

"MORE THAN JUST A PIECE IN THEIR GAMES": AGENCY
AND THE DOCILE BODY IN THE HUNGER
GAMES AND REALITY TELEVISION

by

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Abstract

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In recent years, with the rise of social media and normalized forms of surveillance there has been an increase in the visibility of how female bodies are policed within Western society. As the fight for women’s rights over their own bodies continues there has been an increase in the number of strong female protagonists in Young Adult literature, particularly literature classified as dystopian. Contemporary young adult (YA) literature is now filled with characters, such as The Hunger Games’ Katniss, that are taking on corrupt social institutions that represent exaggerated versions of those we quite regularly encounter in America. As many scholars have done before me I explore the idea of the female body as a docile body; however, unlike scholars such as Susan Bordo, Adrienne Rich, Judith Butler (and others), my focus is primarily on the ways in which youthful bodies are being policed, and the messages that young people within western society are receiving—through the literature targeted specifically toward young adult audiences—that tell them they are able to subvert the systems that seek to deprive them of power and agency over their own bodies. I address the role of modern surveillance, specifically via reality television and social media, in the establishment of increasingly more oppressive forms of power that construct women and children as sex objects, the idea that female agency is predominately an illusion (since women are often unknowingly perpetuating these oppressive forces), and how young women might dispel that illusion through an understanding of the ideologies being perpetuated by the various forms of media.

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Chapter 1

“We’re Watching You”: Panoptic Power in the Hunger Games

1.1 Introduction

A quick look at the currently trending topics on social media shows that women and young girls are fighting a continued battle over their own bodies. Some of the most recent and most disturbing topics include: a sixteen year old Texas girl's rape going viral (hashtags: #jadapose, #iamjada); nude celebrity photos leaked on the internet; a teenage girl used as bait and sodomized in a school bathroom in Florida; NFL player Ray Rice abusing his wife and the video going viral (hashtags: #whylstayed, #whyleft); a hoax about a Florida woman getting a third breast through plastic surgery so that she will no longer be attractive to men; YouTube star Sam Pepper pranking women with stealthy ass-grabbing; Emma Watson's moving speech on feminism being retaliated against with [false] threats to release nude photos; and, *Django Unchained* actress being mistaken for a prostitute and subsequently harassed by police. This list is by no means anywhere near a comprehensive list. With the rise in media literacy it has become increasingly more evident that, as another trending hashtag implies, #Yesallwomen still have to worry about rape (without justice), domestic violence, sexual assault on the streets, private photos stolen from the cloud, harassment from those meant to protect, and unrealistic expectations of beauty. But more than this, women now have to worry about their assault, their rape, and their naked bodies being exposed and criticized on the internet.

The extensive surveillance of our culture has become a double-edged sword; occasionally the spread of photo and video evidence leads to something masquerading as justice, but more often it leads to increased humiliation and visibility of victims (who are often blamed for the abuse/assault). Still, even with increased surveillance—or, perhaps, because of this increased surveillance—these trends persist. Day after day on the internet, in book stores, on television, even on Xbox Live, there are countless examples of women's bodies being misused, abused, appropriated for a cause, being molded and regulated. As Susan Bordo states in *Unbearable Weight*, “The body is not only a text of culture. It is also, a practical, direct locus of social control” (165). This social control is currently playing out on women's

bodies in many oppressive forms. It is easy to see the ways in which women's bodies are policed by our society, perhaps too easy, in fact. It is also easy to question how much control a woman/girl has over her own body in such a society. But, "where there is power there is also resistance" (Bordo 295). Women are continuing to fight a war to win the rights over their own bodies. Unfortunately, young girls are being unwillingly thrust into the warzone and recruited as soldiers of this cause. It is a continued fight over who will possess agency over what bodies.

As the fight for women's rights over their own bodies continues there has been an increase in the number of strong female protagonists in Young Adult literature, particularly literature classified as dystopian. As many scholars have done before me I explore the idea of the female body as a docile body, which Foucault refers to as being a body "that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (136). However, unlike scholars such as Susan Bordo, Adrienne Rich, Judith Butler (and others), my focus is primarily on the ways in which youthful bodies are being policed, and the messages that young people within western society are receiving—through the literature targeted specifically toward young adult audiences—that tell them they are able to subvert the systems that seek to deprive them of power and agency over their own bodies.¹ In the following chapters I address the role of modern surveillance in the establishment of increasingly more oppressive forms of power that construct women and children as

¹ "Young Adult" can be defined in many ways. The definition, in fact, seems to change with time. Rosie Ornstein in "The Sociology of Young Adulthood: An Introductory Study of the Unknown" defines a young adult as "those who have reached sexual maturity, but are not married." However, in June of this year Ruth Graham wrote several articles arguing against this definition of young adulthood, because of its potential to include individuals that are well into their thirties. In one particular essay written for Slate Magazine (which I mention not for its scholarly value, but more for its social media presence) Graham states that, "the cultural definition of 'young adult' now stretches practically to age 30," but in terms of literature young adult "generally refers to books written for 12- to 17-year-olds." I do not wish to spend too much time fretting over the various definitions. I acknowledge that this definition varies from person to person, and from each field of study. For the purpose of this project I will typically refer to the category of young adults as those individuals between the ages of 17 and 25. This is for no particular reason, other than it seems to be a reasonable compromise.

Ornstein, Rosie. "The Sociology of Young Adulthood: An Introductory Study of the Unknown". *Life History and the Media Project*. University of Illinois at Chicago. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.

<http://www.uic.edu/depts/comm/lifehist/LHMPUnderSociology.html>.

Graham, Ruth. "Against YA." *Slat Magazine*. *The Slate Book Review*, 5 June 2014. Web. 18 Oct. 2014.

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2014/06/against_ya_adults_should_be_embarrassed_to_read_children_s_books.html

sex objects, the idea that female agency is predominately an illusion (since women are often unknowingly perpetuating these oppressive forces), and how young women might dispel that illusion through an understanding of the ideologies being perpetuated by the various forms of media.²

As a postmodern form of literature, young adult (YA) literature is filled with characters that are taking on corrupt social institutions that represent exaggerated versions of those we quite regularly encounter in America. In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* Roberta Trites states, contrary to the above statement, "The role of politics in adolescent literature appears more subtly: relatively few novels deal directly with the role of the state in regulating teenagers' power" (22). I do not deny that this is true for the majority of adolescent literature; however, dystopian literature, which I take as my main focus, has provided an exceptional platform by which authors may contest the role of politics and how, not only teenagers, but all readers might come to know their own power within these regulated states.³ In terms of the dystopian novel, the states that regulate are often entire corrupt governments or occasionally a single corrupt ruler, as is the case in *Divergent* by Veronica Roth. The states that regulate teenage power outside the government—media, strangers, friends, etc.—which I address in each of the following chapters, take on a murkier, more malleable and less definable form. The bodies of young women are controlled by all of these forces in addition to the control they exert over themselves. We see this all too clearly through the dystopian genre. As Don Latham and Jonathan Hollister state in "The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games Trilogy," "By nature, dystopian fiction is well equipped to demonstrate the workings of power relations in an exaggerated way" (35). This is precisely why young girls are finding role models in these potentially

² For this project I will be utilizing a poststructuralist notion of agency. As stated by Mel Stanfill in "On the Complexity of Agency" agency "is not a matter of acting in a way that is unconstrained by power, but rather consists of working within power." She further explains, relying on Butler's *Bodies that Matter* "power both subjects us (constrains)" and empowers us. Therefore, I will argue that the illusion of agency is dispelled through the recognition of oppressive ideologies and as a result agency may be obtained through the ability to reinscribe one's own body within pre-existing systems.

³ Young Adult fiction as a whole is particularly useful, because it demonstrates the ways in which youthful bodies are policed in different ways than those of adults. Young adult characters not only have to deal with the same cultural/societal policing as older individuals (not just characters), but additionally they are policed by individual adults (teachers, parents, etc.). This increased form of policing provides more opportunities to critique the numerous examples of power being exerted upon bodies rendered docile.

unexpected mediums.⁴ In contrast to most other forms of YA literature, which is dedicated to “depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures” and “to indoctrinate adolescents into a measure of social acceptance” dystopian literature teaches readers how to find a way to exist against, or in opposition to these destructive social institutions.⁵ It seeks to encourage understanding of oneself within these institutional structures, and thus an ability to self-regulate in a way that allows one to reinscribe one’s own body or image with more intention.

In the last few years, post-apocalyptic and dystopian novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Matched*, *Delirium*, *Legend*, *Enclave*, *Uglies*, *Graceling*, and *City of Ember* have risen among the ranks of best-selling YA literature.⁶ Each of these novels or series has two themes in common with all the rest: brave young women as protagonists and corrupt governments (that strictly police female bodies). In all of these novels/series the protagonist discovers the truth about her government and must make difficult decisions in order to better her world (or simply to stay alive).⁷ Thus, it is this literary material that pushes readers (especially young readers) toward questioning the power of their own societies and their own places within those societies. YA literature, especially YA dystopias exaggerate and draw attention to the way governments and societies seek to take control over the female body, and turn it into something plastic that can be molded and shaped for a particular purpose. Often the young women in these novels are forced to deal with issues of appearance, seeking to find their place in a world that finds them somehow physically peculiar. The “how” varies from novel to novel. Or, as is the case in *When She Woke* by Hillary Jordan, young women have to deal with their own sexuality being regulated. These characters find themselves either being forced to become pregnant or they accidentally become pregnant, but then have to deal with dire consequences (usually governments that strictly forbid abortion). These novels are quite apt at tackling issues consistent with a heteronormative society. Perhaps, in light of the recent

⁴ This is not to say, however, that real women/girls are not also finding ways to exert agency within these pre-existing systems.

⁵ Trites, Roberta Seelinger. *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000. 7, 27.

⁶ This list only refers to a very small portion of similar texts.

⁷ It should be noted that, while each of these novels tackles similar themes of oppression, they depict very different versions of corrupt governments.

incident with the twelve year-old Norwegian bride-to-be,⁸ the issue of child marriage within texts should also be noted. It is a seemingly normal occurrence in these novels for girls anywhere from thirteen to seventeen years old to be married off to older men, and to later become pregnant. YA dystopian literature illuminates these issues so that they might be examined within our own societies.

Among the many popular YA dystopian novels that came out in the 2000s one particular trilogy, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins stands apart from the rest, for its unsettling critique of government power, freakish exaggeration of consumer society, eerily familiar examples of unrelenting surveillance, and the grotesque depictions of the societal pressures placed on young adults to achieve the perfect image or persona. Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, is typically talked about as the character in *The Hunger Games* with the most agency.⁹ Both the character of Katniss and the actress who plays her, Jennifer Lawrence, have been embraced as feminist icons for their ability to control their own images. The only exception to the perspective which gives Katniss agency over herself is the perspective that, instead, gives the audience and Gamemakers (the government) agency; however, even in this narrative, Katniss is still seen to find a source of power after she becomes the Mockingjay. Initially the Capitol and District 13 retain the most agency over Katniss's identity and her body. Yet, when she finally realizes that she has become exactly who the governments (The Capitol and District 13) longed for her to be, despite fighting against their values and ideologies, she is able to see and understand the complex power structures at play. She learns what is meant by Haymitch's pre-arena warning in *Catching Fire*: "Katniss, when you are in the arena, you just remember who the true enemy is" (260). Haymitch means the Capitol is the enemy, but Katniss eventually learns the true enemy is not just the Capitol. There are numerous forms of power which appear to be oppressing and taking away from Katniss. Foucault argues, however, for power to cease being seen in negative terms, such as "it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'" (194). He states, "In fact, power

⁸ Buchanan, Rose. "Meet Thea, Norway's 12-year-old Bride." *The Independent*, 7 Nov. 2014. Web. 20, Oct. 2014. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/meet-thea-norways-12yearold-child-bride-9782495.html>>

⁹ There have, however, been counterarguments that suggest Katniss does not have any agency at all and should not be considered a strong character for feminists. I will address these arguments further throughout the chapters to come.

produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.” (194). Despite this call away from understanding power in negative terms, Katniss’ experience of power does prove to exemplify power as being oppressive. This is not to say that it does not also create reality, it absolutely does, but that the reality it creates is one in which the female body is rendered docile. All oppressive power takes away from the agency she has over herself, unless she is able to learn how these systems operate so that she may act with intention within them. By anticipating the desires and beliefs of those around her Katniss is able to turn the game around, at last gaining agency over herself and her body. In this reading, Katniss struggles with her own agency; throughout most of the trilogy she does not know who she is, because her image is constantly being shaped and molded by men (Haymitch, Peeta, Plutarch, Gale), the Gamemakers, overzealous government officials (President Snow, President Coin), and the Peacekeepers. I assert, for these studies, that Katniss does not actually learn how to craft her own identity until she learns, in the final book (*Mockingjay*), how to see herself through her own eyes and not those of the expectant audience. However, Katniss’ ability to see herself through the eyes of the Capitol and the audience is a crucial part of what gives her the power to overcome the forces of the Capitol and District 13, but only because she learns how to use the knowledge of their perspective to act in direct opposition to their expectations. Katniss determines, for herself, who the enemy is and she acts counter to preexisting expectations, the expectations of the audience and the expectations of both forms of government (that of the Capitol which seeks to doll her up and turn her into something desirable, and that of District 13 which seeks to cast her as fierce, rebel leader). *The Hunger Games*, through Katniss Everdeen, illuminates a different way of understanding bodies and identities as being constructs. As a part of the social control that is so effective in the *Hunger Games*, characters are starved of their humanity; they are dehumanized so that they may be manipulated.

1.2 The Aim of Dehumanizing Individuals

Collins situates humanity itself as a construct, something that is performed, which allows her characters to (re)claim the agency that is taken from them initially by the government that regards them as savage, (non-human) animals. In order to accomplish this she utilizes the reality television narrative, along with the narrative of a corrupt government to illuminate how society has learned to justify

dehumanizing individuals by categorizing them as “other.” When Suzanne Collins created *The Hunger Games* she did not just take corrupt governments as her topic; Collins intricately wove a reality television narrative into her tale of rebellion. As Tom Henthorne suggests in *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis*:

Collins does more than simply depict a particularly horrific reality television program from the future. By presenting the Games from the perspective of someone who has both watched them and played them, Collins provides an inside look at the reality genre, one that exposes its social and ideological functions.¹⁰

Because of the layered nature of its narrative, *The Hunger Games* trilogy is able to cover a broad range of topics. The inclusion of a reality television narrative was quite brilliant, because it offers an overt and familiar representation of current cultural issues. This brilliance stemmed from a boring night for the author, in which she was slipping in and out of sleep flipping through the channels on the television. She notes in an interview that, she “happened upon a reality program, recorded live, that pitted young people against each other for money. As I sleepily watched, the lines of reality started to blur for me, and the idea for the book emerged.”¹¹ The blurred boundaries of the trilogy, because of their merging of illusion with reality, allows for the potential to address such questions as: what happens when consumer culture is embraced to excess? How are ideals of beauty inscribed on bodies? How are these ideals affected by consumer culture? And, how do these exaggerated ideals change the ways in which gender is performed and constructed?

In the world of reality television, everything is exaggerated, made outrageous, but presented as fact. The characters or participants are promoted as “real” people that audiences can identify with. In a video I recently watched on *Toddlers and Tiaras* the mother of a contestant says that she has pulled her daughter from the reality television show, because viewers watch these shows as if they were documentaries or autobiographies.¹² In actuality, these shows are not factual. In their exaggerated form,

¹⁰ Henthorne, Tom. *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co. Publishers, 2012. 96.

¹¹ Blasingame, James, and Suzanne Collins. "An Interview with Suzanne Collins." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 52.8 (2009): 726-7.

¹² WGN, “Strike a Pose with ‘Toddlers and Tiaras’”. Online video clip. *Aol Entertainment*. Aol, 26 June 2012. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <http://on.aol.com/video/strike-a-pose-with-toddlers-and-tiaras-517407776>

they have become artificial, grotesque depictions of society. Despite this, however, they are undeniably based in reality (a reality that fails to acknowledge the humanness of its subjects). As Tom Henthorne states in *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis*:

Artificial drama, it seems, has become more important than real-life suffering, and so suffering continues, unacknowledged and unchecked by the very people who benefit from it. More than that, though, Collins suggests that programs such as *Cops*, *Survivor*, *Extreme Makeover*, and *The Biggest Loser* have a powerful ideological effect, affirming Americans' sense that they are worthy of the privileges they enjoy and that almost any sort of action can be justified in maintaining them. Like the *Hunger Games*, these programs accomplish this by dehumanizing people: they stage conflicts, elicit negative behaviors, and then construct narratives around those behaviors that present them as authentic, ultimately suggesting that people get what they deserve.¹³

The games played in *The Hunger Games* and reality television shows are accomplishing even more than this, though. If we, the audience, pay close attention to the ideologies being narrated and acted out, it becomes possible to pinpoint the many ways in which society has been policing our own bodies. Reality television shows are programming viewers to understand the "proper" aesthetics of this consumer society. Henthorne notes that dehumanizing subjects works to justify treating individuals as less than human, but he does not go into why, or rather how these television shows work in this way.

Collins' portrayal of the *Hunger Games* (that is, the actual televised event), and how they are filmed, show that this objective is achieved through the ability to create a divide between the audience and the participants, to make the people being dehumanized become far less relatable to the viewing audience.¹⁴ This keeps the viewer and the audience separate, fascinated/entertained by one another, but unable to understand each other as like beings. The viewer of the televised *Hunger Games* thinks it is okay to torture those bodies of the televised participants, because they are seen as being not like their own bodies. They are savage, not entirely human.¹⁵ In *The Hunger Games* this is made obvious through the terminology used to describe the people in the districts, and more specifically the tributes. At the

¹³ Henthorne, 106.

¹⁴ Katniss finds power for herself when she breaks down this divide, forcing audiences to see her as human.

¹⁵ This line of thinking is not so far removed from the thinking of the past that regarded women as being closer to nature, because of their presumed less sophisticated status and their bodily importance. This thinking has seemingly evolved into women as not-quite-humans, at least within twenty-first century America (where women are fighting for birth control, the right to choose what happens with their own bodies, a voice for victims of assault/rape, etc.).

beginning of Katniss' and Peeta's tribute experience Effie, their escort, remarks, 'at least, you two have decent manners....The pair last year ate everything with their hands like a couple of savages. It completely upset my digestion.'¹⁶ Shortly after this incident Katniss refers to the remake center—the place she is sent to be completely rebuilt as a more desirable version of herself—as a “giant stable” and she talks about the “launch room” as “the stockyard” or “The place animals go before slaughter.”¹⁷ To a lesser degree we see this kind of dehumanizing in our own reality television shows. Children are objectified and sexualized to a sickening degree; this is justified as entertainment. Overweight individuals are tortured with overly (unnecessarily) rigorous exercise routines; this is justified because they are fat and, according to a society that values thinness, less than human. These programs are successful because of this predominant us/them dichotomy. As Gale says in *Mockingjay*, ‘Panem et Circenses translates into “Bread and Circuses.” The writer was saying that in return for full bellies and entertainment, his people had given up their political responsibilities and therefore their power’ (223). This is what President Snow in *The Hunger Games* trilogy offered the people of the Capitol.¹⁸ They received more food than they could even contain and the Hunger Games, annually, as their entertainment. But, how does society become so blinded to unjust treatment, to a regard for their fellow human, that death and torture become entertainment? Does living a life filled with things, money, and lavish food make one desensitized enough to alter their priorities?

