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## Next to the Divergent: Disability in the *Divergent* Trilogy

Katherine Lashley Fischer

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (<klashley@umbc.edu>)

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### Abstract

This paper analyses how the *Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth addresses cognitive and physiological disability through the medical and social models of disability. The trilogy shows how people perceive difference, and how those same people who have differences such as mental divergence can contaminate the people around them. The trilogy reveals responsibilities of society in the treatment of disability – both the lack of social understanding and tolerance, and the social acceptance of those who are different. The characters help their society to move toward a society that accepts disability.

**Keywords:** Disability, *Divergent*, Medical Model, Memory, Young Adult Literature

The *Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth presents characters with physical and cognitive differences; thereby, the trilogy explores different approaches to healing, from the medical model of disability, the social model of disability, and the practice of remembering. The trilogy focuses on the negative results of using the medical model of disability for the wrong reasons, which include diagnosing alternate ways of thinking as cognitive disabilities. The trilogy also posits that the social model of disability is preferable to the medical model when it comes to the social acceptance of characters with cognitive disabilities. Ultimately, the trilogy presents a viewpoint that the characters need to accept physical and cognitive disabilities because everyone – even those who are highly abled – have varying degrees of disability.

### 1. Trilogy Overview

The *Divergent* trilogy takes place in a post-collapse Chicago that is a sociological experiment. For years, the characters living in Chicago have been divided into five factions based on their personalities and abilities. The Amity faction values peace; they dress in yellow and red, and they farm the land as well as provide

counselors and caretakers. The Erudite faction values intelligence and they are the researchers and scientists. The Candor faction values honesty: they wear black and white and specialize in the law. The Abnegation faction values selflessness, wearing grey to reflect their humility, and they work in government. The Dauntless faction values bravery as they protect everyone living in Chicago: they wear mostly black and many of them sport tattoos and piercings. Each individual is expected to fit within one of these five factions.

There are the factionless: people who do not belong in any faction, whether they left or were expelled from a faction. However, this society makes it clear that being factionless is undesirable, as they tend to be homeless and do not have any representation in this society or in their government.

The last category of people in this society are the *Divergent*: people who have the mental aptitude to belong to multiple factions. Since this society is built on categorizing people into specific slots, when an individual has the values to belong to two or three factions, then the faction system falters, especially in answering the question, "How do we place a Divergent individual?". The answer, therefore, is twofold: either the Divergent person must conceal their divergence and select the faction that they would like to live in the most; or that Divergent person reveals themselves and suffers the consequences, which include becoming factionless or being killed.

The factions use mental simulations of situations to provide tests. For instance, sixteen-years-old teenagers undergo an aptitude test, which is a simulation of different situations that reveal the person's values. The result of the aptitude test indicates to the teenagers their specific faction. The following day, the teenagers participate in the Choosing Ceremony, where they select which faction they will belong in for the rest of their lives.

However, Divergent individuals are dangerous to the faction society because a Divergent mind can mentally control a simulation and therefore break free from the limitations of the factions. This ability to control a simulation – determining what happens next and even ending the simulation early – means that a Divergent individual has the mental and physical ability to challenge the leadership of the factions. A Divergent individual has the capacity to become a rebel. Therefore, the faction society does not tolerate Divergent people. Yet if someone's divergence can be kept a secret, then that person can pretend to be part of a faction.

In the first book of the trilogy, *Divergent*, the female protagonist, Tris, is sixteen years old. She takes the Aptitude test and discovers that she is Divergent – she has aptitude for Abnegation, Dauntless, and Erudite – but she must hide her true identity to survive. She leaves her home faction of Abnegation to join the Dauntless. Tris, along with the other new members of Dauntless, undergoes training that will prepare her for tests that will determine if she can fully join Dauntless, and she does. Toward the end of the novel, the Erudite faction creates a widescale simulation that controls the Dauntless members to create an army to overtake the government from the Abnegation leaders. Tris, however, because of her divergence, is able to overcome the simulation and act of her own accord, saving the lives of Abnegation leaders and breaking the hold of the simulation on the Dauntless members.

In the second novel, *Insurgent*, the Erudite have taken control of all the factions, mandating new policies and initiating a search for Divergent individuals. The leader of the Erudite, Jeanine, conducts tests on Tris to determine how her Divergent mind works. When Tris is not being tested on, she aids the factionless people in overthrowing the Erudite. Tris's main accomplishment is showing a video that appears on all the screens throughout the city so that everyone in the community can view the announcement that reveals the truth about the factions: they are a sociological experiment and when there are enough Divergent individuals, then the experiment could be counted as successful and everyone can join the American society.

In the third novel of the trilogy, *Allegiant*, while some people want to remain in factions, others, such as Tris, choose to leave. Outside Chicago, Tris joins the researchers in the Bureau compound and learns that everyone is considered either genetically pure (GP: original genes that have not been altered), or genetically damaged (GD: genes that have been altered and therefore damaged). Because of the chaos in the faction community, the Bureau leaders decide to release a memory serum to erase the factions' memories of learning about the experiment and of their recent political destabilizations. The leaders planned to reset the memories of the faction community, so people would forget that several insurrections occurred and they would forget about the experiment. However, Tris, once again, uses her divergence to overcome physical and mental controls in order to prevent the memory serum from being spread among the factions. Instead, the memory serum is spread within the research compound, where Tris's friends reset the memories of the scientists: instructing them that there is no cognitive or genetic disability among the genetically damaged but that everyone is genetically equal.

