Restorying Dystopia: Exploring the Hunger Games Series Through U.S. Cultural Geographies, Identities, and Fan Response

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Developing from my own interest in the geographic and cultural defamiliarization found in the Hunger Games series, this dissertation explores the ways in which the Hunger Games novels and film adaptations reflect U.S. cultural geographies and identities and how fan response extends narratives of U.S. identity, particularly analyzing these fan responses through a lens of restorying (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016). Cultural geographies of colonialism in the United States, Black history in the United States, Appalachian culture, and US military tactics are reflected in Panem, and the familiar is made strange to the reader. These parallels between the fictional world of Panem and the real world of the United States provide historical referents and cultural contexts that enrich the reading of both the series and the world in which we live. Following these assertions, I examine identities within the Hunger Games series as performances contextualized by the cultural geographies in which the characters interact. The major characters of the Hunger Games interact with narratives of inequality, marginalization, and racism, illuminating the ways in which they develop and perform identity over the course of the novels and films. I then explore fan response, via a framework of restorying, as a form of social activism, particularly as fans creatively contribute to conversations on the visibility of marginalized identities in young adult literature. Four modes of restorying (mode, perspective, identity, and time) relate to the
ways in which fans extend the narratives of the Hunger Games in a variety of subversive and revolutionary ways, writing themselves into the text, finding avenues for increasing racial diversity in the series, and imagining narratives outside the texts of the films and novels. The fan response examined in this dissertation is both liberatory and culturally transformative, expanding the domain of the Hunger Games to be more detailed, more inclusive, and more equitable.
For Joel.

I love you.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Being a “fan” has long been a part of my reading practice. I eagerly awaited my Hogwarts letter on my eleventh birthday and attended midnight premieres for the Harry Potter books and films in full regalia. Growing up, I participated in numerous fan communities for fantasy novels, eventually becoming a scholar and teacher of children’s and young adult literature. While working on my Master’s degree in North Carolina, I read Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games and felt the same sense of excitement and immersion as I had when reading as an adolescent. I participated in book clubs to discuss the Hunger Games series and attended midnight movie premieres once again, surrounded by adult fans who had grown up with Harry Potter and Percy Jackson, and adolescents who were building their own fan communities from shared enjoyment of The Hunger Games. Living and participating in these fandoms in North Carolina, near where District 12 was being filmed, gave me an intimate sense of place in relation to the dystopian narrative. As the daughter of a West Virginian, with coal in my heritage, I also felt connected to the stories of mining in District 12. Reading Appalachia in the novels blurred the boundaries of the dystopian world of Panem, a sense of place that was further reinforced when I saw the films and discussed geographic connections with other fans. Years later, when watching The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1 in 2014, I felt a similar sense of place that reinvigorated my desire to research U.S. cultural geographies.
within the series. Footage of rebellion and activism in Mockingjay – Part 1 was unsettlingly familiar as, just hours before, I had been glued to imagery of the Ferguson protests on my television at home. I felt a strong sense of both geographic place and cultural relevance as I saw contemporary inequities mirrored in the dystopian world of Panem. I went home and combed through my novels, finding ways in which US history and identities were seen reflected in Panem, from Appalachia to Ferguson. I logged onto social media and learned that I was not alone in my reactions, and then began to explore how fans were responding to the U.S. identities and cultural geographies. I saw innovation and activism in fan response, particularly those that connected fictional identities with marginalized U.S. identities.

Developing from my own interest in the geographic and cultural defamiliarization found in the Hunger Games series, this dissertation explores the ways in which the Hunger Games novels and film adaptations reflect U.S. cultural geographies and identities and how fan response extends narratives of U.S. identity, particularly when viewed through a lens of restorying (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016). Fans and scholars recognize the rich geographic and cultural descriptions that link Panem to the United States. As articulated by Garriott, Jones, and Tyler (2014): “Katniss lives within the very region where we live and are engaging ourselves as scholars. We realize our own sense of place has been destroyed and remade into a political entity that disgusts us” (p. 2). Tan (2013) similarly describes: “set in the ruins of America, the trilogy forces us to recognize aspects of our own, current culture within the dystopian world of Panem (p. 55). The location of Panem is important as cultural geographies influence the ways in which we
read texts and negotiate identities, particularly when discussing marginalized identities and both historic and contemporary injustices. Fans respond to geographic settings and dystopic defamiliarization, discussing, illustrating, and writing about marginalized identities. I explore fan response, via restorying, as a form of social activism, particularly as fans creatively contribute to conversations on the visibility of marginalized identities in young adult literature.

**Theoretical Framework**

Research in cultural geographies and identity studies situate this dissertation within related scholarship and foundational theories, leading to an exploration of how fans take up concepts of cultural geographies and U.S. identities in fan response. I review this scholarship in that order, of cultural geographies, identity, and fan response, next, which provides the organizational structure for each of the findings chapters.

**Cultural geographies.** Cultural geographies examine the connection between geographic space and culture, as “landscapes are embedded with meanings” (Anderson, Domosh, Pile, & Thrift, 2003). This dissertation particularly focuses on cultural geographies of marginalized groups in the United States, examining the dialogue between U.S. landscapes, culture, and identities. Cultural geographies and geocriticism hold many similarities; geocriticism is an interdisciplinary approach uniting ecocriticism and new historicism, in which the study of a fictional environment unites with the knowledge of the social and cultural geographies of a text (Johansen, 2014; Tally, 2011; Westphal, 2007/2011). Geographical criticism seeks to bring together the fictional world and the real world, analyzing the geography and space of both the “real” and “unreal” and also
the liminal space between the two (Tally, 2011). According to De Certeau (1984), “space is a practiced place” (p. 117). Space is fluid, malleable, and cultural, while place is a more concrete and distinguished location. Geocriticism seeks to analyze these places and spaces, both fictional and real, to illuminate both the text and the world in which we live. When analyzing the Hunger Games series, we are able to locate Appalachia on a map and see how Katniss’s Appalachia and the Appalachia of today share common cultures. Geocriticism can also serve to defamiliarize (Garcia, 2015; Westphal, 2007/2011). Westphal (2007/2011) writes “the fictional representation is likely to exert an influence over the ‘real,’ the ‘reality’ of which has been weakened in the postmodern era” (p. 112). Geocriticism recognizes the instability of reality, as fiction often shapes or influences real-life experiences. This dissertation uses foundational elements of geographical criticism to examine the ways cultural geographies from U.S. spaces and places appear in the fictional world of Panem, and how fans take up and manipulate these reflections.

Cultural geographies work within contexts of politics and power (Jackson, 1989; Shurmer-Smith, 2002). Trudeau and McMorran (2011) write “the term marginalization itself is a spatial metaphor that correctly draws attention to the geographical aspects of exclusion” and the exploration of marginalized groups is inherently contextualized by concepts of place (p. 448). Fitting for use with dystopian literature, cultural geographies also have “a way of making the familiar strange” as “cultural geographers seek new ways of addressing their subjects, and of telling new stories about the world, and subverting others” (Anderson et. al 2003, p. 8). As U.S. cultural geographies of colonialism, Black U.S. history, Appalachian culture, and military tactics appear in Panem, the familiar is
made strange to the reader. Dialogues between U.S. locations and identities interact with dystopian contexts of power and politics. In the words of Jackson (1989), “cultural geography must be contemporary as well as historical; theoretically informed yet grounded in empirical work” (p. 8). This dissertation locates U.S. historical and contemporary cultural geographies within the Hunger Games universe, examining novels, films, and the artifacts of digital fan response through lenses of critical theory.

**Identity.** For an analysis of the ways in which U.S. identities are present in the Hunger Games series, I draw upon sociocultural and sociohistorical definitions of identity (Gee, 1996; Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Identities develop through “self-understandings” influenced by interactions and social practices (Holland et al., 1998, p. 3). McCallum (1999) describes: “concepts of personal identity and selfhood are formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people” (p. 3). Following these assertions, I examine the identities performed in the Hunger Games series in context with the cultural geographies within the series. The major characters of the Hunger Games interact with narratives of inequality, marginalization, racism, illuminating the ways in which they develop and perform identity over the course of the novels and films. Shifting and malleable, people perform identities in a variety of ways and these identities can change over time (Butler, 1993), as people are “composites of many, often contradictory, self-understandings and identities” (Holland et al., p. 8). For example, Chapter 2 explores Katniss performing a postcolonial identity, whereas Chapter 4 examines her performance of an Appalachian identity and Chapter 5 examines her performance of a military identity. Katniss is able to undertake many different identities through repeated
interactions, self-understandings, and performances over the course of the series, and I particularly examine the ways her identities interact with these various cultural geographies. Identities result from “living in, through, and around the cultural forms practiced in social life” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 8). In each chapter, characters of the Hunger Games series are contextualized via the U.S. cultural geographies that are integral to the performance and formation of identity. The theoretical foundations of research in cultural geographies and identity lay the groundwork for explorations of how fans interpret and reform U.S. cultural geographies and identities through creative response.

**Fan response.** This dissertation particularly examines fan response as a means of subversive reader response that provides visibility to marginalized identities and opens avenues for conversations on social justice and equity in young adult literature. My exploration of fan response relies on foundational research on reader response by Rosenblatt (1938), as the reader and the text interact with one another. Young adults, when reading the Hunger Games novels and films, engage with both the fictional world and the real world, as Rosenblatt (1938) writes: “through books, the reader may explore his own nature, become aware of potentialities for thought and feeling within himself, acquire clearer perspective, develop aims, and a sense of direction” (p. vi.). The narratives in young adult texts influence and inspire creative response from adolescent readers, many of whom connect online (Black, 2009; Brenner, 2013; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Curwood, 2013; Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Thomas, 2007a, 2007b). Robin Brenner (2013) describes teen fan creations, identifying fan culture as a community of fans who:
discuss, critique, and create around a particular source work, be it a film, a series of books, a television show, or a comic book. Fan works, which include creative writing (fan fiction), art (fan art), music (filk), video (fan vids), comics, costumes, and crafts. (pp. 33-34)

Fans also stated reasons for their interactions and participation in fan culture, citing “a love of compelling stories, finding community, gaining courage to create as well as becoming a better creator, finding a safe space for expression, and becoming more critical consumers” (Brenner, 2013, p. 35). When fans interact online, they express their interests, desires, and frustrations related to popular literature, and fan response to the Hunger Games series shows both the celebration of identities performed in the novels and films and the ways in which fans challenge the performance of other identities. Fan response, and the negotiation of identity, can also be subversive (Willis, 2003), as young people creatively engage with popular texts in ways that can add visibility to marginalized identities, challenge stereotypes, and engage in liberatory discourse with social justice aims.

Fan culture and cultural production are intimately connected (Green, Jenkins, & Jenkins, 1998; Harris & Alexander, 1998). As Harris and Alexander (1998) describe, “fans are motivated by self-invention, in which fandom provides an opportunity to live in and through a set of symbols that are expressive of ones aspirations rather than ‘reality’” (p. 6). When readers challenge dominant ideologies and write unauthorized interpretations of young adult novels, they hold the potential to create radical social change through participatory culture which “shifts the focus of literacy from individual
expression to community involvement” (Jenkins, et al., 2009, p. xiii). As fans engage with participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, et al., 2009), including their interpretations and recreations of popular literature, fan remake the text of the Hunger Games novels and films in ways “more responsive to their needs” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 40). Fans engage in a long tradition of fandom culture (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006) when they insert themselves into the texts of the Hunger Games, and, as I argue in this dissertation, participate in ways that increase representation of diverse identities. In my findings chapters, I present evidence for increased representation of racial diversity (through the intentional insertion of Black identity), multicultural diversity related to both racial and regional diversity (through the presentation of Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian), and examine representations of empowerment and recovery through the navigation of trauma as fans create narratives of empowerment through their explorations of postcolonial identity (with Katniss explored as the Mockingjay) and veteran identity (as Katniss and Peeta negotiate and recover from war).

As a means of examining the subversive potentials of fan response, the chapters of this dissertation examine fan fiction, fan art, cosplay, and fan casting through a lens of restorying (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016). Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe the process of restorying in relation to fan response as an act of resistance, “of reshaping narratives to better reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences” and “an act of asserting the importance of one’s existence in a world that tries to silence subaltern voices” (p. 314). While the Hunger Games novels and films provide some avenues for multicultural and diverse experiences, restorying provides a way for readers to insert
marginalized identities into literature through fan responses, including fan fiction, fan art, cosplaying, and fan casting. Fans, writing themselves into the Hunger Games, engage with a history of restorying practices through digital means, engaging with both a legacy of fandom (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006, Jenkins, et al., 2009) and concepts of identity and transactional response (Bakhtin, 1981; Rosenblatt, 1938; Willis, 1997). Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) present a theory of restorying that articulates ways in which “young people are using powerful new media tools to inscribe themselves into existence in response to efforts to silence, erase, consume, or ventriloquize them within children’s and young adult literature, media, and popular discourse” (p. 314). Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) assert “the potential for young people to inscribe diversity into existence via participatory tools” (p. 314) and this dissertation examines the ways in which fan response to the Hunger Games novels and films either insert diverse perspectives where they are otherwise absent or add to and illuminate diverse perspectives that are already present. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe restorying in relation to “time, place, perspective, mode, metanarrative, and identity” (p. 318). Chapters of this dissertation examine restorying mode, restorying perspective, restorying identity, and restorying time in relation to marginalized identities I locate in the Hunger Games novels and films, and I propose potential future applications of restorying place and restorying metanarrative in the conclusion chapter.

**Methodology**

When examining the Hunger Games novels and films, I have engaged in interdisciplinary methods of literary analysis using elements of close reading, new
historicism, geocriticism, and multicultural analysis to interpret narratives of cultural geographies and identity present in the series. I examined the novels alongside the films, deconstructing the notion of fidelity (Stam, 2000) to view the film adaptations and novels in conversation with one another. I often note and analyze points of departure within the novels and films (particularly when they relate to the portrayal of marginalized identities) without privileging one medium over another. The sections of cultural geographies and identity were primarily informed through close readings of the novels and films, alongside supplemental historical and geographic research. I performed close readings of these texts with regards to the ways in which they relate to particular cultural geographies (colonialism, Black U.S. history and Black social movements, Appalachian culture, and U.S. military contexts) and particular identities (postcolonial, Black, Appalachian, and military). All of the chapters use elements of geocriticism and new historicism, as I have consulted maps, historical archives, interviews, and blog posts (among other media sources) to inform my exploration of the U.S. cultural geographies reflected in Panem. When discussing identity, some chapters also make use of related literary theories; for example, when examining the cultural geographies of colonialism in Panem, I made the choice to use a postcolonial literary analysis on the novels and films to examine the ways in colonialism and postcolonialism influences Katniss’s identity. These cultural geographies and identities enter into conversation with fan response, at which time I used methods related to reader response.

**Researcher positionality.** I am a white woman living in the United States. I am writing about a variety of marginalized identities in the United States and do not attempt
to speak for, or replace, the voices of postcolonial, Black, Appalachian, or veteran identities. While I do identify as a fan, and engage in fan practices, and thus feel as though I am occasionally an insider to fan response, I am an outsider to identities that are not my own. I recognize that I come from a place of privilege (as white and as a researcher) and engage in reflection on my own positionality. I do not speak for the fans whose responses are included in this project, and have made efforts to elevate their voices through the inclusion of their own words and electronic commentary.

**Methodologies in research on fan response.** As I consider myself a fan of the Hunger Games series, I have engaged in what Magnifico, Lammers, and Curwood (2013) describe as “sustained, systematic observation” of fan responses to the series (p. 82). After a researcher has developed a knowledge of a fan community, they are “equipped with a deeper understanding of the organization and culture of an online, multi-sited field” and “attention can turn towards analyzing artifacts” (Magnifico et al., 2013, p. 83). My primary sites of research for this project have been Tumblr.com, FanFiction.net, and DeviantArt.com, as I am familiar with these three sites and they contain a wealth of fan artifacts associated with the Hunger Games novels and films.

I did much of my research on fan response on Tumblr.com, as the site is currently widely popular in the United States for a variety of fan communities. Fans post (and reblog) fan art, fan casting, and blog posts to Tumblr, using a variety of tags and interacting with one another. I did find some difficulty using Tumblr, as many fans will “reblog” materials without crediting the original creator, and fans often change their usernames. During my research, I frequently found bookmarks lost or pages deleted as
fans quickly deleted content or changed usernames. Online research is constantly evolving and changing, making data collection much more fluid than in more traditional field sites (Magnifico et al., 2013). I view the data presented in this dissertation as a selection of materials (from 2015-2017) representative of only a portion of a wide and active online community of fans. While I found a wide range of fan art at Tumblr.com, I also used DeviantArt.com as a source for fan art materials, primarily because fans upload their own content to DeviantArt, eliminating the issues of “reblogging” found on Tumblr. Many pieces of artwork that I found on Tumblr could be traced back to DeviantArt, which allowed me to access and contact the original creators of particular artifacts. I used a similar method when finding examples of cosplaying (shown in Chapter 2). Tumblr posts featured cosplay photography but these photographs often linked to photography websites, cosplay Facebook pages, or blog posts interviewing cosplaying fans. Tumblr was a gateway to many other digital resources.

When doing preliminary research for fan fiction materials (colloquially called “fics”), I investigated the fan communities on popular websites including Tumblr, FanFiction.net, ArchiveofOurOwn.org, and LiveJournal.com. Tumblr and LiveJournal posts related to Hunger Games fan fiction primarily listed links to fics posted at either FanFiction.net (FF.net) or Archive of Our Own (Ao3); while I did use both Tumblr and LiveJournal to find specific fics, it was not my primary resource as the other two databases are much more widely used. Archive of Our Own divides the Hunger Games series into two categories: “Hunger Games Series – All Media Types” (currently with over 8,800 entries) and “Hunger Games Trilogy” (currently with over 6,500 entries).
comparison, “The Hunger Games” is currently the fifth most popular fandom in the book category on Fanfiction.net, with over 45,000 entries. FanFiction.net does not have a separate label for the Hunger Games film franchise, instead users upload fan responses associated with both the books and films into the single label of “The Hunger Games,” listed under a book category. Many of the fan fiction entries I have chosen to examine are crosslisted at both Fanfiction.net and Archive of Our Own, but I chose to focus my searching for fan fiction at FanFiction.net due to the fact that more fans are uploading content there.

To find fan artifacts for this project, I searched multiple sites using the keywords (or hashtags, where appropriate) “Katniss,” “Peeta,” “Rue,” “Thresh,” and “mockingjay.” When reviewing search results, I narrowed my field due to the goals of my research: to examine and discuss artifacts that used restorying methods to showcase particular identities. For example, when finding images of Katniss for Chapter 4, I particularly looked for artwork that depicted Katniss with darker skin. I intentionally sought fan response that positioned Katniss as multiracial for the purposes of analyzing how fans restoried identity to assert Katniss as a multiracial character thus increasing the visibility of marginalized multiracial Appalachian voices in popular young adult literature.

When researching fan fiction, I performed textual analysis similar to my analysis of the Hunger Games novels, particularly noting what words or phrases fans used to describe particular characters. I organized my data collected from these close readings into tables, noting similarities between fics and the ways fans wrote about marginalized identities (an example of one of these tables, relating to fan fiction of Rue, can be seen in
Appendix A). I expanded and contextualized this data analysis to examine issues of representation and characterization, though recognize the limitations of my own work. Fans typically did not provide context for their creation of particular fics, for example, I do not know whether a fan who expanded upon Rue’s Black identity intentionally engaged in restorying practices because the fan also identified as Black. Again, much of my analysis points to the liberatory potential of fan fiction, but, without demographic information and engagement with fans, I can only analyze my own findings and how I view these findings to fit within a framework of restorying. I intend to do further research engaging with fans, and plan to ask the critical question of intent in future projects.

While gathering fan-created materials for consideration, I considered aspects of privacy and anonymity online. Fans often use screennames to publish their work, and, while the work is publically available online, the nature of fan communities often fosters a feeling of safety or inclusion. When approaching fandoms from a research perspective, I considered myself as an outsider, collecting data and making an effort to preserve anonymity (a majority of the fan fiction and fan art used in this dissertation is attributed to particular screennames, rather than an author’s name, even if the author’s identity was publically available). Some artists actively embraced and encouraged the use of their full names or artistic pseudonyms, and those fans are identified in an effort to most accurately reflect both their desire for identifiable contributions to the fan community and their personas as creators and artists. I made the decision to include hyperlinks to fan-created responses in my works cited, in an effort to provide accurate source material from a research standpoint, but recognize that directly linking to fan pages creates a tension with
fans’ possible desires for anonymity. No demographic data was gathered as it relates to fan authors, while this data might particularly enrich a study of both identity and fan response, this decision was made, in part, to help preserve anonymity and follow best practices according to IRB standards. I have made every effort to contact fans for permissions to share their work in this research, contacting them via email and the site messaging systems on Tumblr and DeviantArt. While I assert that my use of images falls under Fair Use practices related to educational research and copyright, as a member of fandom communities, and in an effort to include and support fan creators as the authors of their creative works, I also wanted to respect fans’ right to privacy and desires for anonymity, despite the public nature of online fan research.

The Hunger Games

boasting “more than 50 million copies of the original three books in the Hunger Games trilogy in print and digital formats in the U.S.” (para. 1). Both the books and their film adaptations have a wide fan base of children, teens, and adults in the United States (Falconer, 2010). The popularity of the series has inspired the creation of fan responses including fan art and fan fiction on a number of digital platforms. Fans are frequently engaging with these popular texts, providing a wealth of digital artifacts for researchers to explore.

Synopsis. Although the novels and films differ slightly from each other, they are not so different as to require separate synopses. With this in mind, along with my desire to examine the two media in conversation with one another, I offer a general overview of the storyline driving both the books and the films. Set in the ruins of North America, Panem is a country that consists of twelve districts who provide resources and products to a wealthy Capitol city. The twelve districts have varying levels of poverty, with the protagonist of the series, Katniss Everdeen, living in the poorest district. As punishment for a prior rebellion, the Capitol forces each of the twelve districts to annually send one male and one female “tribute” to fight to the death in a televised, gladiator-style tournament known as the Hunger Games. In the first novel, *The Hunger Games*, District 12 holds the annual Reaping to select its tributes for the Hunger Games. A Capitol representative draws the name of Katniss’s younger sister, Prim. To protect her sister, Katniss volunteers herself as tribute and attends the Hunger Games with Peeta Mellark, a boy from her district. Katniss and Peeta travel to the Capitol of Panem and unwillingly partake in the pageantry of the Hunger Games, in which tributes interview, dress in a
variety of costumes, and parade for televised coverage shown throughout Panem. Katniss, Peeta, and the other tributes train in the Capitol and then enter the arena of the Games, under 24-hour surveillance by the Capitol, where their fighting and survival experiences are broadcast to all of the districts of Panem. During the Games, Katniss befriends Rue, a young competitor from District 11 who reminds Katniss of her younger sister. Rue is killed in the Games, prompting an emotional response from Katniss that is viewed as an act of defiance to the Capitol. Katniss covers Rue’s body in flowers and salutes Rue’s district, recognizing the injustice of the Games. Katniss fights to survive in the Games and, due to a rule change that would permit both of their survival, she and Peeta work together to become the last remaining tributes. At the end of the Games, the Gamemakers revoke the rule change, so, instead of fighting one another, Katniss and Peeta threaten to commit suicide together by eating poisonous berries. The Capitol intercedes and name both Katniss and Peeta victors, and allow them to return to District 12. Upon returning home, Katniss must maintain a performance of romantic involvement with Peeta so that other districts’ citizens do not view her actions as a threat to the Capitol.

In the second novel and film, Catching Fire, Katniss’s response to Rue’s death and her threat with the berries has provoked unrest and rebellion within Panem. The leader of Panem, President Snow, threatens Katniss’s family, forces Katniss to pretend to love Peeta and the two plan a public wedding to distract the citizens of Panem from economic inequality and civil unrest. Peeta, legitimately loving Katniss, participates in the romantic performance to protect her. As the winners of the prior year’s Hunger Games, Katniss and Peeta embark on their Victory Tour, in which they visit the other
districts in Panem. When touring Panem, Katniss realizes the extent of poverty and unrest in the other districts and she must negotiate her role as the accidental catalyst for a rebellion. In an attempt to subdue the rebellion, President Snow announces that the tributes of the 75th Hunger Games, known as the Quarter Quell, will be entirely chosen from the living victors from each district. Katniss and Peeta thus return to the Hunger Games and form alliances with other victors, ultimately destroying the arena and escaping the Games. Rebel forces rescue Katniss while members of the Capitol capture Peeta. Katniss relocates to District 13, a district the Capitol claims to have destroyed, where rebels have been planning a takeover of the Capitol. The rebels inform Katniss that many of her companions and other victors have planned her rescue from the Games and she has been unknowingly adopted as a leader and integral figure of the rebellion.

