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Imagining Oppression in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction

Heather Thompson Lawrence

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Imagining Oppression in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary from The College of William and Mary

by

Heather Lawrence

Accepted for High Honors (out of Honors/Honors/Honors)
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Introduction

This thesis takes place in a social context where young adult fiction is incredibly popular and commercially successful both within and outside its intended demographic. With these novels reaching more readers than ever before, it is necessary to ask what images and narratives these stories are presenting. The issue of fictional representations, especially of characters of marginalized races and ethnicities, is a topic of discussion that has captured the attention of scholars, educators, creators, and the mainstream public alike, as demonstrated by the popularity of such online campaigns and hashtags as #OscarsSoWhite and #WeNeedDiverseBooks in the past few years. More recently, the releases of Marvel's *Black Panther* and Disney's *A Wrinkle in Time* have fueled the conversation about representation, with a new emphasis on racial representation in fantasy, alternative universes, and speculative fiction. My thesis seeks to add to this conversation by using an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from theorists and methodologies within the disciplines of sociology, education, and English, to study a small sample of contemporary young adult novels with fantastical, dystopian, and speculative themes for their representation of oppression.

In this thesis I define oppression as the systemic exploitation and/or employment of violence against a subordinate social group by a dominant social group for the benefit of the dominant group. This definition allows my thesis to analyze the representation of race as well as other marginalized groups including fictional ones that have no direct parallel in the real-world, a necessity in fantasy and speculative fiction. This study draws from the scholarship of suffering and dystopia in young adult and children's fiction and seeks to expand on this scholarship by considering young adult fictional texts as products of society. This thesis goes beyond individual
reception theory to make connections between fictional texts and the workings of oppression and inequality in the real social world, and speculates what the portrayal of these concepts in fictional texts may suggest about how we understand our own world. I also consider the significance of these texts in the context of real-world activism and social change. These novels all feature young adult protagonists, and as the primary demographic of these texts it is important to consider what kind of narrative or guidelines these texts may provide for young adults who are beginning to view themselves as independent social and political actors with the capability to shape their own societies.

This project is a critical qualitative analysis of contemporary young adult texts with insights and conclusions that will hopefully be beneficial to scholars and educators looking to address issues of inequality, oppression, and social change in an educational setting. This thesis is also the first stage in the creation of a syllabus or reading guide for young adult readers as well as educators. This syllabus will serve as a resource for young adults looking to engage more critically with the media they consume as well as a resources for educators looking to engage with sociological issues in the classroom.

**Literature Review**

*Cultural Objects, Finite Provinces of Meaning, and The Social World*

My project's approach to studying texts draws from Wendy Griswold's cultural diamond. The cultural diamond depicts the relationship between cultural objects, their creator(s), their receiver(s), and the social world. A cultural object is a human-made “socially meaningful expression that is audible, visible, tangible or that can be articulated” (Griswold 2013:11). It could be a physical object, a piece of digital media, or a concept. The creator(s) and the
receiver(s) are the people who experience the cultural object (Griswold 2013:14), either by first articulating it or by experiencing it after it has entered the public realm. The social world is the larger context in which the cultural object, creator and receiver exist in.

The cultural diamond is not a model or a theory, but rather a lens through which we can understand culture by considering a cultural object within the larger context of our society. In this way, the narratives and images in novels are not isolated or self-contained. They are part of our social world and can be used to study culture. In my project I focus on the cultural object (young adult literature) and their relation to the social world.

My understanding of the relationship between a cultural object and the social world is similar to Berger and Luckmann's idea of finite provinces of meaning. In *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966), Berger and Luckmann define finite provinces of meaning as "enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience" which are characterized by "a turning away
of attention from the reality of everyday life" (1966:25). They use the example of a play, where the rising and falling of the curtain at the beginning and end of a performance mark the boundaries of a finite province of meaning (1966:25). Similarly, I argue that a novel is a finite province of meaning that exists between the first and last page, where through the act of reading its audience is transported briefly to a world with different rules, norms, and meanings than their own. Most importantly, Berger and Luckmann state that the reality of everyday life, the "here and now" (Berger and Luckmann 1966:22), is still the paramount reality even within these finite provinces of meaning. In this way, even though we as readers recognize fictional worlds such as Panem and Hogwarts as different from our own, they still exist within the realm of the social world and may be analyzed within the context of our society.

This idea that fictional texts are inextricable from the larger social world in which they are created and subsequently read is present in literary analysis in addition to sociological analysis. In Toni Morrison's work of literary and racial analysis, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Morrison analyzes texts by major White figures in American literary history, including Edgar Allen Poe, Willa Cather, and Ernest Hemingway, for their depictions of "Africanist" representations. Morrison's use of the term Africanist refers both to Black characters and to Blackness as a metaphorical, allegorical, and rhetorical concept (1992:6-7). Scholar Ebony Elizabeth Thomas builds on Morrison keynote speech by looking at contemporary representations of Black characters in popular fiction. In her keynote speech, "The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination in Youth Literature, Media, and Culture" (2018), Thomas describes the mainstream and scholarly interest in representations of Black characters in fiction as a moment in the social world. Thomas describes fiction, specifically fantasy, as a space where narratives of the social world are expressed, interpreted, and challenged by cultural
creators and receivers. Drawing from Morrison and Thomas, when I seek to study how oppression is represented in contemporary young adult fiction I am seeking to study what ideas, narratives, rhetoric, and claims about oppression as both a concept and a feature of the social world are being put forth by these cultural objects.

