

4-19-2021

The Hunger Games Trilogy and Young Adult Dystopian Literature: Guiding Adolescents in Addressing the Issues of Media, Power, and Violence

Brooke Sandlin

Mississippi University for Women, lsandlin@myapps.muw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://athenacommons.muw.edu/merge>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), and the [American Popular Culture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sandlin, Brooke. "The Hunger Games Trilogy and Young Adult Dystopian Literature: Guiding Adolescents in Addressing the Issues of Media, Power, and Violence." *Merge*, vol. 5, Iss. 1 2021 .

Available at: <https://athenacommons.muw.edu/merge/vol5/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research at ATHENA COMMONS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Merge by an authorized editor of ATHENA COMMONS. For more information, please contact acpowers@muw.edu.

The Hunger Games Trilogy and Young Adult Dystopian Literature: Guiding Adolescents in Addressing the Issues of Media, Power, and Violence

Brooke Sandlin

Mississippi University for Women

Graduate Year: 2021

The Hunger Games trilogy, which includes the novels *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*, tells the story of a post-apocalyptic dystopian society called Panem, governed by President Snow and made up of the Capitol and twelve of the thirteen remaining districts, with the thirteenth district seemingly obliterated during the Dark Days—the war in which the districts rebelled against the Capitol. Each year, in response to the rebellion and to punish the districts for their uprising, the Capitol selects two children from each district, ages twelve to eighteen, to serve as tributes in televised competitions to fight to the death with only one remaining victor. The tributes are selected from a random lottery (at an event called the Reaping) with other citizens having the option to take the place of those whose names are drawn. The Games have remained an ongoing affair for nearly 75 years to demonstrate the Capitol's absolute power. The Games are designed to be brutal, and the citizens must witness them. Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist of the trilogy, serves as the girl tribute from District Twelve in both the 74th and 75th Hunger Games, and she survives through her physical ability and her mental capabilities. Katniss not only survives both Games, but she also outwits the Gamemakers, undermines the power of the Capitol, and sparks a revolution. The true game at the core of the trilogy, though, represents a power struggle that leads to a violent revolution of citizens against an authoritative state 75 years after the initial rebellion.

Since its publication over ten years ago, *The Hunger Games* trilogy has been a phenomenon in American culture. The books have been read by a broad demographic, ranging from middle school students to literary critics. The trilogy has succeeded in both popular culture and the literary world because of its unique ability to not only appeal to adolescent audiences, but to also “transcend the adolescent label” through its complexity of genres, themes, and characters (Pharr and Clark 9). Even though some adults can enjoy and think critically about the trilogy, adolescents seem to have the most to gain from reading *The Hunger Games* because it addresses the needs of the typical teenager and helps them navigate the issues that they experience in their lives. By reading the trilogy, readers encounter issues such as the manipulation of media, political manipulation, and the consequences of violence—all of which are issues that adolescents experience in their own lives, either through firsthand experience or by witnessing it on television or on social media. Rather than being turned away from the trilogy because of the presence of these issues, readers are drawn to the novels because they offer the readers a safe space to learn how to react to and deal with those issues in their lives.

One of the aspects of the trilogy that is most appealing to young readers is the young heroine and protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. It is through Collins' characterization and the narration of Katniss that adolescent readers experience similarities to their own lives. While Katniss is faced with challenges seemingly specific to her circumstances, her experiences actually prove to mirror the challenges that many teenagers face in America today. For example,

Katniss must learn how the Capitol manipulates the information in the media so that she can counteract that manipulation for her own gain. In the United States, the government does not currently place physical barriers between states to prevent information from travelling between states (which is one tactic that the Capitol uses in *The Hunger Games*), but media manipulation does exist. Many social media “influencers” today edit their images and social media posts to present an ideal lifestyle to their audience when, in reality, their posts disguise the true intentions of the post. By witnessing extreme forms of media manipulation in the trilogy, readers become aware of how they should deal with that issue in their lives, and the same is true for the other issues present within the novel. The trilogy encompasses qualities of both adolescent and dystopian literature by combining elements of real-life issues with extreme forms of the issue represented through a dystopian society. Using young adult dystopian literature, Suzanne Collins gives adolescent readers an outlet to navigate the difficulties and challenges that arise in their lives, specifically challenges concerning media, power, and violence.

In the trilogy, Collins utilizes certain elements specific to young adult, or adolescent, literature. Young adult literature is a genre of literature that is often written for an adolescent audience (although this is not always true) and it utilizes themes, characters, and motifs that are representative of the lives of young adult readers. Science fiction, a subgenre that grew out of young adult literature, appeals to young adult readers today because of its ability to encompass the realistic present while simultaneously transcending it by “reimagining the present as a future or alternate reality” (Pharr and Clark 6). In many instances of science fiction, authors create societies which portray advanced technology in imagined futures. Even though it is imaginative, science fiction is plausible because it focuses on “actions and events that have not yet occurred within the realm of the human experience but conceivably might [occur]” (qtd. in Pharr and Clark). Even into the twenty-first century, these aspects of science fiction continue to appeal to young adult readers.

The realm of science fiction, in some cases, has morphed into dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction. It has become increasingly evident that young adult readers “accept and even expect a dark, dystopian view of existence in their preferred literature—but a view of an existence that, while plausible, is still presented as an ‘other’ time, place, or reality” (Pharr and Clark 9). Young readers crave fiction that offers insight into a dystopian reality while simultaneously offering guidance in their own lives and smaller-scale dystopias. They desire these stories because they offer a safe place to deal with and understand difficult topics. According to Pharr and Clark, “millennial adolescents are especially open to postmodern interpretations of reality as reimagined fiction no matter how grim those interpretations may be” (8). This is because in postmodern adolescent dystopian literature, the future that is being portrayed includes an adolescent protagonist who endures the same problems that the readers experience in their own lives, such as friendship, love, loss, death, and power struggles, and it often portrays the empowerment that the protagonist gains by dealing with these issues. It is because the imagined futures are bleak that readers are drawn to the genre because adolescents view their realities as dreary, also. By reading dystopian literature, adolescents are empowered to confront the issues in their lives because they witness a protagonist who succeeds in overcoming those same issues.

