

COLONNA, SARAH ELIZABETH, Ph.D. There's More to It than Just Girl Power: A Case Study Exploring a Women's and Gender Studies Class Taught with *The Hunger Games*. (2016)

Directed by Dr. Leila Villaverde. 303pp.

In this qualitative case study dissertation, the researcher explored students' perspectives on young adult dystopian fiction in the feminist classroom. Through the lens of popular culture and storytelling, the researcher considers the powerful pedagogical possibilities that lie within these stories. Using a single class as a case study, students were interviewed about their experience in a class taught using *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Data was also collected from student assignments, class documents, and the researcher's field journal. The results of this study include five categories that exemplified the students' experience learning with young adult dystopian fiction: the power of storytelling; students' reflections on class experiences; the need for imagination; fiction as educational space; and continuing to think with *The Hunger Games*. Further, this study showed there is room for additional study of the intersection of young adult dystopian fiction and feminist pedagogy and highlights the place of imagination and storytelling in higher education.

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN JUST GIRL POWER: A CASE STUDY  
EXPLORING A WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES CLASS  
TAUGHT WITH *THE HUNGER GAMES*

by

Sarah Elizabeth Colonna

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro  
2016

Approved by

---

Committee Chair

For PJ Colonna because you have always believed in me.

For mom and dad, Kathy and Ralph Johnson, who modeled what it meant to be a reader.

And Wanda Horvath.

In memory of my godparents, Chris and Debbie Reynolds, my biggest cheerleaders.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Sarah Elizabeth Colonna has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_  
Leila Villaverde

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_  
Glenn Hudak

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tracy Nichols

\_\_\_\_\_  
Danielle Bouchard

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Leila Villaverde for her support, patience, and encouragement as both a professor and my dissertation chair. I have learned so much.

For my dissertation committee, thank you for your patience in the face of my own obstacles.

Dr. Glenn Hudak - Your classes pushed me to ask new questions

Dr. Tracy Nichols - In your classroom and in the community, I am grateful for your knowledge, perspective, and insight.

Dr. Danielle Bouchard - As a Master's student, WGS 650 introduced me to the academic home I was looking for. During that first week, I showed up during your office hours unsure of myself as a student and scholar. Thank you for seeing what I could not.

This project would not exist without the support of the UNCG Women's and Gender Studies program. Thank you for supporting a course about *The Hunger Games*. And, to Ms. Beth Walker who planted the seed for teaching using feminist science fiction with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's (1915) *Herland*.

I would especially like to thank the students who took the Spring 2014 *The Hunger Games* and feminist education (WGS 450) class. Your questions, ideas, laughter, and words are the heart of this dissertation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem Statement .....	6
Research Questions .....	7
Theoretical Framework .....	8
Postmodern Theory .....	9
Feminist Postmodernism .....	11
Feminist Pedagogy .....	16
Critical pedagogy .....	22
Critical Literacy .....	27
Positionality .....	32
Positionality as Teacher and Researcher .....	35
Summary .....	42
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	43
What is Popular? What is Culture? .....	43
Importance of Reading Fiction .....	53
Why Young Adult Literature? .....	55
Why <i>The Hunger Games</i> ? .....	60
Gender .....	65
Real or Not Real .....	66
Love and Community .....	66
Science Fiction .....	68
Preoccupation with Process .....	69
Using Science Fiction to Think about the Present .....	70
Necessity of Space and Limits .....	71
Science Fiction as an Analytic Category .....	73
Prismatic Understanding .....	74
Feminist Pedagogy .....	75
Feminist Pedagogy and Dystopian Literature .....	80
Considering Reality .....	84
Dystopian Fiction in Unexpected Places .....	87
Politics of Dystopian Fiction .....	87
Dystopian Fiction at West Point .....	90
Ways to Think with Dystopian Fiction .....	91

III. METHODOLOGY .....	95
Epistemology .....	95
Interpretivist Paradigm.....	101
Postmodernism.....	105
Feminist Theory .....	113
Gender is a social concept.....	115
We know in community with other people.....	116
Epistemology is not neutral .....	116
Knowing is a process .....	117
Methodology .....	118
Research Strategy.....	118
Understanding case study research .....	119
Class Demographic Description .....	122
Participant Selection .....	122
Participant Profiles.....	123
Jubilee .....	124
Amber .....	125
Marie .....	127
Harper .....	128
Pom .....	129
Elizabeth .....	131
Data Collection.....	132
Interviews.....	133
Observations .....	134
Document Reviews .....	134
Data Analysis .....	135
Interviews.....	137
Observations/Field Journal .....	140
Document Reviews .....	142
Researcher Trustworthiness .....	144
IV. DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS .....	147
The Power of Storytelling.....	150
Students' Reflections on Class Experiences .....	156
Love .....	157
Student voices .....	159
Disability.....	165
Student voices .....	167
Hunger.....	173
Student voices .....	175
The Archives.....	181

Student voices .....	182
Need for Imagination .....	191
Fiction as Educational Space .....	196
Continuing to Think with <i>The Hunger Games</i> .....	201
Summary .....	210
V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CLOSING THOUGHTS .....	211
Conclusions .....	212
Question 1: How Did Young Adult Dystopian Fiction Inform Feminist Pedagogy in a WGS Senior Level Undergraduate Course (WGS 450) on Feminist Education?.....	212
Sub question A: How did students taking a WGS senior level course experience the use of young adult dystopian literature in the course? .....	217
Sub question B: How did students who took a WGS senior level course perceive the use of young adult dystopian literature in feminist pedagogy? .....	220
Sub question C: What challenges and benefits existed in using young adult dystopian literature to teach an undergraduate course on feminist education? .....	227
Challenges .....	228
Benefits .....	236
Implications.....	239
There is Truth in Fiction and Fiction in Truth .....	241
Research Limitations .....	246
Concluding Thoughts.....	248
Epilogue .....	251
REFERENCES .....	256
APPENDIX A. SYLLABUS FOR WGS 450.....	282
APPENDIX B. WGS 450 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	294



APPENDIX C. UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT  
GREENSBORO CONSENT TO ACT AS A  
HUMAN PARTICIPANT .....295

APPENDIX D. *THE HUNGER GAMES* TERMINOLOGY.....299

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Then I [Katniss] remember Peeta's words on the roof. "*Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to...to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games.*" And for the first time, I understand what he means. (Collins, 2008, p. 236)

Teaching sections of WGS 250 (Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies), I searched for ways to use the feminist concepts we were learning to interrogate popular culture. I find the academic concepts like identity and choice showing up in stories like *The Hunger Games*, as highlighted in the above quotation. At this moment in the story, Katniss is realizing her power and seeing how she can affect her world. As a fan of young adult literature and someone who teaches mostly young adults in my Women's and Gender Studies classroom, I wondered how young adult literature and Women's and Gender studies overlapped. Over the course of a couple of semesters, I used examples from the popular young adult dystopian fiction series *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins as a way to explore feminism, education, and popular culture.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Briefly, this trilogy follows Katniss Everdeen as she volunteers to take her sister's place in the state supported Hunger Games, an annual televised fight to the death of 24 randomly selected children to atone for a past rebellion against Panem, a North American nation established after an unnamed apocalyptic tragedy. Katniss wins her Games and we follow her as she bankrolls that victory into another uprising.

In WGS 250, I used *The Hunger Games* to fulfill the objectives of an introductory class and to filter topics and questions. After using the novels as part of an introductory course, I wanted to use *The Hunger Games* as an explicit avenue to explore feminist education with WGS undergraduate students. In Spring 2014, I taught a senior level seminar titled *The Hunger Games and Feminist Education* (WGS 450). This series is not only popular, but has become cultural phenomenon. As of 2012, the trilogy had 36.5 million books in print domestically (Lee, 2015), the first film of the series had the third biggest movie opening weekend to date (Kelly, 2012), and the second and third installments were the top grossing films for 2013 and 2014 (Lang, 2014; D'Alessandro, 2015). This seminar class used the trilogy to explore how *The Hunger Games* can help us think more explicitly about feminism, education, and young adult dystopian literature. We used the novels in concert with articles, videos, and other materials to meet the course objectives, which were to: 1) demonstrate the ability to conduct interdisciplinary feminist analysis; 2) explore the intersections of feminist pedagogy and young adult literature (YAL); and 3) critically examine ideological assumptions underlying the institution of education and systems of representation.

Young adult dystopian fiction has recently been scrutinized with concerns that under the guise of strong female characters is an underlying conservative political agenda. Ewan Morrison (2014) discusses how young adult dystopian novels advance a right-leaning political agenda that maligns big government and lauds libertarianism. The hero is the individual who survives outside the system while evading the overreaching government. By valorizing a laissez-faire existence, Morrison (2014) says we are giving

ourselves right wing messages that pit the individual hero(ine) against aims of the left, namely the welfare state, progress, social planning, and equality. This argument, wrapped in an action-packed story, is that these novels are ultimately “propaganda disguised as fantasy or science fiction” (O’Hehir, 2014). Current young adult dystopian fiction, these authors say, is different from the anti-authoritarian novels written by Orwell or Huxley that inspired previous generations of students and activists. In stories that superficially seem to encourage young adults to challenge the world around them, these authors say these novels are really selling a very different message, one that is propaganda for the ethos of individualism—the central ideology of consumer capitalism (O’Hehir, 2014).

Ewan Morrison (2014) muses on messaging in current young adult dystopian fiction saying, we “might be giving ourselves right-wing messages because, whether or not we realise it, we have come to accept them as incontestable.” I do not believe this messaging to be incontestable. In fact, by reimagining how we read and teach with these stories, I think they offer space to learn how to recognize and challenge ideology like consumer capitalism or the ethos of individuality. One way in which to push back against the conditions where seemingly inevitable self-centered interests outweigh the common good, as described by Morrison and O’Hehir, is by using feminist pedagogy. While hard to summarize, feminist pedagogy works to resist a single, dominant narrative, whether that be about women, education, or young adult dystopian fiction. This happens in many ways, but always includes introducing perspectives that challenge normative tendencies and transform students from the object to subject of inquiry. Fiction contains

political messages, but I'm not sure we can categorize an entire genre with broad political stereotypes. It seems unlikely that an entire genre can support one political ideology exclusively, as Morrison and O'Hehir suggest. Writer and activist Walidah Imarisha uses science fiction as a social justice framework to imagine a world without prisons. She coined the term *visionary fiction* to describe how "we can use science fiction, horror, and fantasy genres to envision alternatives to unjust and oppressive systems" (Hansen, 2014). By imagining different worlds, we can imagine difference in our world.

Teaching young adult dystopian fiction using a feminist pedagogy, which acknowledges the existence of oppression in social systems, connects personal knowledge to political power, and recognizes our shifting, fragmented identities in the classroom, we have the possibility of tapping into the creativity and imagination of this genre. Namely, using science fiction to learn we can see how "to imagine that there is a possibility to exist outside of the current system" (Imarisha in Hansen, 2014), to envision worlds without the constraints of race or gender, and to celebrate strangeness in a way that "clarifies our normal—and makes it, too, seem strange" (Evans, 2014). This kind of feminist pedagogy looks toward a future where equity is realized—a strange world that does not exist now, so in many ways contemplating a new way to understand our world is similar to learning about worlds in science fiction. Evans (2014) notes, "speculation forces us to reconsider the things we take for granted about our world." Young adult dystopian fiction offers students a place to creatively imagine the stories they read, and

one of the roles of the feminist classroom is to find ways to allow for connections to the world around us. Therefore, this pedagogy encompasses theory and action in my classroom.

Science fiction, of which young adult dystopian fiction is a subgenre, is a space where we can explore notions of citizens as consumers and higher education's role in corporate culture, pushing back on conservative politics that are shaping current educational discourse. As a learning tool, young adult dystopian literature can explore "where students can learn the power of questioning authority, recover the ideals of engaged citizenship, reaffirm the importance of the public good, and expand their capacities to make a difference" (Giroux, 2002, p. 450). This does not happen by merely reading the books, but I contend that utilizing stories like *The Hunger Games* within my own feminist pedagogical praxis opens up the space for students to think about how to question, what engaged citizenship looks like, why the public good is important, and how they can make a difference. Looking at characters that save or change fictional worlds opens up the conversation for how students can participate in their own world, something the students I teach have trouble articulating at times. It pushes back on the despair that adults have created a world that students just have to accept. This ability to learn with the story may not happen when reading young adult dystopian literature for our own enjoyment, but occurs by reading and teaching young adult dystopian literature with feminist pedagogy.

## **Problem Statement**

Using *The Hunger Games* got my students' attention by bringing an unexpected text into our academic space. This centered students' experiences by honoring the popular culture many of them were interested in, allowing them to share their experiences outside of the classroom, and connecting their lives out of school with academic objectives (Lee, 1991; Duncan-Moran and Morrell, 2005; Jule, 2010; Adams, 2011; Roberts, 2013; Alvermann, 2012;). Playfulness and rigor were combined in the classroom, and fiction created a space for new, innovative knowledge production. In previous WGS classes, we spent time debating feminism's relevancy, with some students feeling uncomfortable as they implicated their schools, churches, families, and ultimately themselves in our dialogue about sexism, racism, classism, and ableism. This kind of debate is necessary, but I wondered if providing a space that allowed these conversations to happen in a fictional world would be useful. The debates happened, of course, with students who read *The Hunger Games*, but we could see how these concepts were illustrated in fiction, then make connections back to our own lived realities. This fictional space allowed students a place to gather their thoughts, explore, and practice (Imarisha, 2013) before turning our attention back to our realities. Using fiction as another learning space in which to locate our discussions is something I have continued to think about and want to understand better.

For this research project, I am interested in exploring student perspectives on young adult dystopian fiction in the feminist classroom. I want to know if fiction facilitates learning by offering students a place to gather their thoughts, to imagine

difference, and to practice talking about these issues, particularly when we use these stories “to consider issues of social importance” (Gunn, Barr, and Candelaria, 2009, p. 109). I crafted WGS 450 in response to the social issues I noticed while reading and teaching *The Hunger Games*. Young adult dystopian fiction is produced for and consumed by audiences for many reasons, but there are references to issues we struggle with in our lives, which hold our collective attention, and I want to consider the powerful pedagogical possibilities that lie within these stories. Walidah Imarisha sees science fiction as a “useful way of thinking through these issues” (Hansen, 2014), and I am interested in this thinking through students’ experiences of WGS 450 to understand how young adult literature informed feminist pedagogy in this class. In other words, what was significant about reading and teaching with young adult dystopian fiction in WGS 450?

### **Research Questions**

While the question of the significance of reading young adult dystopian fiction is a place to start, it is a large question. In refining my own ideas around this project, my research takes two directions: 1) how young adult dystopian fiction informs feminist pedagogy and 2) the experiences of students in WGS 450. For this project the questions I want to explore are:

- 1) How did young adult dystopian fiction inform feminist pedagogy in a WGS senior level undergraduate course (WGS 450) on feminist education?
  - a) How did students taking a WGS senior level course experience the use of young adult dystopian literature in the course?



- b) How did students who took a WGS senior level course perceive the use of young adult dystopian literature in feminist pedagogy?
- c) What challenges and benefits existed in using young adult dystopian literature to teach an undergraduate course on feminist education?

As a reader and teacher, I am interested in how young adult dystopian fiction functions in my college classroom. I want to explore students' experiences in WGS 450. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature as it relates to young adult dystopian fiction and feminist pedagogy. Chapter 3 outlines my epistemology and methodology. Chapter 4 is an exploration of the class *The Hunger Games and Feminist Education* (WGS 450). And Chapter 5 presents my conclusions and further implications for study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Antonia Lukenchuk (2013) a research framework is a “system of inquiry, a model, and a way of knowing” (p. xv). Frameworks establish what kinds of questions we ask and how we look for the answers to those questions. For this project, a critical postmodern feminist framework supports my exploration of how popular young adult dystopian fiction and feminist pedagogy can inform one another and how students experienced a class based on *The Hunger Games*. For Brady and Dentith (2001), critical postmodern feminism is:

a theory of pedagogy that provides the needed space to embrace the multiple positions required for democratic participation...[it] acknowledges both diversity and unity as it focuses on the real lives of people who live in multiracial, multicultural society... it moves beyond the acknowledgement of gender as a single category of oppression and exploitation...is a discourse informed by multiple strands of feminism rather than one that is exclusive... [and] not only

challenges oppositional stances, but can recognize and foster thriving coalitions for specific projects (p. 166-167)

In other words, intersections of knowledge impact and construct teachers' and learners' ability to understand themselves and the world around them. Looking for ways that we can unite around similarities and how differences can be space for growth provides the framework for this project.

I will examine and describe one particular class taught with *The Hunger Games* to contribute to the academic conversation about what it means to teach with young adult dystopian literature in the undergraduate WGS classroom. In qualitative inquiry, like this project, it is critical to recognize “the importance of interpretation and understanding as key features of social life” (Denzin, 2010, p. 25) and involves making sense of what we are studying. By digging deeply into this class, with the goal of making “the invisible more visible...[and] to make those stories available to others” (p. 32), we create knowledge. What we know is informed by who we are and the relationships we form. Knowledge is not independent from the person who knows it, and context is important in the research process. My theoretical frame is a process where meaning unfolds over time and the work becomes meaningful through interactions— in the classroom and during the research process.

### **Postmodern Theory**

According to Pring (2004), postmodern theory, read through Jean-François Lyotard, “invites us to question what counts as knowledge and truth, and what sense can be attached to verifying what is claimed to be true” (p. 112). To reflect on *post-*

modernity, five premises that Pring (2004) outlines as modern, thus what postmodern thought pushes against, are: 1) The ideal that there is “a complete and scientific explanation of physical and social reality” 2) The understanding that “knowledge can be divided into its intellectual disciplines” 3) These distinct bodies of knowledge “provide a secure base for social action and improvement” 4) a “grand narrative” that has been named “enlightenment” will “provide the solutions to the various problems we are confronted with” 5) Teachers, who carry authority from the so-named “educational system...[initiate] young people into these different bodies of knowledge and forms of rationality” (p. 112). The questioning of these premises characterizes postmodern theory. In our large and complex world, this theory helps us to understand that worldviews are culturally mediated, and we determine reasonableness differently depending on perspective.

So that we do not merely define postmodernism on what it is not, Alversson and Deetz (2006) tell us,

Postmodern themes focus on the constructed nature of people and reality, emphasize language as a system of distinctions which are central to the construction process, and argue against grand narratives and large-scale theoretical systems such as Marxism or functionalism. They also emphasize the power/knowledge connection and the role of claims of expertise in systems of domination, emphasizing the fluid and hyper-real nature of the contemporary world and the role of mass media and information technologies and stressing narrative/fiction/ rhetoric as central to the research process (p. 256).

We tell stories and create narratives to help us understand the world around us.

Postmodernism reminds us to be skeptical about those discourses which take for granted

truth, knowledge, power, and language as they often serve to legitimize singular modes of thinking in narrow, prescribed ways. Postmodern theory, as understood with Angela McRobbie's *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (1994), considers images as they relate to each other and "deflects attention away from the singular scrutinizing gaze...and asks that this be replaced by a multiplicity of fragmented, and frequently interrupted, 'looks'" (p. 13). Situated in inquiry about young adult dystopian fiction and pedagogy, the texts we read and the other popular culture artifacts, like movies, advertising, and social media that are intertwined with the text, become part of the research process.

By looking at important connections between students, the worlds created in fiction, and what those worlds can teach us, I am heeding a postmodern call to make meaning in the mediums of representation that many people have access to, namely popular culture. McRobbie (1994) asks us to "think seriously about the trivial" (p. 3). If a task of postmodernism is to include all living experiences in its critique, popular culture, science fiction, and pedagogy are important parts of that equation. For many, popular culture helps to define the world they live in and how they understand their experiences, so this work opens up space for conversations about education, social justice, and students' experiences.

### **Feminist Postmodernism**

By connecting feminism and postmodernism, McRobbie (1994) "forces us to confront questions which would otherwise remain unasked" (p. 2). Asking unasked questions and looking at the world in ways that are often ignored is a seminal feminist tenet. By shifting perspectives and seeking out what is excluded enhances to how we

know the world, not necessarily in new ways but in ways that have been overlooked. I see the inclusion of young adult dystopian fiction in the WGS classroom, especially by women writers, as a place for students to explore what may have been overlooked. Flax (1987) shows by questioning we “enter into and echo postmodern discourses as we have begun to deconstruct notions of reason, knowledge, or the self and to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lay beneath their ‘neutral’ and universalizing facades” (p. 626). Fiction can help us understand the Other or find ourselves in a character. We can read, and use the stories to think deeper about issues of race and gender in ways that stay with us long after the book is finished. This directly connects to young adult dystopian fiction in my classroom because there is not always an obvious connection to the concepts of sexism, racism, ableism, and classism, but looking for connections is important nonetheless. Starting these conversations in the classroom, we can explore fictional worlds that are both eerily similar and radically different from the ones we inhabit, providing an interesting space to theorize.

Hesse-Biber (2006) states to “engage in feminist theory and praxis means to challenge knowledge that excludes while seeming to include...ask ‘new’ questions... [and] disrupt traditional ways of knowing to create rich new meanings” (p. 3). Using young adult dystopian fiction and science fiction helps push our thinking around feminist pedagogy. *The Hunger Games* franchise is complicit in recreating many of the ideas it critiques including celebrity obsession, our fascination with viewing violence, and manufactured reality. One way to read *The Hunger Games* levels a critique at this complicity, like O’Hehir (2014) and Morrison (2014) contend. That read shows the

heralded individual outwitting the overreaching government in ways that can be interpreted as ideologically conservative. Another way to read this story invokes a feminist pedagogical lens where we read about celebrity obsession, violence, and manufactured reality in a way that critiques Panem so that students can see these issues in our world as well. It allows us to look at how we take part in these issues, but also different ways to push back on their seeming innocuous nature and talk about them personally and systemically. By using the story to teach, we get to explore these kinds of themes from different perspectives, allowing students to form more complete opinions on these complicated and nuanced topics.

This way of reading the story speaks to popular culture and media, but I think it also asks us to look at education more broadly. In the books, we learn we are the real audience for *The Hunger Games* because we are the ones reading and consuming it. It is in that space between pleasure reading and socially conscious themes that I see as a place to teach from this particular story and the young adult dystopian genre more broadly. We can read it to be entertained, like the Capitol residents who are so easy to mock on the pages, or we can realize “the whole point of *The Hunger Games* is all the things going on beneath the surface” (Brennan, 2012, p. 8) thus leaving a seamless opening for teaching with this story. If *The Hunger Games* has something to say about education, the most important question might be: who are the winners and losers in this arena? Students are positioned within the institution of education as spectators, participants, or even tributes<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> In *The Hunger Games*, tributes are the children forced to participate in the Games.

and young adult dystopian fiction can help us think about what that means. It can offer a way to ask new questions and reconsider what seems “normal.”

One of the lessons in *The Hunger Games* is reality can be manufactured and conflated with truth. That is important to understand within the realm of higher education. What we know and how we know it is socially mediated, and understanding that is an important lesson in my classroom. Perhaps here Jean Baudrillard (1994) is instructive as we see *The Hunger Games* as a simulation of reality, but what reality does it copy? This story is “presented as imaginary in order to make us believe the rest is real” (p. 12). Recognizing reality is a central theme in *The Hunger Games* with Peeta, our male protagonist, repeatedly asking those around him if what he is experiencing is “real or not real” to ground himself after his experience in the Games. When trying to understand our experience of education, I use the fiction of *The Hunger Games* to do as Hesse- Biber (2006) suggested by asking new questions and disrupting traditional ways of knowing. By trying to understand if what school teaches us is real or not real, we can pull back the curtain for many students to see the mechanics running the institution of education. By proposing that young adult dystopian fiction has something to say about how we understand education, I leave open space for new questions to be asked.

Following the history of feminism backwards, we encounter many struggles that have been taken up by feminist theory, often categorized simplistically and therefore problematically into ‘waves,’ which work to highlight the complicated history of feminism, often centered on white, middle/upper class women’s experiences. Feminist scholars have argued there is no singular feminism, but a variety of ways to be feminist

(Harrway, 1991; Mendez and Wolf, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2006). Feminist theory, however, has much to offer my inquiry. I am interested in how the intersection of feminist pedagogy, which invites students' experiences into the classroom, with young adult dystopian fiction, which ostensibly tells stories about the experience of being young in the world, can help me think about feminist education more deeply. Brady and Dentith (2001) say feminist theory "can bring substantive integrity to our practice when it is used as a tool to acknowledge difference in ways that unite and organize diverse people for social change" (p. 166). Incorporating this perspective into my inquiry will be useful as I explore feminist pedagogy and young adult dystopian fiction.

As feminist theory and postmodern theory are considered in tandem, I acknowledge these two perspectives do not have an uncomplicated history. Hatch (2002) touches upon this saying postmodern theory "deconstructs grand narratives, including critical theory and feminism" (p. 17). While feminism is important for my teaching and research, it should not be beyond criticism. Flax (1987) continues saying, "there is no force or reality 'outside' our social relations and activity...that will rescue us from partiality and difference. Our lives and alliances belong with those who seek to further decenter the world" (p. 642). Difference is important as is knowing that I always speak, teach, and research from a situated location. Feminist postmodernism does not eliminate the subject of the self, but implies "subjectivities in process, interacting and debating" (McRobbie, 1994, p. 70). We do not dissolve into dissociated pieces of ourselves in postmodern thought, but there is recognition of our partiality and continued growth in relationship with others. It is this social connectedness where I see feminism and



postmodernism coming together most concretely. For me this is not about choosing one perspective above another or using pieces of different frameworks at different times, but rather recognizing the need for both conflict and consensus. Working with tensions, the issues are not which framework(s), but in what balance.

### **Feminist Pedagogy**

Feminist pedagogy is the application of feminist theory to teaching. It is not a monolithic concept that can, nor should, be formulaically applied across learning environments. As I read feminist teachers like Jyl Lynn Felman, bell hooks', and Amie A. McDonald and Susan Sanchez-Casal alongside science fiction writers Ursula K. LeGuin's and Joanna Russ, I am interested in how young adult dystopian literature embodies learning from a feminist perspective. Both young adult dystopian fiction and feminist pedagogy explore worlds that do not exist, whether that is an alien planet or our world where gender inequity is abolished, but can be defined by the power of our imaginations. Walidah Imarisha (2013) teaches, writes, and organizes with a science fiction framework saying, there are "lessons to be taken from science fiction [because] a world free of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism...doesn't exist yet." It is "yet" where I find the power of combining young adult dystopian literature and feminist pedagogy. Looking toward stories that imagine the world differently allows us to think profoundly about the world we live in now.

Feminist pedagogy's central tenets appear, in differing degrees, in its scholarship including: 1) the inclusion of students' lived experiences and voices in the classroom (Felman, 2001; Jiménez, 2011); 2) the recognition of multiple realities (Macdonald and

Sánchez-Casal, 2002; hooks, 1994); 3) resistance to and transformation of hegemonic ideas about gender, race, class, and ability (hooks, 1994; Jiménez, 2011); 4) promotion of collaboration and building connections through community (hooks, 1994; Felman, 2001); 5) importance of reflexivity and the idea that consciousness-raising can be transformative (Macdonald and Sánchez-Casal, 2002; Jiménez, 2011); and 6) curricular innovation and flexibility (Felman, 2001; Jiménez, 2011). These tenets are crucial to how I teach and are part of the classroom environment I build using young adult dystopian literature as a tool.

Feminist pedagogy “acknowledges the ways in which systems of oppression intersect with systems of knowledge” (Weber, 2010, p. 128) and involves more than passing information from teacher to student. Feminist pedagogy urges students to explicitly think about themselves and their education. Feminist pedagogy challenges traditional notions of teacher/student interactions with the inclusion of student voices and experiences in the classroom, focuses on community building and social action, and recognizes power imbalances and limitations within the institution of education. Teacher and blogger Ileana Jiménez (2011) believes “feminist theory and action is exactly what young people need to create understandings across differences, learn how to lead healthy lives and to make social change.” Focusing on intersectionality, feminist theory gives students language to describe their lives, allowing students to move from passive receivers of knowledge to active knowers whose voices and experiences are part of their learning process. Popular culture that students read and watch outside of the classroom is considered for its value, both as teachable texts and as meaningful parts of their lives.

Carolyn M. Shrewsbury (1993) says feminist pedagogy “begins with a vision of what education might be like but frequently is not” (p. 8). When I imagine what a classroom might be, I see the inclusion of popular young adult literature that allows students and teachers to incorporate the story, social media, and student experiences. As students shift from objects to subjects of inquiry, the process of understanding what a classroom engaged in feminist pedagogy can look like shifts as well. Shrewsbury imagines the classroom as “persons connected in a net of relationships with other people who care about each other’s learning as well as their own” and sees this as different from “a classroom comprised of teacher and students” (p. 8). Feminist pedagogy is not a one size fits all teaching method, and will look different in different classrooms. Weber (2010) says, “feminist pedagogy is in direct dialogue with feminist critical theory, teachers must balance content with process. As such, *how* we teach is as important—and often as instructive—as *what* we teach” (p. 128). The inclusion of young adult dystopian fiction in my classroom bridges the gap between school and pleasure reading but also does the work of the “most valuable aspects of education: critical thinking, analytical writing, collaboration, and public speaking, all the while connecting [students] to important social issues that asks them to practice care and compassion” (Jiménez, 2011). By challenging ideas that teaching and learning are about more than lecturing and testing, feminist pedagogy shows teachers and students to be fully human with profound capacity for learning and connecting in a system that was created to test and define.

When I ask students what they expect to learn in WGS classes, replies often include *learning about things women have done* and *looking at women in history*.

Without expecting more than a revisionist history and a linear progression from “woman excluded” to “equality achieved,” many, but not all, students are surprised when we challenge notions of what “woman” means, engage with ideas of gender construction, and learn how society perpetuates patriarchy. Increasingly, students who show up in my classes have been schooled in banking forms of education that rely heavily on testing. In my classroom, I work towards Shrewsbury’s idea of people interconnected and concerned with each other’s learning, and that can be uncomfortable for students who have only been asked to memorize and test. How we learn in my class reaches towards the notion that a classroom can be “a community of learners [that] is empowered to act responsibly toward one another and the subject matter and to apply that learning to social action” (Shrewsbury, 1993, p. 8). I try to create a sense of working together, with varying degrees of success, to push back on the sense of separation and difference that is common in higher education.

There are three points that ground the work I do. First, patriarchy, as a system, is implicated in how we view, value, and understand our world. We are part of a social system that divides, ranks, and counts us. Feminism gives us a lens to see how gender, race, class, and ability can be taken up as real and perceived social identities. Writer Walidah Imarisha, talking with Mary Hansen (2014) says,

These systems that we live under are incredibly unnatural...It takes indoctrination to get us to a point where we believe that this is the way things should be. When we take a small step outside that, we are able to break that indoctrination and see that this is not the only way, and in fact there are as many ways to exist as we can imagine.

Imarisha looks to science fiction for a space to imagine a world that is different, where possibilities exist outside of the current system. Science fiction, of which young adult dystopias are a part of, can offer a new way of looking at the society we live in. Using a fictional world to step out of our own gives us space to contemplate social structures we participate in and step back into our world better able to discuss these systems.

The second point I use to ground my work is that patriarchy can be hard to see. It works so well because much of the mechanism is hidden, seeming natural. Without critique, essentialist notions of gender roles and lived experiences of students can appear to be insurmountable, but authors like Ursula K. LeGuin create different worlds with different expectations. These worlds can be a place for us to think about concepts like gender or capitalism with freedom we may not have in our own realities. For example, in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) characters only adopt a gender during their period of sexual receptivity called “kemmer,” allowing for the radical line, “The king was pregnant” (p. 100). For those who can only imagine rigid notions of sex and gender, this book provides space to contemplate ideas about what differentiates men and women and complicates notions of childbearing. Couched in her science fiction worlds we find concerns that resonate with our own lives. For example, she wants to understand who cares for the children and cooks the meals (Kunzru, 2014). In her acceptance speech at the 2014 National Book Awards, LeGuin reminds us to keep imagining different worlds as we work towards our future saying, “We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable—but then, so did the divine right of kings.” Using young adult dystopian fiction in the classroom can help us see what is designed to be unseen. We can debate the

(un)naturalness of gender, race, class, and ability noting it exists in our socially constructed world and “any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings” (LeGuin, 2014).

The last point I use is that oppression and privilege are intertwined in patriarchy in complicated and nuanced ways. It is easier to discuss how problematic it was that women were prohibited from voting up through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but is much harder to discuss inequity through a neoliberal lens when many assume we live in a post-feminist world. One reading I assign is Marilyn Frye’s *Oppression* (2007) where she discusses door-holding as a seemingly helpful, gendered action that does little to make women’s lives better. Yes, holding the door is polite, but when that politeness, rooted in rigid gender norms, cannot be extended to include equal pay or reproductive choice, it is an empty gesture. If we concentrate so much on the individual act of door holding we lose the larger view that it is part of “a network of forces and barriers which are systematically related and which conspire to the immobilization, reduction and molding of women and the lives we lead” (p. 158). This lesson is about seeing that small, seemingly insignificant acts are part of a world that orders and values us. It is about understanding that we have not yet achieved a post-feminist society. I am not interested in students articulating to me that they will/not hold a door for someone else, but rather that we work together to see that the social world interweaves both privilege and oppression. We don’t need fictional worlds to take up these concepts, but jumping into a world intentionally created to be flawed lets us begin the conversation in a fictional place,

even an assigned article for class, and come back to very real issues of oppression and privilege that shape our lives.

**Critical pedagogy.** Feminist pedagogy has roots in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2006), which refers to “educational theories and practices intended to raise learners’ critical consciousness concerning oppressive social conditions” (Sayles-Hannon, 2007, p. 34). In critical pedagogy, students and teachers reflect on structures of power and use the classroom as a place for exchange of knowledge, in contrast to the “banking” style of teaching (Freire, 1998, p. 33). Along with other educators like Henry Giroux, Ira Shore, Joe L. Kincheloe, and Peter McLaren, Freire’s critical pedagogy continues to ask questions about the relationships between theory/practice and reflection/action as we consider power in our social institutions.

Critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy share many similar goals and components, but are not the same. It is not even as simple as contrasting critical and feminist pedagogies, because we have many pedagogies that inform these two including: hooks’ (1994) engaged pedagogy that unlike feminist or critical pedagogy emphasizes well-being (p. 15) and Rochelle Brock’s (2005) Afrowomanist pedagogy of wholeness where “education targets wholeness of being and spirituality” (p. 94). Critiques of critical and feminist pedagogies highlight their weaknesses as critical pedagogy often does not recognize gender as a central category of analysis (Sayles-Hannon, 2007) and feminist pedagogy has often taken white, middle class women’s experiences as the norm (hooks, 1994; Brock, 2005). There is not a singular feminist pedagogy that simply teaches better. We have to think about why and how information is taught, realizing that

differences are important. For this project, feminist pedagogy is central to that goal, showing how different pedagogies “operate more successfully together rather than as... separate approaches” (Sayles-Hannon, 2007, p. 33).

Education is more encompassing than just what occurs in the classroom. Learning can happen inside of fictional novels and as we interact with social media and popular culture. Feminist pedagogy is “rooted in the assumption that knowledge and critical thought done in the classroom should inform our habits of being and ways of living outside of the classroom...[T]eaching students to think differently...would also lead them to live differently (hooks, 1994, p. 194). Feminist pedagogy is not a static concept; it evolves and changes. Felman (2001) asserts how “*process* not *product* is foundational to...feminist pedagogy” (p. 175, original italics). It is not just the outcome of the class or this dissertation that is important, but the process it took to get there. It is theory and action, praxis, which drives learning for students and teachers and makes the classroom powerful.

Lest this slide into a utopic vision of the perfect feminist classroom, feminist pedagogy takes imagination, creativity, and a willingness to acknowledge the limitations found in feminism—namely that feminism often fails to interrogate the raced and classed perspective from which it speaks. Personal identity is complex and without an interrogation of the ability to simultaneously have privilege and experience oppression, feminist ideas about who can speak and assuming universal experiences of gender, race, and class can be part of the reproduction of domination. More bluntly, race, class, and



sexuality matter because our identities as raced, classed, and sexed people inform both what we know and how we know it.

Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) offered a critical look at homophobia, classism, and racism in a feminist movement that was not invested in understanding difference as a feminist necessity. Difference should not be a term used to homogenize, or gloss over, the importance of talking about race, class, and sexuality. As a white woman drawing from this body of work, I must be aware of my own blind spots and privilege, knowing a history of “white women writing feminist theory that looks at ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ [without making] white women’s lives, works, and experiences the subject of their analysis” (hooks, 1994, p. 103). Acknowledging feminism’s racist history and attempting to work towards reciprocity, in my classroom and as a scholar, I am part of a collective feminist movement creating “space where we can value difference and complexity” (p. 110). Theorizing around difference, instead of assuming sameness, leads to renegotiation of meanings of experience, identity, and epistemology, which “open[s] an expansive new paradigm for feminist pedagogy, one that simultaneously reaffirms the epistemic status of cultural identity while it challenges the wholesale validity of experience—including the experience of oppression—in the production of knowledge” (Macdonald and Sánchez-Casal, 2002, p. 6).

To teach with difference and seek it out as necessary in the classroom is a crucial aspect of feminist pedagogy championed by women of color theorists pushing back on limitations they found in feminist theory (Alarcón, 1990). Rochelle Brock (2005) noted, “Black feminist thought utilizes a structural analysis of the intersection of race, class, and

gender when theorizing a Black woman's standpoint. This becomes an epistemological discussion of not only who creates knowledge but how it is created" (p. 97). Binary notions of identity, black/white, male/female, first world/third world, were interrogated and questions related to identity's relationship to feminist pedagogy were (and continue to be) asked. In the space of feminist pedagogy knowledge is co-constructed across differences instead of trying to explain them away. Students, and teachers, are encouraged to work around the ways we are similar and the ways we are different in the many forms of identity politics like race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class. Audre Lorde (1984) contributes the notion that, "community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (p. 112) echoing again the importance of acknowledging and valuing differences among feminists, particularly feminist teachers.

Further, "naming of difference as the theoretical subject of the classroom provides a contextual frame that allows the multiple identities—and thus the authority—of teacher and student to shift according to changing circumstances and contexts in or outside the classroom" (Macdonald and Sánchez-Casal, 2002, p. 7). Difference becomes part of the feminist pedagogical frame I create for my classroom and for this project. We learn from differences— in our identities as well as the material I assign. I try to create a space to learn from and with difference without having to fully resolve it. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/2007) adds, it is "not enough to stand on the opposite river bank shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions...the new mestiza copes by developing tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity (p. 100-101). Teaching

students who are often groomed to give the ‘right’ answers on the ‘right’ tests is part of my work in the classroom. Employing young adult dystopian fiction, I decenter my voice in an attempt to center their experiences as part of our learning dialogue, while supporting them through an often anxiety-inducing period of disequilibrium in my class. We come together in a classroom with many different race, class, and gender identities and learn with each other as we learn the class material.

Many students have not been in a classroom where they are invited to bring themselves into discussions or to analyze assigned readings with socio-historical perspectives. This can feel vulnerable and disconcerting. I acknowledge that and try to work with awareness that not all students will have the same comfort level/ability to share in the same ways. This is always in my mind as I consider participation requirements and kinds of assignments for my classroom. Feminist pedagogy asks me to think about these kinds of issues at all points in the education process from building my syllabus to facilitating class discussions to assigning grades. Who we are mitigates how we act/react in the classroom. Gender and racial politics do not go away in feminist spaces. Pulling from a feminist pedagogy that acknowledges multiple realities, works to build learning communities, and implements flexible learning environments is designed to address and offer ways to think with students, but will never fully make any learning space safe and equal for all students. I work on the suppositions that we are stronger when we see each other’s differences and work together to achieve our goals.

## Critical Literacy

Critical theory is not simply about documenting oppression and privilege as these ideas are enmeshed within social contexts, which “not only serves the interests of domination but also contains aspects which provide emancipatory possibilities” (Giroux, 2006, p. 28). By adding a critical element to my theoretical framework, I have a way to look at how power is implicated in what we read in the classroom. The texts, like *The Hunger Games*, have both the possibility for oppression, a recreation of the consumeristic norm, or emancipation, using the story to try to see other ways of being in the world. Patti Lather (1991) names “power-saturated discourses” as a means to “monitor and normalize our sense of who we are and what is possible” (p. 164) allowing for discussion of what we know about others and ourselves through the lens of young adult dystopian fiction, which is a product to be consumed and something we can learn from. It exists in both of those roles and that tension is a place for students to explore our own tenuous, contradictory relationships to education and popular culture. Critical theory provides a lens in which to observe the tensions and conflicts that mediate social relationships. By using a critical analysis of how culture and power are mutually entangled shows how the “very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities are shaped, desires mobilized, and experiences take on form and meaning within ... the social world” (p. 195).

Critical literacy connects ideas to experiences, invites reflection, and links the personal to the political, the local to the global, and, I would argue, our experience of the real world to our experience of fictional worlds. Part of Henry Giroux’s (2006) work

looks at how we learn with popular media noting we are “situated in a vortex of globally produced images and representations, consumer postmodernism produces meanings mediated through claims to truth represented in images that circulate in an electronic, informational hyperspace, which disassociates itself from history, context, and struggle” (p. 69). Critical literacy is part of the framework I am creating that builds on the Freireian notion of “reading the world,” which expands the idea that literacy is more than a word-based competency, but a way of interacting with the world. We read text and images to uncover meanings and have discussions in critical, questioning ways. As such, students not only read the books in *The Hunger Games* series, but also read across media platforms and with their own experiences.

*The Hunger Games* use in my WGS classroom opens up possibilities to explore our understandings of education. My research looks for “a recognition of the relations of responsibility between a writer and her reader and, it could be added, between a teacher and her students...In one decisive way, this breaks down the barriers between art, fiction, culture, and the academic disciplines” (McRobbie, 1994, p. 68). By using young adult dystopian fiction as a central text, when science fiction is not often used in that way, I will explore “how to bring new value and meaning to...texts that are marginalized... by the larger culture” (Denzin, 2010, p. 29). Young adult dystopian literature is entertainment but also has value as an educative text in my classroom.

Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2005) argued for teaching popular culture as “the centerpiece of culturally responsive literacy pedagogy” (p. 285). Their argument was specifically for K-12 classrooms, but I contend they apply to my teaching philosophy.

Critical literacy is an active engagement with texts where students interact, construct meanings, and reflect on their learning to better understand power, privilege, and social justice. By reading the world in a more complex, nuanced way, Luke (2004) shows that critical literacy “involves second guessing, reading against the grain, asking hard and harder questions, seeking underneath, behind, and beyond texts, trying to see and ‘call’ how these texts establish and use power over us, over others, on whose behalf, in whose interests” (p. 4). These ways of reading are important in my classroom. It is not just about a superficial reading of a popular book, but digging into the story and connecting to articles, blogs, and social media. It is about taking this story and pulling it apart so that we can learn from it in different ways.

Critical literacy is a way to hone skills that enable people to interpret and challenge power hierarchies that are replicated in those meanings. As the definition of literacy is expanded to include power and privilege, critical literacy “connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity” (Shor, 1999). Those who engage with critical literacy are urged to question social institutions such as the media, family, schools, and government as well as social issues ranging from poverty, equity, to celebrity culture, all topics we can discuss with *The Hunger Games*. This critique reveals normative tendencies and establishes how normative behaviors are unequally applied.

By expanding what is defined as text and engaging with the normative institutions of society, critical literacy examines education that is “not only about issues of work and

economics, but also about questions of justice, social freedoms, and the capacity for democratic agency, action, and change as well as the related issues of power, exclusion, and citizenship” (Giroux, 2006, p. 270). When we apply a critical eye to issues of power and privilege, students and teachers can ask more questions about the texts. Books, like *The Hunger Games*, become more than something to consume. They become a text from which we can confront and learn. These texts then are not merely propaganda for one side of the political field, but active, engaging material for students to tease out where they are situated on the political spectrum. Our understanding of the world is “mediated by symbolic representations, by narrative texts, and by televisual and cinematic structures” (Denzin, 2010, p. 10). If we know about our world through interpreted representations, then critical literacy is an important skill for university students. Learning to question, think, and connect allows critical literacy to become a pedagogy of questioning rather than a pedagogy of knowing, situating learning as a process that occurs in community rather than something that happens just inside a student’s mind. Part of the process is to highlight the norms that are reinforced or broken in these fictional worlds, revealing that young adult dystopian literature has ideological and gendered content. By incorporating young adult dystopian fiction in my WGS classroom, science fiction gives us the possibility to go “to the utopia we want, or a dystopia we don’t, and then leaves us to contemplate how we got there” (Steinem, 2015). The act of contemplating how we got there invokes reflection and connection.

The story becomes a “creative tool for cultural critique” where the writer “change[s] the world in some significant way, tip it on its side. What tumbles loose are

our preconceptions. Where they land, the ground is never quite so solid again” (Evans, 2014). In this space of world building and our own place to consider our world alongside fictional worlds is the opportunity for feminist pedagogy and young adult dystopian literature to come together. There is no one-way to read this genre. I am not looking for students to ape my thoughts and philosophies, but to build community and their beliefs. As Ursula K. LeGuin (2014) said in her National Book Award speech, “resistance and change often begins in...the art of words.” We learn in *Mockingjay* (2012) (book 3 of *The Hunger Games* series), propos<sup>3</sup> are useful tools. Harnessing the Capitol’s media, the rebels tell the back-stories of tributes, like Finnick, to show the people of Panem harsh truths about the Capitol. These stories cause Panem to question their president and the structure that created the Games to begin with. It is not a far jump to encourage students to use this lens to question our own world. I want to use young adult dystopian stories to look at what and how we know about our world, like the fictional propos. I believe books are not “just commodities” as LeGuin implored, but also echo the potential that educator Natalie Wilson (2014) sees in them saying, “if we can use the Hollywood system to sell some revolutionary feminist spark, why not?” It is in bringing together feminist pedagogy and young adult dystopian literature that I have the tools to hold the disparate ideas of subversive art and a Hollywood blockbuster together, to learn and to teach from them.

---

<sup>3</sup> Short propaganda films used to undermine the Capitol as part of the rebellion.



## **Positionality**

Reflecting on what values, attitudes, and agenda I carry with me in this process, research is not a view from nowhere. The researcher brings herself into all aspects of the process, and reflexivity is how “researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practices” (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p. 16-17). In talking about how young adult dystopian fiction and feminist pedagogy inform one another, I must acknowledge,

Reflexive thought assists in understanding ways in which your personal characteristics, values, and positions interact with others in the research situation to influence the methodological approach you take, the methods you use, and the interpretations you make. It forces you to think more about how you want to be in relation with research participants. It can help you make use of personal passions and strengths while better understanding the ways in which knowledge you produce is co-constructed and only partial. (Glesne, 2011, p. 159)

To understand the relationship to my research, I must be aware how my positionality shapes my methods and interpretations as well as my passions and strengths. To be mindful in this process, I start with my own experiences and assumptions because being reflexive about these influences “exposes the power throughout the entire research process. It questions the authority of knowledge and opens up possibility for negative knowledge claims as well as holds researchers accountable to those with whom they research” (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2006, p. 495). The research process will be filled with decisions about how I view my research subjects, what information I consider important, and how I choose to include and exclude.

For this project, I start with myself as a reader. As Hatch (2002) asserts, “in qualitative work, it is understood that the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactments of that phenomenon. Researchers are part of the world they study; the knower and the known are taken to be inseparable” (p. 10). As a reader, teacher, and learner, I must acknowledge that my students are readers, teachers, and learners, but we do not always hold equal power (to each other or to the institutions that influence educational policy) in deciding what is read or taught. Moreover, books themselves are not apolitical objects. Gannon and Davies (2006) remind us, “a text is never innocent but is constitutive of certain truths and exclusive of others, and thus must always be placed under interrogation” (p. 88). Reading is a political and a socially constructed act.

I enjoy reading, was encouraged to read early, and had access to books at home as well as at public and school libraries. However, these truths are situated within my own positionality as a white woman who was urged to use education to exceed my parents’ success. My own identities cannot be taken out of my interest in how young adult dystopian fiction can impact learning. It influences all aspects of my research process. My passions are strengths in this work, but they must be acknowledged. My own reflections of how to position myself in relation to the subjects are important, continuous work.

I have eclectic reading habits, but I tend toward young adult fiction that falls into the science fiction or dystopian fiction category. It is easy to say that I prefer young adult fiction and leave it at that, but my reading choices are not so simple. Like preferences for the foods I enjoy and whom I find attractive, I must be aware that my personal

preferences are socially constructed. Of course, I have my own partialities for authors and stories, but that preference does not occur outside of social context.

In my formative reading, it was easy to see myself in the stories I read. I could imagine myself as Anne Shirley from *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) or the girl detectives Trixie Belden and Nancy Drew from their respective book series. Emily Elizabeth, from *Clifford the Big Red Dog* (1963), was a perfect combination of my sister's first name and my middle one, allowing that character to stay with me. Characters tended to look and live similarly to me, so I was able to see myself reflected in books. In high school, there were token inclusions like Chinua Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart* and Maya Angelou's *Phenomenal Woman* (1978); however, most of the authors I read in school were white, male, and America-centric.