**Defining Oppression**

In order to analyze the representation of oppression in young adult fiction, I first need to have a working definition of oppression. For the purpose of this project, I am defining oppression as the systemic exploitation and/or employment of violence against a subordinate social group by a dominant social group for the benefit of the dominant group. My definition draws from the theories of oppression developed by social theorists Paulo Freire, Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, and Iris Marion Young. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005), Freire defines oppression as "Any situation in which "A" objectively exploits "B" or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression" (55). Oppression concerns the pursuit of material possessions by a dominant class, the oppressors, who dehumanize those not in the dominant group, the oppressed, by reducing them to objects of domination (Freire 2005:58). An essential element of oppression is the ethos that everything in the world can be objectified and possessed, and that it is the right of the dominant class to infinitely possess more goods and resources at the expense of the oppressed. This disparity is justified by the belief that the dominant class has "earned" their possessions while the oppressed class is somehow undeserving or lazy (Freire 2005:59). Additionally, Freire argues that the basic characteristic of the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors is prescription, or the imposition of the oppressor's consciousness on the oppressed, that causes the oppressed to internalize and adopt the guidelines of the oppressor (2005:46-47). This prescription is to the oppressors' benefit and
produces a fear of freedom in which the oppressed fear being liberated from their oppressors as this would mean they no longer have these guidelines. Additionally, this internalized belief in the correctness of the dominant class often leads the oppressed to perceive that the only way to liberate one's self from oppression is to oppress others; "to be men is to be oppressors" (Freire 2005:45).

Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto build on to Freire's theory of oppression in *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* (1999). In *Social Dominance*, Sidanius and Pratto attempt to bring together psychological, sociological, and evolutionary theories of oppression. They argue that human society is made up of group-based social hierarchies. These hierarchies are split into dominant groups and subordinate groups depending on the quantity and quality of resources they possess, similar to Freire's description of the relationship of the oppressor and the oppressed. Sidanius and Pratto also describe the various ways that these hierarchies are reinforced, from the use of legitimizing myths to violence and terror. *Social Dominance's* synthesis and theory of oppression is limited, however, as Sidanius and Pratto often fall victim to both over-generalization and over-specification. For instance, Sidanius and Pratto attempt to categorize "types" of groups, for example referring to certain group identifiers, such as race and religion, as "arbitrary" because they are changeable across societies. However, Sidanius and Pratto do not consider gender an arbitrary group despite recognizing that gender categories can also be flexible within and across societies (1999:33). This use of generalization despite exceptions to the proposed rule is also visible in their employment of evolutionary theories of group-based social hierarchies and oppression, which for the most part appear to be tangential and of limited relevance to the psychological and sociological theories. Sidanius and Pratto look for precedent for group hierarchies in human
societies in primate social groups, where they claim that there are no species where the females are socially dominant though, again, this claim has an exception (1999:54). More worrisome than the shakiness of certain generalizations is the implication that human social groups are either arbitrary or rooted in evolution and essentialism. These implications undermine Freire's emphasis that these group distinctions are created by people in societies and therefore can be challenged and changed.

In contrast, political theorist Iris Marion Young's theory of oppression stems from its use as a term used by new left social movements in the 1960s and 1970s and therefore her conceptualization of oppression is rooted in the context of social change. In her essay "The Five Faces of Oppression" (1988), Young defines oppression as structural, systemic injustice and inhibition reproduced by institutions and everyday social processes and interactions (1988:271). In contrast to terms such as "discrimination" which Young considers a fundamentally individualistic concept, oppression is about group membership. Unlike Sidanius and Pratto, Young does not attempt to categorize types of groups but rather claims that the intrinsic characteristic of all group membership is that individuals do not join groups but instead find themselves members of them. This group membership is a defining part of their identity, and others also define them through their identification with this group. However, not all groups are subject to oppression, Young outlines five conditions of oppression and claims that oppressed groups are subject to one or more of these conditions (1988:275). These five conditions, or five "faces" as they are called in the title, are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Young argues that exploitation is a key concept in understanding oppression. It is not enough to say that certain classes have disproportionately more resources than others, it is also necessarily to understand that the labor of the oppressed is always for the
purpose of furthering the wealth and power of the dominant classes, maintaining and increasing this disparity (1988:278). This is exploitation and Young provides numerous examples of how exploitation is a key feature in racial and gender specific oppression. Also of note is cultural imperialism, which Young describes as the "universalization of one group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm...Often without noticing they do so, the dominant groups project their own experience as representative of humanity as such" (1988:285). Young's cultural imperialism is similar to Freire's description of prescription and Young's assertion that the dominant classes universalize their experience of the social world to all humanity is evocative of Freire's assertion that "to be men is to be oppressors."

All of these theorists emphasize the importance of group membership to oppression. For this reason, my definition of oppression centers on the relationship between groups. When I ask in this thesis "How do contemporary YA fiction novels imagine oppression?" I am asking "How do contemporary YA fiction novels represent the relationship between dominant and subordinate social groups?"

**Dystopia and Suffering in Young Adult Fiction**

After establishing that these fictional worlds exist within a real world context and what it means to study oppression within them, it is important to talk about how other researchers have approached my research topic and similar topics before. In preparation for this research I consulted the small but dense body of literature on dystopian and utopian fiction studies, especially sources pertaining to children and young adult literature. I had initially intended my thesis to be a study of dystopian literature, but dropped the qualifier of "dystopian" when it became clear that making the argument that the texts I wanted to study were all explicitly dystopian would be an unwieldy conceptual undertaking. In "The Three Faces of Utopianism
Revisited" (1994), Lyman Tower Sargent defines a dystopia as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (1994:9). The problem with this definition is that it requires observable and quantifiable intent on the part of the author to create a "society considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" and interpretation on the part of the reader to view that fictional society as worse than their own. Sargent himself acknowledges this problem of intent, referring to authorial intent as the "evidence that is least likely to be available when most needed" and commenting that "we [the reader] may find a work the author intended as a positive Utopia to be, from our perspective, a dystopia" (1994:12). I decided to discard the framing of my texts as "dystopian" and gave my case study texts the qualifier of "contemporary" instead. The primary goal of this project was to describe how my sample texts represent oppression, injustice, and social change, not to make claims about genre.

Despite this change to my research framing, the body of scholarship on dystopian young adult literature did prove very useful to my project. The essays collected in Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults discuss the unique space that young adult literature allows for imagined utopian and dystopian societies and futures. Editors Hintz and Ostry argue that dystopian and utopian fiction provides a space for young adult readers to learn about society and themselves. According to Hintz and Ostry, the typical dystopian young adult fiction narrative mirrors the coming-of-age experience of the genre's audience: featuring tropes and themes such as personal awakening, recognizing the faults and injustices of one's society, rebellion, and loss of innocence (2003:9). Hintz and Ostry claim that these young adult texts can be used to explore questions that are relevant to both the lives of teenagers and the structure of
their societies: "What are the proper limits of freedom? To what extent can one rebel? At what point does conformity rob one of his or her ability to rebel?" (2003:10).