Suzanne Collins satisfies young readers’ desires in *The Hunger Games* trilogy by creating a world in which a possible future reflects fear, anger, violence, and misery, but at the same time gives that future “the possibility of hope through the creation of a hero whose job it becomes to redeem her world” (Pharr and Clark 9). The reader is able to experience a harsh and violent

possible future through the lens of the protagonist as she experiences the difficulties of adolescent life. Even though it is set in a dystopian society, the trilogy appeals to young adult audiences and beyond because it “touches a root human fear, common at any age but most especially terrible for the young: the fear of not knowing what to do, how and when to act in an ever-more-dangerous world” (Pharr and Clark 12). Readers connect with the protagonist because she, like the reader, must deal with difficulties that adolescents face, and she offers them guidance and serves as a model for adolescents to learn how to deal with issues in their own lives. Throughout the trilogy, Suzanne Collins demonstrates how media, power, and violence in an authoritarian state can lead to a revolution when these factors are used by the government to impose absolute authority over its subjects. She uses the form of a young adult dystopian literature to guide adolescents in navigating the issues that arise from media, power struggles, and violence, which are all relevant issues in the lives of adolescent readers.

Media

Media is a major part of the everyday lives of modern adolescents. According to a survey examined by Benjamin Herold, “81 percent [of teenagers] now use social media. Nearly three-fourths check social media almost daily . . . including 38 percent who do so constantly or a few times an hour” (Herold). The statistics examined by Herold show that many teenagers spend time on social media, illustrating the importance of media in the lives of adolescents. Since media is integral to the lives of adolescents, it is likely that teenagers have experienced issues with media. Propaganda, “cancel culture,” and popular trends are examples of issues that teenagers face when using social media, and each relies heavily on the opinions of popular social media influencers or celebrities with large following counts. Throughout *The Hunger Games* trilogy, it becomes very apparent that media plays a critical role in the world of Panem, as well, and it also becomes apparent that there are many issues with media use in Panem. Media is used in many ways in the world of Panem and it is used specifically by the Capitol to serve the purpose of establishing itself as an absolute power (much like the way social media influencers use their platforms to establish their popularity). The Capitol also uses the media to manipulate the image of Katniss Everdeen to foster its own agendas, which directly relates to the way in which individuals manipulate images on social media accounts or on reality television in order to achieve their agenda. The use of media and propaganda in *The Hunger Games* creates a hegemonic culture; memory is reshaped; and, most importantly, the lines between entertainment and reality are blurred. While reading the trilogy and witnessing how Katniss deals with issues related to media, readers understand what is required to overcome those issues.

The most effective way the Capitol utilizes media to impose its authority over its subjects is through the annually televised Hunger Games. The district citizens are forced to watch the Games, and through this televised event, district citizens receive the message of the Capitol: “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen” (19). Even before she participates in the Games, Katniss understands the Capitol’s motives. Before the Reaping for the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss reflects: “When I was younger, I would scare my mother to death, the things I would blurt out about . . . the people who rule our country . . . Eventually, I understood this would only lead us to more trouble” (6). Even at a young age, Katniss knew that the Capitol treated district citizens as slaves. Even so, she eventually realized that bringing attention to the authoritarian power of the Capitol would only bring about more suffering for herself and the other citizens in the district. Katniss understands that the Games are

not merely punishment for a past rebellion that most of Panem's citizens would not have been alive to participate in. The Games are an attempt by the Capitol to influence the attitudes of the districts and establish itself as an absolute power, forcing anyone who defies that power to suffer the consequences.

In order for the Games to function for nearly 75 years, the Capitol has to be viewed as an absolute power. To maintain this reputation, the Capitol forces Panem's citizens to watch the Games on television to create a hegemonic culture in which the Capitol is considered the One and the districts are considered the Other. Viewing the Games is mandatory, and all citizens in Panem watch the Games in the context of their own experiences. The Capitol citizens watch the Games for entertainment, and the district citizens watch the Games only because they are forced to watch. In his essay "The Discourse of the Orient," Edward Said details Gramsci's idea of hegemony and he says that "'in any society not totalitarian...certain cultural forms predominate over others'" (334). Furthermore, in a civil society, the influence of one society "works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent" (334). Therefore, the concept of a hegemonic culture does not seem applicable in Panem since the Capitol is indeed totalitarian and it influences the districts through domination. However, through the use of media, the Capitol manipulates the districts into believing that the Capitol is the One, and the annual reminder of the Capitol's power through the televised Games forces district citizens into consent. The district citizens are forced to believe that the Capitol is all-powerful—the One—because of the media's representation of the Capitol. By using the media to showcase the Games, the Capitol forces viewers to accept and obey its power. The district citizens have no other choice than to consent to the Capitol's power. At the Reaping for the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss remarks that "this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion" (*The Hunger Games* 18). The district citizens must consent because they are at the mercy of the Capitol. So, the Capitol succeeds in creating a hegemonic culture because it forces consent among district citizens.