The marketing machine that drives the publishing industry, in general, and the young adult portion, more specifically, is culpable here as well. What books get marketed, by what authors, and with what message embedded in the story are driven by what is assumed will sell. Parts of the assumptions built into selling books are the identities of the authors and their characters. Even though recent young adult blockbusters have been penned by women like Suzanne Collins and Veronica Roth, JK Rowling, of *Harry Potter* fame, was encouraged by her publisher to use her initials instead of her full name for fear that boys would not read her books ([jkrowling.com](http://jkrowling.com)). Collins and Roth have had explosive success with their respective book and movie franchises, but Hugo and Nebula award winning, MacArthur genius Octavia Butler has

been ignored by Hollywood. While I am unable to untangle the reasons why some books are made to movies over others Tambray A. Obenson (2014) says it succinctly,

If [Butler] were white, with the exact same resume, and her novels reflected her realities and interests as a white woman, her entire oeuvre would've been optioned long ago, with movie franchises set up at one Hollywood studio or another.

We can't ignore race and gender preferences in the books we choose to read or in the realities of who gets published and promoted. As I became aware of the canon I was taught, and thus my tendency to read mostly white, mostly American, mostly male authors, I deliberately set out to diversify my reading list. This has also become part of my drive to understand the pedagogical appeal of young adult dystopian literature.

### **Positionality as Teacher and Researcher**

Another way to look at positionality is how I am positioned as both the teacher of the class and the researcher for this project in relation to the students, whose experiences with WGS 450 are what I am interested in exploring. Some views of research suggest that a teacher is a subjective classroom insider while educational researchers are objective outside observers of what happens in the classroom (MacLean and Mohr, 1999; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). There is an alternative to the insider/outsider binary, and that is the position of teacher-researcher. When teachers shoulder the role of teacher-researcher,

traditional descriptions of both teachers and researchers change. Teacher-researchers raise questions about what they think and observe about their teaching and their students' learning. They collect student work in order to evaluate performance, but they also see student work as data to analyze in order to examine the teaching and learning it produced. (MacLean and Mohr, 1999, p. x)

For this project, I position myself as a teacher-researcher. It was from my previous classes that I began to wonder about the use of young adult dystopian literature in my classes and as a doctoral student was able to teach a class that attempted to answer some of those questions, so I am in both of these roles for this project.

Glenda Bissex (1986) names how teacher-researchers often start with a “wondering to pursue” (p. 482) where a teacher uses the questions that arise from her students and her teaching as she observes and participates in her class. Much like how I spent a couple of semesters wondering about and experimenting with young adult dystopian fiction in my syllabi for other classes until I had the chance to offer a class based on the questions I had been asking. By learning with and from my students, I have been able to examine how they react to young adult dystopian literature in our classes. It is by being with them, having successes and failures with fiction, that I can refine what I know works for my teaching.

In the act of teaching, teacher-researchers can see that “knowledge comes through closeness as well as through distance, through intuition as well as through logic” (p. 483). It was teaching other classes and seeing how students responded to smaller additions of *The Hunger Games* in their course work that I was able to think deeply about young adult dystopian fiction as a route for exploring feminist pedagogy. Successes and failures with young adult fiction in class became opportunities for learning. Moreover, being a teacher-researcher allows me to reflect on the process of teaching and learning. Thus “the teacher researcher improves the lives of students by always seeking to discover better, more effective ways of implementing teaching/learning” (Ritchie, 2015). That

may seem obvious, but as someone who strives to improve both myself as a teacher and the learning experiences in my classroom, learning from the students is a valuable resource.

Positioning myself as a teacher-researcher does not excuse me from questions about asymmetrical power relations, specifically about the relationship I have with the students who took the class and whom I want to interview about their experiences. There are real considerations about power differentials in the teaching and researching process. I created the syllabus, assigned readings, and graded student work. As a teacher there is power in my position and I acknowledge that as part of this project. Traditionally, asymmetry was assumed in research relationships as “the role of the researcher and the subject are mutually exclusive: the researcher alone contributes the thinking that goes into the project, and the subjects contribute the action or contents to be studied” (Reason qtd. in Ben-Ari and Enosh, 2012, p. 422-423). This left open the possibility (and reality) that researchers held the upper hand, with the possibility of exploitation. In response, scholars have noted and theorized from a critical stance, particularly in feminist research, to create ways of researching that addressed, but have never resolved, these power imbalances. Instead of assuming power over or working toward total equality between researcher and subject, I strive to put the researcher and subject in relationship with one another.

The goal of research is the production of knowledge and I utilize the approach that “the construction of knowledge [is] an active process by the researchers rather than a capture of social reality by the researcher (Anyan, 2013). The students who took this

class are an integral part of meaning making around learning with young adult dystopian literature. While we each participate in meaning making, we do it in different ways. As such, power relations, or differentials, are defined as “the power to impact the process and outcomes of knowledge construction” (Ben-Ari and Enosh, 2012, p. 423). These power differentials arise at different times, and to different degrees, throughout the research process. The researcher holds power as the project architect who is able to set the agenda; participants volunteer to be in the project and have their experiences to offer. The researcher decides, often with input from the participant, about data analysis, and the researcher usually makes the decisions about how to disseminate the final project. Throughout, the process power shifts back and forth from researcher to participant.

Reflective practice, where I am intentional about an ongoing practice of observing, processing, and enacting changes when needed to my teaching, assists me in becoming more thoughtful, intentional, and effective. I have engaged in this practice in both my nursing and academic careers. My nursing education was couched in the idea of practice and reflection, both in writing and through group case studies and post-clinical debriefs. It was made part of my nursing practice from the very beginning of my career. As I started teaching, I have kept journals about my teaching practice as a way to reflect on what works and does not work in my teaching practice. I keep my class notes and teaching outlines as part of my reflection on my work. I have my entry from my very first day of teaching, as a Master’s student, and it starts, “Well, I didn’t throw up and no one left the class.” Looking back, I can smile at my nervousness for being in front of students, but this journal is a valuable tool for documenting my successes and failures in

the classroom. I use it to think about what works well so that I can incorporate that into other classes and understand what is less successful with my practice so I am not being an ineffective teacher. It is a place for me to see where theory and action come together. Using Donald Schön's (1983) work on reflective practice to realize that reflection while teaching and on the act of teaching are both important (reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action) and can produce knowledge about my teaching practice. Constructing knowledge about how to teach while both in the act of teaching and reflecting on that teaching supports a shift from routine actions rooted in "the way things have been done" to reflective action emerging from engaged, professional thinking.

There is always negotiation of power as the researcher and participant come together and we should acknowledge that the "goal of a perfect and equal relationship in the prospects of qualitative research...seems unrealistic" (Oakley qtd. in Anyan, 2013, p. 6). That does not mean we should stop considering power differentials and checking in to assure the balance is not tipped too far as to be unreasonable or exploitative, but also to know that "for new knowledge to emerge one should cultivate inquisitiveness and intellectual curiosity, and avoid taking matters for granted" (Ben-Ari and Enosh, 2012, p. 424). We should acknowledge that power differentials occur as people are in relationship with one another, mediated by the imposed structure of the research process and work to lessen their impact.

My own research stances come into play here as well. "Ontologically, one cannot ignore the inherent power differentials in most research relationships" says Ben-Ari and Enosh, (2012), and epistemologically, "the nature of research relations might be used as a



source of the knowledge produced and affect the process of knowledge construction” (p. 424). As a researcher, do I want to be in relationship with my participants, or is there social distance between researchers and subjects? Building on my own view of knowledge construction, I believe my teaching and research is stronger when the process involves my students. The balance of power skews in my direction, and it is my responsibility to be ever vigilant of issues of power differentials and to interrogate them, and myself, at every step in the research process. For this project, my attention to this balance occurred as I planned the research. I was mindful that the students and I both held multiple roles in this project. During the course, teaching the class was my focus, but I was open to the students about how I was interested in using this class as part of my research. I explained the project to the students and answered the questions they posed, but my role as teacher was at the forefront. As the project shifted to the research section, I approached the students fully explaining how I would like their participation, knowing that students may not want to participate in the research. Three students that took the class opted not to be interviewed for this project. Of the students that did participate in interviews, I was aware that their words were being recorded and transcribed, so I reached back out to them with the interview transcripts. This allowed them to look over their interviews to assure that I captured and interpreted them holistically. During the writing process, I have reached out to students to keep them up to date on the process of this research. This is also a two-way process, when something in the news or entertainment media connects with *The Hunger Games* students are just as likely to email me a link or post something on my social media sites, showing me they

are still interested and learning from the material that is part of this project. It is refreshing to know they are still interested in the project when they reach out to me with news about *The Hunger Games* as it has the possibility to keep what we did in that class as part of how they continue to view and make sense of the world around them. This ongoing relationship with students about *The Hunger Games* is one of the powers of young adult dystopian fiction. It lives in the class we created, but is part of our lives outside of the classroom so when room is given, particularly on social media, to continue talking with one another about the story what we learned in the class continues to be relevant and important places to connect and learn together.

Ben-Ari and Enosh (2012) remind us that from “an ethical position, a question to be asked in this context is whether those in power differences are harmful to the participants and to knowledge production. Seeing it as a disadvantage or an advantage is an ethical matter” (p. 425). All research has instances of power imbalances, and the scales are usually tipped in the favor of the researcher, but instead of constructing those moments as solely asymmetrical relationships, set up to fail, we add the notion of reciprocity. There is mutual respect and give and take between researcher, participants, and the phenomena being studied. In this way, power differentials “are acknowledged and exchanges between the parties promoted” (p. 426). This is not an easy path, and assumes mutual respect and understanding between researcher and participants but follows with how I see myself in relation to the project. This does not make power differentials go away, but does remind me, as a teacher-researcher, that by “constantly looking for oppositions, power differentials, and conflicts among researcher, participants,

and phenomena protects us from taking anything for granted [and] enhancing the search for new knowledge” (Ben-Ari, 2012, p. 427).

### **Summary**

As a reader of young adult fiction and feminist teacher, I kept finding ideas and concepts, like identity and choice, which overlapped in in these two separate arenas. While some authors bemoan current young adult dystopian fiction as a imbued with right leaning ideology, that was not my experience reading or teaching these stories. With this project, I set out to investigate the Spring WGS 450 class as a case study to explore students’ experiences learning with young adult dystopian fiction. My research questions are stated. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature as it relates to young adult dystopian fiction and feminist pedagogy. Chapter 3 outlines my epistemology and methodology. Chapter 4 is an exploration of the class *The Hunger Games and Feminist Education* (WGS 450). And Chapter 5 presents my conclusions and further implications for study.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature that explores the importance of reading popular young adult dystopian fiction. In my literature review, I begin with describing popular culture and why it is important in the classroom. Then, I situate the importance of reading by looking at works from theorists like Louise Rosenblatt, Alberto Manguel, and Paulo Freire. Next, I look more specifically at young adult literature as an important genre and *The Hunger Games* as a timely, influential series from which to teach. Next, I review the pedagogical importance of science fiction. Finally, I connect science fiction with feminist pedagogy as it relates to teaching WGS 450.

#### **What is Popular? What is Culture?**

Popular culture, as defined by Donna Alvermann (2012), is “everyday practices that connect a group of people to each other in particular times and places” (p. 214) and can take many forms such as books, movies, and social media. Studying culture is complex because it is shifting, referential, and benefits from a multi-perspective approach, including the sociology of culture (Williams, 1998), cultural studies (Giroux, 2006), critical theory (Shor, 1999; Luke, 2004) and feminist theory (Zeisler, 2008). To name popular culture means that it must be named against something, namely the culture of those with power to the culture of those who have less social influence. Whether this

is known as high culture or Culture with a capital “C,” it marked those that had the power to define the “right books to read, the proper ways to interact at social gatherings, the proper forms of dress, the holiest way to worship a god, the correct modes of speech, and the proper culinary tastes” (Weaver, 2005, p. 1). Culture is a mix of economic, political, and social influences that have sway over most parts of our lives.

Popular culture has been in the classroom for many years and its presence in educational settings has been documented, debated, and researched (Alvermann, 2012; Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, 2002; Hermes, 2005; Weaver, 2005, McRobbie, 1994). There is a body of work that looks at popular culture’s use in various disciplines, including biomechanics (Ludwig, 2012), the sociology of sport (Plymire, 2012), law (Burgess, 2008), biology (Pryor, 2008), and philosophy (Diminick, 2009). Moreover, we live in a multimedia society where popular culture “is really part of the world and [we] need to be able to analyze it” (Adams, 2011, p. 38). Many people get their news and information from TV, movies, Internet search engines, and infotainment sound bites. Popular culture is part of our social milieu. We interact with it, create it, and should be learning from it and teaching with it, reflexively, critically, creatively. Popular culture, in general, and young adult fiction more specifically, should be in the classroom because it is a part of students’ lives. Studying young adult fiction and feminist pedagogy together could allow for creative thinking in this arena, exploring how they are both institutionalized within our educational structure and ruptured by their centralization in the classroom.

Social influences have never been simply hierarchical, but over time the distinctions of high culture and popular culture have blurred (Hermes, 2005). In education, the canon is crafted in regards to raced and classed social influence and we should teach how texts, like the omnipresent Shakespeare, can be read differently at different times. Reading in different contexts shows students cultural texts are not discrete entities, but are related to larger discourses. We must be aware of how the discourses are produced, circulated, and consumed (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, 2002, p. 16) and how those discourses change over time. While Shakespeare was originally performed as cross-class entertainment and wordplay, it is now taught in high schools as cultural canon (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, 2002, p. 28). Including popular culture in the classroom offers glimpses of how texts are understood and used as spaces where “crucial questions about how notions of identity, belonging, and experience are related to notions of place, space, and time” (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, 2002, p. 21). This way of looking at popular culture in the classroom goes beyond merely rote learning to understanding that we are embedded in histories and cultures. Shakespeare’s work has moved from bawdy theater to canonized text and we should explore how texts come to be included and used in our classrooms.

One suggestion for the moment where the “rigid distinctions between high culture and popular culture” relaxed is the scene in the Walt Disney movie *Fantasia* (1940) where classical composer Leopold Stokowski shook hands with Mickey Mouse. With that gesture the lines blurred between high culture and popular culture showing “how far popular culture had come in establishing its own niche in the American psyche” (Gabler

in Alvermann, 2012, p. 214). In my classroom, a modern equivalent of this animated handshake is bringing *The Hunger Games* into my Women's and Gender Studies course. By using the popular dystopian series in conversation with academic articles and other texts in my classroom I am reaching across genres and asking students to think about authors and stories in new ways. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) show that popular culture is "neither an imposed mass culture, nor a people's culture; it is more of an exchange between the two" (p. 287-288). Like the animated handshake in *Fantasia*, this work is to be a meeting place, a coming together, where we can explore how popular culture, like *The Hunger Games*, has something to say about education, politics, and how cultural analyses should be reflected in the classroom.

I am not calling for an unmitigated, uncritical inclusion of all things popular culture in the classroom. To invite popular culture into the classroom without a critical look at relevance and context is irresponsible, though we must recognize its place in our student's lives. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) caution that cooption should not be overlooked. We do not have the luxury of separation between those in power and those who are not, so "[t]hose who choose to study popular culture must simultaneously be conscious of its relationship to and critique of dominant ideologies and dominant markets" (p. 289). There is no simple read of popular culture audiences and those audiences are not homogenous groups. Giroux is informative as he encourages the use of critical pedagogy "to gain a better understanding of how youth identities are being constructed and how these identities are developed within a popular culture that is simultaneously oppressive and resistant" (in Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2005, p. 288).

This work is about more than throwing fictional stories into curriculum to entertain, but about ways to critically understand the importance of including popular culture into how we teach, learn, and understand the world.

Popular culture has several functions in my work. When looking at how we understand the world, Joke Hermes (2005) re-reads popular culture as a way to re-think citizenship, what she calls “cultural citizenship.” If traditional notions of citizenship rely on our rational decision-making capacities, Heremes’ (2005) broader understanding of cultural citizenship is based on everyday lived practices and includes emotion and feeling as well as reason. By rethinking cultural citizenship in terms of practices like inclusion and meaning-making rather than identities we “allow for as a wide a variety of possible experiential knowledges and styles of reasoning” (p. 151). Students felt they could talk about *The Hunger Games* with some expertise and learned a new way to connect what, for some, felt like disconnected academic ideas to the popular culture they were immersed in outside of the classroom. Using popular culture, like *The Hunger Games*, allows us to be creative in exploring learning objectives. We push beyond what is expected in the classroom and ask students to connect works of fiction with academic theory. By rethinking how education is enacted we can be creative in how we learn about the world. “Community... is what is produced by popular culture,” says Hermes, [and] “is at best a promise of belonging” which acknowledges differences and multiple social identities (p. 152-153). Rethinking citizenship in terms of practice is seen in *The Hunger Games* as Katniss builds a community in the midst of rebellion and I can mirror those practices in my work.



Pleasure is an important part of popular culture. We read, watch, and participate in popular culture for entertainment and belonging. Pleasure is political and too often we try to keep the seemingly divergent ideas of pleasure and politics apart from each other rather than in conversation. People seem suspect if students find pleasure in the classroom and I would like to push back on that reaction. Hermes' (2005) concept of cultural citizenship "is a way of insisting on how politics and pleasure are both articulated at the level of the everyday and are reciprocally involved in how we constitute ourselves in relation to society" (p. 151). Popular culture is one way to explore pleasure, as well as politics in our everyday lives (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, 2002, p. 26). People find varying amounts of pleasure in different forms of popular culture, but our interactions with each other, through popular culture texts, we can explore how pleasure helps us to make meaning. I first read *The Hunger Games* (2008) on the way to an academic conference in Rhode Island. I picked it up as a travel-day pleasure read and by my layover in LaGuardia I was five chapters in—and hooked. I am, undeniably, a reader and fiction helps me understand the world, so, then, I wondered if it would be useful in my classroom. It was because I enjoyed the book, and as a late discoverer of this series others had told me how much they liked this series, that I was curious about using it in my classroom.

While Hermes (2005) does not use identity as a primary indicator of cultural citizenship, using popular culture to take up the politics of identity construction is a powerful activity. In Alvermann (2012), Richard Beach and David O'Brien encourage "exploration of how race, gender, and other identity markers mediate mass-produced

popular culture texts” (p. 218). By exploring discourses that perpetuate ideas of whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality as the assumed norms within many popular culture texts, we can begin to teach in ways that identify those constructions and use popular culture as “potential sites of engagement for moving toward a more just and equitable world” (p. 218). It is not the popular culture text itself that dismantles the constructions of identity, but using those texts as part of a “process that encourages youth to explore how texts that position them in negative ways can be resisted or restructured” (p. 218). By viewing popular culture texts as a teaching tool we are taking both popular culture and the students seriously.

Community is an integral part of popular culture. Books and movies invite participation across platforms, offering many ways for people to interact with the stories. Fans connect in virtual worlds, at book and comic conventions, and by writing their own fan fiction, to name a few ways that the fictional world can be expanded. Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc (2002) talk about this in terms of “passionate engagement, active participation,” Hermes (2005) notes that popular culture is “welcoming,” and Adams (2011) calls popular culture a “great hook.” Engagement with fictional world is pleasurable and accessible. Popular culture is part of everyday life in ways that other forms of education and politics are not. Politicians, authors, and pundits appear on the comedy news satire *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* to promote their platforms, taking seriously the idea that “popular cultural texts are far more real than national politics” because they “help us know who we are, and include us in communities of like-minded viewers and readers” (Hermes, 2005, p. 1).

Getting news information from a comedy show reinforces the complex relationship we have with popular culture. For example, late night comedian Stephen Colbert used his television show *The Colbert Report*, a *The Daily Show* spinoff, to illustrate the role Super PACs play in politics. He created his own Super PAC, “Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow,” as a satirical protest over the Citizens United Supreme court case, rallying his viewers to donate over \$1 million dollars and start chapters on college campuses nationwide. Colbert’s mix of comedy and political education won a Peabody Award for “innovative means of teaching American viewers about the landmark court decision” (Subramanian, 2012). Mixing popular culture and education seems a natural fit for looking at how students, many of whom watch shows like *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*, get their news information.

If we use popular culture to better recognize ourselves, find affinity groups, and know the world, understanding ways to critically engage with popular culture is one way for me to envision my feminist classroom. For many, political and cultural information is filtered through social media like Twitter and Instagram, not merely watched on the broadcast news programs or read about in the newspaper. Where we get our information, how it is filtered and interpreted, and what connections are made between politics, education, and popular culture are all important.

Weaver (2005) thinks a “healthy approach to popular culture and education would develop a pedagogy that utilizes the power of popular culture in order to enhance democracy” (p. 108). This view of popular culture education would invite students into the conversation around topics like education, politics, and social justice. It is this

invitation into the educational conversation whereby hooks (1994) recognizes that “everyone contributes...Excitement is enhanced though collective effort” (p. 8). By building education communities that take both popular culture and students seriously, I imagine a classroom where popular culture is used in conjunction with academic texts to allow students to “question the world and act as agents in the world in order to change it” (Weaver, 2005, p. 103). Whether students change the world, in ways we pre-define change, may be immaterial. What this work does is allow space for students to feel invested in their education and part of communities that incorporate their popular culture interests.

What is learned has potential beyond the classroom as students encounter the popular culture texts, like *The Hunger Games*, outside of school. I have a finite amount of time with my students each semester, but if they connect the story to ideas of social justice then the potential for continued engagement exists. At least they will have the tools to approach popular culture with a critical eye and the experience of connecting fiction to social analysis. The use of popular culture to create the kinds of identities we wish to see in the world is a powerful project that builds community. We connect to others that are reading, or watching, *The Hunger Games* opening up learning potential.

One of the strongest arguments for popular culture is that it asks us to think differently. Using popular culture texts does not demand that traditional academic texts be ignored; rather we should be cognizant of the role we play in foregrounding authors and genres. Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2005) think popular texts should be “read and studied as rigorous and relevant pieces with genuine academic merit” (p. 295). By taking

seriously popular texts that are relevant to students we can “facilitate a more engaging curriculum” (p. 297) where students learn to think in context with the changing world around them. Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2005) call for students to be allowed “spaces for considering the significances of these new literacies and popular culture” (p. 304). The importance comes in highlighting work like young adult fiction that speaks to the young adult experience or looking for authors who are often not included in the canon. Expanding what authors, genres, and types of material that students are exposed to makes the possibilities of my classroom larger. The significances that Duncan-Andrade and Morell see in the new literacies offer students the space to grapple with ideas and practice “new modes of critical thinking rather than conclusive judgments” (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc, 2002, p. 11). Fiction, in particular, is ripe for an imaginative exploration of feminist education.

This does not mean merely substituting popular culture texts for canonized texts. Counterarguments against popular culture should be considered. If we are using popular culture to fill time or as novelty, then the possibility of empowerment and resistance are missed and students could passively consume hegemonic ideas of the dominant culture. It is not enough to substitute texts, students must be taught to interrogate the values underlying the work and know the knowledge they possess is valuable in understanding school and ultimately the world around them. In this process, we are forced to “rethink the nature of legitimate knowledge” (Duncan-Andrade and Morell, 2005, p. 290). This rethinking is a powerful re-calibrator for understanding what we teach, why we teach, and how we teach.

## **Importance of Reading Fiction**

Literary theorist Louise Rosenblatt (1995) contends that reading is “a unique mode of experience, an expansion of boundaries of our own temperaments and worlds, lived through our own persons” (p. 68). Reading does not just occur in our minds, but is a way to experience the world, connect with others, and imagine difference. These are skills that resonate with the goals and objectives of my classroom. The value of reading is not just the information you can get from a book, but what students do with that information. Reading can teach students to “live beyond their ordinary lives- to come to understand, from the inside, about other people, other places, other times. In better understanding their world, students are able to envision a future world that is more just and equitable” (Mills, Stephens, O’Keefe, and Waugh, 2004, p. 49). By using fiction and popular culture to push beyond staid notions of learning, I hope to spark their educational curiosity.

Louise Rosenblatt (1995) named democracy as a central tenet of her work. She wrote that for people to live together “they need the ability to imagine the human consequences of political and economic alternatives and to think rationally about emotionally charged issues” (1995, p. xv). Rosenblatt consistently argued the literature students read be diverse and teachers have “an obligation to offer students texts that are going to be meaningful to them” (in Flynn, 2007, p. 57). Meaning comes from the ability of the student to reflect on what they are learning, not to merely learn information disconnected from experience. Teaching with popular fiction is one way to make those connections. Maxine Greene (1988) forthrightly centers the use of fiction in her

classroom saying, “I use the works of imaginative literature in teaching...because of the sense of intelligibility they provoke and because of the way they involve students personally and intersubjectively, in conscious pursuits of meaning” (p. 176). Imaginative literature, specifically *The Hunger Games*, as a route towards imaginative learning allows for a more tactile way of encountering academic ideas.

Using *The Hunger Games* in WGS 450, we did not just talk about disrupting gender norms as an abstract concept, but we discussed the ways that Katniss and Peeta invert the gender paradigm invoking Judith Butler and gender performativity. While students are aghast at the way that characters are drafted to be part of *The Hunger Games*, we watched videos of the televised Vietnam draft lottery asking for them to discuss the similarities with the story. Greene (1988) believes “informed encounters” with imaginative literature “permits students to confront their own lived realities in ways that have consequences for understanding...and identifying themselves in the world” (p. 176). Greene and Rosenblatt are influenced by Dewey’s ideas of art as experience and the integration of learning with doing. As Rosenblatt (1966) notes, “Imaginative literature is indeed something ‘burned through’ lived through, by the reader...reading is of necessity a participation, a personal experience” (p. 999). The classroom is a space for thinking as well as interacting and both are part of a larger project of learning.

For Greene (1988), reading fiction in the classroom forces the reader to confront their beliefs and expectations because each reader must interpret the novels they read. Those works remain open questions for students to fill in questions and gaps with their own knowledge. Realizing there is no perfect or complete answer to the questions asked

in my classroom, but using *The Hunger Games* to open up conversations can be part of “awakening [students] to all the problems of membership in a culture” (p. 178). First, acknowledging that we all have socially defined identities, there are “a number of imaginative works that move students to probe problems they might have never have posed without the confrontations made possible by such works” (p. 178-179). I have found in my classes, students have struggled to talk about issues of sexism, racism, classism, and disability not because they are unaware of the issues, but because they needed a place to start. *The Hunger Games* becomes that starting place. The fictional world of Panem is another space for us to think about sexism, racism, classism, and ableism, while reading more traditionally used authors and articles and incorporating our own lived experiences in the classroom community.

### **Why Young Adult Literature?**

The term “young adult” was established in the 1960s by the Young Adult Library Services Association to represent 12-18 year old readers. This category was delineated following successes like Maureen Daly’s (1942) *Seventeenth Summer*, the first book credited as being written for teenage readers (Strickland, 2013). The young adult category defies easy classification. It speaks to youth experiences, but the story can occur within a fantasy universe, dystopian world, or realistic setting. Consistent elements include: the story is from the young adult’s point of view, deals with issues they face, and confronts experiences and emotions in a way that centers the teenager (Feeney, 2013; Wendig, 2013).



The young adult literature designation is often more important to the publisher than to those who enjoy this genre. Book series that grow into movie and merchandising franchises, like *The Hunger Games*, would not be as successful without adult readers and subsequently adult moviegoers who, along with younger fans, fill up theaters (Herman, 2014). The success of the *Harry Potter* series prompted the New York Times to create a children's book best sellers list to "clear up room" on the regular (adult) best sellers list (Smith, 2000). To require its own best sellers list is a powerful thing for *Harry Potter* to have done because it speaks to the power of good literature, no matter how it is marketed. Good stories that capture the imagination of readers and with the imagination engaged, learning can occur.

Young adult literature is a "rich and constantly evolving subset of literature" (Herman, 2014) with over half of young adult books being purchased by adults (Feeney, 2013; Strickland, 2013). Writing these stories off as childish does a disservice to the way that people, of all ages, connect with the books' characters, emotions, and situations. What they provide is not easily reducible, but a "good story is good story, no matter age range" (Wendig, 2013). Where the young adult novels of the 1970s tried to capture the high school experience with broad strokes and the genre evolved into single-issue stories about topics such as dating and divorce. The resurgence of the young adult market in the late 1990s demanded more complex stories. The characters navigated, to varying degrees of success, the different worlds they inhabited (Strickland, 2013).

In the three most popular series, all of which were mentioned in the WGS 450 class and student interviews for this research, we find the characters navigating

increasingly complex worlds. Harry Potter fought Voldemort during the school year, but went back to his non-magical family during the summer. *The Hunger Games* protagonist Katniss Everdeen showed us the drastically different worlds within Panem. In the *Divergent* series, Tris Prior left her home faction, Abnegation, to live her life as Dauntless, yet found herself in a post-apocalyptic Chicago she never could have imagined. The stories not only showed us a slice of the young adult characters' lives, but intertwined multiple themes and locations in ways that young adult fiction of earlier decades had not done. The complexity of this generation of YAL is another reason that it is a good fit in the classroom. By highlighting different facets of the work, we can teach from within the complexities already in contemporary young adult books.

Many writers highlight the idea of “being between” as a popular theme in young adult literature. The young adult characters are between childhood and adulthood and it is in the limbo of being neither fully adult nor child where the characters are grow. People, of all ages, feel fragmented and “between.” Young adult literature has created a narrative about young adults that seeks to define them as different, but what is attributed to young adults is reflected in people of all ages, which may account for the increasing number of adults who read and are fans of young adult series. We all navigate work, home, school, and social situations that ask us to highlight different facets of who we are at different times, so being between is a universal, rather than solely teenaged, feeling.

What young adult literature does best is take young adults seriously. In these stories, they are the ones who think about the problems they face in unexpected ways. At a time when young adults are maligned for being the entitled millennial generation, these

characters reflect the potential in young adulthood—a potential I often find in my classroom. The boundaries between childhood and adulthood are being navigated and challenged while notions of self and representations of reality are not static. Our identities are created in context.

Popular culture plays a part in how we define roles like young adult, woman, hero, and student and these representations are not straightforward and unmoving. Representations are also not inherently positive or negative, but value is assigned by how we take those concepts up in meaning-making. The social agency that is “employed in the activation of *all* meanings” is a point of consideration (McRobbie, 1994, p. 23). Readers are drawn into the stories as they watch the characters struggle with the complexities of being alive. There is power in imagining what you would do if you were faced with the same decisions, using the stories as a space to start that imaginative process, practicing different scenarios, and encountering the possibilities of choice. When we take seriously the work of the reader’s imagination and understand that notion of being fragmented as well as trying to understand ourselves in relation to a changing world, the role of young adult literature can be more fully appreciated.

Literary theorists have written about the value of teaching with contemporary works (Rosenblatt, 1960, 1993; Friere, 1983, Manguel, 1996). It is not just the texts themselves, which add educational value, but from the “lively interaction with them” that brings passion to reading contemporary texts (Rosenblatt in Pradl, 1996). I see the lively interaction when my students stay after class to discuss *The Hunger Games*, the social media attention these stories receive, and the fandoms, both digital and real life, that

support these stories beyond the printed page. Further, Rosenblatt references Henry James' quandary of how many "people of talent" were overlooked because they did not comply with narrow notions of what it meant to be a writer (Rosenblatt, 1936, p. 199). That question is still applicable as we think about what kinds of writing is seen as proper for the college classroom. Often, young adult literature gets relegated to pleasure reading, if considered at all, because of narrow definitions of what academic writing should look like. I do not intend for young adult literature to displace scholarly work, in fact, academic articles are the first material encountered in my classroom, but I am intentional that we are connecting the fictional stories, the pop culture articles, and the fan created content to the academic ideas that are central to my pedagogy.

Reading is an experience. Literature is not just the book, but is the book plus the reader (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 304). The reader creates the story and fills in the author's gaps with their imagination. This includes pushing boundaries of the work and connecting to their own experiences. I take seriously learning that centers student experience. By including young adult literature as part of this process we center students in ways that "brings both the student and the book into the center of focus" (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 307). A canon can be a way to highlight certain works, but it can also obscure voices and relegate creativity to a preconceived formula. This is not a call to dismantle the canon, but the arbitrary nature of its creation and a place to consider how we place value on learning material. When we center the student in the classroom, then we can employ works that more directly engage them, using their own experience to make learning real, reflexive, and important. Rosenblatt (1960) expresses this thought saying,

“it is precisely the linkages with the student’s own intimate preoccupations that provide the challenge to cope with constantly more complex and more difficult work” (p. 309). To take students seriously as readers by using works like *The Hunger Games*, we work with them to learn to reflect, connect, and understand their experiences.

Paulo Freire (1983) believed that “words should be laden with the meaning of the people’s existential experience, and not the teacher’s experience” (p. 6). By using material that honors the learner’s interests, we teach from the places they inhabit. What we read and how we connect those readings are important. Alberto Manguel (1996) tells us, “reading is cumulative...each new reading builds upon whatever the reader has read before” (p. 19). Using young adult literature to scaffold other readings shows what is said in young adult literature is important and offers a place for students to think, reflect, and possibly even act. There are important lessons in *The Hunger Games*. Not using this series to explore sexism, racism, classism, and ablesim we lose out on a place to connect with our students.

### **Why *The Hunger Games*?**

Building on successes of other young adult franchises, *The Hunger Games* burst onto the scene ripe with blockbuster appeal. *The Hunger Games* is having a moment both in popular culture and in education. The novels are best sellers and we are in the midst of a record breaking four-part movie release. I have observed the symbols of the Games on a registration poster at the community college where I also teach, as a fast food advertisement on my university campus, on my Twitter feed, and at a college sporting

event. This story has transcended its place in young adult fiction and has become a cultural marker.

Teaching with *The Hunger Games*, I endeavor to use the characters, locations, and stories in the fictional universe to think about the world we live in right now. In a passage from *The Hunger Games*, Katniss offers sharp criticism of Panem saying,

The arenas are historic site, preserved after the Games. Popular destinations for Capitol residents to visit, to vacation. Go for a month, rewatch the Games, tour the catacombs, visit the sites where the deaths took place. You can even take part in reenactments. They say the food is excellent. (Collins, 2008, p. 144-145)

This excerpt stayed with me. I recalled it as I walked my dogs in a local park, built on a revolutionary battlefield, passing markers that commemorated the battles and deaths that took place there. This passage in the book asked me to rethink the park I used for recreation as a space that was once a place of war. It left me pondering the details of a fictional universe that reveled in a public death ritual, enough to reenact the Games as vacation, and wondering how there are parallels in our own world that we often overlook. By using Katniss' observations of Panem, we can get a view of our own society that we are rarely asked to think about. We can read the story through Katniss' point of view, as the book is written, imagine ourselves as part of one of the oppressed districts, or uncomfortably sit with how many similarities we share with the Capitol citizens.

Readers tangle with concepts of power and oppression, social justice and action, as well as complicity and surveillance. Ultimately this series asks us to look at society's role in creating and maintaining the Games. Instead of having a monster to defeat it is

the “thousands of citizens watching at home” that assures the spectacle will continue to be televised (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 72). The books ask us to consider society as another character in the series. Katniss is called the “girl on fire” (Collins, 2008, p. 147) because of her fiery opening ceremony outfit, but the fire that she symbolizes has the power to catch fire in my classroom.

In secondary classrooms, teachers are using *The Hunger Games* to teach math (chances in the arena), geography (where would Panem be), and citizenship education (Simmons, 2012; Lucey, Lycke, Laney, and Conolly, 2013). In pre-service teacher education, *The Hunger Games* was used to help new teachers prepare for entering the teaching “arena” (Saunders and Ash, 2013) and to help teachers deal with bullying and suicide (Pytash, 2013). Two American Studies programs have offered courses on *The Hunger Games*. At American University, the class is *The Hunger Games: Class, politics, and marketing* (Bussel, 2014). Using the series as a case study, American University students explore the cultural impact of *The Hunger Games* by engaging themes like oppression, feminism, food deserts, rebellion, and social media marketing and offering students a chance to discuss pressing issues in a different context...[to] better understand political theory” (Calta, 2014, para. 4). At Macalester College the class is called “*The Hunger Games: Map and Mirror of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*” By looking at global themes such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), food justice, and environmental issues in context with the series this experimental class “provoke[s] a larger discussion about all sorts of social issues” while introducing students to experts in fields such as archery, food service, and environmental advocacy (Kavish, 2013, para. 3). The vibrant, multifaceted

world created by Suzanne Collins allows for imaginative ways to encounter themes that are central to a feminist education. In the descriptions of these classes ideas of gender, agency, feminism, and knowledge are discussed, though I have not found *The Hunger Games* specifically taught in Women's and Gender Studies classes as a central text. When used to look at issues of violence and domination that are carried out against the 12 districts of Panem while also looking at how violence has shaped voting rights, civil law, our domestic and foreign policies, and our educational system it's place in a feminist classroom can be understood.

The connections to my Women's and Gender Studies classroom are palpable. Social justice is an important part of what I teach. In step with current events, *The Hunger Games*' three-fingered salute was used by protesters in Thailand (Child, 2014) and the story has been used to talk about the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (Hansen, 2014; Baker-Whitelaw, 2014). When we feel emotions over character deaths like Rue, Finnick, or Prim, then we must turn our collective eye towards injustices that are around us, like hunger, poverty, and sex trafficking, all themes addressed in this trilogy and central to my WGS classroom. By learning to read deeply, infer, and connect the fictional Panem to our present day United States, we can become aware, problematize, and "demythologize reality" (Simmons, 2012, p. 24). The classroom, hopefully, becomes a place to express ourselves, compare experiences, and imagine the world differently because reading fiction makes a difference in living and learning together (Greene, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1995).



For this project, *The Hunger Games* offers both the right timing, the books have been widely read and we are in the midst of the four-part movie release, as well as an “unsettling premise that combines action adventure with a social conscious” (Brennan, 2010, p. 11). *The Hunger Games* is Katniss Everdeen’s story, but it is a story about us as well. Wilson (2010) explains,

The series pushes us to grow up and take responsibility both personally and politically for our choices: those Capitol residents we see milling through the streets in *Mockingjay*, the same Capitol residents who so raptly watched *The Hunger Games* on television year after year without recognizing the suffering that made it possible, are *us*. (Author’s italics, p. viii)

*The Hunger Games* is positioned as a teachable text that connects directly to the exploration of the themes that link this work to a socially conscious view of the world. *The Hunger Games* looks at themes like racism, sexism, classism, and ableism becoming a complicated arena for readers to explore.

As we are introduced to Panem, Katniss learns that to survive she must entertain her audience. The citizens of Panem are captivated by her struggle, both to love and to survive, but we, as readers, are just as riveted to Katniss’ struggle. In the course of this book, we come to realize “we are Katniss’ real audience” (Brennan, 2010, p. 5). We are the people she is really entertaining. Using this twist, where we read the stories as Katniss’ intended audience, “this series isn’t about people starving in a world where there are no commodities, but rather about a world where most exist in terrible conditions in order to support those who have great luxury” (Kress, 2010, p. 184). By refocusing

students on our varying locations in social hierarchies, we explore ourselves as we read the series. We are exploring a world in fiction that is “telling our story...It isn’t focused on black and white, good and bad, but rather on highlighting the grey” (p. 192). The feminist pedagogy I employ works in a similar manner, opening and exposing nuance we encounter as we navigate our worlds.

## **Gender**

Katniss herself is a heroine worth studying. Along with Peeta, the boy sent into the Games with her, she offers new ways to explore gender. Katniss is more likely to be described with traditionally masculine traits like strong, stoic, and provider, while Peeta is described as artistic, soft, and loving. Gender’s complexities should not allow for easy reads, but Katniss forces readers to confront gender stereotypes as well as ways that gender is reproduced on different bodies differently. While there is an element of romantic entanglement in the stories, Katniss is “interesting and flawed and completely three-dimensional...independent of the boys” (Barnes, 2010, p. 15). Katniss’ relationships are important to the story, but they do not define her. In fact, she is a hard character to know. Other than volunteering to take her sister’s place in the Games, she is willing to playact for survival, whether that role is Peeta’s love interest or the manufactured symbol of the resistance, the Mockingjay. The real Katniss is hard to find because she has “no desire to be known” (p. 15). She is a loner, with admittedly low expectations of others, who does not want to be the leader or hero. She wants to survive. By having a character that is different from our usual expectations of woman and celebrity, we look for easy labels like “star crossed lover” to try to define her, but that is

not enough. In her complexity we encounter the complexity of knowing gender and, perhaps, can learn the impossibility of that task.

### **Real or Not Real**

The refrain used by Peeta as he heals his tortured mind is, “Real or Not Real.” What starts as a game in *Mockingjay* becomes a central question of the series. The question of reality is examined as students use *The Hunger Games* to explore social media, reality television, questions of hunger, and their place in this mirrored world of Panem. This deceptively easy question, “Real or Not Real,” is a question “without any definite answer” (Brennan, 2010, p. 8). There is no simple villain or apolitical heroine in this story. We learn with ambiguity. Illusion becomes reality and reality can be an illusion. In this way, the details of this story are not just fiction, but a process to “test the boundaries of reality” (Gordin, Tilley, Prakash, 2010, p. 6). Thus Panem is not merely fictionalized snapshot of America, but a way of thinking that allows students to interrogate their own ideas of how we construct social institutions in a shifting, changing world. Confronting reality, or a shattered expectation of what we expect the world to be, is something that students encounter in WGS classes. By centering an idea that reality is constructed and dependent on many social contexts we can explore how we navigate our worlds in and out of the classroom.

### **Love and Community**

Both the concepts of love and community are explored and exploited in this series. Peeta both publicly announces his love for Katniss, in *The Hunger Games*, and declares her to be pregnant, on television, without consulting her, in *Catching Fire*.

Panem takes his word to be real when neither the relationship nor the pregnancy existed. By using the juxtaposition of his declaration of love to his declaration of her fake pregnancy, we can explore the ways love can manipulate. Community can make people stronger, as evidenced by Finnick and Annie's wedding, but community gets manipulated by District Thirteen as a frightening reflection of the tyranny of the Capitol. As a teaching tool, *The Hunger Games* is a magnificent place to think around these topics. Love and community are often seen as simple, uncritiqued good things, but in WGS classrooms we learn to look deeper into what we think we know and explore how feminist pedagogy can uncover complexities in the everyday.

The Capitol divides people to keep them detached from one another. What Katniss does, on national TV, with the phrase "I volunteer," announces "a radical new idea: that it is important to care about other people; that it is the most important thing in the world" (Borsellino, 2010, p. 31). By seeing how we are connected to other people, including those we know and those we do not, students can explore the interconnectedness of the human experience. Through this text, students get to look differently at the world, themselves, and education, as Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2005) showed in teaching with popular culture and science fiction theorists like Rachel Dean-Ruzicka (2014) when she said, "dystopian literature has the power to help readers reimagine the world" (p. 72) or when Tom Moylan (2000) noted that science fiction has "always offered the possibility for radical re-vision" (p. 30). There is room for learning about what can happen by making others important. Modeling off lessons learned in *The Hunger Games* "the smallest act of community can light the spark that sets an entire

neighborhood, or even nation, ablaze with...concern for the greater good” (Despain, 2010, p. 209). Superficially, *The Hunger Games* does not seem to be a hard-hitting academic text, but by using the fictions of Panem to learn about our own realities we see “the whole point of *The Hunger Games* is all the things going on beneath the surface” (Brennan, 2010, p. 8).

### **Science Fiction**

As a category science fiction is broad, encompassing many types of stories and kinds of writers. In a genre whose most important question is “what if” and presupposes that life and our ideas of being alive will change, it is no surprise that a conclusive definition is hard to find. Science fiction author and biochemist Isaac Asimov’s definition sets the tone for how I will think about this genre, saying, “Science fiction can be defined as that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology” (in Goonan, 2015). Learning with science fiction means that knowledge is fluid, changing as science and technology develops. Advances in technology keep this genre in flux, but it is a genre that welcomes those contestations as part of its identity. Innovations in science and technology open up the possibilities for change, but it is the human reaction to those changes that keep these kinds of stories relevant to readers.

There are many categories related to science fiction such as speculative fiction (as Margaret Atwood calls her work) and visionary fiction (a term coined by Adrienne Maree Brown and Walidah Imarisha, 2015) and sub genres like dystopian and utopian fiction. Under the general subheading of science fiction, *The Hunger Games* falls more

specifically under the subgenre of young adult dystopian fiction. This is not surprising as the “dystopian novel has become the dominant genre model within futuristic fiction published for young readers” (Hintz and Ostry, 2003, p. 16). Knowing that these genres and categories intertwine this project does not aim to untangle the genre specific details, but to work under the broad umbrella of science fiction to outline what is useful about young adult dystopian fiction for this project. The three utilities of science fiction that I will discuss for this project are the preoccupation with process, using science fiction to think about the present, and the necessity of space and limits.

### **Preoccupation with Process**

Ursula K. LeGuin (1979) defines an essential function of science fiction to be the “reversal of an habitual way of thinking” (p. 163). In other words, to learn we need to observe and ask questions about what we see and know. As a genre, science fiction is concerned with asking questions, and the process of finding answers takes precedence to the final answer itself. Joanna Russ (1995) names science fiction as work that explores life as it might be (p. 11) rather than life as it is. As such, she is preoccupied with the processes of work, religion, and society as opposed to the outcomes any of these institutions. It is not the doctrine or the social mores themselves that Russ necessarily wants to write about but the process of exploring why they exist.

Tom Moylan (2000) reiterates this attention to process in science fiction saying, “the work of being ‘on the way’ takes precedence over the celebration of arrival” (p. 272). For the student, science fiction offers a particular reading experience that allows them to think about the world from different perspectives. Authors have created worlds

where gender is immaterial (*The Left Hand of Darkness*), or where emotions are filtered out (*The Giver*) thus giving the reader pause to imagine our own world from these perspectives. The process of reading science fiction does not end with making sense of the text. The potential exists for a triangulation between “an individual’s limited perspective, the estranged re-vision of the alternative world on the pages...and the actually existing society (Moylan, 2000, p. xvii). Students do not merely keep what they read in between the pages of the books, but use what they read to think about the world in imaginative ways. Engaging with science fiction as a process for learning can allow for students to come back to the world with unique and sharper perspectives of current events.

### **Using Science Fiction to Think about the Present**

When I first started reading science fiction I, like many, assumed it was exclusively about the future, whatever that future might be. More often, the genre uses futuristic or altered realities as ways to talk about present conditions. Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash (2010) describe it this way, “Projecting...into the future renders present-day problems more clearly” (p. 1). The illumination of present concerns is one of the strengths of teaching with science fiction. It allows students ways to consider contemporary issues. We can learn about things like privilege and oppression through the characters and then reflect on the world we live in.

For some it can be hard to imagine our own world any differently, but if we see a fictional world that treats racism or sexism in another manner it opens up possibilities for us to imagine our world in a different way. Peter Paik (2010) says “by compelling us to

imagine a different order, science fiction cultivates in us the capacity to conceive of our contemporary situations in a dynamic manner” (p. 2). The call for dynamic ways of thinking about the world resonates in my classroom. In teaching with feminist theory, I ask students to think about their world, their families, and themselves from different perspectives. *The Hunger Games* does not introduce ideas about our racist, sexist, or classist society to students, David J. Lorenzo (2014) reminds us those ideals are “already present in our society” (p. 6), but reading the novels as a way to rethink our current lives is an empowering critical practice. A practice that Moylan (2000) describes as “investigative reading [is] one more skill, one more intellectual habit, by which to make sense of social reality itself” (p. 27). Teaching with *The Hunger Games* and offering my students another way to understand the world through science fiction is a powerful part of this project.

### **Necessity of Space and Limits**

The third utility of science fiction is the necessity of space *and* limits of which science fiction offers both. Ursula K. LeGuin (1979) writes of the imaginative latitude offered in science fiction. Authors create worlds, shift social systems, and frame identities from different perspectives, but that is not done in a limitless way. LeGuin says the “limits, and the great spaces of fantasy and science fiction are precisely what my imagination needs” (p. 30). Often the “great space” of science fiction is recognized, sometimes as literally the momentous universe reached in a space ship, but metaphorically it is the space needed to think and explore. That is exemplified by



LeGuin's experiment in *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) where she creates a society without men or women to probe human nature when gender is factored out.

For this project, *The Hunger Games* gives the reader space to explore themes like gender, love, and compassion. It is not just that Panem is like America after an apocalyptic event, but the story is a place to imagine how we would function in a world where our comforts existed on the back of someone else's discomfort. For some students this realization is uncomfortable and shocking. Moylan (2000) calls this a "distanced space" which can "draw willing readers away from the society that produces and envelops them" (p. 30). Teaching in this distanced space is where I see the possibility for radical re-vision of how we see our society, ourselves, and our actions in the world. Hintz and Ostry (2003) identify dystopian fiction as a "productive place to address cultural anxieties and threats as well as to contemplate the ideal" (p. 12). Students have some control of the imaginative space so reflection and experimentation with ideas of racism, sexism, and classism are less risky. Though safe spaces in education are never guaranteed, using fictional spaces to begin observations and analysis of worlds that feel strange but are a reflection of our own is what Patik (2010) sees as "critical space for reflection" (p. 22). The wide-open spaces in science fiction become part of the draw of the genre.