Though the tropes and questions Hintz and Ostry describe seem overtly political, I found that the scholarship of young adult literature rarely discusses oppression as I, Freire, Sidanius and Pratto, or Young describe it, but rather framed their work as an analysis of isolation and "suffering." In an essay included in *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, "Suffering in Utopia: Testing the Limits in Young Adult Novels," Rebecca Totaro dedicates her essay to exploring the role of suffering in five contemporary young adult novels. Totaro claims that the suffering these novels' protagonists experience is rooted in a "defect" that differentiates them from others and disrupts their society (2003:129). I was intrigued by the variance of the "defects" Totaro identified in her five novels. One protagonist is a middle school social outcast. Jonas in *The Giver* can see color in a world that has eliminated difference, marking him as the successor to the mysterious, burdened Giver who holds the memories of the past that others in the community have forgotten. In *Gathering Blue*, Kira's deformed leg makes her the target of suspicion and disgust from the other residents of her village who normally abandon the disabled members of their community to die. Harry begins the *Harry Potter* series as a child who is marked as different from others both by the neglect and abuse of his aunt, uncle and cousin and his capacity for magic in a world of non-magical "Muggles." The main character, Gemm, of the novel *The Cure* experiences too many emotions and is too individualistic for his heavily regulated, conformist society. Of these examples only one protagonist, Kira, suffers from an axis of oppression, ableism, that a reader could easily recognize as existing in "real life."

In her analysis of suffering, Totaro locates the source of these characters' alienation and oppression in the characters themselves, not in the societies that mark their "defects" as abnormal
or dangerous. The use of the word "suffering" itself indicates a focus on personal experience, rather than societal or institutional oppression. This analysis may stem from the perspective of viewing young adult fiction as a mirror or metaphor for young adulthood, but the perspective still assumes that the problems facing young adults are individual rather than linked to systemic oppression and discrimination. For example, in *The Cure*, Gemm's society inserts him into a virtual simulation where he experiences the suffering of a medieval Jewish boy whose entire community is burned to death by local Christians. This experience temporarily convinces Gemm to conform and abandon his individuality. However, eventually Gemm concludes that while "diversity" can lead to "hatred" it can also lead to "love" and that Gemm and his partner can teach the rest of their society love. This narrative once again frames the virtual boy's Jewish identity as a defect that creates disorder in his society and reduces anti-Semitism to interpersonal prejudice rather than identifying it as a type of structural, systemic oppression. Dismantling this oppression is therefore framed as a simple decision to choose love on a purely individual level.

The danger of restricting literary analysis to the individual level is also discussed in the field of education, though the individuals in this case are not the characters in a text but the readers. In *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents* (2009), one literary theory that Deborah Appleman describes is reader-centered theory. Reader-centered theory shifts the main focus of pedagogy from the text to the reader, locating the reader as the source of meaning for the text. In the classroom, reader-centered theory encourages personal responses from students and for students to share their individual connections of a text. Appleman argues that, while this approach can engage students and generate interesting interpretations of a text, it has potential limitations for studying a text in an academic context. If
the reader is the source of meaning for a text and the focus while studying a text is on the reader relating to it, then the reader not relating to a text means that it has "no meaning." Appleman cites other educational theorists when arguing that this emphasis on the reader's ability to relate collapses and trivializes representations of difference: "we may be able to appreciate a character's situation, but we never will be able to fully understand it; and we reduce the power of literature and the representations of those experiences by pretending that we have such understanding" (2009:44).

While Appleman focuses on students as receivers of texts, I argue that her critique of individualizing literature is also applicable to cultural objects, including Totaro's essay. Totaro's study of young adult dystopian fiction collapses and flattens the varying experiences of her characters under the umbrella of "suffering" and does not meaningfully analyze how being marginalized in one's community for being disabled might be a different experience, both on an individual and societal level, from not being accepted by one's peers in middle school or being able to see color in a world where most people are colorblind. My thesis specifically seeks to move beyond the individual and into the larger social, political and metaphorical dimensions.

**The Political Potential of Young Adult Novels**

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison (1992) summarizes the importance of studying representations in fiction as "one way to benefit from the lessons of earlier mistakes and past misfortune is to record them so as to prevent their repetition through exposure and inoculation" (36). This emphasis on changing the future is relevant to the portrayal of oppression in YA fiction novels. An important theme in the portrayal of oppression is rebellion and social change. In Kay Sambell's essay "Presenting the Case for Social Change: The Creative Dilemma of Dystopian Writing for Children," Sambell compares the depiction of rebellion in young adult
dystopian novels to its portrayal in classic adult dystopian novels. According to Sambell, adult
dystopian novels are ultimately pessimistic and feature protagonists who fail in order to present
readers with a worst case scenario of their current society and to encourage them to take action
before it is too late. Sambell argues that young adult dystopian novels often hesitate to commit to
this dystopian vision and frequently depict their young protagonists triumphing and becoming
social transformers. Sambell's essay holds that this representation is a bad thing, as narratives
where the protagonists succeed against the forces of a dystopian society undermine the weight of
the threat to the future and fail to demand that "the implied reader reject the imaginative world
and assume a role of responsibility to rewrite the social world" (2003:167). Hintz and Ostry
similarly refer to the characteristic of young adults successfully rebelling against society as
taking a "romantic" view of adolescence (2003:10). However, I question the conclusion that the
depiction of young protagonists persevering discourages readers from pursuing social change in
their own societies. Couldn't these images of successful rebellion carried out by relatable
characters their own age just as easily empower their teen readers to interrogate and challenge
their own societies? Contemporary studies of youth activists demonstrate that young adults
already feel politically disenfranchised and are perceived as ignorant and ineffective social actors
(Gordon 2010, Velez et al. 2008). I do not see how more fictional representations of young
protagonists failing to achieve social change would encourage young adults to become more
socially and politically engaged.