To create a hegemonic culture by using the media, the Capitol uses an important manipulative tactic—propaganda. According to Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, "[propaganda] is associated with control and is regarded as a deliberate attempt to alter or maintain a balance of power that is advantageous to the propagandist" (3) and they define propaganda as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (7). The Capitol uses propaganda to maintain absolute power and subjugate its citizens under its authoritarian rule. Through its use of the media, the Capitol shapes citizens' perception of the Capitol and of the districts, manipulates the cognitions of Capitol and district citizens alike, and directs citizen behavior which will serve the Capitol's purpose of setting itself apart as the One.

The Games themselves serve as the foundation for creating an "us versus them" mentality, and through this event, the Capitol is able to showcase its superiority and shape the citizens' perception of the Capitol and of the districts. The Capitol treats the Games as a "festivity," meaning the flamboyance and extravagance of the event is shown during televised coverage of the Games (*The Hunger Games* 19). Without the Games being shown on television, the district citizens would not be able to witness their punishment and they would not be able to witness the superior life of the Capitol which is a complete contrast of their lives in the districts. The Capitol represents the life of luxury and opulence, and it is "the epitome of multicolored decadence, extravagance, and self-indulgence" where residents "sport their excess clothing, makeup and hairstyles" (Pavlik 31). The Capitol represents the ideal lifestyle that the districts

will never be able to achieve, and it is through the media that the Capitol portrays these unattainable standards and manipulates the district citizens into perceiving the life in the Capitol as superior. The districts come to not only hate the Capitol because they feel powerless against it, but they also internalize self-hate as they recognize their inferiority. By promoting unreachable standards, the Capitol maintains its position at the top of the hierarchy.

The Capitol also manipulates the Capitol citizens' perception of the districts. In order to function, the Capitol relies on the resources that it takes from the districts, but instead of taking only necessary portions of resources, the Capitol consumes as much from the districts as possible, allowing the Capitol to devour what has been stripped from the districts, leaving district citizens with nearly no means to even survive. The citizens in the Capitol have plenty because district citizens are forced to go without. With plenty of food and entertainment, "the Capitol's citizens are kept spoiled and debauched, caring nothing for . . . the deprivation of others" (Frankel 55). Their life of luxury distracts the Capitol citizens from realizing the source of their excess lifestyle, causing them to perceive the districts' tributes as lifeless creatures who merely provide entertainment to them during the Games. The Capitol refuses to acknowledge the source of their luxury, which deepens the division between the Capitol and districts since the districts have no hope in experiencing the livelihood that those in the Capitol experience. By displaying their district-sourced luxury on television and forcing the districts to watch, the Capitol situates itself as the authority. The Capitol citizens perceive their life as luxurious and they perceive the districts as entertaining figures, while the districts perceive themselves as lesser than the One. The district citizens come to understand that they are the Other and they must consent to the Capitol because it maintains the power and the influence.

The Capitol also uses the media to reshape memory, or manipulate cognitions, to manipulate Katniss's image to foster the agenda of the Capitol. During the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss becomes a pawn in the games played out by the Capitol. Her image, like the rest of the tributes', is manipulated in a way that will evoke emotional responses from both the viewers in the Capitol and the viewers in the districts. The Games are merely entertainment for Capitol citizens; so, for the opening ceremonies, Katniss must undergo a complete makeover to match the aesthetic of the Capitol and ensure that the Capitol's citizens find her attractive so that they will continue to watch the Games. However, in the arena, Katniss takes back some control of her image by pretending to be madly in love with Peeta, the boy tribute from District 12, to garner sympathy from Capitol viewers and gain sponsors. However, her act of love leads the Capitol to use this romance to profit their own agenda.

Katniss' act allows both her and Peeta to win the Games, but this act leads many of the people in the districts to view this as an act of defiance against the Capitol. For 75 years, only one tribute has come out of the arena alive—a rule of the Hunger Games states that "the last tribute standing wins" (18). At the end of the 74th Hunger Games, only Katniss and Peeta remain alive. Katniss threatens the suicide of both her and Peeta by eating poison berries, so the Gamemakers allow both to be claimed as victors of the Games out of sympathy for their supposed love for one another. Some citizens view this as an act of love, believing that the pair would rather die than live without one another. Other citizens (namely the district citizens) view this as an act of defiance against the Capitol since they did not believe the love story but saw it as a ploy to manipulate the audience.

To prevent a rebellion from the districts, President Snow requires that Katniss and Peeta's images revolve around their love for one another and not rebellious intent. To maintain Katniss's image as a love-struck girl who is free from rebellious thought, President Snow makes a personal

visit to District 12 to explain his concerns with maintaining her image as a compliant citizen: “[I]f a girl from District Twelve of all places can defy the Capitol and walk away unharmed, what is to stop them from doing the same?” (21). To prevent district citizens from taking this viewpoint, the Capitol must distort the district citizens’ memories and cognitions into believing that Katniss and Peeta are in love, and this is accomplished using media. President Snow goes as far as to force Katniss and Peeta into a public wedding proposal on live television to prove the two are madly in love and to suffocate a rebellion by those who do not believe the story. President Snow attempts to direct the behavior of Katniss and Peeta to fuel his agenda and he directs the behavior of the other citizens by using propaganda to diffuse a potential uprising. Through the Capitol’s manipulation of her image, “Katniss learns that the Capitol doesn't simply want to use her for her present power; it wishes to appropriate her past, present, and future image. It wants to reinvent her story and limit her power” (Koenig 42). After coming to this conclusion, Katniss decides to take control of her image despite the Capitol’s attempts at reshaping memory. She understands her involvement in the game of the Capitol, and she knows that the Capitol is “manipulating and using her image” by using the media to create false narratives for her life (Day 176). Using this understanding, Katniss decides to become the symbol of the rebellion, the Mockingjay, to win the game and create her own memory.