## 2. Disability Studies

Within disability studies, there is the idea of the "norm" for the body and mind. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls it the "normate body"; Tobin Siebers, "able-bodiedness"; and Lennard J. Davis, "normalcy". All three scholars note how able-bodied people prefer ability over disability, and many able-bodied people tend to discard the opinions or experiences of those with disabilities. Able-bodied people, who prefer the normate body, can discriminate against those with a disability to the point that they do not want to see or encounter them. Siebers writes:

The ideology of ability is at its simplest the preference for able-bodiedness. At its most radical, it defines the baseline by which humanness is determined, setting the measure of body and mind that gives or denies human status to individual persons. It affects nearly all of our judgments, definitions, and values about human beings, but because it is discriminatory and exclusionary, it creates social locations outside of and critical of its purview, [...] [including] the perspective of disability. (2008, 8)

Societies can promote a hegemony of normalcy simply by categorizing certain states of being as disabilities and by discriminating against those who are different, whether it be through gender, race, social class, or physical or mental dis/ability. This hegemony of normalcy occurs for both the Divergent individuals and the GD.

The *Divergent* trilogy illustrates Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's observation that "disability" can be anything outside of what a society designates as the norm. Garland-Thomson observes that:

Because disability is defined not as a set of observable, predictable traits – like racialized or gendered features – but rather as *any* departure from an unstated physical and functional norm [...] disability unites a highly marked, heterogeneous group whose only commonality is being considered abnormal. (1997, 24)

Indeed, the Divergent individuals and the genetically damaged are considered abnormal because they do not have the desired traits as established by those of influence, such as government officials in the factions and the leaders in the compound. The people in the novels also have the additional belief that divergence, which is abnormal, is also dangerous and maybe even contagious.

In contrast to medical testing, the novels posit the social model of disability as beneficial because the social model is based on social acceptance of difference. Through its engagement with

the social model of disability, the trilogy critiques social acceptance and equitable treatment of physical or psychological differences. The social model includes suggestions that societies should alter the environment to accommodate the differently-abled. For example, the social model advocates the use of easy access routes for people in wheelchairs and special education for those with cognitive disabilities. This social model argument furthermore calls out society for discriminatory behavior against those with conditions marked as disabilities. The social model maintains that a “disability” is in actuality not a disability unless or until that individual encounters a social structure or situation that discriminates against them. Given this, Dan Goodley observes how social model scholars have approached disability by analyzing social constructs rather than focusing on the body: “Social model scholars turned attention away from a preoccupation with people’s impairments to a focus on the causes of exclusion through social, economic, political, cultural, relational and psychological barriers” (2011, 11). So, as Lennard J. Davis explains, “the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (2006, 3). The argument that Davis makes emphasizes that the “disability” itself is created through the acts of perception and definition by able-bodied and normate people. The social model suggests, then, that we must re-think our conceptions of “normal” and “disabled” so that we will not marginalize certain groups of people, but instead recognize everyone’s bodies and abilities regardless of difference.

Disability theorists Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare, in their 2002 work *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory*, connect disability to postmodernism. They assert:

If we fully accept both the phenomenological notion of the inseparability of bodylines and being-in-the-world, and the postmodernist contention that not only the subject but the body itself is discursively constituted and maintained, then it is necessary to rethink what would actually make a difference to those with physical disabilities. (73-74)

As we encounter one another, we change our perspectives on others and on our bodies, sometimes recognizing more health and sometimes recognizing more disability. The idea of a continuum of disability contributes to an analysis of these young adult novels in that these characters experience varying degrees of disability throughout the plot.

The *Divergent* trilogy demonstrates a conscious effort by the characters and faction society to become more socially accepting of differences, particularly the cognitive differences of the Divergent individuals and the GD.

The social constructions of disability also point to the importance of the act of naming a disability. The verbal description of a disability also contributes to how the disabled person and society view the disability. Tris’s divergence and the designations of GD and GP illustrate Temple Grandin’s concern about labeling people with a disability, even if that difference may actually only be a “difference” and not a “disability”:

For some people, a label can become the thing that defines them. It can easily lead to what I call a handicapped mentality. When a person gets a diagnosis of Asperger’s, for instance, he might start to think, *What’s the point? or I’ll never hold down a job.* His whole life starts to revolve around what he *can’t* do instead of what he *can* do, or at least what he can try to improve. Label-locked thinking goes the other way too. *You* might be comfortable with your diagnosis but worry that it will define you in the eyes of others. What will your boss think? Your coworkers? (Grandin and Panek 2014, 105)

The *Divergent* trilogy shows a number of characters in label-locked thinking when it comes to divergence, genetically damaged (GD), and genetically pure (GP). Tris accepts her own di-

vergence but does not tell anyone for a long time because she is worried that it will negatively affect her, and she is correct in hiding her divergence because the label-locked faction society believes that the identity of “Divergent” is dangerous. Similarly, when it comes to GD and GP, people like the Bureau believe that a designation of GD is negative, almost a death sentence, whereas people such as Tris and the rebels believe that these terms are not accurate and are detrimental to individuals and society and that they should not even have these labels. Therefore, the *Divergent* trilogy demonstrates that label-locked thinking reinforces the hegemony of normalcy, provides fodder for the scientists to justify conducting experiments and using medicine to eliminate difference and produces a framework for prejudice in society.

### 3. *Divergence*

In the *Divergent* world, scientists in the Erudite faction use medical testing to diagnose and control disability, which for them is primarily divergence. In the trilogy, the Erudite, their leader Jeanine, and her team of scientists use medicine to discover how the Divergent brain works so that they can control and eventually eliminate Divergent individuals.

The medical model calls for scientists and doctors to conduct tests in order to discover how a disability functions, what causes the disability, and how to treat it. Through this process, however, the medical establishment identifies a disability, thereby creating and upholding its own subjective definition of the normate body. Within the faction system of the Chicago experiment, divergence is the aptitude someone has for more than one faction. In the *Divergent* trilogy, the faction members use the hegemony of normalcy to assert that a faction identity is normate whereas divergence is non-normative. When people misunderstand individual cognitive difference – here represented as divergence – they may label that difference a disability, thereby indicating that it is a limited or negative state of being. The fear of a difference that is misunderstood may also lead to society ostracizing the person or group of people who have that difference. Indeed, there are times throughout the trilogy when Tris is isolated and ostracized because of her divergence.