Sambell's criticism is part of a larger trend of dismissing the political viability of young
adult fiction that makes these texts so important to study. While classic adult dystopian texts
such as 1984, Brave New World, and The Handmaid's Tale are recognized as important works of
political criticism, young adult novels like Harry Potter and The Hunger Games have only
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recently begun to receive this attention. In Melissa Ames' "Engaging 'Apolitical' Adolescents: Analyzing the Popularity and Educational Potential of Dystopian Literature Post-9/11," Ames juxtaposes the popularly held belief that young adults are politically apathetic with the success of the dystopian young adult fiction genre. She questions whether reading these novels could be considered a form of political engagement, suggesting that these novels often have political themes and that their popularity suggests that young adult readers are interested in these themes (2013:3). Ames positions young adult dystopian fiction as spaces where young adults can confront and make sense of political realities and anxieties. In his lecture "Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination" (2018), media scholar Henry Jenkins also describes the relationship between popular culture and politics, with a particular focus on how young adults have drawn from popular young adult media such as the Harry Potter series to make social criticism and imagine socio-political change. Studies of fan activists validate these analyses and provide examples of fan communities using their favorite texts to inspire social and political action and to address social justice issues in the context of a piece of media (Lopez 2012, Kliger-Vilenchik 2016).

Additionally, In Dream: Reimagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy, Stephen Duncombe identifies the popularity of the video game Grand Theft Auto with "the popular desire to rebel" (2007:56). He cites the allure of the figure of the rebel as one of the main draws of the Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, a game that puts its players in the role of a 90's gangster named "CJ". Similar to Duncombe's description of Grand Theft Auto, young adult texts, especially ones with dystopian elements and themes, also embody this popular desire to rebel. Sarah Cantrell highlights the use of the Room of Requirement in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix as a space for Harry and his fellow students to rebel and undermine the authority of Ministry of
Magic official Dolores Umbridge, whose rule at Hogwarts causes the school to "devolve from a place of security...to a dystopia" (2011:203). Mary F. Pharr on the other hand, puts forth The Hunger Games' protagonist Katniss Everdeen as a more realistic figure of the rebel, positioning her as "the girl who learned" to Harry's epithet of "the boy who lived." These analyses of young adult fiction support Ames' claim that young adult fiction provides spaces for young adults to confront and make sense of political themes, including Duncombe's "popular desire to rebel." Additionally, these studies demonstrate that the representation of oppression in these texts and how, if at all, these texts' characters confront and change the injustices of their society can have real political implications.

**Methods**

My study consists of a case study analysis of seven texts. A case study is a focused analysis of a "small sample of interest" (Gray 2014:266). Case studies are best suited to trying to "uncover a relationship between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring" (Gray 2014:266-267). As I am attempting to study the relationship between representation within cultural objects and the social world, a case study methodology is appropriate. In this study, the cases are seven contemporary young adult novels. Each case study text is therefore also a "finite province of meaning." These texts are the three novels in The Hunger Games Trilogy, The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, and Mockingjay, two novels from the Harry Potter series, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Glory O'Brien's History of the Future and Noggin. An ideal case study analysis studies a small number of cases that are both "polar and extreme types" (Gray 2014:271). The Harry Potter novels and The Hunger Games trilogy capture this variety of polar and extreme types. Both series are extremely popular both inside and outside the young adult demographic. The Harry Potter franchise, which
includes books, movies and a theme park, is estimated to be worth about $25 billion\(^1\). *The Hunger Games* franchise has an estimated worth of about $4 billion\(^2\) and as of 2012 the books had outsold the *Harry Potter* series on Amazon\(^3\). Characters and concepts from these books, such as Dolores Umbridge, Dumbledore's Army, and Effie Trinket's iconic line "May the odds be ever in your favor," have also entered the public consciousness. In her research, Melissa Ames connects the popularity of dystopian young adult fiction to these texts' reflections of socio-political fears and anxieties. *The Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter* novels provide the perfect opportunity to test Ames' hypothesis.

At the same time, despite their astronomical success, the *Harry Potter* novels and *The Hunger Games* are very different. On a surface level, *The Hunger Games* is a book series written by an American author with a female main character while *Harry Potter* is a book series written by a British author with a male main character. Additionally, these two series handle issues such as conflict, authority, and identity differently enough that essays such as Mary Pharr's (2012) "From the Boy Who Lived to the Girl Who Learned: Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen" explicitly contrast the two series against each other. In terms of genre, *The Hunger Games* is a classic dystopia, meeting Sargent's definition of a dystopia as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (1994:9). The early Harry Potter novels have a setting that can be initially described as utopian, that devolves into a dystopia in the later books (Totaro 2003, Cantrell 2011). The setting

\(^1\) See http://time.com/money/4279432/billion-dollar-spell-harry-potter/ for more information
\(^2\) See https://www.thoughtco.com/zeros-in-million-billion-trillion-2312346 for more information
in *Harry Potter* is also more or less contemporary to the readers' at the time of publication, as opposed to *The Hunger Games*.

The other two novels, *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* and *Noggin*, were from a previous sample of young adult fiction conducted as part of my Monroe project. This sample was selected from "Best Book" lists published by Publisher's Weekly, Time and School Library Journal of children and young adult novels published in 2014. These novels' status as "best books" marks them as "extreme" in a different way than *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games*, they are distinguished from other young adult novels by the implication that they have a value as both instruction and entertainment that other books don't. With these books coming so highly recommended for children and teens, the kind of representations these books contain are worth our attention.

