PROTECTIVE MIMICRY IN DYSTOPIAN YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

How Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature Consciously Utilise
Social and Gender Norms and Turn Them Into a Survival Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Protective mimicry is a survival tactic mostly observed in the animal kingdom, e.g. butterflies with wings that mimic dead leaves to avoid being noticed by predators. However, mimicry in itself is also apparent among humans, both conscious and unconscious. People mimic mannerisms and behaviour as a part of social interaction. Examples of behaviour that can be imitated are social and gender norms. This thesis shows that protective mimicry, as a conscious imitation of social and gender norms for survival purposes, is present in young adult dystopian literature. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and *Shatter Me* by Tahereh Mafi were analysed to support this thesis statement. A tentative claim is made that a trend can be observed in these novels of this behaviour. This trend coincides with character development of the female protagonists, resulting in the heroines obtaining a better understanding of their values.

Keywords: protective mimicry, social norms, gender norms, characterisation, character development, dystopian literature, young adult literature

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1 INTRODUCTION

With young adult literature still being a relatively young genre, its dystopian subgenre only emerged at the start of the twenty-first century. However, dystopian literature was already well-established with novels such as *1984* by George Orwell (1949). Dystopias show a society that is "considerably worse than the reader's own" (Finnsson 4). A reason for the increase of novels published in this genre aimed at teens and adolescents can be attributed to the rise in awareness of social issues and equal rights among young adults due to the increasing accessibility to the internet. With the global market crash of 2008, teens and adolescents started to realise they had it slightly worse than their parents at their age, which made them connect more easily with dystopian narratives (3). One of the most notable publications of young adult dystopian literature is *The Hunger Games* (2008), which has arguably been the inspiration for various dystopian novels to be published afterwards (3).

In dystopian novels, a trend of female protagonists utilising social conventions can be observed, which shows the heroines mimicking expected behaviour as a survival strategy. This imitated behaviour, specifically consciously adhering to social and gender norms, will be referred to as protective mimicry. Research has been conducted on mimicry in social situations, but it has not been analysed often in literary case studies, and none of those studies included young adult literature. This research, therefore, consists of an analysis of three popular American literary texts of the dystopian genre aimed at young adults, namely *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008), *Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2011), and *Shatter Me* by Tahereh Mafi (2011). These novels have previously been studied for their depiction of gender identity and performativity (Kalkenberg ii, Palmieri iii, Bruins 0). Still, studies linked to the theory of protective mimicry have thus far not been conducted on them. This thesis will provide a starting point in recognising instances of protective mimicry in young adult literature, hoping to inspire further research in the field. The nature of the study is comparative, aiming to reveal

similarities in three different novels from female authors. The chosen case studies are analysed via close reading, focussing on characterisation, instances of protective mimicry, and character development throughout the novel. Early characterisation of the female protagonists is analysed to recognise character development due to the events they are exposed to in their dystopian society. By defining mimicry and pretence and providing a contrast with early characterisation, the analysis will visualise which behaviour aligns with the heroine's personality and which is a result of conscious protective mimicry. The thesis is guided by the research question: "How do the protagonists of *The Hunger Games, Divergent,* and *Shatter Me* utilise social and gender norms present in their dystopian societies and turn them into a survival strategy?"

This thesis unfolds in the following way. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework where the concepts of protective mimicry, social and gender norms, characterisation, and character development will be explained in full. In chapter 3, the early characterisation of Katniss, Tris, and Juliette is analysed through close reading, after which chapter 4 contains an analysis of instances of protective mimicry in all three texts. Finally, chapter 5 encompasses a conclusion, summing up the findings, clarifying the character development, and offering suggestions for further research.

2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   PROTECTIVE MIMICRY

Mimicking is intrinsically embedded in how humans communicate with each other. Whether through replicating mannerisms from close friends or picking up an accent when spending time in another country, behaviour is unconsciously imitated and is a "critical part of human social interactions" (Chartrand and Baaren 221). This phenomenon is referred to as human mimicry. Types of mimicry are facial (mimicking an expression), emotional (catching the feeling of another), verbal (mimicking speech characteristics), or behavioural (mimicking postures, mannerisms, etc.) (222). Human mimicry "appears to be such a critical part of social functioning that the brain may have even evolved specific capabilities to facilitate its use" (221). This evolution indicates that mimicry can both occur outside of someone's awareness and used consciously and deliberately. Therefore, a distinction is made between *conscious* and *unconscious* mimicry (221). Of the two, unconscious mimicry is more common, during which "the mimicker neither intends to mimic nor is consciously aware of doing so" (222). Unconscious mimicry is typically a byproduct of a different task, e.g. people in conversation that take on the same posture. In contrast, conscious mimicry happens when someone deliberately mimics behaviour or mannerisms (Baaren et al. 2381). Bandura argues that conscious imitation is "critical to learning and to navigating our social environment" (qtd. in Chartrand and Baaren 221). In other words, observing conscious mimicry can provide insights on which behaviour is appropriate for which social situation, essentially indicating how someone should act to get a specific result. Therefore, the focus of this thesis lies on conscious mimicry as a response to signs of danger present in the novels, referred to as protective mimicry (Baaren et al. 2382).