1.3 Situating Lack against Excess

As with the players in gameshows like *The Biggest Loser*, the characters in *The Hunger Games* trilogy are involved in complex embodiments of lack or excess. This juxtaposition of lack against excess is another way in which the people of the districts (this includes District 13) are othered and set apart from the people of the Capitol. As Susan Bordo states in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, “ultimately, the body is seen as demonstrating correct or incorrect attitudes toward the demands of normalization itself. The obese and anorectic are therefore disturbing partly because they embody resistance to cultural norms” (203). The people of the districts, ironically, possess bodies

¹⁶ Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2008. 44.

¹⁷ *The Hunger Games*, 69, 144.

¹⁸ This is what our own society claims to offer, as well.

enviable by the Capitol; however, they are bodies that are foreign to those within the society that never want for anything. At Capitol parties the elite, along with the victors that have gained a celebrity position, engage in normalized bulimic behaviors. They go from table to table binging on every imaginable delicacy and when they have had too much they go to the inconspicuous table with flute glasses containing an ipecac-like substance that induces vomiting. This scene in *Catching Fire* illuminates several things about how bodies and behaviors are normalized in an extreme consumer society, such as Panem and its analog, America. After eating all they can hold Peeta and Katniss proclaim that they cannot even hold one more bite. The prep team “all laugh as if that’s the silliest thing they’ve heard,” because as Flavius tells them, “No one lets that stop them.”¹⁹ They direct Peeta to the glasses of vomit syrup, instructing him to “drink this,” but when he goes to drink the liquid they all “lose it” (78-9). Katniss and Peeta are clueless to the norms of the Capitol, because their normal everyday existence involves hunting and foraging and bread at every meal. The reaction of the prep team shows just how oblivious the people of the Capitol are to the constant struggles of the people in the Districts. The Capitol programming has successfully blinded its viewers to the harsh realities of the individuals that provide them with their precious resources. If they were to recognize humanity in these people then perhaps they would have a moral conflict about the transformation of these human bodies into the docile bodies that slave away in mines, and in fields, and caves to bring them their delicacies. And perhaps then, they would realize that the tributes in their beloved Hunger Games are people, not savage animals.

As argued above, the excess of consumer culture represented by the Capitol of Panem in *The Hunger Games*, shows how citizens of such a society can become blind to the torture and abuse being carried out against “othered” bodies within (but outside) these communities. It is, ironically, this privileged surveillance (enacted through reality television programs), by the citizens living in excess, of the outside “other” that leads to the blindness to reality which allows for the creation of various docile bodies. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault discusses the docile body as “an object and target of power” (136). These power relations that target bodies can take many different forms. In the districts, bodies have been trained for their own geographically specific tasks. Each of the districts has a resource that they are responsible

¹⁹ *Catching Fire*, 78-9.

for; District 12 is known for its coal, District 11 was responsible for agricultural pursuits, District 10 provides livestock, District 9 is known for its grain, District 8 is known for its fabrics and textiles, District 7 is the lumber district, District 6 is responsible for transportation, etc. At the Hunger Games the tributes are dressed accordingly to represent the significance, or usefulness, of their specific district. In the Capitol, this is the extent of their (District bodies) significance: what the body can provide for the larger body of the Capitol.

1.4 Appearance and the Docile Body

It is interesting, though, that Collins takes this idea of the docile body and incorporates it with a docile body more congruent with feminist scholarship, showing the ways in which bodies are enticed to perform gender and beauty. According to Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* “anatomically differentiated bodies” can be “understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law” (11). She continues:

'the body' appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case, the body is figured as a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related.²⁰

The reality television narrative of *The Hunger Games* shows how, as Butler states, bodies can become “mere instruments or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related.” The purpose of the Hunger Games is said to be a “yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated” (18). They have, somehow, become more associated with beauty and appearances; therefore, the docile body has become the passive medium on which a different kind of cultural inscription may occur. No doubt, the focus of the Hunger Games evolved over time, responding to the requests and desires of the residents and primary viewers of the Capitol. Clearly, their lives of excess leave much time to ponder aesthetics. There is, however, a double standard that exists within the games. The female contestants, all under the age of eighteen (except during the seventy-fifth quarter quell), are sexualized and objectified. Only one male character throughout the entire trilogy experiences the same treatment, and the adjectives attributed to his character are actually ones more commonly used to describe women in our own society. Not that they are inherently feminine terms, but they do align with feminine

²⁰ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York, NY: Routledge classics, 1990. 12

stereotypes. These women (and one male, Finnick) are put through painful, lengthy makeovers. They are forced to endure hours of their naked bodies gazed upon, poked, prodded, robbed of hair, etc. so that they can come to more closely resemble the people of the Capitol.²¹ As Homi Bhabha suggests in “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (86). In order for this vile reality television show to reinforce the ideologies of the Capitol it is necessary for the tributes to participate in a sort of forced mimicry. The tributes, specifically the female tributes (as Katniss notes, Peeta does not have to undergo anywhere near as much alteration as she does), are taught to transform. Katniss realizes that her transformation, how well she learns this mimicry could mean the difference between life and death. She seemingly allows her body to become docile. As Bordo states:

Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing elusive ideal of femininity—a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion—female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement.’ Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women—we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification.²²

This reinforces an idea that women are inherently lacking. As Fulvia says to Katniss in *Mockingjay* “very few people are born with camera-ready faces”, and it would seem even less women than men are born ready for the camera.²³ These sentiments lead to what I refer to as the illusion of agency. That is, the belief that women have agency over their own transformations and the meaning of those transformations, in a society dedicated to strictly policing these docile bodies. Women do, of course, have a choice. A woman can choose to wear make-up or not wear make-up. A woman can choose to have plastic surgery. She can choose to participate in fad diets. Women do have a choice; however, there are boundaries to these choices.

Reality television shows, like the one depicted in *The Hunger Games*, tackle issues of transformation and constructed identities in very interesting and crucial ways. According to Jennifer

²¹ Katniss also notes that only the female tributes are made completely hairless. The men are allowed to keep their body hair, except for facial hair.

²² Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1993. 166

²³ *Mockingjay*, 81.

Maier in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* the primary demographic of TLC, a major network for reality television, is "eighteen to thirty-four and female" (197). Reality networks are crafting their programming accordingly. Many of the major reality shows within the last several years, such as *Biggest Loser*, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Dance Moms*, etc. deal with the issues of women's bodies and this inherent position of lack that they are assumed, by much of society, to inhabit. Young women are encouraged to confess their flaws and seek transformation. These programs are filled with women aspiring to reach the ideal female body, one that is slim, youthful, and sexual but non-threatening. This trend is largely due to, as Brenda Weber states in *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity*, "the hope that in controlling the 'real' physical body made legible through reality tv we might better regulate and protect the vulnerable social body" (20-21). These shows seek to transform the docile female body; however, women seek to gain control over their culturally constructed bodies, in an attempt to assert some semblance of agency and control over current social circumstances. Therefore, in looking at *The Hunger Games* trilogy along with *Toddlers and Tiaras* I hope to illuminate the significant role played by young adult literature and reality television in the current conversation over women's bodily rights. I argue that the resistance to the strict patriarchal policing of female bodies and female identities—as can be seen in currently popularized reality television shows and young adult trilogies—creates an illusion of agency, which leads to the belief that women are actually in complete control of their own physical and mental being, despite striking evidence to the contrary. Through a reading of society and reality television as a twenty-first century Panopticon which re-enforces the ideologies that seek to oppress women, I will argue that it becomes possible to break free of the illusion of agency, and learn to re-write one's own identity.²⁴ But, how does a person acquire agency over their body once it has been marked as docile? Is it possible to escape the powerful panoptic gaze of cameras and government? Or, is it necessary to create an image within the realm of oppressive surveillance?

²⁴ Agency itself remains allusive, however, it becomes possible for individuals to understand and see the ideologies at work within society. This knowledge of reality provides a person with the ability to re-write their own image with more authority.

1.5 Panoptic Power

Reality Television, both within society and within the novels, functions as a Panopticon which exposes the illusion of agency that is prevalent in western society. As Katniss notes in the first book of the trilogy, “you do have the sense that we might be under surveillance here.”²⁵ This idea that individuals are constantly being watched within a reality television setting is a logical extension—responding to the evolution of media technologies—of Foucault’s initial discussion of the Panopticon. Foucault bases his discussion of the Panopticon on Jeremy Bentham’s theory of a self-surveilling prison--“an annular building” “at the periphery” and “at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring” (Foucault 200). These windows allow for constant surveillance of the individuals in the cells below. What makes the Panopticon function effectively, however, is not exactly the watching or the being seen, but the psychological effects of knowing there is the potential to be seen at all times. As Foucault says, its purpose is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). This same psychological outcome can be witnessed within the reality show of the trilogy and the reality television shows of our own culture. The contestants behave a certain way, because they are aware of the possibility that they are being watched; however, this notion is not verifiable. As Vanessa Russell asserts in “Make me a Celebrity” “surveillance only succeeds when the viewer believes that the gaze is constant and real” (73). As Foucault makes clear, the tower should always be visible, but the inmates should never be able to tell if they are actually being watched.²⁶ Initially, this may not seem to work for reality television shows, since the characters know that they are being followed by cameras at all times. The participants know they are being watched. However, because the participants do not know how the producers are going to cut and edit the footage, they do not actually know when they are being watched or how they will be perceived by audiences. This further adds to the ways in which identities are crafted by surveillance. It also illuminates the blurred boundaries between reality and illusion. There is much of this in the Capitol. The citizens believe they know the truth about their president and their living arrangements, but Katniss notes in *Mockingjay* that

²⁵ *Hunger Games*, 80.

²⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1991. 201.

she tries “to imagine not being able to tell illusion from reality” (271). This is because she has encountered enough Capitol people to know that they were just oblivious. They could not be faulted for buying into what the media, what the handcrafted propaganda was telling them.

This hazy existence does not just apply to reality television. The surveillance of the Panopticon is also seen within the districts. It has already been established that the people of the districts, and the tributes more specifically are regarded as animals and prisoners. They live within a separate Panopticon, one that is similar but different from that of reality television. The districts are the space in which President Snow is most able to assert his power over the people. He makes sure that the people are tortured into submission, and that this torture is made visible. He makes sure that the people of the districts know they do not control the resources, because to be in control of the resources would be to control one’s own body. In *Catching Fire*, as Katniss returns from a hunting trip she is met by President Snow, who lets her know that he saw her kiss with Gale. Snow corrupts the only moments Katniss thought she had to herself.²⁷ His gaze has tainted her experience of the world she lives in, both within and outside the gates of District 12. She learns that she can never escape his watchful eyes: “I thought no one saw me sneak under the fence, but who knows? There are always eyes for hire.”²⁸ This kind of surveillance has a detrimental impact on the way a person grows within a Panoptic society. As Foucault notes:

A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen, or to observe the external space, but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them.²⁹

The watched person is encouraged to behave a particular way, specifically the way they believe they are expected to behave. They are no longer able to be true to themselves. They are subject to transformation. They are docile.

The remaining chapters of this project will deal explicitly with the way a focus on appearance intersects with the notion of the body as docile, as a canvas to be inscribed and transformed. In Chapter

²⁷ He also later corrupts the only space she found sacred and truly her own: the meadow.

²⁸ *Catching Fire*, 152.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 172.

two I look closely at the ways that society constructs young bodies as sex objects, using the reality television show *Toddlers and Tiaras*. I am particularly interested in the various methods used to make young girls look older, turning them into objects of sexual desire. But, also, how older women are made to look younger to appeal to the small male audience, as an inappropriate fantasy of innocence. *The Hunger Games*, through Katniss' portrayal in the Games, helps to draw out the underlying messages being conveyed by our own "real" reality shows. She is similarly manipulated, according to varying circumstances to either look younger (non-threatening) or older (for desirability). The final chapter focuses primarily on society's obsession with weight, and the rewards that are to be gained through the maintenance of one's weight. I look at *The Biggest Loser* and the scandal that surrounded the most recent winner's excessive weight loss to explore the delicate balance between what is deemed too much. The role of food and diet in *The Hunger Games* serves to solidify the significance of this form of bodily control by showing how those that are able to control their own impulses, bodily desires, and resources are afforded the revered position of corporeal mastery. Ultimately, it is Katniss's ability to manipulate her own body that gives her agency. As Henry Kissinger has once said, "control food and you control the people." Or, in other words, control food and you may control yourself. As a whole the remaining chapters are greatly influenced by the overwhelming portrayal of societies which value appearance above all other things, including health and humanity.

Chapter 2

Hungering For Immortality: The Fetishization of Youth in Western Culture

“Today, all that we experience as meaningful are appearances.”

Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*

2.1 Appearance and a Devouring Gaze

In this chapter I examine *The Hunger Games* with *Toddlers and Tiaras* to demonstrate the ways in which western society's overwhelming focus on appearance and unrealistic beauty standards has taught women that they are required to transform aesthetically, through the use of make-up, add-ons (hair pieces, extensions, fake lashes, etc.), body “enhancing” clothing, etc. in order to attain a youthful, sexually appealing body. I also look at how these attitudes, when coupled with society's focus on age, tend to result in the fetishization of youth; therefore, older women must go to extreme lengths to remain young in appearance, and consequently younger girls are encouraged to look and act older in order to fulfill these absurd societal requirements. This postmodern panoptic society, with cameras in every home (in every hand) has taken an especially disturbing toll on both youthful and aging bodies. Women are taught that they are inherently lacking and that this lack is something visible, and in order to remedy their flawed selves they must transform so that they may become valuable. As a result of attempts to attain society's beauty standards or to capitalize on youth as a commodity, young girls are often faced with a deep, damaging confusion over who they are and who they appear to be to the outside world (that keeps pushing its way inward via surveillance technologies).

By subscribing to the messages delivered to individuals within our society by the media (in commercials, movies, television shows, social media sites, and video sites), young girls are unknowingly relinquishing a crucial part of their own agency and ability to craft their own identities. This is because, through the implementation of ideologies, which Althusser defines as “a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,” young girls lose sight of reality, believing that the illusion created by the media is actually truth (1264-5). Althusser goes on to say that “what is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of

individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (1264-65). This understanding of ideologies exemplifies how individuals come to act unconsciously in response to imaginary rules/laws/beliefs which they believe to be real. What this means for young women is that they see and understand harmful media messages as truth, without necessarily understanding that they are subscribing to beliefs which do not benefit them. Because of the ideologies being perpetuated by the various media sources (e.g. "in order for a girl to be pretty she has to be thin") girls and women are participating in rewriting the narratives of their own bodies in such a way that they actually sustain these harmful ideologies. According to Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, bodies are constructed by the messages or texts produced by body writing "as networks of meaning and social significance" (117). The body as construct is a textual body, which is involved in a complex relationship with societal forces that seek to inform identity formation; therefore, these messages, which are presented by the media to girls, women, young adults steal the individual's potential for agency over the creation of their own identity.

Young women will go to extreme measures to ensure that their bodies are acting appropriately in this society that threatens constant watchfulness. As Joanne Morreale states in "Faking it and the Transformation of Personal Identity," individuals subject to the gaze of the camera "try on 'new and improved' selves that they can parlay into social capital. Not only do they adopt clothing and hairstyles, they incorporate qualities, attitudes, behaviors, gestures, movements, and skills, to the extent that they erase the distinction between identity and image" (97). The modern woman/girl changes, responding to messages that tell her she can be better, thinner, prettier, because of the pressure of knowing there is always the potential of watchful eyes pointed in her direction. The gaze of the camera and the audience is critical, judging. There is very little choice, she either changes or is cast out. This makes it nearly impossible for these girls to attain a stable sense of self after these messages have acted upon their bodies; they believe the choice was their own and must then deal with the psychological implications of having changed so much of what was "naturally" a part of their pre-transformation identity. In Vanessa Russell's "Make me a Celebrity" she discusses the ways in which a critical gaze, particularly in the case of exercise videos and weight loss programs, turns the female body into a "human medical specimen, every

flaw being illuminated for the audience and the individual to critique. She states: "The human medical specimen shows how instructors keep prodding and poking, adjusting and correcting the female body, and how women passively accept the intervention" (75). What other choice does the woman/girl have when faced with this kind of scrutiny?

The Hunger Games trilogy sets up the idea of appearances as being pliant and crucial to identity in the very beginning pages of the first book. It also reveals how too much focus on appearance can result in an inability to recognize oneself based on any other factor. That is, girls begin to place so much value on appearances and learning how to be aesthetically desirable that they lose sight of how valuable they are in other areas of life (intelligence, strength, humor, etc.). At the very beginning of the first book Madge, the daughter of the mayor in District 12, jokingly says to Gale before the reaping, "Well, if I end up going to the Capitol, I want to look nice, don't I?"³⁰ Even in light of the reaping, or perhaps especially in light of the reaping, appearances become something of a joke amongst the people of the Districts. This comment from Madge, who is particularly well-off in comparison to the rest of the people in the districts, highlights the perspective of the people from the outside (as those "othered" in Panem) looking in at the people in the Capitol. It shows how the Capitol is particularly obsessed with appearances; they expect for all people in attendance of the reaping to make their best appearance. It is keeping in accordance with the idea that they have to put on their best face for the cameras. Knowing that the reaping means certain death for twenty-three innocent children this focus on appearances seems particularly absurd and barbaric. The viewers of this spectacle want for their district stars to appear human while being recruited for the most dehumanizing experience of their lives. They want them to be like them, but also other. The gaze of the audience and of the camera crews seeks to devour those being observed, to strip them of their humanity and their self-proclaimed identity. As Katniss notes, "the cameras gobble up our images."³¹ They gobble up their images and feed them to the hungry, starved for entertainment, masses of the Capitol as was the promise of the President when the games were implemented decades before. Panem

³⁰ *The Hunger Games*, 12

³¹ *ibid*, 41

et Circenses: Bread and Circuses.³² These tributes are just animals in the Capitol's circus. They are bodies rendered docile, their use-value being their ability to entertain. Katniss recalls how she is unable to be true to whom she believes herself to be, because she knows everyone in the Capitol can see her: "I can't let my fear show. Absolutely, positively, I am live on every screen in Panem" and "between the ceremonies and events and the reporters documenting my every move as I presided and thanked and kissed Peeta for the audience, I had no privacy at all."³³ She acts for the cameras, as those on the other end would expect. Consequently, she plays into the aim of the Capitol to cast her as "other." She unintentionally assists in erasing her own identity.