The final novel of the trilogy, *Mockingjay*, divided into two films, resumes with Katniss visiting her destroyed home in District 12, after the Capitol has bombed the area in response to the rebellion. Katniss witnesses acts of destruction by the Capitol and agrees to take the role of the Mockingjay, a public figurehead for the rebellion. Alma Coin, the leader of District 13, directs Katniss in her role and televises Katniss urging the residents of Panem to fight against the Capitol. Peeta, still imprisoned in the Capitol, appears on various televised interviews designed to subdue the rebellion. Katniss realizes that the Capitol is torturing and brainwashing (called *hijacking*) Peeta. Katniss pushes for the rescue of Peeta and other victors; however, when Peeta returns, he attempts to kill Katniss as a result of his hijacking. Katniss trains to join the military forces of District 13 and ultimately joins a “Star Squad” of victors fighting their way to the Capitol (as
residents of District 13 continuously film the squad for propaganda materials). Peeta joins the Squad for District 13’s propaganda and as a part of his recovery. The Squad, led by Katniss, undertakes a rogue mission to kill Snow, reaching the Capitol alongside other rebel military forces. As Katniss approaches Snow’s mansion to find him, bombs from the rebels kill a number of children gathered in a “safe zone” and a secondary bomb kills medical personnel, including Katniss’s sister. Katniss, injured both physically and emotionally, recovers in the Capitol where Alma Coin suggests reinstating the Hunger Games with the children of the Capitol as a form of retribution. The movement passes, in part, to Katniss’s vote in favor of the Games. At a public execution, Coin allows Katniss to fire an arrow to kill President Snow, but she instead shoots Coin as Katniss has come to the realization that both Coin and Snow are similar leaders willing to kill children for their own gain. Medical doctors within the Capitol declare Katniss as mentally unwell and send her home to District 12, where she and Peeta slowly recover from the trauma they have experienced. In an epilogue, Peeta and Katniss remain living in District 12 and have two children together.

**Overview**

Each of the findings chapters of this dissertation is divided into three parts: cultural geographies, identity, and fan response. Here, I examine the research questions driving each of these parts and then provide an outline of the six chapters of this dissertation, with particular emphasis given to the four findings chapters as they examine cultural geographies, identity, and fan response.
Research questions and structure. The beginning of each chapter seeks to establish contextual parallels between the events of the Hunger Games novels and films and U.S. cultural geographies with the guiding question of How are U.S. cultural geographies reflected in the Hunger Games series? These sections use a variety of referents including historical events, physical landscapes, social movements, and geographic locations to establish cultural connections between the real and the fictional, contextualizing the further analysis of U.S. identities performed in the series.

After establishing a familiar U.S. context within the unfamiliar world of Panem, each chapter examines the ways in which characters of the Hunger Games novels and films perform U.S. identities. An overarching question of How are U.S. identities portrayed in Panem? guides these sections. Chapters investigate postcolonial identity, Black identity, Appalachian identity, and military identity, with particular emphasis on investigating marginalized or silenced voices in literature. By focusing on marginalized and silenced voices, these sections illuminate inequities present both in the dystopian world of the Hunger Games series and the contemporary United States.

With these marginalized identities in mind, the third section of each chapter looks to artifacts of fan response within a lens of restorying (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016). Chapters examine fan responses including fan fiction, fan art, cosplaying, and fan casting guided by a question of How do fans of the Hunger Games series use restorying in relation to marginalized U.S. identities? As fans use various restorying methods (mode, perspective, identity, and time), they reimagine marginalized identities and open avenues for liberatory discourse with social justice aims.
Outline. This dissertation is organized into six chapters. In Chapter 1, this Introduction, I describe the project, articulate my theoretical framework and methodologies, introduce the Hunger Games series, and provide an overview of the chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter 2, “Depictions of Colonialism and Postcolonial Identity,” presents parallels between the colonial history of the United States and economic and social relationships within Panem. Within the context of these cultural geographies of colonialism, I describe Katniss’s postcolonial identity in terms of colonial trauma, dehumanization, and hybridity. Fan response, particularly cosplaying, depicting Katniss as the Mockingjay functions within what Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe as “restorying mode” as multimodal response reflects and celebrates Katniss’s hybrid identity. Restorying mode engages “narrative transformation” using multimodal techniques and fans who cosplay Katniss transform the written word of the novels and the moving images of the films into real-world performances of Katniss (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 320). Fans who cosplay Katniss showcase her postcolonial hybridity, taking up facets of Katniss’s identity and inserting their own identities into the character of Katniss through their performances. These responses assert Katniss’s agency and complexity as a postcolonial hybrid, and, as fans take up facets of Katniss’s identity, show potentials for empathy transference that relate to postcolonial identities in the United States.

Chapter 3, “Depictions of Black U.S. History and Black Identity,” focuses on parallels of Black U.S. history events in Panem and investigates the erasure and
animalization of Black identity within the series. Representation of Rue and Thresh in the novels and films reflects a legacy of racism as portrayals of Thresh appear in animalistic and dehumanizing terms and historic connections between whiteness and innocence challenge and erase Rue’s Black identity. Fan responses to the series use “restorying perspective” showing more complex portrayals of Rue and Thresh that challenge the erasure and stereotyping of Black identity in the Hunger Games novels and films. Restorying perspective invites readers to examine viewpoints outside the view of the protagonist of a story and “has the potential to foster empathy toward diversity and difference” (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 331). These fan responses employ techniques of counter-storytelling (Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) as Black identity in fan fiction of the Hunger Games series is shown here to challenge stereotypes and give voices and add more complex characterization to the two Black characters Rue and Thresh.

Chapter 4, “Depictions of Appalachian Culture and Appalachian Identity,” investigates Appalachian identity within the Hunger Games novels and films, contextualized through parallels of Appalachian culture and the Appalachian experience in District 12. I examine Appalachian identity through evidence of Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian, exploring the whitewashing of Appalachian identities, and through deconstructing Peeta’s Appalachian whiteness. Fan art of the Hunger Games series enters conversation with what Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) call “restorying identity,” particularly looking at fan art that depicts Katniss as a multiracial character, in spite of her casting and portrayal by a white actress in the film adaptations. Affirming
textual evidence of Katniss as multiracial, fan response that restories Katniss’s identity challenges the whitewashing of multiracial Appalachian identities and emphasizes the need for racial diversity in young adult literature.

Chapter 5, “Depictions of U.S. Military Tactics and Military Identity,” looks at U.S. military tactics in Panem as they contextualize Katniss and Peeta’s development of military identities. The United States’ military cultural geographies influence the ways Katniss and Peeta perform military and veteran identities. I identify Katniss as a disciplined soldier, Peeta as a prisoner of war, and show both characters developing identities as recovering veterans as they return home to District 12 at the end of Mockingjay. These militarized identities inform an exploration of fan response in which I examine fan art of the Hunger Games series through a lens of restorying time (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016). Fan responses extend the narrative of the story, imagining narratives between Mockingjay and before the epilogue (before Katniss and Peeta have children), and after the epilogue. These narratives suggest ways in which Katniss and Peeta negotiate the trauma of war while living in District 12. As fan responses represent Katniss and Peeta as recovering veterans, fan response “disrupts predominant metanarratives” and provides diverse and multiple interpretations of what it means to recover after trauma, applicable to conversations on the negotiations of trauma and recovery of U.S. military veterans (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 319).

Finally, Chapter 6, “Conclusion,” provides a review of the findings of the dissertation, within the categories of cultural geographies, identity, and fan response. I propose potential avenues for future research within the forms of restorying place and
restoring metanarrative (as Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016, define these terms). To conclude the project, I provide implications for educators who incorporate fan response in English Language Arts classrooms, encouraging fans to engage in liberatory creative response to popular young adult literature.

Finding representations of U.S. cultural geographies and identity within the Hunger Games series connects dystopian narratives of power inequality and activism to marginalizations and inequities present in the United States. The following chapters explore the connections between history and the present and between Panem and the United States, then explore how fans work within and against these narratives to work towards a more equitable future.
Chapter 2: Depictions of Colonialism and Postcolonial Identity

This chapter locates forms of colonialism in both Panem and the United States and then looks to the development of identity in the character of Katniss as she navigates colonial trauma and negotiates her postcolonial identity through her roles as a tribute and the Mockingjay. These connections provide context to fan responses that use the Mockingjay symbol as an image of autonomy and political subversion, as fans interpret and perform various identities of Katniss through cosplaying, in which they dress and act as Katniss for photoshoots and performances at conventions. I examine cosplaying through a lens of restorying mode, as fans move textual and visual representations of Katniss in the novels and films to live action performances of her identity (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016). As fans transform text into these multimodal interpretations, restorying mode provides avenues for readers to develop empathy and understanding of postcolonial identities as they extend the narrative of the Hunger Games series through their personal interpretations of Katniss.

The United States has a long and detailed history of colonization, both as a colony to Great Britain and as a colonizing force to the indigenous peoples of North America. Singh and Schmidt (2000) describe: “While the U.S. defined itself as the world’s first independent and anti-colonial nation-state it simultaneously incorporated many of the defining features of European colonial networks—including the color line—into its
economic and cultural life” (p. 5). Colonialism has had lasting effects on U.S. identity, through both economic and social power relationships related to race and gender (Morin, 2008; Singh & Schmidt, 2000). The Hunger Games series, set in the United States, displays parallels to economic forms of colonialism present in the U.S. and also shows the effects of colonialism on the development of personal identity, particularly in the character of Katniss as she shifts and negotiates her identity as both a tribute and the Mockingjay. The colonial “social, economic, and political system” (Blauner, 1969, p. 393) results in a power struggle that is not exclusively economic but also “a form of domination—the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals or groups” (Horvath, 1972, p. 46). As residents of Panem interact within colonial power dynamics, the Hunger Games series presents the complex and varied influences of colonialism in a dystopian context, illuminating historic inequities and providing the catalyst for conversations on identity formation and the legacy of colonialism in the United States.

In order to disrupt and critique power imbalances and inequities present in both Panem and the United States, we must explore and reveal the narratives of the colonized. Rather than taking a decolonizing approach (Fanon, 1963; Tuck & Yang, 2012), concerned specifically with the “repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 22), this chapter takes a postcolonial stance as it is articulated by Ahmed (2000): “post-colonialism is about rethinking how colonialism operated in different times in ways that permeate all aspects of social life, in the colonised and colonising nations” (p. 11). I
reference Ahmed in particular as her description of postcolonialism allows for the intersection of multiple forms of colonization across historic periods, as the United States has experienced colonialism in a variety of ways and these various forms of colonization and imbalances of power are reflected in the fictional world of Panem. A postcolonial approach, “concerned with the responses of the colonised” (Kennedy, 2000, p. 15), does not imply that colonization has ended, or that the colonized have “overcome the legacies of colonialism” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 11) but rather “allows us to investigate how colonial encounters are both determining, and yet not fully determining, of social and material existence” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 11). Postcolonial theory, as it is employed in this chapter, “alludes to the ways the colonial past has left material and non-material legacies, ranging from metropolitan demographics and culture to ongoing ideological and possibly psychological impacts” (Bosma, Lucassen, & Oostindie, 2012, p. 9). My postcolonial analysis of the Hunger Games series, particularly focused on the United States, allows for “reaffirming historical and geographical links, structural analogies, and openings for agency and resistance” (Shohat, 2006, p. 248) and analysis of such a popular series illuminates these relationships and avenues for potential agency. Postcolonial analyses of fiction can be particularly liberatory as Palladino (2008) writes:

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1 While Ahmed (2000) hyphenates post-colonial, other scholars (Boehmer, 2005; Loomba, 2005; Morin, 2008; Singh & Schmidt, 2000; Young, 2001) elect to remove the hyphen in effort to remove indications of temporality or the assumption that there can be an “end” to colonization, even after independence is established for some colonies. Ahmed (2000) notes and challenges the temporal and referential assumptions of the “post-”colonial, and ultimately retains the hyphenated form. In a continued effort to assert that colonization has enduring effects on the colonized subject, and as an effort to acknowledge that not all colonies achieve independence, I use the unhypenated term postcolonial.
Postcolonialism grants a significant role to fiction and to its narrative weight and it re-formulates the old grand narrative that have othered the non-European world: offering a literature that often navigates the past, it amends past histories that had been silenced or manipulated. Postcolonial literature opens a permanent dialogue with the past: the writing back into history becomes its institutionalized feature.

(p. 54)

With aims to illuminate historical connections and interrogate narratives of both economics and identity within the Hunger Games series, this chapter establishes parallels in the forms of colonialism present in both the United States and Panem and investigates interpretations of colonial identity in Panem, particularly looking at the postcolonial transformations of Katniss in the Hunger Games novels, films, and fan response.

**Forms of Colonialism in the United States and Panem**

This chapter examines colonialism as an ongoing process, and Panem draws from forms of colonialism that have appeared and reappeared in the United States throughout its history. Colonialism has a multiplicity of meanings that ultimately refer to an imbalance of power resulting from the conquest and exploitation of a nation. Loomba (2005) defines colonialism as “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (p. 20), colonialism is “the takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation” (p. 27). The United States has been involved in a variety of forms of colonialism, from the initial settler colonialism by British colonies that eventually formed the United States to the contemporary modes of internal colonialism
that persist across the country. This section locates forms of colonialism as they have appeared in both the United States and Panem, noting the presence of settler colonialism, trade colonialism and planter colonialism, extractive colonialism, and internal colonialism.

**Settler colonialism.** With the colonization of indigenous peoples in North America, the United States as a nation resulted initially from a form of settler colonialism (Byrd, 2011; Horvath, 1972; Shoemaker, 2015; Watts, 2010; Yokota, 2011). The British invaded North America, eradicating the native population and “becoming the majority” via the settler colonialism model (Shoemaker, 2015). Khader (2014) compares the “structural realities” of Panem to “Israel’s apartheid policies and settler-colonialism in Palestine,” and I extend these parallel to include the settler colonialism in the United States (para. 7). While the involvement of the Peacekeepers in Panem’s districts is not the eradication of native peoples as seen in indigenous America, Khader (2014) aligns “Panem’s fragmentation into districts” to subdivisions and territories created as a result of settler colonialism. I locate the “brutalization of the masses in the fictional and real world” in the racial segregation of Palestinian cantons, the colonization of indigenous peoples of the United States, and in the treatment of district residents in Panem (Khader, 2014, para. 7). Settler colonialism in the United States pushed indigenous peoples from their homes, took over their land, and then established thirteen districts reminiscent of the thirteen original British colonies in the United States.

**Trade and planter colonialism.** Trade colonialism and planter colonialism are grouped together for this analysis, as the economic production of Panem’s districts
borrow from both models simultaneously, and fan responses to the series emphasize and assert parallels between district economics and both trade and planter colonialism in US history. After settlement, the US colonies developed into a trade colonialism relationship with Great Britain, in which “the colonial periphery feeds the metropole with raw materials” and the metropole maintains and regulates the trade and dispersal of resources (Shoemaker, 2015, para. 7). The forms of export and exploitation of labor in both United States and Panem are also characteristics of planter colonialism, in which “colonizers institute mass production of a single crop, such as sugar, coffee, cotton, or rubber” (Shoemaker, 2015, para. 5). The specialized export crops, such as tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton, that expanded in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Atack & Passell, 1994) echo the regionalized specificity of production in the districts in Panem, as each district provides a particular service or set of goods to the Capitol.² Katniss’s first descriptions of the individual districts in *The Hunger Games* classify each according to its primary production: “District 11, agriculture. District 4, fishing. District 3, factories” (Collins, 2008, p. 66). Each district provides a specific and individual economic support to the Capitol. Katniss reveals that her district’s production is a central focus of her own life prior to her participation in the Hunger Games:

² Planter colonialism is certainly not exclusive to the United States, and Troyer (2012) compares “economically exploited and politically dispossessed” (para. 3) residents of Panem to the colonized subjects of the planter colonialism in Uganda: “Uganda’s poverty is of the same nature as *The Hunger Games*: based on exploitation and oppression” (para. 5). However, the geographic locations of the districts in the United States particularly allow for the comparison of the cash crops and plantation-style agriculture of the US South to the economics of Panem.
it all comes back to coal at school. Besides basic reading and math most of our instruction is coal-related. Except for the weekly lecture on the history of Panem.

It’s mostly a lot of blather about what we owe the Capitol. (Collins, 2008, p. 42) Katniss states that her district “owe[s]” the Capitol their resources and production, and her district produces coal as a direct result of its geographic location. The thirteen colonies in the United States similarly exported trade materials or grew specialized crops based on their locations (Collins, 2008, p. 42). The economic parallels between the district of Panem and the British colonies in the United States are particularly apparent when looking at fan made maps (Figure 1) alongside maps of the US colonies and their exports (Figure 2):

Figure 1. Exports of Panem (Rabun/Bustle, 2015)
These maps show not only the geographic specificity present in the Hunger Games series but also the similarities in regional and economic presentation of the colonized districts as providers of exports. Fan responses, and officially franchised products, frequently represent the districts via their contributions to the Capitol. Fan creations (Figure 3) that represent the districts show representations of exports, rather than character faces, geographic locations, or other identifying characteristics that could otherwise separate the districts from one another:
Collins repeatedly portrays the districts as producers of goods for the Capitol; the districts are colonies in the trade and planter colonial models similar to the thirteen original British colonies in the United States.

As a result of economic inequities and a lack of agency and representation in their government, the US colonies, similar to the districts of Panem, fought for independence from a distant power that had been exploiting their resources and labor via the trade and planter colonial models. Collins shows an inversion of the American Revolutionary narrative in which the Capitol defeats the districts’ revolution. Geographic advantage
plays a role in the loss and subsequent reestablishment of colonial Capitol rule, as Katniss narrates:

The mountains form a natural barrier between the Capitol and the eastern districts. It is almost impossible to enter from the east except through the tunnels. This geographical advantage was a major factor in the districts losing the war that led to my being a tribute today. Since the rebels had to scale the mountains, they were easy targets for the Capitol’s air forces. (Collins, 2008, p. 59)

Geographic advantage provided leverage for the colonies in the Revolutionary War as British ships had to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to engage in battle with colonial forces—after a long journey, the British had limited resources and soldiers when fighting to maintain authority over the colonies. Collins inverts the U.S. colonial narrative, having the colonies travel to engage in war with the colonizer, thus giving the Capitol an advantage that maintains privilege for those already in power. The Treaty of Paris negotiated the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 and thus established the thirteen colonies to be “free, sovereign and independent states” (The National Archive, 2006, p. 22). In Collins’ trilogy, the Capitol establishes a “Treaty of Treason” which requires the district-colonies return to shipping goods to the Capitol and, with the creation of the annual Hunger Games, requires the district colonies to also send their children as goods to their colonizer (Collins, 2008, p. 19). The districts remain under the power of the Capitol as a result of their colonial relationship, sending their resources for the use of the elite and continuing a cycle of poverty within the colonies.
**Extractive colonialism.** Shoemaker (2015) differentiates planter colonialism from a similar model of extractive colonialism, in which colonizers desire “raw material found in a particular locale,” and the economic relationships between the Capitol and its districts reflect moments in U.S. history with both variations (para. 6). District 12, with the natural resource of coal, works primarily on an extractive model, similar to mining practices in historic and contemporary Appalachia, topics discussed further in Chapter 4. Yglesias (2013) takes a detailed look at the economics of extractive colonialism, particularly with regards to District 12:

District 12 is a quintessential extractive economy. It’s oriented around a coal mine, the kind of facility where unskilled labor can be highly productive in light of the value of the underlying commodity. In a free society, market competition for labor and union organizing would drive wages up. But instead the Capitol imposes a single purchaser of mine labor and offers subsistence wages. Emigration to other districts in search of better opportunities is banned, as is exploitation of the apparently bountiful resources of the surrounding forests. (para. 8)

The districts fall further into debt by sending goods to the Capitol, as “extractive institutions keep the entire District in a state of poverty, despite the availability of advanced technology in the Capitol” (Yglesias, 2013, para. 8). Shoemaker (2015) notes that colonizers in extractive colonial sites “typically depend upon native diplomatic mediation, environmental knowledge, and labor” and we can see this relationship represented as Katniss discusses the role of Peacekeepers within her community (para. 6).
Katniss is able to barter with her Peacekeepers; she describes selling food to her District’s Peacekeepers in *The Hunger Games* and states that they “turn a blind eye to the few of us who hunt” as she and Gale are able to offer them fresh meat from their knowledge of the land in District 12 (Collins, 2008, p. 5). Katniss’s colonizers depend on her native knowledge of wildcrafting and hunting (topics further explored in Chapter 4), working within the extractive colonialism model present in Appalachia.

**Internal colonialism.** For Appalachian Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans, among other minorities, the United States has taken part in “internal colonialism” within its own geographic borders (Acuña, 1998; Altbach & Kelly, 1978; Chávez, 2011; González Casanova, 1965; Howe, 2002; Smith, 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Defined by Tuck and Yang (2012) as “the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the ‘domestic’ borders of the imperial nation,” internal colonialism establishes modes of control to segregate, surveil, and exert power over peripheral minorities located within the larger nation (p. 4). Acuña (1998) compares the colonization of northern Mexico by the United States to the colonization of “other Third World peoples” (p. 171) and particularly notes the “nations within a nation” of Mexican workers in what became the US Southwest (p. 173). The residents of each of Panem’s districts associate themselves not only as district citizens but also as citizens of a greater nation of Panem, experiencing a form of internal colonization similar to the Mexican population in the US (Acuña, 1998, Chávez, 2011), the Appalachian American population (Smith, 2008), or the Black population (Blauner, 1969; Clark, 1965) in the United States. Blauner (1969) describes how some theorists
have adopted internal colonization as a model for the Black experience in the United States, which “did not involve the settlement of whites in any land that was unequivocably Black” but rather focuses on “common experiences that have been historically shared by the most subjugated racial minorities” (p. 395). Collins does not provide the reader with the knowledge of how Panem’s districts are established (via the forceful taking of land), however, the influence of an outside rule via Peacekeepers and the treatment of subjugated citizens (via brutality and forced labor) reflect characteristics of internal colonialism, related to particular racial and ethnic inequities in the United States. Internal colonization has affected the development and portrayal of Black identity (explored further in Chapter 3) and Appalachian identity (examined in Chapter 4) in the Hunger Games series. A variety of colonial power structures, including internal colonialism, extractive colonialism, trade and planter colonialism, and settler colonialism, transform Katniss’s identity, developing her postcolonial identity throughout the course of the series.

**Postcolonial Identity in Panem: Trauma, Dehumanization, and Hybridity**

Throughout her narrative, as both a tribute in the Games and through her role as the Mockingjay, Katniss undergoes various transformations that reflect the influence of colonial power on the development of her identity. With the assumption that “concepts of personal identity and selfhood are formed in dialogue with society, with language, and with other people” (McCallum, 1999, p. 3), the effects of colonization construct postcolonial identities. Postcolonial analysis places an emphasis on “negotiation of the multiplicity of identities and subject positionings which result from displacements,
immigrations and exiles” (Shohat, 1992, p. 108) and the characters of the Hunger Games series possess complicated identities, rising against their oppressors while simultaneously suffering the effects of the colonization process. In the Hunger Games novels and films, Collins creates a narrative that allows for the historical and cultural exploration of the trauma of colonialism and Katniss’s formation and negotiation of postcolonial identity echoes the experiences of minority communities in the United States. I examine the development of Katniss’s shifting postcolonial identity in light of her colonial trauma particularly through the use of dehumanization in the identity formation of colonized tributes and the negotiation of the hybridized identity of the Mockingjay in the novels and film adaptations.

**Locating a legacy of colonial trauma in Panem.** Incorporating psychoanalysis with postcolonial theory, Ogaga (2013) examines how postcolonial identities are reconstructed in the wake of the trauma of colonization:

I propose to read postcolonial history as a history of trauma—as not just the devastating record of imperialist conquest and domination, and so the empirical damage on the materialist plane, but also that of the arguably more catastrophic injury to the psyche of the colonized. The psychological aspect of the wound of colonialism, I argue, speaks more directly to the problem of postcolonial identity, of the struggle to recover individual and collective identities shattered by the massive blows of slavery and colonialism, than is generally acknowledged. (p. 2) Ogaga looks particularly to postcolonial identities in U.S. history through an analysis of Toni Morrison’s (1987/2004) *Beloved*. Scholars (Bowers, 1990; Mohanty, 1993; Ogaga,
2013; Palladino, 2008; Prakash, 1995) have repeatedly analyzed *Beloved* as a postcolonial narrative exploring the cultural memory of and reaction to slavery in the United States. Bowers (1990) writes a strikingly postcolonial response to an apocalyptic reading of *Beloved*, arguing that the novel “does not drive toward the apocalyptic moment, but recounts the struggle of living through and beyond” as there is a focus on both the colonial past and the struggle to survive, coupled with the rebuilding and renegotiating of Sethe’s identity as a Black American in light of the slave experience in the United States (p. 60). Just as the characters of *Beloved* must navigate “through and beyond” the apocalyptic trauma and legacy of slavery in the United States, Katniss renegotiates her identity as a result of the colonial relationships established in Panem. Prakash (1995) describes *Beloved* particularly as an “exploration of the memory of the racist violence of slavery in the constitution of the contemporary North American identities” (p. 12). He notes that his intent in locating *Beloved* in the United States is “not to say that such texts are insular and nativist” but rather “they are particular and partial knowledges located in contingent constellations of the local and the extralocal” (p. 12). In a similar way, I locate the Hunger Games series specifically within colonial boundaries and the multiplicity of colonial experiences of the United States, with a dystopic narrative that explores the negotiations of postcolonial identities in the wake of the colonial experience.