Protective mimicry is a concept that originates from Henry Walter Bates and his study on moths and butterflies (Royle 37). These insects can, for example, have wings that mimic the pattern of dead leaves as camouflage or have spots that appear to be eyes to scare off predators

(Johnson and Coates qtd. in Meyers 160). Peter Forbes describes the phenomenon, which is also known as Batesian mimicry, as "a defenceless creature obtaining relief from predators by assuming the pattern and colouring of one defended in some way" (Forbes 56). Put simply, a creature mimics an animal or object that does have a chance of surviving against an external threat. Forbes draws parallels between animals and humans, stating that "deception has always played a large role in human affairs" (35). He uses the example of early humans camouflaging themselves while hunting to become superior predators (35). This indicates a distinction between unconscious and conscious mimicry. Animals act out of instinct, using their physical appearance to shield themselves against predators, whereas humans consciously apply camouflage to come out on top. Vladimir Nabokov interpreted protective mimicry not just as an instinct but as an art form as well. He was fascinated by the study of protective mimicry among butterflies and, like Forbes, recognised parallels between insect and human behaviour. He said that mimicry "seemed to have been invented by some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man" (Nabokov 105). With this, he means that only humans can use the full potential of mimicry. Nabokov applied this theory by embedding his fascination for the phenomenon in his fictional work. In *Lolita*, a novel about a man (Humbert Humbert) that falls in love with a young girl, "all of Nabokov's leading characters mimic and deceive each other" (Meyers 161). For instance, Humbert Humbert mimics the behavioural mannerisms of a paternal father to remain near Lolita without being recognised as a sexual predator (161). If he is discovered, it would lead to imprisonment and thus severe limitations to his lifestyle. To prevent this, he protects himself by taking on a role (protective mimicry). Humbert Humbert is aware his obsession with younger girls is not accepted by society and thus acts according to the correct conventions to avoid suspicion and remain undiscovered. These conventions are known as social and gender norms.

2.1.1 Social and Gender Norms

Social and gender norms convey a behaviour that is both socially accepted and expected. These norms are not genetic, meaning it is not in someone's nature to act according to these conventions. Instead, they are shaped by society and maintained through imitation (Cislaghi and Heise 409-412). This type of imitation occurs unconsciously from a young age through observational learning. A child experiences positive reinforcement from their environment when their behaviour is socially acceptable, hence recognising it as the correct behavioural response to their situation (Wodtke and Brown 525). Cislaghi and Heise distinguish between inside and outside forces enforcing this imitated behaviour, with social norms having an internal motivator and gender norms being externally enforced. Social norms, or "the 'social' reasons why individuals do what they do", are "beliefs about what other people do and approve of" (Cislaghi and Heise 408-409). From a young age, a person adapts their behaviour to the role models they are surrounded by, conning and learning how these people act to shape a personality (Royle 40). Social norms, therefore, exist *inside* the mind; "people's beliefs are shaped by their experiences of other people's actions and manifestations of approval and disapproval" (Cislaghi and Heise 412). The behaviour is dictated by someone's assumptions of another's thoughts. These norms should be distinguished from someone's personal attitudes. Whereas personal attitudes are internally motivated judgements (e.g. "I do not like to smoke"), social norms are "beliefs about what other people do and approve of" (e.g. "My friends expect me to smoke") (Miller, McFarland, and Prentice qtd. in Cislaghi and Heise 409). There might be external pressure to act according to the norm, but the decision to adhere is made internally. Gender norms, other the other hand, are "the social rules and expectations that keep the gender system intact", which are enforced by institutions and people's actions; hence, *outside* the mind (Cislaghi and Heise 410-412). The gender system, in this sense, is a "social system that apportions resources, roles, power and entitlements according to whether a person or practice is perceived as male or female" (Ridgeway and Correll qtd. in Cislaghi and Heise 410). An

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example of a gender norm is the hierarchical distinction between male and female traits, in which masculine traits and behaviour are typically privileged over their female or feminine counterpart (Heise et al. qtd. in Cislaghi and Heise 410).