After choosing my sample, I conducted an exploratory first-cycle coding of these texts. I use Johnny Saldana's (2014) definition of a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." When approaching initial coding, I avoided using prepared codes so as not to let any potential expectations affect my findings. Instead, I coded while close-reading each novel looking for two broad elements: "World," which included the setting and important world-building concepts such as Wizarding blood purity in *Harry Potter*, and "Characterization," which referred to how characters conceptualized themselves as individuals and how they understood and react to the setting and the driving forces of the plot. After this first-cycle coding, I created a chart of the most frequent codes used in each novel, seen below.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) For more data on the count and distribution of codes see Appendixes A and B
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Most Frequently Used Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hunger Games</td>
<td>Suzanne Collins</td>
<td>1. Performance (12 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Surveillance/Threat of Surveillance (8 times)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Spectacle (7 times)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Rebellion (5 times)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catching Fire</td>
<td>Suzanne Collins</td>
<td>1. Rebellion (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Symbol/Symbols of authority (5)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Privilege (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mockingjay</td>
<td>Suzanne Collins</td>
<td>1. &quot;anything goes&quot;/war crime (4)</td>
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<td>2. Real/True vs. false narratives (4)</td>
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<td>3. Mentions of slavery or &quot;slaves&quot; (4)</td>
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<td>4. Symbol (4)</td>
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<td>5. Drawing from history (3)</td>
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<td>6. Equalizing/Not so different (3)</td>
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<td>7. Performance (3)</td>
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<td>8. Personal responsibility (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</td>
<td>J. K. Rowling</td>
<td>1. Blood purity/Blood traitors/&quot;half-breeds&quot; (13)</td>
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<td>5. Rebellion/Resistance/Revolution (5)</td>
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<td>Glory O'Brien's History of the Future</td>
<td>A.S. King</td>
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<td>Noggin</td>
<td>John Corey Whaley</td>
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I reviewed this chart to narrow my initial codes into a more concise collection of codes and concepts relevant to my research questions. I did this by grouping similar codes under larger conceptual umbrellas, for example "rebellion," "resistance," "revolution," and "defiance" all became "Resistance," and creating descriptive summaries of each case study novel with a focus on the most prominent codes and themes. From almost 800 codes, I narrowed down my codes to the four themes discussed in this study: Punishment, Resistance, Reference to History, and Post-Racialism.

Limitations

I designed this case study analysis in order to collect the richest, most descriptive data on the representation of oppression in contemporary young adult fiction novels. However, two areas that my data does not cover are authorial intent and readers' reception to these texts. I had initially planned to include a focus group component of this study where I met and talked with young adults who self-identified as readers and fans of young adult literature. However, it became clear that it would not be possible to conduct the multiple focus group meetings with young adult readers that I had wanted in the timeframe of this project and as a result this addition to the study was dropped. As a result, my data allows only for speculation as to how readers might interpret and respond to these texts based on other studies conducted on readers and fans of young adult fiction. Similarly, I do not attempt to analyze an author's thoughts or intentions behind writing the narratives, characters, and images that they did as I did not conduct or analyze any interviews with the authors that would be able to give direct insight into their creative process. Despite this, my study does attempt to analyze one dimension of the cultural diamond: the relationship between cultural objects and the social world. For this reason my analysis is largely focused on the texts themselves and drawing connections to the larger social world rather
than on drawing conclusions about how these texts are received by readers or why authors wrote what they did. Additionally, this focus avoids some of the drawbacks of a reader-centered analysis outlined by Appleman. It avoids placing undue emphasis on the individual reactions and responses of readers and instead draws attention to the larger context of society.

Additionally, the generalizations I can make from this study to young adult fiction as a whole are limited by the sample size of this project. Conducting case study of analysis of more than seven texts would not have been feasible given the scale and timeframe of this project, and to attempt to mitigate this limitation by purposively selecting case study units along the "polar and extreme types" ideal detailed above. I also limited my sample case study units to contemporary young adult fiction texts with strong fantasy or science fiction elements. As a result, I do not attempt to generalize my findings to all young adult fiction texts, but rather to analyze what statement they make about fantasy and imagination. Like completing the proposed focus group, I also hope to be able to study a larger number of novels in the future.

**Data Analysis**

After coding, I began thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying and analysing patterns (themes) within qualitative data" (Gray 2014:609). A theme is important when "it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (Gray 2014:609). As outlined in the methodology section, for my thematic analysis I reviewed my initial codes, grouped codes together into potential themes, and created descriptive summaries of the narrative of each novel, focusing on the prominent codes and themes that had developed so far. This necessitated not only a return to the original codes, but also an additional close reading of and re-familiarization with the original case study texts as well. This was particularly helpful in allowing me to place the codes and themes within the larger context in the novel, and to
identify particularly evocative and illustrative passages as examples of these themes. I eventually picked out the themes that were most descriptive of the representation of oppression in young adult fiction novels. These themes are Punishment, Resistance, Reference to History and Post-Racialism.

Additionally, I also conducted an analysis of the representation of group-membership in the case study texts. As articulated by Freire, Young, and Sidanius and Pratto, groups and group membership are intrinsic characteristics of oppression. Fundamentally, oppression is itself a characteristic of a type of relationship between groups. It is therefore necessary when describing the representation of oppression in these literary case studies to first establish what groups exist in these texts and describe the relationship between them before conducting a deeper analysis of themes. This lays the groundwork to identify parallels between the representation of fictional social groups and the experiences of real world social groups, and to identify what suggestions or claims about how punishment, resistance, and history are made within the finite province of meaning of a fictional text.

**Group-Membership**

*The Hunger Games*

The two most prominent groups that exist in Panem at the start of the first novel are Capitol citizens and District citizens, excluding District 13. The relationship between the Capitol and the Districts embodies Freire's dynamic of the oppressor and oppressed. Capitol citizens have access to food and luxury items while District citizens live on the edge of starvation, their labor going towards producing the food and other resources the Capitol needs to function. Additionally, the Districts are exploited for something else: entertainment. For the ostensible purpose of punishing the Districts for a rebellion they attempted almost 75 years ago, every year
each district must provide 2 children to participate in the Hunger Games, a televised fight to the
death for the spectacle of the Capitol. The difference between the Capitol and the district citizens
are also visible in their physical appearance: Capitol citizens dye their skin and hair different
colors, alter their bodies through cosmetic surgery, and use make up, depilatories, and purgatives
to modify and manipulate their bodies. In comparison, the District citizens—with the exception
of victors of past Hunger Games who are sometimes described as having body modifications and
prosthetics—make even less use of body modifiers than the contemporary reader might. These
factors lead to a mutual dehumanization of the District citizens by the Capitol citizens and vice
versa. This is best represented by the interaction that occurs between Katniss and her prep team,
three Capitol citizens who take care of Katniss grooming and makeup, in The Hunger Games:

I stand there, completely naked, as the three circle me, wielding tweezers to
remove any last bits of hair. I know I should be embarrassed, but they’re so unlike
people that I’m no more self-conscious than if a trio of oddly colored birds were
pecking around my feet.

