

The Exception Proves the Rule: The Detrimental Use of Indispensable Protagonists and
Expendable Deuteragonists in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction

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Children's literature scholars have long praised young adult dystopian fiction for its ability to encourage young people's engagement in social issues; however, these examinations of the dystopian young adult genre primarily focus on the texts' protagonists, who are at the forefront of revolutions, while largely ignoring the impact the protagonists' actions have on those around them, like on the texts' deuteragonists, the second most important characters within the texts, who often suffer due to the protagonists' decisions. My paper asserts that dystopian young adult novels possess one hero who is the exception to the rules within their society while those surrounding the hero are incapable of changing their world, causing readers to recognize that each narrative suggests the powerlessness of ordinary people. By considering Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, and Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, I examine both the exceptional nature of protagonists as well as the inevitable destruction of the deuteragonists, who are largely defined by their relationships to the protagonists. Furthermore, by exploring Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours*, a text where the deuteragonist serves as the narrator, readers are directly exposed to the darker side of young adult dystopian fiction. This project seeks to analyze how the relationship between the protagonist and deuteragonist within young adult dystopian fiction taints the seemingly empowering genre.