While there is a distinction between the enforcement of social and gender norms, both shape a system in which people feel the need to act according to a role to experience a sense of belonging (Morgenroth et al. 1-2). As a result, if someone deviates from the norm, they will stand out. However, suppose someone makes the conscious decision to set aside their personal attitude and act according to social and gender norms. In that case, it can allow them to blend in and experience protection by playing into people's expectations, as can be seen with Humbert Humbert (Meyers 161).

2.1.2 Imitation and Pretence

Mimicry occurs when someone mimics or imitates pre-existing behaviour. There is a source, and that source is used to guide the act. To clarify, in *Lolita,* Humbert Humbert imitates the image of a caring father figure. Pretence, on the other hand, can be defined as "acting as if something were the case when one knows that it actually is not; e.g. 'drinking' from an obviously empty cup" (Gómez 586). Pretence and mimicry are related but not entirely interchangeable since pretence does not require a source. An example can be found among children in the form of pretend play. There is no mirror image in such cases as their play derives from a child's imagination (587). However, pretending without a source can still be used as a protective strategy, albeit without a mirror image to mimic. Consequently, in this thesis, pretence will be observed adjacent and in assistance to protective mimicry, signifying them as the same.

2.2 CHARACTERISATION AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

2.2.1 Characterisation

Characterisation is a literary device that "occurs any time the author uses details to teach us about a person" ("Characterization"). The concept can be divided into direct and indirect

characterisation, respectively, something told and something shown to the reader (Reams 4). An author can use direct characterisation to describe a character's personality, but this is typically shown throughout the story since this humanises the character and aligns with the 'showing, not telling' principle. Rather than telling a character is rude, an author shows this through interactions, allowing the reader to discover and draw their own conclusions about a character (Blume, *Characterization*). Forster makes a distinction between flat and round characters, saying that flat characters are "easily recognized" whereas round characters, which are typically the protagonists, are "capable of surprising" (Forster qtd. in Schneider 607). Such surprises could not occur if a character's personality is fixed from page one, though a reader should establish "mental representations and expectations" (Schneider 607), which are established through characterisation. Reams defines five categories of characterisation for a fictional character: physical description, action, reaction, thought, and speech/dialogue. According to Reams, these are core elements to help readers understand the character they are dealing with (4). This is in line with Schneider, who says that "understanding literary characters requires forming some kind of mental representation of them", which "happens through a complex interaction of what the text says about the characters and of what the reader knows about the world in general" (608). Reams' framework recognises the core elements that shape this mental representation, and a thorough understanding of these five categories is required for a proper analysis.

Physical descriptions shape the reader's mental image and what physical characteristics an author assigned to the character. What an author decides to reveal can be significant, as it places a heightened focus on those physical traits (Reams 4-5). As a second and third category, the *actions* and *reactions* of a character reveal a character's inner workings. If their responses are expected, the character becomes relatable for the reader since they can recognise themselves, whereas an unexpected reaction can reveal specific personality traits. Reams uses

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the example of a character challenged into a fight. An expected response would be for the character to hit back, but if they decided to abstain, it could convey the desire to avoid violence (8). Schneider points out that it is up to the reader to unravel the significance of an action/reaction (608). Fourthly, using the character's *thoughts* for characterisation is a method that varies based on the chosen point of view and thus on how much access there is to the inner monologue. Direct access provides a close connection between character and reader yet binds the reader to a single viewpoint, whereas multiple perspectives loosen the individual connection but provide more depth to the story (Reams 10). Ultimately, through their thoughts, the reader can interpret the character's motivation behind their actions and gather insights into their personality. Lastly, a character's *speech/dialogue* forms "a medium between their actions and thoughts" (Reams 12). Both what is said (their words) and how it is said (their tone) is significant.

2.2.2   Character Development

Characterisation gives the reader mental representations and expectations about the character that they follow throughout a novel. Character development, correspondingly, is how a character is altered throughout the story based on what they experience (Blume, *Develop Characters*). This aligns with Forster's distinction between flat and round characters (Forster qtd. in Schneider 607). Character development is the way that a character responds to obstacles and how this changes them by the end of the story and, consequently, how this might surprise the reader based on their initial expectations (Jenkins).

3   EARLY CHARACTERISATION

This analysis will be conducted based on Reams' theory on characterisation as discussed in the theoretical framework. It will look at the heroines' actions, reactions, thoughts, and speech/dialogue. While physical descriptions provide a mental picture for the reader and are important in that sense, in this thesis, a focus on the character's behaviour and personality are more conducive. Since early characterisation is analysed, the observation is limited to each novel's first 20-25 pages. This will provide an understanding of the heroines' behaviour and personality at the start of their journey.

