SoC* 232). In *Divergent*, the factions keep people in check, and those who become factionless are too busy surviving to stand up to the system. In the Grishaverse, the Grisha are both elite and low; in Ravka, they are not disadvantaged by their identity as Grisha, but everywhere else they are. In the novels with categorising systems, then, the systems (though not necessarily the distinct categories) take over as oppressive systems akin to racism in our world. *The Hunger Games* lacks such a categorising system, but does not replace racism, sexism, and homophobia, instead making every conflict about class.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to see how the three series differed in the ways they shape identity. Since identity is personal, specific to each individual, this chapter first analysed the protagonists of these novels. As expected, this analysis found a clear correlation between the level of identity categorisation in the novel and the importance of identity to the story. The

analysis of the world, then, was relevant since identity is formed in relation to one's environment, as McCallum argues. Here it became clear that the novels with categories used the categorising systems as replacements of other systems of oppression. The manner of oppression of these systems corresponded most with the way racism works (or worked) in our own society.

In *Divergent*, the characters have the most agency; Tris is not just swept along in the current, she makes active choices. This aligns with the slogans on the books: "One choice can transform you", "One choice can destroy you", and "One choice will define you". There is much more agency in this world than there is in those of *Shadow and Bone* and *The Hunger Games*. In *Shadow and Bone*, Alina makes very few choices at all; she is discovered as having Grisha powers and from then on forced to do whatever other characters tell her to. Although she tries to escape, she goes back to obeying others once she believes Mal is in danger. It is telling, in contrast to *Divergent*, that the covers of the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy say "Soldier. Summoner. Saint". This highlights the lack of choice; Alina is a soldier, a summoner, and then a saint, all through no choice of her own. In *The Hunger Games*, the plot starts with Katniss' choice to volunteer. Although the arena feels like a death sentence, Katniss is still making choices within that frame, rebelling against external forces, and paying for that with the lives of loved ones and a great deal of trauma, which Alina is focused on avoiding.

It can be concluded that type one novels are more focused on categories; their characters' identity category is determined by their personality, and therefore everything that happens is seen through the lens of determining which identity category something would fall into. Novels in type two and three are more plot-focused, with the difference being that identity is used as a catalyst for events to unfold, a plot device, in type two novels.

Chapter Four: Who Would I Be? Fan Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

The relationship between novels and readers, perhaps especially in the YA genre, is not straightforwardly one-way: groups of readers which are generally called *fans*⁴ grow around these novels to form a community of analytically minded interpreters of the text. These communities are relevant for the fans in processing what the text has told them about identity. An example of this is the Hufflepuff discourse in the *Harry Potter* fandom, which turned from derisive and dismissive towards Hufflepuff house and its members to appreciative in the early 2010s. Although the novels did not speak highly of Hufflepuff and its members, fans turned being a Hufflepuff into something positive through close readings, fan art, and headcanons.⁵ Especially for fans who identified as Hufflepuff (because they had been sorted into it via the quiz on Pottermore, for instance), this turnaround positively affected their self-image.⁶ In a thesis on the process of identity formation that concerns not only the novels but also the readers, the reception of the texts under scrutiny in this thesis is important; the way that issues of identity are treated in the fandom affects the influence of the novels on their readers' identities.

This chapter will analyse to what extent the types established in this thesis can be found in fan culture as well. The method of analysis that has been chosen is to look at fan

⁴ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a "fan" as "a keen follower of a specific hobby or amusement; an enthusiast for a particular person or thing", and "fandom" as "the world of enthusiasts for some amusement or for some artist". Within fan studies, other requirements are often made for someone to be considered a fan, though; it is a notoriously difficult concept to define.

⁵ *Headcanon*, according to the "Headcanon" page on Fanlore wiki, "is a fan's personal, idiosyncratic interpretation of canon". It is a contraction of "head", meaning "inside of my head," and "canon," which refers to the events of the story. Canon is opposed to "fanon," events that do not happen in the story but which are widely accepted as having happened. Unlike fanon, headcanons are imagined by individual fans instead of (the majority of) the community.

⁶ There is no research into this, but here it is relevant to note that the author of this thesis was very much involved in the *Harry Potter* fandom during this shift from derision to appreciation, and has spoken with many fellow Hufflepuffs about the positive influence on how they viewed their house and themselves by extension. It would be an interesting issue for further research.

quizzes. It would be very interesting to discuss fan production in the context of this thesis, but since the amount of fan art, memes, fan videos, cosplay, and fan fiction is so huge, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to find a proper representation to analyse. Fandoms are sprawled over all types of media and sites, from Facebook pages and groups to YouTube videos to fanfiction sites to discussion forums to (Tumblr) blogs. Fan expressions are not quantifiable; it is impossible to analyse the three most-liked posts about *The Hunger Games*, because of the sheer number of pages and blogs dedicated to *The Hunger Games*. However, just choosing any random post, page, or blog to analyse makes any results arbitrary.