The three step back and admire their work. "Excellent! You almost look like a
human being now!" says Flavius, and they all laugh. (Collins 2008:62)

This excerpt demonstrates how the group distinctions between District and Capitol
citizens are so entrenched that they inhibit individuals from viewing members of other groups as
people. Katniss' rationally recognizes that her prep team are humans just like her, but finds them
"so unlike people"—District citizens and, even more narrowly, citizens of District 12—that she
does not have what she considers a normal emotional reaction to being nude in a room full of
strangers. Similarly, the prep team also dehumanizes Katniss, they only consider her something
approximating a human being after they have made her conform to their standards of beauty. The
fundamental difference between Katniss' treatment of her prep team and her prep team's

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5 For instance, Katniss notably does not remove her body hair (Collins 2008:61).
treatment of her is that Katniss' dehumanization is part of a larger system of District citizens' objectification at the hands of the Capitol, culminating in the Hunger Games themselves.

_The Hunger Games_ also presents intra- and inter-District group hierarchies. Within District 12, there is a hierarchy between the middle-class Merchant class and the impoverished coal-mining workers who make up the Seam. This internal hierarchy is also embodied in the physical appearance of its citizens, with "the Seam look" described as olive skin, dark hair, and dark eyes in contrast with the blonde hair and blue eyes associated with the Merchants (Collins 2008:8). The Merchant class of District 12, however, does not oppress the Seam. The relationship between the Merchant class and the Seam does not have any of Young's five faces of oppression. Most notably, the text provides no examples of the Merchants exploiting the Seam. In fact Peeta tells Katniss that his family cannot afford to eat the bread they make, revealing that the Merchant class is often not even able to benefit from their own labor. While the Merchant class has certain privileges over the Seam—such as not needing to take tesserae: adding a child's name more times to the reaping pool in exchange for extra grain and oil (Collins 2008:13)—the Merchant-Seam relationship is not exploitative or oppressive. As Katniss recognizes, the small privileges that Merchant class individuals receive are just another way the Capitol creates division in the Districts to discourage rebellion:

Gale knows his anger at Madge [the Mayor's daughter, a member of the Merchant class] is misdirected. On other days, deep in the woods, I've listened to him rant about how the tesserae are just another tool to cause misery in our district. A way to plant hatred between the starving workers of the Seam and those who can generally count on supper and thereby ensure we will never trust one another. "It's to the Capitol's advantage to have us divided among ourselves," he might say if there were no ears to hear but mine. (Collins 2008:14)

Similarly, Districts 1, 2 and 4 are much wealthier than the other districts and are given better treatment by the Capitol. These districts have the privilege of preparing children to be
"Career" tributes in the Games so they have a better chance of winning. Additionally, the Capitol recruits some of its Peacekeepers from District 2, an opportunity for a better life that other districts do not receive. As a result, the citizens of District 2 have largely prescribed to the Capitol's ideology, and in *Mockingjay* are portrayed as loyal citizens of Panem who resist the efforts of the rebels to liberate the districts. However, as Katniss points out, they are still District citizens which means that, even though they have the opportunity to better prepare them, their children are still forced to fight and die in the Hunger Games as spectacle for the Capitol. On a fundamental level, the Capitol views all District citizens as "slaves" (Collins 2010:215), no matter how well treated. There are also districts treated worse than District 12 but the text never suggests that there might be intra-district oppression because the districts are treated differently. The representation of social groups and group hierarchies in *The Hunger Games* is particularly interesting in the context of my research, as its depiction of the fictional society of Panem demonstrates an awareness of how group hierarchies are constructed so that the oppression of one group benefits of the other and the ways in which this system can be legitimized in both the minds of the oppressors and the oppressed.

*Harry Potter*

The fictional world of *Harry Potter* presents many different ideas of group membership. Unlike *The Hunger Games*, many of the groups in Harry Potter perceive themselves as "races" rather than classes. This is true of Wizards, who perceive themselves to be both different and superior to "Muggles," or non-magical humans. Within Wizards there are different sub-groups that form a separate hierarchy. At the top are purebloods, or individuals with two magical parents, though this term more generally implies a line of unbroken magical descent. Beneath them are half-bloods, individuals with one pureblood parent and one Muggle-born parent or one
Wizard parent and one Muggle parent. The lowest, most subordinate group is the Muggle-borne, derogatorily referred to as "Mudbloods," with no magical parents and no known magical ancestry. Muggle-borne are considered inferior to pure and half-bloods, are viewed as "dirty," and perceived as tainting pureblood families through inter-marriage. In *The Deathly Hallows*, a legitimizing myth, what Sidanius and Pratto define as "attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for the social practices that distribute social value within the social system" (1999:45), used to justify the oppression of Muggle-borne is the idea that Muggle-borne steal magic from pureblood witches and wizards. Another sub-group within Wizards is Squibs. Few Squib characters feature in the texts, but the working definition generated from these representations is that a Squib is a person with one or more magical parent who has little to no magical ability.

In the *Harry Potter* novels, a key element of group membership is that one's group identity provides access to different worlds and abilities. For instance, Muggles and Wizards are depicted as operating within two separate, distinct social spheres. Wizards attend different schools from Muggles and their communities tend to be segregated. In schools, Wizard children are taught Wizard history with "Muggle Studies" as an elective. Wizards work in jobs that can only be held by witches and wizards, and have a separate government called the Ministry of Magic. Muggles are often magically prohibited from seeing Wizard magical spaces, and while the texts depict Wizards moving through Muggle spaces this is often just a transitory period between traveling from one magical space to another. This designation of spaces as group-specific can result in marginalization. Young defines marginalization as when "A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life, potentially then subject to severe material deprivation and even extermination" (1988:281). Squibs are extremely marginalized in
the Wizarding world, with the general attitude being that there is no place for Squibs in magical spaces as they will always be inferior in ability to "true" witches and wizards. As a result Squibs are encouraged to assimilate into the Muggle world and live as Muggles. Another example of how access to spaces is determined by group membership is the removal of Muggle-born students from Hogwarts and Muggle-born adult witches and wizards from Ministry jobs when Voldemort comes to power. As part of this purge, many Muggle-borns are sent Azkaban, the wizard prison. Some Muggle-born witches and wizards go on the run to avoid being apprehended, living on the fringes of magical spaces. This is an extreme form of Young’s concept of marginalization. Interestingly, while the text portrays Muggle-borns as marginalized, imprisoned, and made the subject of violence by half-bloods and pureblood, it does not show them being exploited, in contrast to Young's theory where exploitation is the key feature of oppression.