LeGuin (1979) also speaks of the "necessary limits" (p. 23) of science fiction. Fantastical worlds have rules and boundaries. Often the worlds created in science fiction feel limitless, but the limits set out by the authors are vital. In attempts to discover who we are by reading, the stories' boundaries give readers a place to push back and

interrogate their thoughts about both the fictional and real worlds. Authors like LeGuin, Russ, and Octavia Butler took to the science fiction landscape to explore the status of women as artistic and ethical considerations. Currently, the edited work of Brown and Imarisha (2105) imagines a world without war, prison or violence. In writing about a world they want to live in these authors are imagining “beyond the boundaries of ‘the real’ and [doing] the hard work of sculpting reality from our dreams” (p. 5). There are limits in fictional worlds. In my classroom, those limits exist for us to learn from. They are not meant to stop our thinking, but to function as a whetstone that sharpens our analysis. What we see in science fiction stories is reflected in our world and ourselves; to learn about racism, sexism, and classism, we have to see it around us and place ourselves as complicit to these systems.

Reasons to use science fiction is just as important as seeing the genre as a tool to employ. These include using science fiction as an analytic category and enabling a prismatic understanding of what can be learned with science fiction. Thinking about science fiction with these two ways of understanding adds dimension to their pedagogical use.

### **Science Fiction as an Analytic Category**

Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash (2010) propose a different way using science fiction, not as “*objects of study but as historically grounded analytic categories with which to understand how individuals and groups around the world have interpreted their present tense with an eye to the future*” (p. 3, authors’ italics). The worlds created in the story can be understood as the author’s response to particular place in time, thus the stories are

not merely a fictional snapshot of our society, but a way to think about social concerns as a mode of inquiry. This way of looking at both the story and our society engages with the cultural norms and preoccupations that created both the ideas written about in the science fiction genre and the specific forms those created worlds took. For example, questions of why the young adult dystopian fiction novel has risen to such prominence and why the rise of female protagonists has caught our imaginations could be explored here. Using science fiction as a category of analysis allows the questions we ask to become a “socially located critical stance” (p. 5). By thinking of stories, like *The Hunger Games*, as modes of critique we give them new ways to be useful in the classroom.

Lorenzo (2014) thinks by analyzing our own society through the lens of science fiction we “sharpen our attention to [moral and social] questions and make them appear less academic and abstract” (p. 211). This is not to dumb down the ideas, theories, and philosophies found in this genre, but to locate the conversations about those things in places where the students and readers are. The setting may be fantasy, but science fiction stories highlight “very real concerns and questions that pertain to the here and now” (212). This way of using science fiction as a category of analysis becomes another way for students to learn about themselves and the world around them.

### **Prismatic Understanding**

Science fiction can help us understand complex ideas. In a genre that bends space, time, and social mores, using it to push students past linear ways of thinking, past simple binary choices of right or wrong, truth or fiction, or yes or no helps them to analyze their world in what Basu, Broad, and Hintz (2013) calls “prismatic

understanding” (p. 9) of the genre and the world around us. Using science fiction to realize that knowledge can be understood in ways that refract, bounce off other ideas and concepts, and generally go beyond linear ways of knowing is an important way of teaching with these stories. When we learn with science fiction we think of how to apply our knowledge, expand our imaginations, and re-conceptualize categories like real or not real, past or present, and truth or fiction. These couplets are not merely binary opposites that simply exist because they are not the other. Science fiction allows us to recognize how and what we know is more like a prism, reflecting and refracting knowledge in numerable ways. LeGuin (1979) called this way of knowing “muddled, elastic, inventive, and adaptable” preferring to it to simpler ways of thinking. Lorenzo (2014) goes a bit further saying, “these stories present us with a wealth of ideas by which to probe our assumptions and go about rethinking what we want from society, economics, and government” (p. 210). If *The Hunger Games* can do this with my students, then it has served its purpose in my teaching.

### **Feminist Pedagogy**

Recently, a demographic coined “Book Girls” has emerged as a major influence in young adult fiction. These readers have been a driving force for girl-centric fiction, like *The Hunger Games*, to dominate the market. This group, which Linda Holmes (2014) loosely defines as young women middle school aged through college aged, have “helped create a space where girls who fight and feel things are not genre-breaking, but genre-defining.” These readers are part of a force that push young adult dystopian novels to the top of best sellers lists and stand in line en masse for midnight book releases and

their counterpart movie premiers. They grew up reading *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *Divergent*. Reading is not just what they do it is part of who they are. They want to read stories and talk about the social and political implications found in the books they enjoy. Holmes (2104) tells us “the world of their books is much more complicated than just them, and they are more complicated than just their books”. These readers want to see their complex lives in the stories they read. While Book Girls are not the only students in my previous WGS classes, they are a demographic who registers for my classes. On the first day of class, I get to know many of my students by asking about their reading habits. Consistently many of my students are excited to talk about the most recent book series and seem excited to connect with a teacher in this way.

WGS 450 came together as a deliberate way to teach with young adult dystopian fiction. As a main character, Katniss initially received attention as the female lead carrying an action trilogy written by a woman author. That in and of itself is worth studying; we need more series written and led by women. The value of reading stories that are written by women and feature women characters is important draw of *The Hunger Games*, but is not the entire reason for teaching with this series. My feminism “recognizes the genderedness of all social relations and consequently of all societal institutions and structures” (Shrewsbury, 1993, p. 167). My feminist pedagogy takes that recognition as a starting place, incorporating critical, intersectional thought and theory with intentional teaching practices that puts pedagogy in dialogue with theory.

It is not merely recognizing gender as a lens with which to assess our world, education, and social institutions, but using feminist theory and pedagogical practices to

reframe our relationships with knowledge, education, and popular science fiction. Joanna Russ (1995) forthrightly states that science fiction is “didactic” (p. 5). That is, it is meant to teach. I wondered what that would look like if I taught a class that looked at education through *The Hunger Games*. I wanted to know if we could use this story to explore how higher education is situated in a political landscape that is increasingly interested in efficiency and standardization. Hintz and Ostry (2013) follow suit saying science fiction is an “inherently pedagogical genre” which teaches students to “view their society with a critical eye” (p. 7). By teaching students to critically assess their own society, popular science fiction and feminist pedagogy are more similar than one might assume. Creating space to look at the familiar with unfamiliar eyes opens possibilities for students to explore what seems most comfortable in new ways.

Stories offer a place to learn about the gendered and ideological content that is produced and consumed in popular culture, often without question. Critical interrogation of the underlying ideology is vital because feminist pedagogy “acknowledges the ways in which systems of oppression intersect with systems of knowledge” (Weber, 2010, p. 128). It is not merely that we see how privilege and oppression function as part of social relationships and institutions, but that *what* we know and *how* we know it are part of what builds those relationships and institutions in the first place.

While feminist classrooms can look and feel different from other classrooms, there is no prescriptive way to enact feminist pedagogy. In general, Shrewsbury’s (1993) definition of feminist pedagogy as “a community of learners [that] is empowered to act responsibly toward one another and the subject matter and to apply that learning to social

action” (p. 166) is a solid location to begin. Eschewing simple answers and reductive certainty, to be feminist means recognizing there are multiple ways of being and engaging around power and difference is a central part of the teaching philosophy. Organizing this class around young adult dystopian novels allowed students to think about their own education and entertainment in new ways. The novels were not just seemingly pleasurable reading material, but critical texts that engage scholars and interpersonal dialogue. They were not read in isolation, but in conversation with both academic theorists and current media to compel student to reflect on themes from the novels from new perspectives.

Rather than being merely consumers of popular science fiction, feminist pedagogy lets us read these novels thinking about how “popular culture and feminist theory share a similar goal of making the subaltern visible, or, put another way, in giving validity to elements of culture that have been devalued” (Weber, 2010, p. 129). For this project, teaching with *The Hunger Games* is an important exercise not just because the books are popular or entertaining, but because these books talk back to normative ideals of gender, race, class, and ability. There is a space ripe for feminist analysis in places where students are already paying attention and are ready to learn.

While there is no singular way to “do” feminist pedagogy, Shrewsbury (1993) says it “begins with a vision of what education might be like, but frequently is not” (p. 166). Feminist pedagogy is engaged learning where what is learned and how that learning happens are both valued parts of the educative process. By valuing more than the end goals of education, often represented by test scores or a relentless pursuit of

educational “excellence” (Readings, 1996), science fiction and feminist pedagogy insist the process of “finding out, or knowing about something ...is itself a crucial good” (Russ, 1995, p. 12). *The Hunger Games*, and stories like it, intrigues students. Capitalizing on that interest, which entails interacting with class materials in different ways as well recognizing that students have been taught to approach education as an individual rather than collective endeavor, we can ask hard questions about higher education. Making visible that which is not readily seen is a powerful tool of feminist pedagogy. The fictional world of Panem gives students room to look at a fantastical society where televised death matches are gripping entertainment, where the comfort of the Capitol is built of the pain of the Districts, and rebellion is sparked by one young woman caring for another. Yet, students begin to question how fantastical it is when it seems to mirror our own world.

Neither science fiction nor feminist pedagogy necessarily allow for easy truths and predigested answers. LeGuin (1979) remarks on the value of feminist ideology because it forces us to “know ourselves better: to separate, often very painfully, what we really think and believe from all the ‘truths’ and ‘facts’ we were (subliminally) taught about being male, being female...we must discover, invent, make our own truths, our values, ourselves” (p. 142). LeGuin continues that it is precisely the “tools of feminism” (p. 143) that she incorporates into her writing and her reflection which allow her to learn about herself and the world around her. For my class, *The Hunger Games* asked the students to think about the world around them and also taught them how dystopian texts like these can be read in ways that allow for students to formulate answers about the



world rather than thinking they must choose from predefined answers. Further, reading texts as open-ended develops the capacity for students to observe and challenge parts of society that “deny or inhibit the further emancipation of humanity” (Moylan, 2000, p. 199).

### **Feminist Pedagogy and Dystopian Literature**

In teaching Women’s and Gender Studies classes, I craft my syllabi so students critically engage with gender, but also use intersectional thinking to look at race, class, and disability. Defining features of a class that embodies feminist pedagogy include space where voices and experiences are listened to, patriarchy is recognized and called out, and our relationship to the production and consumption of knowledge is interrogated. Students find the WGS classroom for many reasons— as a gateway into a WGS major/minor, as a general education credit, or out of curiosity. Because I believe “learning is a dynamic force” (Felman, 2001, p. 14) I attempt, optimistically, to have some part of the semester, a reading, assignment, or conversation, resonate with them. I endeavor to do justice to both the subject and the students in my classes. This includes considering the materials for my class as well as creative ways to participate, as Felman (2001) reminds us, “good pedagogy is up close and personal, rather than intimidating and detached” (p. 6-7).

Responding to what I want my students to learn as well as what Elizabeth Segran (2014) sees as an abstraction of feminist theories, led me to reflect back to my own class construction, in particular, how to capitalize on current popular science fiction texts. In my classes, I mix academic articles with short stories, blog posts, social media, and

videos to both meet students in various locations intellectually and to show feminist ideas are in both academic works and popular culture.

Segran (2014) talks about linking feminism to what is going on in her students' lives, saying, "analyzing college culture through a feminist lens would allow them to respond to it in a critical way." This culture, says Segran, needs to address feminism in context when women like Lady Gaga, Yahoo's Marissa Mayer, and former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor publicly disavow the title feminist while promoting gender equity. At the same time, artists like Taylor Swift and Beyoncé, who previously shunned the feminist label, have reversed course. Singer Taylor Swift, citing the influence of Emma Watson (*Harry Potter*) and Lena Dunham (*Girls*), said,

I wish when I was 12-years-old I had been able to watch a video of my favorite actress explaining in such an intellectual, beautiful, poignant way the definition of feminism. Because I would have understood it. And then earlier on in my life I would have proudly claimed I was a feminist because I would have understood what the word means. (Quoted in Robinson, 2014)

Beyoncé, using the word FEMINIST in bold lights at the 2014 MTV Awards and quoting author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her performance, declared herself a "modern day feminist" (Workneh, 2013). While claiming "feminist" is not an unproblematic action, bell hooks called Beyoncé a "terrorist" during a panel at the New School (King, 2014), this confluence of popular culture and feminist thought is particularly well-timed for investigation in the WGS classroom. Not only because celebrities, like Jennifer Lawrence, get asked if they are feminist as routine interview fodder (begging the question why her *Hunger Games* co-stars Josh Hutcherson and Liam Hemsworth are not also

asked the same question), but we can use the intersection of popular culture and feminist pedagogy to explore what they have to offer one another.

Concurrently, it is hard to ignore the pull that science fiction has on recent popular interest. Along with students, I read current popular series like *The Hunger Games* (2008) and *Divergent* (2011). Many students entering college now were introduced to reading through the *Harry Potter* (1997) series, so they are used to science fiction books, and the subsequent movie franchises, being part of their learning experience. These popular science fictions texts are part of their entertainment, and, I believe, can be part of how they learn about themselves and the world. From Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), a book I was introduced to as a WGS teaching assistant, to current Hollywood blockbusters like *The Hunger Games* (2008) and *Divergent* (2011), these stories tickle students' imaginations and allow for a stimulating entrance into a feminist pedagogical learning space.

*The Hunger Games* is important in my classroom because it allows learners and teachers common, shared, imaginative spaces. Reading is an experience in itself, but through the story lines and characters we can share and connect our own experiences to others' experiences. Denzin (2010) rejects the perceived differences between types of texts as "socially and politically constructed categories" (p. 30). Moreover, he says that there is "only narrative...only differently genre-defined ways of representing and writing about experiences and their multiple realities" (p. 30). In thinking of arbitrary boundaries and my research, the connections between fiction, teaching, and research are central to thinking about feminist pedagogy. We do not have just one reality, our realities

intertwine, and intersect the ways in which we know our worlds and adding to this knowledge is part of my project.

Student experiences with *The Hunger Games* have the potential to add depth to feminist pedagogy in WGS classrooms. It both makes the classroom welcoming, with a text they think they know, and makes the classroom a foreign space that upends what they know to be true. The WGS classroom has the possibility to show that education in the university can be different. bell hooks (1994) names the feminist classroom as a space that students continue to seek out because they want “knowledge that is meaningful...[and addresses] the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences” (p. 19). *What I teach* is deeply connected to *how* I teach and showing that what happens in the classroom affects the world outside is part of my pedagogy and research. Moreover, feminist pedagogy is “political and activist and deeply concerned with questions that emerge from the intersections of the pedagogical, disciplinary, and personal, and with the political, social, and historical contexts of each of these” (Calabrese in Brady and Dentith, 2001, p. 168). As feminisms have moved beyond simply acknowledging gender as a single category of oppression to acknowledging both diversity and unity as it focuses on real lives of people. Weber (2010) contends that to be feminist references pluralities and tensions (p.128) and YAL can be an important tool to teach these concepts.

## Considering Reality

The use of fiction in the classroom adds a critical dimension to the consideration of the “real.” Reading allows us to slip into fictional worlds, but this framework will allow space to further complicate the binary of “real or not real” as used in *The Hunger Games* story. There are elements of reality in fictional worlds and elements of fictional worlds in our everyday. Notions of reality are explored in *The Hunger Games* as we watch Peeta struggle with the different ways that his mind wants to interpret the world after he is tortured in the Capitol. But students also struggle with what they learn about themselves and the world as they read this fictional story. LeGuin (1979) describes reading a novel this way,

We have to know perfectly well that the whole thing is nonsense, and then, while reading, believe every word of it. Finally, when we’re done with it we may find—if it’s a good novel—that we’re a bit different from what we were before we read it, that we have changed a little

Students read and learn about Panem, but think about the connections with the present day that I have set up for them to make in WGS 450. I am using science fiction in one of the ways it is intended, “to present us with the fiction that is our own world” (Wolmark in Shaw, 2000, p. 5). Somewhere along the way, students learned that Christopher Columbus “discovered” America or the color pink represents what it means to be a girl, but neither of these things are true. Fiction helps us to “abolish reality and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth” (Federman in Malmgren, 1985, p. 14). Fiction in my classroom works to push back on what students know to be true. To illuminate how

reality is imbued with fiction as fiction is saturated with truth. We can take bits of each to learn with science fiction.

In the summer of 2014 there was a political coup in Thailand and protesters adopted the three-fingered salute from *The Hunger Games* as a symbol of resistance (Child, 2014). International press covered the use of this symbol and merely a picture of a protester holding the salute connects to the theme of rebellion from the novels. There are not separate worlds of real and hyperreal, but we are all connected to different realities where “identities are constructed by the appropriation of images, and codes and models determine how individuals perceive themselves and relate to other people” (Kellner, 1994, p. 8). The crossover between what we read and see in popular culture and what we learn in the WGS classroom is ripe for learning from and connecting our own experiences to the world we live within. *The Hunger Games* series is important to how many students are reading and understanding the world. Even when the books themselves are not read, the movies are watched and when the movies are not watched ideas from them become part of the social milieu, like the use of the salute from *The Hunger Games* being coopted as a symbol of real world resistance. Dietzel and Paganhart (1995) encourage our realization that “we situate students in a world both unreal and real: one dominated at the surface by chimerical imagery and in its depth by the material constraints on everyday life” (p. 130). Making connections beyond the text, like finding a connection between a fictional rebellion and a coup in Thailand, solidifies the ways that teaching with this text has merit for learning about our world.

Exploring *The Hunger Games* with Jean Baudrillard's sense of the hyperreal and as part of the simulacra, where "entertainment, information, and communication technologies provide experiences more intense and involving than the scenes of banal everyday life" (Kellner, 1994, p. 8), I seek to make the familiar less so and the unfamiliar more approachable. In the ways that Baudrillard (1994) references Disneyland as a copy of an America that does not exist, the artificial space of the arena in *The Hunger Games* works to create a contested space to atone for an unnamed past rebellion. In the story, the arena is a real place where characters die, but as a teaching tool we can see how the created space of the arena is "presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real" (p. 12). We can use the metaphor of the arena to consider how forces that work behind the scenes to manipulate reality control us. With the yearly threat deaths in the Games, the people of Panem are kept under control. It is not a stretch to see how threats of terrorist cells or weapons of mass destruction are used to manipulate our public policy. It is not about Disneyland, or the arena, being true or false places, but they are spaces that deceive us into believing "the fiction of the real" (p. 13) is in the world outside of them. With this in mind, students can gain "the ability to detect and critique hidden ideologies in the everyday" (p. 132).

By understanding that we select, transform, and interpret reality can acknowledge how social relations mediate the construction of knowledge. There is not an objective truth in which to ground our inquiry and in this way we can use texts, like *The Hunger Games*, to hide or to reveal what we want to know. By questioning the idea of reality and experience with YAL, we can try to "keep things in progress, to disrupt, to keep the

system in play, to set up procedures to continuously demystify the realities we create, to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal” (Caputo in Lather, 1991, p. 156).

### **Dystopian Fiction in Unexpected Places**

Feminism and science fiction have a long history. Mary Shelly’s (1818 published as anonymous/1823 republished in her name) *Frankenstein; or the modern Prometheus* is considered the origins of the genre. Joanna Russ is an educator and science fiction writer who has been publishing since the 1950s (Russ, 1995, p. 3). Ursula K. LeGuin (1979) read science fiction as a child and came back to it as a writer in the 1970s (p. 23). Octavia Butler, who explored themes of race and sexuality in science fiction, published from the 1970s-2005 (Marshall, 2006). These feminist science fiction writers, readers, and in the cases of Russ and LeGuin, educators, provide a fascinating place to consider the intersection of feminist pedagogy and young adult dystopian fiction. Reading both feminist pedagogy and science fiction, of which dystopian fiction is a subgenre, influences the feminist theory and methods with which I approach this research based on the principle that all knowledge is constructed and enmeshed in a web of social power. These readings also challenged pedagogical practices that neglected to include intersectional categories of analysis. Teaching with dystopian fiction allows for me to consider how people have access to popular science fiction, but the space of higher education is becoming less accessible to many.

### **Politics of Dystopian Fiction**

Andrew O’Hehir (2014) wrote that progressive parents who assume their kids learn progressive lessons from reading current young adult dystopian literature have it all



wrong, what these stories speak to is consumerism that influences all political debate. Adding to the conversation, Ewan Morrison (2014) penned an article saying the “dystopian narratives which are consuming the minds of millions of teens worldwide are now communicating right wing ideas.” Both authors declare the current batch of dystopian fiction to be different from earlier works like *1984* (1949) or *A Brave New World* (1932) because the villains are not corporations, but the state, undergirding a right leaning worldview that big government is to be distrusted and the social critique in the novels is limited at best because of vague political scenarios.

Morrison (2014) says these new dystopias do not teach kids (ignoring adult readers) to question authority, instead “propose a laissez-faire existence, with heroic individuals who are guided by the innate forces of human nature against evil social planners.” Though O’Hehir (2014) does not attribute these dystopias solely to the left or to the right, but as “propaganda for the ethos of individualism, the central ideology consumer capitalism, which also undergirds both major political parties and almost all American public discourse.” By his reasoning, there is not much that separates the political left from the political right in mainstream American politics, as alluded to in the 2010 Supreme Court Case *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* which allowed corporations a larger stake in funding politics (Liptak, 2010). This aligns with notions of neoliberalism, where the market shapes social destiny.

This ethos of individualism, O’Hehir (2014) sees portrayed in books like *The Hunger Games*, “permeates the entire atmosphere with the seeming naturalness of oxygen...at least if we acknowledge that it *is* an ideology, we can begin to understand

that it limits political action and political debate.” The ideology of current young adult dystopian is a pertinent topic for dialogue. Ursula LeGuin (2014) said something similar at her National Book Award speech, “We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings.” LeGuin continues that we should use art to talk back to that feeling of inevitability. We should use our classrooms as places to discuss the political nature of education through fiction, but it seems reductive to assume the political leanings of an entire genre. Lorenzo (2014) corroborates this saying, “despite some readings of them as such, neither utopians (sic) nor dystopias are automatically progressive or conservative in character” (p. 7).

Additionally, Gavia Baker-Whitelaw (2014), writing about the Ferguson, Missouri shooting, limits the perceived appropriateness of young adult dystopian fiction in learning. She disagrees with those who are making comparison between the rebellion in Panem and the protests in Ferguson, Missouri saying, while Hollywood has succeeded in creating scenarios that feel “vaguely relevant to current events,” it does a poor job portraying people of color. She does not think it a good idea to “take a story where racism, sexism, and homophobia are replaced by the less controversial Capitol-District dived, and use it to illustrate real world struggles.” Adding to this conversation is Imran Siddiquee (2014) who acknowledges “dystopian stories have long celebrated (and used in classrooms across the country) because of their ability to push audiences to think critically...very few ask audiences to think deeply about sexism and racism.” I do not disagree with the critiques of race or gender offered in either of these articles, but rather than saying we should not use young adult dystopian fiction to discuss these issues we

use it as a jumping off point to begin the conversation. LeGuin (2014) said, “Resistance and change often begin in art. Very often in our art, the art of words.” If I want to talk about new worlds, worlds that resistance and change in my classroom, then it seems young adult dystopian literature the very place to start. Using the tools of intersectional feminist pedagogy to engage the stories that are of the moment to do the hard work of social justice education.

### **Dystopian Fiction at West Point**

The 2014-2015 West Point first year class read Margaret Atwood’s (1985) classic feminist dystopian novel *A Handmaid’s Tale*. Atwood was invited to speak by Lt. Col Naomi Mercer because “the Army has real gender issues” and her novel “at least creates a vocabulary to talk about those issues” (Miller, 2015). The juxtaposition of Atwood’s feminist novel in the hierarchical world of the US Military offers a guidepost for reading dystopian literature in unexpected places. We need to be able to see the realities of the world around us, recognize our situatedness, and learn to engage with others around differences. Learning with fiction allows us to do that. Critiques of popular fiction need to be taken up in university classrooms, particularly as these novels are made into Hollywood films filled with images that show an overreliance on the trope of a white savior and a simplification of the dystopian worlds that assume our heroes will not have to navigate racism or sexism as part of their lives. *The Hunger Games* is a fictional story. It is not an unarmed teenager shot in Missouri or Florida nor a political coup in Thailand, but to say that we should not use it to teach seems absolutist and misses where students are ripe to learn. Students are reading these books and watching these movies as well as

learning about Ferguson on television and in social media. The fictional world of Panem might be a place to begin, but not end, these discussions.

If popular culture won't touch the important topics of racism and sexism, as suggested by Siddiquee (2014), my classroom, then, seems a place to do the work of closely reading these stories, discussing the importance of race in casting the movie and recognizing marketing ploys used to sell a film about rebellion—picking up where the author and Hollywood left off. These are the places I see feminist pedagogy and young adult dystopian literature meeting. Not to make the definitive decision if current young adult dystopian novels lean towards a right wing agenda or to decide the only way to understand world events, but as a way to recognize that feminist theory and pedagogy has a place in all of these conversations. As Margaret Atwood says in her venerable feminist dystopian novel, *A Handmaid's Tale* (1985), “we lived in the gaps between the stories” (p. 100). The world is made up of stories, but there is always space to learn beyond what is written, and this is where feminist pedagogy does some of its best work.

### **Ways to Think with Dystopian Fiction**

The fictional Panem is set in an undetermined future, with modern America as its distant history. There is little surprise that *The Hunger Games* readers see the seeds of our society in the Districts and the Capitol. Questions about what histories are remembered and forgotten as Panem is built on a post-apocalyptic United States are important as we consider class and race in the story. It is not a universal history, as if history can be universalized, of the United States; it is based on our politics of today. Merchant (2014) shows how *The Hunger Games* “offer a lens through which to consider

the wealth inequality, militarized policing, and prejudice against minorities” in events like the shootings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Trayvon Martin in Florida or the political coup in Thailand. What is presented as the singular history of the United States must be acknowledged as one of many experiences of politics and history. Merchant (2014) connects this to a valid criticism about dystopian literature saying it “tends to describe what are commonplace woes in much of the world happening to wealthy white Americans and bemoaning them as novel.” Race, class, and gender matter as we use young adult dystopian fiction in the classroom and often what is left out, or glossed over, becomes the impactful teaching points.

In previous WGS 250 (Introduction to WGS) classes where I used elements of *The Hunger Games*, the lesson where we talked about people’s reaction to the casting of Rue, a black character on social media resonated with students. They were aghast that people would tweet that Rue’s death was *less sad because she was black* or that they *could not have imagined Rue to be a black girl*<sup>4</sup>. We got to discuss both the ease that people felt they could malign a character (and worse a young actress) based on race and gender as well as the ways we imagine characters as we read being influenced by social mores and assumptions. Students returned to Rue’s example of fiction- real life connection in their reflection assignments and final projects. Talking about race and gender with both the character and social media gave students a new perspective on the

---

<sup>4</sup> This Tumblr page will expose *The Hunger Games* fans on Twitter who dare to call themselves fans yet don’t know... about the books. (<http://hungergamestweets.tumblr.com/>)

pervasiveness racism and sexism in the places like Twitter where they spend a considerable amount of time.

*The Hunger Games* story leaves open a place to discuss the widening gap between the rich and the poor. The Capitol and Districts at first glance are easy to classify. Rich, indulged people live in the Capitol and poor, hardworking people live in the Districts. But on closer reads we find privilege and oppression live in both. District 12, where Katniss and Peeta are from, has three social divisions and when the curtain is drawn back from the Capitol in *Mockingjay* Tigris shows us poverty exists amongst extravagance. By exploring poverty Panem, both in the Capitol and in the Districts, students in WGS 450 discussed how poverty coincides with abundance in the United States.

*The Hunger Games* is blockbuster book and movie series and it reproduces some of the inequalities that it pushes against. CoverGirl produced a line of Hunger Games makeup products and Subway restaurants encouraged its customers to win a Victory Tour. However, “they still convey a message eminently and uncomfortable relatable to an increasingly large and diverse slice of the world: There’s a sharpening divide between very comfortable elites....and those whose labor the elites are profiting from” (Merchant, 2014). It is in this uncomfortable realization that teaching with *The Hunger Games* is its most productive. This story offers a lens in which to consider inequities in our educational system. Social activist Van Jones (2014, November 21) attributes the popularity of *The Hunger Games* to the ability for us “all see our stories in its sweeping plotline of oppression and rebellion. We know *The Hunger Games* is just a fantasy. But when its world feels so frighteningly real, we cannot help rooting for Katniss Everdeen to

win” (para. 19). By using that interplay of fantasy and reality, dystopian literature provides a useful reference point for students to contextualize events happening around them. While not perfect, certainly dystopian works can be read as prescriptive entertainment, scholars have confirmed this genre can “teach their readers not only about the world around them but also about the open-ended ways in which texts... help to develop the critical capacity of people to know, challenge, and change” their world (Moylan, 2000, p. 199).

In the long run, it is more important to care for real people than fictional characters, but to undermine the learning potential in dystopian fiction ignores ways to engage students with the popular fiction that already has their attention. These dystopian worlds are a well placed to address systemic oppression. By not reading these works in the classroom these teachable moments go unused. Baker-Whitelaw (2014) bluntly says, “if you find it easier to engage with fictional white heroes than with the real victims and survivors of racism, systemic oppression and violence, then you need to reconsider your priorities.” That is true and leaves open a teachable moment for why talking about fictional characters may be easier for some students, but it is a non-sequitur to assume that there is no value in teaching with *The Hunger Games*.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY

**Epistemology**

In order to understand how I approach what can be known through my research I must articulate my epistemology. Defined by Villaverde (2008), epistemology is “the study of knowledge, its nature, origin, limits, and methods. It outlines certain conjectures about knowledge: what can be known, and through what methods it can be known” (p. 107). Put another way, epistemology influences the way that research is imagined, applied, and communicated to others. As I thought about how to articulate this, it is perhaps unsurprising that I was drawn back into a story. Ursula K. LeGuin’s (1969) *The Left Hand of Darkness* opens with her protagonist, Genly Ai, writing:

I’ll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like the singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust. Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive.

The story is not all mine, nor told by me alone. Indeed I am not sure whose story it is; you can judge better. But it is all one, and if at moments the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you can choose the fact you like best; yet none of them are false, and it is all one story. (p. 1)

As I contemplate epistemology, I am drawn to what stories have to say about knowing.

To think with stories, especially science fiction, we have to ask: What is knowledge?



Created, altered realities force this to be a central question for the genre and an abiding concern for its readers. What knowledge is and how it is produced are questions central to our attempts to understand the social world. How I come to know, comprehend, and interpret the world is informed by my understanding of the world.

I understand knowledge to be tentative and evolving, rather than certain and unchanging. Subjectivity is implicated in the stories we read and the stories we tell, about each other and the world, and this way of viewing knowledge reflects our situated perspectives. With this view of knowing, we approach teachers, authors, and other knowledge authorities with some degree of skepticism. Appreciating that we do not navigate the world alone and understanding that knowledge is socially constructed rather than discovered are important aspects of my epistemology. Further, learning is not a simple collection of facts, but a making sense of the world knowing that meaning is partial, referential, and shifting. Following the theoretical framework I outlined in chapter one, my epistemology is shaped by an interpretive postmodern feminist stance.

‘What is knowledge?’ is the most basic epistemic question, though to reduce epistemology to a single question may belie the tensions that exist when searching for answers. LeGuin approaches this query in the passage she uses to open her story. Genly Ai tells us he is filing a report, a type of writing that usually denotes uninteresting facts, linear narrative, and an assumption of truth; however, he immediately rescinds that notion by reporting as if telling a story. Ai proceeds to illuminate how truth is a matter of imagination, facts are contextual, and the story is not his alone. The ways of understanding knowledge described by this character form a core upon which to scaffold

my epistemology. As Glynis Cousin (2010) points out “all research is fiction, yet not the same as fiction. Researchers strive to tell a story from evidence...[the challenge] is to write plausible, useful ‘fiction’ as well as to display a reflexive engagement with how we gather and analyze our evidence” (p. 10-11). While we, as researchers, strive to be truthful, what we do has elements of creation and fiction.

This epistemological scaffolding is inclusive of interpretivist, postmodern, and feminist viewpoints. While I will attempt to discuss each part of this scaffolded epistemology, Glesne (2011) reminds us these paradigms are “not rigid, well-defined categories...[they] have developed and changed over time” (p. 6). As I summarize my epistemological stance, I pull from paradigms outlined by theorists such as Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2003), Sharan B. Merriam (2009), Corrine Glesne (2011), and John W. Crewsell (2013). This is not an attempt to put my finger in every piece of the pie, but to recognize that qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 4). Research helps us to understand the world around us, and my project attempts to understand the WGS 450 class in more depth.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) use the term *bricoleur* to describe someone who “borrow[s] from many different disciplines” (p. 4). Theorists such as Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, Levi-Strauss, and Weinstein and Weinstein have taken up the image of the researcher as gatherer to convey how researchers use multiple ways to conceive and enact their research (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Why this image of a researcher who invokes multiple paradigms is inviting rests on the idea that the lines between the

paradigms are blurred and the “researcher-as-*bricoleur*-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 9). As a scholar, I do not fit neatly into a research box. With my academic background in nursing, women’s and gender studies, and education I pull from many disciplines to form my academic, political, and pedagogical selves. Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2012) describe the bricoleur as having an “epistemology of complexity” which “highlights the relationship between a researcher’s ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history” (p. 21). In the work for this project, I see myself as a gatherer and crafter, pulling together ideas from fiction, popular culture, and academia to make sense of the WGS 450 class.

While there are many ways to describe my epistemology, I am going to continue thinking with LeGuin’s Genly Ai. In fact, storytelling as a way to understand the world is an integral part of my epistemology. Sarah E. Worth (2008) argues,

Reading, telling, and hearing well-constructed narratives are not just idle pastimes that we have created for entertainment purposes or even as a mere means of communication. Rather there are epistemological benefits to reading, hearing, and telling [stories]...those who are able to develop the capacity to reason narratively will be able to have a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience. (p. 42).

Reading teaches us to think about context and to use our imaginations as we learn about the world around us. Lived experience is not presented in an unedited manner but is always mediated through the lens of a speaker who could view the story and the world in a very different manner than we do. Reading literature helps us “experience the world

more fully” because by “using the imagination in ways that literature requires of us, we can imagine, practice imagining, and get better at imagining the position of others” (Worth, 2008, p. 50-51). Exercising these ways of imagining the world beyond our own experience is a valuable means with which to approach my epistemology.

Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes (2011) also explore storytelling as a way to know the world. They show that the right story at the right time has the power to sway opinions, teach new information, and guide decision-making. Two reasons that storytelling is effective, according to their research, are: 1) “People expect stories to be allusive. They expect to have to work to grasp the story’s meaning and they often accept that fact that their initial interpretation may be incorrect or partial”; and 2) “People often respond to a story by telling one of their own” (p. 122). Working to extend our understanding beyond the superficial and connecting what we learn with stories of our own are important ways to learn. With these two expectations of knowing with stories we can see that:

We learn through the structure of stories. That is, we learn to reason through the reasoning provided to us through hearing and telling stories...Reading narrative fiction and experiencing life both involve people performing actions in pursuit of goals and having various emotional reactions to events. (Worth, 2008, p. 54)

By reading fiction we learn to use our imagination, gather information from the story’s context, and use inference to make sense of the story in much the same way we need each of those skills to navigate the everyday world.

Genly Ai's report-as-story highlighted three ways of knowing that connect to the epistemology that I am crafting. Each of these ways of knowing is related to the other like threads in a sweater. We can pull them apart to see how they unravel and fray and combine them in different ways to create unique patterns. Like threads, they are related yet distinct, but work best when woven together. One point that Genly Ai made in his report-as-story was that facts can be suspect saying, "Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are," (LeGuin, 1969, p.1) which I will link to the interpretive paradigm. We co-create meaning rather than assuming it exists beyond our own interpretations. Second, when Genly Ai states, "Truth is a matter of the imagination" (LeGuin, 1969, p. 1) the playful nature of the postmodern paradigm is invoked. Looking for truths in imaginative ways is what led me to investigate teaching a WGS class using *The Hunger Games*. Playfulness and imagination are part of my research stance. Lastly, Genly Ai notes the story is not his alone, this collective nature of knowledge and that recognition of multiple readings of the story draws me toward feminist theory. In my intersectional view of feminism, we must admit our interrelationships with one another and recognize how different perspectives influence how we understand the world.

For this project, I am going to think under the large umbrella of interpretive research, but pull in both postmodernism and feminist thought as imperative to my epistemology. Interpretive research, according to Glesne (2011), has the "goal of interpreting the social world from the perspectives of those who are actors in that social world" (p. 8). This is true as I think about characters in science fiction novels as well as understanding that I am an actor in this research project too. There is a lot that can be

distilled from the case study of WGS 450 and what I relate in this work is but one way to weave the threads of research, paradigms, knowledge, and epistemology.

### **Interpretivist Paradigm**

*Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are- Genly Ai*

Qualitative research, according to Merriam (2009), is most often interpretive (p. 8). In her book, Glesne (2011) pits the predispositions of an interpretive approach (assumes qualitative research) against a positivist approach (which by reducing data to numerical indices assumes a quantitative approach) to show how using an interpretive approach looks for an interpretation of what is investigated (p. 9). In other words, interpretive research resists the idea of a universal truth, with a capital “T.” Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains, “what to believe and why something is true are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns top the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail and shape thought and action” (p. 203). The ideas we explored in *The Hunger Games* are not unifying and should allow for consideration of nuance and complexity. The interpretivist paradigm fits the work done with WGS 450 as it “allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants...[and] uses those experiences to construct and interpret...understanding from the gathered data” (Thanh and Thanh, 2015, p. 24). Creswell (2013) also paints the interpretive framework as the umbrella under which approaches including social constructionism, postmodernism, and feminism could fall. I begin here because there are

“many different traditions of interpretivism...[which] share the goal of understanding human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or in terms of wider culture” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8).

Authors delineate research paradigms in different ways. While Glesne (2011) and Lukenchuk and Kolich (2013) describe the interpretive paradigm, they do not specifically mention social constructionism as its own category, though the concept is discussed. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and Creswell (2013) present social constructionism under the interpretivist paradigm. This is further muddled as Glesne (2011) classifies four paradigms or theoretical frameworks (p. 7), Lukenchuk and Kolich (2013) use six paradigms as systems of inquiry (p. 67-68), Denzin and Lincoln (2003) lay out seven different paradigms/theories (p. 34), and Creswell (2013) shows five interpretive frameworks and their associated philosophical beliefs (p. 36-37). At first, it is hard to find your own ideas in the competing mix of research perspectives. However, Sharan B. Merriam (2009) is instructive here saying, “Researchers do not ‘find’ knowledge, they construct it. Constructivism is a term often used interchangeably with interpretivism” (p. 8-9). That viewpoint is how I use the term interpretivist in this work.

Glesne (2011) continues outlining the assumptions of the interpretivist approach, which includes the idea that reality is socially constructed and research variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure. While there are many purposes for research, Glesne highlights contextualization as opposed to generalizability, understanding rather than causal explanations, and interpretation instead of prediction. Interpretive research approaches include the researcher as an instrument and a search for

patterns, pluralism, and complexity. Finally, the researcher's role includes personal involvement and empathic understanding (p. 9). As I consider WGS 450 as a case study for this project, my research assumptions, purposes, approaches, and role begin to align with the interpretivist paradigm. There is no meaning of the class waiting for me to find, but as a thoughtful, deliberate researcher who is curious about the use of young adult dystopian fiction in the WGS classroom I co-construct meaning with my students. Merriam (2009) names this as "multiple...interpretations of a single event" (p. 8). By interviewing students, I get their perspectives on the successes and failures of the WGS 450 class. Adding my own lens, knowing that in interpretive research the researcher is an integral part of the process, a fuller picture of the class emerges.

Ontologically, "reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing. What is of importance to know, then, is how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action, [or] perception" (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). So, as humans we co-construct what we know about the world in process and together, there are no pre-formed meanings attached to social objects. This process of constructing knowledge is important, but we also must understand the process of meaning making, as there is no "objective" experience that exists outside its interpretation. Creswell (2013) explains,

Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences...These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views...Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social construction) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. (p. 24-25)



Since knowledge is co-constructed and relies on language and history to mediate our understandings if it, absolute reality is impenetrable. What this research investigates are individual perceptions of reality. Thus, individuals' multiple realities structure the world and there is a focus on "meaning and interpretation, especially that which people create and share through their interactions" (Merriam, 2009, p. 9). From this proposition, knowledge is not objective; it is symbolically constructed in concert with one's own positionality and experiences. Truth is what we agree it is rather than a discoverable, objective known.

Using the interpretivist paradigm, methodology is researcher driven. A core idea of the interpretivist framework is that the researcher is an instrument in the research, which includes personal involvement and empathic understanding (Glesne, 2011, p. 9). Interpretivists therefore "seek methods that enable them to understand in depth the relationships of human beings to their environment and the part those people play in creating the social fabric of which they are a part" (McQueen in Thanh and Thanh, 2015, p. 26). The use of rich reporting and multiple sources of information allow the researcher to approach the experiences of the participants in many ways. Thus, the aim is not to document an objective reality but rather to describe reality that is constructed, what language is used to describe the reality and what meaning is attached to the images and texts within our society. There are multiple ways to do research, but for this project I wanted to dig deeply into the WGS 450 class, trying to understand how students experienced learning with young adult dystopian fiction.

## Postmodernism

*Truth is a matter of the imagination- Genly Ai*

Postmodernism invokes a playful, fragmented, imaginative way to look at the world. While young adult dystopian literature generally evokes a bleak worldview, playfulness is important to my epistemology. Postmodern writers commonly treat serious subjects in humorous, playful ways as to add new perspectives in which to view the topics. Tracing this notion of play through Derrida's (1966) essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" postmodern knowledge came to "emphasize pastiche, playfulness, fragmentation, eclecticism, difference, otherness, pleasure, [and] novelty" (Mirchandani, 2005, p. 89). Instead of reveling in order and truth, a postmodern epistemology respects difference, looks for multiple perspectives, and acknowledges uncertainty as part of knowing. Mirchandani (2005), referencing Lyotard, explains the role of the investigator is to "insist on this instability, to disrupt more orderly knowledge—consensuses about the state of the world—if need be" (p. 93). This view of knowledge encourages differences and reinforces the ability to tolerate ambiguity.

Playfulness can be hard to describe. It is a state of play or having fun, but not necessarily in a childish way. Maria Lugones' (1987) *loving playfulness* approaches the idea that I want to include in my epistemology. In contrast with agnostic play, where rules are fixed and winning and losing is the central concern, loving playfulness is about an attitude that turns activity into play. Lugones (1987) explains,

The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an *openness to surprise*. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly. Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are *open to self-construction*. We may not have rules, and we do have rules, *there are no rules that are to us sacred*. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful, we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck, in any particular “world.” *We are there creatively*. We are not passive. (p. 16-17, author’s italics)

This attitude of loving playfulness is one that we can hold personally and is also a way of navigating the world. *Loving playfulness* recognizes we can be understood differently in different spaces by understanding that to construct an idea of yourself in the world you have to be in relationship with others, some who understand you and some who do not. Loving playfulness gives us a way to find creative possibilities if we can be open to surprise.

James Lang (2010) suggests playfulness is a “very serious technique that could offer...different lenses through which to engage with otherwise difficult material” (p. 329). This references another postmodern concept that is important to my epistemology, intertextuality, which recognizes the way that texts reference other texts, as they are not isolated creations, and require reader engagement for multiple interpretations (Villaverde, 2008, p. 12). Connecting texts in new and imaginative ways allows for us to begin to understand how a young adult dystopian text has something to say about our education. Playfulness is a way to engage texts differently that includes the possibility of the examination of power and privilege that may be uncomfortable.

Looking closely at *The Hunger Games* allowed my students and me to find the playful moments in a disheartening plotline, but playfulness also comes from the inclusion of fiction in the class in general as well as the playful ways that we approach the lessons over the course of the semester. Examples include incorporating a campus-wide scavenger hunt into our course work or when students took it upon themselves to dress in their Capitol finest the day we looked at the connection between fashion and politics. By knitting together popular culture, young adult dystopian fiction, and academia, I find playful ways to teach in the various locations and mediums with which we interact with our world.

Genly Ai's assertion that we need imagination to understand truth (I am not using the capital "T" truth like in LeGuin's text) mirrors C. Wright Mills' (1959/2000) mindset of a *sociological imagination*, which emphasizes the ability to connect lived experiences and social issues. While Mills is not first on any list of postmodernists, what I found to be unexpected was Mills' assertion that a "playfulness of mind" (p. 211) is integral to this concept. Sociological imagination is the ability to shift from one perspective to another. Mills stressed the connections between history, biography, and social structure, in much the same way that McRobbie (1994) asserted that "postmodernism deflects attention away from the singular scrutinizing gaze...and asks that this be replaced by a multiplicity of fragmented, and frequently interrupted, 'looks'" (p. 13). By foregrounding playfulness, the necessity to incorporate different perspectives, and the role that fiction can play in this process, this postmodern view is essential to my epistemology.

Bringing in a young adult dystopian novel as a way to connect with student's current popular culture interests and disrupt notions of familiarity with a text that was written as entertainment is a fun and rigorous way to teach. Upon investigation, I found the "postmodern movement was defined in part by...a concern for storytelling" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 3). There is something about storytelling, and learning with stories in the classroom, that is an important way to know the world (Rosenblatt, 1993, Freire, 1970, Manguel, 1996; Worth, 2008). In WGS 450, we learned with the text, connected the story to our histories, and made personal connections with the characters and ideas that encouraged dialogue about lived experiences. Understanding that the use of stories is embedded in postmodernist thinking about research is highlighted as "innovative ways of conducting research by experimenting with expressive means and genres...[and] is important to singling out creative ways of generating research projects that stir our social imaginations" (Lukenchuk and Kolich, 2013, p. 71). One of my hopes for this research was that it stirred my imagination, the imaginations of the students in the class, and those who read my project.

According to Merriam (2009), "research from the postmodern perspective is quite different...nevertheless it is influencing our thinking about interpretive qualitative research" (p. 10). Because I pull inspiration from the different paradigms, as well as from popular and academic sources, this view of research speaks to my perspective. Merriam's voice here, as an expert in case study research, is encouraging as she describes,

According to postmodernists, explanations for the ways things are in the world are nothing but myths and grand narratives. There is no single “truth” with a capital “T”; rather there are multiple “truths.” Postmodernists celebrate diversity among people, ideas, and institutions. By accepting the diversity and plurality of the world, no one element is privileged or more powerful than another. Congruent with this perspective, postmodern research is highly experimental, playful, and creative, and no two postmodern studies look alike. This perspective is sometimes combined with feminist, critical theory, and queer approaches. (p. 10)

By building postmodernism into my epistemology I have access to its tools. These tools allow me to recognize that my work would produce only situated understandings about WGS 450 because of the “futility of attempts to achieve ‘stable’, ‘valid’, and thus generalizable findings” (van Niekerk and Savin-Baden, 2010, p. 29). I am not trying to speak for all WGS classes, all classes taught using *The Hunger Games*, or even all classes that I teach, but this one class taught this one time. What happened in that class was special because of the particular mix of students, the time it was taught, and, as I re-read my field notes, even the snow that kept shutting down the university during that particular semester. What I learned during the course of this project is not meant to be a sweeping generalization but fall into what Denzin and Lincoln (2003) call “local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations” (p. 29). In this way, I look at knowledge along the lines of what Donna Haraway (1988) describes as situated knowledge that is developed collectively and foregrounds the necessity of dialogue, analysis, and reflection.

Underscoring the necessity for postmodern thought to be in my epistemology is the “focus on deconstructing texts, showing how they systematically include and exclude

people and ideas” (Glesne, 2011, p. 13). As a way of knowing, deconstruction, described by Jacques Derrida (1997/1967), is an integral concept to understand. In looking at the relationship between text and meaning, Derrida’s deconstruction highlighted the inconsistencies found in texts thus allowing for an examination of difference. We did not just read *The Hunger Games*, we dug into it, thought past the details presented in the books, and connected with academic theories and social media insults. We used the characters to discuss how gender is enacted on different bodies, imagined what the people of the Capitol thought and felt during the *Mockingjay* rebellion, and confronted America’s history of drafting young adults into war. We looked at the history of our university through the lens of *The Hunger Games* and thought about how we would look to students who study us in the years to come. By dismantling the story of *The Hunger Games*, we found the story, as well as our own ways of viewing the world, to have unstable foundations and a complex relationship to the whole idea of education.

I also find useful Jean Baudrillard’s argument that the problem of representation becomes impossible as the line between the representation and the real begins to merge. Learning with *The Hunger Games*, we see our own society represented in the created world of Panem. We learn about a society where we are the assumed distant history, so some of what is in the story is fiction and some talks directly to our experience living in a neoliberal consumerist culture. As learners, we have to struggle with what is real and what is a copy of a reality that does not exist. There are no perfect answers, but learning in that space is ripe for re-imagining the world around us. Using *The Hunger Games* to highlight the hyperreal allows us a place to talk about how we can think about Thai

protesters using *The Hunger Games*' three-fingered salute to communicate their rebellion in the images shared on social media. This notion of *simulacra* in this work allows us to think about representation in new ways. Using this idea, we can ask hard questions about what we know, or think, underpins or notion of reality and work towards “disrupting and...complicating knowledge” (Mirchandani, 2005, p. 94).

What *The Hunger Games* can teach us may have less to do with themes and character development and more to do with how we read the world afterwards. We can read *The Hunger Games* as an imaginative story, be entertained in the moment, and never think of it again. Or we can scrutinize the text for new meanings, connections to our histories, and perhaps, ways to think going forward. The meanings we find when we start to challenge ideas in the text are the moments for growth. These ways of decentering some knowledges while pulling in others are an important part of a postmodern stance.