Katniss' struggle as a young woman runs parallel (is mirrored by) her struggle in the hunger games. Once Katniss steps up as the female tribute for District 12 she unveils a world so superficial and oblivious that it threatens to irreparably damage her experience of the world, both the world as she once knew it and the world as she came to know it through her contact with the Capitol and citizens of other Districts. Katniss struggles to maintain her humanity and the identity she had created for herself in District 12 while being forced to confront the ways in which society seeks to dehumanize people, particularly women. She becomes unrecognizable to herself and to others as she stares back at her own reflection after being remade by her team of stylists, and she struggles to recognize herself as she grapples with the notion that murdering her peers is no different than hunting (as Gale tells her, "it's just hunting").³⁴ Katniss learns that in order to survive she has to find a way to play the games without letting her opponents win. That means, not letting society steal her humanity and not losing sight of the humanity in others; however, in a world such as the Capitol, where the definition and boundaries of humanity are constantly being tested, it is at times difficult for Katniss to hold onto the identity she created for herself outside the watchful gaze of the Capitol and President Snow. This is made increasingly more difficult

³² Collins, Suzanne. *Mockingjay*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2010.223.

³³ *Hunger Games*, 223

Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2009. 25.

³⁴ *The Hunger Games*, 40

This shows just how the Capitol has come to regard anyone not living in the Capitol as an "other." They are disposable. Pawns in a Game of control.

when she is consistently subjected to the forces of the Capitol which seek to rewrite the narrative of her body and her identity. Katniss comes to the Capitol lacking, by their standards;³⁵ therefore, she was taught that in order to thrive she would have to transform.

2.2 Establishing Lack and the Need to Transform

The act of being watched is a treacherous terrain to be maneuvered, for the person being viewed is always positioned, within societies focused on excess, as being an embodiment of lack. As Susan Bordo states, “through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough” (166). Reality television shows such as the one written about in the *Hunger Games* and those that TLC (the learning channel) likes to air provide a very formulaic narrative that situates both male and female participants in a position that calls for woeful tales of inadequacy, unhappiness, and the desire (or need) to change. These shows then document the individuals’ journeys from lacking to transformed, whole, useful, valuable individuals. As Dana Heller states in “Reading the Makeover”, “‘Making over’ and transformation define the very essence of reality tv itself” (6). In the case of Suzanne Collins’ reality television show, the tributes are only allowed to maintain the transformed image of themselves if they make it through the brutal battle field crafted specifically for the purpose of ensuring that twenty-three people will not leave the arena. In all such shows (within the gamedoc genre) there can only be one victor. The last man/woman standing in any of these shows is granted fame. They are given a title, a new name, a media-crafted identity. This new identity can either be a blessing or a curse. The participants are expected to accept this new identity as their genuine identity, in effect, erasing their old, former self. Brenda Weber asserts that, “before-bodies quite often lack valid me-ness and After-bodies mark the zone of celebrated Selfhood where subjects rejoice, ‘I’m me now!’ (7). Prior to undergoing an imposed or encouraged transformation individuals remain in limbo, unable to claim an identity even if they feel they truly know themselves. There is almost always some voice saying that there is something that needs to change.

³⁵ She was not, however, lacking by her own standards. Her life in District twelve meant that she had very little media interference in her life until she stepped up as tribute. Until then she broke many Capitol rules in order to provide for her family, and perhaps she was still lacking in terms of nourishment, but she knew who she was and she was confident in that person.

Though both male and female contestants in these reality shows/games are forced to participate in the same narrative of growth, the draw to transform is not quite the same for both males and females. Males maintain some form of agency in the process; they are always already complete, whole. In *The Hunger Games* Effie says to Katniss, "Your evening clothes are exquisite. And Peeta's team is probably still asleep." Katniss responds, "Doesn't he need prepping?" Effie responds to this with a matter-of-fact, "Not the way you do" (47). This illuminates just how normalized these differences in beauty standards have become within a modern western society. The transformative process for male participants serves only to make them even more complete. Women, however, start as incomplete bodies that lack. Transformation is the only way to achieve personhood. As Brenda Weber states, "Whether it's change to be more like everyone else or alteration to be extraordinary, the makeover insists that transformations are the critical pathway to producing the unique and stable, read here as normal, self" (24-5). It would seem that girls and women are at least able to make a conscious decision about whether or not they want to undergo the various available procedures to obtain a more normal, stable body; however, this is the illusion of agency. As Susan Bordo states, "we are constantly told that we can 'choose' our own bodies" (247). Choose is in parenthesis precisely because there is not really a choice to be made without a willingness to subvert existing ideologies. As Kim Akass and Janet McCabe state in "A Perfect Lie: Visual (Dis)Pleasures and Policing Femininity in Nip/Tuck":

Obsession with body-management and surface appearance encloses the modern body in new regimes of discursive power related to globalization, the mass media and consumer-capitalism, whereby we are subtly coerced as never before to self-monitor and incessantly self-scrutinize the minutiae of our bodies so that no blemish goes unseen and no detail is overlooked. Ceaseless preoccupation with physical self-improvement functions as one of the most dominant normalizing mechanisms in our culture.³⁶

The forces that watch do not even need to watch, because women are encouraged to police their own bodies. This is the panoptic power that is at work within society, "The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the [person being watched] of being surprised and

³⁶ Akass, Kim and Janet McCabe. "A Perfect Lie: Visual (Dis)Pleasures and Policing Femininity in Nip/Tuck." *Makeover television : realities remodeled*. Ed. Dana Heller. London : I. B. Tauris, 2007. 122.

the greater [her] anxious awareness of being observed.”³⁷ The anxiety in a reality television setting and within a society that is so prone to surveillance is unconscionable. When a woman makes a choice to change or act differently is she acting out of genuine desire or because of the pressure of being watched? A woman makes a choice to improve her appearance, but who or what is driving that choice? Girls/women are shown that there are consequences to be experienced if one does not choose to conform.

In this narrative of women policing their own bodies, girls either change or they are ridiculed, harassed, and cast out.³⁸ In the first book of the *Hunger Games* trilogy Katniss is forced to endure hours of training provided by Effie and Haymitch. The aim of this training is to make her presentable for the people of the Capitol and for the cameras. She is taught how to walk in heels. She is taught how to interview. She is taught how to sit. Her body is completely made over.³⁹ She grumbles, “I’ve been in the Remake Center for more than three hours.”⁴⁰ The remake center is aptly named, because they do truly remake Katniss from the outside-in (as her stylists tell her in the final book of the trilogy. The list of things she is forced to endure include:

scrubbing down my body with a gritty foam that has removed not only dirt but at least three layers of skin, turning my nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, ridding my body of hair. My legs, arms, torso, underarms, and parts of my eyebrows have been stripped of the stuff, leaving me like a plucked bird, ready for roasting.⁴¹

It seems that her stylists, Haymitch and Effie are all trying to teach her how to be less of the savage other that the people in the Capitol see when they look at the people from the districts. Her body and her personality are not adequate. She is lacking. Katniss’ attitude about the entire process illuminates the problematic nature of these imposed transformations. She wonders, “why am I hopping around like some trained dog trying to please people I hate? The longer the interview goes on, the more my fury seems to

³⁷ Foucault, 202

³⁸ Sadly, even if girls/women undergo these transformations they still risk being ridiculed and harassed, but that harassment takes on a different form.

³⁹ These are all very common practices within pageant culture, as will be seen later in this chapter.

⁴⁰ *The Hunger Games*, 61.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

rise to the surface, until I'm literally spitting answers at [Haymitch]."⁴² The hostility that Katniss displays toward Haymitch as he tries to coach her through the interview process is telling, because it exposes her understanding of the fragility of her own identity. Katniss does not want to give anyone in the Capitol the knowledge of her inner life. In this society that sees everything, privacy is the actual commodity. Giving someone knowledge over your identity, the person that a person claims to be when no one is watching, means giving away the power for others to use that information to craft their own identity for the individual. Katniss lets her guard down with her stylist Cinna, whom she claims seems normal enough, and she begins to understand in the second book that he "has turned [her] into a mockingjay."⁴³ The way Katniss phrases this revelation affirms how little agency Katniss has in her own identity formation at that point. It is no coincidence that a man has crafted her as the Mockingjay. She learns later that there are other men in on the crafting of this inspirational television personality. Haymitch was working with the new Head Gamemaker, Plutarch, in order to make a better, more inspiring and relatable Katniss to take on the role of mockingjay for the rebellion.

The language that Katniss uses to describe her dissatisfaction with the process illuminates a troubling aspect of the woman seen as lacking and in need of transformation. Katniss questions why she is hopping around like some trained dog, trying to please people that she does not even like. Her word choice here shows how much power society has in making women feel like non-human animals that need to be trained to serve whatever purpose the person or governments in control so desire. Women exist for the viewing pleasure of a mostly male audience; however, they are made to believe that it is not pleasurable to the audience for the woman to exist as herself (pre-transformation). As with Katniss her District-self is too different. She is unrelatable. She has to change. This sort of molding of her image continues even into the final book of the trilogy when she has finally begun to attain some agency over how her image will be crafted. In *Mockingjay* Katniss thinks:

What they want is for me to truly take on the role they designed for me. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay. It isn't enough, what I've done in the past, defying the Capitol in the Games, providing a rallying point. I must now become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution. The person who the districts—most of which

⁴²ibid., 117

⁴³ *Catching Fire*, 252.

are now openly at war with the Capitol—can count on to blaze the path to victory. I won't have to do it alone. They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances—as if that doesn't sound horribly familiar—and all I have to do is play my part (10-11).

By the third book Katniss has started to piece together the ways in which the Capitol and District 13 are manipulating her for their own disparate wills, which gives her a certain amount of agency, but how much agency does this really afford her, when her image is still being crafted by a team of people? As she states, she is going to be the face of the revolution and that face will be crafted by a number of people other than herself; she doesn't get to choose the face they make. She thought that she'd "get to look more like [herself]. But it seems a televised rebel has her own standards to live up to."⁴⁴ In the eyes of the people peering through the television screen she must look like the self given to her by the Capitol. Her make-up is done. Her hair is done. Her costume is decided. Her weapon has been re-made. Everything about her physical image is fabricated. The only thing prior to her realization of power that gives Katniss any semblance of agency is her inability to perform how people want her to perform. She has to be "real". It has to come from her, and in real situations. This gives her the chance to display a type of humanity that is vital to her identity and to the revolution; however, the Capitol and District 13 will stop at nothing to take this shred of humanity, of self-created identity and ensure its destruction. This theft and destruction begins and ends with her outward transformation. As Flavius remarks to Katniss after she has been "restored" to her Capitol-self, upon returning from the arena, "they did a full body polish on you. Not a flaw left on your skin."⁴⁵ This restoration, or transformation seeks to erase District Katniss (as a named, identified individual with a self-created identity). Because to create a new identity for a person means to have control over that person.⁴⁶

2.3 Cultural Capital and the Almost Woman

This same impulse toward transformation or erasure of identity can be seen in the girls on *Toddlers and Tiaras*; however, these transformations seek to improve the girls through the illusion of sex-

⁴⁴ *Mockingjay*, 60.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, 353

⁴⁶ There is an exception to this, and eventually Katniss becomes that exception. She learns the language of the Capitol and of the audience which gives her the power to manipulate her circumstances and reshape her own identity. I go into this further in the final chapter.

appeal. The glitz pageant industry is especially bad about teaching girls that their natural state is not good enough. Little girls are taken by their mothers to get manicures, their eyebrows waxed, highlights, spray tans, etc. According to Dana Heller, "The goal of these transformations is the creation of malleable subjects adequate to new economic and social conditions" (7). In other words, these girls have become the docile body that Bordo and Foucault discuss in *Unbearable Weight* and *Discipline and Punish*. They are the "object and target of power" that seeks to transform them for potential monetary gain.⁴⁷ On the day of the pageant they are strung out on Pixie Stix (aka, pageant crack) or given red bull, so that they will appear peppy and happy to the judges.⁴⁸ Their faces are buried under make-up and false lashes. The look is topped off with hair pieces and a flipper (false teeth, to simulate the perfect smile). This teaches little girls that the world will judge them, and that they are not good enough for that judgment without undergoing some major alterations, in this case alterations that make them look many years older. In her essay, "Self-Made Women: Cosmetic Surgery Shows and the Construction of Female Psychopathology" Elizabeth Gailey states, in reference to makeover television shows that employ plastic surgery:

Female actors on extreme makeover shows actually do undergo transformation. Far from journeyers in a magical realm, however, they are controlled subjects who undergo the most extreme of disciplining regimes so they may emerge as fully docile, disciplined subjects. As such, they are 'up for grabs', literally opened up and made pliable in preparation for colonization by any number of authoritative agents.⁴⁹

Although Gailey is referring specifically to women in shows such as *The Swan* (2004) and *Dr. 90210* (2004), these same principles apply. In this particular show, these girls are being made docile, and "pliable" by their parents, by the make-up artists, their pageant instructors, the pageant directors, and the judges. All of which agree, in order to succeed in this world they have to be something "other" and someone older (at least in appearance and behavior), because "popular culture does not apply any brakes to these fantasies of rearrangement and self-transformation" (Bordo 247). Nothing is off limits in

⁴⁷ Foucault, 136.

⁴⁸ Pixie stix make a regular appearance in almost every episode of *Toddlers and Tiaras*. It would be difficult to determine which episode marked the first reference. The term pageant crack, however, is widely known. One such instance is found on <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2083119/Toddlers-Tiaras-mothers-DOPING-daughters-drinks-spiked-pageant-crack.html>. There are also references to the special drink (Go Go Juice) consumed by pageant celebrity Honey Boo Boo.

⁴⁹ Gailey, Elizabeth. "Self-Made Women: Cosmetic Surgery Shows and the Construction of Female Psychopathology." *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*. England; United Kingdom: 2007. 118.

the world of bodily transformation. In other words, "Our becoming, our transformation potential becomes confined to image consumption and production. Only our resources limit our existence" (Morreale 105). As long as the mothers have the time and the money they can transform their daughters into whoever they wish for them to be, and in these pageants they want them to be alluring, flirtatious beauty queens (never mind that they are between the ages of two and eight).⁵⁰

Not only are these young girls made up to look nothing like the person they see every day in the mirror, they are also made to look ten, twenty years older. The result is grotesque. As the father of one little girl (Elexis) said in season two, episode one, "The Glitz pageants—it looks like a 20 year old face on a 5 year-old, 7 year-old body."⁵¹ As these pageant mothers live vicariously through their daughters they are forcing their daughters to participate in an unhealthy form of mimicry which, in most cases, causes the girl to begin questioning her own understanding of herself. The imposed mimicry of the Capitol and American society has constructed these young girls as bodies of and for society. In *Catching Fire* Katniss describes the emotional effect of this process on participants through her interaction with Gale. As Katniss tries to give Gale a pair of gloves he responds, "I don't want anything they made in the Capitol.' And he's gone" (101). She looks "down at the gloves" and thinks "anything they made in the Capitol? Was that directed at me? Does he think I am now just another product of the Capitol and therefore something untouchable?" (101). Katniss begins to question her own authenticity. This is not something she had ever been inclined to do, but because Gale reacted toward something made by the Capitol as something grotesque she was forced to make the connection between herself and the gloves. In that moment Katniss realized just how little control she had over the construction of her own appearance, and just how her new identity was being received by audiences outside the Capitol. It is as if Katniss has been colonized by the Capitol. She has learned their language, and can never go back to her District. As Frantz Fanon says in *Black Skins, White Masks*, "In any group of young men in the Antilles, the one who expresses himself well, who has mastered the language, is inordinately feared; keep an eye on that one, he is almost white" (20-1). In his example the man that leaves the Antilles and learns the language of his

⁵⁰ By association, the mothers are also seeking to transform themselves through their daughters. As if the daughter can act as a mirror for the mother to see her own transformational potential, her own "lost" youth.

⁵¹ "American Regal Gems." *Toddlers and Tiaras*. The Learning Channel. TLC, Silver Spring, 12 Aug. 2009. Television

colonizer is never received the same way in his home. He is an “other” among the people with whom he once belonged. The same can be said for Katniss. She was trained and taught the language of the Capitol. This simultaneously affords her power, and takes away her power. She is neither wholly her former district self or the new self the Capitol constructed. This same kind of power exchange happens in *Toddlers and Tiaras*. The children that are being made over learn how to master this mimicry to such an extent that they begin to blur the lines of control. The little girls embrace their new identities; they become “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 86). They appear to be both woman and little girl.

The sexualized girl is now a “child-woman” as Valerie Walkerdine calls them in *Daddy’s Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (166). These girls are trained to exist in an uncomfortable liminal space. According to Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects*, this new reformed other, an almost monstrous other is “neither a total stranger nor completely familiar: she exists in an in-between zone” (216). She is simultaneously like and other, recognizable and unrecognizable. Like Katniss in *The Hunger Games* these little girls have become nothing more than moldable bodies, enlisted in the circus of reality television. The before and after pictures of this exaggerated mimicry are deeply disturbing, as can be seen in figure 2-1.



Figure 2-1: Contestant, Mackenzie, age 5.⁵²

The little girl is so changed that she can no longer see her “natural” self when she looks in the mirror, just like Katniss after many remake sessions.⁵³ By learning the language of pageantry they learn how to

⁵² TLC. *Mackenzie*. n.d. Photograph. The Learning Channel, Silver Spring.
<<http://designobserver.com/article.php?id=28588>>

perfect the performance of the child-woman, beauty queen role they have been given. “[O]ur identities, gendered and otherwise, do not express some authentic ‘core’ self but are the dramatic effect of our performances. These we learn how to ‘fabricate’ in the same way we learn how to manipulate a language: through imitation and gradual command of public, cultural idioms” (Butler 289). Young women are particularly susceptible to the societal (and sadly, parental) forces that wish to rewrite their narrative in order to increase their use-value.⁵⁴ According to Christine Tamer in “Toddlers, Tiaras, and Pedophilia? The ‘Borderline Child Pornography’ Embraced by the American Public” the on-screen images of these girls, “are a record of the child’s participation in the production of images that exploit the child’s sexuality for commercial gain” (95). Their value comes from their ability to be observed and devoured by the societal gaze. And, these “images of children in scant clothing and provocative poses are distributed on national television, the Internet, and in the local community of the participants” (Tamer 95). In an age of such intense surveillance these images of children exploited are so widely distributed that they have become almost commonplace.⁵⁵ They are expected, devoured. The public will have their entertainment.

