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## Arts Beat

The Culture at Large

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### Teenage Girls in a Dystopian World

By *LELA MOORE*

What if teenage girls ran the world? But they still didn't have any real power?

This is an idea explored in a new crop of novels in the ever-popular dystopian young-adult genre. Under the restrictive regimes in Megan McCafferty's "Bumped," Ally Condie's "Matched" and Lauren Oliver's "Delirium," teenage girls are the most valued members of society. But there's a twist: In these dark worlds, the heroines are more likely to be valued for their fertility or marriageability than for their intellect or athletic skill.

#### *Reports From the World of Books*

Ms. McCafferty said she was inspired by news reports of a "pregnancy pact" in Gloucester, Mass., and the subsequent pregnancies of the TV star Jamie Lynn Spears and Bristol Palin. "All this attention prompted me to think, 'What if teenage girls were encouraged to have sex and get pregnant? What circumstances would make that universally acceptable?'"

The result is "Bumped," which portrays a world where young girls are tasked with furthering the human race after a virus wipes out the fertility of everyone over 18. Of course, the identical twin heroines don't want to play along.

"These books are really about defying the social order," Ms. McCafferty said. "And at what time in your life do you feel more oppressed than in high school?"

All three novels feature a government that legislates romantic choice. In "Bumped," where the government actively promotes surrogacy among teenagers, girls are matched with mates by agents who provide them with lucrative corporate sponsorship in exchange for producing genetically blessed offspring for infertile couples.

In "Matched," the ruling administration known as the Society pairs its teenagers using a computerized system. One of Ms. Condie's inspirations for her novel was a conversation with her husband, an economist, in which they

discussed what would happen if the perfect online-dating algorithm were created with the government in control.

Meanwhile, Lena, the heroine of “Delirium,” lives in a world in which the government has convinced its people that love is a disease and requires them to undergo “the procedure” (it involves a laser) at age 18 to rid them of their ability to fall in love.

“The romantic landscape teens navigate now is technologically heavy but light on real connection. It’s not really fulfilling,” Ms. Oliver explained. The appeal of these books seems to lie in the fact that by putting so much value on the teenage girl population, the dystopian governments effectively enable them to change that system. Seems girls still want to believe in romance.