Further addressing the postcolonial trauma presented in *Beloved*, Ogaga (2013) points to a “more or less clear historical referent” of the slave trade in the United States (p. 94). Morrison uses geographic and cultural referents to create a shared experience
between the readers and characters of *Beloved*, providing a “link between traumatic experience and the historical site” (Ogaga, 2013, p. 95) just as Collins repeatedly provides geographic links between Panem and the United States. Morrison (1987/2004) echoes her desire to foster a “shared experience” between reader and page in the introduction to *Beloved*:

> There would be no lobby into this house, and there would be no “introduction” into it or into the novel. I wanted the reader to be kidnapped, thrown ruthlessly into an alien environment as the first step into a shared experience with the book’s population—just as the characters were snatched from one place to another, from any place to any other, without preparation or defense. (p. xviii)

Morrison uses the beginning of her novel to situate the reader in the uncomfortable position of negotiating the unfamiliar, mimicking the removal and lack of personal agency that shape postcolonial identities. Just as Morrison’s readers are “thrown ruthlessly” into the wake of the US Civil War, the reader of *The Hunger Games* is thrust into postcolonial Panem in the opening scenes of both the novel and film adaptation. The film begins with a clip of an interview between Capitol TV personality Cesar Flickerman and Gamemaker Seneca Crane, in which Crane describes the Games as a “tradition” which “comes out of a particularly painful part of our history”—Crane suggests that the Games are a “the way we’re able to heal” from the trauma of a “rebellion,” providing a historical referent for the narrative (Jacobson, Kilik, & Ross, 2012, Opening Interview Scene). The rebellion, as previously compared to the American Revolution, resulted in further exploitation of the districts and mirrors a legacy of colonialism in the United
States. After Crane’s historical link, the film jarringly cuts to a scream in the woods. Brewster (2014) describes the imagery of these opening scenes: “cut away to a mountain road, a small wooden shack of a house, the words ‘District 12’ in the far right corner, and the sound of horrific screaming” (p. 182). The sound of a child’s scream, an auditory representation of postcolonial trauma, immediately makes the audience uncomfortable, thrust into the physical location of the colonized District 12 where Katniss appears on the day of the Reaping. Linking Katniss’s home of District 12 to the horrific scream, the film invites the audience to make associations between the bleak District 12 and the traumatic, in opposition to the elegance and technology of the interview between Crane and Flickerman. The opening scenes of the film clearly position Katniss separately from the two Capitol residents, forming and shaping her postcolonial identity as a result of this opposition between colonizer and colonized.

The first words of the novel The Hunger Games similarly force the reader into Katniss’s experience as she wakes up on Reaping Day:

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim’s warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the reaping. (Collins, 2008, p. 3)

The “day of the reaping” is an unknown fear to the reader, though the implications of the word “reaping” imply a type of harvest. Burke (2013) compares children to crops via the “reaping” that occurs each year:
Calling the day the children are selected for participation in the Games the “reaping” is purposeful—they are nothing more than a crop—and Collins reinforces this again by calling the “reaped” children “tributes,” a Latin term for the grain paid to the Roman empire by peasants or other countries as acknowledgement of submission. (p. 58)

The identities of the colonized residents of Panem are commoditized through the annual Hunger Games. Residents are identified as subjects owned and transported by the colonizer, similar to the experiences of human trafficking and the slave trade in the United States and echoing the association of colonized subjects with the physical goods that are sent to the Capitol via a form of trade colonialism. I explore this movement, particularly with reference to the trauma of slavery and its relationship to Black identity, further in Chapter 3.

**The dehumanization of a tribute.** Katniss’s experiences as a tribute in the Hunger Games reflect the particularly dehumanizing interaction of the colonizer and colonized and a multiplicity of shifting identities in the wake of the trauma of colonialism as she partakes in the Hunger Games. The symbolic positioning of her body as both an animal and as food during her physical transformation in the Capitol position her postcolonial identity. Katniss describes herself as a “plucked bird, ready for roasting” (Collins, 2008, p. 61) and “a piece of meat to be prepared for the platter” (Collins, 2008, p. 64). The Capitol subjects Katniss to the physical trauma of “painful” “tearing” and ripping of hair from her body; her preparation team removes her hair, Katniss describes it as “uprooted,” just as the Capitol has uprooted Katniss from her own home (Collins,
2008, p. 61). At this moment, Katniss describes herself feeling “intensely vulnerable” after her dehumanizing physical transformation; she is a colonial subject and a mere commodity under the colonizing gaze (Collins, 2008, p. 62). Burke (2013) describes the results of the prep team’s work: “and so Katniss enters the arena not as a human being, but as a piece of meat prepared for consumption by those too self-involved to see her as anything other than entertainment” (p. 59). The colonizers transform Katniss into a postcolonial subject, preparing her for consumption by the masses via the Games. The audience of the Games treats Katniss as property, similar to the treatment of colonized slaves in the United States (Ahuja, 2014; Finkelman, 2012). Repeated comparisons of children to commodities, particularly food, connects “our exploitation of oppressed populations who grow that food, and our far too-easy manipulation and disposal of both” (Burke, 2015, p. 546). Not only do these textual comparisons equate Katniss to the crops and food that is exploited in the colonial model of Panem, but the Capitol changes and shapes Katniss’s physical body to benefit the colonizer.

As her prep team recreates her image for the opening ceremonies and a televised interview before the Games, Katniss undergoes a dehumanizing transformation echoing what Boehmer (2005) defines as the “double vision of the colonized” as her experiences alienate her from both from her own home and the home of her colonizer (p. 115). Byrne (2015) asserts “Katniss’s clothing signals her entrapment in power inequalities, especially those of gender and class, and also serves as a continual reminder of her mortality, fragility, and dependence on state systems” (p. 46). Katniss’s costume for the Games’ opening ceremonies, her “girl on fire” unitard, both showcases her transformation by her
prep team (into an appearance more fitting for her presence in the Capitol) and “looks back in time to Katniss’s origin in District Twelve” (Byrne, 2015, p. 46). Even though the Capitol has remade and re-identified Katniss by these physical transformations, the outfit particularly “marks Katniss as a citizen of the oppressed mining district” (Byrne, 2015, p. 52). Katniss is unable to integrate fully into the world of her colonizers but receives praise for her transformation and re-identification via her physical changes and clothing. Her interview dress is covered in “reflective precious gems”, reflecting the imagery of the Capitol residents back to themselves and prompting “screams in admiration” from her prep team (Collins, 2008, p. 121). Katniss receives praise for her transformation, and when she is left alone after seeing herself via the Capitol gaze, she reexamines her own conceptualization of her postcolonial identity. Katniss realizes that other characters, and her experiences as a colonized subject, have created her new identity: “And there I am, blushing and confused, made beautiful by Cinna’s hands, desirable by Peeta’s confession, tragic by circumstance” (Collins, 2008, p. 136). Fanon (1963) describes the frequent negotiation and renegotiation of the postcolonial identity:

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?” (p. 250)

Fanon’s description of the colonial determination to remove humanity from the colonized subject is particularly salient as Katniss’s views herself as a “creature” “from another world,” after her first appearance in her interview for the Games (Collins, 2008, p. 120).
Her prep team’s compliments include, “you almost look like a human being now!” (Collins, 2008, p. 62) and Effie Trinket describes prior District 12 tributes as “savages” (Collins, 2008, p. 44) before praising Katniss and Peeta for their ability to “overcome the barbarism of [their] district” (Collins, 2008, p. 74). The colonizers give praise when the colonized subject acts within prescribed boundaries, and Katniss’s repeated interactions with members of the Capitol result in a dehumanization and recreation of her concepts of self.

The representation of Katniss as inhuman, particularly as an animal subjugated by her colonizer, reflects the animalization of the colonial subject, as Ahuja (2014) describes: “the organized subjection of racialized groups through animal figures. Animalization involves contextual comparisons between animals (as laborers, food, ‘pests,’ or ‘wildlife’) and the bodies or behaviors of racialized subjects” (p. 228). Fanon (1963) identifies animalization in the development of postcolonial identity, describing how “when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms” (p. 7), and hooks (1992) relates the objectification of Black female bodies in the United States to animalization. I explore animalization further, in relation to Black identity, in Chapter 3, as both Rue and Thresh also undergo animalization. Both the Capitol residents, and Katniss herself, animalize other characters throughout the series. Katniss, who, in spite of expressed distaste at being a “plucked bird” (Collins, 2008, p. 61), still describes a tribute from District 2 as “monstrous” (p. 45), calls another tribute “a fox-faced girl” (p. 45), and compares Rue to a bird (p. 99). As the colonized subjects interact with a power structure that repeatedly and inescapably disenfranchises them, the power structure reinforces their
characterization as powerless and inferior, causing these characters to internalize this narrative and unconsciously reinforce it in their own actions (Fanon, 1963; Nadal, 2009). Following the work of Said (1979) and Spivak (1988), I view this reading of power and development of identity as a discourse, in which knowledge and identity is “generated within the society and cultures of the colonisers” but “becomes that discourse within which the colonised may also come to see themselves” (Kennedy, 2000, p. 63). As Katniss identifies other tributes as animals, and she herself undergoes the colonial animalization, she participates in dehumanization of tributes and internalizes her own postcolonial identity.

Smyth (2014) argues that Katniss’s comparison of other characters to animals is not entirely dehumanizing, as she has an inherent connection to animals and the wilderness, though he also presents tributes as “industrialized prey” being “packaged and processed more like factory-farm animals” (p. 184). At the end of the 74th Hunger Games, fallen tributes are reborn into “muttations,” animal hybrids with human characteristics that further reinforce the animalization identification of the colonized subject (Collins, 2008, p. 331). Smyth (2014) argues that the presence of the muttations forces Katniss, Peeta, and Cato to “realize the insignificant nature of their own individualized fight for survival, as their identities, too, have been shaped and packaged by the government” (p. 187). The animalization of tributes not only reinforces colonial power dynamics and the dehumanizing association of individuals as food or product, but also displays the repeated trauma to the physical bodies of the tributes, from makeover to costume to death, all for the entertainment of the colonizer. As Thresh particularly
experiences animalization as a Black male in the arena, the transformation of tributes into animals echoes both the trauma of colonization and the trauma of slavery, carrying loaded racial implications that are further explored in Chapter 3. While Katniss’s positioning as a hunter of animalized tributes may remove her (in this scene) from the animalization by colonizing power, she ultimately is working for the Capitol, internalizing the animalization narrative thrust upon her.

**The hybridity of the Mockingjay.** The Capitol’s muttations function as hybrid identities resulting from the intersection between the colonizer and colonized. Katniss’s identity as the Mockingjay builds on a legacy of postcolonial hybridization defined as “a process of cultural interactions between the local and the global, the hegemonic and the subaltern, the centre and the periphery” (Nilan & Feixa, 2006, p. 2). Katniss’s identity as the Mockingjay shifts as she balances her own experiences as a resident of Appalachian District 12 and her experiences with her colonizers in both the Capitol and District 13, and eventually establishes a degree of autonomy as a rebellious Mockingjay at the end of the series. The mockingjay itself is a biological hybrid of the intersection between Capitol creation and natural animal, just as Katniss’s experiences in District 12 and her interactions with the Capitol and colonizing powers form her own identity. Katniss describes the interbreeding of the muttations: “the jabberjays mated with female mockingbirds, creating a whole new species that could replicate both bid whistle and human melodies” (Collins, 2008, p. 43). The mockingbird itself is female-bodied,
representative of a more idealized wilderness found in Appalachia\(^3\), while the jabberjay more overtly represents the colonial interference, originally bred specifically to memorize and repeat rebel conversations for the benefit of the colonizer. The mockingjay, an unexpected combination of the two creatures, is a symbol both thrust upon and later taken up by Katniss throughout the series and represents her hybridization as a result of colonial trauma.

Drawing on her experiences as a colonized subject, Katniss’s development of identity as the Mockingjay is “infused with the postcolonial notion of cultural hybridity, where two, and often more, cultures merge within one individual” (Burris, 2005, p. 316). Katniss’s role as a colonized resident of Appalachia particularly locates her within concepts of hybridization. Burris (2005) looks at the intersections of identity and race in Appalachia, noting how “all Appalachians could be said to embody a hybridity because of their ‘othering’ by mainstream America” (p. 317). Burris (2005) specifically looks to African American residents of Appalachia (identified as Affrilachian), and Katniss embodies an ethnic and racial mixing in her home of District 12. As the daughter of a Seam worker and a member of the merchant class, some fans view Katniss as mixed race. (These responses are further considered in Chapter 4.) Katniss’s identity as the Mockingjay builds on a legacy of hybridization present not only in the experiences of Appalachian Americans, but also as a result of the many and multilayered colonizations experienced in the United States, particularly those identities developed from the many

\(^3\) Chapter 4 examines representations of Appalachia in Panem, particularly relating to the use of nature and wilderness in the series.
internal colonies present in the contemporary United States. Smith (2008) writes: “The internal colony is used to explain the social, economic, and political experiences of hybrid identities: Mexican-Americans, black Americans, Appalachian Americans” (p. 10), as residents of internal colonies constantly interact with both the cultures of their colonized spaces and the oppression of their colonizers. The hybrid identity of the postcolonial subject appears in literature by and for African Americans (Mostern, 2000; Ogaga, 2013; Peterson, 2000; Pesch, 1993), Arab Americans (Majaj, 2000; Naficy, 1993), Asian Americans (Shankar & Srikanth, 2000; Srikanth, 2003), and Mexican Americans (Acuña, 1998; Madsen, 2003). Katniss, developing and transforming as the Mockingjay symbol, functions within the internally colonized districts of Panem and within the legacy of postcolonial identity in U.S. literature.

The identity of the Mockingjay is turbulent, as the “hybrid identity and composite culture is characterized by contradictions and instabilities” (Naficy, 1993, p. 17). Katniss sometimes embraces the role of the Mockingjay and expresses desires to rebel against her colonizer, though she also often rejects a role she feels the rebels of District 13 force upon her. This internal conflict is characteristic of hybridization (Kennedy, 2000), as the relationship with the colonial power creates the postcolonial identity (Said, 1979; Spivak, 1988). Katniss’s attributes her survival following the Quell Games in *Catching Fire* to others’ perception of her identity as the symbolic Mockingay, as the rebels rescue Katniss without her knowledge or consent. Plutarch tells her: “We had to save you because you’re the Mockingjay” and “While you live, the revolution lives” despite Katniss’s frustrations at her lack of agency (Collins, 2009, p. 386). Katniss internalizes the
discourse of her colonizers through her colonial relationship (Kennedy, 2000), as both the Capitol and the rebel leaders repeatedly name her as the Mockingjay and Katniss realizes and conceptualizes her own postcolonial identity. Katniss identifies the Mockingjay as a symbol of her postcolonial identity and recognizes the role of her colonizers in the formation of her identity:

First there were the Gamemakers, making me their star and then scrambling to recover from that handful of poisonous berries. Then President Snow, trying to use me to put out the flames of rebellion, only to have my every move become inflammatory. Next, the rebels ensnaring me in the metal claw that lifted me from the arena, designating me to be their Mockingjay, and then having to recover from the shock that I might not want the wings. And now Coin, with her fistful of precious nukes and her well-oiled machine of a district, finding it’s even harder to groom a Mockingjay than to catch one. (Collins, 2010, p. 59)

District 13 records and broadcasts Katniss as the Mockingjay, eerily similar to the pageantry of the Games, and her costume and scripting repeatedly emphasize Katniss’s lack of agency via her hybrid identity.

Hybridity can also “permit a restructuring and destabilizing of power” (Prabhu, 2007, p. 1) as the postcolonial hybrid negotiates and establishes a degree of agency in spite of colonial influence. The development and assertion of power of subaltern voices and hybrid identities serves as an example of this agency, shown in the United States in the work of Anzaldúa (1987) and Naficy (1993). Katniss explores her own autonomy, taking increased ownership of her identity as the Mockingjay, as she pushes against the
expectations of her colonizers. In *Catching Fire*, Katniss regards the jabberjay with a degree of reverence, and positions the mockingjay as a symbol of rebellion towards her colonizer:

A mockingjay is a creature the Capitol never intended to exist. They hadn’t counted on the highly controlled jabberjay having the brains to adapt to the wild, to pass on its genetic code, to thrive in a new form. They hadn’t anticipated its will to live. (Collins, 2009, p. 92)

As she progresses in her transformation, Katniss identifies with both the jabberjay and mockingjay. Katniss sees herself as “highly controlled” under the Capitol force but recognizes potential openings for adaptation and survival, if she is willing to take up the hybridized space between jabberjay and mockingbird. Katniss increasingly “becomes the physical embodiment of the mockingjay ideal” (Baker, 2014, p. 208) and finds confidence and power within a community of the disenfranchised:

A new sensation begins to germinate inside me. But it takes until I am standing on a table, waving my final goodbyes to the hoarse chanting of my name, to define it.

Power. I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed. (Collins 2010, p. 91)

After this moment, Katniss begins to commit both quiet and overt acts of rebellion against Coin and the leaders of District 13: she removes an earpiece from which Haymitch gives her orders, she works with Gale to shoot down hovercraft, and she makes plans to overthrow both Coin and Snow. Working within the hybrid identity of the Mockingjay, Katniss develops a degree of autonomy and uses her hybrid role as a “strategy of resistance” (Naficy, 1993, p. 190). It is not her rebellion against the Capitol
or her identification as the Mockingjay that makes Katniss an empowered character, but rather her decisions in which she uses the Mockingjay role to assert her postcolonial hybridity in direct opposition to both Coin and Snow.

As she has assassinates the symbol of colonial authority, Katniss asserts agency via her hybridity. Tan (2013) writes on Katniss’s shift from colonized symbol to individual autonomy, particularly noting the return of Katniss to District 12:

Katniss has liberated her world, and is finally able to come-to-terms with her own hybridity, free to mourn and heal. Katniss is no longer an object or commodity, and while she will always remain a symbol, she is free to simply watch as the world is rebuilt around her—this continuation perhaps the ultimate triumph of “the Mockingjay.” (pp. 64-65)

If Katniss’ return to home is her chance to fully create herself, outside the confines of a colonial, imperial Capitol, the scars and trauma from her experiences will never completely heal, though the eradication of a controlling government appears as progress as Katniss finds some agency in her hybrid identity as the Mockingjay. In the process of separating herself from the colonial control of both the Capitol and the rebels, Katniss experiences both physical and emotional trauma. Katniss calls her skin a “patchwork,” having pieced herself together after the repeated negotiations of her own identity (Collins, 2010, p. 352). Katniss’s hybridity echoes the experiences of other hybrid identities, such as Mexican Americans, Black Americans, and Appalachian Americans, developing identity rooted in their own heritage while negotiating new lives and transplantations. Katniss’s negotiations of power and resulting assertions of autonomy
provide potential avenues for liberatory and illuminating discourse for other internally colonized identities within the United States, offering narratives of strength and survival.

**The Hunger Games, Postcolonialism, and Restorying Mode**

Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) identify major forms of restorying, in which fans “narrate the word and the world, analyzing their lived experiences and then synthesizing and recontextualizing a multiplicity of stories in order to form new narratives” (p. 318). I explore the restorying practice of *restorying mode* here through fan representations of Katniss, in which readers experiment with modality and hybridity in ways that are both transformative and liberatory. Modes are “semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourses and types of (inter)action” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 21). Kress (2010) provides examples of modes such as “image, writing layout, speech, moving images” from which a reader can gain meaning (p. 79). Fan responses to the Hunger Games use a variety of modes when restorying Katniss’s postcolonial identity, including written text, image, speech, and moving images, contributing to conversations of Katniss finding empowerment through hybridity. The fan practice of cosplaying is a manner in which fans restory mode by transforming the written text of the novels and moving picture of the films into live action performances, putting on the clothing and identity of Katniss. As fans take on Katniss’s identity through cosplay, they restory mode in ways that can link empathy to postcolonial identities.

Lamerichs (2011) defines cosplay in four elements: “a narrative, a set of clothing, a play or performance before spectators, and a subject or player” (1.2). Cosplayers typically make their own costumes or commission costumes from other artists, which range
from replicas of film or television costume designs to unique recreations and interpretations of a character’s appearance. Just as fan fiction and fan art extends narratives of the Hunger Games series, cosplay allows readers to restory the mode of the narrative itself, adding elements of live-action performance and speech, through what I argue is empathy-building interaction with a character’s identity. Candy Valentina portrays Katniss as the Mockingjay in 2015:

![Figure 4. Candy Valentina as Katniss, photographed by Justine Louise Photography (GeekxGirls.com, 2015)](image)

Valentina restories mode through her performance of Katniss, putting on the character’s identity and showcasing Katniss’s strength through her role as the Mockingjay. In the series of images from the photoshoot, Valentina poses with a bow and arrow and explores a destroyed building in her images. Valentina speaks of the experience and Katniss’s
identity: “Katniss is such a strong character, and we really tried to portray this with this set of images” (GeekxGirls.com, 2015, para. 2). Valentina performs Katniss’s strength and moves Katniss’s postcolonial narrative from the fictional Panem to the “real” world, restorying mode in ways that celebrate and highlight facets of Katniss’s identity. “As a fan practice, [cosplay] creates an intimate and complex relation between the fan and the character” and as Valentina performs herself as Katniss, she performs the many and complex identities that Katniss performs in the novels and films (Lamerichs, 2011, 4.2).

Fans often integrate parts of their own identity into the cosplay experience. Eleven year-old Alanna Worrall put on Katniss’s wedding gown, created by Marie Porter, for a fan convention in 2014. In the first image (Figure 5), Worrell interprets Katniss as a strong and reserved woman, while in the second image (Figure 6), Worrell inserts her own identity into the character of Katniss, spinning and laughing:
Figure 5. Alanna Worrall as Katniss, photographed by Studio Laguna Photography (Hannerman, 2014)

Figure 6. Alanna Worrall spinning as Katniss, photographed by Studio Laguna Photography (Hannerman, 2014)
Her mother commented on the experience: “Alanna LOVES to spin so several of the photos have her spinning in them as well as a very non-Katniss like completely joyful smile” (GeekxGirls.com, 2014, para. 3). As Worrall restories mode through performance, she adopts Katniss’s identity and inserts her own identity into the role of Katniss. Cosplay particularly allows fans to take on the identity of a character as cosplay “transforms, performs, and actualizes an existing story in close connection to the fan’s own identity” (Lamerichs, 2011, 1.2). Through these actualizations, fans deeply connect to characters and have the potential to use these connections for liberatory means, developing empathy for characters through performance. Worrall, now fourteen, describes herself as “a teen with a passion for cosplaying and community service” as she works to integrate her experiences with fandom into activism with social justice aims (Worrall, 2017). Lamerichs (2011) suggests that “the identity of the fictional character rubs off on the identity of the player. The values or features of a character are projected onto the player” and Worrall’s integration of social justice work into her own life, both within and outside of cosplaying, suggests that she may have taken up facets of Katniss’s identity into her own creation of self (5.3).

When fans perform the identity of Katniss, they are able to interact with postcolonial narratives of liberation and social justice. Fans extend identities present in the Hunger Games series through their use of restorying mode via cosplaying, embedding themselves into the character of Katniss and taking on the power and motivation Katniss represents as she fights for justice in Panem. By restorying the mode of the texts and films, and performing and extending Katniss’s postcolonial identity, fan cosplaying
Katniss both enrich the world of the story (Lamerichs, 2011) and create and artistic space in which readers can develop empathy to marginalized characters through the experience of performance.
Chapter 3: Depictions of Black U.S. History and Black Identity

As I locate the narrative of the Hunger Game series with cultural geographies of Black U.S. history and Black identity in the United States, fans of the series interact with wider concepts of racial identity and childhood. This chapter illuminates ways that Black history events, beginning with slavery in the antebellum south, are mirrored in Panem, then examines the portrayal of Black identity for Rue and Thresh in the novels, films, and fan response. I problematize fan response in this chapter, as some fan responses maintain racist discourse and reify colonial power relations through their portrayals of Black identities. I challenge these responses through the conclusion of this chapter, presenting alternative fan responses that subvert stereotypical portrayals of Black identity through a lens of restorying perspective (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). Not all fan response is liberatory and not all fans have intent of fostering social change with their responses to racism and stereotyping in the series. The conclusion of this chapter examines ways in which fan fiction and fan art can potentially serve as a revolutionary means of increasing Black representation and complex Black characterization in popular young adult novels and films, though there is much work to be done.

Children’s and young adult literature often underrepresents and/or misrepresents Black characters (Dangora, 2010; MacCann, 2001, Myers, 2014). MacCann (2001) describes the presence of Black characters in literature for children: “with the exception
of a few abolitionist narratives, children's books have generally treated Black characters stereotypically, or they have excluded them entirely” (p. xvi). Dangora (2010) similarly describes Black characters in young adult literature and popular media as “absent, underrepresented, and/or misrepresented” (p. 19). Fantasy literature, as a genre, typically features white protagonists (Young, 2016) and Hood (2009) notes the absence of Black characters specifically within young adult science fiction and fantasy, arguing “a lack of self-images in this literature can have a negative effect on the psyche of young readers.”