“Divergence” works metaphorically in the trilogy as a disease or condition that is dangerous to society. Francis Fukuyama warns that a government may take control of groups of people as scientists better understand the brain and develop drugs that will change and/or control how the brain of a “different” person functions. Fukuyama writes: “Biotechnology and a greater scientific understanding of the human brain promise to have extremely significant political ramifications” (2002, 15). While Fukuyama is discussing these processes in reality, the novels critique this same potentiality. The protagonist, Tris, witnesses both the political and the medical ramifications of brain testing, particularly on the Divergent in the first two novels of the trilogy. Testing leads to the death of the subjects under study, the control of the masses, a civil war, and a fear of those who are labeled Divergent. The trilogy plays out the process of using medical experimentation to understand and control those seen as “different”.

Tris is not the only Divergent individual in the faction society, but her divergence, which is stronger because she has aptitude for three factions instead of two, makes her unlike the rest. Mitchell and Snyder, in explaining how disability operates in stories, assert that “disability marks a character as ‘unlike’ the rest of a fiction’s cast, and once singled out, the character becomes a case of special interest who retains originality to the detriment of all other characteristics” (2000, 228). Tris’s divergence singles her out and causes her to be the “case of special interest” to Jeanine and even to her friends and the scientists in the Bureau. She is “different” even among the different, the Divergent.

In *Allegiant*, the third novel, Tris learns more about what it means to be Divergent. She explains:

When I found out I was Divergent, I thought of it as a secret power that no one else possessed, something that made me different, better, stronger. Now, after comparing my DNA to Tobias's on a computer screen, I realize that 'Divergent' doesn't mean as much as I thought it did. It's just a word for a particular sequence in my DNA, like a word for all people with brown eyes or blond hair [...] But these people still think it means something – they still think it means I'm healing in a way that Tobias is not. And they want me to just trust that, believe it. Well, I don't. (Roth 2013, 179)

Through Tris's realization, the novel shows that embodied differences are simply the result of various DNA sequences, and that what society has deemed to be large differences might well be considered small and insignificant, such as the difference between blue eyes and brown eyes. Tris believes DNA and genetic material should not be a basis of medical and social discrimination. The trilogy shows the shortcomings of medical testing, as it can actually cause further impairment and more labeling of disabilities instead of less. The *Divergent* trilogy shows how medicine is used not to heal injuries, but to diagnose disabilities in order to eliminate the disabled people rather than the disability. Because the medical model is used in this way, it leads to even more discrimination. The genetic manipulations and labeling function as a eugenics program as the scientists, with the government's approval, segregate those who have the "damaged genes". Thus, the Divergent, within Chicago, are understood to be defective and contagious. For instance, another character who is Divergent, Uriah, tells Tris why their friends sit on the other side of the cafeteria, " 'But if you're wondering why they're all the way over there... Shauna found out I'm Divergent,' [...] 'And she doesn't want to catch it' " (Roth 2012, 306). Likewise, another character tells Tris what she heard about the Divergent: " 'Like it [divergence] was a fantasy story,' [...] 'There are people with special powers among us!' Like that" (140). All of the misconceptions about the Divergent essentially point to the one solution that the Erudite leadership approved: the Divergent are to be eliminated. In *Allegiant*, another Divergent character named Amar explains how he escaped from Jeanine:

They [Bureau] faked my death because I was Divergent, and Jeanine had started killing the Divergent. They tried to save as many as they could before she got to them, but it was tricky, you know, because she was always a step ahead. (Roth 2013, 139-40)

Throughout most of the trilogy, the factions assert that divergence is undesirable and treat it as a disability, yet as Tris discovers what she can do because of her divergence, she begins to perceive it as a beneficial part of herself – she redefines disability as ability. For instance, her divergence enables her to realize when she is in a simulation and to break free from the simulation. Therefore, throughout the trilogy, Tris learns that her divergence actually makes her more abled than the non-Divergent. She also is more abled in that she can think like the people from three different factions: she can use various mental approaches and consequently better anticipate what will happen next in the rebellion. She can also reason through an activity, taking into consideration diverse viewpoints and margins of error. Divergence is thus the ideal as Divergent people possess multiple traits and mental abilities. In comparison, the non-Divergent are missing personality traits, which makes them disabled according to the scientists monitoring the faction experiment outside of Chicago. The non-Divergent can only think through their faction's philosophy, which means they are limited in their reasoning skills. The non-Divergent also rarely break free from the simulations and do not even know they are in a simulation until it ends.

Jonathan Alexander and Rebecca Black write about the use of personality testing in *Divergent*: “In essence, these young people exist only in the service of maintaining larger institutional structures, and the tests are designed to produce particular types of citizens to meet the needs of the state” (2015, 229). While Alexander and Black analyze the social and personality tests that the institutions use – for divergence, the Aptitude test – I will expand their assertion to focus on the medical and social treatments of disabilities diagnosed through the tests. In fact, the Aptitude test mimics the tests that medical professionals use to diagnose certain perceived disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, and IQ with a low IQ indicating cognitive difference and/or limitation. The Aptitude test not only serves to maintain the institutional structure of the faction system, it also reveals whether someone is Divergent. A Divergent diagnosis contributes to a person’s social ostracism because of the medically-constructed cognitive disability.