In addition to Wizards and Muggles, there are a number of other magical non-human groups presented throughout the series. Like Wizards, members of these groups often self-identify as members of a "race" separate from both magical and non-magical humans. In *The Order of the Phoenix* and *The Deathly Hallows*, the main non-human groups presented are house-elves, goblins, and centaurs. These three groups, along with Wizards, and their positions in society are represented in *The Order of the Phoenix* by the image of the Fountain of Magical Brethren in the Ministry of Magic:

A group of golden statues, larger than life-size, stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin, and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard (Rowling 2003:127).
Later in the text, when Harry returns to the fountain after receiving his first in-person experience of the Ministry's corruption and hypocrisy, he reconsiders the fountain:

He looked up into the handsome wizard's face, but up close, Harry thought he looked rather weak and foolish. The witch was wearing a vapid smile like a beauty contestant, and from what Harry knew of goblins and centaurs, they were most unlikely to be caught staring this soppily at humans of any description. Only the house-elf's attitude of creeping servility looked convincing (Rowling 2003:157).

The fountain is a representation of wizard attitudes of superiority towards other non-human magical groups. As Harry observes, these representations are not accurate, signifying that the myth of wizard superiority and happy domination is a lie. The relationship between the different magical groups becomes significantly more complicated when actual members of these groups are represented as characters. All three of these races' relationships with Wizard society contain elements of oppression as described by Young and Freire. Additionally, Harry's interactions with individuals from these groups demonstrate that he is not immune from using his membership to the dominant social group against non-human magical characters.

One of these non-human magical groups is the centaurs. The centaurs shown in the novels live in the Forbidden Forest, an area considered to be part of Hogwarts' grounds. The centaurs are largely isolationists, not involving themselves in the concerns of the Wizard world. They consider the Forbidden Forest to belong to them, and attempt to ban Wizard characters, including Harry and Hermione, from entering it. In The Order of the Phoenix, Dumbledore hires a centaur, Firenze, to teach divination. While this infuriates Ministry representative Dolores Umbridge, who considers centaurs "half-breeds," Firenze reveals that the other centaurs are also displeased with him teaching at a wizards' school and have banished him. The depiction of Firenze's teaching highlights a number of cultural boundaries between Wizards and centaurs.
Firenze frequently refers to what he considers a limited human perspective while teaching divination, and the students are largely unable to learn or understand the centaurs' method of seeing the future. Centaurs appear again later in the book when Harry and Hermione lead Umbridge into the part of the Forbidden Forest where they live in the hopes that the centaurs will deal with her for them. The centaurs are offended by this presumption, and speak at length about their racial pride and their unwillingness to be insulted or manipulated by humans while turning first against Umbridge and then against Harry and Hermione. The novel acknowledges that Harry and Hermione viewed the centaurs as tools, and suggests parallels between this type of unconsciously dehumanizing perspective and Umbridge's outwardly prejudiced one. While Harry does not reflect on this incident in the novel, it foreshadows Harry's interactions with goblin characters in *The Deathly Hallows*.

Like centaurs, the goblins are noted to keep out of wizard affairs, though the two goblins who appear in *The Deathly Hallows* are on the run and believe Voldemort's rise to power has had an overall negative effect on goblins. Also like centaurs, they have a strong sense of pride in their group membership. Reference is made in *The Deathly Hallows* to the brutal treatment of goblins by wizards in the past, and to the persisting distrust and resentment they have towards Wizards. Goblins also have different cultural attitudes and values than Wizards, especially on the subject of property ownership. Goblins believe that ownership of possessions lies with the creator. Therefore, when a creator sells one of their products this exchange is only a temporary loan, and the object needs to be returned to the creator upon the purchaser's death or the object needs to be re-paid for. This causes conflict between goblins and Wizards on the subject of goblin-made artifacts that are passed down Wizard families, which goblins consider theft. Cultural differences between goblins and Wizards defines the relationship between Harry and the
goblin Griphook, who insists that the "sword of Gryffindor" in Harry's possession is actually a goblin-made sword stolen from its creator by Godric Gryffindor, the founder of Gryffindor house. Griphook agrees to assist Harry and his friend's in exchange for the return of the sword. Harry and his friends eventually plan to double cross Griphook. This event is an important episode in Harry's larger internal conflict about whether figures he has looked up to, such as Dumbledore and Godric Gryffindor, are worthy of his admiration. It is also a moment that might be an important catalyst for readers to consider their own privileges and the ways in which they benefit from and help perpetuate institutionalized inequality.

House-elves are the last major non-human magical group and also the one most represented in the texts. Within the Harry Potter world, house-elves are an enslaved race, with individual house-elves bound to serve a specific magical family. House-elves are magically obligated to carry out any order given to them by their master, with disobedience or failure to carry out an order resulting in compulsions to engage in self-harm. House-elves do not wear clothes and a house-elf's master giving them clothes, on purpose or accidentally, is effectively a form of manumission. House-elves are also described as having their own kind of magic different from Wizards'. They do not use wands, and how house-elves' magic operates is not well understood by most witches and wizards. In *The Order of the Phoenix* and *The Deathly Hallows*, there are two house-elf characters: Dobby and Kreacher. Dobby is a house-elf who Harry had helped free in a previous novel who is now a free employee of Hogwarts. He is fanatically loyal to Harry and often places himself in danger in order to assist him. This culminates in Dobby sustaining injuries in *The Deathly Hallows* while protecting Harry that he later dies from.