One critique of Derrida's deconstruction is the notion that there is “nothing as outside of the text” (Derrida, 1997/1967, p. 158). This has been read by some as infinite naval gazing, but I think the idea that we take something apart to reconstruct it implies action. Creating the socially just world I want to live in takes breaking down ideas, but also building new ones and my classroom a place for that to happen. We can look at the different ways to read this particular story, alternative ways to create it anew, and make connections to the kind of world that we want to live in. This happened particularly as we talked about hunger. It is one thing to read and think about hunger as a theme and metaphor in the book but quite another to bring in a local expert and connect with the hunger that is right inside of our classroom. This blatant examination of our own place in



these narratives “does not allow us to place the blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities, but demands that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 484). The link to our place in the maintenance of social injustice, and the implied social justice needed to correct the injustices, is encouraging. It gives me a reason for action; even when I know that I cannot save the world I can teach to make the parts I reach better.

Postmodernist deconstruction has been critiqued as an endless, self-referential exercise. In acknowledging that, Jane Flax (1990) writes, “postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted” (p. 41). I believe that language is important. We create meaning from the interaction with each other through language, but sometimes we have to act in the world. Returning to this idea, Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000) is instructive and hopeful,

One of the most significant effects of deconstruction is that it foregrounds the idea that language does not simply point to pre-existing things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and, by extension, the world as we know it...The “way it is” is not “natural.” We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it. (p. 483)

This postmodernism does not abandon reason and rationality instead it looks to how those ideas were constructed, who is included in those definitions and who is left out.

McRobbie (1994) drawing from Jane Flax and Judith Butler says,

The failure to face up to the limits of reason, truth and knowledge, is predicated on a fearfulness of letting go...Not to live with fear and danger is to block out so

much of daily lived experience. If postmodernism forces uncertainty on to the agenda, if we have to look beyond reason, then at least we are forewarned. Our politics can begin to reflect the multiple realities of social insecurity. (p. 9)

This postmodernist view of knowledge and how to use it is central to how I understand the world.

### **Feminist Theory**

*The story is not all mine, nor told by me alone- Genly Ai*

My feminism, the belief in equity while understanding that gender is an organizing social concept that contributes to a web of oppression, is part of who I am, but it does not automatically mean that it is part of my epistemology. Feminism has taught me the limitations of social categories, not to undervalue my own knowledge, and why paying attention to the margins and intersections of knowledge/theories is vital to understanding of the world. As important as that is, being feminist does not automatically translate into a feminist epistemology. However, Grasswick & Webb (2002) explain that feminist epistemologists “seek to understand how and why gender makes a difference to knowing, and with gender being a social category, their quest necessarily engages them in a social analysis of knowledge” (p. 186). Thus, if epistemology asks the question, “What is knowledge?” then feminist epistemology has led to the centralization of the question, “Who knows?” which is an important question as the idea of knowing shifts from an impartial omnipotence to something that occurs in

embodied, situated knowers (Grasswick & Webb, 2002; Nelson, 1995; Haraway, 1988; Longino, 2010; Dotson, 2015).

Helen Longino (2010) surveyed twenty-five years of feminist epistemology in *Hypatia* reviewing thinkers who worked to retheorize the subject of knowledge. It was not just who was seen as a subject that was rethought, but that “knowledge itself, in the hands of these thinkers, becomes an active relationship charged with ethical dimensions rather than an uninvolved representation of objects” (p. 735). In retrospect, feminist epistemology is built on the shoulders of theorists including Joan Scott (1991) who utilizes a feminist reimagining of knowledge to uncover bias, Sandra Harding (1986 and 1991) who articulates how a sense of neutrality hides power politics at play, and Donna Haraway’s (1988) situated knowledge which calls for a split and contradictory observer “where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims...arguing for a view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body” (p. 589). This is not the project for an in-depth history of feminist epistemology, but Nelson (1995) does remind us that projects “under the rubric ‘feminist epistemology’ are diverse (and not always compatible) dynamic, and far from complete” (p. 35). When we give up the deeply ingrained ideas of simplicity and singularity and understand knowing as a project that occurs from a situated place we can begin to appreciate knowing with uncertainty and ambiguity. Letting go of certitude allows us to “embrace the idea of knowing in order to question and reconstruct what knowing in the service of our own emancipatory practices and our work toward social transformation might be” (Villaverde, 2008, p. 10).

Drawing back to Genly Ai's assertion that the story he tells is not his alone feels very much like a feminist claim. While he is recording the story, Ali acknowledges the other voices that will appear in the story and they did part of the work of creating the narrative. Stories are never ours alone. They always include other voices. This sits well with my feminist epistemology where four ideas are foregrounded: 1) gender is a social concept; 2) we know in community with other people; 3) epistemology is not neutral; and 4) knowing is a process.

**Gender is a social concept.** To invoke the term feminist, ideas of gender must be attended to. Saying something is feminist without elaboration leaves unknown what ideas of gender, and thus types of feminism, you subscribe to. I believe gender is a social construction. What we know about and do with gender is because we attach meaning and value to it, rather than an essentialist idea of gender that assumes inherent value and meaning are attached to gendered bodies. In terms of epistemology, what women know and how they know it are important, but "women's thinking" is not inherently valued because of essentialist ideals of what it means to be, or think like, a woman. Feminist epistemology works to develop ways of knowing uncovering the role of gender in that process. Further, understanding gender as a social category that resides in embodied persons connected to other persons leads us away from gender as a universal theory towards an idea that it is one of multiple social dimensions which "work in productions of knowledge" (Alcoff and Potter in Grasswick & Webb, 2002, p. 190). Feminist epistemology both is interested in the pursuit of knowledge theory as well as connecting to the social and political goals of unmasking and eliminating webs of oppression.

**We know in community with other people.** Another important aspect of feminist epistemology is that we know in community with others, not as autonomous, rational individuals disconnected from society. That is not to say that we, as individuals, do not have our own thoughts and ideas, but that we are always in community with and connected to others. Haslanger (1999) says that to “decide what is epistemically valuable we need to decide what kind of knowledge community is desirable” because knowledge communities function as more than a way to assemble and exchange information “they draw lines of authority and power, they mediate each person’s relationship with herself (in defining conditions for self-knowledge), [and] they circumscribe common ground for public debate and the basis for public policy” (p. 468). This moves us from the focus on the individual, who is assumed to generate knowledge in isolation, and is contrasted with ‘connected knowing’ which highlights “cooperation in knowledge seeking” (Grasswick and Webb, 2002, p. 190). By recognizing the relationships between theories of knowledge and the broader social, theoretical, and political contexts in which these theories are produced we can acknowledge the interdependence between the knower and what is known.

**Epistemology is not neutral.** What we know and how we know it are not disconnected from historical and political contexts. When considering Patricia Hill Collins’ work on black feminist epistemology, Kristie Dotson (2015) explicitly stated “epistemological considerations are anything but neutral, apolitical and ahistorical” (p. 2324). What we see as normative thought and what lives on the margins have more to do with patterns of suppression, omission, and trivialization than with the fact that feminist

epistemologies are ‘new’ or ‘alternative’ ways of approaching what can be known and by whom. Feminist epistemology has taught us “any *viable* theory of knowledge or science would encompass relationships between knowledge and power, including its own relationship(s) to power, and other features of the circumstance within which it is generated” (Nelson, 1995, p. 41). We must locate ourselves in relation to social and political realities because those relationships are an important part of the project of knowing. We must acknowledge that our own biases, which we all have, affect what we believe can be known. By acknowledging contexts, we can refine or abandon them when changes in experience or knowledge warrant.

**Knowing is a process.** Knowledge does not stand still to give us time to comprehend it because knowing occurs in the process of understanding. Shirley Steinberg (2012) talks about “looking at truth as a *process* of construction in which knowers and viewers play an active role” (p. 190, author’s italics). This is closely related to the idea that we know in community with others, but further disrupts the notion that we can passively receive knowledge or know in advance because we have to be in the process of knowing to understand knowledge. Naples and Gurr (2014) reinforce this idea saying, “power and knowledge are not necessarily static within or between groups, and...must be contextual, responding flexibly to shifts in power and agency” (p. 34). For me, this idea that knowing is an “active relationship” (Longino, 2010, p. 735) that changes and responds to our continued scholarship is comforting. I have to learn with uncertainty and ambiguity, but I am left to think in a space that welcomes growth and imagination or to put in Longino’s (2010) words, “action, engagement, and projection

replace representation” (p. 737). There are stories to tell, as Genly Ai reminds us, but they are not ours alone and perhaps if we are able to tolerate some inconsistency we will “obtain a fuller, more comprehensive understanding than we could from any single [description]” (p. 738).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Strategy**

I conducted a case study of the Spring 2014 class *The Hunger Games and Feminist Education* (WGS 450) using interviews, observation, and document review as methods of inquiry. By working in the interpretivist, postmodern, feminist framework and epistemology that I have outlined, a case study allowed for an in-depth look at this class to gain perspectives on students’ experiences and perceptions about learning with young adult dystopian fiction. This research is based on student interviews conducted in the summer of 2015, and analysis of student course work, documents used to teach the class, as well as the field journal that I kept while teaching the class. Utilizing case study allowed me to “focus on the complexity within the case, on its uniqueness, and its linkages to the social context of which it is part” (Glesne, 2011, p. 22). The use of case study research fits this project because this strategy is a way of looking at education and popular culture as socially constructed institutions that impact students. My interpretation leads towards a deeper understanding of this class experience.

Merriam (1998) has determined the importance of “delimitating the object of the study, the case” (p. 27). For this project, I followed Merriam’s technique for boundaries that have “common sense obviousness” (p. 28). Broadly, this case is delimited by the

students who took the WGS 450 class. This class was taught in the spring 2014 semester with nine students enrolled and met on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2-3:15pm for a 16-week semester. This class itself was time bound by the semester, but I'd like to think about time in a flexible way because I am interested in what students thought about learning with young adult dystopian literature in the classroom, but also if their experiences continue after the class is over.

**Understanding case study research.** Case study research explores a case within its real life context, but has been presented as “a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). While case study is discussed as a research strategy alongside narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Hatch, 2002), case study can mean different things in different applications such as a “pedagogical tool for discussion” to the “intensive study of a case” (Glesne, 2011, p. 22). Case study is characterized by the focus on the bounded unit or case— in this instance the students who took WGS 450. Wanting to explore students’ perspectives from one class on young adult dystopian literature and feminist education, case study seemed a suitable approach to employ for this project.

Three writers, Robert Yin, Robert Stake, and Sharan Merriam, have extensively explored case study as a research strategy. In her review, Patricia Brown (2008) outlined each author’s work in case study research to better understand how she wanted to use case study research in her own practice. This review is a helpful place to situate the differences found in case study research. As Brown was in the field of higher education,



she started with Merriam who's "research on case study applications in education from a qualitative researcher's perspective offered a practical and accessible understanding of strategy" (p. 2). For Merriam, the choice of case study research is a "way to gain understanding of the situation" when the process of inquiry is important to the overall research project (p. 3). She describes Yin as a methodologist who worked through detailed processes (p. 6). Yin's approach is comprehensive and systematic concentrating on each step in process of case study research with the focus to build and maintain rigor and validity. His often cited description of case study says it is the "preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed...and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin in Brown, 2008, p. 5). Brown describes Stake's approach as a "highly interpretive endeavor" where he wants to "represent the complexity and personal experience of the phenomenon" (p. 2). In this way, Stake is a creative interpreter whose work highlights the role of case study research as one who does not discover reality but provides a clearer view of it (p. 6). These three authors have distinct views on case study research with Yin as a more structured researcher, Stake more interested in crafting meaning, and Merriam somewhere between the two (Brown, 2008, p. 7).

Yin, Stake, and Merriam differ on their views and uses of case study research. Yin is guided by positivist epistemological leanings focused on method and control where Merriam and Stake make explicit their more constructivist, but not identical, view of research that involves recognizing multiple realities and knowledge construction (Brown, 2008; Yazan, 2015). For Stake (1995) a case is "a specific, a complex,

functioning thing” that has “a boundary and working parts,” which connect with one another in direct and indirect ways (p. 2). Merriam’s (1998) definition of a case is a bit broader, “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). It seems that Stake leans more toward the case being an object of study while Merriam is more concerned with the process of research. Each use case study research to describe phenomena, interpret meanings and relationships, give reasoned judgments about significance and value, and explore lived experiences.

For my project, I used a combination of Merriam and Stake’s approach to case study research. Merriam’s (1998) approach highlights her experience in the field of education, concern with process, and defining characteristics of case study that say it is particularistic (focused on a particular phenomenon), descriptive (yielding a thick description of phenomenon under study), and heuristic (better understand what is being studied) (p. 29-30). While I used Merriam as a practical guide for this project, there are parts of Stake’s approach that add to my work. Brown (2008) emphasizes Stake’s more poetic approach with his focus on “creating and crafting meaning” (p. 7). Stake (1995) allows for flexible approach to case study design that acknowledges, “the course of the study can’t be charted in advance” (p. 22). I explored student’s experiences of learning with young adult dystopian literature and feminist pedagogy, not ignoring how they apply what they have learned outside of class, showing “the function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (Stake, 1995, p. 43). This class does not define teaching with young adult dystopian literature

and feminist pedagogy, but this research looked deeply at those ideas in reference to this particular class.

### **Class Demographic Description**

The Spring 2014 WGS 450 class was composed of 9 students. It was a mix of WGS majors and minors as well as students of other majors. Surprisingly, some students had never taken a WGS class, even though this was a 400 level senior seminar. There were eight women who preferred she/her pronouns and one man who preferred they/them pronouns in this class. Eight students identified as white, with one identifying as white/Native American in the post-class interview, and one student identified as a person of color. At the time of the class, seven students were juniors or seniors and two were sophomores. Some students had previously read *The Hunger Games* (at least the first book of the series) and some waited until taking the class to read it, but all had a level of familiarity with the story.

### **Participant Selection**

After obtaining IRB approval, I reached out to all nine WGS 450 students to be interviewed for this project. Each student responded back to me. Three students did not feel like they could participate in the interviews due to time or location constraints. Two of the three un-interviewed students gave verbal permission to use their class work in the study, though I opted only to use the writings of the students that I interviewed. Of the six students that I interviewed, four were done face-to-face and two were conducted over Skype. Skype allows for both visual and auditory communication similar to face-to-face interviews, so interview techniques and responses are similar to in-person interviews.

The face-to-face interviews were done with students who remained in the university town or within a thirty-minute drive of the university. One student interviewed over Skype had moved over three hours away and was working two jobs, so her schedule was not conducive to meeting in-person. The other student had moved across the country since the class had ended, so video conferencing was most appropriate for speaking with her.

I interviewed each participant one at a time, and the interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and 15 minutes (depending on the interviewee). Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were sent to the students for member checks. No changes were offered. During the interviews, I followed my semi-structured interview protocol listed in Appendix B. I asked each student the questions listed, but allowed for unscripted follow up questions that fit with the students' narrative to ensure breadth and depth of each interview.

### **Participant Profiles**

In this section, I introduce the WGS 450 students and describe them in the order in which I interviewed them. Before interviews began, I acquired a consent form from each participant (Appendix C). As I describe each participant, I want to give a sense of their reading habits, what classes they have taken that relate to WGS 450, and, for further insight to how each student thinks about the series what character they describe as their favorite.

I have chosen to use pseudonyms for the students. At the end of each interview, they were asked to choose a name that they would like used for this project. I use the name they chose for themselves.

**Jubilee.** At the time of the class, Jubilee was a sophomore art history major and women's and gender studies and French double minor. She had taken an introduction to women's studies class at a community college before transferring to the university. At university, she had previously taken a gender theory class and during the same semester as WGS 450 she was taking a class on witchcraft that was cross-listed with a WGS marker.

As the interviews took place during the summer, Jubilee was at home in a town about 30 minutes away. We had arranged to meet at a coffee shop close to her home, but Jubilee contacted me that morning saying transportation had become an issue. As I was already planning to drive to interview her, she decided the interview could happen at her home. She said that she was most comfortable in that environment.

Jubilee describes herself as a fiction reader. In her art history studies, she reads heavy, academic work, so she says, "for fun, I only read fiction" (2015, line 5). She describes her fiction reading load as "about 2-3 series a year" (line 9) interspersed with a lot of "heavy reading" (lines 9-10) for her academic research. She heard about WGS 450 from a departmental office assistant and thought it sounded fun. Jubilee had previously read the series and was in the process of adding WGS as a minor, so the combined interest in the novels and feminist education drew her to the course. Talking about the course she said, "*The Hunger Games* was like a facilitator for the feminist education discussion, so for every conversation about *The Hunger Games*, there was a conversation about feminist education" (lines 24-27). Both parts of the class were important to her.

Connections to the story are an important part of the reason Jubilee was drawn to this class. She intertwines emotion, learning, and reflection into her response to *The Hunger Games*. Her favorite character is Finnick, a tribute we meet in *Catching Fire*. He is her favorite

not because he's this supposed stud. He would not be my type in real life...but mostly because he uses his vulnerability as a weapon. He is possibly one of the most complicated character in the entire series...he's just as much of the Mockingjay as Katniss is. His "secrets" help bring the needed blow to the rebellion that Katniss had not be able to do alone...That kind of vulnerability takes courage and is painful no matter what you get from it. The fact that we, as readers, lose him in the series just when it feels like we're starting to build this relationship with him is one of the saddest parts of the books. I feel like that happens a lot with the characters you get the closest to— Rue, Finnick, and then Prim. He's one of the few that leave lasting impressions that carved a deep emotional reaction from you the reader. (Jubilee, 2015, lines 598-606)

When explaining her reasoning for being part of this research and talking about her experience in WGS 450, Jubilee said, “It throws you in the hard conversations and just lets you feel your way out” (lines 19-20).

**Amber.** Amber and I met at the on-campus coffee shop. She was living on campus for the summer before starting a new job and graduate school in the fall. In the spring of 2014 she was a junior human development and family studies major with a minor in sociology. She had taken Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS 250) before this class. That class, which combined theories she used in her human development classes, and her own reading habits made her excited to use *The Hunger Games* to talk about education and social issues because she,

connected the things that [she] learned in the last four years at college to real life because people don't read fiction unless you are an English major...so being able to do that and connect it with academic writing was so important because you don't normally see that. (2015, lines 44-48)

Amber describes fiction reading as “probably my one and only hobby. I couldn't live without it. It brings me sanity” (lines 6-7). She reads mostly YA fiction with a little bit of adult fiction. She has surprised herself by leaning towards the science fiction side of young adult literature. She doesn't see herself as a science person, but science fiction draws her for the “unfamiliarity of it all...[science fiction] pulls me because it's unexpected” (lines 11-13).

When Amber heard about this class, she said that she just “had to take it” (line 26). Amber had read the series and had begun to make social and political connections with themes from the book, often calling her mom to talk about *The Hunger Games*. Amber recalled, “just seeing all of those connections and being able to put them into words is very rare for YA fiction, so I just had to take the class” (lines 25-26). Her favorite character from *The Hunger Games* is Cinna, Katniss' stylist for the Games. She picked him as her favorite because:

He comforts Katniss in ways that she's never experienced before and it's a very platonic relationship. I think people sexualize that and so it's interesting to read over his small part and the short time that he had in her life and see the impact that he had and the love that she had for him because he cared for her in the simplest of ways. He wanted to protect her and keep her safe and he risked his life for that. (Amber, 2015, lines 520-526)

Amber took the class and participated in this research because “we could delve deeper into the meaning of the novel...we didn’t just focus on the love interests” (lines 37-39).

**Marie.** Marie and I met in an off-campus coffee shop. She was excited to share that she had recently been accepted into a graduate program for library science. She took WGS 450 as a senior history major with a minor in English who had never taken a women’s and gender studies class before this one. A friend had told her about the class because they knew she was a big fan of the books. In her last semester of her undergraduate education, she was interested in trying a WGS course, and as a big fan of *The Hunger Games* this class seemed a perfect fit for her. Marie found it “interesting to interweave the WGS themes and ideas...It gave me a new perspective on the books” (2015, lines 16-17).

Marie had read *The Hunger Games* series two or three times before taking the class. Further, she is an avid fiction reader who reads three to four books a month, “maybe more than that on a good month” (lines 10-11). Her preferred genres are historical fiction, dystopias, and supernatural fiction, but she confesses to reading “just about anything” (line 8). She looked forward to coming to class because of the interesting assignments that pulled themes out of *The Hunger Games* series. She named this class as “one of my favorite that I took in undergrad” (lines 25-26). Her favorite character is Finnick, though she has affection for Katniss. She chose Finnick because

he was unique to me. He started out sort of—I said I’m gonna hate this guy and then each time you read something with him he turned out to be a little different than you thought he was. He was a very important character, to me, in terms of things that he stood for and things that he did that I don’t think got enough time



[in the book or on screen]. He and Cinna were like that for me, there was so much more here, but I come back to him over and over. (Marie, 2015, lines 263-269)

Marie wanted to participate in this class and research because she “wasn’t very familiar with WGS before the class, so it opened [her] up” (lines 39-41) to the connections between the books and feminist education.

**Harper.** In Spring 2014, Harper was a senior human development and family studies major who had taken several women’s and gender studies classes including a cross-listed religion class that was looking at witchcraft the same semester as WGS 450. After graduation, she moved to a town about three hours away, so I conducted my interview with her over Skype. Before the class she had not read the books but had seen the movie. She wanted to take the class as a way to read the books and “having the twist of feminism really brought it out to me. I really loved WGS” (2015, lines 41-42). She was intrigued about how fiction and feminist education would come together.

Harper describes herself as a reader and is currently working at a bookstore. She says her reading comes and goes, but recently has been reading about two books a week because borrowing from her store is an employee perk. Her preferred genres include fantasy, teen, and, most recently, New Adult romance, but is always looking to broaden her reading categories. While she felt she really learned from both *The Hunger Games* and feminist education perspective, she felt the class was “a little more challenging than I anticipated” (lines 111-112). She was in her last semester as an undergraduate, applying for graduate school, and was “drained...from the last eight semesters” (line 112).

However, she is currently a long-term substitute teacher, along with her job in the bookstore, and uses what she learned in WGS 450 to reflect on what she sees in her classroom. She compares the discussion-based model of our classroom to the standardized tests she is preparing her students for as I conduct our interview. She sees how *The Hunger Games* and discussion based on fiction “is very appropriate for college and late high school students” (lines 72-73). Expressly talking about feminist education in terms of *The Hunger Games* introduced the idea of education as a system and “helped [her] know how to formulate [her] classes” (lines 174) including ways to talk with students about what they read.

Harper names Peeta, Katniss’ co-victor, as her favorite character, particularly as he was written in the novel, and not as he was portrayed in the movie. She chose Peeta because,

The Peeta in the book is vulnerable. He’s found this place where he is disabled and he’s covered up and glamorized. He’s faced with a situation where he is completely confused and he is trying to be himself. He is confused...His life is crashing around him. Sometimes life does that to you. You don’t know what is real or not real...When your life is one big gray area, how do you stay yourself? Through it all and I think Peeta did it as eloquently as he could. (Harper, 2015, lines 541-550)

She took the class and wanted to be a participant in this research because she “is a feminist in her own right and wanted to see how this would come together” (lines 42-43).

**Pom.** Pom came into WGS 450 as the only male identified person who asked that they/them pronouns be used. I met Pom at an off-campus coffee shop to do the interview as they were taking summer classes in anticipation of graduating in the fall. At the time

of the class, Pom was a junior dance and women's and gender studies double major. They had taken most of the requirements for the WGS portion of their degree including Introduction to WGS, Gendered Worlds, Queer Theory, and Feminist Theory. Before the class, they had not read *The Hunger Games* series but thought the class was "a good reason to read the books and see how it relates to feminism" (2015, line 22). The stronger pull for Pom was the examination of feminist education, but *The Hunger Games* added a fun element to the class.

Pom identifies as a reader who reads more in the summer but manages a book every two months during the school year. Fiction is their favorite genre, especially southern historical fiction like *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). They also enjoy fantasy like the *Harry Potter* (1997) series or *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) trilogy. When it comes to fantasy or science fiction, they are drawn to "really unrealistic fiction stories" (lines 7-8). As someone who had not read *The Hunger Games*, the timing of the class after the first movie had been released along with a roommate that had previously read the series got them excited for this class.

Pom had strong feelings for many of the characters in *The Hunger Games*, but named Tigris, a retired Games stylist that Katniss meets at the end of the series, as their favorite character. Tigris, as compared to Katniss, was a more relatable character for Pom who explains,

Tigris is my favorite. I think the media wants Katniss to be everyone's favorite since she is the hero figure, but she was really hard to identify with. [Tigris] was more relatable, more human. Katniss was pretty closed off. You couldn't really absorb what was going on in her mind and she seemed kind like a heroic figure—

like Hercules, a figurehead who doesn't really make sense. But Tigris was part of the Capitol, which I feel like I am part of the Capitol, but she was also oppressed by the Capitol, as I feel like I am too. How she expressed gender power and race was really interesting. (Pom, 2015, lines 515-523)

Pom chose to take the class and participate in this research project because it “was a lot of fun. It made me think about things that I don't think I normally would have ever analyzed within the classroom setting, the educational system, and... the world” (lines 33-36).

**Elizabeth.** As a women's and gender studies and psychology double major, who was also a student worker in the WGS office, Elizabeth took this class, in part, because her boyfriend had read the books and his analysis of the books as a “dumb girly story” (2015, line 47) bothered her. Before the class, she was aware of the story, but had not read *The Hunger Games*. She was interested in social commentary that was “applied to such a big story” (lines 51-52). At the time of WGS 450, Elizabeth was a sophomore and had taken Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies and Feminist Theory prior to this course. Our interview took place over Skype as Elizabeth had moved to Seattle to take a job since the end of the class.

Finding time to read is hard for Elizabeth, but she tries to set aside time at least once a week to take a book to a coffee shop. She has go-to fiction favorites that she re-reads like *White Oleander* (1999) and currently is into younger young adult fiction (geared toward middle school readers) like *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999). She has recently been reading non-fiction and her current book is an autobiography by Aaron Dixon (2012) called *My People are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Captain*. This

book begins with Dixon describing Seattle in the midst of protests in 1968 and that feels very real to Elizabeth. She connected that autobiography to *The Hunger Games* class and the Ferguson march she attended in Seattle two weeks prior. The importance of those social justice connections and the resulting social commentary is crucial to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth names Katniss as her favorite character saying,

I really like Katniss because she gets so much hate...I try to think of myself as a teenager and...I think her reaction is consistent to how I think I would have acted...I definitely get how Katniss responded to things and especially with the fact she is involved in a love triangle that she didn't ask for. She didn't ask for these boys to fall in love with her. She didn't ask to have feelings for them. That's just how life goes. I've experienced horrific situations and still have time to have a crush on somebody. Consistently experiencing poverty and uncertainty about where I'm going to live doesn't keep me from liking someone. It doesn't keep me from thinking someone is cute or cool or funny. That's just means that bad things are happening to me but also I'm a person with other facets and a personality and I think the fact that people hate on her so much is so telling about how we feel about people when bad things are happening. (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 560-577)

As an activist and student, Elizabeth is interested in how the story of revolution is both in the story and playing out in our cities like Ferguson and Baltimore right now. She is excited for the dialogues that *The Hunger Games* opens up saying, "Now it's in your mainstream media. Now it's in the stories your kids are bringing home. You can't avoid talking about this" (lines 38-39). These are the reasons why she chose to take the class and participate in this research project.

### **Data Collection**

Merriam (1998) discusses three data collection techniques: conducting interviews, observing, and analyzing documents. She stresses that for qualitative case studies, like

this project, all three means of data collection are frequently used as “intensive, holistic description and analysis characteristic of a case study mandates both breadth and depth of data collection” (p. 134). In case studies, data collection can be a looping, interactive process where data connects from different sources. For my research, I followed Merriam’s suggestion and used three data collection techniques: 1) student interviews; 2) observations recorded in my field journal; 3) documents from the class including the text of *The Hunger Games* series, articles and other media used to create the syllabus, and student writing assignments. Merriam reminds us that each case study is different and “no one can attend to all things” (p. 139), so I feel the techniques of interviewing and document review, particularly as it pertains to student assignments, centralize the student experience. However, my observations, through my field journal, and reviewing the other documents that were used to teach the class are not to be discounted. I use these three techniques to craft a holistic picture of what occurred in WGS 450 reminding myself “what we are talking about is systemically ‘watching,’ ‘asking,’ and ‘reviewing’” (Wolcott in Merriam, 1998, p. 143). This collection and analysis process was interactive, referential, and on-going.

### **Interviews**

Student interviews were conducted in May and June 2015 with six WGS 450 students. I arranged to meet them at a time and place that was convenient for them. Four interviews were conducted face-to-face and two were conducted over Skype. Each interview was digitally recorded for transcription. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes in length depending on the interviewee. Each transcript

was sent back to the interviewee for member checks. No changes were requested by any of the participants.

### **Observations**

During the Spring 2014 semester I kept a field journal. Immediately after each class, I wrote my observations, reflections, and thoughts about the class. I looked at both “wide angle” and “narrow angle” lenses (Merriam, 1998, p. 105) concentrating on the class over-all as well as particular observations and remarks from students. This journal is 37 single-spaced, typed pages.

### **Document Reviews**

With IRB approval, students allowed me to review their assignments from WGS 450. Student assignments included three critical reflection essays, one essay connected to *The Girl Who Was on Fire* (2010) book, and their final reflection. The other documents for this class included material that was assigned through the syllabus: *The Hunger Games* trilogy was the organizing text for the class and was supplemented with a collection of essays titled *The Girl Who Was on Fire* (2010) as well as academic articles and popular culture articles, blogs, and videos.

The syllabus (Appendix A) was divided into three learning sections: 1) Grounding- using articles, videos, and other media we looked at the institution of education, located ourselves within the educational system, and explored our ideology and worldviews related to higher education. 2) Exploring- this largest portion of the class was spent exploring themes like race, disability, gender, hunger, and community through the lens of *The Hunger Games* stories. 3) Creating- last part of class was spent reflecting

and working together to creatively pull together our knowledge, refining what we learned about young adult dystopian literature and feminist education, culminating in a final project that encompassed group and individual work.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of this data was woven into the process of data collection (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). Following Stake (1995), I wanted to “make sense of certain observations of the case by watching as closely as I can and by thinking as deeply about it as I can” (p. 76-77). Close observation and deep thinking for this project involved reading and re-reading the interviews, student writings, my field journal, and other class documents to construct categories and themes. According to Merriam (1998) “making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read- it is the process of making meaning” (p. 178). My analysis included a thick, rich description of the WGS 450 class. Data was analyzed during and after the data gathering process, influenced by Merriam’s (1998) and Stake’s (1995) approaches to data analysis. I analyzed the gathered data using thematic content analysis to develop themes, patterns, and categories that identify and describe the experience of learning with young adult dystopian fiction and how young adult dystopian fiction informs feminist pedagogy. As suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003), I started with some general categories and added additional categories based on a close reading of the data (p. 275). The a priori codes I began with include: how *The Hunger Games* informed student learning, connections between *The Hunger Games* and student experiences, challenges experienced from learning with *The Hunger Games*, and benefits



reaped from using *The Hunger Games*. These were merely starting codes because part of my job as researcher was to be open to change and actively look for more codes to support or contradict these initial ideas.

My analysis included organizing or combining related codes into themes and categories. In this process of “comparing and merging” (Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa, 2012, p. 14) regularities and patterns recur and these “patterns and regularities become the categories or themes into which subsequent items are sorted” (Merriam, 1998, p. 181). Using a priori codes and emerging codes from my analysis, I developed my central categories. As this is part of a data collection and analysis process, and not truly separate actions, further refinement of these categories occurred during the writing process (Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa, 2012; Merriam, 1998). Starting with the students’ experience from their interviews and incorporating other data allowed me to explore my research questions. Merriam (1998) notes this “as having a conversation with the data, asking questions of it, making comments to it” (p. 181).

My analysis was a complex, non-linear process of thinking about the data, learning from it, and trying to convey meaning about it. Understanding this class was about “trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully” (Stake, 1995, p. 75). This process of pulling apart, reconstructing, reflecting, and being curious was how I made meaning with this project. This way of thinking helps to “tease out relationships, to probe issues, and aggregate categorical data” (p. 77) about WGS 450 and the use of young adult dystopian literature in feminist education.

## **Interviews**

I interviewed six students who took WGS 450 through a semi-structured interview technique. Basically what Merriam (1998) calls “conversation with a purpose” (p. 71), which is used to learn “how people interpret the world around them” (p. 72). Using thematic analysis, a process by which “the researcher focuses analytical techniques on searching through data for themes and patterns” (Glesne, 2011, p. 187), I reviewed my interview transcripts for themes and codes. In essence, I was aggregating the text into “small categories of information” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). I looked for patterns and themes to begin the process of classification. Interviews were transcribed verbatim with the goal of summarizing what I saw and heard in terms of themes and patterns that contribute to understanding and interpreting emerging categories (Merriam, 1998, p. 91).

After the initial interview transcription, I sent the records back to each student to make sure they felt I had captured their words. None of the students returned any objections to the transcripts, thus that is what I worked off of for the remainder of the project. As I began to code the interview transcripts (and the same holds true for my field journal and student assignments), I utilized a constant comparison method, which involves “comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” Merriam, 1998, p. 18). This method allowed me to profoundly analyze the interviews as well as across different mediums including my field journal and the student assignments. I organized and compared my data by underlining, circling, memoing, and grouping ideas into large categories. From there, I was able to refine and re-group my ideas into main themes that emerged for this project.

I read and re-read the interview transcripts marking the data into codes. The first level of coding worked to form an organization scheme, so that I could manage the data in the interview transcripts as well as an initial layer of analysis as “coding is analysis” (Miles and Huberman in Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p. 276). My process included sorting and grouping each piece of data under a specific code. During this time, I used memoing and diagramming to assist in “distilling main processes and events. The memos and diagrams [were] examined and compared to each other” (Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa, 2012, p. 13). Coding, category construction, and memoing helped me explore the connections I made in the data as well as begin to understand the information that emerged from the data analysis. My initial coding attempt resulted in almost 100 codes that were, upon reflection, highly descriptive (too long) and repetitive. Then, I began to connect codes that related to one another or seemed similar and grouped common codes into categories. This process was done several times as I divided and re-grouped my categories through several rounds of analysis looking at how different codes related to one another to begin to create what Glesne (2011) calls a “framework of relational categories” (p. 195).

I ended up, at this stage, with twenty-four categories that reflected the students’ experience and perception of this class and *The Hunger Games* story. One of the most cited codes was “Capitol vs. Districts” which students used as short hand in their interviews to express how *The Hunger Games* made them think about the world around them as well as a connection to the characters in the story. This code had to be refined for meaning through student use. I needed to discern if they were talking about their

experiences or the story. This was a valuable distinction that helped me to better understand how students were talking about the class. At this point, I was also combining codes to reduce overlap and redundancy in my twenty-four code categories. For example, the codes “connection to characters,” “connection between fiction and reality,” and “fluid ways we talk about fiction and reality” merged to form “power of storytelling.” The individual themes from our class like “hunger,” “disability,” and “love” were initially grouped under the theme “art to understand.” However, further codes like “science fiction” and “YAL to think about change” merged with “art to understand” under the code “reflections on class experiences.” Similarly, the code “need for imagination” developed as I combined the codes “compare to characters,” “feminist pedagogy,” and “YAL as a tool.” For the theme “fiction as educational space” I was able to see how the codes “fiction as lens” and “YAL as place” were repeated and invoked in common ways by the students. Lastly, the codes of “current events,” “YAL in college,” “beyond the classroom,” and “seeing differently” combined under “continuing to think with *The Hunger Games*.” As I thought about and refined my ideas around my data, the boundaries between certain categories seemed to blur and more meaningful codes (reflecting meaning from the interviews, student writing, and field journal) emerged. As I continued to work with my data, five categories crystallized. The data in these five categories related to one another with little overlap and redundancy.

Using thematic analysis allowed for five categories to emerge from my data: 1) the power of storytelling; 2) students’ reflections on class experiences; 3) the need for imagination; 4) fiction as educational space; and 5) continuing to think with *The Hunger*

*Games*. I employed what Wolcott (1994) (in Glesne, 2011) names as the second category of data transformation—the identification of key factors and the relationships among them (p. 209). As fitting with my own framework and epistemology, I am not passively discovering this information within these interview transcripts, but constructing it and my representations are mediated through myself, as a researcher, and the ways I view knowledge as socially constructed.

### **Observations/Field Journal**

Systemic observation can be a valuable research tool it provides context, can act as a reference tool for the case study, and are used in conjunction with interviews and document review to substantiate findings (Merriam, 1998, p. 96). Merriam (1998) highlights Gold's (1958) four stances for observer ranging from being a full participant to being a spectator. I did not fall neatly into any of those classic stances, possibly falling between 1) *complete participant*—but not completely as my identity as a researcher was not withheld; and 2) *participant as observer*—researcher's activities are known and are subordinate to role as a participant. A newer stance is highlighted, *collaborative partner*, and this role most closely fits my own role in the WGS 450 class as being a “complete participant...[whose] identity is clearly knowing to everyone involved” (p. 101). I was the teacher for the class upholding that role while also being a researcher. Students were aware of my interest in this class as a researcher, but I was fully committed to teaching. While understanding the role between the observed and the observer, my role as teacher in the project is important. I must be reflexive about the multiple roles that I held for this project. I did teach the class, but the project is interested in the students' experience of

the use of young adult dystopian fiction in the class, so my teaching role must be recognized as 'not student,' thus not a focus for this project. Merriam (1998) continues saying a "researcher can never know exactly" (p. 102) how it feels to be the observed party, so as a doctoral student, observer, and teacher I am still most interested in the student perspectives of this class. Following Merriam's (1998) chapter titled "Being a Careful Observer," I have a situated perspective and I acknowledge that my own perspectives are interwoven into this work.

My field journal was coded and analyzed similarly to the student interviews. After transcribing the interviews, while waiting for member checks, I closely read and re-read my field journal. This journal was kept during the semester that I taught WGS 450. Every day after class, as there was not another class immediately using our classroom space, I recorded my observations, feelings, thoughts, and impressions for the day. This process often took just as long to do as teaching the class itself. During some class sessions I was able to jot notes as we did large and small group discussions, so those were incorporated into my field journal. Some days I was not able to keep notes while I taught, so this reflection time immediately after each class was invaluable. When I returned to the field journal as part of my analysis I did a "careful, line-by-line reading of the text while looking for processes, actions, assumptions, and consequences" (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p. 275). My journal is comprised of what Glesne (2011) calls descriptive notes, describing the class and the students, and analytic notes, which reflect and analyze what the researcher is thinking and feeling. (p. 72-76). Using codes that were beginning to come to life in the student interviews and applying them to my field journal, I coded

the document. With review and assessment, the initial codes were re-worked and refined. Themes emerged and were compared with what was emerging from both student interviews and student assignments. Perhaps the greatest asset of this field journal was its use as a reference tool. I was able to use this journal as a reference tool to look back on the class details that the students talked about in their interviews and return to it to get a feel for how the class was progressing as I was teaching it.

### **Document Reviews**

Merriam (1998) names documents as a “reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” and perhaps most importantly they “reflect the participant’s perspective, which is what most qualitative research is seeking” (p. 116). I divided the documents for this class into two sections: 1) class materials; and 2) student writing assignments. Class materials include *The Hunger Games* trilogy and other assigned readings, videos, blogs, and popular culture texts as well as the syllabus, which was the guide for the course. I did not do a line-by-line reading of all the class materials to code and analyze. As I had read them all to create the course and again the week they were assigned to students I was quite familiar with the materials. I kept my own summaries and teaching outlines for the class materials. This helped me to refer and reflect when specific readings or topics were referred to in my field journal, the student interviews, or student writing assignments. Merriam (1998) reminds us “using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations...Since the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering data, he or she relies on skill and intuition to find and interpret data from documents” (p. 120). As a

researcher looking at the documents for this class, my aim was to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid, in my investigation.

Student writing assignments included three reflection papers, one thematic essay, and the final paper. These assignments were a peek into the students' learning at the moment in which the assignment was written, but also was a way to seek any changes that may occur in their thinking over the course of the semester as well as a perspective with which to view their interviews. The student writing assignments were treated in the same manner as the student interviews and my field journal. They were read and re-read line-by-line and coded with an eye towards the codes that were emerging from the interviews and field journal. The codes were then grouped into themes upon further analysis. This is done under the same thematic analysis rubric as applied to the interviews and the field journal. I looked for patterns and themes to emerge from the papers and connected them to the other aspects of data that was collected for this class

While I aim to describe the ways that I collected and analyzed data for this project, it did follow the general outline I have presented; however, in practice, it was not a neat process of moving from interviews, to field journal, to student writing assignments. Stake (1995) reminds us that the "real business of case study is particularization... take a particular case and come to know it well" (p. 8). Case study allowed me to study one case, or "bounded system" (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011) incorporating contextual data to draw attention to what can be learned from this class. Case study offered a way of understanding complex social situations with a rich, holistic account of WGS 450, as such are particularly useful for education (Merriam, 1998). I jumped across platforms



and used the connections I was making in one area to look up what was going on in another or what another student said about the same material. As I wanted to center student experiences and perspective, I tended to start with the student interviews and move to make connections out from there. This is reflected as Patton (1990) (in Merriam, 1998) reminds us in case studies,

Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective...By using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the field worker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings. (p. 137)

I have shown how I have used three data collection techniques, interviewing, observing, and document analysis, for this project. While each was important they blend together in the process of understanding and describing WGS 450.

### **Researcher Trustworthiness**

Throughout this project, I have sought to create and maintain trustworthiness so that my work is viewed as credible. This notion of trustworthiness speaks to how I view what can be known from my study as well as how I have attended to the process of research throughout my investigation. I used the WGS 450 class as a case study for teaching with young adult dystopian fiction, but realize that my interpretations are but a snapshot in time. Merriam (2009) reminds us that “one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single fixed objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured” (p. 213). Both the processes and outcomes of my research are important parts

of the development of this study. What I achieve with this project speaks to the one class that was taught, but my hope is that it sparks the imagination for continued work by others and myself.

In my roles as teacher and researcher, I have attempted to be clear about my positionality in this project. This includes my positionality as someone with multiple roles in the project as well as my own critical positionality as a middle-class, white woman teaching in a university setting. Unpacking the notions of positionality allow me to further elucidate how “the only expectations should be that situated understandings are produced” (van Niekerk and Savin-Baden, 2010, p. 29). What I know in the world is mediated and interpreted from a particular stance and I have tried to admit to my situatedness throughout the project. I also attended to Merriam’s (1998) call to use interviewing, observation, and document review to obtain a full picture of the case being studied. Within these various data sources I did multiple, close readings of the transcriptions, field journal, and student assignments. In teaching the class, my journal was an invaluable reflection tool. As a research document, it allowed me to look back and learn from what was done in the class, but as a reflection tool I was able to think about my teaching each day after class. With that reflection time built into my work, I was able to think about what was working with this class and make changes as needed to meet the needs of my students.

With each reading of my research materials, I paid attention to what ideas stood out to me marking and noting as I read. As the codes began to emerge, they were grouped into larger categories (at times changing the color of pen I used to demarcate the

different readings) and then the categories were reviewed and refined. The student interviews were returned to the participants for review. I have worked to be reflexive throughout the research process, not only looking for where the data converged but also for contradictions in the data. It has helped to remember that “it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). I tried to attend to issues of trustworthiness at all stages of my research process.

CHAPTER IV  
DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

“I volunteer!” I [Katniss] gasp. “I volunteer as tribute!”  
What I did was a radical thing. (Collins, 2008, p. 22 and 26)

I set out to understand the Spring 2014 class: *The Hunger Games and Feminist Education* (WGS 450). For the class, we read the books that comprise *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Additionally, we read academic articles about education and feminist thought, explored essays by authors highlighting ideas found in Susanne Collins’ fictional world, contemplated social media commentary on *The Hunger Games*, and watched videos to contextualize how we view the history of Panem compared to American history. We talked with one another and debated ideas. We left the classroom and discovered our campus’ history in the library archives and the buildings we walk past every day.

I began this chapter with the most recognizable quote from *The Hunger Games*, said by Katniss as she volunteers to take her sister’s place in what she believes will be her televised execution. In the novel, none of Peeta’s brothers volunteer to take his place in the games. Thinking this through, Katniss acknowledges the “radical thing” she did in substituting herself for her sister. During our first class, whether my students had read the books or not, everyone was familiar with the “I volunteer” scene and knew its importance. As I poured over the novels, listened to student interviews, and reviewed the

papers they turned in for the class, I found that there were both obvious reasons for learning with *The Hunger Games*, along the lines of this oft-quoted scene, but also quieter reasons for learning with this series, more in line with Katniss recognizing the possibility of the “radical thing” she did as she is ushered off the stage. It is in these quieter readings that space is opened up to reflect on if this kind of story is helping us to learn or if it is just another way to be entertained. Teaching with this series lets us return to a familiar story to see if we can explore feminist pedagogy from a fresh perspective.

Students who registered for WGS 450 were all lured by the appeal of taking a class featuring *The Hunger Games*. Beyond that their reasons differed. In her interview Elizabeth said she took the class in part because her boyfriend read the series and described the whole thing as “just a dumb girly story.” She wanted to know more because she didn’t think that was what the story was about at all. (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 47-48). Harper and Marie were both seniors in their final semester. Harper had not read the books, but enjoyed her previous Women’s and Gender Studies classes, so she was interested to see how feminism and *The Hunger Games* “come together” (2015, line 43). Marie had read the series, but had never taken a Women’s and Gender Studies class so she wanted to see how the class would “interweave the WGS ideas and themes” with the story (2015, lines 16-17).

In this section, I share my findings. In the spirit of qualitative research, these findings are but one way of understanding how this class came together. As I interpreted the students’ interviews, their class assignments, and my field journal, many ways of representing this class were possible. Indeed, in the coding and analysis that is built into

the qualitative research process (as outlined in Chapter 3) I identified and grouped themes in different ways looking for ideas and connections about WGS 450. Research has to start somewhere, so in my first attempt I identified six categories with half of those groups having as many as four subcategories. There was significant overlap in some of these ideas, so another round of analysis and reorganization found me with three large categories each having at least two subcategories, but there was still overlap in the ideas. My next round of organization found me looking back to the literature review (Chapter 2) remembering how science fiction is commentary on the present while looking to the future, so I applied that kind of present and future lens to my data. Two strong categories emerged with this analysis- *the power of storytelling* and *the need for imagination*. This class asked students to think about their present and imagine the future through the frame of *The Hunger Games* and returned many times to the ideas that telling stories helps us to learn and imagination is vital to how we think about our future. But these two categories were not quite enough; it was too simplistic of an analysis. As I worked with the data in a second level analysis, three more categories were derived from those two allowing for a more complete look at how students talked about their experiences of this class. The five categories are:

- The power of storytelling
- Students' reflections on class experiences
- The need for imagination
- Fiction as educational space
- Continuing to think with *The Hunger Games*

Each of the categories will be discussed and supported by data from the student interviews, my field journal, and document review.

### **The Power of Storytelling**

“Do you want anything?” I [Katniss] ask.  
“No,” he [Peeta] says. “Thank you. Wait, yes. Tell me a story.” “A story? What about?” I say. I’m not much for storytelling... “Something happy. Tell me about the happiest day you can remember,” says Peeta. (Collins, 2008, p. 267-268)

This quote is from a scene where Peeta is severely injured, perhaps mortally, and Katniss is attending to him. She knows her actions are televised, so she chooses to tell him a story about a gift she gave her sister, Prim. Her motive in telling the story is double fold: the story is meant to comfort to Peeta, but also to rally viewers to send life-saving medicine. Like Peeta, readers are momentarily drawn into Katniss’ story and distracted from the horrors of the Arena. However, we also see the strategic function of her story to convey information. She plays to the camera, creating a romantic narrative, which she knows will resonate with the Capitol audience and inspire them to take the action necessary to save Peeta’s life. Alberto Manguel (1996) tells us reading is not chronological or orderly. Louise Rosenblatt (1964) builds upon his sentiment when she asserts that the reader “has not fully read the first line until he has read the last and interrelated them” (p. 125). As students talked about their experience in WGS 450, understanding the themes and ideas from the class was made tangible through the story of *The Hunger Games*, but also in our discussions and, one year later, as they reflected on what they had learned. I see this as students learn how to use the text as more than

merely a story to read. By the second month of class I note how “students are beginning to see how they can connect personally with characters, how they can bring in real world scenarios, and learn in the gray areas” between the details of the books (field journal, 2014, lines 298-299). I am taking what the students find in the text and pushing them to see these ideas as more than good or bad, but rethink how the ideas operate in the story and in our world. By pushing back on the binary thinking of good/bad or real/fiction, the class is learning more deeply through the story. The interplay of students, texts, and lived experience adds depth and dimension to what the students learned together. In their words, the strength of *The Hunger Games* story is shown, but also how tell stories about their experiences come through as well.