Categorizing differences, however, can be comforting to a young adult who feels pressure from the difficulty of self-determination. Balaka Basu writes about the conflicting messages of labeling in *Divergent*:

*Divergent’s* attraction lies in its ability to define its protagonists, offering readers the hope of being similarly defined—the enchanting possibility of a world where their own interior minds can be ‘read’ and essentialized, and in which their identities may no longer be so alarmingly fluid. (2013, 20)

Basu addresses some of the issues of defining young adults: sometimes young adults want to be labeled so they know where they belong, yet this essentializing also comes with proscriptions on how to act and dress, and specific categories do not account for fluidity and differences in their personalities. Basu then asserts that the *Divergent* novel argues for both upholding and breaking down classifications:

By making her heroine Divergent, Roth appears to want to indicate that such classification into categories is itself problematic, but this thesis is subtly undercut throughout the narrative, as well as flatly contradicted by its marketing, both of which continue to offer the promise of categorization to the novel’s readers, a promise that they render eminently desirable. (24)

While the problems of classifications are to a degree present in the first novel, Tris’s stance on labeling identities and differences changes in the latter two novels. In those novels, Tris reveals that categorization is negative, not only for her, but for others considered Divergent and genetically damaged. Tris also recognizes that the terms Divergent, GP, and GD are meaningless, yet the Bureau has given these identities either positive or negative connotations for their own benefit and for the benefit of the supposed “greater American good”.

Mitchell and Snyder observe that a label of disability “divorces him or her from a shared social identity” (2000, 228). At first, Tris’s divergence separates her from everyone else, yet as Tris resists against the faction system and finds more people who are also Divergent, she is no longer socially isolated. Social acceptance and a shared social identity as rebels also come through Tris’s friends accepting her divergence.

As a Divergent, Tris is medically and socially considered “Other”. Dan Goodley writes that: “Disabled people become Other: the absolute other crossed through” (2011, 129), so much so that sometimes society wishes that an Other does not exist. Not only do certain people, such as Jeanine, want to control Tris, but a number of the faction members admit that they are frightened of Tris and her divergence because they have heard stories of the dangerous things that Divergent individuals can do. For instance, a number of the Dauntless believe that the Divergent can read and control minds or that they have superpowers that make them dangerous. A little boy, Hector,



tells Tris, “You’re *Divergent* [...]. My mom said to stay away from you because you might be dangerous” (Roth 2012, 165). Hector’s statement makes clear to Tris and readers that children learn from their parents to discriminate against those who are different. Thus, discrimination and misunderstanding are perpetuated in society. This places Tris in the challenging position of persuading Hector and others that she is not dangerous. The faction members begin to accept Tris even though they have heard the elaborate and largely untrue stories of divergence and do not understand it. When the faction members learn that the Divergent are actually not much different than they are concerning interpersonal relations and their identities – acting brave or selfless for instance – then the faction members begin to accept the Divergent.

The novels show the problems that can occur when someone is treated like a test subject, as that individual can be discriminated against based on biological processes that she has no control over. In *Insurgent*, Jeanine runs brain scans on Tris to determine how her divergence works so she can then control Tris and all other Divergent people. Jeanine tells Tris:

From your results I have determined that you are one of the strongest Divergent, which I say not to compliment you but to explain my purpose. If I am to develop a simulation that cannot be thwarted by the Divergent mind, I must study the strongest Divergent mind in order to shore up all weaknesses in the technology. (Roth 2012, 328)

Jeanine’s idea of a “cure” for the Divergent mind is a simulation that is strong enough to control them. If that could happen, then the Divergent would be like the other faction members: controlled by simulations and subdued by the government. After Jeanine has taken Tris’s brain scan, Tris asks to see it, and their clinical descriptions and evaluation of her brain convinces Tris that medicine is impersonal, treating her like an object and not as a human being. Jeanine says about Tris’s brain scans: “In fact, it is one of the largest lateral prefrontal cortices I’ve ever seen. Yet the orbitofrontal cortex is remarkably small” (335). She hears her brain and herself spoken of in scientific terms that reveal her personality and explain why she can break free from simulations. Tris reflects on this scientific description of her brain and, by extension, her identity: “I did not know that my entire personality, my entire being, could be discarded as the byproduct of my anatomy. What if I really am just someone with a large prefrontal cortex... and nothing more?” (336). Tris feels objectified as she hears herself spoken of in scientific terms, and she questions that she is more than “a large prefrontal cortex”. Even though Tris learns that her identity and personality are connected to biological processes, she later understands that her experiences, which include her trauma, also contribute to her identity and actions.

Alexander and Black, in their 2015 article entitled “The Darker Side of the Sorting Hat: Representations of Education Testing in Dystopian Young Adult Fiction”, argue that “while the *Divergent* series shows young people steadily moving toward a world in which more choice is allowed – in which being ‘Divergent’ is ok – such a movement is depicted as fraught and even deadly” (231). Young adults have the ability to change how the medical and social communities see cognitive difference. This process of challenging society is “fraught and even deadly”, yet the young adults are ultimately successful in revising how their societies perceive cognitive difference. Such movements can be seen with changing perceptions of what it means to have ADHD or an autism spectrum disorder, highlighting the benefits that come with having a different mindset from the “norm” and using the unique characteristics that different mindsets provide. The Divergent and factionless (who are mostly Divergent) are accepted into American society toward the end of the trilogy. As the male character, Four, notes at the end of the trilogy, they still have a lot of work to do, yet their society has made great progress in the perceptions and treatments of those who are deemed to be different and to have genetic and cognitive differences.