3.1   KATNISS – *THE HUNGER GAMES*

The Hunger Games is set in a dystopian world 74 years after a rebellion. America has been divided into twelve districts, which provide raw materials such as coal and wood for the country, and a Capitol, which is the governing entity. Every year, 24 girls and boys have to perform in The Hunger Games, an event that forces them to kill each other until one remains victorious. The Games serve as a reminder that the power lies in the Capitol, and the districts should not try to rebel against it again (Collins).

Katniss, a sixteen-year-old girl, is presented as a strong, emancipated character. She is from District 12, which is the poorest. Her father died when she was eleven, and she had to step up to take care of her mother and sister, Prim, since her mother was not capable of doing so after her spouse's death. Her reaction to the death of her father shows that Katniss is resourceful. Instead of letting her family starve, she hunts for food in the forest next to her District (Collins 9). Overall, her thoughts show that she is bitter about her life, but also that she is aware of her limitations and what she can and cannot express in the face of oppression:

> When I was younger, I scared my mother to death, the things I would blurt out about
>
> District 12, about the people who rule our country, Panem, from the far-off city called
>
> the Capitol. Eventually I understood this would only lead us to more trouble. So I

learned to hold my tongue and turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts. (Collins 10)

While Katniss dislikes her predicament, she can keep her opinion to herself, recognising that voicing her thoughts will not change anything. Instead, she focuses her attention on more pressing matters such as finding food. This stance is evident when she thinks, "What good is yelling about the Capitol in the middle of the woods? It doesn't change anything. It doesn't make things fair. It doesn't fill our stomachs. In fact, it scares off the nearby game" (Collins 16). It also shows that Katniss is quite pragmatic. She takes the consequences of her actions into account and reacting accordingly. For example, when Gale, her friend, suggests fleeing the District, she thinks, "Leave? How could I leave Prim, who is the only person in the world I'm certain I love? And Gale is devoted to his family. We can't leave, so why bother talking about it?" (Collins 13). Leaving the District might be beneficial to her but would mean she has to leave Prim behind. Her devotion to the people she cares for results in self-sacrifice, as is shown during the Reaping ceremony that decides who has to participate in The Hunger Games. When Prim is picked, Katniss volunteers to go in her place. This decision means facing certain death, which she accepts so her sister will not have to (Collins 21).

To summarise, Katniss' early characterisation indicates that she disagrees with social norms but tries to remain within their limits for Prim's benefit. She is pragmatic, capable of separating her emotions and rational behaviour, and thinks before she acts. She also shows signs of altruism when it comes to her loved ones, putting their needs above her own.

3.2 TRIS – *DIVERGENT*

Divergent is a novel placed in futuristic Chicago. The city is walled to protect people from the outside world, and its population is divided into five factions based on what they value most: Abnegation (selflessness), Amity (kindness), Erudite (intelligence), Candor (honesty), and

Dauntless (courage). Beatrice (Tris), the protagonist, originates from Abnegation but chooses to join Dauntless since she feels a disconnect with her own faction (Roth).

In the first few chapters, the characteristics of the factions are laid out. People from Abnegation are, for example, selfless, empathetic, and place the wellbeing of others above their own. Tris does not meet these criteria. She is characterised as a stubborn sixteen-year-old who observes the world around her with a fair share of cynicism and wonders if she will ever fit in. She feels disconnected from her faction since it is not her first instinct to think of others. This can be seen when she contrasts herself with Caleb: "My older brother, Caleb, stands in the aisle, holding a railing above his head to keep himself steady. We don't look alike. [...] He also inherited my mother's talent for selflessness. He gave his seat to a surly Candor man on the bus without second thought" (Roth 10). Later, when Caleb leaves to get tested, Tris reflects back on this moment, specifically the ease with which her brother acts according to Abnegation standards. She thinks, "I have tried to explain to him that my instincts are not the same as his – it didn't even enter my mind to give my seat on the bus – but he doesn't understand" (Roth 14). Whereas Caleb's first instinct is to act selflessly, "striving to see only them and forget himself" (Roth 11), this is not the case for Tris. It enhances her feeling that Abnegation is not the right place for her.

Her otherness is a reoccurring theme. During the Aptitude Test, which should determine what faction she belongs to, Tris speaks without thinking, inquiring about her instructor's tattoo. To this, the instructor replies that she has "never met a curious Abnegation before" (Roth 15). Tris, internally, acknowledges that her behaviour is strange for someone from her faction by thinking, "my curiosity is a mistake, a betrayal of Abnegation values" (15). She adds, "I try to stop myself from asking another question, but I can't help it" (15). Tris' thoughts suggest that she is a girl who knows how she should behave but cannot conform and struggles with her

impulses. The way she acts gets noticed by those around her, yet Tris cannot stop herself from being who she is.