Throughout the trilogy, the Capitol continually tries to manipulate Katniss’s image by manipulating individual and group cognition and displaying the manipulated cognition through media. After the 75th Hunger Games, the rebels rescue Katniss from the arena, but the Capitol captures Peeta before the rebels can rescue him. In the Capitol’s custody, the Capitol takes “[Peeta’s] memories of Katniss and distorts them so they’re scary” by using a method called hijacking (*Mockingjay* 181). The method uses tracker jacker venom, which “targets the part of the brain that houses fear,” as a form of fear conditioning which causes the subject to be unable to determine what is real and what is not (181). The Capitol broadcasts Peeta’s outbursts against Katniss (because he is now fearful of her) on live television to make the Capitol citizens turn against Katniss and view her as a threat. The Capitol literally reshapes Peeta’s memories of Katniss and displays the results of those distorted memories through television broadcasts. By showing Peeta’s outbursts on television, the Capitol is able to convince Capitol citizens that Katniss is dangerous, and it reshapes their memories of Katniss (who they once viewed as the lovestruck girl who acted out of love) in order to fuel the counterattack against the rebellion. The Capitol's use of propaganda through the media shapes citizens’ perception of the Capitol and of the districts (resulting in a hegemonic culture), manipulates cognitions and reshapes memories by exploiting and distorting Katniss and Peeta’s images, and directs citizen behavior in order to support the Capitol's agenda of remaining an absolute power.

The Capitol finally uses the media to blur the lines between entertainment and reality. The Games are required viewing for Panem’s citizens, but they have different meanings for Capitol citizens and district citizens. For Capitol citizens, the Games constitute a major form of enjoyable entertainment. When watching the Games, Capitol citizens “[do] not recognize the role of reality TV in anesthetizing its inhabitants to the real conditions of their existence” (Day 173). The citizens of the Capitol are passive viewers, and they are unable to realize that the children on the screen are more than images and that these children will experience real deaths. The Capitol citizens become dazed by the entertainment of the Hunger Games and they are unable to recognize the event as reality, which is the goal of the Capitol’s propaganda and one of the reasons for the televised Games. According to Day, “the Capitol audience is so seduced by the image that the viewers fail to acknowledge the tributes as real” (175). If the Capitol can pacify

the Capitol citizens with entertainment and manipulate them into losing sight of reality, then the Capitol citizens will not be able to recognize that what the Capitol is doing is wrong, keeping the Capitol in the position of power and causing the Capitol citizens to become participatory players in the game.

On the other hand, citizens of the districts do not watch the Hunger Games for entertainment but are forced to watch and hope for the victory of their district's child. The districts, unlike the Capitol, understand that the children being displayed on television are real and not just figments of entertainment. The district citizens place wagers on their district's tributes and they cheer on their tributes in the hopes of bringing home a victor from their district. As the district citizens cheer for their own tributes' victories, they are inevitably cheering against the tributes from the other districts. The Capitol forces the district citizens to become players in the game by using a "political strategy of divide and conquer" (Pavlik 31). To use this political strategy effectively, the Capitol isolates "the districts from one another and [monopolizes] mass communications" (Henthorne 74). The districts have no means of communication between one another, and they are given misinformation about the other districts from the Capitol as it uses propaganda to shape and distort the districts' perception of one another to maintain power. Because of this isolation and misinformation, the Capitol pits the districts against one another, causing them to focus their anger on one another. By pitting districts against one another, the Hunger Games function to make political opposition all but impossible because the districts view each other as the enemy and do not recognize the Capitol's corrupt power (Henthorne 46). Even though the Capitol's citizens and district citizens have contrasting viewpoints of the Hunger Games, both audiences become participants in the Capitol's game because of their viewership. No one is out of the Capitol's reach, and by broadcasting the Hunger Games, the media is used to promote the Capitol's agenda of maintaining its elitism by masking reality.

The players, or tributes, in the Capitol's game consist of district children, and they must, in some instances, act in ways that might obscure reality to survive. Katniss understands her role as a player, and as she is in the arena, she remarks: "I feel certain I'm still holding the screen in the Capitol, so I'm careful to continue to hide my emotions" (165). Katniss makes a conscious decision to use the Capitol's media to her advantage. She uses her simulated romance with Peeta as a strategy that allows her to obscure reality to survive. Katniss becomes a player in the game partially because she has no choice (she is a tribute in the Games) and partially because the media allows her to mask reality to survive. So, the Capitol's use of media once again blurs the line between entertainment and reality as it forces the tributes into false narratives.

Another blurred line between entertainment and reality is evident in the comparison between the Capitol and the districts. The Capitol, representing entertainment, is a "superficial society [where] each person owns more clothes, shoes, wigs, and makeup than any ten people in [Katniss'] district" (Frankel 49). The districts, in comparison, represent reality. While in the Capitol, Katniss has a difficult time understanding the lives of Capitol citizens because in her life in District 12, everyone is "poor and starving" (*The Hunger Games* 18). As Katniss enters the world of the Capitol when she becomes a tribute, the lines between entertainment and reality are blurred. When she is in the Capitol before the Games, she must encompass the superficial life of the Capitol to stand a chance at survival in the Games. To seem appealing to the Capitol citizens, she must "giggle and smile to charm sponsors," and she is "remade and objectified" so that the Capitol citizens are more willing to accept her. After her makeover, Katniss views herself as "a stranger in the mirror" because the idea of a false persona is a foreign concept to her (Frankel 51). Even though Katniss must come to embody the superficial life of the Capitol, she still

understands the difference between the two worlds, and she uses the blurring of entertainment and reality to survive the Games.