Young adult readers thus first receive the message that the ideal is actually divergence: that being different among everyone who is the same is a positive thing. This “sameness”, however, is actually artificial, as Tris understands when she learns that her divergence means that she has traits from three factions. The trilogy asserts that there is nothing different or better about the Divergent people. As the faction society collapses, readers see that being Divergent – being different – is actually the normal human state: “divergence” normalizes variation, which means that variation is beneficial for society. When Tris and the rest of the characters perceive the Divergent as not different, then the society moves not only toward social acceptance of the Divergent, but also toward an obliteration of the idea of difference as remarkable or significant. The terms of “difference” are recalculated and even eliminated, promoting social acceptance of all states of being. For instance, the term “Divergent” would not exist, along with the designations of the factions, such as Erudite and Dauntless.

#### 4. *Genetically Damaged*

Outside the factions and the Chicago experiment, the U.S. uses the two labels of GP and GD to distinguish between the abled and the disabled: the GPs have what the government and scientists have deemed pure genes. The GDs have damaged genes, particularly genes that lead to violence and greed. The scientists use the medical model to diagnose whether someone is GD, and they use medical testing to experiment with genetic manipulation. Lois H. Gresh notes the importance and ramifications of labeling someone GD:

If we're all tested for possible genetic damage, or GD in Allegiant terminology, then we'll carry the stigma of whatever supposed genetic damages we possess. This means that employers may not hire us, or they may fire us when they learn of our genetic damages. It means that friends and even family may view us differently. (2014, 49)

Gresh echoes the same concerns that Grandin mentions in being diagnosed autistic, and Gresh aptly points out the fact that the GD do not have good jobs or any job at all. Gresh also points out that if everyone were tested for GD, then most likely everyone would have some kind of GD because we are human and have genetic variations.

In these novels, the Bureau scientists, as representatives of the medical community, determine what is considered normate. The scientists damage society first by purposely manipulating genes and then by deciding that the manipulations were not successful and thus labeling those people genetically damaged. The genetic experiments also lead to unforeseen problems in genetic material. For instance, in eliminating violence, another “undesirable” characteristic – passivity – appears. An expert in genetics, the character David explains that through the use of genetic manipulation, if you

take away someone's fear, or low intelligence, or dishonesty [...] you take away their compassion. Take away someone's aggression and you take away their motivation, or their ability to assert themselves. Take away their selfishness and you take away their sense of self-preservation. (Roth 2013, 122-23)

The scientific manipulations have done more harm than good, as the scientists have interfered with natural genetic structures and caused other problems. However, the trilogy's scientists do not attempt to help the GD because they believe it is not possible to cure what they deem to be damaged genes. It would take an inordinate amount of medicine, time, and money to cure the part of the population that they believe to be genetically inferior. They further believe that resources can be better spent figuring out how to prevent such further “disability”. Leah

Wilson notes that “there’s genetic damage, which – the Bureau claims – controls one’s nature so thoroughly that the kindest thing to do for a GD is to take away her identity and sequester her in a community where she can be more effectively controlled” (2014, 2). Wilson points out that the Bureau believes that genetic damage utterly controls someone’s genes, making that individual beyond the possibility of a cure. The Bureau and American government partially solve the problem of genetic damage in the population by relegating the GDs to their own cities, away from those who are genetically pure and away from the benefits of government agencies.

The *Divergent* trilogy demonstrates what happens when scientists, political leaders, and dominant groups in society use the knowledge gained from biotechnology to subdue and oppress those whom they deem to be inferior. The consequences of manipulating genes are shown as the GPs discriminate against the GDs, whereas the GDs believe that they have done nothing wrong and do not deserve to be treated poorly because of something they have no control over, such as genes. Indeed, having different genes is only a disability because the scientists say it is and the greater society accepts that classification.

The rebels also understand that the scientists who discriminate against the GDs are actually the ones who damaged the GDs by manipulating their genes. The scientists believed that if they could eliminate what society considers a negative trait, such as violence, then they could make better human beings. However, this hypothesis fell apart in the experiment as the genes reacted unexpectedly to the manipulations. After the GDs’ genes have been altered, the government within the trilogy creates actual disability and limitations on the GDs by relegating them to living in tent cities that are cramped in filth with rampant crime, no education, and few food supplies. The lack of basic necessities then causes physical disabilities among the GDs, and a generational cycle, even if they were not initially physically “disabled” by the genetic manipulations. These conditions, in turn, justify for the scientists a eugenics program, as these non-normate bodies must be eliminated to “cure” the larger body politic.

In the trilogy, the social acceptance of the genetically damaged, however, does not come easily, as it is accomplished through violent means. The final novel, *Allegiant*, shows the GD rebels using violence to assert their human rights and to force the Bureau leaders to accept the GDs as equals. For the most part, violence does not succeed and only makes the situation worse for those considered inferior. In *Allegiant*, the GD rebels plan to break into the weapons room in the science compound in order to release the death serum that would kill the scientists and officials. The GD rebels believe that if they can eliminate the scientists, then they can more easily persuade the government officials that the GDs are not disabled/genetically inferior. Despite the illogic of the GDs’ plan (their actions could be used to support the belief that they are inherently violent), Four participates in the attack to help change the perceptions of the GDs because he is also considered GD. During the attack, a bomb detonates, and one of his best friends, Uriah, is so severely injured by the explosion that he is on life support and then dies. When Four sees the effects of the explosion, especially that it killed innocent people and his best friend, he is remorseful. He reflects about his identity:

I wanted to believe that they were all wrong about me, that I was not limited by my genes, that I was no more damaged than any other person. But how can that be true, when my actions landed Uriah in the hospital, when Tris can’t even look me in the eye, when so many people died? (Roth 2013, 304)

Because people were injured in the attack, Four begins to believe that his genes are actually damaged and that they caused him to do a horrible thing.