These young reality television stars have learned that their intrinsic value rests in their ability to captivate the audience. As Plutarch tells Katniss in *Mockingjay*, ‘it’s been decided that you are of most value on television’ (257). Katniss cannot seem to escape the camera. This is what it is like for reality tv stars that actually make it in the industry. One day they are going about their lives, and then at some point they decide to go on a show (or their parents decide for them). If they do well on the show they are embraced by the audience who wants more of this television persona. After that they can no longer escape the cameras. As Katniss states in *Mockingjay*, once she was successfully recreated as the Mockingjay she could not manipulate that appearance. She says, “they would like the Mockingjay to look as much like the girl in the arena as possible at the anticipated surrender” (252). Even after her reality

⁵³ She reflects, in *Catching Fire*, “Over the course of the last five years, the lake’s remarkably unchanged and I’m almost unrecognizable” (34).

⁵⁴ The stories that we tell and that others tell about us are not crafted by one single self or one single entity, “the narratives we tell about our lives are always coauthored”, as Gail Weiss states in “The Body as Narrative Horizon.” Weiss, Gail. “The Body as Narrative Horizon.” *Thinking the Limits of the Body*. New York: University of New York Press, 2003. 60.

⁵⁵ Only almost. If the show were to become genuinely commonplace it would lose the value it gains through being able to shock the viewer and disrupt their worldview.

television appearances have presumably ended she is still required to keep up appearances. The value of Katniss and the girls of reality television becomes tied to their on-screen identity which is crafted on a foundation of sexuality that is nowhere near age appropriate. Nick Couldry in "Teaching us to Fake it: The Ritualized Norms of Television's 'Reality' Games" iterates that, "in game docs, 'what develop[s] is] not so much a self [as] a media self" (58). This applies even in, or especially in *Toddlers and Tiaras* where girls are pitted against each other to win a title and some monetary reward. She is taught to give her true self up for some money and fame. Is it possible for these stars to go back to who they were before this sacrifice? The cost of a child losing her identity, growing up too quickly is a seemingly small price to pay for these parents to finally obtain their fame. But what are they really risking by casting their own daughters as a fetishized sex object for the judges and audiences?

2.4 Age, Sexuality, and the (Re)Positioning of Power

In order to understand the trend that has emerged in which children are cast as sex-objects it is necessary to begin by examining America's obsession with youth and fear of aging. Since mid-October of this year (2014), Renee Zellweger's face has been plastered all over social media sites and celebrity tabloid sites, claiming that she looks nothing like herself. Figure 2-2 below shows one of the many before and after photos circulating the internet at the moment.



Figure 2-2: Renee Zellweger, before and after.⁵⁶

The popular opinion is that she procured plastic surgery. I do not intend to dispute her possible relationship with plastic surgery, but instead I would like to address the anti-aging implications of this

⁵⁶ "Renee Zellweger Before and After Plastic Surgery Transformation." *Plastic Surgery Fans*. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <<http://plasticsurgeryfans.com/renee-zellweger-before-and-after-plastic-surgery/>>

scandal. There is a clear message that surrounds these before/after photos. According to our society women cannot age, or rather should not show their aging. This can also be seen in *The Hunger Games* when Katniss first meets Cinna, she remarks, "I had expected someone flamboyant, someone older trying desperately to look young, someone who viewed me as a piece of meat to be prepared for a platter" (64). Katniss expects that Cinna would be trying to recapture his own youth, because this is a prized possession in the Capitol. In societies that fear aging, youth becomes a commodity, something to be attained at all costs. As stated by Susan Bordo, "Our contemporary body-fetishism expresses more than a fantasy of self-mastery in an increasingly unmanageable culture.... It also reflects our alliance with culture against all reminders of the inevitable decay and death of the body" (153). When a woman begins to age she starts to become even less valuable in Western culture.⁵⁷ Authors Kim Akass and Janet McCabe argue that it is "not too surprising for a country that has historically prided itself on being a young and virile nation that the aging body had no place within the political anatomy and must be somehow repressed and/or denied" (126). This is because the older woman is presumably no longer as attractive. As nature would have it her skin becomes less elastic, her breasts appear less perky. Sex appeal, according to this culture, diminishes with age. "The aged body is unaesthetic, unworthy, and pathological." With breasts made perky again, faces lifted, eyelids pulled, tummies tightened, we can cure the disease of aging, reclaiming or encountering for the first time the youth that life and gravity have taken from us" (Akass 24). The aged woman serves as a reminder that an inevitable part of humanity is death. We, humans, cannot escape mortality.⁵⁸ The aged body, though changed and changing, is no longer as socially adaptable. At forty-five, within this society, a woman has already become the subject of intense, hate-filled ridicule, because of the fear her body elicits. In a response to this scrutiny the aging woman has two choices, either to transform or to accept her changed body:

What is unique to modernity is that the defeat of death has become a scientific fantasy rather than a philosophical or religious mythology. We no longer dream of eternal union with the gods; instead, we build devices that can keep us alive indefinitely, and we work

⁵⁷ I say "less valuable" because, as stated in Chapter 1, women are already regarded as something less than human in this society.

⁵⁸ This is made even more evident through the visibility provided by surveillance technologies.

on keeping our bodies as smooth and muscular and elastic at forty as they were at eighteen.⁵⁹

Because our society possess the means to “correct” this form of lack, women are expected to reform.

Anti-aging criticism is not just taking place after a woman’s forties, however. It happens as soon as the wrinkles appear, and the gray hairs start to take their place, which can happen at any age.⁶⁰ This is not an issue that is necessarily correlated with age; this criticism can happen to any woman. Therefore, the problem that needs to be addressed is what this attitude means for girls/women of all ages, living in this society. Susan Bordo was correct when she said, “today, all that we experience as important are appearances.”⁶¹ As Katniss is told in *Mockingjay*, “We think that it might be best to build you, our rebel leader, from the outside...in” (44). Who a person actually is happens to be of very little significance in comparison to who they appear to be in this society. This is exactly what our reality TV shows are doing, creating an illusion. Building the person on the outside and then seeing what happens with the inside. With a phone in every hand that connects the viewer to an entirely different world, why should society care about much else? Consequently, this overemphasis on appearances has led to a society that does not accept the mortality that comes with being human. According to Brenda Weber women who are affected by this fear-of-aging discourse and “who possess considerable financial means” can assert what appears to be their own agency over their circumstances:

Constant reminders of beautiful bodies also take place amidst a social backdrop of a critical mass of middle-aged consumers who possess considerable financial means and an attitude that if something bothers you, change it. These consumers, increasingly aware of the aging body, are enacting technologies of self-care, creating cultural investments in 'good health' by arresting the signs of time's progress and actively fighting for positive self-esteem through the beautiful body.⁶²

A society used to exerting power through a steady, critical gaze, subject to multiple forms of visual scrutiny, criticizes individuals that do not have the means (the money) to defy the natural process of aging.

⁵⁹ Bordo, 153.

⁶⁰ My own random silver hairs serve as proof of that.

⁶¹ Bordo, 104

⁶² Weber, Brenda. *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity*. Durham. Duke University Press, 2009. 26

The ease by which people are able to observe and police one another contributes immensely to this idea that we are a society consumed with appearances. As technology advances the idea of privacy seems to diminish. Bodies then become docile in a way that perpetuates the ideologies that surround physical appearances. As Foucault suggests, “the perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly” (173). This has been made even more possible by social media, television, etc. Knowing that one has constant access to technologies that open their private world to the public, people are encouraged to try on personas. According to Elizabeth Grosz:

Bodies are fictionalized, that is, positioned by various cultural narratives and discourses, which are themselves embodiments of culturally established canons, norms, and representational forms, so that they can be seen as living narratives, narratives not always or even usually transparent to themselves.⁶³

This fictionalized body carries with it the potential to endow the written body with agency. By learning the language of the Panoptic society one becomes able to rewrite the narrative of the body. If done effectively television personas could lead to fame. Almost anyone can become the next big youtube star. The next Kim Kardashian. The next Birdy (a musician that gained her fame on the internet). The internet and other media sources such as reality television, commercials, even news broadcasts have revolutionized the way people see and are seen by the world around them. They have changed the lens through which people are able to view themselves; “being seen is an important aspect of identity formation.”⁶⁴ How does it affect identity formation when individuals are aware of the looming possibility that they are being watched or filmed at any given moment? And, how does it affect these aging individuals faced with the reality of their changing status within a society so obsessed with appearances? These media sources have made the world a smaller place, a less private place. This proliferation of powerful surveillance technologies has created an illusion of control that allows individuals to believe they are crafting their own images. But, like Renee Zellweger, if that image is crafted in a way that is “incorrect” there are consequences to be suffered. These consequences, however, do not only apply to those that are aging

⁶³ Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 2004. 118.

⁶⁴ Morreale, Johanne. “Faking it and the Transformation of Personal Identity.” *Makeover Television : Realities Remodelled*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2007. 99.

out of youth. The stigma placed on getting old carries throughout society, and takes a somewhat unusual form when directed toward younger girls.⁶⁵

The obsession that western society has with youth and immortality has led to a fetishization of youthfulness, of a young, non-threatening form of beauty and sexuality. In Western society this is seen through the ways in which young girls are objectified and sexualized, particularly in the fashion and film industries.⁶⁶ In 2003 a young Evan Rachel Wood did a photo shoot for Vanity Fair at the age of fifteen.⁶⁷ Recently, within the last few weeks (also mid-October), she came out of hiding about her experience on set. She stated that, "we were all lined up, stared at and approved. I was 15 and felt for the first time my identity being erased and the pressure to shut up and do what you are told. I felt like meat. Since then, I have found my voice. Never again."⁶⁸ There is so much wrong with the way Evan Rachel Wood was regarded and how she was made to feel on the set of Vanity Fair. She was lined up and stared at as if she were livestock at a stock show or rodeo. She felt like meat, because she was being treated like meat. In those moments she just became another girl to be gawked at, to be molded. She was just another product to be sold. Katniss expresses this same sentiment in *Catching Fire* when she remarks that during a photo shoot she "[felt] like dough, being kneaded and reshaped again and again" (166). This shows how pliable bodies are, and how the focus of the camera is able to make a woman feel as if she is just a thing with no sentience or personality.

This lack of agency leads to young girls feeling as if they've been robbed of their individually crafted identity, even though such identities are themselves illusory. Both Evan Rachel Wood and Katniss describe being in situations where they feel that their identity was erased. They both had their identities taken from them, if only temporarily. As Katniss goes through a sort of post-transformation mirror stage in

⁶⁵ Older women must look younger, young girls must look older. The only women that are deemed acceptable are those society considers "young adult."

⁶⁶ By this I do not mean that girls outside of these industries do not also suffer the same ill-treatment, because unfortunately they do in this society. I simply mean that these issues are more visible within these industries, since they are even more open to the devouring gaze of surveillance technologies.

⁶⁷ "Evan Rachel Wood Was Left Feeling 'Like Meat' After Her First Vanity Fair Photoshoot." *Women's Rights News*. Viral Women. Web. 20 Oct. 2014.

http://viralwomen.com/post/evan_rachel_wood_was_left_feeling_like_meat_after_her_first_vanity_fair_photoshoot

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

the first book she recalls catching sight of her and Peeta on the large television screen and she is “floored by how breathtaking we look...We both look more attractive but utterly recognizable” (70). In the early stages she is able to recognize herself, but later she tells Darius, one of the Peacekeepers in District 12, that after her stylists finish with her she will be unrecognizable.⁶⁹ This idea that she felt her identity was being erased is particularly important as it shows how young girls are forced to grapple with the authenticity of their own self-image when that image is constantly being molded by a society that is attempting to make them sexy while simultaneously commodifying their youth. As Guy Redden states in “Makeover Morality and Consumer Culture”, “Such consumer transformations are inseparable from processes of identity formation and how they bear upon cultural change or continuity” (151). A young girl is no longer able to just be a young girl, her identity becomes tied up in the interests of those with the most power. Her body exists as a blank canvas to be painted or crafted however the media and/or society desires. She is to be remade in whatever image will prove most beneficial in any given situation. For the girls of *Toddlers and Tiaras* that means being dressed up and paraded across a stage to win fame and money. For Katniss that means being dressed up and paraded across a stage in order to start a revolution. The situations vary pretty significantly, however, the psychological outcome for the young girls remain the same. In Katniss’ final mirror stage of the trilogy she sees herself remade as the Rebel leader. She muses as she watches “the woman on the screen”:

Her body seems larger in stature, more imposing than mine. Her face smudged but sexy. Her brows black and drawn in an angle of defiance. Wisps of smoke—suggesting she has either just been extinguished or is about to burst into flames—rise from her clothes. I do not know who this person is.⁷⁰

The experience of the Capitol re-writing people and gawking at them, put simply, is dehumanizing. Katniss lost the ability to see herself as a teenage girl. Her face was smudged and sexy. She was fiery, fierce. She was successfully crafted as a rebel leader, but an unexpected consequence of her desirable, District 13 crafted identity is her increased access to power. She was given sexuality like a costume to wear as a visible threat against the Capitol. As Dana Heller notes, “The powers of transformation, once

⁶⁹ *Catching Fire*, 11.

⁷⁰ *Mockingjay*, 71.

unleashed and nourished, are not easily controlled" (21). Western societies have become so threatened by female sexuality that it has become both a source of power and a catalyst for fear.⁷¹

This society's fear of sexuality coupled with its fear of aging has led to a strange/disturbing rendering of sexuality in young girls. It is something that is metaphorically speaking, packaged and sold on national television. As if by controlling how the sexuality is portrayed it alleviates some of the fear for those in power. Don Latham and Johnathan Hollister explain:

Sexuality is powerful and empowering, but it can also be dangerous. [...] Their sexuality is dangerous as well. Clearly, it is a threat to the current power structure, but it is also a threat to Katniss and Peeta— and, more broadly speaking, to the citizens of the districts—because it has provoked the ire of a government that is capable of taking brutal action to suppress any uprisings.⁷²

Because of this fear and power play young girls on and off the screen are treated like meat, as pure flesh, as something that exists only to be consumed (especially by the male public). Evan Rachel Wood was not alone on the Vanity Fair photo shoot mentioned in an earlier paragraph and these incidents are not rare. She was one of several young women including Mandy Moore, Lindsay Lohan, Raven-Symoné, Amanda Bynes, the Olsen twins, Hilary Duff, and Alexis Bledel. Almost all of these girls, at the time, were fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen years old. For this society, that makes them old enough to be plastered on the cover of a magazine that also displays the headline, "20 pages of the hottest teen and tween stars."⁷³ So, as illustrated by figure 2-3 below, these girls are posed borderline suggestively with one another; their limbs are tangled together and their bodies leaned into one another.⁷⁴ Their attire and body language alone could be interpreted as innocent enough, but these things do not stand alone.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Katniss evolves throughout each book and eventually becomes so filled with needs and desires that she cannot be satisfied or contained by what society is offering. Her desirability poses a threat to the Capitol and eventually this interplay of desires ends up becoming a significant source of agency for Katniss.

⁷² Latham, Don, and Jonathan M. Hollister. "The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games Trilogy." *Children's Literature in Education* 45.1 (2014): 42.

⁷³ Gajewski, Ryan. "Evan Rachel Wood: My Vanity Fair Cover Shoot Made Me Feel 'Like Meat'". *The Hollywood Reporter*, 19 Oct. 2014. Web. 22 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/evan-rachel-wood-my-vanity-741954>>

⁷⁴ Not to mention Lindsay Lohan's foot, which seems to be either poorly edited or it is doing an under the table (but not nearly so private) move on Evan Rachel Wood's leg. It is also particularly interesting that Lohan and Raven are posed inward facing each other, perhaps the most suggestively, given that Raven officially came out as lesbian in 2013 and Lindsay Lohan has been coming and going from the closet since 2008. It is not possible to know whether the girls knew they were interested in women or if the photo directors knew at that point, but it does

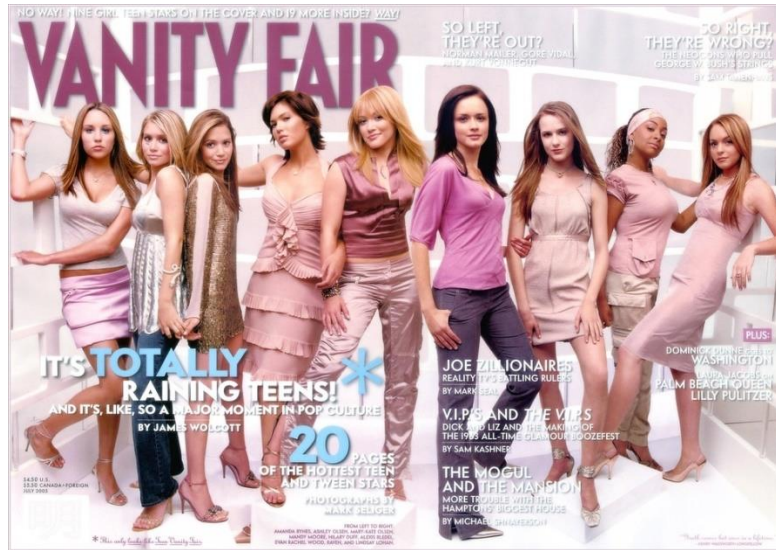


Figure 2-3: Vanity Fair issue July 2003⁷⁶

In addition to the picture itself, and the process of the photo shoot the girls are framed by a very telling headline that encourages viewers to take notice of and rate teens and tweens based on their perceived level of hotness. The aim of this photo shoot, of this edition of the magazine as a whole, is made very clear; youthful sexuality is an alluring spectacle. As long as it remains this way it does not pose a threat, because the young women are not granted complete access to the crafting of their own sexuality. At least not in terms of how it will be perceived by the public. That is a job for producers, photographers, photo editors, and a slew of other behind the scenes workers that are performing cinematic operations on their screen identities. Women are made weak by a society that sends messages that imply girls/women are only as valuable as their appearances suggest, but they are only given so much control over how they craft that identity.⁷⁷ The amount of success they garner is directly correlated with how “hot” they are

present the possibility of an interesting critique on the ways that young, attractive lesbians are doubly commodified by a patriarchal society that gains gratification through the power of their gaze over what remains unobtainable otherwise.

⁷⁵ It should also be noted that Vogue is not meant to specifically target teen and tween audiences, in fact their target audience would be outside the scope of young adulthood.

⁷⁶ Gajewski, Ryan. “Evan Rachel Wood: My Vanity Fair Cover Shoot Made Me Feel ‘Like Meat’”. *The Hollywood Reporter*, 19 Oct. 2014. Web. 22 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/evan-rachel-wood-my-vanity-741954>>

⁷⁷ This argument varies slightly when considering other means of public presentation, such as social media. Presumably, when a girl posts something of herself on sites like Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter she has full

according to the collective consciousness of society. By collective consciousness of society I actually mean the media. Media, whoever is on the looking side of the camera, determines how much a girl is worth, and that saying, "sex sells" has taken on a new form in this society. This is especially obvious in the world of glitz pageantry and fashion.