The absence of Black characters, and the misrepresentation or stereotyping of Black characters who are present, not only maintains racist hegemony but also conflicts with the imaginative themes of the genre itself (Leonard, 1997). In examining dystopian literature, Gómez (2014) describes a lack of racial diversity shrouded behind “post-racial” arguments, in which authors imply that Black characters do not exist in these hypothetical futures. By including Rue and Thresh as specifically Black characters, Collins asserts that race does exist, and I propose that portrayals of Rue and Thresh be placed into conversations of racial cultural geographies and histories in the United States, similar to Lavender’s (2011) consideration of “historical consciousness” in which elements of history and fantasy overlap in the examination of race and science fiction (p. 8). Collins has relegated the Black characters within the Hunger Games novels and films primarily, although not entirely, to a single district (District 11) and often portrays them in stereotypical or racist ways, following historical representations of Black identities in the United States.
Rue, Thresh, and the residents of District 11 are portrayed by Black Americans in the Hunger Games film adaptations. While some scholars (Moore & Coleman, 2015; Valby, April 7, 2011) have interpreted Katniss as mixed-race, due to her “olive-skin” (Collins, 2008, p. 8), compared to Rue’s specifically “brown skin” (Collins, 2008, p. 98), Katniss (and other residents of the Seam) are portrayed by white characters in the film adaptations of the series, marking a racial difference between their district and the residents of District 11. This dissertation asserts Katniss’s identity to be that of a (potentially non-white) Appalachian (explored in Chapter 4) whereas Rue, Thresh, and the residents of District 11 are specifically identified as Black, and I explore the tensions and conversations surrounding the decision to racially segregate one district so blatantly.

Suzanne Collins is a white author, writing a series with major settings in Appalachia and the U.S. South. I am a white researcher and, while white researchers and white authors can elevate the voices of Black authors and characters, they do not have the right to tell stories of Black identity (Bishop, 2003). I aim to engage in research in a way that “could inform the study and criticism of literature about parallel-culture people produced by outsiders” (Bishop, 2003, p. 30). My critique of Collins writing about Black characters is not exhaustive nor representative of the Black community in the U.S., but rather I assert that the representation of District 11, located in the geographic U.S. South,

4 When discussing Katniss and Gale in an interview, Collins describes “ethnic mixing” that has occurred in Panem, though when she is questioned about Thresh and Rue, she explicitly describes them as “African American” (Valby, April 7, 2011). In the same 2011 interview, Director Gary Ross states “Thresh and Rue will be African-American. It’s a multi-racial culture and the film will reflect that” (Valby, April 7, 2011). The racial mixing of District 12 seems to suggest a post-racial society far in the future (Along with assertions of “ethnic mixing,” Collins describes “hundreds of years have passed from now” when discussing the races of Katniss and Gale), yet Rue and Thresh are purposefully Black both in the novels and the films (Valby, April 7, 2011).
and the Black characters living within District 11, enter into wider conversations on race in children’s and young adult literature.

As Collins locates District 11 in the South, I find comparisons in the narratives of Southern U.S. literature. Southern literature is a particular genre, not only via its geographic location but also through tensions that challenge traditionally ideals in the United States (Greerson, 2010; Romine, 2002). Greerson (2010) writes:

our South appears in U.S. literature to embody both sides of the disavowed binary: simultaneously colonial and colonized, it diverges from the nation writ large on the basis of its exploitativeness—as the location of the internal colonization of Africans and African Americans in the United States—and on the basis of its exploitation—as the location of systemic underdevelopment, military defeat, and occupation. (p. 3)

Greerson (2010) describes the south as “othered” (p. 11) and discernably separate from other US literature and experience, as the literature of the South carries with it “enduring associations—slavery, white supremacy, underdevelopment, poverty, backwardness” (p. 1). Greerson (2010) particularly notes that these associations “bluntly contradict the national ideal” and relate Southern literature to a broader power relationship derived from colonization (p. 1). By examining the erasure and misrepresentation of Black characters, this chapter explores the tensions created when literature upholds a national legacy of racism that has emerged from a complex history of colonization and slavery.
The South is “othered” both in US history and in Panem. Geographies of race and spatial theory have particular relevance to the segregation of Panem into districts, particularly as District 11 is populated by Black residents. Price (2010) notes the use of spatial organization in geographies of race as “people and places that are racialized or otherwise stigmatized are literally and figuratively erased from the official landscape” (p. 153). Spatial organization in Panem serves to establish control via districts, and coupling this organization with geographies of race and racism complicates the narrative of District 12. Spatial organization “has always been a mode of [racialized] social control and differentiation” (Ford, 1992, p. 117) and ghettos (Woods, 2002; Wilson, 2007) have served as “a long-standing form of spatial isolation, concentrate and reinforce other dimensions of marginalization” (Price, 2010, p. 153). These theories and geographies guide this analysis of District 11 as a racialized, othered space within Panem in which Black characters are erased and stereotyped.

**Black History and Black Movements in the United States and Panem**

Black U.S. History spans a time from the first slaves forcibly brought to the United States in the 1500s to inequalities that permeate contemporary U.S. culture. This section focuses on three periods of Black U.S. history: antebellum Slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Lives Matter Movement, showcasing cultural geographies of the United States that are reflected in the Hunger Games novels and films. I align scenes from Panem with these particular U.S. cultural geographies to allow for a closer negotiation of the ways in which the Hunger Games series is intimately connected
to Black U.S. history, setting a foundation for the analysis of Black identity in the novels, films, and fan response.

**Antebellum slavery.** District 11 shows similarities to the antebellum South and a legacy of U.S. slavery through power dynamics and cultural signs. The district is geographically positioned south of the region of Appalachia and is particularly known for its agricultural production, aligning it with the US South. The reader’s first encounter with the geography of District 11 appears in *Catching Fire* when Katniss leaves a snowy District 12 on her Victory Tour and exits the train during a service stop where she remarks on the landscape: “the air’s warm and balmy against my skin. The trees still wear green leaves. How far south have we come in a day?” (Collins, 2009, p. 50). Not only is District 11 geographically located in the US South, but economic and cultural parallels are shown through the exploitation of Black workers in an agricultural community, the use of violence as a means of discipline over Black bodies, and the role of children in enslaved communities.

As explored in Chapter 2, the planter colonial relationship between District 11 and the Capitol evokes slave narratives in U.S. history. Like the slaves of the antebellum South, Black men, women, and children are forced to grow food in which they are not allowed to eat. Upon seeing District 11, Katniss describes the expansive crops and the roles of the residents:

Now the crops begin, stretched out as far as the eye can see. Men, women, and children wearing straw hats to keep off the sun straighten up, turn our way, take a moment to stretch their backs as they watch our train go by. I can see orchards in
the distance and I wonder if that’s where Rue would have worked, collecting the fruit from the slimmest branches at the tops of the trees. Small communities of shacks—by comparison the houses in the Seam are upscale—spring up here and there, but they’re all deserted. Every hand must be needed for the harvest.

(Collins, 2009, p. 55)

Fricke (2014) alludes to parallels between the series and the antebellum South: “the novels also hint at the connection between race and social inequality with regard to District 11” as the crops and violence “are reminiscent of slavery in the U.S. South before the Civil War” (p. 21). In the same geographic location of District 11, similar scenes appeared in the antebellum South as “most blacks were enslaved and most worked as agricultural laborers” (West, 2006, p. 1094). Brown (2015) recognizes parallels to African American cultural tradition: “Rue tells Katniss that workers in the fields sing work songs throughout the day, much as slaves in the antebellum South did” (p. 194). Through these geographic and cultural clues, Collins builds upon a legacy of U.S. slavery with imagery of crops, forced labor, and cotton fields.

In addition to slave imagery found in the series, the surveillance and punishment in District 11 echo Foucauldian discipline that has been linked to racialized punishment in the United States. While Foucault particularly ignores “the specificity of American slavery as a part of the history of the U.S. prison system” in *Discipline and Punish* (Huffer, 2010, p. 6), Huffer (2010) and Davis (2006) illuminate ways in which slave labor and race in US history relate to Foucault’s writings on discipline and power. Scholars (Pulliam, 2014; Tan, 2013; Van Dyke, 2012; Wezner, 2012) have linked
Foucault to the Hunger Games series, and Tan (2013) particularly notes the use of public punishments as an “instrument of political control” (p. 60). In analyzing surveillance via Peacekeepers and punishments via whipping, I link both the antebellum South and Foucault to the Hunger Games series.

The use of exclusively Black residents of District 11 alongside white Peacekeepers repeatedly echoes the historical roles of overseers and slave workers. Film stills of District 11 show Black families picking cotton in expansive fields (as opposed to more generalized references to “crops” and “orchards” referenced in the novels), guarded by white-clad “peacekeepers” (Collins, 2009, p. 55) (Figure 7). Sorisio (2002) describes surveillance historically, as “major mechanism for maintaining power over slaves” in the United States (p. 81). Scenes of District 11 evoke imagery of slaved individuals picking cotton, supervised by white overseers (Figure 8):
Figure 7. A Peacekeeper in District 11 (Jacobson, Kilik, & Lawrence, 2013)

Figure 8. Overseer on horseback (Library of Congress, 1917)
Exclusively Black residents in District 11 (in both the film and novels) alongside white-clad Peacekeepers echo the historical roles of overseers and slaves. The Peacekeepers serve to discipline residents of Panem through both discipline and punishment in District 11.

The Hunger Games series builds on a legacy of public brutality and violence against Black bodies that is particularly associated with slavery in the United States, including the frequent use of whipping (Schwartz 2006). Hopkinson (2006) describes the violence, particularly whipping: “the work itself was hard enough, but the brutality of the owners and overseers caused even more misery” (p. 22). Revealed both during her conversations with Rue in The Hunger Games and her visit to District 11 in Catching Fire, the severity of punishments present in District 11 shock Katniss. Similar to the whipping of Black slaves in the antebellum South, Rue tells Katniss how the Peacekeepers "whip you and make everyone watch" (Collins, 2008, p. 282). There is a brutality in District 11 that is notably absent in District 12, Katniss even describes her own home as a “safe haven” in comparison to Rue’s district (Collins, 2008, p. 284). District 11 calls to mind a United States that is deeply rooted in racism as Black bodies are whipped and killed as a means of establishing power and discipline among enslaved subjects, and these violent events are considered “not that uncommon an occurrence” for the residents of District 11 (Collins, 2008, p. 282). Fricke (2014) also comments on the “public whippings” of the series, as public demonstrations of power and violence evoke images of inequality, racism, and social injustices that merit discussion and criticism (p. 21). These blatant portrayals of violence against Black citizens echo a legacy of U.S.
slave narratives, a “ritual debasement” that is not only punishment but also a
defamiliarizing trope, as Varsam (2003) describes: “slave narratives describe these events
not merely to shock but also to reveal both the double standards and hypocrisy practiced
by the slave masters as well as their cruelty” (p. 212). The violence experienced by Rue
and the residents of District 11 aligns the series with a legacy of U.S. slave narratives
while also urging the reader to question the dystopian relationship between colonized and
colonizer.

Children are particularly important to the narrative of the Hunger Games series
and also serve as a critical method of political control. The Capitol maintains power over
its citizens by threatening children, a dynamic that echoes relationships between slave
families of the South. Schwartz (2006) examines childbirth and family relationships in
the antebellum South, describing both the necessity of children born into slavery
(particularly after importation of slaves ended in 1808) and the power relations between
mother, child, and white slaveowner. Children hold a degree of resistance, and “could
fish, trap animals, gather fruit and nuts, and otherwise secure food” both for slaveowners
but also as a supplement to food allotments given to enslaved families (p. 11). Katniss is
able to hunt and gather for her community, but both she and the other children of Panem
ultimately work for the Capitol. Schwartz (2006) describes typical tasks of enslaved
children in the antebellum South:

Children could be counted upon to assist with cleaning, cooking, and caring for
younger siblings. They gathered chips and wood for fuel and herbs for making
medicine. At times they lent a hand to parents in completing chores dictated by owners. (p. 11)

Rue similarly forages for food for her younger siblings and describes children working in the orchards of District 11. Enslaved children take on roles to support their families in both Panem and the antebellum South.

Varsam (2003) describes how children are particularly used in slave narratives, as “the violence of slavery is crucially extended to the forced separation of families, with children sold away from their mothers” (p. 212). Slave owners threatened Black children, viewed them as commodities and took them from their families as a means of political control (O’Donovan, 2009; Varsam 2003). The Capitol similar treats tributes as commodities in Panem, transporting them to the Capitol similar to the transportation of slaves throughout the South. Tan (2013) explores the trope of sacrificial children in Collins’ series: “the commodification of children is part of a Foucaultian ritual of punishment” and emphasizes the Peacekeepers’ role as a means of creating fear and political control (p. 60). As the Capitol forces children to work for the Capitol or to fight one another to the death, Panem’s citizens undergo what Longenberger (2015) describes as “a constant state of terror and fear, which subjugates them into submission” (p. 80). O’Donovan (2009) similarly describes enslaved children as “a homegrown means to dilute the collective and troubling power of their elders” (p. 89). Just as public punishment and Foucauldian discipline shapes the enslaved residents of Panem, the commodification of children reinforces political rule and echoes a legacy of U.S. slavery. The portrayal of enslaved children, public punishments including whippings, and the
presence of white Peacekeepers in the Black agricultural community of District 11 represent reflections of the antebellum South. These markers of antebellum slavery reinforce historic power relationships and racism that are transferred to the experience of the characters in Panem.

**The Civil Rights Movement.** Systemic racism and racial inequality certainly were not eradicated with the abolition of slavery, and the rebellious and liberatory narratives of the Hunger Games series reflect similar movements towards equality among Black Americans. Readers can find echoes of the Civil Rights Movement in the role of children in Panem, the use of protests and revolutionary figures, and the historical inspirations to music used in the film adaptations. The Civil Rights Movement is an important and revolutionary time in Black U.S. history, and the major characters of the Hunger Games series interact with key cultural geographies associated with the era.

Children play an important role when the series is aligned with the Civil Rights Movement. Rue’s death is a major catalyst for the revolutionary narrative in *The Hunger Games*, driving Katniss to question the government and residents of District 11 to rebel against the Peacekeepers. Gignac (2012) and Manley (2014) compares Rue’s death to the death of four young girls during the Birmingham Church Bombing in 1963. The bombing “was a pivotal turning point” which incited protests and put political pressure towards the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 (Smith, 1997). Sandra (2012) writes a response to Rue’s death on her blog: “As I sat there weeping like a fracking baby, I could not stop thinking about the civil rights movement. Seeing those people pushed to rage by the slaughter of their daughter, Rue made 100% sense to me” (para. 10). Sandra expresses
the emotion felt by protesters, linking the events of The Hunger Games to a legacy of revolution and the fight for freedom:

For black people, I could riot. For our freedom and safety I would riot if it came to that. I would hope I’d do it peacefully as Dr. King did.

It was a powerful scene in the movie for me. That scene that made me so grateful for the many blacks (and whites!) who were brutally murdered in the Civil Rights Movement for the freedom of African Americans. (Sandra, 2012, para. 13-14)

Rue’s death inspires Sandra to reflect on both historical and contemporary inequities, just as the deaths of four young girls in the Birmingham Church Bombing shocked many in the United States and spurred people to protest. The deaths of innocent children are a catalyst to both the Civil Rights Movement and the uprisings in Panem.

Katniss’s response to Rue’s death (a burial, her victory tour speech) emphasizes the inequities of Panem and encourages revolutionary action in District 11 via the gift of bread, raised hand salutes, and later physical and more violent rebellions. Imagery of the revolts in District 11 after Rue’s death calls to mind protests and riots of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly those in Birmingham following the bombing. Police forces in Birmingham turned fire hoses and dogs on Black protesters in 1963 (Berger, 2011; Manley, 2014), and we can see police dogs echoed in scenes with canine muttations in The Hunger Games. The Capitol’s response to protestors echo the imbalance of power and inequity that was challenged during the Civil Rights Movement. Janet Manley (2014) links President Snow to Alabama governor George Wallace: in an address to Panem,
President Snow chants “Panem today, Panem tomorrow, Panem forever” (para. 1), and Manley (2014) aligns the propaganda-style film with a statement from George Wallace’s 1963 inaugural address: “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” (para. 3). Wallace was an outspoken opponent to the Civil Rights Movement and fought equality during his time in power in Alabama.

Other major figures in the series hold similarities to various historical figures in the Civil Rights Movement. Via (2016) compares Katniss to both Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, by teaching The Hunger Games alongside texts including Letter from a Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King Jr. and The Ballot and the Bullet by Malcolm X:

In each essay, King and Malcolm X acknowledge and condemn the injustices that have been committed against African American communities. King stresses the difference between just and unjust laws, which can be applied to the ways in which the Capitol inflicts unjust laws upon the districts. (p. 276-277)

There are reflections of Civil Rights activists in the actions of Katniss and other residents of Panem rising against their oppressors. Frankel (2012) compares Haymitch Abernathy to a potential namesake, Ralph David Abernathy, Sr., who “was Martin Luther King’s close friend and helper in the American Civil Rights Movement” (p. 46). Abernathy helped organized marches and protests and later campaigned to end hunger in the United States; as Frankel (2012) describes: “in a book called The Hunger Games, it would hardly be surprising to find an homage to the man who did so much to try to end hunger for the impoverished in America” (p. 46). Carpenter (2012) makes a similar comparison,
comparing Haymitch to Ralph Abernathy, which gives “hints of his importance as a revolutionary figure, battling for equality and civil rights in Panem” (p. 40). Linking Haymitch to one of Martin Luther King’s advisors opens a potential to compare Katniss or Peeta to Martin Luther King, Jr. though Katniss uses violence where Dr. King advocated for pacifism (Balkind, 2014) and neither are Black leaders from within District 11, though their actions do incite District 11 to revolutionary action. Rue, as a black character from District 11, may have closer parallels to Martin Luther King, Jr., as she inspires (initially peaceful) revolution in District 11, though she does not have the same associations with Haymitch.

Readers can hear echoes of Civil Rights protests through the use of music in the Hunger Games film adaptations. During many of the major protest scenes of The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1, Jennifer Lawrence sings “The Hanging Tree” and the song includes chanting that feels eerily reminiscent to historical protest songs. Granger (2010), in a blog post published years before Mockingjay’s film premiere, compares the song to Billie Holliday’s “Straight Fruit,” a Civil Rights anthem in which the lyrics describe “black bodies hang from the Southern trees.” Mason (2014) similarly describes how Billie Holliday’s song was inspired by an image of two lynched Black men, comparing Holliday’s song with the lyrics in Mockingjay – Part 1, which invite a lover to “wear a necklace of rope, side by side with me” poetically aligning the two songs (Collins, 2010, p. 124). Mae (2015) writes:

The entire tune and tone of the song heavily mimics the folk songs sung by Civil Rights marchers, and it reinforces the idea that “The Hanging Tree” can be
viewed as a direct reference to the awful struggles that black Americans went through pre-Civil Rights Era, and a metaphor for what the citizens of Panem are fighting against. (para. 6)

“The Hanging Tree” functions as a revolutionary anthem in Panem, just as “Strange Fruit” served during the Civil Rights Movement, drawing upon the discourses of both contemporary and historical racial movements in the United States.

**Black Lives Matter.** While readers can find echoes of the antebellum South and the Civil Rights Movement in the Hunger Games novels and films, the series also holds contemporary parallels to the Black Lives Matter Movement. The first film adaptation of *The Hunger Games* was released in the United States on March 23, 2012, less than a month after Trayvon Martin’s death (on February 26, 2012), during which time the media and the U.S. public were entrenched in discussions of the innocence of a Black child and racial inequalities. As Americans discussed Trayvon Martin’s innocence, the death of Rue (a young, Black child) appeared on screen. Various bloggers and scholars (Holmes, 2012; HungerGamesTweets, 2012; Sandra, 2012; Suzanne, 2012; Vilson, 2012; Wang, 2012) link Rue to Trayvon and discussions of contemporary racial inequities in the United States.

The premiere weekend of *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1* brought with it the murder of Tamir Rice who, at twelve years-old, was the same age as Rue in the series. Rice’s death, involving a white police officer, paralleled on-screen moments of white Peacekeepers shooting Black residents of District 11. *Mockingjay – Part 1*
appeared in theaters during the second wave of the Ferguson unrest—the first wave having occurred between August 9, 2014 and August 25, 2014, after the shooting of eighteen year-old Michael Brown. When white officer Darren Wilson was not indicted for the murder, a second wave of protests occurred from November 24, 2014 to December 2, 2014. It was hard to watch the rebellions of *Mockingjay – Part 1* and not immediately see parallels to the simultaneous news coverage of both Tamir Rice’s murder and the events in St. Louis.

During protests in St. Louis, protesters spraypainted the phrase “If we burn, you burn with us” in a St. Louis neighborhood. Katniss yells the phrase as a rebellious message to President Snow in *Mockingjay – Part 1*, both challenging the government in Panem and urging other residents to recognize the inequities and destruction occurring as a result of President Snow’s rule. When protestors take up the message in Ferguson, the phrase calls to mind the same themes of rebellion, inequality, and threat. Saraiya (2014) challenges film viewers of *Mockingjay – Part 1* to connect the events in Panem to those in Ferguson: “Turn on the television: We are witnessing an hour of struggle between those without power and those who are eager to hold onto their own” (para. 8). Saraiya (2014) links *Mockingjay – Part 1* to the events in Ferguson, emphasizing the power struggle present in the contemporary United States that is inextricably related to race and tied to Black American history.

Fans discussed parallels between Ferguson and the Hunger Games series (Earls, 2014; Nakagawa, 2014; Wesley, 2014), comparing the U.S. government to that of the
Capitol, and the uprising to the rebellion in the dystopian series. Philabaum (2015) writes on his personal Tumblr:

You want to know what I noticed?

In the Hunger Games, all of district 11, which is basically the size of a state, broke out into violent riots when Rue died. The ever brutal peacekeepers only broke out riot shields and fire hoses. The same day, the government made an attempt to calm the riots without killing everyone.

Ferguson, which is only a single town, with completely nonviolent protests, has a paramilitary force deployed with the armor you’d see on soldiers in Afghanistan, armored vehicles, firearms, tear gas, and the police are even invading people’s homes. The federal government has yet to so much as comment on this after 5 or 6 days.

A fictional, dystopian society is more lenient than the United States, “home of the free”

Philabaum, while not explicitly mentioning race, compares District 11 to Ferguson, aligning Black fictional characters with Black Americans. Similarly, the website OddsinOurFavor.org showcased collages that show direct comparisons of imagery in Ferguson to film stills of *Mockingjay – Part 1*, specifically showing the militarized forces discussed in Philabaum’s post:
The imagery is striking, showing white peacekeepers paralleling white police officers and protestors organizing against a militarized force, dismantling the boundaries between the real and fictional and reflecting US current events with a defamiliarizing immediacy.

Another image by OddsInOurFavor.org particularly shows the division of race in both Panem and Ferguson, Missouri. The image shows Peacekeepers (dressed entirely in white uniforms) restraining a Black resident of District 11, and pointing their guns at him—these images are paired with photographs of white police forces and Black men in Ferguson:
These fan-made images show the suffering inflicted upon Black citizens throughout Black U.S. history, combining the power dynamics and violence of the antebellum South and militarized responses of the Civil Rights Movement and reinforcing the lasting effects of inequality and racism into the contemporary United States. The imagery and experience of Black residents of Panem urges contemporary readers to compare fictional experiences to both historic and contemporary injustices.
Black Identity in Panem: Erasure and Animalization

Readers and scholars (Moore & Coleman, 2015; Thomas, 2014; Wilson, 2012) have critiqued Suzanne Collins for her refusal to critically address the inclusion of Black characters in her novels. With the intentional descriptions of skin color and the casting of Black actors, “Rue and Thresh’s racial difference becomes highlighted, segregating them on the screen and inviting perception of these characters as markedly different than the white tributes, while providing no clear reason for it” (Moore & Coleman, 2015, p. 958). Their Black identities separate and Other Rue and Thresh from other resident of Panem, explored here in terms of erasure and animalization in the novels, films, and fan response. I explore fan response throughout this dissertation is as liberatory and activist, though I also found instances of fan response that uphold racist and stereotypical portrayals of black characters. These portrayals are examined here, with liberatory fan response explored through a lens of restorying perspective later in the chapter.

The erasure of Rue’s Black childhood. Rue’s development of identity intersects with issues of Black childhood and the erasure of Black women in narratives. Allahar (2005) describes: “erasure is in large part the act of neglecting, looking past, minimizing, ignoring, or rendering invisible an other” (p. 125). As Collins identifies Rue as a Black child, and I create a parallel between her identity and that of colonized U.S. slaves, Rue’s identity undergoes erasure similar to that of Black fictional women in U.S. literature. Black women have historically struggled with representation via their erasure in mainstream feminism (Moffett-Bateau, 2015; Spellman, 1982) and many bloggers have questioned the absence of Black characters in science fiction (Geller, 2015; Young,
Fan responses to the casting of Amandla Stenberg reflect Rue’s erasure as a Black adolescent girl, as do her repeated comparisons to Prim, a white character.