Therefore, this chapter will analyse quizzes that have been made around the series, both by fans themselves and by other parties. The series used in this chapter are the same ones that were discussed in Chapter Two. Many quizzes are related to identity as well, making them a valuable part of fan culture to analyse. A comparison of the first 10 hits on Google when searching for “[series] quiz,” made it possible to decide what kinds of quizzes are most relevant and popular in these fandoms, and establish whether the fandom of a certain series is more focused on identity than the fandom of another. Based on the division into types from the earlier chapters, it could be expected that type one fandoms are focused most on replicating the sorting from the novels, type two fandoms to have some sorting, and type three to have little to no relationship to identity. This would show that the three types established in Chapter Two and Three are also present in fan culture. First, though, some context about fan culture will be provided to show that fan quizzes are inherently linked to identity, and therefore useful in this thesis.

4.2 Who or What Would I Be?

“Fandom”, though its definition is notoriously difficult to pinpoint within the field of fandom studies, is the word generally used to refer to the community of people who are fans of a

certain cultural phenomenon, whether that be sports, music, TV shows, films, or novels.

Henry Jenkins identifies five levels of fan activity in his renowned study of fan culture *Textual Poachers*, which can be summarised as follows: after consuming the series or novels, the fan *joins a community* which critically *assesses* the text, *reviews* it and sometimes *influences* other texts such as sequels. Some fans also *produce* works that “speak to the special interests of the fan community” (Jenkins 279), such as fan art or fan quizzes.

Fan quizzes toe the line between fan production and fan consumption; some quizzes are made by fans themselves, others by authors, and others by third parties such as *Buzzfeed*: platforms that make money by providing content for fans. The goal in making these quizzes varies per party as well: being interesting or entertaining, fitting with the story, or being shareable and clickable within a fan community. For fans, these quizzes are appealing because they “are highly shareable content for many users, a characteristic that speaks to their implications for fun identity declaration and construction” (Berberick and McAllister 3427). They give fans a way to represent who they are to others; if two *Harry Potter* fans meet, their respective houses will tell each other what type of person they are.

Fans are motivated to take these quizzes beyond sharing the results. Proudfoot et al. investigated what motivated fans to take quizzes for the fandoms that they were part of, and found that “self-esteem and escape motivations” were relevant motivations, but not “eustress, entertainment, belongingness, or family” (270). Concerning belongingness, however, they put forward that as “group identification often serves an important esteem-boosting function [...] a significant relationship between belonging and test-taking might be absorbed by their shared relation with self-esteem”, meaning that their statistic methodology could have had the effect that the belongingness factor seemed to be insignificant even though it might be (Proudfoot et al. 270). They suggest, though without having gone back to their data to confirm this, that the fact that self-esteem was a significant factor implies that belongingness, which is closely

related to self-esteem, is more significant than their results may show. Even though the quizzes do not necessarily tell the fan “useful information about their personality” (Crysel et al. qtd in Proudfoot et al. 271), self-esteem, which the study links to acts of self-discovery (267), is a motivation to take these quizzes. It is apparent that fan quizzes are related both to a fan’s sense of their own identity and for declaration of their identity. Therefore, it is useful to determine how identity is constructed in these quizzes, to see if this matches with the type system that was discussed in the previous chapters.

4.3 Relevant Quizzes

In order to find out which types of quizzes occurred in each fandom, quizzes for each of the series that were discussed in Chapter Two were searched for by using the simple search query “[series name] quiz” via a private window on Google. The first page for each of the results was analysed to find out which types of quizzes could be found for that specific series. For the scope of this analysis, this small sample was deemed enough; general trends rather than small differences are the subject matter of this analysis. Four categories of results were determined: knowledge/trivia quizzes, character quizzes, sorting quizzes, and mixed/other results.

Knowledge quizzes consist of a series of questions about the texts, ranging from relatively basic knowledge (what colour clothes do the Erudite wear) to very minor details (what was painted on Four’s bedroom wall). They are used to determine how much the quizzee knows about the text, which can strengthen the quizzee’s connection to the text, but also their self-confidence in their status as a fan (mostly if they score very high). *Character* quizzes are a type of personality quiz: the quizzee fills out questions about themselves and is told which character from the text they resemble most (or, in variations of this type, which character would be their friend or partner). Since these quizzes have to do with the personality of the quizzee, the quizzes from the *Hunger Games* search that led to “Would you survive the

Hunger Games”-type quizzes were included in this category. *Sorting* quizzes are the ones that tell the quizzee which label they would get in the world of the story, or in which category they would fall. Faction, House, Daemon, Godly Parent, and Grisha quizzes were included in this category. These quizzes often give the fan a clear-cut description of their personality.