Jubilee had previously read the series, but learning with *The Hunger Games* in our classroom context helped her to see the power in the story. She says,

The first time I read *The Hunger Games* it was just this really cool book I was reading. I think that’s the way it is for a lot of people because it’s an interesting story. When most people read books it’s to get out of their own space and to get into some other space they can go to and hide in because we feel it’s not real. That’s the thing with fiction and dystopian novels. They feel like dystopian stuff is not real and the importance of teaching it is to show that reality is actually intertwined with young adult literature. It’s inspired by it...But there are pieces of our own community in it that we can learn from. (Jubilee, 2015, lines 364-373)

In this passage, Jubilee is articulating how she learned from *The Hunger Games*. She is aware that the story is fiction, but when it is centered in her learning experience she was able to find connections to her own lived experiences and community. She finds there are lessons to be learned in this story when rereading it for class.



Amber shared this idea of the connection between young adult literature, education, and lives beyond the classroom, as well. She talked about how the class incorporated

pieces from the academic side of it and from feminist culture, connecting them to real life and to society. Once you've done that we can walk away and we still have the novels. We can pick it up and remember what we talked about. Being able to go back later and read the books again and say I remember when we talked about this and I remember how it important that made me feel. (Amber, 2015, lines 248-253)

This connection of fiction and life, learning and feeling, getting to know characters in a novel and learning about the world you live in is a common theme from the WGS 450 students. They have the novels to go back to, as Amber said, but it was learning about their own world through the themes of the novels that continue to influence how the students make meaning from what they learned that semester. During class, but also in the year between class and their interviews, students used *The Hunger Games* as a reference point, a way to try to understand their world, which is a powerful thing that learning with a story can do. The influence of the story in the class, but also when the class is over gives the students a framework for continuing to think with the issues presented in the class.

For Harper, *The Hunger Games*, as well as the *Harry Potter* series, “introduced reading back into [her] life” (2015, line 456). In taking this class, and learning with a story, she now looks for “the bigger picture” (line 457) when she reads. Reading fiction is a hobby and stress reliever for Harper, especially now that she is finished with her

undergraduate studies, but learning with *The Hunger Games* allowed her to add perspective to her reading about issues like “war and poverty” (line 49). In reflecting on those kind of real-world issues through fiction Harper asks questions like, “Who is benefiting from large industries that take over our lives- and who is not? Who are we- are we the Capitol or not” (lines 49-51)? These kinds of questions, which she posed during our interview, reflected the kinds of questions we grappled with in class. She continued to use these questions, and this way of questioning that she learned in WGS 450, to clarify her perspective (line 51) about intersectional identity politics. Using the story, she was able to see herself in the story saying, “At one point, I was just a white, poor chick who is straight, but...this class just put those issues [race, class, gender] in the young adult literature and... young adult literature is our society” (lines 52-56). It is powerful to see yourself and the issues you are grappling with reflected in the stories you are learning with. Harper explained this by saying,

*The Hunger Games* facilitates what I am going through, it’s just painted a different way. It’s the same picture but it’s like having two different painters there’s one who does expressive and one’s doing abstract...It’s the same image, it’s the same history or same message, but it’s painted a different way and I think that really is what *The Hunger Games* did for me. (2015, lines 233-236 and 242-244)

Pom described their experience with WGS 450 as one that “definitely made me think about things that I don’t think I normally would have ever analyzed within the classroom setting [like] the educational system and what’s going on in the world” (2016, lines 33-36). It is not that Pom did not think about these issues, as an astute and curious

person Pom was immersed in school and current events, but that this class, through the lens of the story, put these issues in conversation in new and different ways. The topics we discussed were not necessarily new ideas, but the power of thinking about them through the story was reflected in Pom's interview. Pom said *The Hunger Games*,

brings you in because it is a really creative story so that keeps you interested right away. I think if people in the class weren't from a strong feminist theoretical background it helps them kind of understand what is going on. The storyline was important because you could identify as different characters throughout the story- or maybe not yourself personally, but someone you know or just a current event going on. (2015, lines 202-208)

Pom's thoughts about how the story can help students who may come into class with different levels of content specific knowledge (like feminist theory) or making it easier for students to look from different character's perspectives highlights the creative ways that storytelling can help students learn in the classroom.

Elizabeth also talks about learning with the story in her interview. Her own personal energy was amplified in the classroom as she talked with other students about the story. She said,

It was interesting to see, really bouncing ideas off my classmates and everything because- I think everybody had such different ideas and feelings on the story and what they were going to get from the class. Just asking someone else what they got from it was so interesting because it could be completely separate from what I got from it- from what I saw. It was interesting to see what parts of the story people prioritized...It was that whole idea of applying that feminist academic structure to [*The Hunger Games*]. (lines 56-63)

Elizabeth's learning was augmented by what others saw differently in the story.

She also found concreteness and relatability in learning with this story. It is not that we are talking about concepts related to gender, race, class, and ability in the abstract, but they are reflected in the characters the students are invested in. Elizabeth describes it this way,

It just that for a lot of [the concepts] you see a concrete example, you know. *The Hunger Games* is a really good place for that because it is relatable story...People that have nothing in common with Katniss feel very connected with her...So taking this relatable story and applying different ideas and theories to it you can really get a better example [of what we are learning]. It's a lot easier than just reading a couple of articles and then having a discussion, reading a couple of articles and having a discussion...Putting it into context of this world we've established and using one consistent story to talk about a bunch of different ideas is really helpful because you can see how they relate to each other...So, if you are talking about race, and disability, and sex workers separately that is still really impactful and meaningful but if you can talk about it in the context of one [story]...it's a lot easier to relate it back to real world stuff and to see it in actual situations we are dealing with. (2015, lines 261-277)

In reflecting on the power of storytelling in this class, Marie talked about the importance of Panem. As a reader, she thinks it is easy to see Panem as a “different world but [one] we could possibly get to and- well, people think it's in a setting that won't happen to us, but it was actually very on point to the things we deal with day to day” (Marie, 2015, lines 54-56). The idea that the world of Panem was not that different from our world was important to Marie. She describes learning with the story as a way that these ideas “click for people...you can think to yourself this isn't real, but I see these issues [in the story] and that helps you to relate it to the real world” (lines 99-100). She further described this way of learning as “seeing the things in action” (line 88). It was not just that we were learning important concepts, but we had a fictional world to insert

these ideas into that helped Marie to think about them more deeply. She describes it this way,

We would read and then we would talk about it [in class]...I would go home and re-read and be like I didn't even think that that- that didn't cross my mind, so that was really- that was a way to see the different themes and we'd talk about issues, but they were really in play in the book. So I guess it was just a way of working together and seeing things in play rather than just, "we learned about the issues and we are trying to see them in real life." We got to see them in a fictional setting. (lines 88-95)

### **Students' Reflections on Class Experiences**

Looking beyond the story with popular culture readings, academic articles, and guest speakers added depth to our learning. I crafted the class so that we would talk about various themes drawn from the trilogy and participate in learning projects outside of the classroom. WGS 450 was divided into three sections- Grounding, Exploring, and Creating- to guide our movement through the class. In the second section, Exploring, we use *The Hunger Games* story as well as additional essays, articles, and social media to examine what and how we could learn from this series. The guiding quote, included in this section of the syllabus, is from Neil Gaiman, noted science fiction and fantasy author, and it says, "Fiction allows us to slide into these other heads, these other places, and look through other eyes" (2011, p. 285). This is how we approached learning with the series during the class and it seems that attitude of curiosity followed the students after WGS 450 ended. When interviewed about the class one year later, students were asked to describe their experience in WGS 450 (semi-structured interview guide, question 3, Appendix B) with probes for them to talk about the readings, themes, and activities

from the class that resonated with them. For many, describing how they learned and connected with the class was a large part of their interview. The students consistently talked about how *The Hunger Games* story helped them to understand those themes more deeply and getting out of the classroom expanded where they imagined learning could take place. While there were a variety of topics we broached during the semester, the themes that emerged from the data with the most frequency are:

- Love
- Disability
- Hunger
- The Archives

It was not just that *The Hunger Games* story was a powerful way for the students to learn, but particular themes from the class resonated with them. In my analysis of the data, these themes emerged as the most often referred to and the ones that students used as examples to answer the interview questions.

### **Love**

Love in *The Hunger Games* was an important part of the story. The students spent time pushing back on staid ideas of love typified by discussions about Katniss merely choosing between boyfriends. They discussed how love can be a relationship shared between people, but it can be much more than that (field journal, 2014).

Reviewing my journal, I observed the students

[T]alking about where they saw love in the world even when it was not named as such and why they thought that pop culture wants to put such a narrow definition

on love. Love is radical and if we really loved the world around us like Katniss did, or Peeta, it could really change things. If we keep love as a romantic feeling, something that is connected with “The Bachelor” and giving out red roses to keep viewers watching then it is controlled, but if we see it as a powerful way to view the world, those in power might lose control. We might see each other as fully human and worth consideration. The tributes were seen as subhuman so that we could watch them on screen, but to fully consider someone’s humanity asks you to show empathy and compassion- all ideas of radical love. (lines 359-368)

*The Hunger Games* allowed WGS 450 students access to different ways of talking about love between different people in different ways. Exploring the nature of love in education is something the students wrote about during the class and returned to in their interviews. It is not as simple as merely teaching that we can love, but getting students to explore the notion of love as the “most powerful weapon in *The Hunger Games*” (Borsellino, 2010, p. 30). This kind of exploring pushed students to think about the society in which they live. Following hooks’ (1994) ideas of love in the classroom,

To answer these questions [students] had to think deeply about the society we live in, how we are taught to compete with one another. They had to think about capitalism and how it informs the way we think about love and care, the way we live in our bodies, the way we try to separate mind from body. (p. 199)

In a story that features weapons ranging from bows and arrows to genetically modified animals, students discussed how love could be the most dangerous weapon of all because love gives people hope. And Paulo Freire (2007) plainly says, “Without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible” (p. 45). By teaching with *The Hunger Games* one way students think about love, hope, and tomorrow is through fiction; if we can read about a different future in fiction we can begin to imagine our world differently.

**Student voices.** Jubilee writes about hope and love for a class assignment saying,

Each action [Katniss] makes, in each moment she puts others before herself she is filling everyone with hope. That love and hope is stronger than fear. That is probably the core point that brings anyone to any movement. Hope, it brings you together. (89-92)

This flies in the face of one way that many people discussed this story, as merely a love triangle where Katniss' defining choice is between Peeta, the baker who loves her from afar, or Gale, her trusted hunting partner. If *The Hunger Games* is simply an action story disguised as way to discover which boyfriend Katniss will choose then we are missing so much of what we can learn from this story. Elizabeth came to this class, in part, because her boyfriend reduced the story to its love triangle saying, "I'm tired of Katniss whining about boys and it's just a teenage love triangle. I hate it so much. It's just a dumb girly story" (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 46-48). Exploring why we assume that "girly" stories are dumb and why how love plays a part on that was a major idea for the students.

Borsellino (2010) defines love in *The Hunger Games* as much more than fickle, teenaged feelings because love means "compassion, loyalty, empathy, and the bonds of friendship, family, and romance" (p. 30). This book creates a society that is built on the back of greed, despair, and fear, so finding love, in all the ways it manifests in the story, becomes a subversive act for these characters. We see love where it is not supposed to be as Katniss volunteers to take her sister's place, as strong, available Finnick marries the flawed and broken Annie, and as Cinna, who armors Katniss in clothes and confidence, says if he could he'd bet on her. The story takes place in a society where people are



divided into Districts and travel as well as communication between them is strictly controlled. Jubilee notes in a paper she wrote for the class, “In Panem the citizens have been pushed to become distant from their feelings of togetherness, and even family, because of the reaping and the games” (Jubilee, 2014, 58-59). Caring for one another is actively discouraged to maintain order, so finding connections and loving those around you becomes a radical act. In a system where caring for others is seen as a radical act love not defined by competition and struggle but compassion and cooperation is a rebellious notion (field journal, 2014).

Elizabeth finds this understanding of love much more powerful. This is not a “dumb girly story,” but a way of looking at love which impacts the way she looks at many other aspects of her life,

[I] liked the chapter where we talked about love as a radical act, which I had heard that so many times and I thought it was total bull. I had heard the expression so many times and I was like, “oh, yeah love is super radical, guys. Ok, cool, but really.” Unpacking the idea of what is love and how do we capitalize off it. When I thought about it in the context of *The Hunger Games* I was like, “oh, yeah I guess it is super radical that she loves Peeta *and* Gale, cool,” but then it occurred to me, “man, she really loves her family, she loves her community, she loves her little sister” and that’s really radical that she would make those choices to benefit them at her own expense. Thinking about it that way it was really amazing. But it totally turned a lot of ideas about books that I enjoyed it totally turned it on its ear. Re-reading old stuff is interesting now because I can see stuff like that in a different way. (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 63-74)

It is the realization of the radical nature of love as well as Elizabeth’s admission that revisiting other material is interesting because she can read it with a different perspective that reinforces that teaching with these stories is powerful.

Pom shared a similar realization thinking about the relationship between Katniss and District 11 tribute, Rue. Katniss mourned Rue's death on camera and that act became the lightning rod for rebellion. Because of that act of love, the rest of the story exists. Pom said, "Katniss' love for Rue [shows] how...love doesn't need to be a romantic thing in order to be powerful or revolutionary" (Pom, 2015, lines 97-99). In fact, a platonic, non-heterosexual love with this much power and consequence is a powerful force for disrupting our usual heteronormative narrative on love. By looking into this story, Pom's revelation that love does not have to be romantic to be revolutionary repositions what kinds of love are recognized and given power.

Amber considered the shallow nature of the love triangle and how this story tackles the concept of love on a deeper level (field journal, 2014, lines 265-266). At the time, our state had recently passed a constitutional amendment defining marriage as being between one man and one woman. In connecting to current events, students used *The Hunger Games* as a place to start talking about love, but connected it to ways that we define what love is and whose love is legitimized in our state. Love is not just an emotion felt between two people, but when connected with public policy becomes something that can be used to control. Who we love and how we love is deeply personal, but there are some forms of love that are less accepted and more controlled than others, as the students saw during our state's campaign to revise our constitution (field journal, 2014). This conversation led the students to dig deeper into ways to read this story and how to connect the ideas found in fiction to the academic articles and their own lived experiences.

With the help of a feminist performing artist and teacher who skyped into the class (Day 8, syllabus, Appendix A), we discussed Katniss as a complicated character. One of the reasons she is complicated is because of how she loves. If she only had to choose between loving Peeta or Gale, Katniss might be easier to understand. At least she would fit the mold that is set out for teenage girls, which is to have no more important choice than selecting a lover. However, we talked about love as an active process and explored how it is defined in many ways throughout the book (field journal, 2014, lines 311-312). For example, Katniss loves her sister deeply and without reservation, but her love for her mother is much more measured and distrustful. She loves her community, even though they were the people that would have let her starve if she had not started hunting illegally. Amber added that Katniss could go on fighting the Capitol because she kept finding people to love. While she started out only loving Prim, she kept falling in love with people throughout the books like Rue, Peeta, and Finnick (field journal, 2014). By expanding a definition of love, we were exploring all the ways that it appeared in *The Hunger Games* and the ways it appears around us even if we did not name it as such.

Students continued to ponder what our world would look like if we saw each other as fully human and worth consideration (field journal, 2014, line 365). In the books, this looks like small acts of love that have huge consequences such as Katniss volunteering to take her sister's place in the Games and singing for Rue's death. I noted in my field journal that students reflected, "it is love and seems small, but without it the spark of rebellion might not have caught on" (field journal, 2014, lines 369-370). When viewed by others, these acts ask the fictional characters, as well as readers, to redefine

what we think of as love (field journal, 2014, lines 368-371). If we define love not as a limited heteroromantic feeling shared between two people, but in the vision of authors like bell hooks (1994) who names love as part of her epistemology, and Paulo Freire for whom love is an action to transform domination. We see this concept as a much larger one that works for a socially just world. Freire shows us this saying, “The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love ...Because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is commitment to others” (in hooks, 1984/2000, p. 164). We learn to talk to each other, and about the world, from a different perspective because we love the world.

Marie, in a critical reflection paper written for class, does not diminish the romantic love that Katniss struggles with in the books saying, “while I enjoy the romantic portions of the book, I took more from the other facets of love shown” (Marie, 2015, lines 20-22). Romance is certainly part of love, and an important part of being a young adult, but Marie found more than romance in this story. Katniss is the character whose love life gets the most attention, but Marie also acknowledges other ways that love appears in *The Hunger Games*. She uses the examples of how

Finnick’s love for Annie was used against him so that he will bend to the Capitol’s will. How the jabberjays in *Catching Fire* distort voices of Katniss and Finnick’s loved ones to hurt them, are also really potent examples of love being used against characters. I found this an interesting aspect to the books and to this article, which also used *1984* as a great example of love, not only being an extraordinary political act but as a weapon to be used against someone. (Marie, 2014, lines 39-45)

Marie comes back to Katniss' love for both her sister, Prim, and Rue, the tribute that reminds her so much of her sister, writing,

But more than Prim, the most important instance of love that is shown anywhere in the trilogy is Katniss' relationship to Rue. This is where love becomes a radical act...I imagine that any alliance made in the arenas up to that point had ended in betrayal and certain death. I certainly do not think there would have been any amount of grieving on the part of the living party. But Katniss and Rue change this. Katniss' earlier showing of love for Prim spills over to Rue, who is similar to Prim in manner and size. When Katniss sings to Rue, and later surrounds her body with flowers, it is the first emotional shock that I felt as a reader. Rue's death, and how Katniss reacted to it, is an event that continues to have influence in the next two books so it is important, not only as one of my favorite parts of the series, but as an act of love that was unprecedented and began the domino effect of events of the rebellion. (Marie, 2014, lines 28-37)

Love is generally discussed as a social good, but research and anecdotal evidence reminds us of harm perpetuated under the guise of love such as domestic and child abuse and neglect. In class we pushed back on a singular idea of love's goodness (field journal, 2014). Katniss' mother loved her father so much that when he died she could no longer care for her daughters, leading an 11-year-old Katniss to become an illegal hunter to put food on the table. In *The Hunger Games*, one of the last things Katniss tells her mother before she leaves for the Capitol is, "You can't leave again...You can't clock out and leave Prim on her own. There's no me now to keep you both alive" (Collins, 2008, p. 35). Referencing the depression her mother succumbed to after her father's death, we discussed in class how her mother sank into herself and forced Katniss to be the strong one, something that should not have been asked of a child (field journal, 2014, lines 375-379). We must not fall prey to only talking about the goodness of love and forget its role

in patriarchal culture which “linked to notions of possession, to paradigms of domination and submission wherein it assumed one person would give love and another person receive it” (hooks, 2000, p. 101). Love has the power to help and the power to hurt and we should be talking about all of the ways that it is used.

Students, in their interviews and class assignments, identify the multiple ways that love is wielded in this trilogy. For all the ways that we find love in *The Hunger Games*, few are simple. The story is built on a game that is rigged to make sure those in power win and those without power do not. But it is in those moments of connection, of love, between the characters we find places to deepen our own thoughts on what it means to love. Love is not merely the delayed wish fulfillment that assumes girls are waiting patiently for their knight in shining armor to rescue them, or even that the strong girl who hunts merely needs to choose a boyfriend, but *The Hunger Games* situates love as a powerful force for social change.

### **Disability**

The Games are but one of Panem’s tools used to control and terrorize. The Districts are completely cut off from one another and they only see each other during the yearly Games. Schooling only equips children for work in their District’s industry. As such, the people of Panem do not know much about each other. When Rue and Katniss begin to know one another, we get a bit of insight into Panem’s disregard for those with disabilities. This can be grounded in an exchange between Rue and Katniss as they explore the ways people are treated in District 11 and District 12,

“These aren’t for sun, they’re for darkness,” exclaims Rue. “Sometimes, when we harvest through the night, they’ll pass out a few pairs to those of us highest in the trees. Where the torchlight doesn’t reach. One time, this boy Martin, he tried to keep his pair. Hid it in his pants. They killed him on the spot.”

“They killed a boy for taking these?” I [Katniss] say.

“Yes, and everyone knew he was no danger. Martin wasn’t right in the head. I mean, he still acted like a three-year-old. He just wanted the glasses to play with,” says Rue.

Hearing this makes me feel like District 12 is some sort of safe haven. Of course people keel over from starvation all the time, but I can’t imagine the Peacekeepers murdering a simpleminded child. There’s a little girl, one of Greasy Sae’s grandkids, who wanders around the Hob. She’s not quite right, but she’s treated sort of like a pet. (Collins, 2008, p. 284-285)

There are many kinds of disabilities, mental, physical, and emotional, described in *The Hunger Games*. This excerpt shows one kind of disability talked about in one particular way, but many characters in this series are ripe for discussion of disability. BeeTee, a past winner from District 3, sustains an injury that paralyzes him; we meet two former Games winners in *Catching Fire*, Annie and Old Mags, who are non-verbal; and Haymitch, District 12 mentor, self-medicates to handle sending hometown children to their deaths every year.

Even our main characters are not exempt from injury. Peeta lost a leg in *The Hunger Games* and in *Mockingjay* we read how he struggles to keep up with the team as a result of his injury. Katniss suffers hearing loss during a large explosion in the arena and that injury is used against the Capitol in *Catching Fire*. These injuries are glossed over (Katniss), or completely ignored (Peeta) in the movies. The altered story line, from books to movies, allowed the students to discuss how disabilities are represented in our media. The novels’ treatment of disability asked the students to grapple with when and

how we talk about disability, and when it was erased from the conversation. There is power in having disability represented in our heroes, but that is couched in a context that must acknowledge the way society views adversity, ability, and victory. In WGS 450, *The Hunger Games* was a platform that allowed students to explore how we read, view, and talk about disability.

**Student voices.** Almost all characters in *The Hunger Games* universe are dealing with mental and/or physical traumas. We meet characters whose bodies are broken by hard labor in mines, factories, and fields and The Games themselves are tools of terror and control that Panem wields to control the populace. Elizabeth described it this way in a class assignment,

In *The Hunger Games*, all citizens of the districts are in some way traumatized by the circumstances of the masses. Every district participates in the Games. Some districts may have more traumatizing day-to-day experiences, like District 12's consistently dangerous mining industry, but everyone is forced to participate in the yearly punishment. By taking a community's children and having the children kill each other on national television, the Capitol is flexing its strength and bending the community a little more. The trauma of seeing family members, neighbors, and friends murdered for the viewing pleasure is an oppressive force used by the governing body of Panem to keep themselves in power. (Elizabeth, 2014, lines 14-21)

The spectacle of the Games is required viewing in Panem. People are forced to participate in the selection of their own friends and family members, just to watch their televised deaths. After surviving the Games, where the environment is engineered to kill and social agreements like mutual cooperation and the taboo against murder are



disregarded for the Capitol's entertainment, the victors are living reminders of the yearly trauma. Jubilee describes it this way in a class assignment

In Panem, you become a potential tribute by existing. You are a piece in The Capitol's game to be played with...No one is left without a scar sometimes it's physical from actual battle but then you have people who have scars from being punished, those who have starved. It doesn't stop there the Capitol is set up as an extremely abusive system, a lot of people suffer from mental illness especially the surviving tributes, but then there is death as well. [It is] a scar no one can escape. (Jubilee, 2014, lines 94-100)

Blythe Woolston's (2010) essay "Bent, shattered, and mended: Wounded minds in *The Hunger Games*" helped the students begin to talk about disability in the books and then begin to talk about the way that disability is constructed and discussed in our lives (field journal, 2014). Jubilee remarked before one class session that the assigned readings made ideas about disability tangible for her. They were not just issues that we were talking about in an abstract way. Jubilee explains how fiction allows her to think about herself through the characters and made connections to her own life in this part of the story (field journal, 2014, lines 416-418). Because Jubilee was reading about characters she cared for, their disabilities were part of who they were, but also were a jumping off point to think about disability in our world. In this short time, we would not have a definitive discussion about disability, but could see how using *The Hunger Games* facilitated how we approached the idea of disability. In my field journal, I reflected on how I want to "dig deep into the text and connect with the world we live; however, we will just start a conversation as this topic is complex and intersectional, but there are strong connections to be made with *The Hunger Games*" (lines 419-425).

In the novel, Peeta loses a leg because of an injury he sustained in the arena; his amputation was erased in the movie. In interviews, students spent a lot of time discussing how disability was left out of the movie, particularly Peeta's amputated leg. Amber brings this up saying,

The disability theme, oh my gosh. I was so upset. I watched the movie before re-reading that book and so realizing that an entire piece that went through the entire novel was left out and then- through the films you don't see that. He's not disabled [in the movie]. He's perfectly fine. That's a whole other part of Katniss that drew her to Peeta and missing that out not only loses a part of her character but you lose an entire struggle for Peeta...you don't get that perspective. (Amber, 2015, lines 115-121)

Harper talks about the difference in Peeta's character from the book to the movie outlining both his physical disability, but also his mental disability, when the Capitol took away his ability to distinguish what was really happening from what was their created nightmares. As the rebellion against the Capitol intensifies, Peeta does not know who is the enemy and who is a friend. Harper describes it this way,

Peeta... is vulnerable. He's found this place where he is disabled and glamorized. He's faced with a situation where he is completely confused and...he is trying to be himself in all of it. He is confused, asking what is real and not real, and he is being tortured. His life is crashing around him. Sometimes life does that to you. You don't know what is real or not real. When people are telling you one way and you are trying to understand this way of life you are just kind of stuck there and you are like, "wait a minute." When your life is one big gray area, how do you stay yourself? (Harper, 2015, lines 540-549)

In asking, "how do you stay yourself," Harper is using Peeta's story to think about the complexities of disability that we discussed in class. It is not as simple as losing his leg

and dealing with physical injury, but adding mental trauma to a pivotal character who continues to live and contribute to the world around him lets us ask tough questions about how we view disability in our own world. My reflections on this topic show how the class is growing through the story. I note how I am glad to see the students add complexity to their critique and class discussion so they

see the world in ways that implicate individuals and the systems they operate in. The students are going beyond simple comparisons...[and] jumped into the idea of using the books as ways of thinking about the world...The narratives we have about disability are limited and preconceived. We need to rethink how we see and understand disability to see how we are connected to it. (field journal, 2014, lines 500-503, 509, 515-517)

It is more than the individual's coping with a disability, but a systemic investigation of a world that does not have room for those who are disabled.

In her interview, Marie discusses the loss of characters' disabilities in the movies in general,

Disability was interesting to me because, actually in books and movies and all sorts of things disability is not really portrayed very often. And there are so many different forms of it. I thought it was interesting in the books there was a lot of disability and that is completely ignored by people who read them or watch the movies- because they are not in the movies. (Marie, 2015, lines 42-47)

But Marie's reflection paper shows her thoughts around the exclusion of Peeta's amputation, but larger issues around inclusion and representation in the media. They ways that narratives about disability are constructed and how students get to see characters that are like them in the young adult literature they read.

The things we read for our day on disabilities also made me think about our society. I wondered why the filmmakers simply chose to ignore the issue of Peeta's leg amputation, an event that continues to affect Peeta through the rest of the series. I have even made excuses for them by thinking that it was cut because of budgetary reasons. Now, I no longer do that. I think it is wonderful that things like disability, both physical ones and mental ones, are touched upon in a young adult series. The ways these things are portrayed are also important because Peeta's amputation is not the focus of his life. It shows that people with a disability are still capable of giving love and receiving it and also that their disability does not control their lives. Both the social issues in these articles caused me to really do some thinking on representation in the media. It is important for people everywhere to have something to look to. By just glimpsing what is on our televisions, we might think that only white straight individuals have a chance at happiness or romance. Representation changes that for the better, for people of color, LGBT people, and people with disabilities. Some changes are happening and I can only hope for more. (Marie, 2015, lines 80-93)

The class talked about how they did not initially read many of the characters as disabled; disability becomes something we do not see unless it is pointed out to us (field journal, 2014, lines 450-451). This led to a discussion around ideas of who gets seen as disabled, whether mental and physical disabilities are viewed in the same ways, and how race and class get implicated in these narratives (field journal, 2014, lines 452-454). Pom was astounded by the article that pitted people with disabilities against each other in competition for a modified van (Jilani, 2013). The parallels to the Games were obvious as the organizers of the competition set people against one another for a life-changing prize, but Pom also discussed how things we think of as basic, like transportation, are used to control people with disabilities (field journal, 2014, lines 429-432). By looking at disability as something that limits people and limiting the ways people can access basic needs, like transportation, our society creates the Games in our own world. As a class, the students continued talking about how if we do not see disability in the fiction we are

reading then we, as a group that identifies as predominately, but not completely, able-bodied, can pretend it does not exist (field journal, 2014).

Collectively, the students discussed other characters that got defined by their disabilities. If their disability is all we understand about them then we do not see their full humanity. Characters in this series have disabilities, but for the most part Collins chose not to make their impairment their defining characteristic. We are able to see them as more complex people, to the point of overlooking their disability (field journal, 2014, lines 458-460). In *Catching Fire* surviving victors are reaped back into the Games, regardless of previous injury. A scene in the movie *Catching Fire*, but not the novel, shows all of the tributes on stage together, holding hands. One tribute is missing a hand and, in protest to the Capitol, his stump is raised into the air. For Jubilee, the scene in the movie is poignant, but until this class she had not considered all the disabilities, mental, physical, and emotional, that were gathered on that stage. She felt concern while watching the characters on stage, but quickly forget them when they were dumped back into the arena to kill one another. As a class, the students could not remember what happened to the tribute missing his hand. We forget him as soon as we stopped looking at him (field journal, 2014, lines 464-469). As a class, we discussed who is seen as entertainment, again drawing back to the people competing for a modified van, and who gets to do the looking. (field journal, 2014, lines 474-475). Elizabeth connected the theme of disability to the ideas of love we talked about previously saying “If we can be convinced that love is shallow and consumable, then revolution can be viewed the same way...If there is a revolution where people with disabilities don’t see themselves then

how can they participate?” (field journal, 2014, lines 477-480). In class discussion, the students were adding complexity and nuance to hard questions and seeing the world in ways that implicate both individuals and the systems they operate in (field journal, 2014, lines 501-502).

Many forms of disability are represented in *The Hunger Games* world. Students were able to use the story, additional readings, and our class dialogue to think more deeply about disability as both an individual and systemic concern. This was not a definitive disability or disability theory discussion, but ideas of representation, lived experiences, and visibility connected for students in new ways.

## **Hunger**

Somehow Rue and I must find a way to destroy their food. I’m pretty sure feeding themselves will be a tremendous struggle...That the Careers have been better fed growing up is actually to their disadvantage, because they don’t know how to be hungry. Not the way Rue and I do. (Collins, 2008, p. 208).

In a series with hunger in the title, it is unsurprising that hunger was a major theme in my data. As part of their media, *The Hunger Games* partnered with the World Food Programme and Feeding America to remind us “no matter where you live, hunger isn’t as far away as you might think—often it is right around the corner” (<http://hungergames.wfp.org/>). For many, thinking about hunger brings to mind children in far off places. This myth often allows us to overlook the hunger that is close to home. For this class, it meant 170,000 people in our state received emergency food assistance every week, food pantries have to turn people away because they are empty, and three of

our cities rank in the national top 30 (two in the top 5) for food hardship rates (<http://www.thefoodeffect.org/all-about-hunger/hunger-facts/>). Our campus is situated in a food desert<sup>5</sup> and the city we live in was rated as the #4 city nationwide with the greatest food hardships (thefoodeffect.org).

Katniss and Rue work and live hungry. Until Rue teamed up with Katniss, she had never had a piece of meat that she did not have to share (Collins, 2008, p. 202). Being full in Districts 11 and 12 is practically unknown. But hunger is not a simple issue in the books or in our world. People are starving in District 12 while the elite in the Capitol routinely binge and purge at Romanesque parties. Peeta's family is considered well off in District 12, but he confesses, "practically everything we eat is stale" (Collins, 2010, p. 311). Without a critical eye, it is easy to set up the Capitol as the ones that "have" and the Districts as the one that "have not," but hunger is not that simple. Districts 1 and 2, which are closer to the Capitol, routinely have enough food whereas Tigris, a former Games stylist, has moldy cheese and dented cans to offer Katniss and her team to eat when they took shelter in her second hand shop in *Mockingjay*. It is not simply about physical hunger either. I note in my field journal that we talked about "hunger as a literal idea. There were characters who were hungry. But it is also a metaphor because they were also hungry for things like freedom and power" (lines 529-

---

<sup>5</sup> The CDC defines a food desert as an area that lacks access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet. (<http://www.cdc.gov/features/fooddeserts/>)

541). Students learned hunger is more than simply an individual not having the calories they need, but is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed on many levels.

**Student voices.** The subject of hunger shaped how Elizabeth read the books. In a question asked to open the class, she was able to think about the story in a different way, to employ perspective shifting, and ask new questions of the world she was reading about.

In the first week, there was a question raised: “Do you think everybody in the Capitol has enough to eat?” and it’s been on my mind while re-reading. Keeping that question in mind has shaped a lot of how I look at the books. It’s made me wonder a lot more about the Capitol than I previously had, as well as the state of other people in the districts. I had previously written everyone in the Capitol off as the same type of person with the same group of opinions and the same privileges. If some people living in the Capitol could be starving, some people could be seeing the situation from another perspective. Even people who participate in the lavish parties may see the underbelly of the beast. (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 32-39)

This line of questioning followed class discussion that inquired if everyone in the Capitol was like the people Katniss saw at the lavish parties. The students pondered who served at the parties? Who planned them? Who educated the children of the people attending and working at the parties? What do university students do in the Capitol? With these questions in mind, students were asked how hunger could exist around us, with some having enough and others not. We live in a world that has lavish parties like in the book, but people still have to plan and serve at them. There is not a leisure class without a working class. It was through this theme that the students dug deeper into ideas of hunger in our own world.



The students talked about hunger in various spaces, in fiction, internationally, and in our state, but hunger is also on our campus. Most of the class did not know our campus sits in a food desert or that our university has a food pantry for students and staff to access. It can be hard to think we could be in class with people that are hungry, that there are those around us choosing between food and other necessities, or perhaps hardest of all, to be the hungry person in class. These students had no trouble discussing hunger that seemed beyond our classroom, but bringing it to our campus shocked them into silence (field journal, 2014). We talked about the complexity of hunger, saying if there was hunger even in the Capitol how can we think about hunger in our university (field journal, 2014). First, students reflected back to Patricia Hill Collins (2007) where she used the university as a place to consider privilege and oppression as she urged readers to “examine your position” (p. 83). By asking students to look both oppression and privilege that resides in the university system they inhabit, using Collin’s work as a base, we complicated the binary notions of having and not having to see how hunger could exist in our university.

Jubilee talked about how hunger can be confronted in reading stories like *The Hunger Games*. Reading and talking about hunger issues in class, made her think about local food issues differently,

It makes you not able to distance yourself from [hunger] anymore. You can’t ignore it as much. It’s another place to remind you. When you are reading books your like oh, we are like I believe #1 now in food scarcity and instability in the state...it puts it in your face and says this is something you can’t ignore. You’re going to this book so that you can get out of your head, get out of reality, but no you can’t because this is here, too. It reminds you that you can’t really get out of

it. You can't escape from it. You can't just distract yourself from it because [hunger] affects you, too... There are so many food deserts and it makes you want to get involved ...[*The Hunger Games*] that gives you inspiration. (Jubilee, 2015, lines 338-361)

In Amber's interview she saw *The Hunger Games* as a place to recognize the issues.

While it may not happen with just reading the stories alone, but connecting with the food websites that put our local hunger issue in perspective and talking to someone working on hunger issues on our campus made the issue more real.

I think we don't want to recognize that these things are happening especially with the area of the food desert and the starvation in NC. Realizing that we are impacted by that so closely. Even at the university with the food pantry and everything- you don't want to accept those things as true. And being presented with the statistics and the facts on all of that you kind of have to take a step back and think how do I process this? I had no idea and then having the fiction there to show you what could happen if people don't process it makes it kind of scary. And it's a real scary. It's not a "oh no poor Katniss" it's- these people are surrounding me. (Amber 2015, lines 277-286)

But more than that, she feels a connection. Reading the books and learning in class allowed her to see the ways that our campus reflects ideas found in *The Hunger Games*. The knowledge of the problem feels connected to what Amber sees on campus.

We have Food Friday on campus now and so there is collection boxes of can goods to go to the food pantry. Working in the housing office we get call-"are there any pick ups?" I have to say pretty much every other week "no we don't have any food." Nothing's been donated and that hurts because I feel like I have a connection to it and it's not because I'm a student in need and can't eat but because I have knowledge about those students and I have met the people who are impacting them. The passion they have behind it. The dystopian societies are our reality and without reading them in fiction you wouldn't see that in real life. (Amber, 2015, lines 298-307)

Amber continued to connect in her critical reflection paper. She talked about how through the books and our discussion she became aware of the issue. Around the time we were discussing hunger in class, the campus food pantry was robbed, and she took time to reflect on that action as well, showing perhaps a different perspective than if she we had not talked about hunger in class.

Throughout our discussion of hunger in North Carolina and the U.S., I continued to be shocked by the large numbers of people that go without food in our state. Once I consider the amount of people in Greensboro alone that go hungry every night then think about the robbery of the Spartan Pantry, I am not surprised by others desperate acts for survival. By just simply knowing facts about the food source systems within NC my perception of hunger and starvation within North Carolina changed...It is because of this that I can now understand why someone would need to rob a food pantry, one that limits access to students. It is also because of my new education about hunger in NC that I feel more action needs to be taken and others need to learn the harsh realities, so that people do not have to resort to desperate acts, like stealing from a food pantry. (Amber, 2015, lines 33-45)

She continued,

I imagine that the people who stole from the Spartan Pantry were in serious need of food. Hunger attacks people at the core of their beings, many people live their lives for their next meal, starving or not. Those who starve worry when their next meal may come while those who do not suffer from wanting; wondering what luxurious or speedy dining facility they will eat at next. For me, food is powerful. But with that power, should come knowledge and education; and that access can change lives. That is how you win the hunger games: knowledge and education. (Amber, 2015, lines 47-52)

In Pom's interview, they connected hunger to current events, volunteering, and ideas of going abroad to perform charity work.

The [class] where we took hunger literally was really interesting because that is something my family is really big on with poverty in the area and I think with that reading that's one of the things that really draws me back to what is going on in Baltimore. Kind of the dynamic of Capitol and districts. And it even made me think about my mom. [She] volunteers for this organization and they provide diapers and children's books for families in need and it's kind of this idea of what charity is. People go abroad to do charity and not do it in their own communities because they refuse to believe that there can be those that need it. So that made me think about it with Greensboro being a food desert... and how it's not talked about because- like I didn't know we had a food pantry until the pastor came in and talked about it. (Pom, 2015, lines 41-56)

Marie took time to reflect in her class assignments about hunger in a broader context. Using *The Hunger Games* story, but pushing beyond simply reading the narrative to imagining what goes on behind the scenes. The Capitol is portrayed by Katniss, as the first person narrator, as merely a city of excessive parties and over the top politics, but in glimpses through other characters she can see what life might be like for some who live there. That is where our imagination can let us ask questions of characters like Tigris,

This...made me think of the things we learn in *Mockingjay* about the Capitol that we were not aware of before. When Katniss and her team are inside the Capitol, they see that not all of the apartments are created in the same extravagant way (for use of the Avoxes). There is also the example of Tigris, a woman who used to be a stylist for the Games but got displaced once she became older. It is when they are staying with Tigris that Katniss and her team see that everything in the Capitol is not as good as it is made out to be. They have moldy food and even ratty clothes. This shows me, going hand-in-hand with the Tumblr article, that even people who supposedly living in luxury may be having a hard time of it. This is easily relatable to real life and other things we have learned, such as our lesson on hunger...People perceive the United States as a great place where many can come and make a better life of it but we have the same problems. (Marie, 2014, lines 20-32)

Elizabeth's class assignments had her asking questions about the marketing of *The Hunger Games* and its relation to food. Hers was a different perspective, to look at the marketing of the movie, noting that Subway was a major sponsor. At the Subway restaurant on our campus, there was a window advertisement encouraging you to buy a sandwich and win your own victory tour, which upon reflection, was an uncomfortable notion as only people who killed all of their peers in the Games went on a tour (field journal, 2014). The images from the movie felt incongruent to her,

The advertising for *The Hunger Games* has been peculiar. In a story about hunger, a large chunk of the advertising for the second film was sponsored by Subway. The commercials largely reduce the story to the Capitol's manufactured "Girl on Fire" image and neuters the point of [the movie] down to simply noting that Katniss is 'bold.' Another commercial even features the starving residents of district 11 with images of the "Fiery Footlongs" beneath them. (Elizabeth, 2014, lines 83-87)

Marie talked briefly in her interview about the Subway Victory Tour because that advertising campaign made her uncomfortable. She remarked, if you "go on one of those that means I've killed 23 other kids" (2015, line 119-120). For Marie, understanding the media around *The Hunger Games* at more than "just the face value" (line 122) let her think about food, advertising, and the story from different perspectives. By attaching their advertising to *The Hunger Games* without more than a superficial understanding of the story, Subway seemed to want to honor victory and celebrity, without looking at what it took for Katniss and Peeta to be on that tour.

Framing hunger as a local issue through the lens of the fictional Panem allowed students to see hunger on our campus as a pressing issue. Many were unaware of how

close to home hunger was for our campus and *The Hunger Games* was a conduit for starting this conversation.

### **The Archives**

Our class partnered with an archivist from our university library with lessons built off of this passage from *The Hunger Games*:

The arenas are historic sites, preserved after the Games. Popular destinations for Capitol residents to visit, to vacation. Go for a month, rewatch the Games, tour the catacombs, visit the sites where the deaths took place. You can even take part in reenactments.

They say the food is excellent. (Collins, 2008, p. 144-145)

We looked at our campus and our histories with a critical lens. Lorenzo (2014) says that reading science fiction, as an exercise in imagination, “allows us to sharpen our vision and develop our critical capacities” (p. 2) to critique our own society. By reading science fiction we can contemplate whether what we know about ourselves is the full truth or a partial telling of history that relies on myth and assumption. This is a unique place to begin to understand ourselves by understanding our own history.

Reading that passage alongside Sarah Brennan’s assertion that “we are Katniss’ real audience” (2010, p. 5) students explored a deceptively easy question, “Are we the Capitol or the Districts?” Students think through nuanced ideas of privilege, oppression, and ways they can be located in various spaces of oppression and privilege at the same time. It is in moving beyond a simple yes or no answer that we have to look at what Collins (2007) describes as the three main dimensions of oppression: institutional, symbolic, and individual (p. 77). In my field journal I note how students begin to feel

uncomfortable, shifting in their seats or looking to see how others are reacting, as we talked about the ways that we use space like the campus or local military parks in the same ways that we critique the Capitol citizens for doing with the arenas. It is not enough that students recognize the ideas, but that they are making deeper connections with the ideas from the book. We end this class with Harper's question: What does it mean that all of this history exists, but we aren't taught it? (lines 618-620 and 640-641). This lesson is not about merely gaining favor or disadvantage based on identities like gender, class, or race, but looking at how those are interwoven into our institutions, language, and relationships.

**Student voices.** In WGS 450, students initially argued that they were part of a District, as they sympathized with Katniss and saw the Capitol as the antagonist in this series. As the class progressed, many of the students began to identify with Capitol privileges (field journal, 2014). This was an uncomfortable realization, but one that allowed them to think more deeply about the intertwining nature of privilege and oppression. In one of her reflection papers, Marie summed it up saying,

These lessons had us looking at our own society and seeing how we are not so different from the Capitol. Specifically, postulating whether we qualify as Capitol citizens or citizens of the districts has possibly been the most fascinating topic we have covered in the course. (Marie, 2014, lines 8-11)

By going into the university archives, we could use the fictional space of Panem as way to look at our own university history and ask an initial question, "are we the Capitol or the Districts?" In asking that question of the story, but looking into the history

of our campus, students can make connections about our own history through the story. It is not a neat history, not one that easily defines us as privileged or oppressed. Further, our privilege many not even be simply something that we, as individuals, possess unlinked from our racial, classed, and gendered identities and outside of communities to which we belong. Pom, in one of their class papers, thinks of it this way,

We were asked throughout the semester whether we identified with the Districts or the Capitol of Panem. Originally, I would have suggested that I am, at times, part of both the Districts and the Capitol. After evaluating my privilege throughout the semester I have found otherwise. I think that, if anything, we should take away from this class a firm understanding in our own privilege and how it affects other people in our communities and in a global retrospect. (Pom, 2014, lines 37-43)

Before our archives trip, I urged students to think about how we know the history of the places we inhabit, including our campus and our city. The city in which our university is situated hosted a revolutionary war battle and there is a national park built on that battlefield. History has happened all around us, but how we recognize that history and use the spaces, like the military parks, is an interesting subject. Do we use them in the ways that are described in the passage that starts this section, as places to vacation, tour, and reenact war?

Students were assigned to look at the battleground park's website and reflect on the passage that uses the old arenas as tourist destinations. The question students reflected on was, "How did you judge the Capitol citizens who vacationed in the arenas?" The students uniformly felt "disgust at the Capitol citizens for vacationing in the arenas" (field journal, 2014, lines 614-615). We then linked to the park's website to talk about



how the park is marketed as a place for recreation that just happens to have historical roots and how most of the students had been to the park to jog, walk dogs, or participate in other forms of recreation. The students expressed feelings of being uncomfortable with the idea of entertainment on a former battlefield where soldiers died (field journal, 2014). Using *The Hunger Games* to think about local history is one way that Lorenzo (2014) urges the use of science fiction showing how the “stories present us with a wealth of ideas by which to probe our assumptions and go about rethinking what we want from society, economics, and government” (p. 210).

There is not a simple solution that solves the issues of modern use of historical spaces; students agreed that they would rather a park be there instead of a shopping mall or no marker of the battlefield at all, but our dismissal of this history by using it mostly as a jogging trail was disturbing to them when we think that people died there. With this exercise, students began to connect how we do many of the things we are critical of the Capitol for doing in the trilogy (field journal, 2014, lines 618-619). This drew the class back to a conversation we had been having all semester about navigating the complexities of privilege and oppression (field journal, 2014, line 621) in both the fictional world of Panem and our own world.

Transitioning our reflection from the larger city history to our university history students were introduced to how the archives were a place to explore the university through the lens of a Games arena. Students spend hours every week on campus, but do not often think of the history of the buildings and spaces they occupy. For a class on feminist education, this is especially relevant as our university started as a state normal

college for women in the late 1800s. In her interview, Jubilee reflected on what she learned in the archives saying, “The things about the women’s school were really powerful. The fact that the students stood up for so much... Learning the stuff in archives I feel like was empowering, important, uplifting, and powerful information to know about our school” (Jubilee, 2015, lines 115-116 and 146-148).

Using pictures, historical artifacts, and a personable storytelling style our archivist told us a campus history that includes a dormitory fire in which all the students safely evacuated themselves, a typhoid epidemic in which we lost 2% of the student population, and periods of campus racial and gender desegregation. Our campus has hosted controversial political speakers, a former first lady, and more than one student-led protest. Some students in this class have been university orientation leaders, so they have heard parts of our history, but as a whole tend to regulate it as side knowledge and not integrate it into current lived experience of the university (field journal, 2014, lines 632-633). Without a connection to the history of place our campus feels like a place to rush through not a place to learn with.

Elizabeth was struck with how a powerful, controversial lecture by a Black Panther occurred in what is “now a glorified shopping mall” (field journal, 2014, line 638). That is her description of our student union, which relates back to a previous class discussion on consumer culture influencing our educational choices (field journal, 2014). Students were surprised to learn about a student-led protest for food service workers that occurred in the 1970s. There was a campus walkout in solidarity with the cafeteria workers on the same paths that students took to get to the library. In reflection, students

connected that action with the Patricia Hill Collins' (2007) article from the beginning of class, drawing on how race and gender has divided our student population as well as our faculty and staff. Harper was concerned that, as a senior in her final semester, all of this history exists, but is not regularly taught. Now that she knew these stories, she was interested and wanted to know more. She had access to this information only because she was in a particular class at a particular time (field journal, 2014).

The archivist designed an activity to get the students to consider the history of the university at particular points in time. She pulled primary documents (letters, oral histories, newspaper articles) from three points of view (students, university administration, general public) for three pivotal events on our campus: racial desegregation of our school (1956); desegregation of the city's downtown (1960); desegregation of the business district that borders campus (1963). Using the lens of the arena provided by *The Hunger Games* to view spaces that we inhabit with a fresh understanding of what has occurred so close to us, the students dug deeper into our campus and city history. Though the events happened decades before, the archival materials linked us to places the students learn in, eat at, and walk by regularly.

These materials, with the differing points of view, allowed the students to see what they assumed to be static historical facts, like how spaces were once divided by race, from new perspectives. Students read how people advocated both for and against desegregation and how students played a part in each event. After dividing into groups and reviewing the documents we talked through "the ways that the different viewpoints were similar, the ways they were different and what that means as we think about our

campus' history. History gets mediated through the teller and we need to learn how to see that and think about the history that is all around us" (field journal, 2014, lines 667-670). For the different events, students tried to imagine the exact places or building in which the things they were reading in the letters, oral histories, or newspaper articles occurred. Thinking about the physical space of our campus and city as an arena where important events have happened connects with how we remember and imagine our campus currently. As students linked place with the historical events that happened in them it is "no longer just a current place that exists for them to be in now, but a place that has a history they know" (field journal, 2014, lines 675-676). *The Hunger Games* allowed us to see how our campus is not disconnected from our history, but a place to learn from it. This week, it felt like all of the threads we are pulling from *The Hunger Games* are coming together. The students are pulling what we are learning from the books and then reflecting back on their life experiences (field journal, 2014, lines 646-648). It is helpful to be on the campus and in the archives. To have these places on which to overlay what we are learning helps to give the ideas fullness and body for the students.