There was an intense social media backlash toward the casting of Rue’s character when mainstream media reported the casting decisions for the first film adaptation of *The Hunger Games* (Holmes, 2012). White readers could not believe that this “magical wisp of a tribute” (Collins, 2008, p. 126) was a Black child, despite Collins’ insistence of Rue having “satiny brown skin” in her novel (Collins, 2008, p. 98). Author Suzanne (2012) compiles a list of the tweets in response to Rue’s casting in a post titled “Trayvon Martin, The Hunger Games, and Me” that includes numerous instances of Black erasure. One user Tweets “why is Rue a little black girl” while another suggests that producers chose to make white characters Black, inserting racial diversity where the reader had imagined the characters as white: “why did the producers make all the good characters black” (Suzanne, 2012). Anna Holmes (2012) looks at a similar compilation of tweets, from the “Hunger Games Tweets” Tumblr, describing “the a-hundred-and-forty-character-long outbursts were microcosms of the ways in which the humanity of minorities is often denied and thwarted, and they underscored how infuriatingly conditional empathy can be” (para. 10). Moore and Coleman (2015) explain the disconnect between Rue’s Black identity and white readers’ perceptions of her character: “the young fans who wrote the tweets expressed an unwillingness to define Rue in any way except as an ‘Other,’” reflecting deep-seated prejudices stemming from historically-reiterated representations of race” (p. 962). The tweets are direct evidence of white readers admitting their own erasure of Rue’s Black identity.
Repeated comparisons between Rue and Prim also erase Rue’s identity as a Black female. Collins first introduces Rue, and compares her to Katniss’s younger sister, when Katniss sees Rue on a televised recording of the Reaping and is surprised by Rue’s young age: "and, most hauntingly, a twelve-year old girl from District 11. She has dark brown skin and eyes, but other than that, she's very like Prim in size and demeanor" (Collins, 2008, p. 45). Katniss feels a connection and responsibility to Rue, aligning the youngest competitor with the sister she left behind in District 12. This emotional connection fosters a sisterly relationship between Katniss and Rue, however also risks erasing Rue’s identity as a Black adolescent girl. Thomas (2014) describes “Prim is a much more familiar figure in children’s literature—the guileless, golden girl child often is the counterweight that balances the evil that the protagonist must overcome” and we frequently see Prim used as an angelic and innocent figure spurring Katniss towards survival in the violent games (para. 18). At Rue’s death, a pivotal moment in Katniss’s transformation and the impending revolution in Panem, Katniss equates the two young girls: “Sing. My throat is tight with tears, hoarse from smoke and fatigue. But it this is Prim’s, I mean, Rue’s last request, I have to at least try” (Collins, 2008, p. 234). Prim effectively replaces Rue in the narrative, just as white readers replaced her Black identity with that of a blond child.

Rue’s erasure as a character is intimately connected to concepts of childhood innocence. When many U.S. readers see Rue as an innocent child they simultaneously imagine her as white because children’s literature has repeatedly represented and equated innocence with whiteness. Bernstein (2011) describes the juxtaposition of white and Black children of historic children’s literature in which “angelic white children were
contrasted with [Black] pickaninnies so grotesque as to suggest that only white children were children” (p. 16). Literature showing Black children has often presented them as threatening or monstrous. For as long as readers have considered children to be innocent and angelic, literature has overwhelmingly coded this innocence as white, effectively objectifying and removing personhood from Black youth (Bernstein, 2011).

Ebony Elizabeth Thomas (2014) places *The Hunger Games* and Rue’s character in conversation with Harper Lee’s (1960/1988) *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which mockingbirds are symbols of innocence (“they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird”) (Lee, 1960/1988, p. 119). Thomas (2014) writes: “just as the doomed mockingbird, Tom Robinson, is the central symbol of Harper Lee’s classic, Rue from District 11 is the doomed mockingjay of the Games” (para. 7). We are accustomed to associating Katniss to the mockingjay symbol, but Thomas, also echoing Bernstein, identifies the tension of having a Black child serve as a symbol of innocence in an U.S. children’s text:

I believe that Collins’ construction of Rue as the symbol of innocence meant that some reader automatically imagined her as White. After all, in what universe is an older Black tween innocent? Certainly not in American schools, with the often noted discipline gap. Certainly not in contemporary children’s literature, where Black kids and teens are underrepresented… and when they do appear, are sometimes viewed as “unlikeable” or “unrelatable.” (Thomas, 2014, para. 16)

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8 Thomas is not the first to link *The Hunger Games* to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Rea (2012) also makes a comparison between the two books in a blog post, examining Scout and Katniss.
Contextualizing Rue’s Black identity with Black U.S. history illuminates why white readers find it difficult to imagine a complex, Black girl in such a popular series and, instead, erase her Black identity entirely.

**Thresh and the animalization of Black masculinity.** Where Collins predominantly portrays Rue as small and invisible, she frequently describes Thresh as large and strong. I examine Katniss as an animalized tribute in Chapter 2 as a result of her postcolonial identity, and Thresh’s animalization intersects with the physicality of his Black masculinity, particularly as Anuja (2014) describes the “racialized subject” (p. 228). Collins frequently describes Thresh in ways that reflect his strength and power, equating his Black identity with a threatening nature. Moore and Coleman (2015) point to scenes in which Collins compares Thresh to an animal, reinforcing his stereotypical portrayal: “identification of Thresh as a wild animal is reinforced when he conceals himself in tall grasses during the Games, attacking and killing others who enter his territory” (p. 958). When the tributes appear as muttations at the end of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss knows which is Thresh as “Who else could jump so high?” (Collins, 2008, p. 335). The muttations are “umistakably human” yet grosteque, they are uncanny animalizations of the children forced to fight in the Hunger Games (Collins, 2008, p. 334). Peeta remarks “What did they do to them?” indicating that the animalization of the tributes is a result of the control of the Capitol, as described in Chapter 2 (Collins, 2008, p. 335). While all of the children, not only the Black characters, experience animalization in this scene, the use of animalization for Thresh and Rue, particularly holds loaded, racial stereotypes and the association of Black male adolescence with violence appears
throughout the novels and films as Thresh is frequently represented in physical, animalistic terms.

Panlay (2016) writes “the black body and what it represents is perceived in the white imaginary as a threat” (p. 137). As a Black male character, Collins describes Thresh in the novels as a “physical wonder” (Collins, 2008, p. 126), “towering” and “massive” (Collins, 2008, p. 286); he is “one of the giants, probably six and a half feet tall and built like an ox” (Collins, 2008, p. 126). Thresh’s strength and size represent a threat of violence, stereotypically attributed to Black masculinity. Wilson (2012) notes

When characters of color do appear, instead of signifying the oppressive correlations between race and class, they often further stereotypes. One of the first images we see of the actual “hunger games”—the contest in which 24 adolescent “tributes” must battle to the death—is a black boy with a bloodied brick, which he has apparently just used to bash in the head of another tribute. One wonders why the first time a black face is featured, it is done so in a way that furthers the narrative that “dark people are dangerous and violent.” (para. 8)

Collins depicts a very narrow view of Black male characters in her novels—Thresh is the reader’s only experience with Black male children in the novels (until Katniss visits District 11 in Catching Fire, yet none of those background characters carry as much narrative weight or complex visibility as does Thresh). Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) describe, Thresh “is presented in ways that fit conventional images of Black masculinity—physically dominant and rarely speaking” and the only time he is the primary focus of the film is “a moment focused on saving Katniss and highlighting her
kindness to people of color” (p. 402). Thresh perpetuates stereotypes while simultaneously redirecting the viewer’s gaze back to Katniss.

There are also instances of racism and misrepresentation in fanfiction portrayals of Thresh. In “How Rue Became the Mockingjay” (Arrow, 2011), Thresh is a powerful character, a “huge boy” (para. 133), “a burly boy,” who “can crush [Foxface] like a bug” (para. 65). Thresh speaks with a dialect in the story (and is the only character to do so—Rue does not share the same vernacular): “How you know it ain’t a trick? How you know that girl ain’t gonna kill Rue and me?” (para. 69) and “Why you willin’ to help?” (para. 72). Descriptions of Thresh include “dark” (para. 72), and references to brute strength and animalistic power: he is “big” (para. 32) and can “hurt” (para. 32) both Katniss and Foxface, he is described with “muscles all tu[ned tight” (para. 67), “almost vibrating with power” (para. 67), and “not used to being gentle” (para. 69). In other stories, Thresh is a “monster” (KrekDe, 2016, para. 2) or a “large creature” (Wallflower95, 2014, para. 23), effectively erasing his personhood. He is “tall and dark and sullen” (Amie, 2015, para. 35); with “brute force” (Kix, 2015, para. 76); a “terrifying” (KrekDe, 2016, para. 2) character who “could reach across the podium and snap me in half” (KrekDe, 2016, para. 2). Some fan fiction writers describe Thresh in terms of his size and physical power, echoing the stereotypical and one-dimensional portrayals of Black masculinity in the novels and film adaptations.

I position Black identity in Panem as a marginalized identity in similar ways to other identities explored in this dissertation, as the characters of Rue and Thresh undergo erasure and animalization as a result of power inequities. I describe Katniss through
forms of animalization with a postcolonial identity in Chapter 2 and explore how her multiracial Appalachian identity undergoes erasure in Chapter 4. However, as Collins specifically identifies Rue and Thresh as Black, their marginalization intersects with cultural geographies of Black U.S. history and a legacy of racism towards Black Americans. Locating and investigating the portrayal of Black identity in Panem reveals instances of stereotyping and erasure that merit discussion and criticism. Readers challenge these portrayals through fan response, explored in the next section.

**The Hunger Games, Black Identity, and Restorying Perspective**

Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe restorying perspective as “telling stories from a nonprotagonist’s point of view” (p. 319). When fans “want to know more about characters in the margins” and focus their fan art and fan fiction on these marginalized characters, they “are participating in an age-old tradition of restorying from different points of view” (p. 320). Restorying perspective allows for fans to re-narrate the events of the Hunger Games series, shown here through response that increases the visibility of Black characters and creates more complex representations of Black characters that combat racism and stereotyping. Restorying perspective interacts with concepts of counter-storytelling (Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) as readers assert the voices of characters whose stories are not told in the novels and films of the Hunger Games series. While some fan responses featuring Black characters of the Hunger Games series are stereotypical or one-dimensional, as I explore in the previous section of this chapter, there are other instances that position Rue and Thresh as complex, multifaceted Black characters, as fans engage in restorying perspective in subversive and liberatory
ways. These fan creations complicate notions of childhood and work towards diversity and equity in young adult dystopian narratives, challenging both Rue’s erasure and Thresh’s animalization. I explore portrayals of both Rue and Thresh here through a lens of restorying perspective, in which fans both increase the visibility of Black identity and create more nuanced, complex characterizations of Rue and Thresh through fan response. It is important to note that since I did not collect demographic information from the fans in this study, so these fans may or may not be restorying perspective in ways that interact with their own identities. Instead, my goal is to reveal how fans use restorying in ways that may potentially work for social justice and examine how fans depict Rue and Thresh through fan fiction and fan art, particularly focusing on ways in which these fan responses may provide antiracist contrasts to dominant ideologies and representations of Black characters in children’s and young adult literature.

One way in which fans make Rue more complex in fan response is her frequent association with mockingjays, symbolic of both the rebellion and of innocence. When fans restory Rue’s perspective to be that of the critical symbol of the series, they add depth to Rue’s characterization and show Rue as a pivotal character in the series. In some fan fiction examples, Rue is “surrounded by mockingjays” (Prea, 2016, para. 28); depicted as a “girl with wings” (Prea, 2016, para. 8); or wearing wings (Rebekah, 2012d, para. 3); “perched on a branch” (Kix, 2015, para. 6); “I almost felt like I was flying. I felt like a bird. Spreading its wings and flying from branch to branch” (Wallflower95, 2014, Chapter 4, para. 37). Some fans associate Rue explicitly as a mockingjay symbol: “she’s the mockingjay” (Arrow, 2011, para. 39); “But [Katniss] wasn’t the mockingjay. That
When fans position Rue as the mockingjay, they align her both as a pivotal character in the series and also align her with historically white interpretations of childhood (Thomas, 2014). Some Tumblr users also describe Rue as a symbolic mockingjay, inciting the entire rebellion, thus making a young Black girl the central figure of the entire franchise.

Leo (2013) writes on their blog:

The Speech for Rue. Peeta’s painting. Everything eludes back to this one little girl who became Katniss’s family.

So the revolution never started with Katniss, she was just the tinder for Rue’s ignition.

Rue was the real Mockingjay.

Another Tumblr blog, “Black Fangirls Unite” (2013) responds to the same chain of posts:

The beauty of this all makes it even more impossibly angering because white fans really tried to fight Rue’s blackness. They wanted to deny that someone so innocent loved and protected could be black. She is the ultimate martyr, dying like no other black character has ever done before. Dying to start a revolution, to spark a fire that would change the face of their world. She didn’t die to protect someone or to get rid of a token her death is arguably the single most important death in the whole trilogy.

Any they tried to deny her of that because of her blackness.

Rue is the heart and soul of everything the Katniss fought for
These posts advocate for an interpretation of Rue in which her character can not only be both innocent and Black, but also a multifaceted, complex character with a central role in the franchise.

A few fan responses also show Thresh as a comforting and more complex character—these typically do so by restorying perspectives of Thresh, giving him the role of a caretaker or older sibling to Rue. In “Through His Eyes” (Rebekah, 2012a), Thresh repeatedly compares Rue to a sibling: “She’s like a little sister to me, and she reminds me of my real sister back home” (2012c, para. 22); “I gently hug her back, and stroke her hair like I used to do to my younger sister” (2012e, para. 13); Rue is “a second sister” (2012e, para. 15); and “a lot like my younger sister” (2012f, para. 13). Thresh is still viewed as someone who “must protect [Rue]” (Rebekah, 2012b, para. 10), using his size and physical strength as a major component of his characterization. Though there is still certainly room for improvement and diversifying these narratives as I did not find instances where Thresh is shown as comforting and simultaneously Black, as the aforementioned fics do not clearly identify his skin color. However, Lily (2012) illustrates Thresh as both comforting and Black in fan art:
In Lily’s art, both Rue and Thresh are obviously Black characters. Lily draws Rue as a small child while Thresh kneels and reassures her, escaping his animalized role. The imagery of both Rue and Thresh as more complex characters, rather than painted as a
mirror for Prim or an animalistic threat, more fully realizes the complexity of Black American identity.

When readers create artwork that celebrates the Black identity of both Rue and Thresh, they restory perspective in ways that make Black American identity more visible in popular young adult literature. Rather than upholding a legacy of racism and dehumanization, fan imaginations of Rue and Thresh subvert colonial domination and hegemonic inequities through their creation of complex, multifaceted Black characters. Restorying perspective “has the power to build empathy and understanding” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 320) and these fan creations move Rue and Thresh from the margins into more central roles, fighting the stereotypes present in the novels and films and pushing back against a legacy of racism in popular young adult literature.
Chapter 4: Depictions of Appalachian Culture and Appalachian Identity

This chapter identifies the residents of District 12 as Appalachian, contextualizing their identities with Appalachian culture, including race. I locate these cultural geographies in the novels and films of the Hunger Games series and further explore the ways in which fans restory identity in fan response. Representations of mining, folk medicine, plants, and folk music locate District 12 within Appalachian cultural geographies, providing a framework for an exploration of both Katniss and Peeta as Appalachians living in Panem. I examine Appalachian identity here particularly within Appalachian racial contexts as identifying Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian in the novels and as whitewashed in the film adaptations. I identify Peeta as a white Appalachian, and deconstruct whiteness by positioning Appalachian whiteness as distinct from the whiteness of the Capitol. After providing parallels between the cultural geographies of Appalachia and District 12 and exploring racial identity within Appalachia, I examine fan responses to the Hunger Games series by the locating ways fans restory identity, providing visibility and representation to multiracial Appalachian identities.

Katniss locates her home early in the novels, providing a geographic and economic referent for District 12: “District 12 was in a region known as Appalachia.
Even hundreds of years ago, they mined coal here” (Collins, 2008, p. 41). The region of Appalachia is defined geographically by the Appalachian Regional Commission as:

a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. (Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.)

Much of the footage from District 12 appears in the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina. Scenes featuring District 12 feature the Henry River Mill Village in Burke County, North Carolina, an area that was originally planned in 1905 around a textile mill, which was later abandoned and then caught fire in 1977 (Smith, 2013). Film viewers can see the general store of Henry River Mill Village converted into Mellark Bakery, and Katniss and Gale hunt in DuPont State Forest in the Blue Ridge Mountains (Ruggeri, 2015). Brown (2014) superimposes the official map of Panem over a map of the United States, revealing the geographic overlap of Katniss’s home and the region of Appalachia (Figure 12). District 12 clearly overlaps parts of West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, all areas that the

Figure 12. District 12 and Appalachia (Brown, 2014)
Appalachian Regional Commission identify as Appalachian. I locate Katniss’s home not only geographically and visually linked to Appalachia, but also through the many forms of Appalachian culture that are found in District 12.

**Forms of Appalachian Culture in Panem**

Situating Katniss’s home in Appalachia provides readers with cultural signifiers, tying District 12’s poverty to contemporary and historic Appalachian cultural geographies. Scenes depicting District 12 in the novels and films reflect Appalachian landscapes and Appalachian culture, and Katniss and Peeta perform Appalachian identity both at home and while traveling to other districts in Panem. Appalachian culture is explored through comparisons of mining and exploited workers, folk medicine, plants, and folk music that link the experiences of the residents of District 12 to the lives of Appalachian Americans.

**Mining and exploited workers.** Mining families of District 12 undergo exploitations that parallel the experiences of many Appalachians. Owens (2000) identifies Appalachia through socioeconomics: “Appalachia is defined as the 200,000 square-mile region where economic hardship exists from southern New York to northern Mississippi” (p. 179). As I describe in Chapter 2, extractive colonialism and Appalachian economics are intimately connected; miners ship coal out of the Appalachian communities, but receive low wages and struggle to escape a cycle of poverty (Lewis & Knope, 1978). Hanlon (2012) specifically connects District 12 to Appalachian economics, clearly articulating “the focus on coal mining and the exploitation of miners and mountain families obviously link District 12 with Appalachian history” (p. 59).
Hanlon (2012) praises Collins’s use of Appalachia as “the coalfields provide one of the best historical backdrops for a dystopian view of exploited workers, especially since that exploitation continues today” (p. 61). Residents of District 12, particularly the miners who live in the Seam, experience extreme poverty reflecting the experiences of many Appalachian Americans. Katniss describes memories of starvation and miners are shown working long hours in the mines to send coal to the Capitol.

With parallels to the Appalachian narrative of marginalized poverty and worker exploitation, the Hunger Games series taps into a history that invokes political and transformational narratives recognized by readers, illuminating both the experiences of fictional Seam workers and the historic and contemporary struggles of Appalachian residents. Hanlon (2012) describes:

Katniss’s accounts of the injustices and deprivations suffered by miners’ families resemble countless stories, real and fictional, from Appalachia and other mining regions, illustrating the human cost of industrialization. Details about the coal-town environment, hunting and the black market, folk medicine, folk music, and propaganda spread by mass media make her futuristic world recognizable to today’s readers because of issues of employment, law, energy, food, health care, communication, and cultural traditions. (p. 59)

While the dystopian image of Panem may seem hyperbolic and fantastic, District 12 holds very real roots in Appalachia, illuminating stories of mining families and those disenfranchised by corporate colonialism. Katniss’s descriptions of her neighborhood and mining workers echo imagery of Appalachia:
Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces. (Collins, 2008, p. 4)

Collins provides rich descriptions of District 12, providing a clear connection to the experiences of miners in coal towns in the United States. The imagery of coal miners in the films (Figure 13) parallel mining in both historic (Figure 14) and more contemporary (Figure 15) Appalachia:

![Appalachian Miners in Panem](image)

Figure 13. Appalachian Miners in Panem (Jacobson, Kilik, & Lawrence, 2014)
Figure 14. Miners in Gary, West Virginia (Hine, 1908.)

Figure 15. Miners in Richlands, Virginia (Corn, 1974)
In a series focused on power relationships and revolution, portrayals of exploited mining workers allow readers to draw parallels between the dystopian events in District 12 and the both historic and contemporary exploitation of miners living in Appalachia.

**Folk medicine.** Residents of District 12, most notably Katniss’s mother and sister, practice folk healing similar to methods of healing practiced in Appalachia. While there is not a variety of folk medicine exclusive to Appalachia (Cavender, 2003), Appalachian Americans have historically used a variety of Euro-American folk remedies and medicinal herbs (Cavender, 2003; Cavender & Beck, 1995; Hackey, 2015; Sharp 1986). Hackey (2015) analyses the use of medicine and healthcare in the Hunger Games series, asserting “*The Hunger Games* captures the rich tradition of folk healing in rural Appalachia” (p. 776). Hanlon (2012) similarly writes: “the trilogy’s depiction of folk medicine links District 12 with the history of Appalachia” (p. 63). Many Appalachians depend on the availability of local healers and the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants, and the Everdeen family plays this role in their Appalachian community.

Geography and socioeconomic status influence the role of folk healers in Appalachian communities (Cavender, 2003; Cavender & Beck, 1995). Hackey (2015) notes “the geographic isolation of Appalachia—both in the twentieth century and in the dystopian world of *The Hunger Games*—limits the availability of health care providers” (p. 777). Hackey (2015), Hanlon (2012), and Burke (2013) note the socioeconomic influence of folk healing in Appalachia as it relates to the Hunger Games series. Burke (2013) describes:
Katniss’s mother is a healer, using ecological knowledge and plants to treat the injured, but the district is so poor—set in the coal-mining mountains of Appalachia, representing the very real poverty that exists there—that she often treats patients for free. (p. 547)

Katniss makes it clear that their reliance on folk healing is influenced by poverty: “almost no one can afford doctors, apothecaries are our healers,” echoing an Appalachian reliance on traditional healing methods over more expensive conventional medical treatments (Collins, 2008, p. 8). When a Peacekeeper whips Gale in Catching Fire and Gale needs medical assistance, Katniss describes her mother’s “meager store of painkillers, the kind usually accessible only to doctors. They are hard to come by, expensive and always in demand” (Collins, 2009, p. 113). Instead, Katniss’s mother uses “dried herbs and tinctures” relying on Appalachian wildcrafting tradition to heal her patients (Collins, 2009, p. 111). Fritsch and Gallimore (2007) write of Appalachian wildcrafting in relation to medicine: “Wildcrafting is not a new phenomenon. From ancient times indigenous healers were on the lookout for herbs, roots, and plant leaves that, through handed-down cultural and ethnobotanical knowledge, were known for their medicinal value” (p. 181).

Katniss and Prim forage for plants, and the generational knowledge of wildcrafting appears throughout the series as plants are used for medicinal purposes.

Folk remedies and healing practices are traditionally passed through generations of Appalachians (Hackey, 2015). Katniss’s mother’s parents owned an apothecary, where Mrs. Everdeen learned healing skills including a knowledge of which plants she can use
to treat her patients. Katniss describes her mother’s apothecary book, a manual that helps
the entire community:

My mother had a book she’d brought with her from the apothecary shop. The
pages were made of old parchment and covered in ink drawings of plants. Neat
handwritten blocks told their names, where to gather them, when they came in
bloom, their medical uses. (Collins, 2008, p. 50)

The book is an heirloom of the family profession, Katniss says it was created “ages ago”
by “some herbalist on my mother’s side of the family” (Collins, 2009, p. 160).
Containing “page after page of ink drawings of plants with medicinal uses,” the inscribed
knowledge of Katniss’s family is a resource for the residents of District 12 (Collins,
2009, p. 160). Mrs. Everdeen serves the members of her community using plants and
homemade herbal remedies in combination with the few “store bought bottles” that hold
stronger medicines (Collins, 2009, p. 111). Prim assists her mother, eventually becoming
a healer following the tradition of their family.

While Katniss often expresses doubts about her own healing abilities, she does
depend on the generational knowledge of folk healing during her time in the Games.
When she is stung by tracker jackers, she recalls “my mother knew a treatment for them,
some type of leaf that could draw out the poison” (Collins, 2008, p. 198). She later treats
Peeta’s injuries: “I know the tracker jacker leaves draw out infection, so I start with
those. Within minutes of pressing the handful of chewed up green stuff into the wound,
argues Katniss’s use of leaves to care for Peeta both calls upon her mother’s knowledge and her heritage, but also critical reasoning skills as she has not previously seen the leaves used on infections—he suggests that this “inventive and adaptive approach” is similar to the medicine and techniques used by folk healers of Appalachia (p. 780). Without access to conventional medicine or formalized medical care, Appalachian healers teach their families inventive ways to use found plants to treat common injuries and sickness.