The world of pageantry capitalizes on the child as sex object and society's inclination toward fetishizing youth. It is a world in which five year old girls are dressed as a provocative Shirley Temple and taught to twerk; it is a world in which two year old girls are dressed as Marilyn Monroe because "she was a sex icon" and that, according to the mother suits the child's personality;⁷⁸ it is a world in which three year old little girls are dressed as Madonna, complete with cones on her chest;⁷⁹ it is a world where a little girl dressed as a prostitute is cheered on by the crowd. As Christine Tamer states, "child beauty queens are made to look physically mature and sexually inviting through their costumes, make-up, and performances" (88). Yet, these behaviors have become so normalized in this setting that the parents involved do not even realize they are still taboo to the rest of society. But, how taboo are they really? It appears that there is no easy answer:

Americans are split on the desirability of such pageants. On the one hand, Facebook groups and petitions have been created to ban such television shows for dangerously exploiting and sexualizing children. On the other hand, some parents argue that pageants allow their children to build positive qualities such as poise, individuality, and confidence.⁸⁰

Toddlers and Tiaras has exposed the good, the bad, and the ugly within the world of pageantry.

According to Bordo, "The ideal, [by contemporary beauty standards], is an 'image of a woman in which she is not yet a woman'" (163). The child beauty queen is the embodiment of this "not yet woman" that resembles a woman. In season two, episode one of *Toddlers and Tiaras* one little girl, aged six, asks her

control over the image she projects. However, she does not have control over how people will perceive that message and she cannot control the messages about beauty that have already permeated the airwaves This shows more evidence of Althusser's ideology at work.

⁷⁸ "Mississippi Sweat Pea Pageant." *Toddlers and Tiaras*. *The Learning Channel*. TLC, Silver Spring, 12 Aug. 2009. Television

⁷⁹ "Universal Royalty, Texas." *Toddlers and Tiaras*. *The Learning Channel*. TLC, Silver Spring, 12 Aug. 2009. Television

⁸⁰ Tamer, Christine. "Toddlers, Tiaras, and Pedophilia? the "Borderline Child Pornography" Embraced by the American Public." *Texas Review of Entertainment and Sports Law* 13.1 (2011): 85.

mom to “spell hot on [her] arm.” In another episode of the show two and a half year old [...] sings “yeah, sexy and I know it” to her mom and dad repeatedly while dancing in an inappropriate way.⁸¹ At a very young age sexuality has become a part of these beauty contestants’ personas. Yet, they are too young to even know anything about sexuality. What does society stand to gain through dressing toddlers as twenty year old women? According to Debra Merskin in “Reviving Lolita: A Media Literacy Examination of Sexual Portrayals of Girls in Fashion Advertising”, “Looking at sexualized portrayals of girls appropriates them for male consumption” (120). Therefore, by crafting children as sex objects pageant parents are essentially throwing their girls to the wolves. They are teaching their children that women are objects that exist for the viewing pleasure of men, of adults in general, of cameras and national audiences. They are taught that their role is to be submissive and obedient.

Katniss shows that there is a way beyond blind submission and obedience. As much as her stylists tried to make her appear non-threatening by putting her in “flimsy dress[es]” that make her feel “vulnerable” and by covering her in pink to make her appear “girlish, not sexy” they could not fully erase the powerful image she planted in the minds of her audience.⁸² Katniss is the first to admit that she would be hopeless at trying to “convince anyone of anything if [she’s] trying to be provocative.”⁸³ She allows her stylists to craft her as girlish, innocent, feminine. This gives her an advantage. She is most desirable as the not yet woman. The Capitol and the majority of the audience is fooled by her appearance, distracted by the identity she has been given, because she appears less threatening as an innocent girl and not the powerful woman that has learned how to manipulate the Capitol’s games. This affords her time to figure things out behind the scenes. She takes advantage of the distractions that make her more desirable in the eyes of the Capitol and she learns as much as she can about her surroundings, the people she shares them with, and their motives. Katniss learns about those who are in positions of authority. She experiences moments in which—despite all the make-up, and the carefully crafted appearances—she is truly powerful. Though sexuality is a powerful tool and she does gain an edge through manipulating the

⁸¹ A way that I can only explain as mimicking seduction, since she is very obviously performing in a way that she has been trained.

⁸² *Hunger Games*. 363.

-- *Catching Fire*. 37-8, 68.

⁸³ *Catching Fire*, 37-8

audience via her desirability (which is, to an extent, an illusion) this is not the primary source of her power.

In order to acquire agency over the crafting of her own image Katniss had to gain an awareness of the illusion the Capitol was creating. They were presenting her as someone “other” so that viewers would not care if she died. She was deprived of any influence; however, she realized that the person they were trying to present her as was not the Katniss she knew herself to be when she was back home in District 12. The messages of the Capitol told her that she was not enough, that she was weak, that she was savage, that her and other tributes had to die to keep the peace. She had no value, except the value she obtained by performing well on-screen (as can be seen with the girls of *Toddler and Tiaras*). Katniss found her way out of this imposed performance by playing her part to extremes, but done in such a way that it subverts the control that the Capitol believes it has over her and the rest of its citizens. During the first games she plays up her status as star-crossed lover in order to manipulate the audience into sending her valuable, life-saving goods. At the end of the games she manipulates knowledge of the land by using the berries to make sure there is more than one victor. She creates a new rule by exposing the motives of the president and the Gamemakers. In *Catching Fire* she is able to escape the arena again, because of her knowledge about the faulty forcefields. Then in *Mockingjay* she finally ends the entire corrupt cycle by killing President Coin and (indirectly) President Snow. She makes her final decision based on the knowledge that Coin is just like Snow. Coin used Gale’s knowledge of hunting against the people of the Capitol, which ended in the death of Prim. Katniss believed this to be staged by Coin in order to manipulate Katniss, who refused to be manipulated any longer. Katniss becomes powerful through her knowledge of the messages being transmitted, how the messages are perceived, and how they are being manipulated (to manipulate viewers).

This practice is applicable to all women, including the young women of shows like *Toddlers and Tiaras* and older women like Renee Zellweger that feel pressured to remain youthful at all costs. Society aims to control female identity, appropriating feminine sexuality as a commodity, but through the knowledge of the ideologies being represented in the media women and girls are able to manipulate their own roles in these ideologies. It is through this knowledge that women become equipped to rewrite their

own narratives, to start affecting the ways in which their own bodies exist in this society. This chapter began with a quote from Bordo stating that Western society is too focused on appearance. It now ends with a quote about the relationship of the body to the world and other subjects:

The body is not an object. It is the condition and context through which I am able to have a relation to objects. It is both immanent and transcendent. Insofar as I live the body, it is a phenomenon experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon and perspectival point which places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible (Bordo 86).

An understanding of the bodies relations between the self and other objects and subjects is crucial to having agency over one's own identity. Katniss knew about the illusion of the Capitol's control because what she was being led to believe was reality did not fit with her experience of the world. She questioned these messages and acted accordingly. Women in western society possess the power to do the same. The solution is both in manipulating the body, and in manipulating narratives about the body.

Chapter 3

“The disbelief of the chronically hungry”: The Power of Starvation in the Hunger Games

“Control food and you control the people.”

Henry Kissinger

“District 12: Where you can starve to death in safety.”

Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

In this chapter I examine the ways in which society polices bodies through the strict control of food and other resources; how power is achieved through starving the masses, and how this nutritional manipulation of people contributes to a larger conversation about regulating access to the land, rendering bodies useful, and suppressing/abusing bodily desires.⁸⁴ In *The Hunger Games* trilogy the Capitol, the Gamemakers, and District 13 are all seen depriving citizens of food in order to create the docile body. By providing citizens with just enough food to stay alive (though sometimes not even that much), these three communities ensure that regular people are always indebted to the person or people that provide them with nourishment. In order to repay this debt people are forced into the mines, up trees, into bedrooms, and into the arena. These starving people, desperate for food, easily make the choice to work from sun-up to sun-down in order to have just one meal a day. In many cases, young women find themselves in the beds of people like Head Peacekeeper Cray, trading sex for food. As Katniss says, “Cray would have been disliked, anyway, because of the uniform he wore, but it was his habit of luring starving young women into his bed for money that made him an object of loathing in the District.”⁸⁵ Katniss notes that she could have been one of those girls if she had been a little bit older when her father died. Instead of trading her body for food, however, Katniss starved until she realized she already had the skills she needed to survive. Katniss’ mastery over the land and her own body illuminates a “chink in the armor” of

⁸⁴ I make the connection between hunger, the need for sustenance, and other forms of hunger, such as sexual appetite. These connections are made in *The Hunger Games* trilogy through Collins transparent language regarding desire and desirability.

⁸⁵ Collins, Suzanne. *Catching Fire*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2009. 115

those that believe themselves to be in complete control.⁸⁶ *The Hunger Games* reveals the illusion of control over resources (and, as a result, bodies) believed to be possessed by harsh governments and societies, such as the Capitol and District 13.⁸⁷ These institutions operate under the false belief that they can control people (both their actions and their bodies) through shame, deprivation, and the economy of food.

3.1 Starvation in the Districts

In countries of excess men and women are able to make the decision to eat or not to eat;⁸⁸ it is a luxury that those with full bellies rarely stop to consider. The readers of *The Hunger Games*, however, are presented with the shocking reality of starvation and the desperation that emerges as a result of that unsatisfied hunger. Katniss matter-of-factly points out that:

Starvation's not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Those injured in the mines. Straggling through the streets. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or lying in the Meadow, you hear the wails from a house, and the Peacekeepers are called in to retrieve the body. Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It's always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one.⁸⁹

Everyone in the districts knows that starvation is one of the leading causes of death among their people, and they also know that their starvation is brought about by the way the Capitol polices resources and

⁸⁶ When Katniss is preparing to go back into the arena in *Catching Fire* she meets Beetee and Wiress who show her that the forcefield protecting the Gamemakers have tiny, hidden inconsistencies. They have what Beetee calls, "chinks in the armor." Katniss later uses this knowledge and terminology when she brings down the forcefield around the arena (285). It is an important metaphor as it represents the chinks in the even more substantial armor of the Capitol. By revealing weaknesses in the Capitol's defenses Katniss is able to prove the Capitol is not as powerful as they believed, and as they would have the people in the districts believe.

⁸⁷ This is not just an issue in the novels, but one that is relevant to our own society as well. It has been a long time since I last saw a commercial about giving money to starving children in another country, but I still remember them vividly. They always struck me as odd. If it only took a few cents a day of our (the people watching these commercials) money to feed these children, then why were they still starving? Why did not someone with more power just share our resources? This was likely childlike idealism and naivety, but now it is apparent that they did not wish to actually feed those people that are starving. These messages directly say that the individual has the ability to save whole starving? nations. Yet they continued to air, reinforcing that the individual really has very little influence. Thus, this perpetuates the cycle of governments convincing individuals of their powerlessness against hunger.

⁸⁹ It is important to note that those that are visibly starving in the districts are those that do not possess a useful body to be traded as collateral.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2008. 28.

uses them for cheap labor. When Katniss runs away from District 12 in *Catching Fire* to be alone after finding out about her impending second round in the arena, she meets Bonnie, a runaway from District 8. When she gives Bonnie all the food in the bag she is carrying Bonnie replies, 'Oh, is this all for me?' Katniss is unsettled by this, "Something inside me twists as I remember another voice. Rue. In the arena. When I gave her the leg of groosling. 'Oh, I've never had a whole leg to myself before.' The disbelief of the chronically hungry" (143). Food is a gift that not all have the opportunity to acquire. Katniss was fortunate to live in a district surrounded by a meadow, with an electric fence that was rarely hot, but when she meets people from other districts and sees their disbelief at receiving enough food to placate their hunger she is reminded of just how ill-prepared the people are in the districts. When she meets Bonnie and her travelling companion, she muses, "It's a miracle these two have made it this far... I remember District 8, an ugly urban place stinking of industrial fumes, the people housed in run-down tenements. No opportunity, ever, to learn the ways of nature" (142). If there was opportunity, like there was for Rue, who lived in an agricultural community, then there were steep consequences that accompany any attempts to become self-sufficient.⁹⁰ The people of the districts believe that they have no other options but to depend on the Capitol for resources, so they continue to live in poverty, doing the bidding of the Capitol, with hidden rage toward the government and President Snow.

District 13 does not fare much better in terms of controlling food sources in order to dominate large populations of people. When Katniss meets Bonnie she is told that District 13 might still exist. At this news Katniss is enraged. There is another district, a place with weapons and food and they have been passively watching and waiting as the people of the districts die as slaves to the Capitol. When she finally makes it to District 13 she finds that there are more restrictions on food and the body than there were in the Capitol. She explains, "[District 13] has nutrition down to a science. You leave with enough calories to take you to the next meal, no more, no less. Serving size is based on your age, height, body type, health, and amount of physical labor required by your schedule" and "They have very strict rules about food... In some ways, District 13 is even more controlling than the Capitol." What Katniss thinks separates District

⁹⁰ Rue tells Katniss a harrowing tale of the torture that ensues whenever someone is caught stealing food in her district.

13 from the Capitol, however, is their treatment of the body, outside of the ways in which they control food; she believes they do not torture people as they do in the Capitol. Unfortunately, after accepting the role of rebel leader and Mockingjay, Katniss learns that District 13 is not different from the Capitol in this way, they just choose to torture bodies behind closed doors instead of in a public venue. After Katniss finds her prep team locked up and being tortured for stealing a loaf of bread she is enraged and in disbelief. She insists that they are taken to see her mother. When the team is taken to Katniss' mother for treatment Katniss notes that her mother was already wearing a look of consternation, which she explains as, "not a result of seeing abused bodies, because they were her daily fare in District 12, but the realization that this sort of thing goes on in 13 as well."⁹¹ They both realize in those moments that President Coin is the same as President Snow. They traded one form of starvation and control for another, but with one exception, The Hunger Games. At least in District 13 Katniss knows children are not being sent to the slaughter for Capitol amusement and spoiled rations. This raises the issue of how the bodies of children are used in these controlling societies, when they do not have the same kind of use-value as adults.

The children of the districts, before the uprising, are faced with an unjust amount of responsibility for their families; they are able to obtain food that their parents do not have access to, but only if they enter their name into a drawing (the tesserae) to become a tribute in the Games.⁹² Every child is entered into the drawing once for every birthday starting at the age of twelve, but they can receive more rations from the government if they enter their name more than once in a year. The message is clear: in order to eat one must sacrifice their body. When a child risks their life in the Games they are supposed to be rewarded with rations for their district provided they are the victor, but even this is an empty promise. After Katniss and Peeta win the games they move into the Victor's Village and they are provided with a sufficient amount of food which means Katniss no longer has to hunt to survive; however, the rations promised to the people in the rest of the district leave much to be desired and circumstances only seem

⁹¹ *Mockingjay* 48.

⁹² Children do not have the same responsibilities as adults in this society; they cannot be forced to work in the mines like men do once they reach maturity, so they have to earn their food in another way. Thus, the bodies of children are offered up as a sacrifice to keep those they love alive.

to get worse. The people of her district are punished for the way Katniss threatens the Capitol's illusion of power. She observes:

As the days pass, things go from bad to worse. The mines stay shut for two weeks, and by that time half of District 12 is starving. The number of kids signing up for tesserae soars, but they often don't receive their grain. Food shortages begin, and even those with money come away from stores empty-handed. When the mines reopen, wages are cut, hours extended, miners sent into blatantly dangerous work sites. The eagerly awaited food promised for Parcel Day arrives spoiled and defiled by rodents. The installations in the square see plenty of action as people are dragged in and punished for offenses so long overlooked we've forgotten they are illegal.⁹³

The situation that the districts faced after Katniss won the Games proves the precarious nature of the Capitol's hold on the districts. The Capitol is like the boa constrictor tightening its grip when it fears it might lose its prey. When Katniss offered up the berries to Peeta at the end of *The Hunger Games* she proved that the Capitol could be defeated at their own game. This showed audiences in the districts that they have more agency over their circumstances than they previously believed. As Katniss states in *Mockingjay*, "The Capitol's fragile because it depends on the districts for everything. Food, energy, even the Peacekeepers that police us. If we declare our freedom, the Capitol collapses" (169). Once unleashed, this line of thinking ignites a fire that spreads throughout Panem. President Snow recognizes this threat and reacts by increasing Peacekeeper activity in the districts, sending spoiled rations, decreasing wages (to show that work is a privilege), and ensuring that there are more displays of public torture.

In an attempt to tighten his grip on the districts, fearful of losing easy access to the food and recreation that keeps the people in the Capitol sedate and willfully unknowing, Snow utilizes the power of the Panopticon to reestablish fear of rebellion. As Foucault asserts, "Every penalty of a certain seriousness ha[s] to involve an element of torture" (53). In the districts hunting outside the gates, stealing, and trading in the underground market are all offenses punishable by death at worst and punishable by lashing at best. It is not enough, however, that the deviant body be tortured; this torture must take place in front of an audience so that the sovereign may display the limitlessness of his power. This "policy of terror [is] to make everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the

⁹³ *Catching Fire*, 131-32.

sovereign.”⁹⁴ This policy of terror is used in District 12 (and likely other districts, but readers are only granted access to District 12 and District 11) to elicit fear in the citizens so that they, despite knowing they can take control of their own resources and bodies, will not attempt to break the rules that keep them docile. Snow rules the land by fear and an understanding that humans can experience the greatest pain by witnessing the torture and deterioration of those they love. In *Catching Fire* Gale is used against Katniss (and the rest of the District) as an example of what might happen to anyone that chooses to illegally obtain their own food sources outside of those provided by the Capitol.⁹⁵ As Katniss approaches the square she witnesses:

Gale’s wrists are bound to a wooden post. The wild turkey he shot earlier hangs above him, the nail driven through its neck. His jacket’s been cast aside on the ground, his shirt torn away. He slumps unconscious on his knees, held up only by the ropes at his wrists. What used to be his back is a raw bloody slab of meat.⁹⁶

The offender is transformed into an embodiment of his offense so that his body can be used as an instrument of fear. Gale becomes a “raw, bloody slab of meat” as his neighbors, family, and friends are forced to stand-by and watch. This message serves as a double warning for Katniss, as Snow wants her to know that he is never far away and he sees everything and he has control of her happiness. But, she and others are also being warned of the consequences of wandering away from District 12 to hunt. Snow ensures that people do what he wishes by not only breaking down their bodies and starving them of food, but also starving them of love and meaningful connections.

One of the most effective methods of control in *The Hunger Games* trilogy is the ability to deprive characters of caring relationships with the people they love; Snow does this by decreasing the value of person-to-person interactions through the representation of closeness as a commodity.⁹⁷ In addition to not allowing characters to hold onto love, Snow uses their bodies, particularly those of young, attractive tributes to assert his own significance within the social networks of the Capitol elite, who predominantly

⁹⁴ Foucault, 49.

⁹⁵ It is not coincidence that the offenses punished with the greatest severity are those that threaten the Capitol’s control over food and resources. If people are able to obtain their own food they no longer need the Capitol, and thus must no longer hand over their resources in exchange for the promise of regular rations.