The superficiality of the Capitol, Frankel says, becomes a mirror to our world (49). Today, adolescents are immersed in technology and media, and many teenagers base many of their decisions on the popular trends displayed by social media influencers or television stars. Because of this, it is essential that adolescents become aware of how to decipher between entertainment and reality. To distinguish between what is real and what is not, adolescents must use what Latham and Hollister call information and media literacies (33). Throughout the trilogy, Katniss proves to possess the necessary skills in information and media literacy. The Capitol controls Panem's citizens by maintaining complete control of the media. To remain in authority, "the Capitol tightly controls information in an effort to discourage resistance as much as possible, particularly any kind of widespread resistance" (Latham and Hollister 37). Katniss combats this control, though, by resisting the Capitol and gathering information that the government has kept from its citizens. Katniss manages to acquire strategic information because of her skills in media literacy. One way in which Katniss does this is through her relationship with her ally Rue. When talking with Rue, Katniss learns about District 11, and as they are talking, Katniss wonders if the Capitol is blocking their conversation from the media since "they don't want people in different districts to know about one another" (*The Hunger Games* 203). By gathering information about another district, Katniss learns how to receive information that had been withheld from her, which is a skill that will be useful for her throughout the trilogy.

As the trilogy progresses, Katniss realizes that she must "not . . . accept everything she is told at face value, but . . . recognize that the Capitol not only suppresses, but also distorts information, both inside and outside the Games" (Latham and Hollister 38). To determine who can be trusted, she must learn to decipher between what is real and what has been fabricated. Katniss's understanding of the Capitol's manipulation of the media through propaganda leads her to develop the ability to not only monitor the credibility of that information but also use the Capitol's media for her own benefit.

As adolescent readers witness Katniss's media literacy, they are "provide[d] a model that [they] can admire and emulate" (Latham and Hollister 36). For adolescents to distinguish between reality and entertainment, they must become media literate. Information and media literacy allows adolescents to take control of the information they receive and use that information to form judgements. The component of media within *The Hunger Games* trilogy is extremely important because it allows readers to experience how media is manipulated by a dystopian and authoritarian government through the use of propaganda and how the protagonist deals with that manipulation. If readers witness extreme forms of media manipulation by a totalitarian government and witness an adolescent take control of her life by resisting that government through media literacy, then they will be taught how to develop their own media literacies. By using media literacy in their lives, adolescent readers learn how to evaluate the information given to them by adults, social media influencers and television stars, and political or social groups. Being able to evaluate the information presented to them will allow adolescent readers to distinguish between reality and entertainment and will allow them to resist false or manipulated information.

Power

Power struggles, specifically those involving political manipulation and historical memory, are another major part of the lives of adolescents. Unfortunately, many adolescents

today face these issues in many aspects of their lives. Teenagers have been involved in activist movements, protests, and rallies as they work toward achieving political agency. However, in many instances, adolescents are unaware of the political manipulation that surrounds them, including the governments' use (or neglect) of the teenage image to foster its agenda, and the governments' manipulation of historical memory (placing books on the "banned book" list so that students are not exposed to those books in the classroom, for example). Just as adolescents in the United States today struggle to find their place in society, Katniss struggles to find her identity in the authoritarian state of Panem. To maintain its power, the Capitol invents Panem's history to create a false national memory, and in doing so, becomes a tyrannical state. After years of manipulation, the citizens of Panem come to accept this national memory, and it is not until Katniss sparks a revolution that they come to realize that revolution is not only possible, but necessary. Through the revolution, Katniss must decide whether power is merely a force that conspires against her or if she will use her own power to bring the Capitol to justice. Even though *The Hunger Games* is set in a dystopian society in which an authoritarian government rules through tyranny, adolescents can use Katniss' experiences with political difficulties in order to recognize the similar difficulties in their lives and understand how to combat these issues.

In his essay "The National Longing for Form," Timothy Brennan discusses nationalism and how memory is used to develop a history for the nation and how nationalism creates a sense of belonging for its citizens. He quotes Hobsbawm and Ranger as they claim that the idea of a nation is an invented phenomenon: "It is clear that plenty of political institutions... were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented" (217). Hobsbawm and Ranger explain that history is invented by "creating an ancient past" that works to create a collective memory (217). The invention of history is exactly what happens in Panem. The Capitol invents a history of its past, and it reminds its citizens of this past every year which works to manipulate the collective memory of Panem. In the districts, the invented history works to subjugate the district citizens into conformity and obedience by manipulating them into believing that they deserve the punishment inflicted upon them. The Capitol forges nationalism among Capitol citizens as it uses the invented past to make the Capitol citizens believe the districts deserve the punishment they are receiving, encouraging them to be complicit with the Capitol's authoritative rule. The Capitol uses an invented collective memory to develop nationalism in Panem and it manipulates its citizens' memories to create a history that will allow it to thrive as a tyrannical state.

During the Reaping, the history of Panem is read aloud, and the district citizens are reminded of "the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires . . . the brutal war for what little sustenance remained" (*The Hunger Games* 18). The Capitol is portrayed as the Savior who brought the citizens out of the ruins and into prosperity—that is, until the first uprising of the districts against the Capitol. The annual reminder of the consequences of the uprising works to create a false memory of the past. It is used to force the citizens of the districts into believing that they deserve this punishment. During the Reaping in District 12, the mayor notes that "it is both a time for repentance and a time for thanks" (*The Hunger Games* 19). The mayor's remarks demonstrate the effectiveness of the Capitol's manipulation of the collective memory since he demonstrates sorrow for an uprising that he, like the other citizens, was not alive for. Through manipulation, the Capitol "leads citizens to develop a violent" and false memory of the past every year, and the citizens within the districts believe the forged history (Koenig 40). The citizens of Panem, therefore, voluntarily play a role in their own manipulation by going beyond

simply observing the scripted history recounted every year; instead, they internalize it as their own history and send their children to their death every year. This internalization of a false history exemplifies the weakness of the public and how that weakness is extorted by the Capitol. By forcing the citizens of Panem to internalize a violent memory of the past, the Capitol can successfully maintain its power by reshaping Panem's history.