**Appalachian plants.** Appalachian residents hold a strong sense of place and connection to physical geography, and plants are used both for food and for nomenclature in the Hunger Games series (Alexander & Berry, 2010; Englehardt, 2003; Gottlieb, 2001). I contextualize Appalachian identities through a connection to the nature in District 12, through Katniss’s foraging for edible plants and the symbolism and naming of the residents of District 12. Connections to the natural environment create a sense of place in District 12 that is particularly Appalachian, laying the foundation for an exploration of Katniss’s Appalachian identity.

Katniss forages for herbs for her mother’s medicinal cabinet, but her primary use of the apothecary book is to find food to avoid starvation. Katniss’s father has written additions into their medical book that include “Plants for eating, not healing. Dandelions, pokeweed, wild onions, pines” (Collins, 2008, p. 50). Katniss describes in *Catching Fire,* “my father added a section on edible plants that was my guidebook to keeping us alive after his death” (Collins, 2009, p. 160). Just as Prim follows her mother’s footsteps into folk medicine, Katniss joins her father in the Appalachian “multigenerational tradition of
plant gatherers” who use the environment to feed their families (Davis, 2006, p. 174). Food is a major theme in the series (Burke, 2013), and Katniss works within Appalachian contexts of foraging to provide for her family.

Characters in Appalachia are also connected with the environment through symbolism and naming. Katniss repeatedly associates Peeta with dandelions when she sees one after he has given her bread in The Hunger Games:

I had just turned away from Peeta Mellark’s bruised face when I saw the dandelion and I knew hope wasn’t lost. I plucked it carefully and hurried home. I grabbed a bucket and Prim’s hand and headed to the Meadow and yes, it was dotted with the golden-headed weeds. After we’d harvested those, we scrounged along inside the fence for probably a mile until we’d filled the bucket with the dandelion greens, stems, and flowers. That night, we gorged ourselves on dandelion salad and the rest of the bakery bread.

“What else?” Prim asked me. “What other food can we find?”

“All kinds of things,” I promised her. “I just have to remember them.” (Collins, 2008, p. 50)

Peeta’s assistance via the bread, and Katniss’s knowledge of foraging for food, save the Everdeen family. Stewart (2013) calls dandelions a “valuable, life-giving source of food” for Katniss, whose family is on the brink of starvation and Peeta, like the dandelions, repeatedly helps Katniss survive throughout the series (p. 102). Plants are a means for survival, and Katniss realizes she is able to support her family by using her knowledge of
the Appalachian environment. As she finds dandelions, katniss roots, and berries, Katniss uses her knowledge of the edible plants in Appalachia.

Collins gives many residents of District 12 names associated with plants from the Appalachian landscape in which they live, including Prim (primrose), Gale (myrica gale), Hazelle (hazel) Hawthorne (hawthorn), and Katniss herself being associated with the katniss root. Frankel (2012) asserts, “the plants of the forest are a part of Katniss, so much so that the Katniss roots give her her name” (p. 13). The katniss root was “a staple wild edible food in the diet of Native Americans” in the Eastern United States, and can be found in Appalachian environments (Stewart, 2013, p. 102). Katniss reveals her namesake in a detailed passage:

In late summer, I was washing up in a pond when I noticed the plants growing around me. Tall with leaves like arrow-heads. Blossoms with three white petals. I knelt down in the water, my fingers digging into the soft mud, and I pulled up handfuls of the roots. Small, bluish tubers that don’t look like much but boiled or baked are as good as any potato. “Katniss,” I said aloud. It’s the plant I was named for.” And I heard my father’s voice joking, “As long as you can find yourself, you’ll never starve.” I spent hours stirring up the pond bed with my toes and a stick, gathering the tubers that floated to the top. That night, we feasted on fish and Katniss roots until we were all, for the first time in months, full. (Collins, 2008, p. 52)
Katniss feeds her family, finding herself in her landscape and giving herself (both by her actions and metaphorically through the katniss roots) to her family in order to survive. She associates her foraging with her father, and her namesake connects her to her Appalachian heritage and the environment. Hardy (2010) enumerates some of the common names of the plant that has “been used historically by a number of indigenous people and settlers”: including duck potato, “swan potato, wapatoo, tule potato, and, most commonly, as *arrowhead*, a name reflected in its Latin moniker—Sagittaria (or ‘belonging to an arrow’)” (para. 3). Collins (2008) explicitly describes the “leaves like arrow-heads” of the plant connecting Katniss as an archer to her natural namesake (p. 52). Katniss, as an Appalachian, is intimately connected to the plants of Appalachia.

**Folk music.** Appalachian folk music plays a role in both the novels and film adaptations of the Hunger Games series. Smith (2007) writes: “traditional Appalachian music—folk songs, ballads, lullabies, play songs and chants, and hymns—is most often included in Appalachian children’s literature” (p. 32). While Smith discusses specifically Appalachian children’s literature, and the novels and films of the Hunger Games series are typically classified as young adult literature, her assertions and analysis of the musical genre are still relevant to finding echoes of Appalachian folk music in Panem. Smith (2007) describes Appalachian music:

> It is largely based on Anglo-Celtic folk ballads and instrumental dance tunes.
> Women often sang love songs, lullabies, play songs and chants, and hymns unaccompanied as they went about their daily chores. Many of the tunes were
modal and sung as personal narratives, a style reflective of the British tradition.

(p. 32)

Many of the songs present in the books and film soundtracks appear as narratives or traditional hymns reminiscent of Appalachian songs.

Viewers first hear an Appalachian-style lullaby, “The Meadow Song,” when Katniss sings it to comfort her sister in the opening scenes of *The Hunger Games* film, just after the viewer first sees District 12 and is thrust into the heart of Appalachia. Fitzgerald and Hayward (2015) note that traditional Appalachian ballads are traditionally unaccompanied and often sang alone or with a friend and “Katniss’s brief duet with her sister represents just such a moment of domestic intimacy” as the sisters provide comfort to one another (p. 79). Katniss sings “The Meadow Song” at Rue’s death and provides a background to the lyrics:

> The song that comes to me is a simple lullaby, one we sing fretful, hungry babies to sleep with. It’s old, very old I think. Made up long ago in our hills. What my music teacher calls a mountain air. But the words are easy and soothing, promising tomorrow will be more hopeful than this awful piece of time we call today. (Collins, 2008, p. 234)

Katniss describes the song as a “mountain air,” a phrase Collins repeats when Katniss is held captive in the Capitol and reverts to singing “hour after hour of ballads, love songs, mountain airs” when remembering her home in Appalachia (Collins, 2010, p. 376). These
types of songs specifically point to Appalachian musical styles, locating Katniss and District 12 within a legacy of Appalachian culture.

Hanlon (2012) describes the subversive uses of Appalachian songs in relation to “The Hanging Tree” as Appalachian folk songs are “exploited to promote both social justice and corporate interests” (p. 66). As I describe in Chapter 3, the song “The Hanging Tree” has roots in Civil Rights protests songs, many of which have Appalachian and African foundations. Over time, African Americans “who either escaped slavery or freely chose to settle in the mountains influenced Appalachian traditional music in several ways” such as call-and-response which developed spiritual songs incorporating repetitive refrains (Smith, 2007, p. 32). The integration of diverse musical styles and adaptation of folk music for protest songs situate Katniss’s musical ability within an Appalachian context in the United States.

Katniss’s songs reference an association to the landscape and her relationships to her Appalachian family, reinforcing her identity as an Appalachian living in Panem. The physical landscape of District 12 heavily influences Katniss’s formation of identity, from the meadow in her song and the descriptor of “mountain airs” for the lyrics she sings (Collins, 2010, p. 376). As Katniss and Peeta interact within Appalachian cultural geographies of music, plants, folk medicine, and mining, their fictional struggle against the Capitol and poverty in District 12 relate to the real experiences of both contemporary and historic Appalachian Americans. I further explore Appalachian identities by examining the ways in which readers and scholars differentiate Katniss and Peeta by race.
Appalachian Identity in Panem: Multiracial, Whitewashed, and Deconstructed

Descriptions of the residents of District 12 provide evidence for two classes of Appalachian identities: the Seam and the merchant class. Collins particularly describes Katniss as having “olive skin”, which I argue is an assertion of her multiracial identity (Collins, 2008, p. 8). As a multiracial character, Katniss provides avenues for the exploration and elevation of multiracial Appalachian voices, though the casting of a white actress in the film adaptations whitewashes her racial identity. Katniss’s multiplicity of identities (as I describe in Chapter 2) echo the experiences of minority identities in the United States, as literature has historically erased or silenced multiracial Appalachian narratives and voices. I examine Peeta, as a member of District 12’s merchant class, as a white Appalachian deconstructing his whiteness in relation to the whiteness of the Capitol. I provide this examination of racial identities in conjunction with the regional identities explored above to provide a more complex examination of what it means to be Appalachian in Panem.

Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian. Fans have read Katniss as multiracial as a result of her appearance in the novels, which Collins first describes in comparison to Gale: “He could be my brother. Straight black hair, olive skin, we even have the same gray eyes” (Collins, 2008, p. 8). Katniss and Gale are both from the Seam, the poorer section of the District, and Collins segregates them both socioeconomically and via their physical appearance, as “most of the families who work the mines resemble one another this way” (Collins, 2008, p. 8). Collins specifically contrasts their skin color to that of Katniss’s mother and sister, who look markedly different with blond hair and blue eyes.
Katniss reveals that her mother is from a more privileged class in District 12: “My mother’s parents were part of the small merchant class that caters to officials, Peacekeepers, and the occasional Seam customer” (Collins, 2008, p. 8). Katniss describes her mother and Prim to have “light hair and blue eyes” and “always look out of place” on the edge of the Seam where they live (Collins, 2008, p. 8). Additionally, Katniss interacts with the mayor’s daughter, Madge, who is described as “blond” (Collins, 2008, p. 12), and Peeta has “ashy blond hair” and blue eyes (Collins, 2008, p. 25). The physical differences in these characters make visible a division of social classes within District 12, in which the people of the Seam (dark hair, gray eyes, olive skin) are poor and work in the coal mines, and the merchant class (blond hair, blue eyes, white skin) hold more elevated positions and social status (Gabi, 2015; Wilson, 2012). There is an obvious interaction between the two social classes, as Collins writes of Katniss’s memories of seeing Peeta and Madge in school and in Katniss’s parents’ relationship. Katniss’s father, from the Seam, met her merchant class mother when he would “collect medicinal herbs and sell them to her shop to be brewed into remedies” using the Appalachian landscape and folk medicine contexts described earlier in the chapter (Collins, 2008, p. 8). However, Katniss reveals that intermarriage is not a common occurrence as Katniss’s mother “must have really loved him to leave her home for the Seam” (Collins, 2008, p. 8). Based on both her father’s heritage in the Seam and her olive skin, Katniss can be read as a multiracial Appalachian character.

Using textual evidence of the appearance of Seam residents, Stillwell (2016) links Katniss with the Melungeon identity in Appalachia: “the way Katniss, her father, and
Gale are described as olive-skinned, dark-haired, and gray-eyed is remarkably similar to the descriptions of the Melungeon, a group of dark-skinned, blue- and green-eyed people found in Appalachia and the Blue Ridge mountains” (p. 263). Scholars describe Melungeons as tri-racial, emerging “from intermarriage among whites, blacks, and American Indians” in the Appalachian region (Schrift, 2013, p. 7). Puckett (2001) writes on the descriptor Melungeon:

applies to any individual who can trace ancestry to southeastern U.S. mixed-race populations which they argue emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries from early English, Portuguese, Turkish, or Spanish explorers, servants, soldiers, or settlers assimilating with Native Americans or possibly some Africans. (p. 136)

Melungeon identities experience similar erasures and sociopolitical status to that of Native American and African American Appalachians (Puckett, 2004; Puckett, 2001). Some scholars (Everett, 1999; Schrift, 2013; Winkler, 2005) describe pejorative origins for the word “Melungeon” and “it is reasonable to accept that, like other mixed-race groups, Melungeons faced varied forms of intolerance” (Schrift, 2013, p. 7). The intolerance associated with the Melungeon identity provides a potential framework for the class divides in District 12. Readers (Lee, 2011; Rastogi, 2011; Rich, 2011; Seltzer, 2011; Wilson, 2012; Yamato, 2011) have asserted that the textual evidence of class differences and skin color in the Seam suggest multiracial identities in Katniss and Gale, with Melungeon being one possible contextualization of their Appalachian identities.
**Whitewashing Appalachian identity.** From Native American (predominantly Cherokee) populations before colonization to an influx of African Americans as a result of slavery, Appalachia has been a racially diverse region of the United States; and Appalachian racial diversity continues to increase in contemporary communities (Simon, 2014). Even with these racially diverse Appalachian identities, Simon (2014) describes "a climate of white superiority while facilitating the disenfranchisement of non-whites" in Appalachia (para. 4). Baird (2014) and Simon (2014) describe a common association of Appalachian identities with whiteness and Appalachian literature privileges white voices, often marginalizing or erasing the experiences of Appalachians of color. I locate this whitewashing of Appalachian identities in the film adaptations of the Hunger Games series. The overwhelming whiteness in film adaptations of District 12 effectively erases the identities of Black, Latino, Native American, and multiracial Appalachians, despite textual evidence asserting the presence of multiracial residents within the Seam.

Despite readers’ assertions of Katniss as multiracial and olive-skinned (Lee, 2011; Rastogi, 2011; Rich, 2011; Seltzer, 2011; Wilson, 2012; Yamato, 2011), Collins has been reluctant to confirm a racial identity for Katniss, after casting Jennifer Lawrence, a white actress, to portray her in the films. In an interview between Karen Valby and Director Gary Ross, Valby (March 17, 2011) specifically asks Ross: “In the books, Katniss is described as being olive-skinned, dark-haired, possibly biracial. Did you discuss with Suzanne the implications of casting a blond, Caucasian girl?” and Ross responds: “She thought there was a tremendous amount of flexibility. It wasn’t doctrine to her. Jen will have dark hair in the role, but that’s something movies can easily achieve”
(para. 5). In a later interview with Valby (April 7, 2011), Collins comments on the race of Seam residents: “they were not particularly intended to be biracial” and “there’s been a lot of ethnic mixing” (para. 24). In the same interview, Ross comments, “Suzanne [Collins] didn’t see a particular ethnicity to Gale and Katniss when she wrote it, and that’s something we’ve talked about a lot” (Valby, April 7, 2011, para. 28). The distinction between authorial intent and fan response with regards to Katniss’s race opens up conversations on racial visibility and whitewashing Appalachian identities.

Jurgensen (2011) describes casting call for Katniss: “She should be Caucasian, between ages 15 and 20, who could portray someone ‘underfed but strong,’ and ‘naturally pretty underneath her tomboyishness’” (para. 19). Childs (2014) critiques the call for “eliminating the opportunity for actresses of all other races to even compete for the role” (p. 109). Moore and Coleman (2015) echo these concerns: “thus, a Native American, African American, or any non-white had no chance to audition for the lead roles, contrary to what Collins and Ross claimed” (p. 959). Despite multiracial cues in the novels and a history of multiracial Appalachian identities, the Hunger Games films have contributed to the whitewashing of Appalachian identities.

Deconstructing whiteness in Panem. I maintain the assertion that Collins writes Katniss as an Appalachian of color, with Peeta and the residents of the merchant class being white Appalachians. Whiteness in Panem appears in a variety of ways, and I examine Appalachian whiteness in District 12 as distinct from the white identities of residents of the Capitol. Puckett (2001) writes of a multiplicity in white Appalachian identities: “whiteness is not monolithic, but reflexively diverse” as socioeconomic status
and exploitation marginalize white Appalachians in the United States (p. 131). Similarly, Scott (2009) writes to the importance of deconstructing Appalachian whiteness: “one of the most important steps in dislodging hegemonic ideas about white supremacy has been to deconstruct the notion of a monolithic white identity” (p. 803). Viewing the merchant class of District 12 as white Appalachians reveals socioeconomic inequities and additional parallels between the United States and Panem.

Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) describe Katniss as white—while I disagree with their assertions of Katniss’s racial identity, I think their argument for deconstructing whiteness can be applied to Peeta. They write: “Katniss is white in specific ways that appear natural, good, and heroic, which are juxtaposed with an unauthentic, excessive whiteness—embodied by the people in The Capitol” (Dubrofsky and Ryalls, 2014, p. 402). The juxtaposition of disenfranchised citizens of District 12 and the affluence in the Capitol shows a differentiation in excess and poverty, as Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) describe:

…the wealth, excess, and privilege of the people in The Capitol and the richer districts make them hyper-visible, marked by an undesirable and inauthentic white racial identity. This is apparent at the Reaping in District 12 when Effie taps the microphone and, in an excessively cheerful voice that cuts through the silence, says chirpily, “Happy Hunger Games!” as if a wonderful celebration is beginning. (p. 403)

These classes of whiteness serve to separate Appalachian identity from the colonizing whiteness of the Capitol, making white Appalachians a potentially separate class of the
colonized residents of Panem. This deconstruction of Appalachian whiteness appears in examinations of poor Appalachian communities set apart from more affluent white communities in the United States (Klotter, 1980). Collins describes Peeta in contrast to Katniss and Gale in the novels, which I assert as evidence to their racial difference, though the expanse between Peeta and Effie is just as wide, even if not in racial terms.

Placing Peeta’s identity in conversation with white Appalachian stereotypes illuminates his interactions with residents of the Capitol. Effie Trinket, the first Capitol resident with whom Peeta has a sustained relationship, shows little knowledge of District 12 beyond stereotype. Effie praises Katniss and Peeta for overcoming “the barbarism of [their] district” and how other Capitol residents had “reservations, naturally” to working with residents from the poorest district in Panem (Collins, 2008, p. 74). Despite Peeta and Effie both being white residents of Panem, Peeta’s identity is more tied to District 12, to Appalachia, that he and Effie are initially unable to relate to each other. While much of contemporary Appalachia is racially diverse and economically improved, white Appalachians still experience stereotyping for being “backwoods” or “hillbillies” (Baird, 2014; Massey, 2007). Stereotypes of Appalachians not only risk telling a single story (Adichie, 2009) of whiteness but also further erase the experiences and stories of Appalachians of color.

The Hunger Games, Appalachia, and Restorying Identity

Whitewashing Appalachian narratives further silences marginalized voices from conversations on race and poverty in the United States. Despite the whitewashing of Katniss in the film adaptations of the Hunger Games series, many fans have responded to
the series through a lens of restorying identity (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016) that centers and celebrates Katniss’s identity as a multiracial Appalachian. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe restorying identity as “young people change the identities of characters to more accurately reflect the diversity of the world, to blur boundaries between traditional categories, or to create characters whose identities more closely mirror their own” (p. 321). Many readers expressed frustration when they learned Jennifer Lawrence would be playing the role of Katniss, questioning the casting of a white woman for a potentially multiracial role (Alexander, 2012; Caverley, 2011; Childs, 2014; Moore & Coleman, 2015; Lee, 2011; Rastogi, 2011; Rich, 2011; Ross, 2012; Valby, March 17, 2011; Valby, April 7, 2011; Yamato, 2011). As fans restory identity, they challenge “official” narratives to increase visibility and representation (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016), which I examine here with regard to the multiracial Appalachian identity of Katniss. In response to the whitewashing of Katniss in film, fans have illustrated Katniss as multiracial through fan art and have created fancasts that imagine Katniss portrayed by actresses of color. Fans emphasize Katniss’s multiracial identity through depictions of her skin color in pieces of fan art. To make this distinction, Katniss is often purposefully shown with olive skin alongside members of the merchant class in District 12, who have white skin:
Figure 16. Katniss and Madge (Andrea P., 2012)

Another image, titled “Hunger Games: Bread, Fire and Snares” by Veronika Hofmann (2012), shows racial diversity in an image of Peeta, Katniss, and Gale (Figure 17):
The three-paneled image shows not only Katniss as multiracial but also Gale as an olive-skinned resident of the Seam. One user (NeverworldDreamer) comments on Hoffman’s art: “I think a lot of people forget (or choose to ignore) the fact that she’s supposed to have olive skin” and another (twifanjacob11) writes “I love how you made Katniss look how she is described in the books, not the movies,” commenting on the whitewashing of the film adaptations (Hofmann, 2012). A third image, by Kate Wheeler, shows Katniss and Peeta kissing, to which Stewart (2011) comments:
“Notice how dark Katniss’s skin is?” (Figure 18). Kate Wheeler has created many illustrations of Katniss as multiracial, one of which depicts Katniss alone in District 12, described as a “pre-Hunger Games” portrait (Figure 19):

![Image of Katniss](image)

Figure 19. "Katniss Sketch" (Wheeler, 2013)

Wheeler (2013) notes that Katniss is “supposed to have olive toned skin,” and her portrait depicts a multiracial character. Wheeler’s use of a bow and arrow call to mind imagery of Katniss hunting in the wilderness, a multiracial Appalachian providing for her family. Positioning Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian character is a “radical decentering of
cisgender, heterosexual middle- and upper-class male Whiteness as the default reader position” that is prevalent in children’s and young adult literature (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 329). Fan art that positions Katniss as multiracial, purposefully noting her “olive skin” or showing her skin color as darker than other white character is evidence of fans responding to whitewashing and writing racial diversity into existence in the Hunger Games series.

Fancasting (also known as fantasy casting or dream casting) is another form of fan response positioning Katniss as a multiracial character, as “fans imagine their dream cast for the movie version of some media they love” and insert multiracial actors in place of Jennifer Lawrence (Misra, 2016). Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe ways in which fans restory identity through fancasting as they “become the media producers who cast characters in their own likeness or the likeness of people around them to better reflect the reality of their worlds” (p. 323). Fans often depict Q’orianka Kilcher, an actress with Quechan heritage, as Katniss (Stewart, 2011). Chloe (2013)

Figure 21. Fancast of Q’orianka Kilcher as Katniss (Chloe, 2013)
shares an image of Q’orianka Kilcher wearing a mockingjay pin (Figure 20). She superimposes a quote from *Mockingjay* on the image, including the line “My home is District 12,” recalling Katniss’s Appalachian identity and contextualizing the image within the narrative. Another user, Clara (2014), shares the following compilation, including Q’orianka Kilcher as Katniss:

![Image](image-url)

Figure 22. “fancast – q’orianka kilcher as katniss everdeen” (Clara, 2014)
The compilation shows Wilcher with film stills of District 12, including images of the Seam and foraged food which situate Wilcher within cultural geographies of Appalachia explored earlier in this chapter. The image repositions Katniss as an Appalachian woman of color. Similarly, some fans have cast Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs as Katniss:

Figure 23. Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs as Katniss Everdeen (Bell, 2015)
Devery Jacobs, having grown up on a Canadian Native reservation, identifies herself as “Kanien'keha:ka from Kahnawake” (Indian Country Media Network, 2013). While Devery Jacobs is not Appalachian, the compilation imagines how a native actress could be used to increase Katniss’s visibility as a character of color. These fancasts push against whitewashing and the absence of actors of color in popular cinema, asserting Katniss’s identity as a multiracial Appalachian.

Fan art and fancasting depicting Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian makes visible historically whitewashed, marginalized, or erased Appalachian identities. Appalachian culture contextualizes Katniss’s identity as she sings folk songs, forages for plants in an Appalachian environment, and resides in a mining town set in the Appalachian region of the United States. Fans, through restorying practices, assert her identity as both an Appalachian and a multiracial woman, illuminating issues of race and class critical to the dystopian narrative of power and inequality. Fighting the whitewashing of Katniss’s identity as a multiracial Appalachian works towards increasing diverse voices in literature and challenges the whitewashing of both historical and contemporary Appalachian narratives. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe restorying identity to have the “potential to be culturally transformative” (p. 322) and fans that illustrate and write Katniss to be a multiracial Appalachian challenge discourses of white hegemony in popular young adult literature.
Chapter 5: Depictions of U.S. Military Tactics and Military Identity

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of military identities contextualizing these identities through the presence of U.S. military cultural geographies in Panem in the novels and film adaptations of the Hunger Games series. Katniss undertakes a soldier identity as she experiences the Games and through her participation in the rebellion in District 13, while I align Peeta’s military experience with that of a tortured prisoner of war. As a result of their wartime experiences, I identify both Katniss and Peeta as recovering military veterans in the novels and film adaptations, and examine their recovery as it relates to posttraumatic stress disorder and psychological treatments that help them to negotiate and define their identities after experiencing war. To further explore connections between U.S. military identities and the Hunger Games series, I explore fan response through a lens of “restorying time” (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016) in the conclusion of this chapter. By restorying time, fans extend the postcanon narrative of the Hunger Games series, depicting Katniss and Peeta recovering from the trauma of war and adding diverse perspectives and increased visibility to veteran narratives in the United States.