⁹⁶ *Catching Fire*, 105.

⁹⁷ Readers find out in the second book of the trilogy that Snow also murders the loved ones of those he feels threatened by, thereby giving them nothing left to live for, and ensuring that they remain subservient to him.

sponsor the Games.⁹⁸ As Roberta Trites states in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, "The sexual predator thrives on having power over a victim" (99). In such a starved society there are many young women (and a few men) for these power hungry sexual predators to solicit, because when food is that scarce one would do almost anything not to starve. Or, as is the case of some of the tributes who are forced to have sex with people in the Capitol, they would do anything not to see their loved ones taken away or harmed. They submit to the control of the Capitol so that they will never have to experience what it is like to be starved of love. In *Catching Fire*, Johanna alludes to the fact that President Snow killed everyone she loved, but she does not provide the knowledge of why he would take those people away from her (that knowledge is provided later in book three). When Katniss pleads with Johanna not to go into the wilderness with the terrible jabberjays that mimic loved one's cries of pain, Johanna retorts, 'They can't hurt me. I'm not like the rest of you. There's no one left I love' (347). The Capitol has taken everything from Johanna, but once there is nothing left for her to lose there is nothing left for the Capitol to use against her (this is not the case for most of the tributes who still have someone).⁹⁹ Later in the trilogy readers find out that Snow slaughters the loved ones of the tributes that choose not to offer up their bodies for sex. In *Mockingjay*, Finnick comes forward with information about how Snow had turned the tributes into prostitutes. In one of the District 13 propos (propaganda) Finnick states, 'President Snow used to...sell me...my body, that is.' He goes on to say, "I wasn't the only one. If a victor is considered desirable, the president gives them as a reward or allows people to buy them for an exorbitant amount of money. If you refuse, he kills someone you love. So you do it."¹⁰⁰ Snow makes it clear that all forms of desire and need will not be fulfilled under his rule. Katniss could have easily become one of President Snow's prized possessions. She had two boys/men that she had grown fond of, as well as her sister and mother who could all be easily used against her. In addition to this, the Capitol

⁹⁸ This allows Snow to have more agency over the outcome of the Games. By investing in the loyalty of sponsors he is able to indirectly sway the direction of the Games.

⁹⁹ It is actually because the tributes all still have someone left that they love that Snow sends them back into the arena. He uses the medium of public torture as entertainment to assert his power, once again, over the tributes (those deemed "the most strong among us").

¹⁰⁰ *Mockingjay* 170.

had become attached to her and the elaborate story of District 12's star-crossed lovers, so many of them would have liked their chance to experience a night with the girl on fire. Her image, her dissatisfaction, her hunger became a commodity: the girl on fire and the boy with the bread that could never satiate their desires.

3.2 Starvation and Excess in the Capitol

Starvation in the districts, where everyday existence is defined by lack (an inability to satisfy one's desires), is anything but a choice; however, in the Capitol, where everyday existence is defined by excess starvation is a choice.¹⁰¹ The people in the Capitol live in such luxury that they never have to consider where their next meal might be coming from or when the next meal might appear. This effortless comfort allows them the ability to focus their efforts on aesthetics and not just staying alive. It is likely that individuals in consumer cultures, such as America, are more likely to identify with the struggles of the people in the Capitol than those of the people in the districts. At least this is the argument of Max Despain in "The 'Fine Reality of Hunger Satisfied.'" Despain states that, "Tapping into the complex contemporary guilt Americans feel about indulgence, abundance, and weight gain, Collins can count on her readers to find the Everdeen family's hand-to-mouth existence as unfamiliar as the hovercraft in her narrative."¹⁰² This is, perhaps, true for male readers as the messages sent to them by our society differ from those sent to female readers. The female reader is more likely familiar with what it feels like to go hungry, not because she has to, but because she chooses to; the way that Katniss has a mastery over how much and how often she is able to eat, mirrors the ways in which the people in the Capitol (and women in our own society) strictly control their own diets. These examples are, however, on two ends of the spectrum. In *Unbearable Weight* Bordo states that, "Almost all of us who can afford to be eating well are dieting—and hungry—almost all of the time";¹⁰³ however, "To those who are starving against their wills, of course, starvation cannot function as an expression of the power of the will" (154). Because the people in the

¹⁰¹ It is a choice, insofar as the Capitol citizens choose whether or not to eat. There is, however, an illusion of agency at work here.

¹⁰² Despain, Max. "The 'Fine Reality of Hunger Satisfied.'" *Of Bread, Blood and the Hunger Games: Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*. Eds. Mary Pharr, et al. US: McFarland & Company Inc, Publishers, 2012. 71.

¹⁰³ Bordo, 103.

Capitol live in such excess they believe they can exert agency over their own bodies by starving those bodies into submission. For characters like Katniss and Peeta, who are thrust into the grotesque world of the Capitol this intentional deprivation is wholly alien. Katniss will never know starvation as a means of exerting control over her own body, like the people of the Capitol. The very notion disgusts her. Katniss encounters the Capitol's inclinations toward "control" when she arrives in the Capitol and discovers the many delicacies available to her there that she never would have imagined existed when she was living unaware in District 12. She takes one bite of every dish, but she begins to fill up too quickly, so she gives the rest of the food to Peeta. All around her people are continuing to binge and purge and throw away food. Katniss is appalled by these people and their behavior. They are so accustomed to excess, to always having so much that they must resort to other means of "mastering" their desires. Katniss states, "Every table presents new temptations, and even on my restricted one-taste-per-dish regimen, I begin filling up quickly. I want to keep tasting things, but the idea of throwing away food [...] is abhorrent to me"¹⁰⁴ Because Katniss comes from a place where food is so scarce she makes it painfully obvious how wasteful the people are in the Capitol. She further explains the logic behind her disgust:

All I can think of is the emaciated bodies of the children on our kitchen table as my mother prescribes what the parents can't give. More food. Now that we're rich, she'll send some home with them. But often in the old days, there was nothing to give and the child was past saving, anyway. And here in the Capitol they're vomiting for the pleasure of filling their bellies again and again. Not from some illness of body or mind, not from spoiled food. It's what everyone does at a party. Expected. Part of the fun.¹⁰⁵

The bodies of the people in the districts slowly wither as the people in the Capitol take pleasure in the sensation of having a full belly that they can fill and empty at will. In both cases they want satisfaction, and in both cases food is a valuable resource, but in only one of these cases do readers see the illusion of agency. For the people in the Capitol, they believe that they have choices over their own bodies. They never stop to think that their bodies are just as restricted and regulated as those of the people in the districts. It is just that they are choosing to police themselves. The economics of food and starvation are inverted in the Capitol.

¹⁰⁴ *Catching Fire*, 78.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 80.

There are certainly exceptions, but the majority of people in America have steady access to food (even if that food is fast food, which is another issue entirely) and can sit comfortably at home while watching people starve on the other side of a screen. Katniss develops a mastery over food so that she can stay alive and keep her family alive. The people in the Capitol by contrast do so as a result of the normalization of eating disorders. For women within (a current) western culture, however, eating disorders are still considered taboo. Yet, many young girls and women still engage in these practices, because while the disorders themselves are taboo the body type they produce is the “ideal.” As Bordo states, “Such restrictions on appetite [...] are not merely about food intake. Rather, the social control of female hunger operates as a practical ‘discipline’ that trains female bodies in the knowledge of their limits and possibilities” (130). In the Capitol and in our own society girls are starving themselves so that they can look a certain way. She who starves (or purges) believes that she is empowered by her behaviors, that through testing her own limits and surpassing those limits she is able to create a body that is untouchable by the temptations of culture; however, her starvation is the equivalent of bodily self-sacrifice; “[t]hrough these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough” (Bordo 166). The purpose of starving oneself then becomes a way of proving how skilled a person is at rendering their own body as a useful body. In our own society the useful body of the female is one that meets certain beauty expectations. Young girls believe and act according to the messages on the television that are crafted to convince them that their suffering will be rewarded. They believe that they will finally be praised and seen as whole when they achieve the ideal body. This shows how societies control food and consumption through the messages they broadcast about ideal bodies.

3.3 Starvation in the Televisual Arena

In order to perpetuate this false belief, societies (or governments as is the case in *The Hunger Games*) are forced to control “information in an effort to discourage resistance as much as possible, particularly any kind of widespread resistance.”¹⁰⁶ This is accomplished by the strict maintenance of the

¹⁰⁶ Latham, Don, and Jonathan M. Hollister. “The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games Trilogy.” *Children's Literature in Education* 45.1 (2014): 37-8.

most efficient medium of the dissemination of knowledge, which in this society means television (and the internet).¹⁰⁷ Television broadcasts such as *The Biggest Loser* transmit messages of inadequacy and ineptitude through encouraging participants and viewers to strictly monitor their own relationships with food. They tell viewers that there are consequences to overindulgence, thus in order to avoid dire consequences they must starve themselves. In a society of excess it becomes more difficult for the resources to be regulated by a governmental system such as in *The Hunger Games*. This then leads to the belief that individuals' bodies and minds must undergo a torturous process of normalization if they wish to fit within society; therefore, one enacts their own torture and regulation. This is ultimately a message about denying one's own impulses and desires. Thus, "The regulation of desire [...] becomes an ongoing problem, as we find ourselves continually besieged by temptation, while socially condemned for overindulgence" (Bordo 199). When one cannot control their own desires they are shamed by society. There is only a moderate amount of choice; one must conform or suffer the consequences. The consequences of not conforming (for women) within current western society (as opposed to the future America represented in *The Hunger Games*) involve being "less likely than their thinner counterparts to be judged as attractive, less likely to show physical affection, and more likely to be the object of humor."¹⁰⁸ This same study showed that women were less likely to have been involved in romantic and sexual relationships if they were deemed by society to be "fat." The woman must, at all costs suppress (or master) her desires.

Weight and overindulgence is an issue within society that discriminates against both men and women, though the way female bodies exist in the world differ from the way male bodies exist and as a result the discrimination experienced varies. As Janna Fikkan states in "Is Fat a Feminist Issue?":

Exploring the Gendered Nature of Weight Bias":

[F]at is a feminist issue because the culture at large allows for much less deviation from aesthetic ideals for women than it does for men, meaning that many more women than men end up feeling badly about their (normal and healthy) bodies, and thus engage their

¹⁰⁷ This is also applied to *The Hunger Games* in that they strictly mediate the images of the tributes and the stylists and all others that are in a position of visibility.

¹⁰⁸ Fikkan, Janna L., and Esther D. Rothblum. "Is Fat a Feminist Issue? Exploring the Gendered Nature of Weight Bias." *Sex Roles* 66.9 (2012): 584.

energies in all manner of corrective action, from restrictive dieting to eating disorders (575).

Consider: how many male actors do not have the “ideal” body type, as determined by society? Jack Black, Kevin Smith, Jonah Hill, Seth Rogen, Kevin James, and even an animated Homer Simpson. Now, think of how many women on television or in movies do not have the “ideal” body type? Melissa McCarthy and Gabourey Sidibe. There are only a handful of female actresses that do not fit the mold society has created for the female body. It is blatantly apparent that “fat women in the media [...] are largely absent.”¹⁰⁹ In addition to this, “A study analyzing both primetime network television [...] found that female body types were more slender on average than male body types, with 72.5% and 29.2% of females and males, respectively, in the underweight category” (Fikkan 584). Many of the actresses that begin their careers not having the slender body prized by the film industry end up falling prey to the pressure of society (a pressure that is even greater for them since they are constantly under the scrutiny of the camera).¹¹⁰ Other actresses begin their careers thin and then gain weight only to capitalize on their weight loss later on by signing up with weight loss companies such as Jenny Craig.¹¹¹ There are very few men that have capitalized on their weight loss, one of the most well-known being Jared Fogle, the subway spokesperson, who claimed to lose a substantial amount of weight by eating only subway sandwiches every day.¹¹² These inequities prove that the pressure on women to conform and to master their desires is exceptionally more intense than the pressure placed on men. As Bordo states, “we, [women], can

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Actress America Ferrera is the first to come to mind. She was larger in *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* than she was in *The Dry Land*. In 2002, before *Sisterhood* she even starred in a film called *Real Women Have Curves*.

¹¹¹ Kirstie Alley comes to mind here. She had her own television series in 2005 called *Fat Actress*, in which illuminates what life is like for a Hollywood actress that was once thin and successful but then lost her claim to fame as she approached three hundred pounds. Just before her television sitcom (which only lasted one year) she signed on with Jenny Craig. Now that she has lost a significant amount of weight she has rekindled her television career and even advertises her own organic weight loss plan on her website: www.kirstiealley.com

¹¹² Jared is actually a fascinating example, though he is a rarity among “celebrity” men. He stands in direct opposition to the writer and director of the documentary *Supersize Me*, which aims to expose the harsh reality of a fast food culture. *Supersize Me* director, Morgan Spurlock goes on camera and eats McDonald’s every day for thirty days. If he is asked by the cashier to upsize he must say yes. At the end of his experience he has gained 24.5 pounds and the doctors state that his heart may have been irreparable damaged. Morgan eats fast food to expose the dark side of our culture’s relationship with food. Whereas Jared eats fast food every day in order to lose weight and presumably improve his health. Both men use their bodies to capitalize, but the messages exist on opposite ends of a spectrum.

master our desires only by creating rigid defenses against them" (201). Weight loss TV shows exist to teach young women (and men, to a lesser extent) how to gain mastery over their own bodies. They show contestants who are locked away in a "resort" for weeks at a time, with their food intake strictly monitored and controlled. These television programs illuminate the ways in which our own society regulates the eating habits of those who "shamefully" overindulge. Instead of their bodies being appropriated for cheap labor, they are instead used to entertain the masses. The public nature of these shows provides an opportunity for participants to gain control over their own images and their own bodies. By acting in unexpected ways reality television contestants, such as Rachel from the controversial fifteenth season of *The Biggest Loser* and Katniss, are able to expose the problems of society. Their actions, whether intentional or unintentional, cause audiences to question their own long-standing beliefs. Katniss' defiance during the Games reveals problems in terms of the way societies control bodies, with no regard for the actual person, in order to send particular messages and to increase their use-value. By holding out the berries at the end of *The Hunger Games* Katniss takes the idea of female-sacrifice, engrained in women by society, and uses it to subvert the structure of the Games. In Rachel's situation she lost an excessive amount of weight while she was not being filmed. When she first appeared on screen for the finale, an event that the producers could not edit out of the final footage, she presented an unexpectedly thin body that illuminated the problematic relationship our society has with food and body image.

The end of *Biggest Loser* (BL) season fifteen marked a monumental shift in the way society regarded reality television shows that starve participants and put them through unnecessary torture. *BL* contestant Rachel Frederickson won the grand prize after having lost almost sixty percent of her original body weight. When she began the show she weighed two hundred and sixty pounds. When she finished her journey she weighed just over one hundred pounds. She stood in front of millions of people on national television and presented her slender new body with pride. Rachel claims that she lost the weight "naturally" by working out for many hours a day and thus was not anorexic, but the way she presents herself to the nation on television reflects similar attitudes to those held by individuals diagnosed as

anorexic.¹¹³ As Susan Bordo states, “The anorectic discovers her steadily shrinking body is admired, not so much as an aesthetic or sexual object, but for the strength of will and self-control it projects” (178). Rachel was able to prove to a large audience of people that she was exceptional at playing this particular cultural game.¹¹⁴ She embraced her small frame with glee. The people watching the season finale, however, were not as convinced by Rachel’s new appearance, and were jolted out of a position of blind obedience (of the cultural rules for obtaining the ideal body). There was an excessive amount of social media backlash claiming she went too far. People were criticizing Rachel for losing too much weight and others were criticizing the creators and producers of the television show for not monitoring the contestants closely enough when they went home.¹¹⁵ Once Rachel was left on her own to manage her weight without the scrutiny of doctors and cameras she spiraled out of control. In her own mind she was doing what she had to do to win the game and to look her best. But, as Bordo argues, “the [...] slender girls and women who strive to embody these images [of fitness] [...] who suffer from eating disorders, exercise compulsions, and continual self-scrutiny and self-castigation are anything but the ‘masters’ of their lives” (182). It took a woman losing over half of her body weight in front a national audience for individuals to finally realize this may not be a healthy means of gaining mastery over one’s own body. This realization then led to the startling understanding that not only are the bodies of reality television contestants being regulated in this way, so too are the bodies of audience members.¹¹⁶

The incident of last season’s *Biggest Loser* forced viewers out of their comfort zones; for many years (fourteen seasons) desensitized audiences watched the torturous process of men and women fighting for a “fit” new body and the over two hundred thousand dollar prize that accompanied their new

¹¹³ It is also well documented that one form of disordered eating, that of overeating in this case, can easily transform into another form of disordered eating (anorexia).

¹¹⁴ Unlike Katniss her willful starvation leads to a...moderately...agential existence within the realm of television.

¹¹⁵ Jones, Alex. “Biggest Loser winner Rachel Frederickson Weight Loss Scandal GMA Good Morning America.” Online Video Clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 6 Feb. 2014. Web. 1 Nov. 2014
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrTah_CXO9Q>.

¹¹⁶ As audiences watch shows like *The Biggest Loser* they are being shown how to lose weight, how to have a healthy (meaning, desirable) body. But, at the same time when the show breaks for commercial they are being marketed hamburgers with cheese and mayonnaise and bacon with a side of greasy fries. The messages of aesthetic culture contradict the messages of consumer culture. Eat what you want, but stay thin. It is no wonder Collins made her future America, the Capitol, bulimic.

body.¹¹⁷ The hours of exercise and starvation serve as punishment of the fat body; however, “[i]n the practice of torture, pain, confrontation and truth were bound together” (Foucault 41). By watching these contestants starve themselves and run their bodies past the point of exhaustion audiences gain access to the truth. The deprivation and torture of contestant bodies is deemed, by viewers, as okay because the contestants that were being starved and forced to work out for hours upon hours every day on national television (to the point of injury and illness) have been labeled by society as fat. It was further justified, because it is just entertainment. Our society has a way of separating entertainment from the real.¹¹⁸ The American viewer can use their own willful ignorance in order to passively accept the public torture of the people around them, people that they believe to be the same kind of normal as them.

The torturous process (made public by the persistent gaze of the cameras) of *The Biggest Loser* was packaged as entertainment, but in reality it is a part of the social shaming and policing that has become the norm within western culture. By watching these shows, viewers are indirectly participating in the perpetuation of the dehumanization of contestants and the messages that also police their own bodies. Audiences, until last season, could justify this treatment by linking weight to health and success. They could tell themselves that it was okay, because they cared about the best interest of the contestants. In “Make Me a Celebrity,” Vanessa Russell suggests that “Visions of swollen, bruised participants working out in the gym [...] show the viewer a truer story of how to attain the celebrity’s ideal body. In this way, makeover television takes the blame off the viewer” (78). Russell is claiming that the viewer is able to rid himself or herself of guilt by watching other bodies being tortured, that this access to “reality” gives the viewer an excuse not to look like a celebrity.¹¹⁹ This, however, seems to implicate the viewer even further.