Generally, this type of quiz uses the same categories as the novels do, though when there is no evidence for a certain personality fitting in a certain category (as with Grisha orders), the makers of the quiz have thought of a way to sort based on personality either way. Fans, being critical readers, can take clues from the text to draw conclusions about the relation between personality and category. The “other/mixed” category consists of two types: the number of hits that did not lead to one particular quiz, but to a list of quizzes of various categories; and the number of hits that lead to no quiz at all, which was very occasionally the case when a hit led to a study guide for the novel. In table 4.2, a combined category of *Identity* quizzes has been created, containing both Character quizzes and Sorting quizzes. This allows for a more accurate comparison when discussing the importance of identity. In order to get the best results for *The Mortal Instruments*, three options were considered: “The Mortal Instruments quiz”, “City of Bones quiz”, and “Shadowhunters quiz” (the first is the name of the series, the second the name of the first novel, and the third the name used by fans for the universe in which all the stories take place as well as the name of the TV show). Since fans would be likely to use fan terminology in their search, the results below reflect “Shadowhunters quiz”, though the differences were not very big.

| | Knowledge | Characters | Sorting | Other/mixed |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| <i>Divergent</i> | 2 | 0 | 7 | 1 |
| <i>Harry Potter</i> | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| <i>His Dark Materials</i> | 3 | 1 | 6 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Total type 1: | 9 (30%) | 2 (7%) | 16 (53%) | 3 (10%) |
| <i>Shadow and Bone</i> | 2 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Six of Crows</i> | 3 | 6 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>The Mortal Instruments</i> | 4 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Percy Jackson</i> | 4 | 0 | 4 | 2 |
| Total type two: | 13 (32,5%) | 16 (40%) | 6 (15%) | 5 (12,5%) |
| <i>Hunger Games</i> | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Twilight</i> | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total type three: | 15 (75%) | 5 (25%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |

Table 4.1: number of quizzes for each fandom divided over the categories of knowledge, character, and sorting quizzes. Search results that could not be categorised were put in the “other/mixed” category.

On average, type one novels have 50% sorting quizzes in the first 10 hits when searching for “[series name] quiz”. Type two novels have an even division between knowledge, characters, and sorting quizzes. Type three novels have a majority of knowledge quizzes and only few character quizzes.

Type one shows most diversity: *Divergent* and *His Dark Materials* have many more sorting quizzes than *Harry Potter*. The fact that the sorting systems in *Divergent* and *His Dark Materials* play more important roles than that in *Harry Potter* could go some way to explaining this difference. Type two is more unified, although *Percy Jackson* stands out with a lack of character quizzes, though that is compensated by more sorting quizzes. That makes sense, as the *Percy Jackson* categories are linked to identity the most out of the series of this type, and so *Percy Jackson* fans would be more interested in being sorted in this universe than fans of the other series. The two series from type three give similar results, with a focus on knowledge quizzes.

Fandoms that do not fall into the YA fantasy genre show similar results to type three novels, with *Lord of the Rings* (9 knowledge, 1 character), *Game of Thrones* (8 knowledge, 1 character, 1 mixed), One Direction (7 knowledge, 2 character, 1 mixed), and Marvel (7 knowledge, 1 character, 2 mixed) all having a majority of knowledge quizzes and only one or two character quizzes.

| | Knowledge | Identity |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Type 1</i> | 33% (9) | 67% (18) |
| <i>Type 2</i> | 37% (13) | 63% (22) |
| <i>Type 3</i> | 75% (15) | 25% (5) |

Table 4.2: percentage of knowledge and identity (sorting and character quizzes combined) quizzes for each type.

The “other/mixed” category is not relevant for these percentages.

With the data split up as in table 4.2, the difference between type three and the other two types is clear. This is the case even though two of the *Hunger Games* quizzes that were categorised as Character quizzes were focused on whether the quizzee would do well during the *Hunger Games*, which is much less related to identity than most of the other Identity quizzes. If these were removed, the 25% of identity quizzes would go down to only 17%. As it pertains to the importance of identity for the fans, though, type one novels and type two novels are not significantly different from one another. However, in Table 4.3 it becomes clear that type one novels are focused on sorting quizzes and type two novels on character quizzes.

| | Characters | Sorting |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------|
| <i>Type 1</i> | 11% (2) | 89% (16) |
| <i>Type 2</i> | 73% (16) | 27% (6) |
| <i>Type 3</i> | 100% (5) | 0% (0) |