Growing up in a military family, Collins pulls from a legacy of U.S. war narratives when describing the events within the arena and during the rebellion of Panem’s citizens. Rauwerda (2016) asserts “militancy permeates The Hunger Games ’s settings [and] cultural context” as Collins draws from U.S. military culture and tactics,
including her own familial experiences with wars with U.S. involvement (p. 173). Many of Collins’s family members were soldiers in US wars:

Her grandfather was gassed in World War I, and her uncle sustained shrapnel wounds in World War II. Some of Collins’s earliest memories are of young men in uniform drilling at West Point, where her father, who later made lieutenant colonel, was on loan from the Air Force, teaching military history. (Dominus, 2011, para. 10)

Suzanne Collin’s own experiences with war and U.S. military history heavily influenced the Hunger Games series and the military identities of Katniss and Peeta. Collins has remarked in interviews that the narrative is “always first and foremost a war story” (Grossman, November 22, 2013). Collins’s experiences with U.S. cultural geographies of war are reflected in the portrayal of U.S. military tactics in Panem.

**U.S. Military Tactics in Panem**

This section is organized in relation to specific military tactics as they appear in both U.S. military history and in Panem. The Hunger Games novels and films reflect the U.S. military use of the draft, guerilla warfare, television coverage, and propaganda materials, creating a foundational link between U.S. cultural geographies of war and events in Panem. These military cultural geographies provide context for an exploration of military identities later in the chapter.

**The Draft.** The Reaping is Katniss’s enlistment into a military role as the Capitol drafts her into a position that requires her to fight other tributes. The United States used a draft system to select men for participation in the US Armed Forces, particularly
effecting US military efforts in World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War (Flynn, 1993; Keith, 2001). In Panem, the Treaty of Treason requires citizens ages 12-18 to be eligible for participation in the annual Hunger Games, where children fight one another to the death. Petery (2014) relates the Reaping to the US Selective Service System:

> Grandparents of adolescents, reading these words, would likely pause to remember similar lotteries that decided the fate of hundreds of thousands of young American men who were sent into a jungle on the other side of the world to fight against battle-hardened soldiers and guerillas for reasons that few of the men understood. The tributes were called “conscripts” or “draftees,” and their ages were 18 to 26. Otherwise, the scene was as Collins described it. (para. 2)

The anticipation of the Reaping and the removal of tributes from their homes and families echo the conscription of soldiers in US history. Film stills of the reaping in District 12 show similarities between the Reaping and draft selections in US history, with glass bowls holding the fates of young civilians:

Figure 24. The Reaping in District 12 (Jacobson et al., 2012, The Reaping)
Figure 25. World War I Draft (Library of Congress, 1918)

Figure 26. Vietnam Draft (Library of Congress, 1969)
Figure 27. Effie Drawing Names at the Reaping (Jacobson et al., 2012, The Reaping)

The four images above show similar scenes with suited leaders adjacent to glass containers holding names or numbers representing civilians eligible to go to war. The
glass bowl shown at the Reaping (Figure 23) particularly echoes clear imagery of prior U.S. drafts, though the names are slips of paper rather than capsules containing birthdates. The event of the Reaping provides imagery that echoes both the spectacle of the draft and historic anxieties of young citizens waiting for their names to be chosen.

The drafting of US soldiers reflects power dynamics related to socioeconomic status. Petery (2014) describes the conscription of poor men, as many privileged and wealthy members of local draft boards would “volunteer” members of their communities while exempting their own family members. With draft boards having little to no oversight, draft results were often biased so “the poor and disadvantaged more often went to war” (Petery, 2014, para. 6). These drafting strategies parallel the system of tesserae described in Panem, in which poorer civilians increase their risk of selection in the Reaping in exchange for food. When Katniss interacts with Madge, the mayor’s daughter “who has never been at risk of needing a tessera,” she acknowledges “the chance of [Madge’s] name being drawn is very slim compared to those of us who live in the Seam” (Collins, 2008, p. 13). Katniss’s collection of tesserae, as a reflection of her socioeconomic status in the Seam, puts her at an increased risk of draft selection similar to inequalities present in the historic drafting of US soldiers.

Both the Selective Service System of the United States and the Reaping in Panem allow for volunteers, shown as Katniss volunteers in the place of her sister, and as “Career Tributes” in Districts 1 and 2 train for the purpose of participation in the Games. When viewing footage of the 74th Reaping, Katniss witnesses “a monstrous boy who lunges forward to volunteer from District 2” as he expresses a desire to go to war for his
district (Collins, 2008, p. 45). She later describes the other tributes during training, remarking on the poor health of most of the tributes, with Career Tributes as outliers: “The exceptions are the kids from the wealthier districts, the volunteers, the ones who have been fed and trained throughout their lives for this moment” (Collins, 2008, p. 94). Civilians in the United States have historically volunteered to go to war even during draft times, as Shields (1980) describes motivations of Vietnam war volunteers, some of whom volunteered “out of a sense of moral obligation” or “as a career, as an opportunity for adventure and travel, or as an avenue to increase skills through training” (p. 134). Career tributes show similar career motivations for enlistment, whereas Katniss volunteers out of a sense of moral obligation. Desiring to protect her sister, Katniss volunteers and “takes on a mission much like a military mission in which the individual participates in a violent and dangerous conflict and by so doing believes that she protects her immediate family” (Rauwerda, 2016, p. 180). Katniss volunteering to go to war reflects the experiences of soldiers who have internalized U.S. war narratives of obligation and duty, contextualizing her identity as a soldier explored later in this chapter.

**Guerilla warfare.** After her enlistment into the Hunger Games, Katniss functions as a soldier and uses guerilla war tactics against her enemies in the arena. Military troops used guerilla warfare in the American Revolution (Boot, 2013), the Civil War (Boot, 2013; Hulbert, 2016), and the Vietnam War (Boot, 2013; Laqueur, 1976; Taber, 2002) and war scenarios in Panem reflect similar guerilla tactics, which I examine through Katniss’s experiences in the arena of *The Hunger Games* and the rebellion of the districts in *Mockingjay*. In the Arena, Katniss takes a position as a guerilla soldier, using guerilla
tactics to dodge threats from the Capitol and while fighting other tributes. While guerilla tactics differ from war to war, common features include short skirmishes and the use of geography as cover (Laqueur, 1976) and tactics including “harassment of the enemy, evasion of decisive battles, cutting lines of communication, [and] carrying out surprise attacks” (Laqueur, 1976, p. ix). In the arena of the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss runs through the forest, calling to mind the experiences of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, using geography for cover to hide from her “enemies” and dodging the ever-present threats from the Gamemakers (Collins, 2008, p. 152). Katniss and Rue use guerilla warfare tactics when they execute a surprise attack to blow up the Careers’ supplies at the Cornucopia in the 74th Hunger Games. Rue distracts and evades the other tributes while Katniss ambushes their encampment. In the arena, Katniss is a guerilla soldier, surviving through evasions and short attacks that allow her to strategically outlast her enemies.

Mutanda (2016) describes guerilla warfare as “the conflict of the weak against the strong” (p. 171) and Guevara (1961) calls guerilla war a “war of the masses, a war of the people,” (p. 10). Guerilla warfare is also commonly used in the fight for independence or social reform (Guevara, 1961). The residents of Panem function as guerilla soldiers in Mockingjay as the residents of District 5 blow up the hydroelectric damn to cut power to the Capitol and residents of District 7 launch surprise attacks on Peacekeepers in their forests. Short and decisive battles with smaller groups of combatants work to cut off supplies to the enemy and build a resistance movement across the Districts. As the other districts are fighting in their homes, District 13 uses guerilla tactics of infiltrating lines of communication as they televised their own news and propaganda in the place of the
Capitol’s broadcasts. Interacting with military contexts of guerilla warfare situates the residents of Panem within U.S. military narratives of rebellion and survival via guerilla tactics.

**Televised news coverage.** War events in the Hunger Games series frequently appear on televised meda, from Katniss appearing on reality TV-style reports of the Games or through District 13’s televised missions. Contemporary wars have similarly appeared on television screens in U.S. homes. Mandelbaum (1982) describes, “the Vietnam War was the first to be televised. In their living rooms watching the evening news, American regularly saw film of airplanes flying, often dropping bombs, and troops on patrol, sometimes in combat” (p. 157). With her father fighting in Vietnam, Collins grew up hearing nightly televised recaps of the war (Dominus, 2011; Margolis, 2010). These nightly recaps appear in the arena when Katniss views the images of each day’s casualties, reflecting “at home, we would be watching full coverage of each and every killing” (Collins, 2008, p. 156). The Capitol forces district citizens to watch televised coverage, which Koenig (2012) compares to how “American citizens during the Vietnam and Iraqi wars engaged with coverage that we did not ask for but that was provided by our own commercial media” (p. 40). District citizens and the U.S. public receive updates about war efforts via their home television sets (or public screens), reflecting U.S. cultural geographies of war in Panem.

Reality television and war coverage blur in contemporary U.S. media, as media figures analyze and make a spectacle of wartime events. Collins references the
convergence of reality television and frequent war coverage in U.S. media as a source of inspiration:

One night, I was lying in bed, and I was channel surfing between reality TV programs and actual war coverage. On one channel, there’s a group of young people competing for I don’t even know; and on the next, there’s a group of young people fighting in an actual war. I was really tired, and the lines between these stories started to blur in a very unsettling way. That’s the moment Katniss’s story came to me. (Margolis, 2008)

The Capitol broadcasts the violence and deaths of the Games throughout Panem and Caesar Flickerman functions as both a news anchor and celebrity who interviews tributes and comments on the events of the Games. Jaramillo (2009) writes “Part of the power of news programming lies in its ability to construct very specific ways of seeing and hearing the world in conflict. In that sense, war coverage on television operates no differently than everyday news” (p. 2). Televised coverage often holds political bias as “news producers adapt strategies that simplify and distort information about international and domestic events” (Jaramillo, 2009, p. 3). Television sets in both the United States and Panem show the spectacle of war, functioning as a portion of the war-time propaganda meant to instill patriotism and fear in the lives of civilians.

**Propaganda.** Televised coverage not only informs viewers but also manipulates narratives toward dominant ideologies. The media in the United States has used a variety of propaganda tools throughout history, from posters to televised news, and these forms of propaganda appear in the Hunger Games novels and films. Scholars have critiqued the
US construction of media coverage for the Iraq War for fear-based tactics and the promotion of US propaganda (Jaramillo, 2009; Kellner, 2004). Similar fear-based and sensationalized media coverage appears in propaganda from both the Capitol, through the portrayal of the Hunger Games event and the history of Panem, and District 13, through representation of Katniss as the Mockingjay.

Lantham and Hollister (2013) write of Panem: “the government’s survival depends not only on its ability to impose punishment and enforce discipline but also on its ability to manipulate media and control the flow of information,” and the Capitol uses propaganda to control information regarding Panem’s history (p. 35). The mayor of District 12 reads a history of Panem at the Reaping, detailing a “brutal war” that resulted in a “shining Capitol” that upheld peace even after an uprising from the districts (Collins, 2008, p. 18). In the film adaptation of *The Hunger Games*, a propaganda-style film shows this history to the resident of District 12. Gale predicts the first lines (“war, terrible war”) and Effie mouths the words the final phrases of the film along with the narration. Their memorization and repetition of the phrases from the film show that the propaganda appears frequently in Panem, reinforcing its content. The propaganda film shows the uprising as “thirteen districts rebelled against the country that fed them, loved them, protected them” (Jacobson et al., 2012, *The Reaping*). As a result of this uprising, the Capitol “gave” the districts laws and the Hunger Games “to guarantee peace” (Collins, 2008, p. 18). Katniss reveals that the Capitol reinforces their propaganda through a “weekly lecture” at her school that is “mostly a lot of blather about what we own the Capitol. I know there must be more than they’re telling us, an actual account of what
happened during the rebellion” (Collins, 2008, p. 42). History lessons serve as a form of propaganda that craft a narrative of Panem to the benefit of the government.

The Capitol also uses propaganda to position the Hunger Games as a celebration. The Games are a “festivity” and the government pitches the event as “both a time for repentance and a time for thanks” (Collins, 2008, p. 19). The Capitol describes the Hunger Games as a necessary celebration, a “pageant of honor, courage, and sacrifice” of the districts, to instill obedience in the citizens of Panem (Jacobson et al., 2012, The Reaping). At the Reaping in District 12, camera crews are perched “like buzzards on rooftops” to record and televise the event and the constantly-televised pageantry of the Games makes the propaganda into a form of entertainment for viewers (Collins, 2008, p. 16). Propaganda surrounding the Games uses themes of victory and honor similarly present in US military propaganda, giving viewers a sense of patriotism despite the atrocities of war (Brewer, 2009). Though many residents of Panem are either silently or overtly critique the spectacle of the Hunger Games, the propaganda and presence of government officials contribute to their initial obedience. While Katniss is critical of the Capitol, she says she has “learned to hold her tongue” and “avoid discussing tricky topics” (p. 6). Propaganda disciplines the residents of Panem, keeping them in line so they dutifully submit to the government that requires participation and celebration of the Hunger Games each year.

The residents of District 13 use propaganda in the Mockingjay novel and films. Francis Lawrence, director of both Mockingjay films, describes the use of propaganda in an interview: “one of the big things we explore is the manipulation of images and the use
of propaganda and this battle over the airwaves, and we actually get to see some of the ways that imagery is manipulated” (Bibbiani, 2014). District 13 creates a team for Katniss to coach her to deliver speeches and encourage uprisings in Panem. Plutarch describes the strategy as an “Airtime Assault,” a military strategy to use “a series of what we call propos—which is short for ‘propaganda spots’” to film Katniss encouraging the citizens of Panem (Collins, 2010, p. 44). Katniss’s propos team shapes her image according to their message, as Fulvia tells Katniss “let’s find the most stunning Mockingjay possible, and then work your personality up to deserving it!” (Collins, 2010, p. 44). Her team focuses on how they will film Katniss, rather than Katniss’s own experiences within military contexts, and the propos team consistently follows and films Katniss throughout her visits to other Districts, echoing the spectacle of her Victory Tour.

Katniss’s propos team follows her when she visits a hospital in District 8, capitalizing on Katniss’s emotions in order to craft compelling propaganda footage. Cressida points Katniss to direct her thoughts: “Would you like to tell the rebels anything?” as the bombing of the hospital has unnerved Katniss and Cressida uses these emotional moments as a means to create propaganda materials (Collins, 2010, p. 99). Iraq War coverage used a similar method of embedded-style reporting, as news reporters traveled alongside U.S. troops to gain new footage and on-the-ground viewpoints to war efforts (Jaramillo, 2009). The resulting footage is powerful, showing Katniss firing arrows on Capitol planes and wounded by battle, the scenes meant to provoke anger and unity among Panem’s residents.
Katniss frequently appears on film and her presence as the Mockingjay is taken as a symbol of rebellion in propaganda that reflects U.S. cultural geographies of war. Adams (2015) asserts “deep at its core, The Hunger Games franchise is about the power of propaganda” and both the Capitol and District 13 frequently use methods of propaganda (para. 1). To retaliate against the first propos of Katniss as the Mockingjay, Snow uses fear-based methods of propaganda and puts a traumatized and tortured Peeta in televised interviews, hijacking his memories to use him as a voice against the rebels. I explore Peeta’s identity as a prisoner of war later in this chapter, as Collin’s positions his televised appearance as a foil for Katniss, as opposing political forces use both Peeta and Katniss to coerce audiences into action. Streams of news coverage from both the Capitol and District 13 show conflicting images of Katniss and Peeta as each side fights for their version of truth to be accepted. The use of propaganda, combined with other war tactics of televised coverage, guerilla warfare, and the draft, contribute to Katniss and Peeta’s development of identity in US militarized contexts.

**Military Identities: Disciplined, Tortured, and Recovering**

U.S. war tactics of televised coverage and propaganda influence the portrayal of Katniss as a solider and Peeta as a prisoner, and both Katniss and Peeta must negotiate their roles within wartime scenarios. Katniss and Peeta perform various military identities through their experiences in Panem, reflecting American cultural geographies of war and U.S. military tactics. Katniss appears as a disciplined soldier, as the Capitol’s surveillance shapes her identity and her participation in war in both the Games and District 13 form her into a military soldier. Peeta becomes a prisoner of war after his capture and torture.
by the Capitol. After witnessing the atrocities of war and returning home at the end of the series, both Katniss and Peeta deal with posttraumatic stress disorder and renegotiate their identities as veterans, reflecting therapeutic measures therapists use with U.S. veterans. I examine Katniss’s and Peeta’s military identities here as they relate to discipline, torture, and recovery.

**Katniss as a disciplined soldier.** Katniss’s civilian identity becomes a soldier identity that I explore here through elements of Foucauldian discipline that shape her as a soldier as both a tribute in the Hunger Games and as the Mockingjay. Foucault (1977/1995) describes a soldier as the example of a disciplined subject, as “something that can be made” through discipline and correction (p. 135). Katniss experiences soldier training from both the Capitol and the rebels of District 13, forming a new identity through means of surveillance, time-tables, and through physical transformations that turn citizens into soldiers.

Surveillance by the Capitol in the arena forces Katniss to adopt a military identity to survive. Multiple scholars (Brost, 2016; Connors, 2014; Garriott, 2014; Wezner, 2012) have discussed the role of surveillance and Foucauldian discipline in Panem, as the panopticon creates “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 201). While Foucault writes of surveilling discipline in prisons and schools, the constant surveillance in the arena, converging with U.S. war tactics, functions to shape and discipline Katniss’s identity as a soldier. The citizens of Panem, potential sponsors, the Gamemakers, and President Snow, record and analyze Katniss, and she is acutely aware of the ways in which an audience
can influence her survival in the Arena. Using tactics like guerilla warfare, witnessing graphic violence, and both directly and indirectly killing tributes, Katniss interacts with military contexts while undergoing disciplinary tactics that shape her into a soldier of Panem.

Katniss’s “propos” team in District 13 similarly televises her, calling to mind both surveillance and the televised propaganda of contemporary U.S. wars. Katniss’s role as the Mockingjay further unites surveillance with military contexts as she appears training with other residents of District 13, firing on Capitol hovercraft, and rallying troops. When District 13 films Katniss, they find they are unable to film authentic and inspiring clips without embedding Katniss into wartorn landscapes, which then serve to reinforce her soldier identity. As Fuchs (2014) describes, “Team 13 means [their propaganda] to look real, to place Katniss in war zones, leading smudgy-faced fighters, surrounded by ruins from which to rise” (Fuchs, 2014, para. 3). Though Katniss has moments of rebellion and autonomy in her role as the Mockingjay, she is consistently aware of her propos team and the presence of higher ranking military figures who report to Coin, the military surveillance informing and shaping her actions to benefit District 13.

Another means of creating disciplined and docile bodies is Foucault’s concept of the “time-table,” a disciplinary force that is used to “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 149) and District 13 uses regimented schedules to create military order. Each resident of District 13 has a schedule physically marked on their body each day, their bodies being molded according to the discipline enforced by their district:
You can’t miss your schedule. Every morning, you’re supposed to stick your right arm in this contraption in the wall. It tattoos the smooth inside of your forearm with your schedule for the day in a sickly purple ink. 7:00 – *Breakfast.* 7:30 – *Kitchen Duties.* 8:30 – *Education Center, Room 17.* And so on. (Collins, 2010, pp. 17-18)

District 13 strictly regulates time. Initially, Katniss says she “pretty much ignore[s] the words” (Collins, 2010, p. 18) on her body and later comments “I did blow off my schedule every single day unless something suited me” (Collins, 2010, p. 235). Katniss realizes she must conform to the timetables of District 13 if she is to travel to the Capitol, and begins training with other soldiers. District 13 shapes Katniss through the use of the schedule which coincides with Katniss’s further integration into the rebel’s military groups. Wezner (2012) suggests that District 13’s regimented schedule, “adoption of strict codes of conduct and a military culture mirror the invisible mechanisms of confinement and control” used by the Capitol to discipline the residents of Panem, making District 13 a “deadly panopticon” in which surveillance and military tactics converge (p. 151). District 13’s military culture and scheduling disciplines Katniss, reflecting US cultural geographies of war and shaping her identity as a soldier.

Soldiers in District 13 receive various marks and physical changes as markers of their identity. After following her schedule and attending training with the other members of District 13, Katniss receives another mark on her body when a soldier “stamps [her] hand with squad number 451, and tells [her] to report to Command” (Collins, 2010, p. 249). The mark is a symbol of her graduation from training and acceptance as a soldier in
District 13. When Katniss joins her group, she forces herself “to take calm, soldierly steps to join them” instead of showing excitement, showing evidence of her conformation to the expectations of a soldier in District 13 (Collins, 2010, p. 250). Foucault (1977/1995) similarly describes soldiers through movements, marching in step and assimilating habits. According to Foucault (1977/1995), these physical transformations create soldiers who are “manipulated, shaped, trained” (p. 136). Soldiers in District 13 traveling to fight in the Capitol are “given a very short haircut, the mark of a person going into battle” (Collins, 2010, p. 247). Katniss does not receive a haircut so that she can continue to appear in propaganda as the recognizable, long-haired Mockingjay, though she does experience the costuming and regulation Foucault describes as hallmarks as a docile body, wearing her Mockingjay clothing and participating in the military exercises as they are directed by District 13. While Katniss rebels against some of the expectations of Coin during her experiences with Squad 451, the disciplinary forces in Panem ultimately change her identity. The surveillance of governing forces, both the Capitol and District 13, coupled with the regulation of both her schedule and appearance, mark her as a soldier in line with Foucaultian disciplinary tradition.

Peeta as a tortured prisoner of war. Peeta experiences war scenarios similar to Katniss as both participate in the Games and both are in Squad 451 as they attempt to assassinate Snow; however, Peeta’s experience as a prisoner of war shapes his military identity when the Capitol captures him after the Quarter Quell. Before his first Games, Peeta expresses a desire to retain his sense of self in spite of the atrocities of war: “I don’t want them to change me in there. To turn me into some kind of monster I’m not”
(Collins, 2008, p. 141). When Peeta becomes a prisoner of war and the Capitol hijacks his memories, his loss of his former self becomes the ultimate unraveling in the wake of war trauma. Peeta’s appearance in televised interviews, the role of torture in the war narrative of Panem, and how Collins describes him after his rescue and transport to District 13 reflect his identity as a prisoner of war.

Peeta’s physical and emotional shift between his three televised interviews in *Mockingjay – Part 1* show his physical and emotional transformation. Peeta’s first appearance in an interview with Caesar Flickerman is shocking to Katniss: “Peeta looks healthy to the point of robustness. His skin is glowing, flawless, in that full-body-polish way. His manner’s composed, serious” (Collins, 2010, p. 21). Katniss is energized when seeing Peeta’s initial health, though he quickly deteriorates in later interviews which provide proof of his torture and imprisonment. Peeta appears to be losing weight and is distressed in his second interview, and appears disoriented in his third televised appearance in which he is appears alongside President Snow. MTV discussed Peeta’s costume design in an interview with designers Kurt and Bart, who describe Peeta’s changing attire:

The idea was that he was still being trotted out by the Capitol and was no doubt being styled and dressed by them, so the looks were in line with where he left off in the last film. We first picked three colors for his transition. White being him at his most pure and symbolic and eventually going to black and finally grey at his most beaten down. The collars and ties reference him being literally collared by the Capitol. (Reilly, 2015, para. 15)
The Capitol keeps Peeta as a prisoner, and his appearance and demeanor make it apparent that he is being tortured. Peeta later reveals details about his cell, hearing the torture of adjacent prisoners, and describes the tracker jacker venom that makes him fear Katniss. He appears “damaged” in his second appearance:

Peeta’s physical transformation shocks me. The healthy, clear-eyed boy I saw a few days ago has lost at least fifteen pounds and developed a nervous tremor in his hands. They’ve still got him groomed. But underneath the paint that cannot cover the bags under his eyes, and the fine clothes that cannot conceal the pain he feels when he moves, is a person badly damaged. (Collins, 2010, p. 112)

Peeta’s physical and mental changes reveal the trauma he is experiencing as a prisoner and strike fear in Katniss. In his final interview, Katniss describes Peeta sweating, commenting “his eyes look insane,” before he is beaten on camera after warning District 13 about an impending attack (p. 133). Peeta is seen deteriorating throughout his televised interviews, his traumatization visually apparent through Katniss’s descriptions and film imagery from Mockingjay – Part 1.

Peeta is tortured primarily due to his relationship with Katniss, and his public image and punishment serves as a tactic of war against the rebels. Katniss realizes Peeta’s role in the war when she is trapped underground in District 13 after viewing his final televised appearance: “thinking that he’s being tortured specifically to incapacitate me is unendurable” (Collins, 2010, p. 154). Public punishment and torture serves both to traumatize Peeta as a prisoner of war and to threaten and instill fear in Katniss. Sturken (2011) describes torture in contemporary U.S. war contexts as “the exercise of power, the
brutal dehumanization of people who are within the power of their captors,” and as “a form of terrorism; it aims primarily to terrorize” (p. 426). President Snow tortures Peeta to inspire fear. He does not want to gain information from Peeta, as Finnick remarks “they’ll figure out he doesn’t know anything pretty fast,” but instead the violence and power of Peeta’s torture functions to “use him against [Katniss]” (Collins, 2010, p. 155). Peeta is a threat to Katniss and, through his torture and hijacking, is a traumatized prisoner of war.