Before she chooses to switch factions, a longing for Dauntless can be observed. Tris pays significantly more attention to that faction than to any of the others. An example is her daily routine of watching them arrive: "I pause by a window in the E Wing 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" (Roth 12). Her fascination with Dauntless indicates a desire to be courageous and free instead of the strict life she leads in Abnegation.

To summarise, Roth shaped a world in which the factions represent personality traits. In the early characterisation, Tris' thoughts and actions show a preference for Dauntless. This suggests she is courageous, or at least has a desire to be. Her thoughts also show that she is capable of judging other's perceptions of her when she takes the time for it. However, Tris has trouble with impulse control, causing her to react before thinking her actions through.

3.3 JULIETTE – *SHATTER ME*

In *Shatter Me*, a political movement called The Reestablishment has risen to power. It is placed in a dystopian landscape where climate change has started to destroy the world. The Reestablishment claimed they could help Earth's dying society, but after they managed to solidify their rule, it became clear that they did not care about humanity; they only cared about power. They divided the Earth into sectors, killed the voices of oppression, and enforced a strict regime of regulations and violence to keep people in check (Mafi).

The protagonist, Juliette, is a quiet, anxious girl. People are afraid of her because her touch is lethal. As a result, she lived in isolation for 264 days after being locked up by The Reestablishment for something outside of her control. Her thoughts have a bitter undertone, suggesting that she feels misunderstood. An example of this is: "no one cares that I didn't know what I was capable of. That I didn't know what I was doing" (Mafi 12). It implicates that people

assume she would harm others on purpose. However, her thoughts show that this assumption is in contrast with Juliette's true character. This is, for instance, visible when she draws a parallel between being startled by her new cellmate, Adam, and being caught by her parents: "I spin around like I've been caught stealing food again. That only happened once and my parents didn't believe me when I said it wasn't for me. I said I was just trying to save the stray cats living around the corner but they didn't think I was human enough to care about a cat" (Mafi 17). Whereas her parents see her as inhuman, assuming the worst, Juliette's thoughts indicate that she is empathetic and merely wanted to help. Despite her best intentions, she cannot change society's opinion of her, and as a result, she started to believe what they told her. She fears herself and what she can do. It results in her loneliness and partially self-inflicted isolation, evident in her conversation with Adam when he tries to console her: "'You can't touch me,' I whisper. [...] I can't remember the warmth of any kind of embrace. My arms ache from the inescapable ice of isolation. My own mother couldn't hold me in her arms. My father couldn't warm my frozen hands. I live in a world of nothing" (Mafi 21). This is once again a sign of Juliette's empathy, her wish not to harm others despite her ability to do so. She is forced into isolation, unable to remember the last time she has touched another because she knows what will happen if she does give in to her desire for physical contact. Other interactions with Adam also show a desire to be liked and stay out of trouble. She remains passive when he claims her bed as his own and explains how breakfast works even though he has not been kind to her (Mafi 14-19).

To summarise, Juliette's characterisation portrays her as a sweet, shy character that lacks assertiveness. Society has decided she is a monster, and her actions, reactions, thoughts, and speech all reflect her desire to be liked despite being shunned for years. Instead of showing assertiveness and stick up for herself, Juliette remains passive and tries to be as little of a nuisance as possible.

4   PROTECTIVE MIMICRY

4.1   KATNISS – *THE HUNGER GAMES*

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss discovers she has to adjust her behaviour to the social norms of the Capitol to survive. In her District, no one cares about how she looks or behaves. District 12 is the poorest of all twelve, and for this reason, it is not as strictly regulated as the others. Katniss, who hunts in the woods, states that "most of the Peacekeepers turn a blind eye to the few of us who hunt because they're as hungry for fresh meat as anybody is. In fact, they're among our best customers" (Collins 9-10). This understanding with the Peacekeepers shows that the social norms in District 12 vary from those in the other districts, where unlawful behaviour is strictly punished (Collins 152). Consequently, she has to adjust her behaviour when she goes to the Capitol, where physical appearance and regulated behaviour appear to be more important than anything else. Katniss notes:

> They do surgery in the Capitol, to make people appear younger and thinner. In District 12, looking old is something of an achievement since so many people die early. You see an elderly person you want to congratulate them on their longevity, ask the secret of survival. A plump person is envied because they aren't scraping by like the majority of us. But here it is different. Wrinkles aren't desirable. A round belly isn't a sign of success. (Collins 97)