The way in which the Capitol succeeds in maintaining this false history and, in turn, maintaining its power is through trust. Panem's citizens trust the Capitol because they have come to accept a false history; the district citizens believe that they are deserving of the punishment that ensues. The 17th-century political philosopher, John Locke, focuses specifically on how trust negatively affects political relationships which "leads him to urge vigilance in those who do the entrusting; as beneficiaries, subjects are charged with the task of determining when their rulers have defrauded them" (Nacol 580). Panem's citizens have been not only defrauded by the Capitol, but they have been manipulated into submitting to the Capitol's power. The Capitol has succeeded in becoming an authoritarian state, and its subjects have come to believe that there is no possible way to escape the oppressive regime.

During the Games when Katniss's ally is killed, the reader witnesses Katniss's power struggle as she thinks to herself: "There's no way to take revenge on the Capitol. Is there?" (236). At this point, Katniss does not believe that a revolution against the Capitol would be possible because she understands the power that the Capitol possesses. However, Katniss' actions, which the Capitol views as acts of defiance, work to fuel a revolution that she is not yet aware of. After she has won her first Games and is on the Victory Tour, Katniss decides to make a public tribute to Rue when she visits her dead ally's district even though she has been warned by President Snow to avoid actions that might be considered rebellious. After she makes the tribute, Katniss realizes what she has done: "The full impact of what I've done hits me. It was not intentional - I only meant to express my thanks - but I have elicited something dangerous. An act of dissent from the people of District 11" (62). John Locke says that "the people who are generally and wrongfully ill-treated will be ready on any occasion to free themselves of a burden that sits heavily on them. They will want an opportunity to do this, and will look for one" (74). After 75 years of brutal mistreatment, the people in the districts desire freedom from the authoritarian government that abuses them, but they are waiting on an opportunity to revolt. Because of their manipulated collective memory and false sense of history, they are unable to act alone. Locke says that individuals "are not moved by individual examples of injustice," but rather tyranny as collective experience (75). Even though Katniss does not intentionally begin to fuel the revolution, her acts of defiance illuminate the collective harm that all of the districts experience. Since her actions are displayed through the media for all the district citizens to witness, Katniss helps the district citizens find their opportunity to revolt.

Even though Katniss initially struggles to find her place within the brewing revolution, she eventually comes to realize that revenge against the Capitol is possible and she makes the decision to become the face of the revolution—the Mockingjay. After two trips to the arena, Katniss finally reaches a conclusion: "It just goes around and around, and who wins? Not us. Not the districts. Always the Capitol. But I'm tired of being a piece in their games" (215). Upon this understanding, Katniss accepts her role as the Mockingjay. On determining when to revolt against the authoritarian state, Locke "claims that tyranny will be rendered very apparent to the people over time" (Nacol 588). This suggests that it may take time for individuals to realize not only that they are under tyrannical rule, but also that they are capable of resisting that rule. Because the Capitol has manipulated its citizens' collective memory for so long, the citizens

have become desensitized to the authoritative rule that suppresses them. When Katniss finally realizes that she has an obligation to rebel and refuse to play the game of the Capitol, the tyrannical rule becomes apparent to all the citizens, and with the spark of rebellion that Katniss presents through various acts of defiance, the citizens recognize the need for rebellion.

By accepting the role of the Mockingjay, Katniss comes to realize the power that she truly has—a power that she has always had but one that she was unaware of. The concept of power and political struggles are common within young adult literature because adolescent readers are working to achieve their own power, either to influence politics or defend their causes on a smaller scale. Trites offers two examples of power that work to determine the type of power that Katniss has and the type of power that will best benefit the adolescent reader. One definition of power comes from Michel Foucault as he defines power as “that which represses” (qtd. in Trites 4). Foucault’s definition determines that power is an external force acting against and oppressing the subject. The other definition of power comes from Judith Butler as she explains that “power not only acts on a subject but...[it] enacts the subject into being” (qtd. in Trites 5). From this perspective, power is a “force that allows for . . . agency [and] an internally motivated subject who can act proactively” (Trites 5). By combining the two definitions, it becomes clear that there is “perpetual relationship of force” produced by the Capitol, and since Katniss must exist within those perpetual forces of power, “power enacts [her] into being” (qtd. in Trites). So, Katniss’s power, although innately present, flourishes as she experiences the effects of the tyrannical forces against her.

Since adolescent readers experience power struggles (especially struggles with adult authorities), Katniss’s own power struggle invites readers to understand how to confront those issues in their own lives. Since Katniss is able to take the forces that act against her and use those forces to foster her own power to revolt against tyranny, then young adult readers are led to do the same. Through the dystopian element within the trilogy, readers experience extreme forms of power struggles in order for them to be able to learn how to deal with the struggles that they experience. In the twenty-first century, readers experience forms of power struggles in their own lives as they encounter racial injustice, gun violence, and abuse. Adolescents are becoming invested in resistance groups as they become aware of the need for political and social change. These readers are compelled to “do what their parents cannot or will not do . . . no matter the cost” as they use their power to fight for justice (Pharr and Clark 8). It is through witnessing Katniss’s ability to harness her power and use it for good that readers understand the importance of doing the same.