Descriptions of Peeta after his rescue from the Capitol reinforce his loss of agency and rewritten identity. An effect of war is “the destruction of [soldier’s] identities and worldviews” (Poladian, 2016, p. 78). Plutarch describes Peeta’s torture to Katniss: “he’d been abused” with “a rather uncommon technique known as hijacking” and Beetee confirms that hijacking is “a form of fear conditioning” (Collins, 2010, p. 180). As a result of his torture, Katniss views Peeta as prisoner of war, his identity markedly different, and describes him as “irretrievable” (p. 191) and “tortured and tormented until no bits of his former self will ever emerge again” (p. 290). Both Katniss and other characters comment on Peeta’s loss of self and lack of agency: Katniss says “He’s gone” (p. 267) and Haymitch remarks “I don’t think he’ll ever be the same” (p. 182). Peeta’s torture is the destruction of his previous identity as he is “programmed” to associate Katniss with fear; descriptions of Peeta imply the Capitol has erased his “real” identity and replaced it with a “not real” hijacked version of himself (p. 304). Brighton (2016) describes Peeta’s traumatization: “He goes through something no other person has been known to go through: being tortured through tracker jacker venom to the point that he
loses his understanding of reality and turns on those he loves with violent rage” (para. 6). Peeta’s recovery is thus “uncertain” as he suffers flashbacks and attempts to distinguish reality in his memories (Brighton, 2016, para. 6). Peeta is entirely remade, as his experience in war have rewritten his conception of self.

**Katniss and Peeta as recovering veterans**

Their experiences as soldiers and prisoners change both Katniss and Peeta, giving them veteran identities that are complex negotiations of their wartime experiences. I explore Katniss and Peeta’s negotiation of veteran identities here through an analysis of their responses to and methods of recovery from posttraumatic stress disorder. Katniss struggles to negotiate her identity, experiencing symptoms of PTSD and dehumanizing both herself and Peeta before beginning her recovery process. In recovery, Katniss and Peeta both experience cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy; Peeta undergoes this treatment through his discussions with Squad 451, and Katniss begins her recovery upon her return to District 12 using both talk therapy and art therapy to negotiate her identity as a veteran of war.

While Panem has no word for posttraumatic stress syndrome, both Katniss and Peeta show symptoms of PTSD after their participation in the Games and the rebellion in the Capitol. Hayes (2015) argues ”Katniss clearly has PTSD, re-experiencing the events that played out in both arenas, having nightmares every night about her experiences” (p. 37). Suzanne Collins confirms the diagnosis in an interview: “She’s got a lot of classic posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. She has nightmares. She has flashbacks. And in the beginning you can see she’s practicing avoidance” (Grossman, 2013 Nov. 18).
Freeman (2016) describes symptoms of PTSD for many characters in the series, noting Katniss’s PTSD after her experiences in the Games and after the rebellion and Peeta’s display of symptoms after his hijacking. A dimension of posttraumatic stress disorder is “identity confusion” (Douglas, 1993), and both Katniss and Peeta are unable to take up their civilian identities after returning from war. Katniss shows her frustration with trauma through dehumanization and both she and Peeta undergo various treatments and recovery processes that allow them to negotiate new identities as veterans.

The indoctrination and discipline of the military irrevocably change soldier identities (Goffman, 1961; Smith & True, 2014) as military roles can result in identity dislocation, “losing touch with whom you are” (Smith & True, 2014, p. 153). Katniss shows her identity dislocation through dehumanization, identifying both herself and Peeta as “mutts” after experiencing war scenarios (Collins, 2010, p. 369). When describing her post-war identity, Katniss specifically and repeatedly associates the transformation in terms of dehumanization. Katniss associates her own physical form to the grotesqueness she has witnessed in muttations, calling herself and Peeta “both fire mutts now” (Collins, 2010, p. 368-369). Her disfigurement leaves Katniss unable to recognize herself and in both physical and mental pain: “a fire mutt knows only a single sensation: agony” (Collins, 2010, p. 348). Katniss’s dehumanization of herself is a dissociation apparent in war veterans, as “extreme emotional control and a significant degree of dissociation are essential to the identity of soldiers who experience violent combat deployments” (Smith & True, 2014, p. 153). A major facet of Katniss’s recovery becomes the control of her emotions and her ability to piece together her identity in the wake of trauma.
Where Katniss shows her frustration and trauma through dehumanization, both she and Peeta establish new veteran identities as a process of recovery and their return to home. Both Katniss and Peeta receive medical treatment and psychological help in various forms. Peeta’s recovery from his hijacking appears through his experiences talking with other veterans and in his medical treatment. District 13 attempts counter conditioning (Freeman, 2016) on Peeta: “trying to hijack him back. Bring up the distorted memory of [Katniss] and then give him a big dose of a calming drug” (Collins, 2010, p. 195). The counter conditioning puts Peeta in a stupor but does not have the intended effects; however, Peeta does respond to forms of exposure conditioning and cognitive restructuring as he discusses his experiences and corrects errors in his memory. Leed (1981) argues that World War I “produced men who shared a new, common identity” different than that of civilians who had not experienced war (p. 12) and therapists have used cognitive restructuring to treat U.S. veterans of war with PTSD (Hassia & Gray, 2010). As Peeta discusses his experiences with other victors (primarily Finnick and Katniss), and other displaced refugees from District 12 (Delly and Gale), he connects his traumatized veteran identity to other shared experiences. When Peeta interacts with other veterans, he sorts his memories and Katniss recognizes moments of recovery: “for a moment, he was really there” and “Peeta sounded like his old self” (Collins, 2010, p. 299). Peeta’s game of “Real or Not Real” is, in a sense, talk therapy and cognitive restructuring that allows him to process his traumatization (Collins, 2010, p. 272). After his hospitalization in the Capitol following the death of both Snow and Coin, Peeta receives and responds to treatment and is allowed to return to District 12. He is scarred
and changed but Katniss notes, “He looks well. Thin and covered with burn scars like me, but his eyes have lost that clouded, tortured look” (Collins, 2010, p. 382). Peeta’s recovery and negotiation of his veteran identity does not erase his experiences of war but rather establishes him as a survivor.

Katniss’s recovery primarily occurs when she returns home to District 12 through the use of both talk therapy and art therapy. In the Capitol, her medical team brands her as “mentally disoriented” (Collins, 2010, p. 352), and she describes herself as a “hopeless, shell-shocked lunatic” (p. 378), however when she returns home and has the company of Greasy Sae, Thom, Buttercup, Haymitch, and Peeta, she begins to recover.

Dr. Aurelius provides therapy to Katniss through phone conversations: “Slowly, with many lost days, I come back to life. I try to follow Dr. Aurelius’s advice, just going through the motions, amazed when one finally has meaning again” (Collins, 2010, p. 387). Katniss negotiates her identity as a veteran through conversations and the act of recording memories in a book. Freeman (2016) argues “the final recovery process that helps both Peeta and Katniss is the creation of art” (p. 214) as illustrations and narratives of lost friends and family help her to process her experiences. Malchiodi (2012) writes of art therapy with U.S. combat veterans who experience PTSD, relating them to cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy: “in art therapy, traumatic events may be gradually and/or purposefully depicted through drawing, clay, or other media; in this sense, art expression serves as a form of imaginal exposure therapy” (p. 328). Just as Peeta experiences cognitive restructuring and exposure through conversations with his friends, Katniss is able to process traumatic events in the creation of art and begin to heal from
the trauma and violence of war in Panem. As Katniss and Peeta develop military identities through discipline, torture, and recovery, they interact with the U.S. cultural geographies of war present in Panem. These cultural geographies and identities tell a story about U.S. military identities and veteran identities that is continued and expanded through fan response.

**The Hunger Games, Military Identities, and Restorying Time**

As art allows Katniss and Peeta to a method of recovery from the trauma of war, fan art also allows readers to negotiate militarized identities and U.S. war narratives in the Hunger Games series. I explore fan art here within Thomas and Stornaiuolo’s (2016) definition of “restorying time” in which fan responses extend the narrative of the story to provide additional perspectives, related here to military identities. Due to the sheer volume of fan response available online, and as fans create post-canon responses to the Hunger Games series, fan art shows imaginative negotiations of identity that can build upon the U.S. military contexts and military identities present in the novels and films.

Collins’s epilogue reveals Katniss and Peeta have two children, though “Katniss admits to never losing the nightmares of the Hunger Games and their aftermath” (Cadden, 2012, p. 352). Restorying time between the events of *Mockingjay* and the epilogue present Katniss and Peeta supporting each other before the birth of their children. Marine Piegay (2015) illustrates Katniss and Peeta in bed, memories floating around them:
Figure 28. Katniss and Peeta (Piegay, 2015)

Piegay connects Katniss to illustrations of a mockingjay, dandelions, and Prim, and surrounds Peeta by illustrations of bread, an arrow, and fire. The images do not appear violent or frightening, though do potentially represent trauma and loss (in the case of Prim), and the two characters appear to be comforting each other as they recover. An illustration by Clayton (2012) titled “Healing Scars” depicts various scenes of Katniss and Peeta recovering from their war experiences after the events of Mockingjay. Katniss teaches Peeta to fire an arrow, paints a humorous portrait of Peeta, and sits with Peeta and Buttercup in the forest:
Clayton captions the image: “Katniss and Peeta grow back together. One thing the Hunger Games taught me was that you can find happiness, even after the hardest trials. We can piece together the fragments and find a safe place.” The illustration also includes
a scene of Katniss comforting Peeta who clings to a pillow. The words “MUTT” “friend” and “lover” surround the two, as Clayton captures lingering trauma amidst the happiness of their recovery. Clayton is restorying time by imagining the events that happen outside the text of the novels and films, developing Katniss’s and Peeta’s veteran identities and creating a place for Katniss and Peeta to recover from the trauma of war.

Fan depictions of Katniss and Peeta post-epilogue show the two as parents, often building and celebrating family relationships. In an image by Tasia (2015), Katniss and Peeta are shown smiling with their daughter, looking at their memory book:

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 30. “Deep in the Meadow” (Tasia, 2015)
Both Katniss and Peeta have visible scars, physical evidence of the trauma they have endured during the war in Panem. A second image by Piegay (2013), titled “A Dandelion in Spring,” shows a scarred Katniss holding her son (Figure 30). Parenthood is appears, in these fan responses, as a means of recovery and growth in these images as fans restory time, adding depth and further characterization to the identities of Katniss as Peeta as veterans of war and parents after trauma. In both Tasia’s illustration (Figure 29) and Piegay’s (Figure 30), Katniss appears potentially multiracial (as explored in Chapter 4), adding visibility to persons of color in veteran and military narratives.

Some fans depict motherhood as a part of Katniss’s recovery experience both in Mockingjay and in fan response, though other fans critique Collins’s epilogue due to Katniss’s assertions that she did not wish to have children in The Hunger Games. Woloshyn, Taber, and Lane (2013) critique the epilogue for heteronormative practices of positioning parenthood as recovery for Katniss, though fan art that restories time extends the narrative to make

Figure 31. “A Dandelion in the Spring”

(Piegay, 2013)
Katniss’s motherhood a more complex negotiation of her recovery from trauma that is not simply a “happily ever after” as the epilogue may suggest. Fan art that restories time allows for more complex negotiations of what occurs outside of the text of the novels and films complicating Katniss’s recovery and her veteran identity. Lindsay (user Linzart, 2012) depicts Katniss as pregnant but clearly unhappy (Figure 31). One fan comments on the image: “Yeah… I don’t know how she EVER accepted that” articulating frustrations about the epilogue and Katniss’s identity as a parent (Linzart, 2012). Fan art that restories time is able to provide multiple, even sometimes conflicting, interpretations of the events after the end of the canonical narrative, giving voices to perspectives that are not initially present in the narrative of the novels and films.

New technologies “amplify the scale, scope, and nature of people’s communicative efforts” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 315) and fan art that restories time provides avenues for empathy transference and increased visibility to the many ways in which veterans navigate trauma. When Katniss and Peeta appear scarred and healing, these narratives disrupt a single story of healing. As some fans illustrate Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian through restorying time, she functions within narratives of both
her veteran identity and her racial and regional identities (as I explore in the previous chapter), disrupting “predominant metanarratives and epistemologies” that whitewash and erased marginalized voices (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 319). Restorying time in fan fiction allows for more complex and varied interpretations of identity with regards to the narratives of the Hunger Games series. As Katniss and Peeta interact within U.S. cultural geographies of war, as I present here with soldier, prisoner, and veteran identities, fan response works to synthesize U.S. war narratives and shows the imaginative ways in which fans are negotiating these complex military identities.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I present a review of the findings of this dissertation, as they relate to cultural geographies, identity, and fan response, with particular emphasis on the revolutionary and subversive ways fans are responding to the Hunger Games series, particularly through a lens of restorying. I examine restorying (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016) as a lens through which fan response functions as a revolutionary and equitizing extension of the narratives present in popular texts. In this dissertation, restorying practices related to the novels and films of the Hunger Games series increase the visibility and complexity of marginalized identities relating to the cultural geographies of Panem. In this conclusion, I provide suggestions for future research related to fan response and restorying of the Hunger Games related to the portrayals and representation of marginalized U.S. identities. To conclude the project, I provide implications for English/Language Arts teachers, encouraging the use of fan response for social justice work in the classroom.

A Review of the Findings

Here, I review the findings of this dissertation in three categories: cultural geographies, identities, and fan response, in that order, as a reflection of the structure of each of my findings chapters. I give attention toward my findings related to restorying
practices in fan response as in the next section I propose questions and topics for future research related to restorying among fans of the Hunger Games series.

**Cultural geographies.** The cultural geographies in this dissertation include reflections of colonialism, Black history and social movements, Appalachian culture, and U.S. military tactics in the Hunger Games novels and films. These parallels between the fictional world of Panem and the real world of the United States provide historical referents and cultural contexts that enrich the reading of both the series and the world in which we live. Dystopian narratives like the Hunger Game series invite readers to not only imagine difficult futures but also to reflect on power dynamics and inequities in both the past and present. Tan (2013) examines the defamiliarization of seeing our own world in the fictional world of Panem and suggests that “the power of the trilogy seems to lie in this vision: in an engagement with the uncomfortable tensions between real, current culture, and this all-destructive world” (p. 55). Explorations of cultural geographies in this dissertation both embrace and interrogate these uncomfortable tensions as they bring to light historic and contemporary inequities in the United States. Collins writes U.S. narratives of colonialism, Black history, Appalachian culture, and military contexts into the world of Panem, building upon conversations of geography, racism, economic inequality, and trauma present in the United States. By highlighting these cultural geographies, we are better able to understand the portrayal of a variety of identities represented in the novels and films of the Hunger Games series.

**Identity.** Building from the examination of cultural geographies in the novels and film adaptations of the Hunger Games, this dissertation examines the portrayal of
marginalized U.S. identities found in Panem. As people are “composites of many, often contradictory, self-understandings and identities,” the characters of the Hunger Games interact with multiple U.S. identities throughout the narrative of the series (Holland et al., p. 8). For example, Katniss performs postcolonial identities in Chapter 2, a multiracial Appalachian identity in Chapter 4, and a recovering veteran identity in Chapter 5. My exploration of these coexisting identities illuminates the ways in which marginalized identities appear in the Hunger Games series, in multiple and sometimes conflicting ways, and in popular young adult literature. Collins builds on historical traditions of erasure and marginalization in the portrayal of some identities, particularly through the erasure of Rue’s Black identity (explored in Chapter 3) and the whitewashing of Katniss’s multiracial Appalachian identity in the film adaptations (explored in Chapter 4). Revealing these inequities in the novels and films allows for discussion of the perpetuation of stereotypes and erasure of marginalized identities in popular young adult literature, paving the way for discussions of how to remedy these inequalities.

**Fan response.** I explore fan response, including fan fiction, fan art, and cosplaying, in this dissertation through a lens of restorying, in which readers extend the text of the narrative in various ways (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) discuss six forms of restorying in the digital age: “time, place, perspective, mode, metanarrative, and identity” (p. 313). Four of these forms appear in the findings chapters of this dissertation, and I propose avenues for future research with the remaining two (place and metanarrative) in this concluding chapter.
I examine restorying mode in Chapter 2 in conjunction with postcolonial identities, as fans transform the written mode of the novels and moving pictures of the film adaptations into cosplay creations, bringing the character of Katniss to life through performance. Fans often insert parts of their own identity into their fan creations (Lamerichs, 2011; Thomas, 2007a) and cosplay recreations of Katniss show fans engaging, and embedding themselves, into her postcolonial hybrid identity. Vandergrift (1996) writes, “engagement with story is life-affirming; it puts us in touch with the world, with one another, and with our essential selves” (p. ix). As fans embody Katniss through cosplay that restories mode, they engage with the Hunger Games series in new and often subversive ways that allow them to build empathy for the postcolonial character of Katniss and write themselves into the text.

Chapter 3 examines restorying perspective alongside the notably absent or stereotyped Black American identities in the novels and films of the Hunger Games series. Fans that restory perspective by writing fan fiction “from a nonprotagonist’s point of view” or creating fan fiction and fan art featuring complex Black characters write Black visibility into the narrative of the Hunger Games (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 319). Portrayals of Rue and Thresh in fan fiction shift these two Black characters into central, and often pivotal, positions in the series, portraying them as multidimensional characters with the “power to build empathy and understanding” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 320). Complex Black characters challenge the whitewashing of popular young adult literature and insert necessary racial diversity into the Hunger Games series.
Chapter 4 investigates restorying identity with regards to Appalachian identity, particularly with regards to the portrayal of Katniss as a multiracial character. Fans interpret textual evidence from the novels to indicate Katniss as a multiracial Appalachian, despite Jennifer Lawrence, a white actress, playing Katniss in the film adaptations. Fan art featuring Katniss as multiracial restories the white identity of Katniss in the film adaptations to center characters of color. Other fans use fancasting to imagine alternate actresses who could portray Katniss, creating collages that depict actresses of color in Appalachian settings. Restorying identity through racebending is subversive and transformative as readers challenge dominant narratives of whitewashing in film and assert the importance of representation of multiracial Appalachian identity.

Chapter 5 analyzes restorying time in relation to U.S. military identities as Katniss and Peeta negotiate and recover from the trauma of war in post-canon fan response. Fans depict Katniss and Peeta healing from the trauma of war in complex ways, extending the story of the Hunger Games series to include more complex representations of recovery and veteran identities, disrupting a single story (Adichie, 2009) of healing from war. Fans depict Katniss in particular as a multiracial mother in some fan responses, showing intersectionality in fan art that challenges perceptions of femininity, race, and trauma. Fans that restory time disrupt “predominant metanarratives and epistemologies” surrounding Katniss’s multiple and intersecting identities (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 319).

These four modes of restorying relate to the ways in which fans extend the narratives of the Hunger Games in a variety of subversive and revolutionary ways,
writing themselves into the text, finding avenues for increasing racial diversity in the series, and imagining narratives outside the texts of the films and novels. The fan response in this dissertation is both liberatory and culturally transformative, expanding the domain of the Hunger Games to be more detailed, more inclusive, and more equitable. I examine the remaining two forms of restorying in the next section, to show possibilities for future research that can add further breadth to my exploration of revolutionary fan response.

**Future Research**

Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) identify two other methods of restorying that I do not address in this dissertation: restorying place and restorying metanarrative (also called “restorying together”). Future research on the fan responses relating to U.S. cultural geographies and identities of the Hunger Games could examine the ways in which fans extend the narratives of marginalized identities through methods of restorying place and restorying together. Here, I suggest ways in which these methods could be used to explore LGBTQ identities with restorying place and issues of poverty with restorying together.

**Restorying place.** Fans restory place when they transport the characters or events of a story into another location (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). Fan fiction that is set in a location outside of the characters’ canonical setting is known as “alternate universe” (or AU), in which writers will often transport the characters of one fandom to the location of another fictional or real place. Future research on restorying place in fan fiction of the Hunger Games series could examine the portrayal of sexuality in alternate universe fan
fictions, particularly fics with high school settings. There are various “Hunger Games High School” fan fictions posted online, where the characters of the series navigate social and romantic relationships in high school settings. Some of these fan fictions present Katniss as a lesbian, as bisexual, or as queer, and future research could examine these fics for the ways in which they challenge heteronormativity with regards to restorying place. Some slash fics (fan fiction featuring same-sex relationships, often with canonically heterosexual characters) position Katniss and Madge in a relationship, evidenced by Katniss’s descriptions of Madge in the novels:

She keeps to herself. Like me. Since neither of us really has a group of friends, we seem to end up together a lot at school. Eating lunch, sitting next to each other at assemblies, partnering for sports activities. We rarely talk, which suits us both just fine. (Collins, 2008, p. 12)

Madge and Katniss are friends at their school in Panem and this friendship, and potentially romantic relationship, appears when fans restory the place of Katniss’s school to be that of an U.S. high school. In The Hunger Games, Madge visits Katniss and gives her the iconic mockingjay pin and “a kiss on the cheek” before Katniss travels to the Capitol (Collins, 2008, p. 38). Fans find evidence for a potential romance between Katniss and Madge in the text of the novels (as Madge is absent from the films), and extend the narrative of the text to include marginalized LGBTQ identities through the practice of restorying place. Restorying place allows readers to make “rich text-to-self connections by restorying a narrative within their own context” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 331). Readers who restory place and challenge heteronormativity can examine
the treatment of sexualities in their own own high schools, creating discourse and spaces that combat homophobia and challenge heteronormativity.

**Restoring together.** Restoring together examines the ways in which fans engage in participatory culture and affinity spaces (Curwood, 2013; Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Gee, 2004, 2005) to construct new stories and media in fandoms. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) provide examples of Twitter campaigns and public participatory art that challenge metanarratives and move shared fans into collective action. Public and networked challenging of metanarratives can push “official responses from authors and their representatives concerned about managing public perceptions” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 331). Restoring together could analyze a variety of marginalized identities present in the Hunger Games series, though I propose researchers could examine this lens, so focused on action and collectivity, through a lens of social class and poverty. A group of fans of the Hunger Games started a collective campaign called “Odds in Our Favor,” formed from an offshoot of the activist group The Harry Potter Alliance. Odds in Our Favor “tackles economic inequality on several levels as well as the disparity between the Hunger Games franchise’s poignant content and its vapid, exploitative marketing strategy” (The Harry Potter Alliance, n.d.). The group worked collaboratively with protestors demanding fair wages and shared stories of community members with the hashtag #MyHungerGames. Fans of the Hunger Games shared their own stories about their experiences with poverty, along with pictures of fans raising a three-fingered salute adopted as a symbol of revolution from the franchise. Collective organization, via restoring together, showed fans that they were part of a larger
community of activism and resulted in social action and reform related to poverty in the United States.

These two additional forms of restorying work to continue the research of this dissertation, examining ways in which fans use creative digital practices to extend the narrative of the Hunger Games series, writing increased visibility and inclusion for often absent or underrepresented marginalized identities in the novels and films. These restorying practices have the potential to be radically transformative and could be evidence of young fans desires for both a more equitable future and more equitable representations of marginalized identities in popular young adult literature. Not only can researchers examine these practices in out-of-school digital settings, as I do in this dissertation, but teachers and researchers could integrate these practices into English Language Arts curricula with implications for educators that I explore in the next section.

**Implications**

For some teachers, simply integrating fan response into pedagogy is “revolutionary,” however, I would like to push against that notion through the words of Leander (2008): “The time for thinking about the Internet and digital literacies as revolutionary has passed” (p. 33). Leander advocates for the recognition of adolescent digital practices by researchers, who can see online literacies as “flowing with and interconnected to streams of other literacy practices, material culture, traditional media, movements of people, identity practices, and the social construction of technologies” (p. 34). Fans are engaging, in complex and liberatory ways, with popular young adult texts.
and teachers can integrate methods of restorying for social justice work in their classrooms.

Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) suggest that teachers can use fan response and student engagement in revolutionary ways through:

pedagogies that frame teaching and learning as centrally concerned with nurturing the language, literacy, and cultural practices youth bring with them, moving beyond the four corners of texts to explore the intersections between identities, contexts, and author/reader/text transactions (p. 330).

Teachers can use fan response for liberatory aims as readers engage with popular literature, recognizing contexts of cultural geographies and marginalized identities. The identities in this dissertation, postcolonial, Black, Appalachian, and military, can inform students’ understandings of both the text of the Hunger Games series and the world in which we live. When teachers allow students to negotiate meaning and extend the narrative of the text, students can challenge dominant metanarratives of inequality. Willis (2003) suggests that fan response can be particularly subversive as:

young people creatively respond to a plethora of electronic signals and cultural commodities in ways that surprise their makers, finding meanings and identities never meant to be there and defying simple nostrums that bewail the manipulation or passivity of consumers. (p. 39)

When readers challenge texts and write unauthorized interpretations of young adult novels, there is the potential for radical social change and liberatory discourses that may not be initially present in these young adult novels. Teachers can harness the power of
this revolutionary work by encouraging it in their classrooms, allowing students to respond creatively to a variety of texts and opening conversations on which voices are centered, who is represented, and how cultural geographies influence how we read identities in literature.
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Appendix A: Fan Fiction Data Collection

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