This description provides a visualisation of the clear divide between the two worlds and what is valued in each. The people in the Capitol grew up surrounded by wealth, whereas Katniss has lived her life in poverty. Since social norms regulate behaviour to obtain the approval of others, putting wealth on display and taking pride in their appearance loses relevance in District 12 because it would seem wasteful and excessive. However, in order to appeal to sponsors that can aid her during the Games, Katniss has to mimic their social norms. This is in contrast with her personal attitude (Cislaghi and Heise 408-409). Her characterisation made clear that she

disagrees with the Capitol. While she stays quiet rather than voicing her opinion, she does not act like she appreciates their rule. Regardless of her personal attitude, Katniss is reminded by her team that she has a role to play. Effie, for instance, says:

> 'Just remember, Katniss, you want the audience to like you.'
>
> 'And you don't think they will?' I ask.
>
> 'Not if you glare at them the entire time. Why don't you save that for the arena? Instead, think of yourself among friends,' says Effie.
>
> 'They're betting on how long I'll live!' I burst out. 'They're not my friends!'
>
> 'Well, try and pretend!' snaps Effie. Then she composes herself and beams at me. 'See, like this. I'm smiling at you even though you're aggravating.' (Collins 89)

Katniss is made aware that appealing to the audience does not just mean staying silent about her disapproval but also that she has to pretend to like it there. While this means she will have to go against her personal attitude towards the situation, she recognises that it is essential for survival by acknowledging, "If you appeal to the crowd, either by being humorous of brutal or eccentric, you gain favor" (Collins 90). Consequently, she pretends to be a girl in love, pretending alongside Peeta (the male tribute from District 12) to keep this act intact. Throughout the competition, she is constantly consciously pretending because she knows people are watching her every move. She uses this knowledge in her favour, aiding her survival. When she discovers Peeta is working against her with her biggest competitors, the following scene takes place:

> The audience will have been beside themselves, knowing I was in the tree, that I overheard the Careers talking, that I discovered Peeta with them. Until I work out exactly how I want to play that, I'd better at least act on top of things. Not perplexed. Certainly not confused or frightened.
>
> No, I need to look one step ahead of the game.

So as I slide out of the foliage and into the dawn light, I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me.

Then I cock my head slightly to the side and give a knowing smile. There! Let them figure out what that means! (Collins 125)

Katniss actively plays into the expectations of her sponsors. While she is confused about Peeta's change of allegiance, she knows that showing it will decrease her chances of survival. Instead, she hopes that the audience will believe this is a rouse Peeta and she have come up together by showing confidence through behavioural and facial mimicry by cocking her head and smiling (Chartrand and Baaren 222). She consciously shields her true emotions as a survival strategy, recognising that behaving according to the audience's expectations will get her further than sticking to her personal attitude to prove a point.

Katniss teams up with Peeta again when they near the end of the Games. They have a chance of both surviving, but Peeta is badly hurt. During the beginning of the games, her strategy was to shield her emotions, but now she has to act out romantic feelings, something she is unfamiliar with. Katniss acknowledges: "If I want to keep Peeta alive, I've got to give the audience more to care about. Star-crossed lovers desperate to get home together. Two hearts beating as one. Romance. Never have I been in love, this is going to be a real trick. I think of my parents [...]. 'Peeta!' I say, using the special tone that my mother used only with my father" (Collins 196). As a reference, Katniss imitates her parent's show of affection and uses verbal mimicry (Chartrand and Baaren 222) to stay true to the act of star-crossed lovers. Behaving according to social norms linked to a girl in love proves to be a successful survival strategy since the sponsors give them food in return. Peeta and Katniss eventually manage to survive long enough to win the games.

4.2   TRIS – *DIVERGENT*

Tris realises that to survive, it is sometimes wiser to adhere to stereotypes linked to her social status and gender, even if that is against her personal attitude. Her aptitude test gave away that she is Divergent, meaning that she does not belong wholly to one faction. This is considered a dangerous trait, and Tris is advised to be inconspicuous and keep the test results hidden if she wants to survive (Roth 20-21). In other words, she is advised to pretend she is not Divergent for her own protection. Tris chooses to join Dauntless, for which she has to undergo initiation. During each stage, the initiates will be ranked, and those who score lowest will be cut from the faction. The first part of initiation consists of combat training. Tris originates from Abnegation. A preconceived notion of her former faction that the people are prude, weak and unimpressive (Roth 40-42, 80). Subsequently, Tris is expected to be bad at fighting, which proves to be the case. She manages to score just high enough to reach the tip-over point. When the scores are made public, Molly, another initiate, complains about Tris ranking higher than her. Four, one of her trainers, replies: "'If you intent to secure yourself a high rank, I suggest you don't make a habit of losing to low-ranked opponents,' says Four, his voice cutting through the mutters and grumbles of the other initiates. [...] The words sting a little, reminding me that I am the low-ranked opponent he's referring to" (Roth 121). Tris is still perceived as a weaker candidate who reached the second stage because she beat a higher-ranking opponent once.