In each of the student interviews, they brought up how much they enjoyed learning from the archives. That learning experience both got the students out of the classroom and into a space many had never utilized before. What the students learned both connected them to the physical spaces of our campus and allowed them to look at their privileges in new ways. In reflecting, Amber both enjoyed the experience of the archives and connected to current struggles that she sees on our campus,

I love going to the archives- love, love, love, love, love it. Being able to go to the archives was the best thing ever. Having been on [the student orientation] staff I knew so much of that history already, but I didn't think about putting it in comparison with the history of *The Hunger Games* and comparing the oppression we had been through- and I didn't know the details that we learned in the archives about the UNCG women going and helping the A&T four and all of that, so it made me appreciate this university but then considering all of the arguments for the Rec Center and the LGBTQ population on this university and they are still struggling...I look back at the archives we have done so much (Amber, 2015, lines 218-231).

Amber knew some of the university's history. As she put that history in conversation with the books, she connected historical events like desegregation and the food service worker protest to current campus topics like our controversial Student Recreation Center that is part of a campus expansion and LGBTQ rights in a time when our state recently amended the constitution to define marriage as between one man and one women.

In Marie's interview she talked about being unsure of how the archives were going to tie into the books, but ultimately what she learned from that experience was part of what made the class memorable for her.

I loved archives, too. That was really fun because we did a lot on the 60s, on the race issues and integration...It sort of tied in [with *The Hunger Games*]. I didn't think it was going to but it did. At first I wondered, "why are we here, what are we going to do?" But it did ended up tying into all the things we learned and *The Hunger Games* in really strange ways. I liked that, too. I like that we got out of the classroom a couple of times and we go to do different things...We talked about the first two black women admitted into the school and how they thought they were going to be ostracized and then they ended up not- the [white] girls kind of took them in. There was also the protests- the girls going downtown for the sit-ins and all. That tied in, for me, it's odd, you don't think we have things like a rebellion or we don't need people to stand up and do anything, but that's really very similar to the books just in a non-violent way...that was sort of tying in the political and instability, and real life, and the books. (Marie, 2015, lines 65-82)

While the links between the arenas of Panem and the historical events we talked about in the archives are not direct. It provided a way to think about the issues. They were not just things that happened a long time ago, but are student-influenced events that occurred in the same spaces we are learning in.

Marie also used a reflection paper to highlight how the connection between learning in the archives and *The Hunger Games*.

The idea of UNCG as an arena did not really make sense to me until we went to the archives. I then began to see the school as a place where battles have been fought and this all connected me back to Adrienne Rich's idea of students claiming their education. It is clear that over UNCG's history, many students have claimed their education. The examples of students participating in sit-ins, war efforts, and a myriad of other things made me see UNCG in a new light. It made think of things that students are fighting for now- against the new rec center, for LGBT rights, etc. It made me think of other things we have touched on in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, like disability and race and how those issues are still huge. UNCG was innovative for its time and allowed women to get a great education in a time where that was not common. This has made me see UNCG as a place that is innovative and radical. (Marie, 2015, lines 75-86)

In her reflection, Marie was able to link the history we learned about in the archives, with material we read to start our class, to events that impact our campus now. It is not that we could not have used another way to talk about the connection between academic theory, history, and current events, but that *The Hunger Games* gives us a unique way to make those connections.

For Harper, she both liked being out of the classroom and in the archives. "I loved being in that room, just being there...I liked knowing the history of UNCG. It made me proud that I went to UNCG because our foundation was education for women"

(Harper, 2015, lines 197-200). She also reflected on the use of entertainment as a way to learn history. We went to the archives because we were learning about *The Hunger Games*. Susanne Collins writes fiction, but Harper saw how she was also writing about an American history. As a reader, Harper was asked to think about her own country and her own history in different ways, Collins “didn’t have to call it the U.S. but it was totally the U.S.” (Harper, 2015, line 214). The archives allowed her a place to reflect in the place of *The Hunger Games* to both entertain us as readers, but also to teach. Using the idea of the arena to ask us to look differently at our own campus is how Harper thought about learning with the archives. She said the archives experience was a different way of learning, but showed her that fiction does not just have to entertain, but can teach what “has happened and what is happening now” (Harper, 2015, line 217). In a reflection paper, Harper connected the bravery of Katniss to the bravery of JoAnne Smart Drane and Betty Anne Davis Tillman, the first African American women admitted to our university. Fighting for your life in a fictional story is not the same as desegregating a university, but *The Hunger Games* let Harper look at that moment in our university’s history in a different way.

Pom’s connection to the archives happened because they work at a boutique right off campus. The store is situated between a restaurant and former movie theater that were both, at one time, for white people only. In the archives, Pom was able to read about the place they work and connect with a history that happened long before they were a student. Pom was able to tell how the spaces that were mentioned in the archival

documents are used currently. The history felt very real to Pom and if we “hadn’t gone to the archives I never would have known” (Pom, 2015, line 200).

In her interview, Elizabeth also lamented that without this class she would have missed out on knowing this history.

I didn’t know any of that stuff. I had no idea and it’s the fact that you have to go out of your way to take one specific class and happen to go to the archives to know that stuff. That should be stuff that we all pretty much know. Just the fact that it’s a school with so much history of social activism that students and community members are putting together why isn’t it talked about? (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 237-241)

When presented with this view of university history, students were eager to learn it. They made connections between the fictional and real worlds, while also linking to the current events that are happening on our campus now. The buildings and spaces we learn in, eat in, and walk past everyday become not just static structures but part of a vibrant history that students see themselves as part of. With both Russ (1995) and Hintz and Ostry (2003) highlighting the pedagogical nature of science fiction, these stories are powerful teaching tools. By letting students glimpse into a fictional world, with different rules and new ideas, they can look back at their world with fresh ideas and new perspectives.

### **Need for Imagination**

As I drift off, I try to imagine that world, somewhere in the future, with no Games, no Capitol. (Collins, 2010, p. 354)



Using the students' imaginations to think beyond the story is an important part of teaching with young adult dystopian literature like *The Hunger Games*. LeGuin (1979) champions the power of imagination. She feels the power of the imagination is to "deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own feelings, and your destiny" (p. 43). Susanne Collins' fusion of reality television and war reporting is familiar to readers because it is what we watch on television, read online, and talk about on social media. Using what is familiar about *The Hunger Games* lets us see contemporary social issues in a new light. From my notes, students have remarked in class both, "Wow, all of this in a kids' book. I see all of these issues now, but I would have passed them all by before" (lines 1054-1055) and "It's easier to think about these issues in the book, it's more complicated in the world" (lines 1110-1111). By taking time to acknowledge we are learning to see issues where we would have missed them before and that acting on them outside of fiction can be hard I note that it "seems that when we have the chance to talk about or imagine things from a different perspective then we can choose to act differently" (lines 1465-1466). As students talked about what they learned, I was able to see how imagination was woven through as one student said there is "not one answer, but many...the Other is not monolithic and we should be able to learn from those who are different than us" (lines 1619-1621). Clearly, there are differences between the fictional world of Panem and our experiences of America. Students know the story's characters are not direct reflections of real people. However, as we talked about what they learned in the class, they continued to use that knowledge the

imaginative ways that engaged their imagination to think about different ways to understand themselves and others.

In her interview, Elizabeth told how fiction offered her the power to see herself in others. By seeing expanded views of the world, through her reading, it motivated her to act in her real life (2015, lines 381-382). By learning through dystopian fiction she asked questions like, “Notice any patterns, notice any similarities? Anything look familiar? This might be a yesterday or tomorrow for you.” (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 294-296). By asking questions about the world around her through the fictional story she can imagine different answers to the questions, they help her “clarify what is dystopian...and [think] maybe that is what is going on and nobody told me. I didn’t get the memo that we are living in that” (lines 290 and 292-293). Using tongue-in-cheek humor, Elizabeth was using imaginative ways to question both the ideas from the story and they different ways they made her think about her world.

Jubilee, in her interview, said that she pulled details from characters to connect with her own life. Fiction allowed her to think about how *The Hunger Games* “opens up your ideas to things you don’t get to experience firsthand” (Jubilee, 2015, lines 323-324) like Rue’s agricultural existence in District 11 compared to Katniss’ life in District 12. While those are fictional states, she is able to link her thoughts about the bleakness of the characters’ lives back to local food insecurity issues (Jubilee, 2015, lines 330-331). Several times in her interview Jubilee mentioned the inspiration she got from *The Hunger Games*. She found inspiration in how Katniss and Gale hunted as partners, likening the character’s collaboration to a movement in her community to bring a food co-op to an

underserved neighborhood (lines 357-361). It also gave her “inspiration to be like, ‘okay, I can ask this question’...it makes you realize that Katniss is not magical...you don’t have to be this big leader to do something” (lines 173-174 and 177-178). She further found her own courage to act learning that “I can do this now. I can apply [what I’m learning]. I can start. I can put the seed in now and I can help it flourish” (lines 261-262). Learning with this story helped her see “different ways of dealing with issues...different stories will help us figure out how we can deal with issues and work towards a better outcome in our own world” (lines 471-473).

For Amber, the story was important because she was invested in the characters. Thinking with these characters, many who live lives very different from her own, “helped to put [her] life in perspective. You can figure out the things you enjoy, the things you don’t, through characters and their mistakes” (Amber, 2015, lines 155-156). She recognized that fiction was a way to learn about herself, “putting into focus what we already know” and highlighting what you may not recognize in yourself because “when I read I can’t ignore it” (lines, 340 and 348). She related how she continued to think about the story when she watched the news,

When I turn on the news that is when I see [the connections]. The Capitol streamed to the districts and you were mandated to be in the town square to watch whatever live broadcast it was. You had to stop doing whatever you were doing to watch it. If you didn’t you could potentially be shot and killed. [Then] seeing on our news, people being shot and killed. It’s a big reality check and it’s scary to think that pieces of fiction can feel so real. Even though they are not about the same things...combining those two things [media and social control] are very scary, and deadly...having it in front of you is kind of hard to ignore, both from a fiction standpoint in the books and then in real life from the media. (lines 351-362)

Harper talked of the importance of “learning how to be comfortable with being uncomfortable” (2015, line 365). She gave examples from the book that connected with current events like the shooting in Ferguson, Missouri and the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland. She expressed it like this, “You can’t help but look around and you’re like ‘holy crap!’” (lines 381-382). The similarities between fiction and reality struck her as a place to learn and imagine both herself and the world differently. She saw how easy it is to make assumptions and feel disconnected from events in other cities saying, “the uncomfortableness of that realization teaches you...you have to be down on your ignorance and move from it” (lines 370-373). She said that through dystopian fiction we “have to realize we don’t live in a perfect world and it’s our job to...make sure that everyone is treated fairly” (lines 348-350). Harper knew the world was unfair before this class, but looking at the issues through the story allowed her a different way to imagine the process of creating a world that looks more like the one she wants to live in by allowing her to investigate issues of privilege and oppression from different perspectives in ways that she had not done before. She explained it like this,

*The Hunger Games* helped me [see] there are two sides to every story and even a third one that is silent. I mean, we didn’t know what was going on through Cinna’s eyes, but I’m sure that it’s there. I’m sure his final moments could have impacted the entire [story]... So, we have our own perspective and Katniss’ perspective, there’s probably the Capitol. And that shows us in our society that there is the media’s perspective, what [information] we are fed, and then there are the people who are on the other side- and then there’s ours. (Harper, 2015, lines 390-393 and 396-400)

Harper used *The Hunger Games* to think with different perspectives and imagine the story through other characters, like Cinna, and reflect on the ways that she saw similarities to current events.

Pom appreciated the creative perspective *The Hunger Games* employed. This creative angle kept them interested in the story and in the ideas when the story was done. Pom talked about how learning with this story had the potential to “challenge people to think outside the box” (2015, line 248) through re-evaluation of what you think you know about yourself and the world you live in. The messaging was wrapped in an entertaining story, but the ideas are about “power dynamics...[and] what it means to function as a society” (lines 255-256). The links to current events in Baltimore and Ferguson resonated with Pom. Using the story, Pom discussed how

We placed ourselves within that struggle...we talked about the real world and school. School is part of the real world, so seeing what you learned play out in front of you...it's scary, but in a good way though because you can see what change is being made and how you can be part of that. (lines 325-331)

Pom, and the other WGS 450 students, used this series to imagine beyond the borders of the story. Sometimes they reflected back to what they learned within the books and other times they projected what was in the story into current events, but the need for imagining differently was in each of their narratives about learning with *The Hunger Games*.

### **Fiction as Educational Space**

Reading allowed the students another environment in which to consider the issues they were learning about. For instance, students encountered the insidious nature of

media within the story. While students learn that media and advertising is designed to sell ideas of what it means to be a woman, or a consumer, or a student, they often resist the idea that they are susceptible to the marketing. The students used the fictional space of Panem to explore those ideas; looking at both the Capitol and the rebellion's use of propaganda to sway the citizens of Panem and readers. Once students were able to talk about media in the fictional world, they could connect back to ways it operated in their own lived experiences. The instances where I reflect on asking questions about Panem that I wanted students to answer about themselves I see them "connecting the dots with the story and their experiences" (field journal, 2014, line 890). In those kinds of connections between story, life experiences, and our shared class space the students expressed how they were connected to this class ways they did not with other classes saying, "I think about this class in other classes" and "I think about this class outside of class" (lines 959-960). Because they are thinking with a story, it creeps into their thoughts outside of just this class and fictional space becomes another learning arena. For Jubilee, it "helps to know that different people imagine things differently" (Jubilee, 2015, line 475). It is not just that we are reading a fictional story, but that through the story we see different perspectives and possibilities.

For Pom, *The Hunger Games* is both a space to think differently as well as a tool for learning. That does not mean that the learning is easy or that hard questions are not uncomfortable, but that students have another educational space to think through the ideas. Pom's interview reiterates this idea saying,

I think fictional space, for people with different privileges, shows them in a way they can recognize what they wouldn't normally. Then they can apply it back to themselves. ...it shows that other people can see what is going on and bring awareness to it in a different way. I think young adult literature can be used as a tool to bring awareness to and change or to critique what's actually going on. (Pom, 2015, lines 391-398)

Pom continued,

Like the question of whether or not you are part of the Capitol would make a lot of people- and still makes people uncomfortable- but if you reword it to about how the U.S. is an imperial colonial institution would a lot more people turn off from that discussion right away. But having it in fiction allows a lot more discussion to happen and then you can go back and show them how that applies to them. So it's like a tool to make things more accessible. (Pom, 2015, lines 408-413)

Elizabeth described fiction as a "practice space" (Elizabeth, 2015, line 441).

After reading *The Hunger Games* for this class she liked having fiction as that space.

Going further she said fiction is,

a space to be introduced to some ideas that you might not be familiar with. It's a way to kind of take you from a place- you know *The Hunger Games* is familiar it's a comfortable story for a lot of people and kind of jumping back and forth to see those connections. I think that can be really useful because I think it's getting rid of a lifelong willful ignorance for a lot of people. And that's hard. That's really hard to break down and it doesn't just happen in one conversation in one day so that jumping back and forth is really important. To keep going back [to the idea that] here's the real world equivalent. Here's the harder conversation versus let's look at it in Katniss' life and how it impacts her and her community and her friends. (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 441-450)

Here Elizabeth is saying that in this class the fictional space is a space of introduction.

Because it is a story perhaps there is less risk for trying out new ideas or looking at

concepts from a fresh perspective. Because the characters are not your family or your community there is distance to think about the ways they are enmeshed in problematic social institutions. She also highlighted the importance of going back and forth from the fictional setting to the real world showing that what she learns does not stay in the fictional realm but is connected to her lived experience.

As Pom said previously, learning in a fictional space is a tool to learn about ourselves. It is not enough to keep the ideas inside the story but to make connections with our lived experiences. Elizabeth also acknowledges the work that it can take to learn in fictional spaces. This is one way to learn, but does not automatically make the ideas or concepts easier. It allows a new space to think about them. Pom continues, in a paper written for class, “this is where education enters new spaces” (Pom, 2014, line 57). Learning occurs with academic articles and textbooks, but it can also happen reading young adult dystopian fiction. Pom reiterated the use of young adult literature and education as tools for social change saying,

This class has helped me rethink my own privileges and oppressions. Learn how to apply my own histories to dealing with different situations and to be sensitive to other people’s experiences and oppressions, as well as realize how my own actions oppress others; and how all of this connects back to education and young adult literature, which are both revolutionary tools for societal change. (Pom, 2014, lines 13-18)

Seeing how we connect with others, in a fictional world and in our own world, allowed for shifts between the world of the story and the world we live in.



Harper described it this way, “It’s the same image. It’s the same... message, but it’s painted a different way and I think that is what *The Hunger Games* did for me” (Harper, 2015, lines 242-244). Using the story to think through new ideas allowed Harper another space to consider what she was learning. She also spoke more directly about how we can look at Panem and see ourselves saying, “as much as we like to say *The Hunger Games* is not us, it’s fictional... as some elements are fantastical [but] we are still the Capitol... this is very close to home” (Harper, 2015, lines 165-172).

Amber liked learning in a fictional space because it allowed her to slow down and consider complexities in ways that she did not for other classes. She described it like this,

I think [*The Hunger Games*] is beneficial because you see the detail, you see the complexities. In real life you don’t get that. It’s all coming at you hard and fast. You’re in sensory overload. Literature let’s you slow down a little bit. You get to read at your own pace and life’s not like that- you can’t hit rewind or slow down but you can take literature in and think about it. And think about it in kind of the way that you would do a devotion. You read a passage, you sit there and think ...Fiction in academia lets you do that and you process it...we got to reflect. (Amber, 2015, lines 407-417)

Reading for this class felt different for Amber. It was about more than being entertained or learning bits of information that she would need on a test or for a paper, but because we were reading fiction with intent to learn about our lived experiences she got to interact with the story in a different way. What she thought about this story was important and what we learned about the story together added to what she knew.

While Amber felt like *The Hunger Games* allowed her to slow down and think, Marie had a different idea about the space that fiction creates for students to learn. In her interview she said,

I think that [*The Hunger Games*] gets to people in a faster way than real life. I think that it clicks for people... You can think to yourself this isn't real, but I see these issues here and that helps you relate it to the real world. (Marie, 2015, lines 96-100)

*The Hunger Games* offered Marie a quicker way to think about the issues. Thinking about ideas within the fictional story allowed her faster connections to real life issues.

She continued, "It helps people to read something and see it in practice in the story. Then be able to relate it to the real world" (Marie, 2015, lines 208-209). The idea that fictional space can be a lower risk space to learn resonated with Marie. She said,

If [fiction] gets people comfortable talking about issues even if they think it happening to people who aren't real I think that is helpful. Because once they have talked about it in a fictional setting they feel a little more comfortable talking about it as it is really happening because that's probably the way it happened for me- I'm not sure- but it's hard to talk about issues like [racism] in the real world...I understand that it is awkward and people will trip over the issues and ideas, but I like that as sort of a stepping-stone or building block for people. (Marie, 2015, lines 217-226)

### **Continuing to Think with *The Hunger Games***

I interviewed the students one year after they took WGS 450. Each student talked about how they continued to think with *The Hunger Games*. At the time that I conducted the student interviews (May-June 2015) our collective national attention was focused on

the #BlackLivesMatter movement<sup>6</sup>. Between when our class ended and the student interviews took place a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri killed an unarmed Mike Brown, Eric Garner died while being arrested in New York City, and Freddie Gray died while in police custody in Baltimore, Maryland. Each student connected ideas from learning with *The Hunger Games* to how they were thinking about these events. For Harper, the link between Ferguson, Missouri and *The Hunger Games* was a visual one. She said,

When the Ferguson protests happened [the quote] “When we burn you burn with us” was painted on that wall. That taught me that there is a blurred line between fiction and reality because there it’s saying the same message it is just painted differently. (Harper, 2015, lines 385-388)

As the town waited for the grand jury decision on indicting the officer that shot Michael Brown, someone spray painted the quote, “if we burn, you burn with us” on a monument in the Shaw neighborhood of St. Louis, Missouri (Bates, 2014). That quote referenced a scene where the Capitol has just bombed a hospital. Katniss is helping the resistance, but is unsure if she wants to be the symbol of the rebellion. In watching a hospital full of injured people die, Katniss realizes that the war will happen with or without her, but as the Mockingjay she will have greater power to attack President Snow and the Capitol. In the heat of the moment Katniss delivers an impassioned response to the Capitol saying,

---

<sup>6</sup> #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society...[and] is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. (<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>)

“You can torture us and bomb us and burn our districts to the ground, but do you see that?” One of the cameras follows as I point to the planes burning on the roof of the warehouse across from us. The Capitol seal on a wing glows clearly through the flames. “Fire is catching!” I [Katniss] am shouting now, determined that he will not miss a word. “And if we burn, you burn with us!” (Collins, 2010, p. 132, large print edition)

As the importance of the book is intertwined with the movies, it is important to note that *Mockingjay Part One* was released in theaters on November 10, 2014 and this graffiti protest was painted on November 24, 2014. The movie had just come out and the story line is about the people rebelling against a government that is in control because of a rigged system. *Mockingjay* is a fictional story set in a place that feels much like the United States. People were making those connections and using the popularity of the films and books to bring attention to Ferguson, Missouri and that was not lost on Harper.

Jubilee also talked about the connections with Ferguson, Missouri as she added, “I think that was one of the most important things about the class, honestly, is that we are reading this in fiction and we can apply it to the real world, our communities” (Jubilee, 2015, lines 167-168). For both Harper and Jubilee, *The Hunger Games* opened their imaginations to make connections between the story and what happened in the world around them. Jubilee continued,

The value of the fiction helps you navigate your own space in your own country even on how you feel about policies that are being upheld. Fiction helps you realize ways you can learn more about them because not only are you seeing the person in power but you are seeing the people. (Jubilee, 2015, lines 196-200)

For Jubilee, it was not just seeing the main characters fight the Capitol, but seeing how the secondary characters reacted as well. She said, “You don’t have to be a Katniss...you can be a Rue. Rue was an important catalyst for things happening. [She brought] emotion out of people...and made them mad enough to do something.” (2015, lines 179-186). Jubilee was not advocating martyrdom, “don’t get killed in the process” (line 180), but she was reacting to how Rue’s death brought District 11 to action when Peeta and Katniss addressed them on their Victory Tour. By being in a class that used a storytelling strategy both Harper and Jubilee were encouraged to use fictional space to think about politics and current events in our world.

For Pom, the value of continuing to use *The Hunger Games* to think about the current events surrounding the #BlackLivesMatter movement is how they continue make connections. Pom spoke about that saying,

With all the news about riots, which I think is really it’s kind of easier to make that connection. It primes the idea of revolution- of what we kind of place as the picture of what a revolt is. Seeing groups that are oppressed and have been for a long time finally organizing- or who have been organized and fighting a system but now are coming to ways to make it more visible to the public audience really shows exactly what is going on in *The Hunger Games*. People were revolting all this time. Katniss didn’t know until she became part of it and started to help bring it to a bigger picture and I think that is what is happening with the use of social media, which we talked about in class, too. (Pom, 2105, lines 335-345)

Racial, gender, and political issues are not always easy for students to talk about. But when using a fictional story “primes the idea,” as Pom said, it lets students think about the issues and have examples to rely on as they move forward after the class is over.

Marie, who in her interview said that she is a quiet person who usually listens rather than talks, explained how learning with *The Hunger Games* gave her the confidence to talk about current events. She said,

I use [*The Hunger Games*] a lot. When we went to go see *Mockingjay* I told my mom [this is] why we talked about it in class. I've used it a lot when people say things about *The Hunger Games* and I can clarify for them. I can say, "Well actually we read in Alice Walker about such and such." It's again, real life issues. I think it's very easy to talk to people about that now- things like Baltimore and you can say well this sort of parallels what we learned, what we talked about. I talk about the class all the time. If *The Hunger Games* is brought up, I say "well we talked about this in my class." We went in depth and we talked about Peeta and he does this- and all that stuff. So, I really do reference it probably far too often for some people. (Marie, 2015, lines 189-198)

Elizabeth also uses the series to talk to friends about political issues and as they get into "really good discussions" she launches into how current politics can be looked at through *The Hunger Games* saying,

Well, you guys, in *The Hunger Games*. And they are like, "wow [Elizabeth], in *The Hunger Games*?" And I'm like, "In *The Hunger Games*, guys this is the exact same thing." This is a point that we can use to talk about. (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 384-387)

She incorporates her current political action into what she has learned from the class. She adds that she used *The Hunger Games* to talk to her younger cousin. Using this series, zines, and other books she talked about how she has guided her cousin to fiction that might interest her as a teenager while also engaging her with questions like, "What do you think about this? That actually reminds me of what happened in Ferguson and

Baltimore” (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 402-403). It opens up places for conversation with both her peers and her family.

For Jubilee, learning with *The Hunger Games* was about acting in her community. She pinpoints how *The Hunger Games* “opened her eyes” to what was going on around her (Jubilee, 2015, line 157). She went on to explain how the class “got me more involved in the community. I’m not a very social person, but it made me make friends within the UNCG community because I realized I could use some of my privileges to help in a good way” (Jubilee, 2015, lines 159-164). She participated in campus protests, increased her social media presence and voice, and said that she still, one year later, feels like *The Hunger Games* helps her to think about politics in different ways.

While it has helped the students to continue to think about political issues, those issues are not always simple. One thing the series did was to expose how complicit we are in the political systems that are designed to control us. It was not simply that the Capitol was “bad” and the rebellion was “good.” Through characters like Tigris and Cinna the students uncovered the humanity of the Capitol. As the rebels take the city, it is one of Gale and BeeTee’s inventions that kills Katniss’ sister, Prim. President Coin, the rebel leader, turns out to be a dictator much like President Snow. Amber talked about how *The Hunger Games* helps her to see how current events are not always easy to understand,

One of the things I struggled with reading *The Hunger Games* was the battle between Snow and Coin. That is one part of the novel that really can be applied in real life- there’s constantly the good and evil battle. And you don’t know who is really good and who is really evil. You have to pick the best of the worst.

That's like with currently- the Ferguson stuff, you've got the police that could be making bad decisions- that could be being racist. And then you've got this group of black people trying to fight back and you don't know who is right and who is wrong. And you don't have the facts. You recognize that both aren't necessarily in the right and both aren't necessarily in the wrong. *The Hunger Games* put that in perspective. I don't think before I accepted that you don't have to be right, you don't have to be wrong. It doesn't have to be black and white. That there is a middle and you do have to choose the best of the worst sometimes. So, with current events you really pick that up and you can picture it out. (Amber, 2015 lines 310-322)

Learning there is not always a right and a wrong, in fiction or in the world, was a big lesson for Amber. The story gave her a new perspective with which to view and make decisions about information in the real world.

Having a complicated political landscape to learn with in fiction was helpful for Marie as well. She talked about how much she learned in class,

I was not very informed in high school and stuff like that. There particularly are things like *The Hunger Games* and dystopias, people think that is so far away from us. We will never get there, but it's easy when you read and then be able to correlate it to real life- this class helped me. We talked about how things are happening in the world. Maybe that's what it is- to read it and to discuss it with other people. (Marie, 2015, lines 210-216)

The story and the class allowed her a place to think about the issues, but also showed her how similar issues in fiction can be to what goes on in real life. She calls out this parallel saying,

Some of the real life socio-political issues have paralleled pretty closely. There were things at Ferguson and at Baltimore that people bring in law enforcement, people disappearing, even on camera, people just being pulled away. And that- I think to myself, "I saw that in *Catching Fire*." They brought somebody up and they shot them... The people that are just now taking a stand. They are getting



fed up with the way they've been treated. Deciding not to take it anymore. It's interesting to me the law enforcement/PeaceKeeper parallel where you think these people are supposed to be protecting me and they are not helping some people. That's been, for me, the thing I've taken away from it was the PeaceKeeper police. (Marie, 2015, lines 149-163)

Students continued to reflect on the series more than one year after the class. These ideas are kept fresh because of the movies, and the movies bleed over to our current event and political movements.

As Pom considered how *The Hunger Games* continued to influence their thinking a year later, they said, "It definitely made me think about things that I don't think I normally would have ever analyzed" (Pom, 2015, lines 33-34). Pom talked frankly about the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the connections with Rue from *The Hunger Games*. We talked in class about the social media uproar when Rue was cast with a black actress. The character is described as black in the book<sup>7</sup>, but people went to Twitter lamenting how the character's death was less sad because she was a black girl instead of the blonde, white girl they imagined when reading the book. Pom linked the way race was portrayed in the movies with current politics saying,

People wanted to care about Rue's death, but they are not going to care about Rue's death if she's a black girl because black lives don't matter. That really started to resonate with me more and more. That's what I've been seeing with the Baltimore riots and police brutality and kind of this concept of white property being valued more than black lives. Because that is usually what they've been what the topic of conversation is- "well, they shouldn't be violent because they are destroying all of these businesses." But it's like someone destroyed

---

<sup>7</sup> I...see the little girl from District 11 standing back a bit, watching us. She's the twelve-year-old, the one who reminded me so of Prim in stature. Up close she looks about ten. She has bright, dark eyes and satiny brown skin and stands tilted up on her toes with her arms slightly extended to her sides, as if ready to take wing at the slightest sound (Collins, 2008, p. 98-99).

someone's life, why is that not worth more than a building? (Pom, 2015, lines 109-118)

When students are able to talk about issues of race, politics, and popular culture they can imagine the future they will be part of differently. Using *The Hunger Games* to get students to think about the connections that can be made is important, but it is not the final step. Learning with young adult dystopian fiction lets students think about their present and their futures. It involves students so they feel like what they have to say about the future is important. Pom shows this saying,

People like to think of [young adult dystopian fiction] as the future so they don't have to deal with it. I think *1984* was a perfect example of that because people read *1984* and are like, "I'm so glad that didn't happen." And other people read it and they are like, "This is happening right now." I think it is the same with *The Hunger Games*. It is the future and it's what is going on now and what has been going on. I think it is challenging use to change how the future will be because of what is going on right now. We are starting to see that more with the rise of social media, people who don't normally have power, or voice, are now getting it and their issues are being brought up so like the #BlackLivesMatter movement, transgender and other LGBT rights coming into the picture. (Pom, 2015, lines 257-267)

Fiction like *The Hunger Games* lets us imagine a future so that we can work in the present to make the world one we want to live in. Though students are talking about what they have thought about after the class has ended, *The Hunger Games* is merely the vessel to talk their education and the way they see the world and that was reflected in the last part of the class, especially. We are talking about the story, but it is about what they connect and learn from it that is important (field journal, 2014). I was able to see that in the class and now as I interview them one year later. Fiction, as the students said in their

interviews, lets them see issues in ways that might not have without reading the story. Pom said that for them it is “where we place ourselves in the struggle” (Pom, 2015, line 325) that becomes important. Harper ties the idea back to an event in *Mockingjay*. The rebels break the Capitol’s water dam shutting off the lights to the city. For her, that showed that, “even one thing can make affect the bigger picture. That was my personal message. One little thing can become a big thing if you grow it or foster it” (Harper, 2015, lines 452-454). Perhaps that is the message from the class.

### **Summary**

In this section, I have discussed the data that I collected using my field journal, student writing assignments, and student interviews. I identified and discussed five categories that emerged from my data analysis; 1) The power of storytelling; 2) Students’ reflection on class experiences where they discussed the impact of love, disability, hunger, and the archives; 3) The need for imagination; 4) Fiction as educational space; 5) Continuing to think with *The Hunger Games*.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CLOSING THOUGHTS

Teaching and researching the Spring 2014 WGS 450 class was fun, exciting, and hard, but above all, an honor. The students approached this class with enthusiasm and wonder and those who chose to be interviewed were gracious and thoughtful about their experiences with *The Hunger Games*. *The Hunger Games* was written by a woman and featured a strong heroine, perhaps initial details that could connect the story to a class about feminist education. However, the series tackles social justice themes like power and privilege, oppression and compassion, love and responsibility under the guise of young adult literature. For students, *The Hunger Games* became a frame for talking about their experiences of education and the world around them. The books were what brought them into the class, but that was not where learning stopped. What appeared repeatedly in my conversations with students was how this series grabbed their attention: as entertainment and as social commentary. In this class, *The Hunger Games* helped students to dig into concepts, find correlated moments in the books and the other media, and connect back into the world we live in. This course was not just about searching for ideas in the text, but connecting to their own experiences of education, current events, and feminist thought.

I began this dissertation project with a desire to understand the Spring 2014 *The Hunger Games and Feminist Education* class (WGS 450) more explicitly. I was

interested in students' experiences of this class in which feminism, education, and young adult dystopian literature were put into conversation with one another. In order to learn more about the students' experiences in this class, I crafted the following questions to guide my study:

- 1) How did young adult dystopian fiction inform feminist pedagogy in a WGS senior level undergraduate course (WGS 450) on feminist education?
  - a. How did students taking a WGS senior level course experience the use of young adult dystopian literature in the course?
  - b. How did students who took a WGS senior level course perceive the use of young adult dystopian literature in feminist pedagogy?
  - c. What challenges and benefits existed in using young adult dystopian literature to teach an undergraduate course on feminist education?

In this chapter, I share the conclusions drawn from my research data including student interviews, class documents, and my field journal. This chapter reflects on the responses to my research questions. I answer and explore what I found in relation to each question. I also share implications for future research and my closing thoughts.

## **Conclusions**

### **Question 1: How Did Young Adult Dystopian Fiction Inform Feminist Pedagogy in a WGS Senior Level Undergraduate Course (WGS 450) on Feminist Education?**

I found two ways in which *The Hunger Games* informed feminist pedagogy in the WGS 450 class. First, using young adult dystopian fiction in the classroom allowed students to look at the familiar with an unfamiliar eye. *The Hunger Games* was well positioned to ask students to look at a curious plotline, where children who were sent to their televised death engage in political rebellion, from different perspectives. As Joanna Russ (1995) describes, "What is at first bizarre turns out to have hidden in it the familiar,

but this perception of the familiar causes the familiar to be seen from an odd perspective that makes it, in turn, bizarre” (p. 24). As readers, we both believe that what we read is possible and know that it is fiction. This paradox in science fiction unearths room for readers to imagine and question both the story and our experiences through which we read the story. With its fantastical setting and unrealistic premise, *The Hunger Games* set students up to learn in an environment that all at once felt out of sorts and entirely probable, pulling on a strength of the genre to revel in paradox. Panem is not the future of the United States and our present is not exactly the past that *The Hunger Games* references, but they inform one another. It was in these paradoxical moments where the students read about the impossible and imagined themselves reacting to it that they had the creativity to explore possibilities and experiment with difference.

Each of the students interviewed talked about how Panem felt very much like the United States, so when we discussed ideas about the fictional place they reflected on them in the context of their own lived experiences. We do not live in a country where students are reaped into a yearly, televised death match, but by looking closely at the details of this story students thought deeply about contemporary issues like education and political unrest. Ideas of love, hunger, disability, and history, as referenced in through our archives activities, were seen with a fresh perspective when the students encountered them in *The Hunger Games* and then again in our own world. Jubilee says it most succinctly,

It's not something that you can read and forget...And it doesn't stop there. After you've really taken it in, you start to see things everywhere. Like different events happening, different things within your community and then you unconsciously say things to people around you and then you realize that is something I learned and a behavior I got in this...WGS class. It's a different type of education. (Jubilee, 2015, lines 501-507)

What Jubilee learned in the course showed up in her experiences outside the classroom. She used what she learned in WGS 450 in her community. For her, these types of connections, between learning with a story and acting in her community, are an important part of education. She was able to see what she learned put into action. Other students discussed how they found the practical implications of learning with a story as well. They connected what they learned in WGS 450 to other classes (Jubilee, Harper, and Amber), used the perspectives they found in this class to talk with family and friends (Pom, Elizabeth, Marie, and Amber), and each student reflected that reading this story helped them to think about political events after the class had ended. They were able to look at the familiar, whether that be a young adult novel or current events, and think about them from unfamiliar perspectives. There were no radically new ideas introduced by *The Hunger Games*, but rather a different way to see the world through the story.

Second, teaching with this young adult dystopian fiction story centered the importance of feminist imagination. Here I look to Barbara Taylor's (2003) notion of feminist imagination as "dual reference to conscious, reasoned creativity...and to the implicit, often unconscious fantasies and wishes that underlie intellectual innovation" (p. 4). I want to live in a world that embraces gender, racial, class, and ability differences and values equity. Since I neither live nor teach in such a world urging students to

imagine what that world could be is an important part of my feminist pedagogy. It is common to hear that we are preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist. As a feminist teacher, I encourage students to imagine an equitable world that does not yet exist. Just like I cannot teach the skills for jobs that rely on technology just now being invented, I cannot tell students what a fully realized feminist world can be. However, I can encourage creativity and imagination in my students knowing that being creative and imaginative thinkers will help to them craft and navigate the world they are headed into after they leave my class.

Walidah Imarisha (2015) centers this imaginative imperative saying, “we are dreaming of new worlds every time we think about the changes we want to make in the world...Art and culture themselves are time-traveling, planes of existence where the past, present, and future shift seamlessly in and out” (p. 4-5). The students in this class reflect how I encouraged them to use their imaginations in how they read the story and then how they made connections to what they saw in the world. Their interviews and writings are sprinkled with questions that ponder: What if America is not that different from Panem? (Pom, Marie). How are we similarly policed like the Districts? (Harper, Marie). Is this Real or Not Real? (Harper, Amber). Are we more like the Capitol or the Districts? (Jubilee, Amber, Marie, Harper, Pom, and Elizabeth). The questions they ask and the imaginative ways they tried to answer them, in the interviews as well as in their assignments for the class, are a portal into the creative ways that the students learned with the story of *The Hunger Games*. Learning with this story was a way for students to imagine different futures while critically assessing our present reality. The power of



seeing something, in fiction, which could happen, allowed the students, in turn, to examine what was going on around them, on social media, in politics, or even in their own lives, with different perspectives. That ability to look with a different perspective is central to Louise Rosenblatt's theory (1995) of reading as exploration where reading is about more than being entertained by a story, learning vocabulary, or investigating literary themes, rather she imagined that if students learn with stories they have the ability to become "citizens with the imaginative capacity to put themselves in the place of others and see the human implication of ideas" (p. 353).

The importance of feminist imagination is reiterated by LeGuin (1979) saying, "the discipline of the imagination may in fact be the essential method or technique of art and science" (p. 41). To encourage imagination may be to encourage students to see their own futures differently than the narrowly defined measures of success instilled by other types of education, which resonates with my own feminist pedagogy. It is about first seeing the structures and institutions that are upheld by the status quo and then imagining a future that does not include them. Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe, and Waugh (2004) explain how stories help students "live beyond their ordinary lives—to come to understand, from the inside, about other people, other places, other times. In better understanding their world, students are able to envision a world that is more just and equitable" (p. 49). Using stories like *The Hunger Games* can help students to think about themselves and others as well as to employ their imaginations in ways that remakes what they imagine can be in their futures.

**Sub question A: How did students taking a WGS senior level course experience the use of young adult dystopian literature in the course?** Ursula K

Leguin (1979) explains how reading can help us experience the world around us saying,

We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel—or have done and thought and felt; or might do and think and feel—is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become. (p. 31)

Students' experience of this course varied, but learning with *The Hunger Games* allowed them to make connections, contextualize their experiences, and empathize with others' experiences. In their interviews, the students discussed how they connected with the class, as a whole as well as with individual ideas, themes, and readings. They had so much to say about what they learned reading *The Hunger Games*. Each student experienced WGS 450 in a unique way from how they looked forward to coming to class (Marie, Jubilee, Amber), to ways that they created and reinforced community between and among themselves (Pom, Marie, Elizabeth, Amber, Harper), to how ideas have continued to resonate with them after the class had ended (each of the students interviewed). Students' experiences of WGS 450 were interesting, diverse, and enlightening.

The students' interviews were filled with ways that *The Hunger Games* opened their imaginations, connected them with their peers, expanded our class onto the university campus, and incorporated their own lived experiences into their learning. Amber perhaps summed it up most succinctly as she talked about hunger,

Seeing those realities would have probably not been possible without the course having laid them out plain as day— like this is happening around you. I wouldn't have had those learning opportunities and I wouldn't feel connected to them at all...I feel like I have a connection to [the food pantry] and it's not because I'm a student in need and can't eat but because I have knowledge about those students and the people who are impacting them— the passion they have behind it. Dystopian societies are our reality and without reading that in fiction you wouldn't see that in real life. (Amber, 2015, lines 295-298 and 302-307)

The students each had unique experiences with the class, but with the strong links to four of the concepts (love, disability, hunger, and the archives) echoing throughout all of the interviews we can see how some class experiences struck a common cord.

As I reviewed my field journal, I was surprised that these four concepts were the ones that students kept reflecting upon. They are good themes with strong connections to the story and, obviously, to students' experiences of this class. In my notes, other themes like visibility/surveillance and gender/sexuality were stronger, but I followed the data about how the students talked about their class experiences and reported what they revealed to be most impactful. I will revisit my expectations in sub question 3.

Other than the novelty of being in the university archives, the information students learned about those four concepts was not dramatically new. However, the perspective given by *The Hunger Games* allowed students to visit ideas of power, privilege, oppression, and social justice from fresh perspectives, or as Joanne Russ (1995) surmises, when reading fiction, we “conceive of the relation between possibility and impossibility very differently” (p. 22). The students looked from a fresh angle because *The Hunger Games* gave them space to explore how difference was possible.

It is not just that different is possible, but that reading these stories are a shared learning experience. Maxine Greene (1988) plainly argues for the inclusion of fiction in teaching saying,

I have found that informed encounters with literary texts permits students to confront their own lived realities in ways that have consequences for understanding what I hope to be their own projects...and identifying themselves in the world. (p. 176)

Teaching with young adult dystopian fiction allows for the incorporation of books that are relevant to student experiences, but also uses the shared experience of reading as a learning tool in the classroom. We learn because we are reading a book together. It is not just about the book, but also the experience of reading we share. This is also reflected in literary theorist Louise Rosenblatt's (1993) transactional theory of reading which takes into account what happens between the reader and the text. The reader, the text, and their interaction are each "an aspect of a relationship occurring at a particular time under particular circumstances" (p. 380). There is not a one-way flow of information from the story to the student, but a transaction between the text and the reader situated in a web of human relationships.

These relationships were reflected in student interviews, as they were able to critique the media used to advertise the series to them, the social media that they all participate in, and the national events that occurred after the class but resonated with what they learned in WGS 450. Marie summed it up saying,

I saw it everywhere once we [read *The Hunger Games*]. The first time I read it, I didn't see anything. When we were in class, more things started to happen or I just started to really see stuff that related everywhere. They banned *Mockingjay* in a lot of countries because they thought it would incite people and I thought, "see this shows this is really important." (Marie, 2015, lines 130-134)

Reading is "a social process, a transaction, between and among human beings" (Flynn, 2007, p. 68) and that was repeated in all the student interviews similarly to Marie's experience of reading *The Hunger Games*. Using imaginative literature in class is not just an exercise in reading, but a lived experience we share and participate in.

As Louise Rosenblatt (1964) has shown, there is no generic or universal way to read a story, rather each reader brings with them their own context and lived experiences into their reading. Encouraging students to bring themselves to the stories and into the classroom opens up the ways that young adult dystopian fiction can be used to teach. This approach is less about the regurgitation of material and more about the personal and social connections that can be made.

**Sub question B: How did students who took a WGS senior level course perceive the use of young adult dystopian literature in feminist pedagogy?** While students' experiences of WGS 450 (sub question A) relate directly to what they encountered in the course, their perception of the course has more to do with how they interpreted or made meaning of the class. Here concerns such as they found the class useful, why were they drawn to this class, and whether they would recommend the class to others became part of my analysis. The perception of this class was positive. As a simple way to measure the students' connections to this class, each student showed up to

our first archive day as the university announced an early closure due to snow (field journal, 2014). I expected some student no shows, but the connection they felt to what we were learning overcame southern snow tendencies<sup>8</sup>. Reading and learning with *The Hunger Games* resonated with each student after they left the class. They thought about what they learned as they watched the last installment of the movie franchise, reflected on why #BlackLivesMatter issues were trending on their social media, or talked politics with their family and friends.

In the students' interviews, none of them described this as an easy course, though in the excitement of having a WGS course about a popular book series, some may not have fully realized what the course was about beyond their enthusiasm for *The Hunger Games*. As a self-selected class of readers, they were ready for this course to be a book club (field journal, 2014). As part of the Grounding portion of the syllabus (Appendix A), the first few weeks of class allowed the students to see how this class was more than a discussion of the series, but a course where *The Hunger Games* became a tool with which to explore, critique, and re-imagine education and the world around us. Rosenblatt (1964) describes how "seeing others' interpretations will enable [the reader] to discover elements of the text that [the reader] has ignored or exaggerated" (p. 126). Feminist pedagogy is about teaching the material and simultaneously recognizing the interactions of the students with the material and each other can be larger than simply the sum of

---

<sup>8</sup> In the southern United States, the threat of snow, sleet, or ice combined with our limited municipal snow resources makes winter weather driving a more cautious activity than in other areas of the country. Having all students show up to class while it was actively snowing was surprising. We did release early so that all could get home safely.

those things. Reading young adult dystopian fiction, the idea that we are reading it together, and how we make connections to social media, academic theories, and lived experiences reinforce the importance of learning as both an individual and communal project.

As such, the students began to joke that this class could be summed up with the idea, “It’s complicated.” That phrase became the class mantra after students used it to start almost all of the class discussions (field journal, 2014; Jubilee, 2015; Amber, 2015). We were not simply reading the story and searching for themes, but were looking for connections with academic theorists, social media, and the fictional story. The students were connecting with their own lived experiences and reading beyond the story such as imagining what the Capitol would have been like for university students and who the people were that planned and staffed the parties that exemplified Panem’s excess (Marie, 2015; Pom, 2015). “It’s complicated,” became shorthand for the students to think deeper about the layers and nuances of the ideas we were discussing and acknowledge that we were doing more than just reading a book. There was not a simple read of the class material, but rather we explored layered and nuanced ideas through the story of *The Hunger Games*. While this did not always make for straightforward discussions of ideas from the books it did allow students a space to embrace academic concepts in fictional arenas, dialogue with each other around their differences, and bring in their individual areas of academic interests (art history, media studies, dance, human development and family studies, feminist theory, and history) to see each other as experts. This served to

strengthen our in-class community and build foundations for a continued peer community outside of the classroom (Marie, Amber, Pom, Elizabeth, Jubilee).

The kinds of interpretations and meaning making students did in this course were varied. Pom said outright that learning to place yourself in different situations, using the example of imagining current events in Baltimore happening in our town, “made education more meaningful, more realistic” (2015, lines 326). It was not just that Pom was reading about rebellion in a novel, but applying what they learned in the story to possibilities in real life. As a graduating senior, Marie reflected that even though this was her only WGS class in her undergraduate degree that she should have done a minor “because people have very wrong views of feminism as in we are anti-men or we’re ‘women are better’ or whatever and that’s cleared out for me...I started connecting things” (2015, lines 179-183). One of ways that students perceived this class was by making connections between the story and their lived experiences. Each student talked about how they connected with the concepts of the class, the fictional space we were using to learn, and the power of the story in bringing all of the ideas together. They discussed how they connected to people in their lives in different ways based on what they were learning in the class (Pom, Elizabeth, Amber, and Marie) because the lessons from this class asked them to think about those connections in different ways. They pulled on the lessons from *The Hunger Games* to illustrate ideas about current events related to #BlackLivesMatter. They discussed how this class connected with other academic classes (Harper, Jubilee, and Amber) to allow those classes to be viewed with some of the perspectives they were learning in this course



Because they had the fictional space of Panem to practice perspective shifting and reflection, and because those skills were emphasized in the pedagogy of this class, students indicated in their interviews that they were able to make connections between ideas because they were reading a young adult dystopian novel. In Panem, a space they know is not real there is freedom to explore what might be. Jubilee explained it this way, we “feel like dystopian stuff is not real and the importance of teaching it is to show that reality is actually intertwined with young adult literature...There are pieces...of our own community in it that we can learn from” (lines 369-373). Because the fictional space feels like a space with less risk and the students are dealing with characters; they felt license to imagine and play around with risky or new ideas. They had more patience to listen to others practice new ideas on characters precisely because they were characters, not real people. Students discussed how the stakes felt lessened because we were not talking about people or communities that their peers might be part of but wholly fictional characters. Connecting back to the academic theories or the popular culture media allowed us to take our fictional reflections back into the real world, but the students had time to refine what they were thinking and feeling about the topics so when we did encounter the same ideas in our own world the foundation was laid for students to see differing perspectives or understand that their classmates had complicated ideas about the topic. For Pom, this idea of learning in fictional spaces helped them bring it back to their own reality. They said the class showed them an “idea of how to bring what we learned in the classroom into other spaces because that was the point...that it wasn’t just a class

[but] how to make education accessible to other people and other styles of learning”  
(2015, lines 173-176).