3. Violence

A difficult reality in the twenty-first century that adolescents experience is the presence of violence. Forms of violence that are present in the lives of adolescents include domestic violence, gun violence, sexual abuse, bullying, and verbal abuse. The term “experience” can be used in several ways to describe adolescent exposure to violence; teenagers may experience violence firsthand, they may be threatened by violence, or they may witness violence being perpetrated onto someone else (Beharie, Nisha, et al. 191). Many teenagers today might not experience violence firsthand (although many do have firsthand experience with violence), but witnessing violence still has detrimental effects on the “healthy development” of teenagers during the formative years of adolescence (Klika and Linkenbach 1). One of the central aspects of *The Hunger Games* trilogy is violence, and in the trilogy, violence is depicted as the result of power struggles. In the trilogy, the ultimate form of violence is perpetrated by the Capitol through the Hunger Games. This violence against the districts forces the district citizens to

decide when and how to rebel. The districts conclude that the only way to revolt is through violence as well. Because of the perpetual violence that ensues, it becomes integral for one to recognize his or her own participation in the violence to reach peace and become victorious. The trilogy is useful in guiding readers in recognizing the violence in their lives (or the violence that they witness) and understanding his or her participation in the violence to put an end to the violence.

One form of violence that the Capitol uses within the Games includes both physical and psychological manipulation. To fuel the spectacle, the tributes are assigned stylists who work to remake their appearance using costumes, grooming, and cosmetic procedures. After she has been transformed by her prep-team, Katniss refers to herself as a “creature...feeling like no one at all” (*The Hunger Games* 146). The makeovers signify not only physical manipulation (physically changing the appearance of the tributes), but also psychological manipulation. By altering the appearance of the tributes, the Capitol alters their perception of self and makes them question their identity. Michel Foucault says that “power relations have an immediate hold upon [the body]; they invest it, mark it, train it, [and] torture it” (qtd. in Koenig 43). The Capitol manufactures the identity of the tributes to make them more attractive for Capitol enjoyment and make them more equipped to kill so that the Games are as entertaining as possible. To maintain power, the Capitol manipulates the bodies of the tributes to fuel their own agenda and make the tributes question themselves. Since the tributes lose their sense of identity, they are forced toward violence, and since the violence cannot be directed toward the Capitol, the tributes direct their violence onto each other, which is the goal of the Capitol. It is because of adult manipulation that the children tributes resort to violence because their identities have been manipulated for mere spectacle.

Even though Katniss participates in multiple acts of defiance against the Capitol, it is not until her last night in the 75th Hunger Games arena that she truly understands the possibility of rebellion. As Katniss is about to kill another tribute, her mentor’s words echo in her head: “You just remember who the real enemy is” (378). She knows who the enemy is (the Capitol), but she realizes that she has been participating in the violence that the Capitol forces her to participate in. Instead of the Capitol killing the district children, the Capitol forces them to kill one another, manipulating them into believing that the enemy is another tribute. When Katniss recognizes her participation in the Capitol’s violence, she shoots her arrow into the arena’s force field, blowing up the arena and setting off the rebellion.

Locke says that there are certain circumstances in which people may revolt against an authoritarian state. In the first circumstance, “the people may resist based on the knowledge that they are well under the thumb of existing tyranny” (Nacol 587). This is the circumstance the districts are under. They realize that they are being controlled and manipulated by a tyrannical government, and when Katniss shoots her arrow into the arena, they take the opportunity to rebel against the Capitol. Even though their eventual goal is peace, they rebel using violence since there is “no logical or practical way to remove oppressive regimes from power other than through militaristic means” (Pavlik 37). Even though the districts have been inflicted with violence, they use violence in return to resist the Capitol. According to Locke, “anyone who uses force without right puts himself into a state of war with those against whom he uses it; and in that state all former bonds are cancelled, all other rights cease, and everyone has a right to defend himself, and to resist the aggressor” (76). Locke supports the use of violence against a tyrannical state and places the blame of the rebellion on the government, not the rebels.

Even though violence seems to be necessary to resist an authoritarian government, it is important for individuals to recognize their participation in that violence. In order for peace to ever be achieved, then violence must come to some end. Murphy says that “if the child is going to become an adult one day without ending up hating and rejecting either [the child figure or the adult figure], these two violent species must learn to understand each other” (207). Murphy believes that while the adolescent (in this case, Katniss) might not be responsible for starting the violence, adolescents have the “opportunity and moral obligation to come to terms with his or her own complicity in that violence” (207). At the end of the trilogy, Katniss decides to create a book of all the people that have died due to violence in order to “make their deaths count” (*Mockingjay* 387). She understands that she was a pawn for the Capitol, and she is very aware of her participation in the violence that killed so many. Even so, it is her willingness to accept that responsibility and honor those who died that allows her to achieve peace.

Pavlik says that “violent response to situations may well be universally condemned and recognized as harmful to social systems, yet it remains an everyday part of global culture” (36). Adolescents view violence through the media and they witness it in their own lives so much so that they have become desensitized to its consequences. Adolescents must know when to rebel against authoritative regimes, but they must also know how to recognize their participation in that violence to put an end to it. *The Hunger Games* trilogy offers young adult readers an opportunity to experience extreme acts of violence in a dystopian society and witness how Katniss operates under those conditions. Readers come to understand the necessity of violence in trying to achieve the greater good. In some readers’ lives, certain instances of violence require violent responses to rebel, such as physical domestic abuse, sexual abuse, racism, gang violence, and the risk of homicide. For others, it is necessary to recognize the violence perpetrated onto others and become the voice for those who are unable to defend themselves. Katniss becomes the Mockingjay (the symbol and the voice of the revolution) because she realizes that the revolution must occur to stop the violence of the Capitol. Likewise, adolescents must realize that change must occur (in the form of a revolution) to resist the violence that persists against them and to fight for justice. The revolution in *The Hunger Games* is a physical battle, but it represents the ability of an adolescent advocate to speak out and act against perpetual violence. Even though Katniss rebels against the forces against her, she completely understands her participation in the violence and does her best to honor those who were killed because of the violence. Adolescent readers are given a great example of how to confront the existence of violence in their own 21st-century lives through the character of Katniss Everdeen.