¹¹⁷ By fit I mean slim, because that is the implication of these shows. Health is equated with weight.

¹¹⁸ Perhaps because we have so many movies and television shows that market themselves as real (Blair Witch Project, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, all reality television), but are actually not based in fact. Likewise, there are so many movies and television shows that claim they are fiction (Law and Order: SVU), but are actually based on fact. It becomes difficult to discern fact from fiction when these messages are constantly blurred and merged.

¹¹⁹ The idea being that it is too difficult for any normal person to obtain a celebrity body, because normal people do not have the resources. But, because reality television packages itself as casting real people this argument becomes invalid.

Weight loss shows invite the viewer into what is meant to be perceived as the reality of extreme weight loss. They encourage the viewer to believe that torture is what it takes to obtain the ideal body, yet even after gaining access to this reality audiences still watch these participants while sitting comfortably at home on their couches. Viewers are desensitized to the pain of other humans when they are separated by a television screen. When that pain is normalized as a necessary part of a journey toward self-actualization it becomes even more justified. As Emily Askew explains, "Pain becomes the assumed and accepted price of achieving a new identity—a more authentic identity."¹²⁰ The viewer becomes invested in the bodily alteration of the contestants, while simultaneously internalizing the message that the activities being endured are healthy and normal (thus, not cruel or dehumanizing). As Bordo states, "[I]n the 1980s and 1990s an increasingly universal equation of slenderness with beauty and success has rendered the competing claims of cultural diversity ever feeble" (102). The fifteenth season, however, showed that there are moral and ethical issues with treating people like objects to be tortured, shaped and molded (to meet the expectations of a certain body image). The same practices that regulate bodies in *The Hunger Games* are shown, by the *Biggest Loser* to be at work within our own society. How long would our society have continued watching programming such as *BL* without questioning these harmful methods of bodily regulation, though? Rachel's actions provoked audiences, leading them to seek out their own means of control. As Henthorne notes, "By incorporating viewer input into the program, producers give their games another dimension one that theoretically, at least, increases the viewers' level of engagement by making them part of the show" (Simon 195; Henthorne 103). That is, the interactive elements of reality television shows, where audiences can vote and tweet and facebook while these programs are on air gives the audience the ability to become more engaged with the shows. This also means that audiences have a greater ability to manipulate media messages. As Pamela Wilson notes in "Jamming Big Brother: Webcasting, Audience Intervention, and Narrative Activism":

The ability of fans to use the internet not only to follow the moment-by-moment action but also to organize and mobilize as activists as well as interventionists supplied a crack in the surface of the network or producer's total control over the television product. In so

¹²⁰ Askew, Emily. "Extreme Makeover and the Classical Logic of Transformation." *You've Come a Long Way, Baby: Women, Politics, and Popular Culture*. Ed. Lilly Goren. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009.

doing, it inadvertently offered a space through which viewer-fans could actively participate in the production of the program and affect its narrative outcome.¹²¹

This control, however, relies on the relationship between contestants and the audience.

Characters/Participants, like Katniss, know “that their chances for survival depend on their being able to compete successfully for the hearts and minds of the viewing audience” (Latham 42). This ability for audiences and participants to interact is crucial to increasing widespread visibility of the harmful means of control at work within our society and the society of *The Hunger Games*, because it engages “everyone” in a common purpose.

In *The Hunger Games* Katniss skillfully employs the use of her time on screen to expose, the unethical and barbaric treatment of the district people. When Katniss offers the berries to Peeta she shares her humanity, her capacity for longing and need. Katniss may have only been trying to keep herself and Peeta alive, but the Capitol read her acts as those of a person desperate to be with the one she loves. Prior to the seventy-fourth Games, when Katniss acted so quickly and unexpectedly that she could not be edited, the people in the Capitol were oblivious to the harsh reality of life outside their safe, isolated existence.¹²² They watched the Hunger Games annually, but the producers (or Gamemakers) strictly policed the information and images that actually made it into their homes. As Katniss states in *The Hunger Games* while she is in the arena talking to Rue about her home, “We have so little communication with anyone outside our District. In fact, I wonder if the Gamemakers are blocking out our conversation, because even though the information seems harmless, they don’t want people in different districts to know about one another” (203). Similarly, they do not want the people in the Capitol to know anything that might make them question the humanity of the tributes and the ways that their government dehumanizes these people. The conversation that Katniss finds “harmless” is one in which Rue tells her “we’re not allowed to eat the crops.” She goes on to say that individuals that get caught are publicly tortured: “They whip you and make everyone else watch” (202). This seems like nothing too out of the ordinary for

¹²¹ Wilson, Pamela. “Jamming Big Brother: Webcasting, Audience Intervention, and Narrative Activism.” *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. Eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Oullette. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 338.

¹²² Likewise, the people in the districts were kept in the dark about one another as well. This made it easier for the Capitol to control them.

Katniss, because she knows torture happens in the districts, especially when it comes to taking control of one's own food. But, she also assumes that the people in the Capitol would know this and that the information would not change their perception of the games; however, once audiences start questioning the humanity of the tributes it becomes blatantly obvious how unethical it is to starve, torture, and leave individuals in a death arena in order to satisfy a twisted need for violent entertainment.

Katniss spends a significant amount of time trying to navigate her way through a society that wishes to minimize her existence. She has many moments that test her resolve, and she occasionally loses herself in the Capitol allure. It takes the deaths of several people that she loves to help her see through the smoke and mirrors created by the Capitol and District 13. The entire time, however, Katniss had the answer to where her own power and potential resided and how it might be accessed. It was given to her at birth, in the moments of her naming. Katniss. Katniss possesses the resilience of the plant she was named after, and like her father said she need only find herself to thrive. Despain argues that Katniss finds herself, "and realizes that her purpose is ensuring that she and all Panem will never again starve—by ending the population's metaphorical hunger for justice" (77). While I do believe that Katniss ends the population's hunger for justice I find the notion that Katniss' purpose is to ensure that Panem will never again starve quite problematic. This argument insinuates that the Katniss that she finds is one that is meant to satiate the desires of Panem. This use of her name and coming to know herself implies that she exists for consumption, thus circling back to the docile body.¹²³ It is not important for Katniss to discover a self-sacrificing identity—she already had that—it is necessary for her to discover an identity that does not feel guilty about embracing self-survival.¹²⁴ This society capitalizes on female self-sacrifice. As Bordo states, "None of this self-sacrifice, however, is felt as such by the 'paragon of womanhood', for it is here, in the care and feeding of others, that woman experiences the one form of desire that is appropriately hers (118). Girls are taught to always give, to be sweet and smile, to be gracious and know their space, to think of others first, to show love by feeding. The true victory for Katniss is not in learning how to feed

¹²³ This also brings us back to the faults of reality television, where the camera and the audience are meant to consume/internalize the embodied struggles of contestants. The participants on these shows are completing this journey publicly as much for themselves as for others.

¹²⁴ Or perhaps, to return to the identity she felt she possessed prior to taking Prim's place in the games.

others, it is in learning about self-preservation, learning that all she needs is herself; she does this through her mastery over the land and resources, and as a result of that mastery she gains greater mastery over her own body.

3.4 Control Resources and Control Bodies

The characters in *The Hunger Games* that learn how to live off the land and obtain their own resources possess a sort of agency that none of the other characters in the novel are able to exhibit, because they break the imposed laws and they see the ideologies that regulate their existence. This mastery over the elements that leads to survival is the key to finding (and saving) oneself both in and out of the arena. According to Tom Henthorne, “The Gamemakers’ absolute control over resources in the arena is presumably meant to mirror the Capitol’s control over the resources of Panem, the Games thereby reinforcing the existing social order by reproducing it symbolically in the arena” (98). Katniss learns how to manipulate her environment in the arena primarily through her knowledge of available food sources. She did not follow the rules in her district and this gave her the opportunity to learn how to live off the land and to survive in inhospitable circumstances. Henthorne claims, “the Capitol cannot tolerate any form of resistance, even suicide, if the games are going to have the desired ideological effect: it must always exercise power in absolute terms” (99). Katniss is a threat in the first book because she was able to use her knowledge of the arena landscape to subvert the order of the games. She would not have had access to this form of power had she not be a part of a society that required creativity to survive. By relegating the people of the Districts to an oppressed existence of starvation and hunger they unintentionally opened the door for these individuals to seek power over their own resources. Ironically, their oppression leads to their emancipation. Henthorne continues, “[b]y demonstrating that their control of resources gives them control over people’s lives, the Capitol is able to convey the idea that a widespread rebellion could not possibly be sustained, and that uprisings would result in further suffering rather than social change” (98). Therefore, the Capitol has convinced the people of the districts that they are incapable of living a decent life without the control and maintenance of the Capitol.

Fear of starvation and death kept the people of the districts docile, until Katniss proved that there was another way. She proved that the Capitol did not control the food or the land. In ““The ‘Fine Reality of Hunger Satisfied” Max Despain claims:

Collins consistently reveals her complex understanding of food as a metaphor for cultural, social, political, and personal longing when she produces a dystopian future where a brewing rebellion is best portrayed through hunger, and independence comes when that hunger and its metaphorical substitutes are finally satisfied.¹²⁵

Collins’ use of food as a metaphor does illuminate the many ways that bodies hunger, and it does offer a way of understanding the need to satisfy one’s appetites, I do not believe, however, that the hunger of the people in the districts is ever truly satisfied. They starve under the dictatorship of President Snow, and then they are fed just enough to keep them alive under the control of President Coin.¹²⁶ The only time they come close to being independent is after both governments have been destroyed, and even then their desires and hungers and needs have not been satisfied. Everything has been destroyed; they are returning to a barren wasteland and each person is responsible for his/her own nourishment. The only people that would thrive in such an environment are the characters like Katniss that have learned, by breaking the rules of the governments (or by changing them) how to live despite the various restrictions.

The struggle to eat and survive within the districts is so great that the relationship these characters have with food becomes their greatest source of agency over themselves and eventually the governments that oppress them. In “Botanic Notables: Plants of the Hunger Games” Anna Laurent writes, “Author Suzanne Collins considered the significance of the wild plant when she scripted a food-insecure world, and her characters are often defined by a plant—some can identify them (they live), others can’t (they die).”¹²⁷ This is what gives the characters an individual agency apart from their community existence. This is how they learn to exist within new ideologies, which give them greater control over their own bodies and narratives. At the age of eight Katniss lost her father, and her mother fell into a deep depression, leaving Katniss as the sole provider for her family. Without the income and rations provided

¹²⁵ Despain, 69.

¹²⁶ This can be read in two ways, they are fed literally and they are fed metaphorically. Their cultural, social, and political longings were addressed in similar ways to their bodily hunger.

¹²⁷ Laurent, Anna. “Botanic Notables: Plants of the Hunger Games.” *The Magazine of Outdoor Design*. Garden Design. Website. 8 Nov. 2014.< <http://www.gardendesign.com/ideas/botanic-notables-plants-of-the-hunger-games>>

to her by her father, Katniss did not know how to keep herself or her family alive. They starved, until the day Katniss ended up behind the bakery. She was so deprived of food that she felt death approaching. About to give up she fell against a tree where she witnessed Peeta being yelled at by his mother for burning the bread. He was ordered to feed the bread to the animals, but instead he threw it to Katniss. Looking back at that moment she thinks, “To this day, I can never shake the connection between this boy, Peeta Mellark, and the bread that gave me hope, and the dandelion that reminded me that I was not doomed.”¹²⁸ The bread that a merciful, compassionate Peeta gave her that day showed her that she never had to starve again and neither did her family. When she looked down at the bread she saw a dandelion and she “knew hope wasn’t lost.” That dandelion reminded her of the lessons taught to her by her father and passed down in a book penned by her ancestors. Her mother salvaged the book from the apothecary; Katniss describes it as being, “an old thing, made of parchment and leather. [That] some herbalist on my mother’s side of the family started [...] ages ago.” She continues, “The book’s composed of page after page of ink drawings of plants with descriptions of their medical uses. My father added a section on edible plants that was my guidebook to keeping us alive after his death.”¹²⁹ She says these entries, added by her father, are “[p]lants for eating, not healing.”¹³⁰ Katniss spent hours looking at those pages, consuming the knowledge scrawled on the pages. Her life-saving book, like the domestic receipt books of centuries past, contained the crucial information that would allow her to survive and gain agency.¹³¹ In the past these books were a significant part of community and social networking, but more importantly they contained knowledge of the land. In a society deprived of regular access to food this information is power. Not only did it teach Katniss what plants (in and out of the arena) were safe to consume, it also provided her family with a source of income. Katniss’ mother, a woman that she claims would normally call her to kill a spider, transformed into “a woman immune to fear” whenever “a sick or

¹²⁸ *The Hunger Games*, 32.

¹²⁹ *Catching Fire*, 161.

¹³⁰ *Hunger Games*, 50

¹³¹ Typically these receipt books contained everything from remedies for illnesses (headaches, depression, etc.) to recipes for meals (how to cook pork or make bread or cheese, etc.) to instruction on making make-up and lotions. It seems, however, that Katniss’ book is a combination of these receipt books and **an herbal** which can be similarly placed in time.

dying person is brought to her.”¹³² Katniss notes, “[T]his is the only time I think my mother knows who she is.”¹³³ The skills and information that Katniss’ mother attained from this book became her only source of identity after the Capitol stole everything from her.

Suzanne Collins creates such close relationships between characters and land that these relationships literally define who they are and how they are named. As Despain observes, “Each outlying district in Panem forms an identity around not only the products the district is known for but also the ways in which its citizens cope with their lack of food” (70). In addition to the districts developing an identity based on their interactions with food, the individuals of the districts also develop their own food-related identities. The plants that the characters are named after in the book depict similarities in properties between the plants and the characters. Laurent notes that Katniss’ sister Primrose is most likely named after evening primrose, which is known for its ability to heal. Sweet Rue is named after the rue plant, which is known as the herb of grace. Katniss is also named after a plant which can be nutritious and is known for its resilience.¹³⁴ Not only do the names correspond with plants, but the characteristics of the plants do represent the characteristics of the individuals. The district characters are closely aligned with their land and their resources, so much so that it has become a part of who they are. This is a connection Collins no doubt wants her readers to make, that there are alternative ways to construct identity that do not exist symbiotically with culture. She wants readers to realize that the people in the districts have a greater command over resources than the people in the Capitol (though the Capitol believes they have the greater command). As Despain affirms, an important scene in the first novel that reveals the significance of food as it relates to finding confidence in oneself is the scene in which Katniss’ father tells her, “As long as you can find yourself, you’ll never starve.”¹³⁵ Despain’s analysis brings to the surface the issue of food as it relates to identity, but he overlooks the significance of her gendered existence.

The way that Katniss comes to know herself is largely through the way the Capitol rewrites her gendered body, but the Capitol cannot rewrite or take away the knowledge that Katniss gains through her

¹³² *Catching Fire*, 111

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ All plant and name correlations come from Laurent’s “Botanic Notables.”

¹³⁵ *Hunger Games*, 52

surroundings (the knowledge Katniss was forced to obtain). When Katniss first starts to believe she might win the Games her relief is short lived because she begins to question who she will be and what she will do with her time. Since her father died, much of her time was spent hunting with Gale, but when she wins the Hunger Games that time becomes free time.¹³⁶ She muses:

For the first time, I allow myself to truly think about the possibility that I might make it home. To fame. To wealth. To my own house in the Victor's Village. My mother and Prim would live there with me. No more fear of hunger. A new kind of freedom. But then...what? What would my life be like on a daily basis? Most of it has been consumed with the acquisition of food. Take that way and I'm not really sure who I am, what my identity is. The idea scares me some.¹³⁷

This is not just an issue she experiences in District 12 after winning the games. Once the rebellion has begun and she is living within the walls of District 13 she experiences a new kind of regulation. “[District 13] has nutrition down to a science. You leave with enough calories to take you to the next meal, no more, no less. Serving size is based on your age, height, body type, health, and amount of physical labor required by your schedule.”¹³⁸ In many ways there is less freedom in District 13 than there was in District 12. At least in 12 they had the Hob, an “underground” market for trading goods and services. In order for Katniss to feel like herself in District 13 she had to cut a deal with President Coin. She would be their rebel if they let her hunt, because as she tells Gale, “We could go aboveground. Out in the woods. We could be ourselves again.”¹³⁹ Katniss is only herself when she is in the woods, hunting.¹⁴⁰ Constant starvation completely shaped her life. In an interesting way Katniss takes the old critiques of the female body as being close to nature, and she infuses them with power. She makes closeness with nature a non-gendered issue. It is a matter of survival, and of an embodied existence. Katniss gains her agency by

¹³⁶ The Capitol expects her to fill the time with a talent or hobby that they can present to the Capitol audience as a part of her culturally crafted identity. This ends up failing, because Katniss is not good at any of the things they want her to be good at, but she is good at hunting. So, she continues to hunt. And Cinna develops a fashion design talent for her to present as her own.

¹³⁷ *The Hunger Games*, 311.

¹³⁸ *Mockingjay*, 35.

¹³⁹ *ibid.* 36.

¹⁴⁰ This implies that Katniss does not just hunt to survive anymore. She came to know a way of being that did not just rely on the acquisition of food. Through pursuing endeavors that fill her with passion Katniss had already begun the process of learning how to rewrite the narrative of herself within District 12.

rewriting the problematic, cultural narratives the Capitol has tried to write onto her existence (and more specifically, her body).

The realization that Katniss does not have to exist in a world of self-sacrifice frees her from the shackles of culturally constructed identities. She is no longer subject to the pressure to fit a certain image. She does not need the audience to find her desirable in order to survive. And more importantly, she does not need the resources that the Capitol provides. Katniss becomes self-sufficient in the way President Snow always knew/feared she could. This self-sufficiency, because it was televised posed a threat to the entire structure. Audiences that watched Katniss saw that if she was capable of escaping the control over her own body then they were capable of making the same escape. Audiences that watched Katniss did not see the mark of starvation; they saw a girl with strength and mastery over her own body and image.