However, during the second stage, Tris rapidly improves. This stage consists of simulations, which do not affect her the same way they do others because she is divergent. She is capable of manipulating the system and outperforms the others. Consequently, the other initiates grow suspicious when Tris ranks first. Where she was initially seen as a weaker opponent, she suddenly becomes a threat. As a result, a group of initiates, including Al, a former friend of Tris, tries to kill her. In the novel, the threat she poses is clarified by Four when he says, "[Al] wanted you to be the small, quiet girl from Abnegation. [...] He hurt you because your strength made him feel weak" (Roth 168). This is an example of gender norms. It

implicates that Al felt threatened by Tris once she started to outrank him, thus disturbing the hierarchy of males being superior to females (Heise et al. qtd. in Cislaghi and Heise 410). Based on Four's suggestion, Tris decides to utilise her awareness of the gender norm instead of falling victim. She pretends to be scared and startled the day after the attack and thus presents herself as weaker than she is. When Tris enters the cafeteria where her attackers are seating, she thinks: "They attacked me to make me feel weak. I can pretend they succeeded to protect myself, but I can't let it become true. I pull away from the wall and walk into the dining hall without another thought. A few steps in, I remember I'm supposed to look down like I'm cowering, so I slow my pace and hug the wall, keeping my head down" (Roth 171). Tris recognises she is defenceless since she is physically weaker than the other initiates and chooses to assume expected behaviour to protect herself (Forbes 56). Tris clarifies to herself that it is merely pretence rather than a behavioural change when she claims she "can pretend they succeeded to protect [herself], but [she] can't let it become true" (Roth 171). Hence, it is a conscious survival strategy rooted in protective mimicry.

4.3   JULIETTE – *SHATTER ME*

Juliette evolves from someone who pretends to be different for the benefit of others into someone that imitates behaviour for their own benefit and survival. At the start of *Shatter Me*, her true character is hidden away since she pretends to be someone else to please those around her, as seen in her early characterisation. She actively imitates an obedient, harmless girl in an attempt to be liked. When reminiscing about her parents, Juliette states: "I stole their happiness. Destroyed my mother's hope for ever having children again. Couldn't I see what I'd done, is what they'd ask me. Couldn't I see that I ruined everything. I tried so hard to fix what I'd ruined. I tried every single day to be what they wanted. I tried all the time to be better but I never really knew how" (Mafi 31). The description suggests self-loathing and shows Juliette trying to self-

efface in an attempt to be accepted. Whereas the other two heroines act a certain way for their own benefit, Juliette, at the start, pretends to be a different person to please others.

Juliette becomes more assertive once she is transported from her prison cell to sector 45, a military compound. Warner, the man in charge of the sector, wants to use her powers for his gain. Juliette does not want to hurt others, as was clarified in the analysis of her character in the previous chapter, but Warner decides to make a spectacle of her abilities. He forces her to touch one of his soldiers, which could kill him. The following scene takes place: "The sea of soldiers parts behind me. Every face is etched in astonishment and pure, undiluted fear. Jenkins is lying on the floor and no one dares approach him. 'Somebody help him!' I scream. 'Somebody *help* him! He needs a doctor – he needs to be taken – he needs – he – oh God – what have I done–'" (Mafi 76). Juliette knows what she is capable of, but she does not want the power. Warner's behaviour shows that people expect her to be a monster, believing she wants to harm others merely because she can. At Sector 45, conforming to expected behaviour, therefore, means hurting people. Warner continuously presses her to use her abilities instead of hiding them away, but Juliette tells him: "'I don't want to be a monster,' I say, perhaps more for my sake than his." To which Warner replies: "'Don't fight what you're born to be'" (Mafi 116-117). Despite her personal attitude towards her abilities, Juliette decides to pretend to comply with his social norms to buy herself time to escape, at which she succeeds (Cislaghi and Heise 408-409).