4. The Life of a Victor

By the end of the trilogy, Katniss finally can live the life of a victor—a life without the threat of being put into the arena ever again to play the Capitol’s game. In order to achieve this life, though, Katniss had to find a way to discover and harness her power which came from her abilities: to understand how the Capitol uses the media and then find ways to use the media for her advantage; to determine when revolution is necessary and then use her power for the greater good; and to rebel against the authoritative powers that institutionalized violence and then recognize her participation in that violence in order to end the violent cycle. The reader witnesses Katniss in her fight for justice and it becomes apparent that although the power of the Capitol worked against her to manipulate and abuse her, it was that power that propelled her into recognizing and using her own power to overcome the Capitol.

In dystopian literature, authors take conditions of the real world and spin them to the extreme to relate to their audience in a particular way. This trilogy functions to appeal to an

adolescent audience by demonstrating the connection between dystopian literature and real-life society. Readers witness issues within the text that are similar to (or the same as) the issues in their lives. From the text, adolescents encounter issues with the media and how the media is manipulated. Adolescents experience media manipulation in their own lives, whether that be the government withholding information from them or the adolescents themselves manipulating their image on social media to gain approval from certain audiences. By following Katniss' example, readers become aware of the necessity of media literacy and they learn how to evaluate the information that they receive through the media. Readers also encounter power struggles within the text as Katniss struggles to discover her own power even though the government has imposed its authoritative power over her and the rest of Panem. Through reading the trilogy, adolescents relate their own power struggles to Katniss' experiences. Adolescents struggle to resist political and social forces that work to silence them, and Katniss' experiences prove to adolescent readers that they can use their own power to resist the adult powers that work against them. Finally, adolescents are shown through the trilogy how violence is used to resist injustice. Many adolescents may experience violence on a day-to-day basis (either by experiencing violence firsthand through abuse or by witnessing violence, even on television), causing them to become desensitized to its consequences. However, after reading the novel, adolescent readers come to understand the necessity for resistance against powers that use violence against them. Adolescents also realize that although violence is sometimes necessary, it is integral to understand one's participation in that violence to end perpetual violence and to achieve peace. It is through reading *The Hunger Games* trilogy that readers can follow a teenaged protagonist as she encounters the struggles and issues relevant in the lives of adolescents, equipping the reader with the skills necessary to confront the same issues in their lives.

In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, "things are messy, just like a teenager's dirty room" but instead of confusing the reader with uncertainty, the trilogy gives young readers a safe place to understand how to work through the uncertainty in their own lives (Henthorne 12). Therefore, the presence of media, power, and violence in the trilogy function to connect the events of a dystopian society to the realities of the adolescent experience. From this trilogy, adolescent readers can understand their lives from the mirroring of the dystopian world in new and different ways. *The Hunger Games* allows readers to discover the enemy within their lives; this discovery will help young readers to understand the world around them to help them navigate their own dystopias, overcome the challenges in their lives, and find the life of a victor.

Works Cited

- Beharie, Nisha, et al. "Associations of Adolescent Exposure to Severe Violence with Substance Use From Adolescence into Adulthood: Direct Versus Indirect Exposures." *Substance Use & Misuse*, vol. 54, no. 2, Feb. 2019, pp. 191–202. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/10826084.2018.1495737.
- Brennan, Timothy. "The National Longing for Form." *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, edited by Dennis Walder, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 211-226.
- Day, Helen. "Simulacra, Sacrifice and Survival in *The Hunger Games*, *Battle Royale*, and *The Running Man*." Pharr and Clark, pp. 167-179.
- Frankel, Valerie Estelle. "Reflection in a Plastic Mirror." Pharr and Clark, pp. 49-58.
- Henthorne, Tom. *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012.
- Herold, Benjamin. "Social Media Use Among Teenagers Is Rising Rapidly." *Education Week*, vol. 38, no. 5, Sept. 2018, pp. 1–14. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=132974267&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Jowett, Garth, and Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. Sage Publications, Inc., 2012.
- Klika, J.Bart, and Jeffrey W. Linkenbach. "Social Norms and Violence Against Children and Youth: Introduction to the Special Issue." *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1, Feb. 2019, pp. 1–3. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1007/s10560-018-0596-7.
- Koenig, Gretchen. "Communal Spectacle: Reshaping History and Memory through Violence." Pharr and Clark, pp. 39-48.
- Latham, Don, and Jonathan Hollister. "The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games Trilogy." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 45, no. 1, Mar. 2014, pp. 33–46. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1007/s10583-013-9200-0.
- Locke, John. *The Enhanced Edition of John Locke's Two Treatises of Civil Government (1689, 1764)*. E-book, Liberty Fund, 2014.
- Murphy, Sarah Outterson. "The Child Soldier and the Self in *Ender's Game* and *The Hunger Games*." Pharr and Clark, pp. 199-208.
- Nacol, Emily C. "The Risks of Political Authority: Trust, Knowledge and Political Agency in Locke's Second Treatise." *Political Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3, Oct. 2011, pp. 580–595. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2010.00878.x.
- Pavlik, Anthony. "Absolute Power Games." Pharr and Clark, pp. 30-38.
- Pharr, Mary F. and Leisa A. Clark. *Of Bread, Blood, and The Hunger Games: Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012.
- Said, Edward. "The Discourse of the Orient." *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, edited by Dennis Walder, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 329-340.