When Four believes that his genes are the reason why he acted so violently, he begins to believe that everything can be explained by genetics and that he actually does not have any control over himself because it is in his genes, almost as if he is predetermined to complete

certain actions. He believes that some people can have “good” genes, while other people, like himself, have “bad” genes. Four believes that bad genes are actually a disability that should be solved and/or eliminated. This thinking contradicts what Tris and other GD rebels desire the society to believe. The GD rebels believe that there is no such thing as “good” or “bad” genes. There are just genes. They instead believe that one’s actions are the result of choices and that people have free will – not that their actions are determined by biology.

In the *Divergent* trilogy, discrimination based on difference is harmful to the GDs as well as to the society as a whole. The rebels, then, work to eliminate the belief that a GD body is a disabled body. In other words, the rebels want to eliminate the negative connotation, not the difference, and they promote instead the acceptance of the GDs as they are. Thus, the trilogy presents the rebels and other society members using a social model of acceptance to further prevent scientists from conducting scientific experiments on the GDs and to refrain from ostracizing them. Rather, the rebels and even the citizens of the dystopian U.S. begin to accept the GDs and include them in American society.

The trilogy shows that social acceptance on a cultural level takes time. Social acceptance of the GDs only occurs at the end of the trilogy, after Tris has died, and the rebels bring about social acceptance with force. The rebels realize that waiting for the scientists to come to accept the GDs on their own without any interference would take years. Although the trilogy equivocates on the rebels’ methods, it argues that social acceptance is necessary and important for a healthy, fair society.

### 5. *Memory*

The use of memory greatly aids in the social acceptance of the *Divergent* and the GDs. Remembering contributes to the success of the social model because the characters and society use their individual and collective memory to remember the discrimination of the past (including the failed medical experiments) in order to prevent them from happening again. The main characters propose remembering as vital in healing from trauma. The novels also compare the effectiveness of remembering with forgetting, which is ultimately posed as a negative means of eliminating discrimination.

Discussing the roles of language and memory in healing from trauma, Tom Moylan, in his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000), notes that language is often a tool of survival and healing for characters. When people have language, they gain the power to speak against hegemonic powers. According to Moylan, when characters put their past traumatic experiences into language – spoken and written – they remember the trauma, begin to heal from it, and even learn from it. When they speak or write about trauma, when they give a voice and language to it, they unlock their memories from their mind and remake the event into a real experience. Giving voice to a traumatic memory can be painful, yet by voicing the memory, and even sharing it with others, they experience the therapeutic benefits that language can offer.

Raffaella Baccolini also discusses the use of memory in science fiction in her 2004 article, “The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction”. Baccolini argues that in typical dystopias, memory remains trapped in the individual and spreads to the community so that it becomes a collective remembering. This remembering becomes a large part of the resistance against the hegemonic and authoritarian discourses (520-21). This type of collective remembering plays a key role in the trilogy.

Within the trilogy, the memory serum allows someone to wipe clean the memory of a person and/or group of people and allows them to be re-educated about themselves and their past. At the end of the trilogy, the rebels use the memory serum to force the Bureau scientists to forget their

collective memory of the medical experiments on the GD and to replace them with the belief that the scientists were terminating the experiments and were going to accept everyone, regardless of genetics. The memory serum itself does not create social equality; however, it allows the possibility of remembering an alternative history. In this case, the rebels use the memory serum to eliminate the negative connotations of being GD and to erase the “logic” that the scientists have used to justify their discrimination. In short, the scientists are “re-educated” to accept social and individual differences. The novels present the use of the memory serum on the scientists as an example of an easy, though not entirely beneficial way, of remembering a revised history. Their new memories of accepting the GD are forced and not brought about by social and natural means. The scientists are made to forget; however, memory must also be preserved so that people can learn and heal from the traumatic and negative actions of the past and prevent the same negative events from happening. Therefore, the trilogy shows how beneficial remembering the painful events is for the main characters, such as Four and the rebels who remember both the discrimination and the inclusiveness of the Divergent and the genetically damaged. Remembering trauma allows individuals to come to terms with it. Trauma becomes a part of a person’s or culture’s identity. These memories will, the novels suggest, influence the future actions of the citizens of the factions and in the greater U.S. society for the better so they can work toward more healing and not repeat the actions that caused trauma and inequity in the first place.

In *Allegiant*, by the time Tris and her comrades are in the science compound with the scientists outside Chicago, the factions have dissolved into a civil war. The Dauntless have killed and terrorized many in the Abnegation faction, causing the Abnegation to fracture. The Dauntless and Erudite have united to subdue everyone else, especially the Divergent. The factionless, led by Evelyn, have overthrown the Erudite and the Dauntless and have tried to establish a new factionless society. The Chicago experiment has failed. Because of this fighting, which has caused many deaths and injuries, the scientists desire to take action to regain control of the faction experiment. The scientists have two choices: they can either shut down the faction experiment, which would also prove to the American government that scientific and sociological experiments do not produce less violence and better human beings; or they can “reset” the memory of everyone in the factions by releasing the memory serum. If the scientists are successful in resetting the memory of the faction members, then they will be able to continue the faction experiment. The leader of the Bureau, David, explains in a council meeting:

The experiments are already in danger of being shut down if we cannot prove to our superiors that we are capable of controlling them. Another revolution in Chicago would only cement their belief that this endeavor has outlived its usefulness—something we cannot allow to happen if we want to continue to fight genetic damage. (Roth 2013, 375-76)

Tris and her friends decide to save the individual and cultural memory of the faction members, believing that the faction citizens deserve to remember the truth about the factions because no one should be used by scientists as an experiment without their knowledge and consent. Tris and her friends further believe that the lives of the faction members would be better if they remember the fighting and the civil war that they have had because it can potentially keep them from engaging in another war. Tris and her companions decide to reset the memories of the scientists, and then to manipulate their memories by making them believe that they want to dismantle the Chicago experiment. Tris’s friends also want to alter the scientists’ memory by asserting that neither “genetically damaged” nor “genetically pure” people are better or worse human beings. And they do just this, as Tris releases the memory serum in the science compound and the rebels instruct the scientists in their new memories:

Those lost in the memory serum haze are gathered into groups and given the truth: that human nature is complex, that all our genes are different, but neither damaged nor pure. They are also given the lie: that their memories were erased because of a freak accident, and that they were on the verge of lobbying the government for equality for GDs. (495)

Up to this point of “re-education”, both groups – the scientists and those in the Chicago experiment – have their own distinctive collective memories. The faction citizens ultimately retain their collective memory, which includes being in the experiment, living in factions, and surviving the fighting that occurred. They are allowed to remember and to learn from their mistakes so that fewer conflicts will occur. The scientists’ collective memory includes controlling the Chicago experiment and asserting that GPs are better than GDs. However, the scientists’ collective memory is manipulated to be more favorable to GDs. Dan Krokos interprets Tris’s actions in resetting the memory of the scientists: “Tris admits that the entire Bureau compound can’t possibly know what their leaders have done, but she’s willing to erase their identities anyway, the very thing she condemns the Bureau for wanting to do in Chicago” (2014, 182). He then explains, “In this [resetting memory], Tris isn’t so unlike the Bureau. She is willing to sacrifice for the greater good—her greater good. What she does is terrible, but it saves the people she loves and believes in most” (183). Tris is biased when she makes the decision to erase the scientists’ memories, yet she tries to make her decision as unbiased as possible by claiming that she has experienced both realities in the factions and in the Bureau, whereas the leaders in the Bureau have only experienced life in the Bureau, not in Chicago. Tris justifies using the memory serum to Four: “The people in the city, as a whole, are innocent. The people in the Bureau, who supplied Jeanine with the attack simulation, are not innocent” (Roth 2013, 388). The trilogy thus suggests that often people allow scientific “knowledge” to determine how they treat people in society. Humane and equitable treatment should not depend upon genetic make-up, and difference does not justify oppression. Therefore, the rebels reset the collective memory of the scientists in order to instruct them in more humane ways to understand the GD as not qualitatively different.

The rebels instruct the Bureau scientists to believe a rhetoric of acceptance that is more equitable for everyone. Thus, the rebels use medicine (the memory serum) to promote social acceptance of difference. The rebels assert that it is bad for the scientists to use the memory serum on the faction members, yet the rebels are willing to use it on the scientists. The novel supports the rebels’ use of the memory serum because the rebels use it to right more quickly the social wrongs that the scientists created, but it ultimately suggests that real healing requires memory. This becomes clear in how individuals interact with the memory serum. When individuals choose how they use the memory serum for themselves, they illustrate on a small scale how society may use something as a prosthesis, in this case choosing to forget, as a substitute for addressing personal and cultural trauma.

The Bureau in the *Divergent* trilogy attempts to use memory as a means of social control when they suppress people’s memories. The Bureau determines collective memory through promoting their belief that the GD are damaged. However, when the rebels keep their collective memory, they begin to heal from the trauma caused by the segregation and discrimination against the GD by the government. The people benefit from collective memory as the factions, GP, and GD begin to accept one another. Part of this acceptance occurs when the physical walls and barriers between cities are taken down in order to allow people to travel and live where they want.

Peter (a fellow Dauntless member), Evelyn (Four’s mother), and Four address the issue of someone making the personal choice either to remember or to forget. Throughout the trilogy,

Peter has committed awful actions, such as kidnapping Tris and sticking a bread knife in someone's eye. Toward the end of the trilogy, Peter admits that he is masochistic, and he decides to change: "I'm sick of doing bad things and liking it and then wondering what's wrong with me. I want it to be over. I want to start again" (451). His admission of his tendency toward violence and his desire to become better are commendable, yet he wants to become a better, nicer person by taking the memory serum. He knows that he will be sacrificing his memories of both bad and good actions, but he is willing to forget everything about himself and his past in order to start over. He is willing to forget the indications of good in him, such as when he helped Tris escape from the Erudite building and her potential death. At the end of the trilogy, Four describes Peter: "After Peter emerged from the memory serum haze, some of the sharper, harsher aspects of his personality returned, though not all of them" (519). This description of Peter reveals that simply forgetting his past life is not enough for effective change. Peter's example of not remembering and thus not learning from the past indicates that one way to heal from trauma is actually to remember it, not to forget it. In the end, Four's friends report that Peter begins to act in the same violent way he did before. Therefore, the novel suggests that it would have been better for Peter if he had kept his original memories and worked through the guilt that he felt in response to his violent actions in order to make effective change.

Gresh provides another way of examining Peter's use of the memory serum:

In an interesting turn of events, Peter changes in character by the end of *Allegiant*. He's tired of being a bully and wants to make a fresh start. The assumption here is that people are violent based largely on genetics, so Peter's bullying might be caused by his genetic makeup. (2014, 18)

The assertion that violence can be caused by genes means that nothing could change Peter's propensity for violence. Gresh continues: "If indeed Peter's bad personality is based on genetics, then erasing his memory won't heal him and turn him into a generous, loving, kind person" (*ibidem*). And as we see, the novel poses his violence as genetic – he is GD – because even though he erases his memory, his violent tendencies return. An individual could have the capacity to be violent and yet try to overcome the violence by forgetting their past wrongs instead of remembering them and learning from them. Here, amnesia is the narrative prosthetic for facing the trauma. However, Tris would argue that Peter's violence is not necessarily a part of his DNA or his genetic damage: she would point out that Peter has demonstrated the ability to be kind, if still a little rough. Peter could still exemplify Tris's previous argument: he has been violent, but he also has the ability to be kinder. His actions are not determined by his genetics, rather they are determined by his choices.