Katniss is able to control the image she presents to the audience (and therefore manipulate the messages that exert power over all societal bodies); therefore, she can be seen as “a postmodern heroine, insofar as she is in ‘control’ of her image, and she defies convention by using her ability to construct and reconstruct her identity” (Joy 352). Katniss finds her own agency in this way. By unveiling the lies of the government and of society she robs those lies of their power. She proves, through her mastery over food, her body, and her own image within the arena, that the Capitol is not in control of her body or the bodies of anyone else in the districts. Once the ideologies enter the realm of consciousness they cease to operate in the same ways as they once did. When Katniss knows how the officials are playing the game she is able to create her own conditions and craft her own identity. In addition to using her knowledge of land, food, and resources Katniss also uses her knowledge of the audience and audience perceptions to promote her own messages. Despite being used as the girl on fire, the mockingjay, and the rebel from District 12 Katniss was able to find a way to cease being a pawn. Ultimately, these titles were powerless without the humanity and strength that Katniss brought to them. It was not the Girl on Fire, or the Mockingjay, or the Rebel that moved people to rebel against a cruel government, it was Katniss. She was most powerful in the raw, unscripted, not staged, spontaneous moments. The ones that the cameras, the audiences, and the gamemakers could not predict. The ones that she had learned to write for herself.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis I have focused on the merging of the reality television and young adult dystopian genres by exploring *The Hunger Games* trilogy with *Toddlers and Tiaras* and *The Biggest Loser*. I sought to illuminate the ways in which our own media representations of women perpetuate the fetishization of youth and the idealization of the slender female body. I began this project with an exhaustive list of trending topics that chronicled the real-life struggles of female bodies rendered docile by our society: young girls raped in bathrooms and at parties, nude photos leaked on the internet, women as victims of domestic violence, and women accused of prostitution while proceeding through their everyday routines. These occurrences/issues hinge upon the idea that the female body's use-value stems from her ability to be submissive and passive, sexualized but not sexual. Women are consistently shown on television and on the internet as mere objects that exist for the viewing (and sexual) pleasure of men, but rarely as agents of their own bodily existence. As was shown in chapter two of this thesis, the female body is presented via the media as a canvas, lacking identity, waiting for one to be inscribed. Young girls are taught that they are never good enough, that their bodies must undergo physical transformation to make them better (whole, not lacking). As long as the threat of constant surveillance looms over the female body these messages of inadequacy will persist. Women will continue to exert what they believe to be agency over their bodies in an attempt to establish an unrealistic body ideal. But will continue to discover this agency is just an illusion. In this paper, I affirm it is only through recognition and understanding of these media messages and of the ideologies they perpetuate, that women become able to subvert the prevailing patriarchal dominance over the female body and identity, thus crafting their own identities and escaping the culturally constructed docility of the body.

4.1 Subverting or Reproducing the Docile Body

It has been my aim, through the use of *The Hunger Games* as an example, to illustrate how YA dystopian novels that portray strong, female protagonists can offer encouragement to female readers and present one possible way to exist agentially within the controlling forces that seek to manipulate female bodies. I offer Katniss as an example of one such protagonist as she finds herself continually molded by

the Capitol and is forced to consistently seek new ways of living with and within her ever-changing environment. She continually proves that she is able to anticipate the desires of her audience and react in such a way that it empowers her instead of rendering her docile. Likewise, when the Capitol and District 13 seek to deprive her of the things she requires to thrive, specifically food and medicine, she learns how to obtain those things on her own. This self-sufficiency endows her with a type of power her society and the government does not wish for her to have, but she proves that her will is greater than that of any government.

There has been some critical disagreement regarding Katniss' role as empowering feminist role model. When the first *Hunger Games* movie arrived in theaters in 2012 female audiences felt excited and empowered by seeing an independent, female protagonist in the spotlight; however, there has since been some objection to the use of Katniss as a feminist icon and source of empowerment. According to Don Latham and Jonathan Hollister, there are scholars that argue against Katniss as a strong, self-sufficient character based solely on the epilogue of the trilogy. They insist that all of Katniss' progress as a character is invalidated, because it is revealed in the final text that she married Peeta and started a family. These scholars claim that it is her domesticity that renders her docile (not the forces of the government or the media prior to her marriage).¹⁴¹ Hollister and Latham state that scholars, "Having admired Katniss for her strength, independence, and skill throughout the three books, [...] feel she has now repressed those traits and capitulated to a life of domesticity. She and Peeta have become what Foucault calls 'docile bodies', rendered fit and benign for the workings of society" (45). A claim that Katniss becomes docile at the end of the novel when she chooses a marriage and a family is problematic for many reasons. This argument implies that she was not rendered docile prior to her marriage, and that her marriage was not her choice. These scholars are arguing that Katniss needs a man to be complete and that she has finally accepted her role as pawn in the games of the government. An argument that follows this logic denies the possibility that Katniss can choose marriage (through making a choice that is not a part of the illusion of agency) and a family and still be a strong character that overcomes her

¹⁴¹ These arguments reflect earlier beliefs that strength and independence were not compatible with the domestic sphere.

docility. Katniss acquires and retains her agency throughout the trilogy by always choosing that which will fill her with nourishment (in its many forms), allow her to craft her own image, and help her obtain self-sufficiency; this can be seen in the ways she survived in the arena, how she fed herself and her family in the districts, how she embraced certain identities but rejected others, and why she chooses to marry Peeta at the end of the trilogy.¹⁴²

4.2 Sexuality as Power

A significant part of any teenage narrative involves discussions (direct or indirect, depending upon the medium) about the power afforded to subjects via their own sexual agency. The young girls from *Toddlers and Tiaras* learn at a young age to embrace their sexuality, not shy away.¹⁴³ When they enter into their teenage years and adulthood this becomes a problem, because they are both encouraged and discouraged. As Roberta Trites states:

[W]e live in a society that objectifies teen sexuality, at once glorifying and idealizing it while also stigmatizing and repressing it. Foucault might argue that adults enjoy lecturing to adolescents about sexuality because it gives the adult power and a certain sexual pleasure, the scintillation present in the act of forbidding.¹⁴⁴

Additionally, it becomes necessary for adults to lecture and assert power over adolescents in order to keep young adults from the power of their own sexuality. It is too dangerous for society if women learn to embrace their ability to satisfy their desires (this is not just isolated to sexual desires) without shame. As Trites says later, "Sex may be one of the first times they become aware of their own power—but negative depictions of human sexuality provide the author with an occasion to remind the adolescent not to become too powerful, not to become too enamoured with their knowledge of pleasure" (116). The girls of *Toddlers and Tiaras* do not have access to these negative depictions; in fact, they are taught that there are rewards that accompany successfully performed sexuality.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Katniss states that she chose to marry Peeta, not because he was the Capitol's choice for her, but because he reminded her of the dandelion. He represents hope. She does not need Peeta, but she chooses him. She chooses to be reminded that she doesn't just have to be a piece in their games.

¹⁴³ This is another one of society's contradictions. Women/girls are to be desirable by men, but they are not to satisfy their own desires.

¹⁴⁴ Trites, 95

¹⁴⁵ This line of thinking could just as easily lead to beliefs in young women as they grow into adulthood that encourage them to perpetuate the exploitation of their own bodies. The idea that a sufficient performance of

Katniss is also taught that sexuality is power, but unlike the girls of *Toddlers and Tiaras* she is old enough to experience and fully understand what this power means in context. She does not just mimic the behaviors she has witnessed in older individuals she seeks to embrace her own, real sexual autonomy. Throughout the trilogy Snow attempts to restrict Katniss' ability to experience this fulfillment, just as he sought to restrict her ability to fulfill her more basic needs for food and other resources. Snow is the face of the strong, overly involved government. He lets Katniss know that he sees her even in her most private moments, such as when she shared a kiss with Gale in the meadow. It is also made evident that he does not approve of her sexual exploration, because it is not compatible with the image the Capitol has constructed for her. As Bordo states, "The young woman discovers what it feels like to crave and want and need and yet, through the exercise of her own will, to triumph over that need" (178). Katniss is meant to gain control over her own desires and needs by triumphing over those needs. This is what Snow desired, and what our own society desires for girls. This is not the path Katniss took. She embraces those desires, gives in to them and does not try to triumph over them. These desires remind her that she has a body, and that her body is her own. She says, "Gale's touch and taste and heat remind me that at least my body's still alive, and for the moment it's a welcome feeling."¹⁴⁶ Katniss is meant to be in love with Peeta, and to live out that desire any time she may be captured by a camera (which is almost always). Instead, she acts on her feelings toward both Gale and Peeta.¹⁴⁷ By embracing her sexuality Katniss becomes a threat to the Capitol in many ways; it is another way in which she displays agency over her own impulses and desires, but it also makes her more desirable to the Capitol audience. She is consistent, however, in her attempts to craft her own image, despite how this may look to audiences.¹⁴⁸

sexuality should be rewarded, particularly with money. But, if she uses her own sexuality to advance in other aspects of her life does she actually have agency?

¹⁴⁶ *Mockingjay* 198.

¹⁴⁷ Something our own society would regard negatively. It is the double standard that men can sleep with as many women as possible, that it is a source of power and dominance for them, but for a woman exploring her sexuality with multiple partners makes her a slut or a whore. This is indicative of the ways in which society attempts to police female sexuality.

¹⁴⁸ It just happens that through her attempts to reveal the foolishness of the Capitol she ends up becoming more desirable and useful.

4.3 Author of Her Own Life

The Capitol tried to construct Katniss as the desirable, love-sick girl from District 12; Cinna created her as the “girl on fire”; Coin used her as the Mockingjay, but despite all of these artificial constructions Katniss remained the strong, brave, resourceful girl from the seam. The Capitol and District 13 learned quickly that Katniss lived up to her first title, “the girl who was on fire.”¹⁴⁹ She could not be controlled by anyone that she did not want to be controlled by, despite having accepted certain Capitol-constructed identities. When Katniss first arrived in the Capitol she was almost enamored by the grandiose Capitol with its vibrant colors, exquisite food, and strangely styled people. She quickly came to trust her stylist Cinna and she allowed him to mold her image. Audiences were awed by the image Cinna created of Katniss. When Peeta surprised audiences with the news that he was secretly in love with Katniss and he that he had always been in love with Katniss, she became desirable to the Capitol audience. Her natural response was to reject the roles she was thrust into by these men in her life, but she accidentally stumbles upon the realization that she has been given access to a unique kind of power. Katniss’ understanding that she is being watched provides her the opportunity to promote her own image and her own messages contrary to those the government and society were trying to promote through her.¹⁵⁰ She does not seem to logically grasp her power until the final book of the trilogy, but prior to that revelation she is consistently putting the pieces together in her own mind. In *Catching Fire* she realizes that the Capitol has begun to stop dehumanizing her and the other tributes, they are infuriated that they are being sent back into the arena, because as Katniss notes “It’s more like watching your own friends die. More like the Games are for those of us in the districts” (205). In that moment she knows that if the Capitol can reach the districts through the televised Games then she has the same potential.

Katniss is able to use her own on-screen persona to dismantle the ideologies of the Capitol. The Capitol wanted the people of the districts to believe they were indebted to the Capitol for keeping them alive, they wanted them to believe that another rebellion would end poorly for the districts, and they

¹⁴⁹ *The Hunger Games*, 67

¹⁵⁰ Because our society is one of constant surveillance women and girls have access to this same kind of power. This is not to say that the only way to obtain agency over one’s image is through the use of surveillance technologies, but that it is one way that has proved successful for Katniss and also many women within society.

wanted them to believe that individuals cannot have power. But, as Katniss' interaction with Snow in *Catching Fire* reveals, "[The Capitol's governmental infrastructure] must be very fragile, if a handful of berries can bring it down" (22). The Hunger Games are named as they are to remind people of the hunger that was suffered in the last rebellion and the starvation that would inevitably result if they rebelled again; therefore it is telling that Katniss uses food against the Capitol the way they have always used food against the people in the districts.

There is one element that impedes Katniss' attempts at agency: the Gamemakers. The Gamemakers are the producers of the Games, they have the ability to edit and cut footage before it reaches national audiences. Additionally, they have the ability to manipulate the environment, to change the temperature, create and unleash deadly mutations, and deprive the tributes of natural sources of food and water. They are the all-powerful force of Panem television. At least, the Gamemakers were the all-powerful until Katniss. She knows how to "speak" to her audience through the screen. She knows how to play the game. In one instance she thinks, "I need to look one step ahead of the game. As I slide out of the foliage and into the dawn light, I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me. Then I cock my head slightly to the side and give a knowing smile. There! Let them figure out what that means."¹⁵¹ She consistently makes these observations and acts with intention, in this way creating her own image. Katniss expressed an understanding of the image she was supposed to portray and she exaggerated that image. In the Capitol where they are accustomed to excess her overacting was exactly what they needed to believe her as the girl on fire and the star-crossed lover. The districts were not as easily convinced.

Despite knowing how to manipulate her Capitol audience Katniss proves to be an ineffective actress; ultimately, she has the most agency when she is not trying to embody an identity created for her by someone else. In the raw moments that Katniss does not think before she acts she is able to reach beyond her Capitol audience. In District 13, after Katniss has accepted the role of Mockingjay (with some conditions), she is cast in a rebel Propo. She is remade by her old prep team, who think the rebel should appear dark and sexy. She is then prompted to read from a script. Her one line is, "People of Panem, we

¹⁵¹ *The Hunger Games* 164

fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice!”¹⁵² She says, “it seems like a mouthful...and stiff. She “can’t imagine actually saying it in real life” except when “using a Capitol accent and making fun of it.”¹⁵³ Her opinions about their line for her are evident through her performance. Haymitch, always tactful, turns on the intercom and his “acerbic laugh fills the studio.” He says, “And that, my friends, is how a revolution dies.”¹⁵⁴ Katniss knows that what Haymitch has said is true; she has never been good at wearing the identities the Capitol or District 13 have crafted for her. Haymitch confirms this when he calls a meeting and tells everyone that he wants them all to “think of one incident where Katniss Everdeen genuinely moved you. Not where you were jealous of her hairstyle, or her dress went up in flames or she made a halfway decent shot with an arrow. Not where Peeta was making you like her. I want to hear one moment where *she* made you feel something real.”¹⁵⁵ The responses were overwhelming: “When she volunteered to take Prim’s place in the reaping”; “When she sang the song. While the little girl died”; “[W]hen she drugged Peeta so she could get him medicine”; “When [she] took Rue on as an ally”; “Extended [her] hand to Chaff on interview night”; “Refusal to give in under impossible odds”; and, “Defiance of the Capitol’s inhumanity.” It becomes apparent that if Katniss is to be the Mockingjay they need her to be, in order to make a rebel cause survive, then they need to give her the opportunity to be herself on camera. Not just in actions, but also in appearance. Her prep team had turned her into a replica of a *Toddlers and Tiaras* contestant: “She’s still a girl and you made her look thirty-five.”¹⁵⁶ They wash her face and take her to the hospital in her district. She is finally able to shoot raw footage of Katniss being Katniss.¹⁵⁷ She shows that she is human and real. She shows her strength. It is through the realization of her own raw potential that Katniss acquires an agency that no one in the Capitol or the Districts can take from her. She becomes the author of her own identity.

¹⁵² *Mockingjay* 71

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 72

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 74.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 77.

¹⁵⁷ Rather, the Katniss she knows herself to be.

4.4 Ending the Reign of the Sovereign

Katniss' final act of rebellion is fittingly that of a public execution, but not the execution she was scheduled to enforce. At the end of *Mockingjay* Katniss finally realizes her own power and her role in the Games.¹⁵⁸ During her moment of revelation she thinks:

Power. I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed. Snow knew it, as soon as I held out those berries. Plutarch knew when he rescued me from the arena. And Coin knows now. So much so that she must publicly remind her people that I am not in control.¹⁵⁹

In that moment Katniss was no longer subject to the lies created by Snow or Coin, by the Capitol or District 13. She became able to create her own rules and her own image, but she could never be completely free until the current governmental hierarchy was overthrown and the rebellion was over. She was given the opportunity to execute President Snow in front of the entire remaining population. It would take place live for the citizens of 13 and it would be broadcast on all available television screens in the Capitol. Katniss would be known as the girl who assassinated President Snow and thus would have attained even more power. As Foucault notes, "The public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested" (47). In most cases the execution was meant to display the strength of the "all-powerful sovereign" (49). When Katniss shot President Coin instead of Snow (and Snow died as a consequence of his hysterical laughter at the irony) she upset this balance of power. By making a last minute decision to aim at Coin instead of Snow Katniss blatantly denied the will of others in front of a live audience. She did not assert herself as the new sovereign, but she eliminated those that had been perpetuating the relentless policing of her body and her identity. Katniss was put on trial for the assassination of Coin and was sentenced to return to District 12 and receive regular mental evaluations. She was able to return to the land where she felt most herself without the threat of ever having to return to the Games, and without her children ever experiencing that dread.

¹⁵⁸ By the Games in this sentence I mean to imply that the Games go beyond the arena and infiltrate every part of Katniss' life (and the lives of those of the districts).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 92

4.5 Final Thoughts

The end of *The Hunger Games* is not seeking to teach young readers that they should blatantly deny authority, though it could be read in that way. Roberta Trites claims, "The [YA] novel communicates that institutions are more powerful than individuals, but that individuals who engage their own power can affect the shape of the institution" (24). *The Hunger Games* trilogy appears to be arguing that individuals can do more than just affect the shape of institutions, they can rewrite their own narratives within these institutions/systems. Katniss actually subverts the entire system, starting with a handful of berries. This implies that one person can have power. Regardless of whether or not one believes this message, it remains an empowering image of female strength and perseverance. Fortunately, *The Hunger Games* does not stand alone as the sole representation of young women overcoming the oppression and objectification by society and government.

As I began this project I attempted to find other texts that would further substantiate my claim and I stumbled upon a goldmine of YA dystopia novels with common themes. These novels all expose the ways in which young women are able to recognize and escape the firm grasp of harmful ideologies. As methods of surveillance become increasingly more prevalent within our own society, it becomes increasingly more difficult to find solace from the forces that police and regulate female bodies. Bodies have become more visible and in many ways easier to regulate. It seems that every politician currently in a place to make policy within our society has an opinion about how best to control our unruly female bodies. They have opinions about how much sex is too much sex. They have opinions about ovaries and wombs and vaginas, even if they do not have one of their own. These patriarchal ideals permeate our culture, this is why when a woman/girl is raped someone will inevitably ask what she was wearing or if she was drunk. The perpetrator will oftentimes escape punishment, because boys will be boys and he has such a bright future. Despite the popular countermovement "why we don't need feminism", our society still most certainly needs feminism. Even if younger generations deny the term feminism, because of an absurd stigma, they can still find examples of strength in the kinds of female protagonists that appear in YA dystopian literature. Young girls need more access to positive messages about their bodies and their sexuality. They need these characters that show them their own power, and that they do not

have to remain docile. They need to know it is okay to question the things being pushed by the government and society. These girls need more characters like Katniss and Trice (Divergent) and Saba (Blood Red Road) and Darla (Ashfall).¹⁶⁰ If the YA dystopia genre is any indication of future trends then feminism, as a term/label may not have a future among younger generations, but it will most certainly still have a presence. The time for supporting roles is long gone, it is time for young girls to start writing their own rulebook, and crafting their own identities.

¹⁶⁰ The next step needs to be incorporating more strong characters of other races. Each of the young protagonists in my examples are described as being white. There are many secondary characters that are more diverse, but very few in the spotlight.

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