However, during the escape, Warner discovers that he can touch Juliette without being harmed. This discovery ignites his desire for her. When Warner captures Juliette again, she is aware of his feelings and mimics them to steal his gun, as can be observed in the following scene:

'Admit it,' he says. 'We're perfect for each other. You want the power. You love the feel of a weapon in your hand. You're... attracted to me.' [...]

I notice the gleam of silver in his inside jacket pocket.

I feel a thrill of hope. A thrill of horror. Brace myself for what I need to do. Spend a

moment mourning the loss of my dignity.

And I relax.

He feels the tension seep out of my limps and responds in turn. He smiles, loosens his

clam on my shoulders. Slips his arms around my waist. I swallow the vomit threatening

to give me away. (Mafi 223-224)

Juliette consciously imitates Warner's emotions, executed through facial and behavioural

mimicry, to obtain the upper hand in a situation where she has little to no power (Chartrand and

Baaren 222, Forbes 56). As a result, she utilises Warner's expectations to protect herself and

find an opportunity to escape. It shows that while Juliette does not want to be associated with

being a monster, she can perform the role of one to survive.

5 CONCLUSION

In all three novels, protective mimicry is used consciously by the female protagonists. They mimic behaviour and pretend to adhere to social and gender norms to blend in with their hostile environment, buying themselves the time to reach relative safety. In doing so, they learn more about their personal attitude and recognise when it is necessary to (temporarily) put their values aside for the sake of survival. For this reason, their character development is not necessarily a direct result of protective mimicry. Because they mimic behaviour, they are placed in situations that allow them to learn more about themselves and their values. Katniss learns that playing into the expectations of the Capitol provides her with the tools needed for survival, Tris notices that mimicking preconceived notions people have about her gives her protection she cannot achieve otherwise, and Juliette discovers that at times, people assuming the worst about her can be used in her favour.

The heroines' character development is evident at the end of each novel. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss learns that the oppressing power of president Snow does not end after she has survived the Hunger Games. At the start of the novel, she did not want anything to do with the Capitol, but the ending shows she has learned that manoeuvring in the intricate web of politics and schemes is her only chance of survival. When she is accused of starting a rebellion, she is told that her "only defence can be you were so madly in love you weren't responsible for your actions" (Collins 266). Whereas the conversation with Effie presented in chapter 3 of this thesis shows Katniss resisting the idea of pretending, she now knows that sometimes, putting up a performance is the only way to survive and agrees with the strategy without hesitation.

Throughout *Divergent*, Tris becomes aware of her values and how she can live accordingly. She had to pretend to be weak to not be recognised as a Divergent and fit in with Dauntless but discovers that what makes her different is what makes her strong. Consequently, she sets out to find her place in the world outside the boundaries she set for herself. Tris learns

that life is more than the factions of their society and states that "I have no home, no path, and no certainty. I am no longer Tris, the selfless, or Tris, the brave. I suppose that now, I must become more than either" (Roth 279). It indicates character growth and contrasts with the start of the novel, where she was constantly worried about which faction she belonged to. Now, she recognises that it is acceptable to move beyond those boundaries and find herself in what she discovers there, even if that means becoming factionless.

Lastly, in *Shatter Me*, Juliette learns to not let others take advantage of her, staying true to her personal attitude and becoming more assertive. She is offered the comfort of a luxurious home and acceptance by Warner but decides against it because his values contradict her own. Juliette learns to recognise her desires and takes charge of how she wants to live her life. At the end of the novel, she manages to find a safe haven with people who want to fight the Reestablishment. Juliette agrees to fight for their cause, thinking to herself: "Things are changing, but this time I'm not afraid. This time I know who I am. This time I've made the right choice and I'm fighting for the right team" (Mafi 286). Juliette no longer settles for a life of trying to please others and instead decides to fight for what she believes in.

The novels show the heroines recognising that there lies strength in playing into other's expectations and using this to survive. This thesis highlights an apparent trend in young adult dystopian literature where protagonists mimic behaviour or pretend to be someone they are not as a survival strategy. As a result of the situations this puts them in, the characters undergo development that makes them become, to an extent, a more versatile version of themselves with a better understanding of their values. However, since the research was limited to three novels, this is not a definite conclusion. More extensive research has to be conducted on more books from this genre. Suggestions for works to look at published in the same decade are *Legend* by Marie Lu (2011), *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner (2009), and *Uglies* by Scott West (2005). This will expand the research with male protagonists since both The Maze Runner and Legend

feature a male main character. Another limitation of this research has been the word count. Because there was limited space available, only selected parts of the novels were analysed. It was required to observe multiple cases for this potential trend to be established, but this resulted in a briefer analysis' of each literary text. Therefore, another suggestion would be to perform additional analysis of each book separately to extract all possible information.

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