An opposite approach to remembering and healing is presented through Evelyn, who is Four's mother and the woman who has taken control of the factionless, the factions, and the fighting in Chicago. Four, in order to end the fighting in Chicago, presents a vial of memory serum to his mother: she could take it, forget almost everything about her life, including her son, and end the fighting, or she could refuse to take it and keep fighting. When faced with this choice, she chooses a third option: to stop fighting without taking the memory serum because she desires to maintain her memory and improve her relationship with her son. She does not want to forget him just so the fighting will stop. A little later, when Four and Evelyn are talking with each other about the next actions they should take in saving the memories of the faction members, Four reflects on how both of them handled the memory serum:

I didn't come here to ask her to lay down arms for me, to trade in everything she's worked for just to get me back. But then again, I didn't come here to give her any choice at all. I guess Tris was right – when

you have to choose between two bad options, you pick the one that saves the people you love. I wouldn't have been saving Evelyn by giving her that serum. I would have been destroying her. (Roth 2013, 478)

Four understands that there is more to memory than simply the act of remembering. Being able to recall the people one loves and to do the right thing are vital for social healing. He also understands that he presented her with two choices, an ultimatum, and yet she had the wisdom to provide her own solution. Evelyn has this wisdom and freedom to choose how and if she remembers or forgets, and the novel poses this in contrast to the scientists who have no choice in forgetting.

Because Evelyn rejects the memory serum, she still possesses all of her memories and life experiences, which aids her in making a new life for herself. When Evelyn keeps her memories, she heals not only herself but also the community around her from the fighting. She will still remember the fighting and how she was factionless, yet she will also still remember her son, Four, and continue her relationship with him. When she remembers, she contributes to the social acceptance of the Divergent, the factions, and the factionless. She remembers that forcing people to change does not work and can even create more dissension. Therefore, she agrees to stop fighting. She also relinquishes her control over the factions and factionless, understanding that her unwavering control, which actually suppresses and oppresses the people in a different way from Jeanine, is still dictatorial and does not allow the people to heal from their cultural trauma. Therefore, she decides to remember her past actions when she relinquishes control in order to prevent herself from becoming dictatorial again in the future.

At the end of the trilogy, Four also faces the decision of whether to take the memory serum to heal from his trauma of losing Tris. Tris has died, and because he loved her so much, he finds it painful to live without her; therefore, he decides to take the memory serum so that he can forget her, his past, and his pain. However, Christina, Four's friend, tells him that he would be dishonoring Tris's memory by forgetting her: he needs to keep her memory alive and to keep himself alive as well by remembering her and keeping her a part of his life. Christina tells him:

This is the decision of a coward [...] I know she [Tris] wouldn't want you to erase her from your memory like she didn't even matter to you [...] The person you became with her is worth being [...] If you swallow that serum, you'll never be able to find your way back to him [yourself]. (505-507)

Christina argues that no matter how or for what reason the memory serum is used, it is the easy way out. Christina makes this argument in response to Four, yet her argument also applies to the scientists and the rebels. Instead of working together to find solutions, instead of consciously working toward equality and understanding, instead of facing traumatic, painful memories, some people would rather forget the pain and trauma and start over. But the novels suggest that our memories are necessary for healing and for moving forward. Four ultimately decides not to take the memory serum. When he remembers Tris, he allows himself to heal naturally from the pain of losing her. He allows his memory, not a drug, to do the healing – he foregoes the medical model of disability in favor of the memory approach to disability/trauma.

James Kidd quotes Veronica Roth about healing emotional trauma: "Arguably the principal theme that connects Roth to her fiction is the question of how emotional damage can be repaired. '*Allegiant*'s last line is about healing, and you can't talk about healing without talking about loss'" (2014). Healing includes remembering loss and traumatic experiences. Roth argues that in order to heal individually and socially, people must remember the past. While it is necessary to look to the future, it is important to learn from what caused pain and loss and make sure the same does not occur in the future. Thus, remembering the past also becomes a



preventative therapeutic strategy. The *Divergent* trilogy posits that it is beneficial for individuals and society as a whole if people can remember the painful parts of the past.

## 6. Conclusion

The *Divergent* trilogy shows how a society can use multiple modes of disability and healing, from the medical model to the social model. The *Divergent* trilogy reveals a dark side of the medical model as the doctors use medicine to diagnose disability, yet they do not use medicine to cure disability. Furthermore, medicine sometimes causes even more discrimination by labeling differences and then searching for a cure for the difference, or, worse, attempting to eliminate it instead of accepting it. Societies can mark physical and cognitive/psychological differences as disabilities, which can then lead to discrimination. Also, societies tend to uphold a hegemony of normalcy, which can include medicalizing or ostracizing those with disabilities.

The trilogy highlights that disability itself is a social construct, as the normate group decides what is normate and what is non-normate. Those in power, who label disability, ignore complex embodiment – that society affects how someone is dis/abled and how someone's difference can affect society. When societies adhere to a hegemony of normalcy, they assert that anything different is disabled, yet when the societies begin to enact the social model of disability, societies shift from viewing the non-normate as being disabled. Instead, they can eliminate the categories of normate and non-normate and view differences as human variation. The ultimate goal of the social model, then, is to eliminate the notion of difference altogether and to accept everyone as they are.

Therefore, the novels indicate to readers that no single strategy will be successful all the time in healing physical and mental “disabilities”. The approaches of medical diagnosis and social treatments contribute to the healing of the individual characters and their societies. The trilogy also shows readers that people do not have to be defined by their dis/ability and that they do not have to seek healing at any and all costs. The characters understand difference as something that no longer needs to be cured or eliminated, but as a variation of humanity, a state of being on a continuum of ability. Indeed, the trilogy suggests that societies can accept disabilities, no longer labeling difference but accepting everyone the way they are.

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