For most students this class felt different from others they had taken during their academic careers (Marie, Amber, Elizabeth, Pom). For those who had not taken a WGS class before, this was a surprising break from the lecture and test routine of other classes. Marie explained it like this, “I was far more comfortable in this class because I didn’t feel like the weight of the world was on [me]- so much pressure to do and say the right thing” (2015, line 233-235). For some with WGS class experience, the small class size and intentional activities to take us out of the classroom pushed them to reflect deeper on where and how learning can take place. At the end of her interview, Amber expressed her wish for this class to be taught again,

I think that it’s a creative class and it’s fun and it’s real. I mean real in the sense that students connect in a way they would never get the opportunity to in a typical lecture class and even if it’s not on *The Hunger Games* and it’s on some other piece of fiction. There’s so much personal growth from the class, regardless of the academic side, that it’s important for students. Throw away the college benefit or the academic side of it. I think students learn from the class for themselves. That’s the most important take away- you are going to learn in college no matter what you do but you don’t often learn about yourself unless you take risks. (Amber, 2015, lines 504-512)

She does not want the class again for herself, but for future students. She found meaning in this class in ways that she did not in other classes and she wants others to have the chance for those learning experiences. The power of storytelling is not just about her experience of this class, but she found enough meaning in it to think that other students would as well.

The overall perception of this class was that it was a class that none of the students who were interviewed were expecting. We discussed topics that surprised them and pushed them to think about things in ways that they never would have without this course. They said this class made them ask different questions, learn to look for what is missing in what they read, and connect with bigger picture ideas through the context of the story. Elizabeth said that learning such disparate ideas within one story allowed her ways to connect to the issues in ways that other classes have not.

It's a lot easier than just reading a couple of articles and then having a discussion, reading a couple of articles and having a discussion and then putting it into context of this world we've established and using one consistent story to talk about a bunch of different ideas is also really helpful because you can see how they relate to each other if you are looking at it as one person's life or one community's experience. So if you are talking about race, and disability, and sex workers separately that is still really impactful and meaningful but if you can talk about it in the context of one or a handful of people's experiences together it just reflects real life in a more genuine way. It's a lot easier to relate it back to real world stuff and to see it in actual situations we are dealing with. (Elizabeth, 2015, lines 267-277)

Elizabeth's summary of learning through a story, because of the unifying storyline, to see the interrelated concepts of privilege and oppression is quite astute. *The Hunger Games* let this class dive deeper into the complexities woven into intersectional identities and learn with characters we held in regard, whether that regard was positive or negative. We approached the characters' intersectional identities, as part of who they are as a whole person, in ways we would in our lived experiences. We put those characters into complex systems that controlled their lives and then reflected on the systems we are beholden to in our world. We read, discussed the ideas found in the books, worked on

projects, and explored our campus. What this class did for students was more than explain the story, but connect ideas in and out of the classroom. It exists as a place for them to go back to, revisit, and revise what and how they think. Amber summed it up like this,

I think that it really connected the things that I learned in the last four years at college to real life because people don't read fiction unless you are an English major in college courses. It's pretty much unheard of and so being able to do that and connect it with academic writing was so important because you don't normally see that. You often times will just read assignments or academic literature- like what did I just read? I don't understand. How does this connect to my life in any way? Sure, I understand this metaphor and I understand this example that the author gave, but it doesn't come into perspective until- with *The Hunger Games* you have that imagery in your head. You had the writing, you had the entire story to back it up. (Amber, 2015, 43-53)

The students have the story long after the class has ended. And that might be the best thing they got from the class. LeGuin (1979) says it is "precisely this kind of question-asking: reversals of a habitual way of thinking" that opens up space for the what-ifs (p. 163). The spaces for the what-ifs were evident as students talked and wrote about their experiences learning with *The Hunger Games*.

**Sub question C: What challenges and benefits existed in using young adult dystopian literature to teach an undergraduate course on feminist education?** In asking this particular question, I resist the urge to try to make this class more than it was. While I relished the opportunity to teach with this series and am honored to have taught this particular group of students, it was one class taught at one time with the good and bad that process entails.

*Challenges.* While this was an overall great class, not everything about this class was seamless. Reviewing my field journal, students participated in discussions, came to class with questions, and showed excitement as we made connections from the story to their own experiences. However, as any teacher can imagine, this class had its ebbs and flows. Students came to class tired, under prepared and facing time constraints placed on most college students around family obligations and work demands. I had technical issues when setting up for a Skype presentation, another guest speaker missed presenting due to a scheduling snafu, and classes were canceled multiple times due to an active winter weather season. With student input, the final project morphed from a paper to a class project. While the project met the class objectives and allowed students to reflect on what they learned in WGS 450, it did not fully materialize the way that the students and I planned it. With things that went right and wrong, this class was no different from others that I teach, but that is not what students talked about in their interviews, nor wrote about in their class papers. I will talk about class challenges more in depth, but it is worth noting the students' highlighted experiences like community building and common themes rather than the challenges we faced in the course as they discussed their experiences of this class.

The structural challenges encountered with the course included struggling to get the class to fill. As I advertised the class across campus and fielded email questions about it, people were interested in the topic. While the class could have accommodated up to 40 students, I was realistically hoping for about 12-15. As I monitored enrollment leading up to the beginning of the semester, I noted there were as many as 11 students

enrolled, but on the first day of class 9 students showed up. Other interested students reached out to me lamenting time conflicts with other classes. Students who did not need the class credit wanted to sit in on classes about topics that interested them. I also had students contact me with questions about taking a senior seminar without any prior WGS experience. There were no prerequisites for this class, though it was a 400 level class, so I welcomed them to take the class with the caveat that it was not an introductory course and knowledge of feminist theory would be assumed.

During the semester, people who knew I was teaching with *The Hunger Games* constantly asked for updates and wanted to know what topics we were discussing in the class. Occasionally, in the semesters since I taught this course, people have asked when it is being offered again or ask if there is a course that will use other popular young adult dystopian series. The small class size worked to build community and allow for flexible activities in ways that larger classes cannot, but I was flummoxed to understand the difference between the interest in the class and the difficulty in filling the class. I wonder if it was because of the 400 level designation, scheduling, or that people are only abstractly interested in just the idea of teaching with young adult dystopian fiction.

Another challenge I had teaching this class involved the detail that a 400 level WGS seminar did not have any prerequisite requirements. This class was crafted as a senior seminar, so my assumptions were that I would be teaching students with an academic grounding in feminist theory. I selected my readings and structured the course believing the students who signed up for this class would have feminist theoretical knowledge. I was surprised on the first day with the uneven knowledge base represented

in the class. Four of the nine students had not taken a prior WGS class. My plan was to spend some time grounding students in the ideas that we were going to be exploring in this class, but not to introduce feminist theories. As we were in the midst of introductions, I was concerned about some of the upcoming material. This concern is not to say that any of the students in the class could not understand the material and contribute to the discussion, but that the foundational level of knowledge would not support the depth of discussion I assumed we would tackle in the class. If I were a chemistry teacher teaching a 400 level senior seminar I cannot imagine a student taking that class without having at least an introduction to chemistry class. That is not to say that any particular student will not perform well in any particular class, but what subjects that students feel able to enter at particular places.

This steps into the conversation around disciplining the WGS discipline (Walzer, 1982; Kessler-Harris, 1992; Grace, 1996; Price and Owen, 1998; Stake, 2006; Papadelos, 2011; Romack, 2011; Flaherty, 2013). As part of the university, Women's and Gender Studies is a fairly young discipline with interdisciplinary work built into its core "by a diverse group of scholars with relevant theoretical and methodological training" (Flaherty, 2013). Grace (1996) discusses the scholars who are pondering WGS as a discipline, as interdisciplinary, as transdisciplinary, and as a cross- discipline (p. 62-66), which is a large and complicated discussion around who is trained in the subject and how WGS can be used by some as a department to advance their careers in other academic fields. Suffice to say that WGS is part of the academy and has theoretical and methodological underpinnings that students should become versed in as they navigate

their way through more and more advanced courses in a program. There is value in being introduced to feminist theory in a systematic way. To speak to the work of this dissertation, students need to have some way to understand the story of WGS in ways that foreground the interdisciplinary, critical, feminist work done in these classes. WGS is “a space for intellectual debate, critical inquiry, and sustained knowledge production” (Romack, 2011, p. 240); as such, WGS often pushes back on the notions of hierarchy and division in the academy in ways that open up learning and knowledge production in new and interesting way, but we must be cognizant that WGS has foundational ideas, theory, and history that students need to be aware of.

Under consideration, I did not change the readings, but noted in my field journal places where remedial lecturing took the place of discussions I had planned. The students in WGS 450 did admirably in the class and this concern on my part did not drastically change what I chose to teach for the class, but some shifts did occur. There were places where I chose to lecture instead of dialogue around the topics and the depth of discussions in some papers I attributed to this uneven foundational feminist knowledge. For example, students wrote and talked about ideas of how gender was deployed by different characters or why the Finnick’s sex work gets read as ‘hot’ versus abuse because he is a man, for those without any other training in feminist theory the analysis was shallow. It was about the character superficially and a general idea that gender is something we need to consider in our own lived experiences. However, because the theory of Giroux, Walker, Collins, and others assigned in the Grounding part of the class was new to the majority of the students and they did not have a foundation of



classes like Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies, Sexuality and Culture, Gendered Worlds, and Introduction to Feminist Theory, all courses leading up to WGS 450 in our program, to root the ideas we were addressing in this course many in this class were missing the foundation to build deeper arguments. Students need time to live with, learn around, and use theory. Because this was a senior seminar where I wanted to take students deeper into feminist thought using *The Hunger Games* I planned for a different set of students than those that arrived in my class. We learned together; I shifted my perspective and worked with where the students were, but must acknowledge how my expectations for this class were not fully realized.

I also revisited this as I analyzed the students' interview data. The four concepts that they talked about most in their experience of this class (Love, Disability, Hunger, and the Archives) were clearly the ideas that resonated with them. These concepts were ones we talked about in various class meetings and they had important connections with the themes of the book and what was going on in student's lives. In reviewing the field journal and my own notes, other ideas, like visibility and surveillance, were my highlights. While we touched on these topics, and students had things to say about them, I never felt like we got to a point where we could have an advanced discussion around these topics because some of the students did not have the underlying theory on which to build those arguments. While we were able to have conversations about ways that characters were seen, and not seen, as well as how surveillance was a troubling part of *The Hunger Games*, my notes reflect ideas around the politics of visibility, notions of

subjectivity, and ways that surveillance invokes gendered cultural practices and normative gender performances.

Two examples of this deeper exploration of gender, visibility, and surveillance that I find in *The Hunger Games* and connect to what we were learning in WGS 450 come from Katniss's interactions with Haymitch as she learns to navigate the world of the Games. First, during the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games Katniss realizes Peeta is dying because of an infected wound. Haymitch can get her medicine to treat him if only she plays the role of sweetheart to the camera. Katniss realizes this saying to herself,

If I want to keep Peeta alive, I've got to give the audience something more to care about. Star-crossed lovers desperate to get home together. Two hearts beating as one. Romance. Never having been in love, this is going to be a real trick. (Collins, 2008, p. 261)

Katniss' character is merely acting out what a girl in love should be based on audience assumption, not a real reflection of her feelings for her fellow tribute. She is not discovering a love that she values or wants, but is playing a role to satisfy the society she lives in.

We see this again in *Catching Fire* (2010) as Haymitch and Katniss prepare for the Victory Tour. Katniss implores Haymitch for his help navigating the political complexities of being a Victor, not realizing that her life has been defined for her in more ways than she can imagine,

You and Peeta, you'll be mentors now, every year from here on out. And every year they'll revisit the romance and broadcast the details of your private life, and you'll never be able to do anything but live happily ever after with that boy.

The full impact of what he's saying hits me. I will never have a life with Gale, even if I want to. I will never be allowed to live alone. I will have to be forever in love with Peeta. The Capitol will insist on it. I'll have a few years maybe, because I'm still only sixteen, to stay with my mother and Prim. And then...and then...there's only one future if I want to keep those I love alive and stay alive myself. I'll have to marry Peeta. (Collins, 2010, p. 61-62)

Here Katniss shows more vulnerability thinking about marrying Peeta than she does facing mortal foes. She has less of a problem fighting to survive in place of her sister, but reveals real trepidation in having to live with the gendered expectations of perpetually being the girl in love. Peeta publicly declares his love for Katniss, but we meet her at a time when she has not fully discovered herself. There is some attraction to her hunting partner Gale, but it is not well developed. What if Katniss had been a lesbian, or had fallen in love with someone else, or was not attracted to anyone at all? She says plainly to Gale before the first reaping that she does not want kids because she does not want to create fodder for the Capitol's Games machine. Because of the trope of star-crossed lovers thrust upon them, spurred on as a way to keep them alive in the Games, both Katniss and Peeta will have to continue to play a pre-defined role in their foregone relationship. Because this play-acting is bigger than she is, Katniss becomes aware that the expectations of being a girl in love are reflected on her mother and sister, she is trapped by other's beliefs about who she is and what she must be and that script is very gendered and heteronormative. This is my own analysis of two small parts of this story, but models the types of analysis that I was leading this class towards and never felt that most got to. These examples pull from theorists like Foucault and Butler, whom I thought 400 level WGS students would be familiar with, but were not known by most of

the students in this class (field journal, 2014). *The Hunger Games* can be used to introduce these ideas, which is what I did in other semesters when I taught Introduction to WGS with this series, but was not how I assumed I would teach WGS 450.

I want to be clear, this analysis is not a reflection on what the students brought to the class, but a reflection of my expectations for the class because it was a 400 level senior seminar. I also do not want to appear to be laying blame for this at students' feet. As the instructor for this class, I chose the readings and guided the topics. If I wanted more depth with these topics, at the expense of other goals in this class, I could have taught them differently. The students in this class would have been great sponges for this kind of knowledge. My view of this as a challenge comes in how students approach the field of WGS differently than other fields. My assumption that students with a WGS background would sign up for a senior level seminar is a product of my expectations alone. But I think it does reflect ways that WGS is seen by students and the administration in comparison to other courses of study at the university. Without an appreciation for the rigor of learning WGS in ways that other disciplines are assumed, like taking introductory courses and building up towards higher-level classes, we shortchange what can be known in this discipline. Our popular culture and interest in topics like *The Hunger Games* drives our interest in ways that are good and compelling. I want students to be intrigued by WGS and willing to try courses that are not part of their major, like most of the students I WGS 450, but there is foundational knowledge that is needed to address topics in a 400 level WGS class. As an academic trained in this discipline, I know that this is a slippery slope. WGS is enriched by its inclusive,

interdisciplinary nature. There is much to be said about the practitioners of a subject who push back on the arbitrary nature of academic divisions, but not to be protective of the important work done in WGS and demand that work to be recognized is just as vital. We do our students and ourselves a disservice by not delving into this conversation.

**Benefits.** Benefits of teaching with young adult dystopian fiction have shown up in this case study for WGS 450. Students enjoyed learning with the story of *The Hunger Games*. They were excited that fiction, instead of more obvious academic material, was going to anchor our class. To put it simply, this class was fun. So often we lose places to have fun in education. Making learning fun is a political stance. Encouraging excitement in higher education is to transgress our notions of what learning in the university could be. Students' humanity has to be recognized and teaching agendas have to be flexible and responsive to student needs, but "excitement [can] co-exist with and even simulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement" (hooks, 1994, p. 7). Students will remember this class. They talked about it as the "most fun" class they took as an undergraduate and how they continued to use the ideas learned in the class a year after completing the course. This class has not left them; thus they are still learning from what we did that semester.

In their interviews, the power of storytelling was a strong concept; students liked learning with a story. Storytelling allows students to ask new questions, make different connections across texts and ideas, and occupy a shared space with other readers. It is not just that this class was taught using a story as its backbone, but that using *The Hunger Games* allowed students in this class to look at the world a bit differently, to make

connections that might otherwise have not been made, or to feel emotions for both characters in a story and the people around them a bit differently. We did not dispassionately discuss the themes and structures that occurred in the texts, nor did the students and I abandon all pretense of learning with the books to merely talk about our feelings of the story. We attempted to connect our lived experiences both inside and outside of the classroom through different learning experiences and media used to teach the class. Teaching with *The Hunger Games* offers space to frame storytelling as an important part of critical, feminist pedagogy. Stories are a place where we can imagine difference and science fiction is a particularly important place to push against what we believe are the boundaries of what we know. As LeGuin (1979) explains,

There are questions, not answers; process, not stasis. One of the essential functions of science fiction, I think, is precisely this kind of question-asking: reversals of an habitual way of thinking. Metaphors for what our language has no words for as yet, experiments in imagination. (p. 163)

The need for imagination is a central benefit from this class. It is in striving to connect different ways of knowing in the story, and in the classroom, that students can slip between and around fiction and reality to learn from *The Hunger Games*. Here science fiction's epistemology aligns with my own feminist pedagogy as it explores what life could be and looks towards a future we can influence. My students studied the indistinct areas where ideas about gender, race, class, ability, love, hunger, and hope overlap and intersect. This is what Imarisha (2015) calls the "intersection of identity and imagination," and there is the space of possibility in what we do not yet know. Russ

(1995) highlights that science fiction “embodies in its basic assumptions the conviction that finding out, or knowing about something...is itself a crucial good” (p. 12). To be curious is a valued characteristic. It is that straining towards the future that we do not yet know where I find similarities in science fiction and feminism. Reading that passage alongside Sarah Brennan’s assertion that “we are Katniss’ real audience” (2010, p. 5) made me think about the ways that the spaces we inhabit are connected to a history that we often do not think much about. One of the things *The Hunger Games* does is it allows us to think about ourselves as the Capitol or the Districts, as privileged or oppressed. By situating this exploration alongside the dystopian world of Panem I aimed to “sharpen [the students’] attention to those questions and make them appear less academic and abstract” (Lorenzo, 2014, p. 211). It is not important to me that students articulate if they feel like they are more like citizens of the Capitol or of the Districts, but we can use these places to begin talking about ways that privilege and oppression are intertwined in our own world.

Students highlighted fiction as an educational space and imagination as an important benefit of this class. The question of what happens in a world where gender, race, class, and ability assumptions do not define a person’s choices are equally at home in both *The Hunger Games* and my own notions of feminist pedagogy. Imarisha (2015) explains that in trying to imagine a world without war, violence, prisons, and capitalism, organizers and activists dedicate their lives to creating worlds that do not yet exist. In other words, “all organizing is science fiction” (p. 3). Along those lines, teaching students to imagine concepts like gender and systems that legitimize particular forms of

knowledge through a feminist pedagogical lens I am teaching for a world that does not exist yet. So, following Imarisha's call, all feminist teaching can be science fiction as well. I want my students to see the possibilities that can exist if we think differently about our identities, what is recognized as legitimate knowledge, and our popular fiction. *The Hunger Games* is one way to encourage students to explore that way of knowing.

### **Implications**

Having the experience of teaching, learning, and thinking with *The Hunger Games* for the past couple of years has been a pleasure. Listening to the WGS 450 students recount their experiences and perceptions of learning with this story, I know there is still much to learn in regards to teaching with young adult dystopian fiction. First, there is a place for teaching with young adult dystopian fiction in the WGS classroom. I identified five categories that exemplified the students' experiences with learning with *The Hunger Games*:

- The power of storytelling
- Students' reflections on class experiences
- The need for imagination
- Fiction as educational space
- Continuing to think with *The Hunger Games*

These categories are about this one class, taught one time, but there is more to learn as we look at the intersections of feminist pedagogy and young adult dystopian fiction. The power in stories, connections to student experience, the need for imagination, and the



idea of fiction as educational space warrant further study. Why students continue to think with a story like *The Hunger Games* and how it influences ways they navigate the world are questions ripe for further exploration.

Next, teaching with young adult dystopian fiction locates learning in spaces already occupied by my students. They are already reading these stories and watching these movies. Following the lead of teachers like Ileana Jiménez (2011), Jyl Lynn Felman (2001), Audre Lorde (1984), and bell hooks (1994) to meet students where they are at and to center imagination and excitement as motivating factors for intellectual engagement, putting popular fiction as central texts in the classroom makes the space more inviting for students. It is fun material that may let students rediscover pleasure in reading, sharing, and learning together in the classroom. Often those in higher education underrate pleasure, excitement, and imagination and there is room for all of that in the university classroom. While not right for every classroom, meeting students with the stories they are already reading is an important pedagogical practice. The whole class does not have to be structured around a dystopian trilogy, but showing students where the academic ideas we discuss in class show up in the stories they read can be a powerful learning tool. Moving theoretical ideas into the fictional world can give students a place to practice with new ideas, allow them to take imaginative risks with their ideas, and employ perspective shifting with characters in a book.

It is not merely that we move the ideas to a different space, but how learning with fiction through an explicitly feminist lens is about more than a look at gender and equality, but at a different relationship to knowledge altogether. Feminist knowledge

pushes back on normative, hegemonic ideals of who is a knower with an understanding that our identities are always implicated in questions of what we know and how we know it. Using *The Hunger Games*, students wrestled with questions about who produces knowledge and who consumes what is produced both in the story and in our world. This idea of knowledge and material production and consumption lends itself to a range of exciting pedagogical questions around who is understood to be a producer, who is understood to be a consumer, and why? Our explicit engagement with stories, both our own and those we read, can work to dismantle the dualism of reality and fiction. We can see how they intertwine and inform one another. Or in *Hunger Games* speak, understanding what is *Real or Not Real* is often a matter of context and perspective.

### **There is Truth in Fiction and Fiction in Truth**

This project also shows there is room for further study of young adult dystopian fiction and feminist pedagogy together. It is not just reading these books, as the students interviewed for this project showed, but using them as pedagogical tools that brought the story to life in our class. For the students who had read *The Hunger Games* before this class, revisiting the story with the deliberate academic perspective I asked them to employ allowed them to learn with a story they had only seen as entertainment before. Students' experiences learning with young adult dystopian fiction in WGS 450 speaks back to the literature that opens this dissertation, which discusses current young adult dystopian fiction as right wing messaging. Morrison (2014) and O'Hehir (2014) draw inevitable conclusions of self-interest outweighing the common good, which in turn valorizes the ethos of individualism and accepts capitalistic consumerism as

incontestable. Through pairing *The Hunger Games* with Henry Giroux, Patricia Hill Collins, and Alice Walker, among others, we began to highlight the structure of capitalistic patriarchy in ways that allowed students to use this story to learn a different message from the ones that Morrison (2014) and O’Hehir (2014) see in this genre.

Amber highlights this saying,

Throughout the semester, I loved how we developed friendships and we developed understandings of each other. We shared our backgrounds, our history, the things that makes us separate from each other, like the ways we’d been marginalized in life, and we discussed that in context of feminism. And in context of young adult literature and *The Hunger Games*...being able to do that in that kind of setting you can never do that anywhere else. That kind of culture is not developed in your apartment hanging out with friends drinking a glass of wine- that’s not what you talk about. To be able to do that is refreshing because you very rarely get to do it with literature. (Amber, 2015, lines 6-72)

Teaching stories like *The Hunger Games* with explicitly feminist pedagogy acknowledges the existence of privilege and oppression, connects knowledge and action, and recognizes the shifting, fragments humanity of all students in the classroom. When partnered with a curiosity that centers imagination and creativity, students are able to push back on notions of hierarchical authority, learn to ask different kinds of questions, and explore things like the public good and engaged citizenship in the worlds they are reading about. Students in WGS 450 built community around their interest in the story, used the fictional space of the arena to interrogate history and reimagine the political nature of their university education, and resisted individualist solutions to current events surrounding #BlackLivesMatter. This shows that the genre is not inherently right or left

leaning and that there is a specifically there is a feminist science fiction history that feminist teachers can use to counter that view of the genre.

Using young adult dystopian fiction as academic texts asks scholars to push boundaries of what we know about teaching. Academics need space to critique each other and to grow our work and knowledge. The tendencies described by Morrison (2014) and O’Heir (2014) merit consideration, but are not the only ways of understanding or using science fiction storytelling especially in the feminist classroom. Imarisha (2015), whose work I found after I taught WGS 450, is most instructive in how to think with this genre. She shows us how to “claim the vast space of possibility, to be birthing visionary stories. Using [our] everyday realities and experiences of changing the world, [we] can form the foundation of the fantastic and... build a future where the fantastic liberates the mundane” (p. 3). Imarisha and Brown (2015) show it is not the genre inherently which holds a political leaning, but the stories being told and the way we are teaching them. We need more stories by and about women, people of color, transwomen and men, and people experiencing disability. These stories need to be read and taught widely because of what they have to offer in terms of social critique and pedagogical potential.

Where students do not encounter people that are different from them, in person or in the curriculum they learn in, science fiction can be a place to include difference. In my own small, homogenous high school I read Orson Scott Card’s (1985) *Ender’s Game*. Using an alien race described as “bug-like,” I learned lessons about othering and empathy unlike any lesson taught using characters that looked and lived like me. To read about

characters who look, live, and think differently from your own experience is a powerful lesson that science fiction has the possibility of teaching us. But this call for diversity cannot merely happen in the book or only be important in the classroom. It must be connected to the world. Diversity, difference, and marginalization have to be acknowledged and made important in our lived experiences. As the noted science fiction writer Samuel Delany (quoted in Warner, 2012) argues we should “promote the planning and construction of civic spaces designed to encourage contact rather than discourage it.” We have to talk to one another. We have to find out how we are alike and how we are different and as anonymous Internet comments and twitter interactions show that can be hard. As a science fiction writer and literary critic, Delany uses this genre as a place for meaningful discussion of difference and a tool for understanding, and changing, the world around us. The story is not the ends but the means of enacting change. We do not want to change the world just to be able to tell different kinds of stories, but because we tell fantastic stories we can change the world. As Delany (2012) says, “without an image of tomorrow, one is trapped...Only by having clear and vital images of many alternatives...will we have any control of the way we may actually get there [and] nothing gives images of our tomorrows like science fiction” (p. 14). What we imagine and praise in science fiction must not stay only in the pages of the book. It is important that our heroines be black, female, queer. When we encounter diverse characters in many novels, they are often noted as being exceptional despite of their race, gender, or sexuality, but changing the way that heroism is understood and redefining who is the

hero, in ways that Katniss did in *The Hunger Games*, our students can imagine and enact difference in their lives.

I am excited when my classroom is filled with students whose lived experiences are different from my own, and each other's, but that is not always the case. In WGS 450, the students were overwhelmingly white and female, a reflection of our university's student body. I cannot change who I am or who my students are, but I can center marginalized identities, authors, and ways of knowing in my classroom and science fiction is one way to do that. Delany (2012) says that science fiction is a "dialogue with the present to prepare for the future" (p. 165). Authors like Delany, Russ, and LeGuin do not imagine a vaguely different, but overwhelming white and heteronormative, future, but they encourage deliberate ways of imagining possible futures with Ytasha Womack's sense of Afrofuturism, which "offers a 'highly intersectional' way of looking at possible futures or alternate realities through a black cultural lens. It is not-linear, fluid and feminist; it uses the black imagination...[and] blends the future, the past, and the present" (Thrasher, 2015). Looking at science fiction, pedagogy, and feminism through lenses like Afrofuturism allows for people to "better understand our lives and their possibilities beyond our present circumstances" (Thrasher, 2015). Science fiction, feminism, and Afrofuturism encourage experimentation, reimagine identities, and deploy imagination as a tool of resistance (Womack, 2013). With tools like this, students can talk about issues in different ways and figure out a world that we all want to live in. And this means

identifying with people who don't look like you [or] talk like you...It's a challenge, and it's as radical and useful for white cis boys as it is for the rest of

us- because stories are mirrors, but they are also windows. They let you see yourself transfigured, but they also let you live lives you haven't had the chance to imagine. (Penny, 2015)

When WGS 450 went into our university archives, we explored the complexities of desegregation and the hard work of social change. Even after the class ended, students used that experience to contextualize politics after class ended invoking ideas of rebellion and history to talk about the deaths of Mike Brown, Freddie Gray, and Trayvon Martin. The conversations about characters and race in *The Hunger Games* allowed us to look at how the roles of Katniss, Rue, Beetee, and Cinna were cast, comparing the books to the movies through the lens of social media. This was an important and impactful lesson, but I can go further. I can look back to the venerable Octavia Butler and forward to the work of Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown or Hugo Award nominee NK Jemisin. In teaching with difference and making it necessary to my classroom it is not just the stories we read, but how we learn with them, using the tools of feminist pedagogy, that allow me to bring all of these ideas into conversation.

### **Research Limitations**

This research project, like most, has limitations. As explained, I had trouble recruiting students into the course and ended up with 9 students in the WGS 450 class. When I reached back out to the students for follow up interviews, only six students were able to participate leaving me with a small set of data to analyze. Time constraints were the largest factor in trying to expand the class size or teach the class again. The class was approved only the semester before it was taught and was only approved to be offered in

that single semester. Though I believe the strengths of case study research outweigh the limitations for the questions that I want to answer, I acknowledge that issues of generalizability looms large over case study research. I hope that the readers find meaning and context in this work because readers will restructure the ideas of this project with their own knowledge in ways likely to be personally useful to them.

Along with the predictable limitations about sample size and generalizability, another limitation to this project was my own approach to *The Hunger Games*. While I approached teaching this story with depth and intention, it is from a genre I enjoy and a book series that I was already a fan of. In some ways, those are good things. It gave me the fuel to write this dissertation because I genuinely like the topic of *The Hunger Games*. In other ways, being a fan and having strong impressions of what I thought this story had to say about learning limited my ability to interrogate *The Hunger Games*. I had decided that *The Hunger Games* had something to offer my course thus limiting my ability to ask hard questions about what it did not offer or what possibilities were foreclosed by not teaching with this story. I looked at what the story had to offer the class through the combined lenses of a fan, reader, and teacher. I started this project thinking I was just talking about this one story, but realized that I was talking about many stories. While reading, teaching, and researching will never be apolitical, not recognizing the presence of these perspectives is a limitation.



## Concluding Thoughts

In the *Mockingjay* epilogue, Katniss reflects on her past and thinks about the future as she watches her children play in the meadow that was once her District. She tells us,

The questions are just beginning. The arenas have been completely destroyed, the memorials built, there are no more Hunger Games. But they teach about them at school... (Collins, 2010, p. 494, large print edition)

Here I am doing what Katniss predicts, teaching with *The Hunger Games*. WGS 450 was a moment in time where *The Hunger Games* became the touchstone for students to explore feminist thought, education, and the world around them. If nothing else, it showed that storytelling and imagination have a place in higher education. Students consume these stories and then these stories become part of the popular culture milieu. Young adult dystopian fiction offers both a place to escape into a fantasy world while simultaneously urging readers to think more deeply about social and political realities. If we want students in higher education to engage with pressing global concerns, this genre can help them to understand their world and place in it. Basu, Broad, and Hintz (2013) tell us,

YA dystopias are marked by their ambitious treatment of serious themes. Yet the far-fetched concepts they employ may create a buffer between the reader and text, perhaps allowing them to be read ultimately as flights of fancy rather than projections of a possible future. However, their wildly fantastic premises may provide young people with an entry point into real-world problems, encouraging them to think about social and political issues in new ways, or even for the first time. (p. 4-5)

Young adult dystopian fiction is about both escape and education. The issues they tackle are reflected in the world we live in, but in the pages of the books we can become lost to our reality for a time. It is not about one becoming more important than the other, but rather it is in the tensions between education and escapism where the pedagogical potential of this genre is realized.

The power to reimagine the world should not be undermined. Because these stories have the potential to challenge beliefs, the space to imagine concrete applications to theoretical assumptions exists. In reading and teaching this genre, we get the privilege to explore, “what if?” And in questioning, there is push back on the notions of reality and truth. Students learn to see that each has elements of fiction within it. We tell stories to understand truths and learning with young adult literature is one way to see how we participate in meaning-making. We read these stories for many reasons, to identify, to universalize, to fantasize, but this project has shown these texts are

capable of changing the minds of their readers, young and old alike, by exposing the false solidity of the world as it is commonsensically lived, by tearing open its sutured normality, and by daring to expose the power that reigns and the possibilities that lurk... (Moylan, 2000, p. 271)

Reading young adult dystopian fiction can be a deliberate strategy for social change, as it makes space for reflection and cultivates in us the capacity to consider our current lived realities in a dynamic manner. Students are creating and re-creating themselves as they grow and learn in the world and *The Hunger Games*, and other young adult dystopian fiction, has the power to remind us that life is not a finished story.

Ending this project is bittersweet. I have spent so much time teaching, reading, collecting, and analyzing information about *The Hunger Games* that it has become a part of my life. I now get to let *The Hunger Games* play a much smaller role in my life, but this project has let me learn more about myself as a teacher, student, and reader than I ever thought possible. I have learned to ask new questions, look from different perspectives, and ask more of the stories that I hear and tell. I have learned so much along the way, but there is much left to learn. With the release of the final movie of this franchise, the immediacy of *The Hunger Games* will fade into the background. I have no doubt this empty spot in popular culture will be filled by the next up-and-coming young adult author whose work gets spun into a block buster. As Marie (2015) said in her interview, “there’s more to it than just girl power... You read about those things and think, ‘does that really happen? Does that really occur?’...I can’t believe that stuff like that would happen. It helps people see it in practice and again they’ll read something in fiction and see something in real life and say that kind of reminds me of something I just read” (lines 185 and 200-206). *The Hunger Games* was well positioned to help Marie, and the other students, see their world from different perspectives and have the experience of learning with young adult dystopian fiction taught with a feminist, social justice oriented lens. These ideas are in the stories and students want to make connections with the world around them. *The Hunger Games* was the perfect vehicle at the right time.

## Epilogue

As I finish my dissertation and reflect on what I have learned, I start with what a troubling story *The Hunger Games* is. As readers, we encounter death, war, starvation, sex work, addiction, deception, and suffering, all in a book written for and marketed to young adults. If we recognize that Katniss is entertaining us as much as she is the Capitol residents who are “enthralled by her pain and sucked in by her love story” (Brennan, 2010, p. 5) then why did I want to teach this story and students want to read it? It is not only that we enjoyed the book and had fun with the class, but that we were fascinated by Games that were meant to terrorize and control the people of Panem. We watch, talk about, and learn from others’ pain in classes like history and literature, but seem to rarely consider the politics of whose tragedies, in fiction and in life, are talked about and exploited. More succinctly, who suffers the tragedies and who gets to learn from them?

Of course, Panem is fiction but Collins tells us that *The Hunger Games* germinated as she flipped between reality shows and war coverage. *The Hunger Games* is tragic and links to the worst of our reality, but I am not sure I spent enough time imagining the text as something I should problematize. In the class, we talked about despicable things that happened in the books. We turned to our own history and learned about awful things done in our community. We talked about how the themes and ideas in the books helped us to relate to events happening in the world around us, but wanted to walk away feeling okay about the text as we finished it. I wanted *The Hunger Games* to challenge my students, but I am not sure I asked enough of the text in this course. I am left asking why does it take a tragedy, real or fictional, for us to learn from? Where do

we draw the line in finding pleasure in something that is painful? Who gets to watch and comment on tragic events and who lives through them? Where in our educational system is there room for questions like these? I grounded the course within a larger academic discourse, but I am not sure that I ever fully tackled the issues of gaze and agency that are central to feminist theory.

Though, I am more convinced that storytelling is a useful way to think about these topics because the story neither starts nor stops with us. We begin life *in media res*, so using stories to help us understand how we are seen and see others as well as how we have the possibility to act in the world is a powerful tool. I thought about and taught with ideas of gaze and agency, but know that more could have been wrought from *The Hunger Games*. There are no simple answers to the questions that I have posed because the human condition is complex and contradictory. The ability to observe and understand the world is part of education and storytelling helps us to learn about others and ourselves. My teaching is about more than imparting specific information, at specific times, to specific students. It is also about creating the space for students to explore questions like these.

By choosing to center these books in this course, I am influenced by the structure of the story. I fully own the design of the class, but at the same time my agency as a teacher and a reader is entwined with the paradigm of the story and genre, by its popularity, and by its value in our popular culture milieu. Because I taught with *The Hunger Games*, I can follow the story or push against it, but the story is still there acting as a boundary for the class. Through *The Hunger Games* we explored another world, but

it was not a boundless exploration. I am not free to run through Panem unlinked from the characters of the story because Panem would not exist without them in it. And Panem, for many, is connected to Hogwarts is connected to Middle Earth is connected to our lives. In these spaces, complicated notions like gaze and agency have space to be explored. These places are fiction, but are also a laboratory to examine what we think about the world. As Ursula K. LeGuin (1979) says,

realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding...the incredible realities of our existence. A scientist who creates a monster in his laboratory; a librarian in the library of Babel; a wizard unable to cast a spell; a space ship having trouble getting to Alpha Centauri: all these may be precise and profound metaphors of the human condition. The fantasist...may be talking as seriously as any sociologist—and a good deal more directly—about human life as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it out to be lived. (p. 58)

We related to the stories and these far off places. But in relating to them, we relate to one another. And my hope is that with curiosity and creativity we learn to think more deeply about our world and ourselves.

Whether in fiction or real life, we encounter a world already in process; it has ideas, meanings, and symbols that already define us. I understand that I am not a completely free agent acting in the world on my own, in fact Deborah Britzman (2009) says, “we act without knowing in advance what becomes of our efforts.” (p. ix). In the classroom and elsewhere, I am sometimes met with inaction and indifference, but just as often with creativity and passion. What I can do is work to make the world a place with more possibilities, rather than less. I think teaching with young adult dystopian fiction allows me the space to explore more possibilities.

If I had to a chance to teach a class like WGS 450 again, I would explore the idea of troubling our positions as readers from the start. It is not merely that we read the books, but they are the vessel through which we explore the ideas of the course. Instead of accepting popularity as the *raison d'etre* for using the series I would probe deeper into the reading experience. I am interested in what we would learn if we read through the lens of different characters. How would President Snow, Katniss, and Haymitch react to Patricia Hill Collins or Alice Walker? If President Coin or Finnick could assign a reading, what would it be? In general, I would make the text work harder. I think it took teaching *The Hunger Games* the way I did and the extensive reflection of the material and my own teaching through this dissertation process to see how much harder I could have pushed myself, the text, and the students in the process by framing the class differently.

This question of framing *The Hunger Games* differently does not end with teaching the course. In writing this dissertation, I gave you all the parts of the story of this class: the setting, the cast of characters (students), and the questions, but followed the traditional five-chapter dissertation format. I talked about the power of storytelling and the need for imagination yet I reined in both when it came time to write this dissertation. This class was a story all its own and I did not tell it to you. There were time and family issues beyond my control that made the traditional format of a dissertation more appealing, but now I get to choose how I tell this story. I can explore academic thinking

in a storytelling format. I am interested in how my stories can further my thoughts on research, the academy, and young adult dystopian fiction. If I tell you my story will you tell me yours?



## REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Portsmouth, NH: William Heinemann Ltd.
- Adams, G. (2011). Lessons in Pop: Does pop culture belong in the classroom? *Scholastic Instructor*, 37-40.
- Alarcón, N. (1990). The theoretical subject(s) of this bridge called my back and Anglo-American feminism. In G. Anzaldúa (Ed.), *Making face, making soul*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute.
- Alvermann, D. E. (2012). Is there a place for popular culture in curriculum and classroom instruction? [The point position]. In C. J. Russo, & A. G. Osborne, Jr. (Series Eds.), & A. Eakle, C. Russo, & A. Osborne (Vol. Eds.), *Debating Issues in American Education: Curriculum and instruction*. (pp. 211-229). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452218465.n13>
- Alvesson, M., & Deetz, S. A. (2006). Critical theory and postmodernism approaches to organizational studies. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of organization studies* (2nd ed., pp. 255-283). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.
- Angelou, M. (1978). Phenomenal woman. In *Poetry Foundation*. Retrieved from <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/178942>
- Anyan, F. (2013). The influence of power shifts in data collection and analysis stages: A focus on qualitative research interview. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(36), 1-9.

- Anzaldua, G. (2007). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestiza* (third ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Atwood, M. (1985). *The handmaid's tale*. Toronto, Canada: McClelland & Stewart.
- Baker-Whitelaw, G. (2014, December 22). Why it's not OK to compare Ferguson to 'The Hunger Games'. In *The Daily Dot*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailydot.com/opinion/problem-with-hunger-games-allegory-ferguson/>
- Barnes, J. L. (2010). Team Katniss. In L. Wilson (Ed.), *The girl who was on fire: Your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, Inc.
- Basu, B., Broad, K. R., & Hintz, C. (2013). Introduction. In B. Basu & K. R. Broad (Eds.), *Contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults: Brave new teenagers* (pp. 1-15). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). Simulacra and simulation (S. F. Glaser, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Ben-Ari, A., & Enosh, G. (2012). Power relations and reciprocity: Dialectics of knowledge construction. *Qualitative Health Research*, 23(3), 422-429.
- Berendt, J. (1994). *Midnight in the garden of good and evil*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Bissex, G. (1986, September). On becoming teacher experts: What's a teacher-researcher? *Language Arts*, 63(5), 482-484.

- Borsellino, M. (2010). Your heart is a weapon the size of your fist. In L. Wilson (Ed.), *The girl who was on fire: Your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, Inc.
- Brady, J., & Dentith, A. (2001). Critical voyages: Postmodern feminist pedagogies as liberatory practice. *Teaching Education*, 12(2), 165-176.
- Brennan, S. R. (2010). Why so hungry for The Hunger Games? In L. Wilson (Ed.), *The girl who was on fire: your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, Inc.
- Bridwell, N. (1963). *Clifford, the big red dog*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.
- Britzman, D. P. (2009). *The very thought of education: Psychoanalysis and the impossible professions*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brock, R. (2005). *Sista Talk: The personal and the pedagogical*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Brown, P. (2008). A review of the literature on case study research. *The Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 1(1), 1-13.
- Burgess, S. (2008). *The founding fathers: Pop culture and constitutional law: Who's your daddy?* Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- Bussel, R. K. (2014, August 8). There is now a college class about 'The Hunger Games' and it sounds kind of amazing. In *teenvogue.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.teenvogue.com/story/hunger-games-college-class>

- Calta, A. (2014, August 26). A new look at American culture with The Hunger Games. In *american.edu*. Retrieved from <http://www.american.edu/cas/news/hunger-games-class-politics-marketing.cfm>
- Card, O. S. (1985). *Ender's game*. New York, NY: Tor Books.
- Child, B. (2014, June 4). Thai military threat to protesters using Hunger Games salute. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jun/04/thai-junta-threat-to-hunger-games-protesters>
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. L. (1993). *Inside/ Outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2007). Toward a new vision: Race, class, and gender as categories of analysis and connection. In S. Shaw & J. Lee (Eds.), *Women's voices Feminist visions*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Collins, S. (2008). *The hunger games*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Collins, S. (2010). *Catching fire*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Collins, S. (2012). *Mockingjay (large print edition)*. New York, NY: Large Print Press.
- Cousin, G. (2010). Positioning positionality: the reflexive turn. In M. Savin-Baden & C. H. Major (Eds.), *New approaches to qualitative research: Wisdom and uncertainty*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- D'Alessandro, A. (2015, January 22). 'Mockingjay' Tops 'Guardians of the Galaxy' To Become 2014's Highest Grossing Film. In *deadline.com*. Retrieved from <http://deadline.com/2015/01/the-hunger-games-mockingjay-part-1-2014-highest-grossing-film-of-the-year-guardians-of-the-galaxy-1201355262/>
- Dean-Ruzicka, R. (2014). Of scrivens and sparks: Girl geniuses in young adult dystopian fiction. In S. K. Day, M. A. Green-Barteet, & A. L. Montz (Eds.), *Female rebellion in young adult dystopian fiction* (pp. 51-74). Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- Delany, S. R. (2012). *Starboard wine: More notes on the language of science fiction* (revised ed.). Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (2010). *The qualitative manifesto: A call to arms*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). Introduction: The discipline of and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Derrida, J. (1997/1967). *Of Grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press. Retrieved from [http://www.mohamedrabeea.com/books/book1\\_3997.pdf](http://www.mohamedrabeea.com/books/book1_3997.pdf)
- Despain, B. (2010). Community in the face of tyranny. In L. Wilson (Ed.), *The girl who was on fire: your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, Inc.
- Dietzel, S. B., & Pagenhart, P. (1995). Teaching ideology to material girls: Pedagogy in the "postfeminist" classroom. *Feminist Teacher*, 9(3), 129-136.
- Diminick, J. P. (2009). Popular Culture: A teaching medium for philosophy or Into the iPod with Neo. Retrieved May 17, 2014, from [http://www.usma.edu/cfe/Literature/Diminick\\_09.pdf](http://www.usma.edu/cfe/Literature/Diminick_09.pdf)
- Disney, W. (Producer). (1940). *Fantasia* [Motion picture]. Walt Disney Productions.
- Dixon, A. (2012). *My people are rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party captain*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
- Dotson, K. (2015). Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins's black feminist epistemology. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(13), 2322-2328.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M.R., & Morrell, E. (2005, May). Turn up that radio, teacher: Popular cultural pedagogy in new century urban schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, 15.
- Evans, C. L. (2014, July 23). Feminist Science Fiction Is the Best Thing Ever. In *motherboard.vice.com*. Retrieved from <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/feminist-science-fiction-primer>

- Felman, J. L. (2001). *Never a dull moment: Teaching and the art of performance*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Feeney, N. (2013, October 22). The 8 habits of highly successful young-adult fiction authors. In *The Atlantic*. Retrieved February 13, 2014, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/10/the-8-habits-of-highly-successful-young-adult-fiction-authors/280722/>
- Fitch, J. (1999). *White oleander*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Co.
- Flaherty, C. (2013, August 21). Who should teach women's studies? In *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/08/21/scholars-consider-appropriate-background-teach-womens-studies>
- Flax, J. (1990). Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory. In L. J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism* (pp. 39-62). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Flax, J. (1987). Within and without: Women, gender, and theory. *Signs*, 12(4), 621-643.
- Flynn, E. A. (2007, September). Louise Rosenblatt and the ethical turn in literary theory. *College English*, 70(1), 52-69.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum
- Freire, P. (1983). The importance of the act of reading. *Journal of Education*, 165(1), 5-11.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage* (P. Clarke, Trans.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littleman Publishers, Inc.
- Freire, P. (2007). *Pedagogy of the heart* (D. Macedo & A. Oliveria, Trans.). New York, NY: Continuum.

- Frye, M. (2007). Oppression. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Race, class, and gender in the United States* (7th ed., pp. 154-158). New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- Gaiman, N. (2011). *American Gods* (10th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Gannon, S., & Davies, B. (2006). Postmodern, poststructural, and critical theories. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: theory and praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Garza, A., Cullors, P., & Tometi, O. (2013). Who we are. In *Blacklivesmatter.com*. Retrieved March 1, 2016, from blacklivesmatter.com
- Giroux, H. (2002). Neoliberalism, Corporate Culture, and the Promise of Higher Education: The University as a Democratic Public Sphere. *Harvard Education Review*, 72(4), 425-463.
- Giroux, H.A. (2006). *Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, class, and the biopolitics of disposability*. *College Literature*, 33.3, 171-196.
- Giroux, H. A. (2006). *The Giroux reader*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Gordin, M. D., Tilley, H., & Prakash, G. (2010). Introduction: Utopia and dystopia beyond space and time. In M. D. Gordin, H. Tilley, & G. Prakash (Eds.), *Utopia/dystopia: Conditions of historical possibility* (pp. 1-17). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.