Table 4.3: percentages of character and sorting quizzes per type out of the total of identity quizzes for that type.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to show the correspondence between the types of novels and their fandoms. Fan quizzes were determined to be a good source for analysis due to their inherent relation to identity as well as their quantifiability. The data showed that the types of quizzes in each type are related to identity in a distinct way, with type one quizzes focused mostly on sorting quizzes, type two focused more on character quizzes, and type three quizzes focusing on knowledge, which is not related to identity as much. Therefore, it is clear that the three types that were established in this thesis are also reflected in fan culture.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to find out how identity formation is represented in and around Young Adult fantasy novels, and distinguished three types of novels. The first type treats identity as if it is linear and therefore groups its characters into categories based on their identity (or a part of it, such as personality or particular values or beliefs). The second type also treats identity in a linear way, but the categorisation happens by virtue of birth, and an individual's category is therefore inherent to the person. The third type conceives of identity in a developmental way and therefore does not categorise its characters. Instead, the identity of these characters is formed only through the society they live in, the people they engage with, and the events in the novel. Through analysis of fan quizzes, it became apparent that these types can also be found in the treatment of these novels by fans. Although the novels themselves occasionally criticise the categorisation systems, the readers generally do not engage critically with that aspect of the novel in quizzes. That may not be the case in other fan productions, which could be an interesting topic for further research.

What do these types say about novels that are classified as a certain type? Type one novels suggest that readers can be who they are in a community of like-minded people. The emphasis in these novels is on linking behaviour to communities, showing the reader that they can find their place in the world with people that resemble them. This can also be seen in the quizzes most prevalent for these novels' fandoms; sorting quizzes tell the quizzee which community they would be a part of in the fictional world. For adolescents, this is an important message to keep them from feeling as if they are on their own. These novels also emphasise agency and tells readers they can choose their community; *Faction Before Blood*. Type two novels, on the other hand, tell their readers that they can still grow within the confines of who they are, whether that be a demigod hero, neurodivergent, or chronically ill (although admittedly the former is least likely to happen to a reader). There is less agency in what

someone *is*, as the emphasis is on how they were born, but within those confines happiness can still be found. Novels of this type can also display a protagonist finding a community through friendships and romantic relationships, but the community is not based on their category, showing readers that even if there is no one like them, they can still find their group. The fan quizzes for these novels are mostly focused on characters, which shows the reader which role they might fulfil in a friend group or community, parallel to the role of the character of their quiz result. Lastly, type three novels focus on the agency of their protagonist to make their own choices, giving the reader the freedom to choose regardless of expectations of others. Everyone is their own person, and this individual growth is emphasised in type three novels. The fact that type three fan quizzes are mostly concerned with how much the quizzee knows about their fandom of choice shows that fans also take this message of individual achievements from these novels. Of course, there are communities in type three novels, like in the other ones; family, friends, and (potential) partners can help inform choices and shape a character's growth. The prevalence of love triangles, a representation of a choice between two ways of life, two potential identities, in these novels emphasises that one's identity is informed by one's choices.

The methodology of the analysis, a combination of general analysis, close reading, and fan analysis, worked well. However, especially in the close reading, much more could have been analysed to give a full picture of the differences between each type. A few facets of the novels were chosen in order to scrutinise them from different angles, yet even so, the analysis could not go as deep nor as broad as would have been necessary to draw out all the subtle differences, especially with regard to the distinction between type one and type two novels.

This thesis could not cover everything that can be said about identity in YA novels. A more in-depth fandom analysis, including a close reading of several fan quizzes would have been interesting; it would show how fans conceive of identity categories in the novels

(through research on which questions are asked, which answers lead to which results, and how do the results relate to the content of the novels could fill another entire thesis). Research on the way the established types affect readers differently would be a good follow-up to this thesis. It would also be useful in the context of identity to research readers' self-identification as YA fantasy readers, and how marketing and paratext play into certain genre-specific tropes, as well as cross-overs between marketing and fan culture (in Goodreads and YouTube reviews, but also in the phenomenon of fan-art being used to illustrate a printed novel). In order to keep the scope of this project focused, though, these very interesting questions could not be considered. Further research into this topic could also investigate whether other genres of YA novels treat identity in a similar way or not.

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Appendix

Abbreviations, accompanied by author name

(page 259 from *Allegiant* will be cited as (Roth, *All* 259))

PS *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

DH *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

GK *The Golden Compass*

THG *The Hunger Games*

CF *Catching Fire*

MJ *Mockingjay*

Div *Divergent*

All *Allegiant*

LT *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*

SoC *Six of Crows*

S&B *Shadow and Bone*

R&R *Ruin and Rising*