- Grace, N. M. (1996). An exploration of the interdisciplinary character of women's studies. *Issues in Integrative Studies*, 14, 59-86.
- Grasswick, H. E., & Webb, M. O. (2002). Feminist epistemology as social epistemology. *Social Epistemology*, 16(3), 185-196.
- Greene, M. (1988). Qualitative research and the uses of literature. In R. R. Sherman & R. B. Webb (Eds.), *Qualitative research in education- Focus and methods*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.
- Gunn, J., Barr, M. S., & Candelaria, M. (2009). Introduction to part ii. In J. Gunn, M. S. Barr, & M. Candelaria (Eds.), *Reading science fiction*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hansen, M. (2014, December 3). Science Fiction and the Post-Ferguson World: “There Are as Many Ways to Exist as We Can Imagine”. In *yesmagazine.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/science-fiction-post-ferguson-world-walidah-imarisha>
- Harding, S. (1986). *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge?* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Haslanger, S. (1999). What knowledge is and what it ought to be: Feminist values and normative epistemology. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13, 459-480.
- Hatch, J. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. New York: New York Press.
- Herman, A. (2014, January 23). 25 YA novels everyone- even adults- should read. In *Flavorwire*. Retrieved March 14, 2014, from <http://flavorwire.com/434697/25-ya-novels-everyone-even-adults-should-read/>
- Hermes, J. (2005). *Re-reading popular culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2006). Feminist research: exploring the interconnections of epistemology, methodology, and method. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: theory and praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. & Piatelli, D. (2006). Holistic reflexivity: The feminist practice of reflexivity. In Hesse-Biber, S. N. (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and Praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hintz, C., & Ostry, E. (2003). Introduction. In C. Hintz & E. Ostry (Eds.), *Utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Holmes, L. (2014, June 5). The muscle-flexing, mind-blowing book girls will inherit the earth. In *NPR.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/monkeysee/2014/06/05/319064976/the-muscle-flexing-mind-blowing-book-girls-will-inherit-the-earth>
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Hunger facts. (n.d.). In *Thefoodeffect.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.thefoodeffect.org/all-about-hunger/hunger-facts/>
- Huxley, A. (1932). *Brave new world*. London, United Kingdom: Chatto & Windus.
- Imarisha, W. (2013, December). Imagine a World Without Prisons: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Superheroes, and Prison Abolition. In *The Abolitionist* . Retrieved from <http://walidah.com/node/413>
- Imarisha, W. (2015). Introduction. In A. M. Brown & W. Imarisha (Eds.), *Octavia's Brood: Science fiction stories from social justice movements* (pp. 3-5). Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Jenkins, H., McPherson, T., & Shattuc, J. (2002). The culture that sticks to your skin: A manifesto for a new cultural studies. In H. Jenkins, T. McPherson, & J. Shattuc (Eds.), *Hop on pop: The politics and pleasures of pop culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jenkins, H., McPherson, T., & Shattuc, J. (2002). Defining popular culture. In H. Jenkins, T. McPherson, & J. Shattuc (Eds.), *Hop on pop: The politics and pleasures of pop culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jiliani, Z. (2013, May 2). Real hunger games: Hundreds of disabled Americans compete for one wheelchair accessible van. In *Thecontributor.com*. Retrieved from <http://thecontributor.com/economy/real-hunger-games-hundreds-disabled-americans-compete-one-wheelchair-accessible-van>

- Jiménez, I. (2011). Teaching feminism in high school: Moving from theory to action. In *ontheissuesmagazine.com*. Retrieved from [http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2011fall/2011fall\\_imenez.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2011fall/2011fall_imenez.php)
- Jones, V. (2014, November 21). 'Hunger Games,' a mirror of America's inequality. In *cnn.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/21/opinion/jones-hunger-games/>
- Jule, A. (2010). Using the Mary Tyler Moore show as a feminist teaching tool. *Gender and Education*, 22(1), 123-130.
- Kavish, D. (2013, July 2). Hunger Games: The course. In *macalester.edu*. Retrieved from <http://www.macalester.edu/news/2013/07/hunger-games-the-course/>
- Kellner, D. (1994). Introduction: Jean Baudrillard in the fin-de-millennium. In D. Kellner (Ed.), *Baudrillard: A critical reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kelly, C. (2012, March 26). 'Hunger Games' sets records, pulls \$155 million over the weekend. In *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/hunger-games-sets-records-pulls-155-million-over-the-weekend/2012/03/26/gIQAtxYecS\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/hunger-games-sets-records-pulls-155-million-over-the-weekend/2012/03/26/gIQAtxYecS_story.html)
- Kessler-Harris, A. (1992). The view from women's studies. *Signs*, 17(4), 794-805.
- King, J. (2014, May 9). Is Beyoncé a terrorist? Black feminist scholars debate bell hooks. In *Colorlines.com*. Retrieved from [http://colorlines.com/archives/2014/05/black\\_feminist\\_scholars\\_debate\\_bell\\_hooks\\_beyonce\\_terrorist\\_remark.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2014/05/black_feminist_scholars_debate_bell_hooks_beyonce_terrorist_remark.html)

- Kinchloe, J. L., McLaren, P., & Steinberg, S. R. (2012). Critical pedagogy and qualitative research: Moving to the bricolage. In S. R. Steinberg & G. S. Cannella (Eds.), *Critical qualitative research reader*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Kress, A. (2010). The inevitable decline of decadence. In L. Wilson (Ed.), *The girl who was on fire: your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, Inc.
- Kunzru, H. (2014, November 20). Ursula Le Guin: 'Wizardry is artistry'. In *TheGuardian.com*. Retrieved April 4, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/20/ursula-le-guin-wizardry-is-artistry-interview-national-book-awards>
- Lang, B. (2014, January 10). 'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire' Top Grossing 2013 Domestic Release. In *TheWrap.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.thewrap.com/hunger-games-catching-fire-top-grossing-2013-domestic-release/>
- Lang, J. C. (2010). Feminist epistemologies of situated knowledges: Implications for rhetorical argumentation. *Informal Logic*, 30(2), 309-334.
- Lather, P. (1991). Deconstructing/deconstructive inquiry: The politics of knowing and being known. *Educational Theory*, 41(2), 153-173.

- Lauckner, H., Paterson, M., & Krupa, T. (2012). Using constructivist case study methodology to understand community development process: Proposed methodological questions to guide the research process [Electronic version]. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(25), 1-22.
- Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*. New York, NY: Warner Books, Inc.
- Lee, J. (1991). Integrating popular culture into a pedagogy of resistance: Students respond to the sitcom. *Feminist Teacher*, 5(3), 19-24.
- Lee, S. (2015, January 18). Updated figures for 'The Hunger Games' books: More than 36.5M in print in the U.S. alone. In *EW.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.ew.com/article/2012/03/28/hunger-games-updated-sales>
- LeGuin, U. K. (1969). *The left hand of darkness*. New York, NY: Ace.
- LeGuin, U. K. (1979). *The language of the night: Essays on fantasy and science fiction*. New York, NY: G.P Putnam's Sons.
- LeGuin, U. K. (2014, November 20). Ursula K Le Guin's speech at National Book Awards: 'Books aren't just commodities'. In *TheGuardian.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/20/ursula-k-le-guin-national-book-awards-speech>
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Liptak, A. (2010, January 21). Justices, 5-4, reject corporate spending limit. In *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/22/us/politics/22scotus.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>
- Longino, H. (2010). Feminist epistemology at *Hypatia's* 25th anniversary. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 733-741.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider*. Berkley, CA: The Crossing Press.
- Lorenzo, D. J. (2014). *Cities at the end of the world: using utopian and dystopian stories to reflect critically on our political beliefs, communities, and ways of life*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Lowry, L. (1993). *The giver*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Lucey, T. A., Lyke, K., Laney, J., & Connelly, C. (2013). Dimensions of citizenship through the lens of *The Hunger Games*: Fiction and the visual and performing arts as springboards for citizenship education. *The Social Studies*, 190-199.
- Ludwig, K. (2012). Using pop culture to teach biomechanics. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, 83(8), 27-30.
- Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, "world"-travelling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, 2(2), 3-19.
- Luke, A. (2004). Foreword. In McLaughlin, M. and Devoogd, G. (2004) *Critical literacy: Enhancing students' comprehension of text*. New York, Scholastic.
- Luke, C. (1992). Feminist politics in radical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 25-53). New York: Routledge.

- Lukenchuk, A., & Kolich, E. (2013). Paradigms and educational research: Weaving the tapestry. In A. Lukenchuk (Ed.), *Paradigms of research for the 21st century: Perspectives and examples from practice*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- MacDonald, A. A., & Sanchez-Casal, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Twenty-first century feminist classrooms: Pedagogies of identity and difference*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacLean, M. S. & Mohr, M. M. (1999). *Teacher- researchers at work*. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project, p. vii-ix.
- Malmgren, C. D. (1985). *Fictional space in the modernist and postmodernist novel*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press.
- Manguel, A. (1996). *A history of reading*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Marshall, J. (2006, February 26). Octavia Butler, 1947-2006: Sci-fi writer a gifted pioneer in white, male domain. In *Seattle Pi*. Retrieved from <http://www.seattlepi.com/ae/books/article/Octavia-Butler-1947-2006-Sci-fi-writer-a-gifted-1196968.php>
- McRobbie, A. (1994). *Postmodernism and popular culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mendez, J. B., & Wolf, D. L. (2006). Feminizing global research/globalizing feminist research: Methods and practice under globalization. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: theory and praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.



Merchant, B. (2014, August 15). We need dystopias now more than ever.

In *motherboard.vice.com*. Retrieved from <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/we-need-dystopias-now-more-than-ever>

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*.

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San

Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mirchandani, R. (2005, March). Postmodernism and sociology: From the epistemological to the empirical. *Sociological Theory*, 23(1), 86-115.

Miller, L. (2015, February 8). Margaret Atwood visits West Point for a frank

conversation on gender, politics and oppression. In *Salon.com*. Retrieved from

[http://www.salon.com/2015/02/08/margaret\\_atwood\\_visits\\_west\\_point\\_for\\_a\\_frank\\_conversation\\_on\\_gender\\_politics\\_and\\_oppression/](http://www.salon.com/2015/02/08/margaret_atwood_visits_west_point_for_a_frank_conversation_on_gender_politics_and_oppression/)

Mills, C. W. (1959/2000). *The sociological imagination* (40th anniversary ed.). New

York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Mills, H., Stephens, D., O'Keefe, T., & Waugh, J. R. (2004, September). Theory in

practice: the legacy of Louise Rosenblatt. *Language Arts*, 82(1), 47-55.

Montgomery, L. M. (1908). *Anne of Green Gables*. Boston, MA: L.C. Page & Co.

Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.). (1981). *This bridge called my back: Writings by*

*radical women of color*. Watertown, MA: Persephone Press.

- Morrison, E. (2014, September 1). YA dystopias teach children to submit to the free market, not fight authority. In *TheGuardian.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/01/ya-dystopias-children-free-market-hunger-games-the-giver-divergent>
- Moylan, T. (2000). *Scraps of the untainted sky: Science fiction utopia dystopia*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Naples, N. A., & Gurr, B. (2014). Feminist empiricism and standpoint theory: Approaches to understanding the social world. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (2nd ed., pp. 14-41). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Paik, P. Y. (2010). Introduction: The god that succeeded. *From utopia to apocalypse: Science fiction and the politics of catastrophe* (pp. 1-22). Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Price, M., & Owen, M. (1998). Who studies women's studies? *Gender and Education*, 10(2), 185-198.
- Obenson, T. A. (2014, July 3). Adapting Octavia Butler - The opening scene from the 'Xenogenesis' trilogy. In *Indie Wire*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/adapting-octavia-butler-the-opening-scene-from-the-xenogenesis-trilogy-20140703>
- Nelson, L. H. (1995). The very idea of feminist epistemology. *Hypatia*, 10(3), 31-49.

O'Hehir, A. (2014, March 22). "Divergent" and "Hunger Games" as capitalist agitprop.

In *Salon.com*. Retrieved from

[http://www.salon.com/2014/03/22/divergent\\_and\\_hunger\\_games\\_as\\_capitalist\\_agitprop/](http://www.salon.com/2014/03/22/divergent_and_hunger_games_as_capitalist_agitprop/)

Orwell, G. (1949). *Nineteen eighty four*. London, United Kingdom: Secker & Warburg.

Papadelos, P. Out of the community. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 26(70), 485-500.

Penny, L. (2015, December 28). What to do when you're not the hero anymore.

In *New Statesman*. Retrieved from

<http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/film/2015/12/what-do-when-youre-not-hero-any-more>

Pring, R. (2004). *Philosophy of educational research* (2nd ed.). New York, NY:

Continuum.

Plymire, D. C. (2012). Teaching the sociological imagination. *Journal of Physical*

*Education, Recreation, and Dance*, 83(8), 23-31.

Polletta, F., Chen, P. B., Gardner, B. G., & Motes, A. (2011). The sociology of

storytelling. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 109-130.

Pradl, G. M. (1996). Reading and democracy: Louise Rosenblatt's enduring

influence. *The New Advocate*, 9(1), 9-22.

Pryor, G. S. (2008, September). Using pop culture to teach introductory biology. *The*

*American Biology Teacher*, 70(7), 396-399.

Pytash, K. E. (2013, March). Using YA Literature to help preservice teachers deal with

bullying and suicide. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 56(6), 470-479.

- Readings, B. (1996). *The university in ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ritchie, G. (2015). The importance of teacher research to the classroom teacher. In *Definition of Teacher Research*. Retrieved from <http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/tr-definition>
- Roberts, M. (2013). Teaching young adult literature. *English Journal*, 102(5), 89-90.
- Robinson, J. (2014, September 30). Taylor Swift demonstrates why Emma Watson's U.N. feminism speech was so important. In *Vanityfair.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/09/taylor-swift-emma-watson-feminism-speech>
- Romack, K. (2011). Women's studies in the "postfeminist" university. *Feminist Formations*, 23(1), 235-256.
- Roth, V. (2011). *Divergent*. New York, NY: Katherine Tegen Books.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1936, January). A writer's dilemma: a case history and critique. *International Journal of Ethics*, 46(2), 195-211.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1960, May). Literature: a reader's role. *The English Journal*, 49(5), 304-310 and 315-316.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1964). The poem as event [Electronic version]. *College English*, 26(2), 123-128.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1966, November). A performing art. *The English Journal*, 55(8), 999-1005.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1993, April). The transactional theory: Against dualisms. *College English*, 55(4), 377-386.

- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1995). *Literature as exploration* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Modern Language Association.
- Rowling, J. K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.
- Rowling, J. K. (2012). Biography. In *jkrowling.com*. Retrieved from [http://www.jkrowling.com/en\\_US/#/about-jk-rowling](http://www.jkrowling.com/en_US/#/about-jk-rowling)
- Russ, J. (1995). *To write like a woman: Essays in feminism and science fiction*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, h. R. (2003). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Saunders, J. M., & Ash, G. E. (2013, March). Entering the arena: The figured worlds transition of preservice teachers. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 56(6), 490-499.
- Sayles-Hannon, S. J. (2007). Feminist and liberatory pedagogies: journey toward synthesis. *The International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations*, 7(2), 33-42.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Scott, J. W. (1991). The evidence of experience. *Critical Inquiry*, 17, 773-797.

- Segran, E. (2014, August 7). If we want feminism to have a real impact, then let's stop teaching so much theory. In *newrepublic.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118996/womens-studies-departments-are-failing-feminism>
- Shaw, D. B. (2000). *Women, science and fiction: The Frankenstein inheritance*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian.
- Shelley, M. (1818). *Frankenstein; or, the modern Prometheus*. London, United Kingdom: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones.
- Shor, I. (1999). What is critical literacy? *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*, 4(1). Retrieved September 1, 2013, from <http://www.lesley.edu/journal-pedagogy-pluralism-practice/ira-shor/critical-literacy/>
- Shrewsbury, C. M. (1993). What is feminist pedagogy? *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 25(1/2).
- Sidiquee, I. (2014, November 19). The topics dystopian films won't touch. In *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/11/the-topics-dystopian-films-wont-touch/382509/>
- Simmons, A. M. (2012, September). Class on fire: Using The Hunger Games trilogy to encourage social action. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 56(1), 22-34.
- Smith, D. (2000, June 24). The Times plans a children's best-seller list [Electronic version]. *The New York Times*.

- Snicket, L. (1999). *A series of unfortunate events*. New York, NY: HaperCollins Publishing.
- St. Pierre, E. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5), 477-515.
- Stake, J. E. (2006). Pedagogy and student change in the women's and gender studies classroom. *Gender and Education*, 18(2), 199-212.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Steinberg, S. R. (2012). Critical cultural studies research: Bricolage in action. In S. R. Steinberg & G. S. Cannella (Eds.), *Critical qualitative research reader* (pp. 182-197). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Steinem, G. (2015, February 23). Woman on the edge of time: Still on the edge. In *GloriaReads*. Retrieved from <http://gloriareads.openroadmedia.com/woman-edge-time-still-edge/>
- Strickland, A. (2013, October 17). A brief history of young adult literature. In *CNN*. Retrieved February 13, 2014, from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/15/living/young-adult-fiction-evolution/>
- Subramanian, C. (2012, April 5). Stephen Colbert's Super PAC satire lands him a Peabody. In *Time*. Retrieved from <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/04/05/stephen-colberts-super-pac-satire-lands-him-a-peabody/>
- Taylor, B. (2003). *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

- Thanh, N. C., & Thanh, T. T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American Journal of Education Science, 1*(2), 24-27.
- Thrasher, S. W. (2015, December). Afrofuturism: reimagining science and future from a black perspective. In TheGuardian.com. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/dec/07/afrofuturism-black-identity-future-science-technology>.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954). *The lord of the rings*. London, United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin.
- van Niekerk, L., & Savin-Baden, M. (2010). Relocating truths in the qualitative research paradigm. In M. Savin-Baden & C. H. Major (Eds.), *New approaches to qualitative research: Wisdom and uncertainty*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Villaverde, L. (2008). *Feminist Theories and Education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Warner, J. (2012, August 9). The future of sex. Samuel R Delany on working all that stuff out for yourself. In *openDemocracy*. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/james-warner/future-of-sex-samuel-r-delaney-on-working-all-that-stuff-out-for-yourself>
- Walzer, J. B. New knowledge or new discipline? Women's studies at the university. *Change, 14*(3), 21-23.
- Weaver, J. A. (2005). *Popular culture primer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.



- Weber, B. R. (2010). Teaching popular culture through gender studies: Feminist pedagogy in a postfeminist and neoliberal academy? *Feminist Teacher*, 20(2), 124-138.
- Wendig, C. (2013, June 4). 25 things you should know about young adult fiction. In *Terribleminds*. Retrieved February 13, 2014, from <http://terribleminds.com/ramble/2013/06/04/25-things-you-should-know-about-young-adult-fiction/>
- Wilkinson, L. (2010). Someone to watch over me. In L. Wilson (Ed.), *The girl who was on fire: Your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, Inc.
- Williams, R. (1998). The analysis of culture. In J. Storey (Ed.), *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader* (pp. 48-56). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Wilson, L. (2010). Introduction. In L. Wilson (Ed.), *The girl who was on fire: your favorite authors on Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games trilogy*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, Inc.
- Wilson, N. (2014, November 24). Sometimes the master's tools can light a fire. In *Msmagazine.com*. Retrieved from <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2014/11/24/sometimes-the-masters-tools-can-light-a-fire/>
- Womack, Y. L. (2013). *Afrofuturism: The world of black sci-fi and fantasy culture*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books.

- Workneh, L. (2013, April 3). Beyoncé calls herself a 'modern day feminist' in Vogue UK. In *TheGrio.com*. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2013/04/03/beyonce-calls-herself-a-modern-day-feminist/>
- World food programme. (n.d.). Learn more about hunger. In *Teaming up against hunger*. Retrieved from <http://hungergames.wfp.org/>
- Worth, S. E. (2008). Storytelling and narrative knowing: An examination of the epistemic benefits of well-told stories. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 42(3), 42-56.
- Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake [Electronic version]. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 134-152.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Zeisler, A. (2008). *Feminism and Pop Culture*. Berkley, CA: Seal Press.

APPENDIX A

SYLLABUS FOR WGS 450

WGS 450: *The Hunger Games* and Feminist  
Education- Fire is Catching

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Spring 2014



Course Description:

Inquiry is at the heart of education. This class will dive deep into that heart by asking and exploring questions about Feminism, Education, and Young Adult Literature. We will ponder the questions:

**What is a Feminist Education? What is Social Justice? How does Education inform Young Adult Literature (and vice versa)? What CONNECTIONS can we make?**



Head Gamemaker: Sarah E. Colonna

Email: [secolonn@uncg.edu](mailto:secolonn@uncg.edu)  
Twitter: @secolonna/Instagram: secolonna  
#HungerGamesClass  
Office: EUC 239- hours by appointment



Arena: Curry 238- M/W 2-3:15

#### Course Objectives:

- Demonstrate ability to conduct interdisciplinary feminist analysis
- Explore the intersections of feminist pedagogy and Young Adult Literature (YAL)
- Critically examine ideological assumptions underlying the institution of education (and other social institutions) and systems of representation

#### Student Outcomes:

- Understand the process of inquiry in the interdisciplinary environment of WGS
- Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze content
- Express the application of critical, creative thinking

#### Texts:

- The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins
- Catching Fire by Suzanne Collins
- Mockingjay by Suzanne Collins
- The Girl Who Was on Fire edited by Leah Wilson
- Other readings will be posted in Blackboard/ links in the syllabus
  - This class requires you to bring readings to class on paper or in digital form

#### Assignments and Requirements:

- Attendance and Participation (20%)
- Critical Reflections (30%)
- The Girl Who Was on Fire Essay (20%)
- Final Project (25%)
- Self -Assessment (5%)

## **Major Class Assignments and Requirements**

- **Participation (20%)**
  - This class is designed to be interactive –most class periods will center on group activities, questions and answer sessions, and large and small group discussions. In order to grapple with the material, it is VITAL that you read the assignments carefully and on time, come to class with questions, opinions, and analyses—in other words **be prepared to participate in an intellectual debate**. It is ESSENTIAL that you complete and reflect on reading assignments before coming to class, and be prepared to contribute to the discussion. Class participation will count for 20% of your grade – this includes but is not limited to: coming to class, participating, reading all assignments, handing in all assignments on time, staying awake and paying attention, and in general being engaged with the work at hand.
  - Attendance is important for your academic growth.
    - This is a small class and as such your voice is important to the daily discussion.
    - I appreciate an email if you are not going to be in class in case I need to make pedagogical adjustments.
    - Multiple absences require a meeting with me to be allowed back in class.
  - Throughout the semester I will assign smaller, weekly assignment, ask you to bring in things, etc. – These will be graded as participation.
  
- **Critical Reflections (30%):**
  - I am looking for an intellectual engagement with the material – compare your reactions to different readings, ask questions and try to answer them, pose opposing viewpoints, make suggestions, use the reading to think about something in your life, take risks, and incorporate your ideas about the subjects, but remember to include the content from the class readings.
  - 1. **Due 2/5-** This class is based on *The Hunger Games* yet we aren't discussing the trilogy for the first month. Why? What are you thinking? What are you learning? What connections are you making?
  - 2. **Due 3/5-** What are you learning and how is it all connecting for you? Why is *The Hunger Games*- a YAL series- relevant to your college education? How does it connect to education at all? How do education, YAL, and social justice begin to connect for you?
  - 3. **Due 4/14-** What are you learning and how is it all connecting for you? Why is *The Hunger Games*- a YAL series- relevant to your college education? How does it connect to education at all? How do education, YAL, and social justice begin to connect for you?
  
- **The Girl Who Was On Fire (TGWWOF) Essay (20%)**
  - In class, you will be reaped with an article from The Girl Who Was On Fire (TGWWOF)
  - On the day that reading is due you will turn in an essay reflecting on that article and connecting it to your learning.
  - This can be a meta analysis, or a detailed look at one point of the article (you decide), but I am looking for your reflections and connections. I must read about your thoughts and what you are learning. THIS IS NOT A BOOK/ARTICLE REVIEW.

- **Final project: (25%) Manifesto**
  - Building on what you have learned, thought and connected to in class you will write your own manifesto. It will link together your experience, education, and ideas to loudly proclaim who you are, where you are rooted, and what you expect for your future.
  - We will work through some of this in class and you will have to present it to class as your final project
  
- **Self -Assessment (5%)**
  - In class self assessment of your participation, rigor, and involvement in the class

**\*\*EXTRA CREDIT\*\***

That got your attention, didn't it!? There is so much that I want to put in this class, but to overstuff a class does not allow time for students to think, reflect, and learn. However, if you feel like you would like to tackle them for extra credit- talk to me and we can work it out!

-Keep a journal about your journey through class. Draw/scribble/explore. This is not a hastily put together, last minute thing, but rather something you use to document your learning. I imagine this exercise could help you with your final project

-Show UNCG what we are doing in this class. This can be an individual or group effort

-Take up the class hashtag #HungerGamesClass and do something with impact

- Bring your favorite *Hunger Games* quote to class on the first day written/printed on a piece of paper. Lay it face down on your desk until I ask for it.

-Have another idea? Talk to me about it.

**Writing**

All written work will be:

1. Typed.
2. Double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and in 11-12 point Times New Roman font. Pages should be numbered. All citations in APA format, with bibliography.
4. Include your name, the date.
5. Have an appropriate title.
6. Thoroughly proofread. Spell-check is important, but please remember that it does not catch everything.
7. My preference is an electronic copy turned in on blackboard (first choice) or emailed (second). Let's work to save trees.

I will consider the following criteria in grading papers:

1. The argument you are making (in other words, the content of the paper and the ideas you express).

The thesis or argument should be clearly expressed, and should be developed in a careful and in-depth way. Your analysis should show serious and careful engagement with the theories addressed in the course readings. Specific details and careful analysis of the texts you are using are important. Understanding of the critical terms and ideas we are learning should be demonstrated. The argument should be precise—avoid generalizations. I will also consider whether you follow assignment guidelines.

2. The organization of the paper. The argument should flow well, and the different ideas or specific details you are engaging should be connected through clear transitions. You should pay attention also to carefully citing your sources; this includes not only direct quotations, but also paraphrased ideas and arguments taken from other authors.

3. The style and mechanics of the paper. This includes grammar, diction, spelling, and punctuation.

It's my job not only to teach this course but also to help you with your writing. No question is too small, so feel welcome to come talk to me about your writing. I am happy to consult with you about a draft of your paper before you hand in the final version—talk to me, but it must be before the due date.

### **Grading**

There are 1000 possible points in this class.

900-1000 A

800-890 B

700-790 C

600-690 D

<600 F

A: Work of exceptional quality. Exceptional work shows deep engagement with course materials and lectures, clear logic, precise and artful writing, integration of different ideas and topics.

B: Work that is above average vis-à-vis your peers' work and the expectations for the assignment and for the course.

C: Work that adequately fulfills the requirements for the assignment or course.

D: Work that does not adequately fulfill requirements, but is deserving of some credit.

F: Work that is not deserving of credit.

The University grading policy: <http://www.uncg.edu/reg/Catalog/current/AcaRegs/Grading.html>

### **Other Stuff**

**Late assignments:** I do not accept late assignments unless arrangements have been made in advance. Even if you are absent, I will not accept the assignment late.

**Attendance:** Attendance is required and you are an important part of the class. Please alert me (when possible) if you will miss a class. Multiple misses will require meeting with me to be allowed back into class.

**Tardiness:** Tardiness is disruptive and all reasonable efforts to be on time should be made. At my discretion, habitual disruptive tardiness may need to be addressed.

**Electronics:** Calls, texting, and Facebook are not permitted in class. We will be exploring the class hashtag: **#HungerGamesClass** but e-learning takes a backseat to in person participation

**Plagiarism: DON'T DO IT!** You will fail the class and I will report you to the university. If you have any concerns about APA format I will be happy to help you.

### **ASSUMPTIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSIONS**

For the purpose of our discussions in this course we agree that:

1. We are all teachers and learners.
2. We all have multiple identities (including but not limited to those based on our race, gender, age, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, abilities, region, appearances, talents).
3. Societies construct meanings of gender, race, place, time, etc.
4. Oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism) exists.
5. One of the mechanisms of oppression is that we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own groups and about members of both dominant and subordinate groups.



6. We will not blame others or ourselves for the misinformation we have learned in the past, but accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
7. We will not blame victims for their oppression.
8. We will actively pursue information about our own groups and those of others.
9. We will share information about our groups with other members of the class and never demean, devalue, or in any way "put down" people for their experience.
10. We will actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls that prohibit group cooperation and group gain.

### **Tentative Schedule**

**This is the schedule, but there is always the possibility of change.**

### **Part 1: Grounding**

*I would much rather you come away with questions than answers- Veronica Roth,  
Divergent Series*

#### **Day 1 (1/13): Welcome to WGS 450**

Welcome to class, get to know each other, expectations for class

#### **Day 2 (1/15): Claiming an Education/ Reaping**

Claiming an education by Adrienne Rich

**1/20- MLK Holiday-** Are you reading the books? This is a good time to do so!

#### **Day 3 (1/22): Ideology**

Toward a New Vision- Patricia Hill Collins

Tired of playing Monopoly- Donna Langston

#### **Day 4 (1/27): Oppression**

Oppression- Marilyn Frye

In Full Bloom- Alice Walker

#### **Day 5 (1/29): Higher Education**

When Schools become Dead Zones- Henry Giroux- <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/18133-when-schools-become-dead-zones-of-the-imagination-a-critical-pedagogy-manifesto>

Neoliberalism and the politics of higher education- Henry Giroux- <http://truth-out.org/news/item/15237-predatory-capitalism-and-the-attack-on-higher-education-an-interview-with-henry-a-giroux>

#### **Day 6(2/3): Higher Education con't**

Think tanks take aim at UNC- <http://www.newsobserver.com/2013/10/25/3312473/think-tank-takes-aim-at-unc-ch.html>

Letter to Gov. McCroy

I am Malala (video, you need to watch all 3 parts)-

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/tue-october-8-2013/malala-yousafzai>

Malala being appropriated- <http://omidsafi.religionnews.com/2013/10/12/malala/>

**Day 7 (2/5): Revolution (critical reflection #1)**

It's a big fat revolution- Nomy Lamm: <http://tehomet.net/nomy.html>

<http://www.trueactivist.com/you-are-the-revolution/>

<http://lesbonaut.wordpress.com/2012/02/05/the-personal-is-political/>

## **Part 2: Exploring**

*Fiction allows us to slide into these other heads, these other places, and look through other eyes- Neil Gaiman, American Gods*

**Day 8 (2/10): Hunger Games, Go! (You need to have read THG trilogy and be ready to discuss)**

The girl who was on fire (TGWOF): Why so hungry for the hunger games

[http://io9.com/hunger-games-catching-fire-is-a-captivating-tale-of-pr-](http://io9.com/hunger-games-catching-fire-is-a-captivating-tale-of-pr-1469527675/@Jessica)

[1469527675/@Jessica](http://io9.com/hunger-games-catching-fire-is-a-captivating-tale-of-pr-1469527675/@Jessica)

**Day 9 (2/12): Love as a radical act**

TGWOF- Your heart is a weapon

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/22/the-passage-cardboard-](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/22/the-passage-cardboard-signs_n_4319568.html)

[signs\\_n\\_4319568.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/22/the-passage-cardboard-signs_n_4319568.html)

**Day 10 (2/17): Katniss (and a little Peeta)**

[http://bitchmagazine.org/post/the-rebel-warrior-and-the-boy-with-the-bread-gale-](http://bitchmagazine.org/post/the-rebel-warrior-and-the-boy-with-the-bread-gale-peeta-and-masculinity-in-the-hunger-games)

[peeta-and-masculinity-in-the-hunger-games](http://bitchmagazine.org/post/the-rebel-warrior-and-the-boy-with-the-bread-gale-peeta-and-masculinity-in-the-hunger-games)

<http://popgoesalicia.com/2012/03/28/katniss-everdeen-girl/>

[http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/27/why-hunger-games-](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/27/why-hunger-games-katniss-everdeen-role-model-jennifer-lawrence)

[katniss-everdeen-role-model-jennifer-lawrence](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/27/why-hunger-games-katniss-everdeen-role-model-jennifer-lawrence)

[http://m.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/another-reason-em-the-](http://m.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/another-reason-em-the-hunger-games-em-is-awesome-katniss-is-taller-than-peeta/281826/)

[hunger-games-em-is-awesome-katniss-is-taller-than-peeta/281826/](http://m.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/another-reason-em-the-hunger-games-em-is-awesome-katniss-is-taller-than-peeta/281826/)

\*\*Author Alicia Sowisdral will be skyping into class discussion today, come prepared to talk, ASK QUESTIONS, and think!\*\*

**Day 11 (2/19): Race in Panem**

[http://jezebel.com/5896688/i-see-white-people-hunger-games-and-a-brief-history-of-](http://jezebel.com/5896688/i-see-white-people-hunger-games-and-a-brief-history-of-cultural-whitewashing)

[cultural-whitewashing](http://jezebel.com/5896688/i-see-white-people-hunger-games-and-a-brief-history-of-cultural-whitewashing)

[http://jezebel.com/5896408/racist-hunger-games-fans-dont-care-how-much-money-](http://jezebel.com/5896408/racist-hunger-games-fans-dont-care-how-much-money-the-movie-made)

[the-movie-made](http://jezebel.com/5896408/racist-hunger-games-fans-dont-care-how-much-money-the-movie-made)

[http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/03/hunger\\_games.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/03/hunger_games.html)

[http://thegrio.com/2013/11/22/catching-fire-becomes-2nd-hunger-games-film-with-](http://thegrio.com/2013/11/22/catching-fire-becomes-2nd-hunger-games-film-with-racial-casting-controversy/)

[racial-casting-controversy/](http://thegrio.com/2013/11/22/catching-fire-becomes-2nd-hunger-games-film-with-racial-casting-controversy/)

[http://www.buzzfeed.com/michaelblackmon/17-harrowing-examples-of-white-](http://www.buzzfeed.com/michaelblackmon/17-harrowing-examples-of-white-privilege-9hu9)

[privilege-9hu9](http://www.buzzfeed.com/michaelblackmon/17-harrowing-examples-of-white-privilege-9hu9)

**Day 12(2/24): Disability in Panem**

TGWVWF- Bent, shattered, and mended

<http://tigerbeatdown.com/2012/03/26/so-how-about-those-hunger-games/>

<http://thesedeafeyes.tumblr.com/post/20236466065/i-loved-this-essay-about-disability-the-hunger-games>

<http://thecontributor.com/economy/real-hunger-games-hundreds-disabled-americans-compete-one-wheelchair-accessible-van>

<http://feministdisabilitystudiesblog.wordpress.com/2012/04/13/disability-lost-in-the-translation-of-the-hunger-games-2/>

<http://news.moviefone.com/2012/03/27/in-the-hunger-games-what/>

\*\*Candice Buss will be co-facilitating class discussion today, come prepared to talk, ASK QUESTIONS, and think!\*\*

**Day 13 (2/26): What about Hunger?**

<http://hungergames.wfp.org/>

<http://www.thefoodeffect.org/all-about-hunger/hunger-facts/>

<http://www.philanthropyjournal.org/nc/ncnews/hunger-soars-us-north-carolina>

[http://www.endhunger.org/north\\_carolina.htm](http://www.endhunger.org/north_carolina.htm)

<http://www.freerice.com>

\*\*Panel of Community leaders to discuss hunger, come prepared to talk, ASK QUESTIONS, and think!\*\*

**Day 14 (3/3): The Arena: Physical Space and Collective History**

\*\*\* We will meet at the McIver Statue in front of Jackson Library for class today\*\*

**Day 15 (3/5): The Arena Cont.**

\*\*\* We will meet at the McIver Statue in front of Jackson Library for class today\*\*

\*Spring Break\* (oh, Thank Goodness!)

**Day 16 (3/17): SEX in The Hunger Games**

TGWVWF- Team Katniss

[http://www.theonion.com/video/the-onion-reviews-the-hunger-games-catching-fire\\_34637/?playlist=recent-news](http://www.theonion.com/video/the-onion-reviews-the-hunger-games-catching-fire_34637/?playlist=recent-news)

<http://www.good.is/posts/4-things-the-hunger-games-can-teach-us-about-the-war-on-women>

<http://thehairpin.com/2013/11/closeted-characters-and-the-books-that-love-them>

<http://jezebel.com/what-if-katniss-didnt-have-to-choose-between-peeta-and-1475060744>

**Day 17 (3/19): Finnick Odair**

<http://socialwrkgirl.wordpress.com/tag/finnick-odair/>

<http://jezebel.com/even-finnick-doesn-t-think-he-s-attractive-enough-to-be-1466262647>

**Day 18 (3/24): Fashion, femininity, and playing woman (critical reflection #2)**

TGWFOF- Crime of fashion

[http://entertainment.msnbc.msn.com/\\_news/2012/03/28/10904124-some-hunger-games-critics-say-jennifer-lawrence-was-too-big-to-play-katniss](http://entertainment.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/03/28/10904124-some-hunger-games-critics-say-jennifer-lawrence-was-too-big-to-play-katniss)

<http://jezebel.com/catching-fire-producer-weighs-in-on-the-makeup-merch-1471917858>

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-10-15/bodies-double-as-cash-machines-with-u-s-income-lagging-economy.html>

<http://jezebel.com/volunteering-for-the-hunger-games-dont-forget-the-cov-508277061>

**Day 19 (3/26): Bread and Circuses**

TGWFOF- Panem et Circuses

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/books/review/what-would-aldous-huxley-make-of-the-way-we-consume-media-and-popular-culture.html?pagewanted=2&\\_r=1&src=me&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/books/review/what-would-aldous-huxley-make-of-the-way-we-consume-media-and-popular-culture.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1&src=me&)

**Day 20 (3/31): Are we the Capitol or a district?**

TGWFOF- Smoke and mirrors and someone to watch over me

<http://advicepeeta.tumblr.com/post/15724917840/you-know-whats-ironic-about-the-hunger-games>

<http://k-punk.org/remember-who-the-enemy-is/>

Vietnam Draft Lotteries- <http://www.sss.gov/lotter1.htm>

1969 draft- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-p5X1FjyD\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-p5X1FjyD_g)

**Day 21 (4/2): Capitol or District Cont.**

Village of 100- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D\\_efnYwHxTc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_efnYwHxTc)

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/30/north-carolina-voter-id-kid\\_n\\_4176141.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/30/north-carolina-voter-id-kid_n_4176141.html)

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/10/why-many-americans-are-averse-to-unironic-expressions-of-patriotism/280317/>

**Day 22 (4/7): Politics determines who has the power, not who has the truth- Paul Krugman**

TGWFOF- Politics of Mockingjay

[http://the-wopr.newsvine.com/\\_news/2013/09/19/20572264-church-members-mistreat-homeless-man-in-church-unaware-it-is-their-pastor-in-disguise](http://the-wopr.newsvine.com/_news/2013/09/19/20572264-church-members-mistreat-homeless-man-in-church-unaware-it-is-their-pastor-in-disguise)

**Day 23 (4/9): What about the future?**

TGWFOF- The Decline of Decadence

[http://www.trueactivist.com/gab\\_gallery/bertrand-russells-message-to-the-future-recorded-in-1959/](http://www.trueactivist.com/gab_gallery/bertrand-russells-message-to-the-future-recorded-in-1959/)

**Day 24 (4/14): Building Community**

TGWFOF- Community in the face of tragedy

## **Part 3: Creating**

### **Day 25 (4/16): Manifestos-**

*“From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.” –Michel Foucault*

<http://www.1000manifestos.com/manifesto-manifesto/>  
<http://99u.com/articles/7005/5-manifestos-for-art-life-business>

<http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>  
<http://literarymovementsmanifesto.wordpress.com/text-2/mina-loy-feminist-manifesto/>  
<http://junketstudies.com/joomla/11-rules-of-writing/the-rules>  
<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/2decs.html>  
[http://playpen.meraka.csir.co.za/~acdc/education/Dr\\_Anvind\\_Gupa/Learners\\_Library\\_7\\_March\\_2007/Resources/books/readings/17.pdf](http://playpen.meraka.csir.co.za/~acdc/education/Dr_Anvind_Gupa/Learners_Library_7_March_2007/Resources/books/readings/17.pdf)

**Day 26 (4/21): TBA**

**Day 27 (4/23): TBA**

**Day 28 (4/28): TBA**

**Day 29 (5/7): Final Exam**

**Self-evaluation: This is done in class and is part of your final grade**

## May the Odds be Ever in Your Favor!

Additional material to consider:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-buckworth/hungry-for-hunger-games-e\\_b\\_1337411.html#s801333](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-buckworth/hungry-for-hunger-games-e_b_1337411.html#s801333)

<http://www.rachelremen.com/service.html>

<http://www.thekatnisschronicles.com/>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/23/hunger-games-ryan-gosling-tumblr\\_n\\_1375144.html?ref=women#s806872](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/23/hunger-games-ryan-gosling-tumblr_n_1375144.html?ref=women#s806872)

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolpinchefsky/2012/04/10/16-questions-the-hunger-games-movie-doesnt-answer-that-the-book-does/>

<http://www.hgfiresidechat.com/episode-index/>

<http://entertainment.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/03/23/10828159-liberals-conservatives-embracing-hunger-games-for-very-different-reasons>

<http://hungergamestweets.tumblr.com/>

[http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/26/my-take-hunger-games-asks-us-not-to-watch/?hpt=hp\\_bn10&hpt=hp\\_bn10](http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/26/my-take-hunger-games-asks-us-not-to-watch/?hpt=hp_bn10&hpt=hp_bn10)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/08/movies/katniss-everdeen-a-new-type-of-woman-warrior.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/08/movies/katniss-everdeen-a-new-type-of-woman-warrior.html?_r=2)

[http://geekout.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/23/the-truth-about-the-hunger-games-katniss-is-better-than-bella/?hpt=hp\\_bn13](http://geekout.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/23/the-truth-about-the-hunger-games-katniss-is-better-than-bella/?hpt=hp_bn13)

## APPENDIX B

### WGS 450 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Interview Questions:

1. How would you describe your fiction reading?
  - a. What genres?
  - b. How much/often do you read fiction?
2. Tell me how you chose to take WGS 450.
  - a. How did the class being about *The Hunger Games* interest you?
  - b. How did the class being about feminist education interest you? see above
3. Describe your experience taking WGS 450.
  - a. What readings resonated with you?
    - i. What did you like about those?
  - b. What themes?
    - i. How did reading THG help you think about those themes?
  - c. What activities?
  - d. How did *The Hunger Games* facilitate those take-aways?
4. What do you see as the benefits to learning with young adult dystopian fiction?
  - a. The challenges?
5. The socio-political issues are similar to current events, but more pronounced in *The Hunger Games*. How did this impact your learning?
  - a. How did you use *The Hunger Games* to think about real-life issues?
  - b. How have you used this as a reference point since class ended?
6. In what ways did/does the literature cause you to think about real-world issues of oppression and power?
7. What did you learn about yourself as a learner in this class?
8. What would you do differently if you took this class again?
  - a. In terms of structure?
  - b. How you engaged with class material?
9. Anything to add?
10. What was your favorite character?

#### After Questions:

1. What was/is your major/minor?
2. Had you taken any other WGS classes? Which ones?
3. What year when taking the WGS 450 class?
4. Had you read *The Hunger Games* before taking this class?

## APPENDIX C

### UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: “She has no idea. The effect she can have.” *The Hunger Games* in a Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS) Classroom

Principal Investigator: Sarah E. Colonna

Faculty Advisor : Dr. Leila E. Villaverde

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

Sarah E. Colonna: [secolonn@uncg.edu](mailto:secolonn@uncg.edu)

Dr. Leila E. Villaverde [Levillav@uncg.edu](mailto:Levillav@uncg.edu)

#### **What is the study about?**

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. This project is educational research looking at the Spring 2014 WGS 450 class *The Hunger Games* and Feminist Education. The purpose of this study is to better understand the learning experience of that class and to explore the intersection of feminist pedagogy and popular culture.



**Why are you asking me?**

You are being asked to participate because you took part in the Spring 2014 WGS 450 class *The Hunger Games* and Feminist Education. You must be 18 or older to participate.

**What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

If you agree to be in this study you are agreeing to be interviewed for approximately one hour with the possibility of follow up interviews for clarification for about 30 minutes, if needed. You are also giving permission for me to review and use your assignments from Spring 2014 WGS 450 class *The Hunger Games* and Feminist Education for this project. There is minimal risk associated with being part of this research project. All identifying information will be removed from interviews and assignments and will be coded and organized under a pseudonym.

**Is there any audio/video recording?**

Interviews will be audio recorded for transcription. All data will be coded under pseudonyms, but because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

All audio recordings will be stored on a password protected computer and pseudonyms will be used in transcription and analysis.

**What are the risks to me?**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Sarah Colonna at [secolonn@uncg.edu](mailto:secolonn@uncg.edu) or Dr. Leila E. Villaverde at [levillav@uncg.edu](mailto:levillav@uncg.edu)

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**

Benefits to society from this study may include better-informed pedagogical practices

**Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

Data will be kept confidential by assigning of pseudonyms, all information will be kept on a password-protected computer, and that computer will be locked in my home office when not in use. A master list with student names and pseudonyms will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home office, separate from research data. Data will be kept for three years past the end of the project then will be erased from the protected computer. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Sarah E. Colonna

## APPENDIX D

### *THE HUNGER GAMES TERMINOLOGY*

#### **People:**

**Annie Cresta-** Winner of the 70<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games from District 4. Married to Finnick Odair.

**Avox-** A person punished by the Capitol. Their tongue is cut out and they work in a service capacity in the Capitol.

**Beetee Latier-** Former Hunger Games winner (year unspecified) from District 3. Electronics and wiring expert.

**Career Tributes (Careers)-** In districts 1,2, and 4 select children train with past victors until they are 18, and then volunteer to enter the Games.

**Cinna-** (Last name unknown.) Katniss Everdeen's Capitol stylist for the 74<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. Rebellion supporter.

**Finnick Odair-** Winner of the 65<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games from District 4. Married to Annie Cresta.

**Gale Hawthorne-** Katniss Everdeen's hunting partner and closest confidant. Rebel soldier and weapons designer.

**Gamemakers-** Capitol citizens who design the yearly Hunger Games and control the arena during play.

**Greasy Sae-** Black market food vendor in District 12. She buys Katniss Everdeen and Gale Hawthorne's illegally hunted game.

**Haymitch Abernathy-** Only living District 12 victor of The Hunger Games. Serves as a mentor to the yearly District 12 tributes.

**Katniss Everdeen-** Narrator of *The Hunger Games* series and main protagonist. She entered the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games as a volunteer for her sister, Primrose Everdeen.

**Mags Flanagan (Old Mags)-** Winner of the 11<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games from District 4. Volunteered to take Annie Cresta's place in the 75<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games.

**Peacekeepers-** The Capitol's internal security force. They ensure compliance to the Capitol's laws and punish those who break them. Most are recruited from District 2.

**Peeta Mellark-** Male tribute for the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games from District 12. Co-victor and rebellion leader alongside Katniss Everdeen.

**President Coin-** Leader of District 13 and rebellion leader.

**President Snow-** President of Panem. It is unknown if he was elected into this position.

**Primrose Everdeen-** Katniss Everdeen's younger sister. Original District 12 female tribute for the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. Worked as a healer for the rebellion.

**Rue-** (Last name unknown.) Female tribute from District 11 for the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. Though small, she was surprisingly highly rated (7/12) by the Gamemakers.

**Tigris-** (Last name unknown.) Disgraced former stylist for The Hunger Games. Runs a second hand shop in the Capitol.

**Tributes-** District residents who are required/volunteer to participate in the yearly Hunger Games. Every district supplies a male and female tribute between the ages of 12-18.

**Places:**

**Arena-** A large, enclosed area where *The Hunger Games* are held. A new one is designed and built each year.

**Capitol-** Panem's seat of power. Home of the rich, powerful ruling elite. It is located west of the Rocky Mountains.

**Districts-** Panem is divided into 13 states, 12 of which are ruled by the Capitol. Each one is responsible for one particular industry. There is little interaction between the districts.

**District 1-** The closest district to the Capitol. It is tasked with making luxury goods for the Capitol and is considered the wealthiest district. This district produces career tributes.

**District 2-** Masonry is produced in this district along with weaponry, trains, and the bulk of the Peacekeeping force. This district produces career tributes.

**District 3-** Electronics and mechanical products define this district. This district does not train career tributes.

**District 11-** This is the agriculture district. Most of the food is shipped to the Capitol, so this is one of the poorest districts with many of the residents being underfed. This district does not train career tributes.

**District 12-** This district mines coal for the Capitol and is the poorest of the 12 districts. This district does not train career tributes.

**District 13-** The official industry of this district is graphite mining, but they also worked in nuclear science and technology. Until the Dark Days, none of the other districts knew of its investment in nuclear weapons. It was the starting point for that rebellion and was thought to be destroyed by the Capitol by chemical bombs. In reality, the people of the district moved underground due to a non-aggression pact with the Capitol. They remained independent and isolated in exchange for not attacking the Capitol. The second rebellion was planned in District 13.

**Panem-** A North American nation established during a political and ecological upheaval where sea levels rose, changing the shape of the world's land masses. It was large enough to separate into 13 districts, perhaps separate nations that were annexed by Panem. A rebellion, referred to as the Dark Days, occurred about 74 years before the events in *The Hunger Games*, in which various districts rebelled against the oppressive regime of the Capitol. The Capitol retained control of 12 districts and annihilated the 13<sup>th</sup> entirely. The yearly ritual of The Hunger Games was started to remind the districts of the Capitol's power.

**Other:**

**The Hunger Games (the Games)-** A yearly reminder of the thwarted rebellion by the districts. Each district must send a boy and a girl to the Capitol for a televised fight to the death.

**Jabberjay-** A mutated male bird created by the Capitol to spy on enemies of the Capitol. The bird can memorize and repeat entire conversations. The rebels learned how to send them back telling lies and the Capitol ceased using them. They were abandoned to die in the wild.

**Mockingjay-** A hybrid bird produced by the mating of the abandoned male jabberjays and female mocking birds. They have lost the ability to memorize words, but can mimic noises they hear in the environment. Katniss Everdeen's father used to sing with the mockingjays before his death and Rue used them to communicate in the Arena. They are seen as a slight to the Capitol because of the connection to the failed jabberjays. Katniss wore a mockingjay pin into the Games and it became her symbol during the rebellion.

**Three Finger Salute-** An old custom from District 12 in which the three middle fingers of your left hand are pressed to your lips and then held up toward the person to whom you are showing respect. It is first seen when Katniss Everdeen is on stage after she volunteered for her sister. Most famously, Katniss shows the sign to the cameras after she is finished singing for Rue's death. As part of the rebellion, District 11 salutes Katniss during the victory tour for her treatment of Rue. The man who starts the salute is killed by the Peacekeepers.

**Victory Tour-** Following The Hunger Games, the Capitol parades the winner through each district. It is billed as a happy event allowing each district to congratulate the winner, but is done to cultivate the fear and terror of the Games between events.