Kreacher is a house-elf who belongs to the Black family who is introduced in *Order of the Phoenix*. Unlike Dobby, he has largely internalized the ideas of Wizard superiority, believing
in blood purity, hating Muggle-borns, and wishing only to serve the Black family. His hatred of Sirius Black, who rejects the Black family legacy and mistreats Kreacher, eventually leads Kreacher to betray him to Voldemort, resulting in Sirius’ death. Harry inherits Kreacher along with the Black mansion after Sirius' death and in The Deathly Hallows, Harry's kindness and understanding towards Kreacher wins his loyalty. Kreacher transforms into a helpful and servile companion, and the novel ends with Harry coming to appreciate and expect Kreacher's servitude and expressing no plans to free him. I consider this a missed opportunity for the text to explore ideas of social change and taking real steps towards ameliorating social inequality. An ongoing narrative in the Harry Potter novels, including The Order of the Phoenix, is that Hermione's attempt to advocate for the house-elves by secretly giving them clothes and freeing them without their consent is dehumanizing and unsustainable. However, the series never proposes an alternative course of action, but rather falls back on the problematic idea that if the dominant individuals behave kindly to subordinate individuals, and the subordinate individuals do not mind being subordinate, then institutionalized social change is not necessary.

Glory O'Brien's History of the Future

Did all outcasts come to this realization at a certain point in life? That being an outcast from a bogus and pornographic society was actually a good thing? I hoped so. I hoped there was an army of us out there, smiling about it at that very moment (King 2014:232).

Unlike The Hunger Games and Harry Potter, Glory O'Brien's History of the Future largely takes place in a setting that a contemporary reader would most likely identify as their own. While the novel has fantastical elements, such as the protagonist being able to see visions of people's ancestors and descendents years into the past and future, the setting of the novel is largely realistic. As a result, Glory O'Brien's History of the Future does not construct new social
groups and group relationships that need to be described to the reader, but rather pulls from real-life group hierarchies, specifically gender.

The novel has two different narratives: Glory's first-person narration in the "present," roughly analogous to contemporary America in the 2010s, and Glory's "history of the future," a factual recounting of the events within the next generation that will plunge American society in a second civil war. The most important group identifier and hierarchy in the novel is gender. The novel asks both Glory and the reader what it means to be a girl and explores how the persisting hierarchy between men and women affects individuals by focusing on the life of Glory, a contemporary teenage girl, and the experiences of women during the future war. In the present, Glory is concerned by what she perceives as her difference from other girls. She has not had a prominent female figure in her life since her mother's suicide when she was a toddler. As a result, she views her own disinterest in makeup, boys, and sex as evidence of her failure to be a woman. One of the closest equivalents she has to a female role model is Ellie Heffner, Glory's best friend who has prescribed to ideas about gender that support the continued dominance of men over women. For the majority of the text, Ellie serves as the voice for oppressive, misogynistic ideas about gender. Ellie is of the opinion that women no longer need feminism because equality has been achieved, and upholds double-standards of sex and promiscuity in regards to men and women. Ellie also continually interprets Glory's personal struggles, largely in regards to her visions and coming to terms with her mother's death, using misogynistic stereotypes of inter-personal conflict between girls. At one point, Ellie misinterprets Glory's frustration about Ellie not taking the visions seriously as Glory being jealous that she has not had sex like Ellie has. Glory is not immune from prescribing to misogynistic ideas herself, particularly in trying to navigate her relationship with Ellie. Eventually, Glory is able to achieve
what Freire describes as humanization, illustrated in the quote at the beginning of this section. Glory is able to reaffirm her own worth separate from society's ideologies about women and realizing that her society is something she can change. This allows her to cut ties with Ellie while also losing her resentment and bitterness towards her, and to embrace the ways she takes after her mother rather than view her as ghost haunting her. Drawing from Ames, Glory's personal journey over the course of the book could potentially provide a space for young women readers to confront their own issues of identity and struggles with misogynistic stereotypes, experiences, and expectations.

Glory's visions of the future re-interpret Glory's gendered interpersonal interactions and relationships onto a larger societal level. In the future, The Fair Pay Act is passed as an attempt to prohibit the exploitation of female workers by making it mandatory to pay them the same wages as their male coworkers. The nine states that will eventually secede and become New America pass the Family Protection Act for the express purpose of undermining The Fair Pay Act by making it illegal for women to work. This vision is a direct response to and refutation of Ellie's insistence that women in the present no longer need to advocate for social change, as it depicts the future trying to correct the inequality that Ellie insists does not exist and the vitriolic, misogynistic response this attempt provokes. The same states that pass the Family Protection Act will also pass the Father's Count Law in one of Glory's later visions, prohibiting welfare assistance and child support for single mothers. The law also makes it illegal for a woman to leave her husband, but legal for a man to leave his wife if she does not meet "his personal or domestic needs" (King 2014:140). Once again, this law evokes Ellie's statement that it is okay for men to be promiscuous but not women and girls, and her experience of being pressured into sex to keep her boyfriend happy. These two laws both allow for the continuation of the
exploitation of women's domestic and emotional labor, and constitute extreme examples of institutionalized marginalization, with women as a group forced out of the entire labor force and denied state and federal aid. These acts are accompanied by widespread homelessness and starvation among women and children, in addition to an upswing of physical and sexual violence against women and girls. This violence escalates with the creation of K-Duty Club, a New American military organization that steals women and girls from Old America to sell to breeding camps, and Ferret Company, which hunts and kills runaways and exiles. Glory O'Brien's History of the Future is an interesting case study of the representation of oppression in fiction because it is a text that, like The Hunger Games, presents its characters and settings in a way that intertwines the personal and the political.

Noggin

"I mean, you're both living these lives you didn't choose to live with a world full of people telling you what that's supposed to mean. It's messed up." (Whaley 2014:104)

Noggin is the only case study text that addresses group-membership as an acquired status. The novel follows Travis Coates, a 16 year old boy who is cryogenically frozen after battling leukemia and re-animated with a new "donor body" five years later. The novel largely focuses on Travis' existence as one of only two people to have survived this new experimental medical procedure. As a result, Travis is a member of one of, if not the most, exclusive groups in history. Unlike Glory O'Brien's History of the Future, where Glory struggles against the narratives and ideology leveled against women, Travis' conflict of identity stems from the fact that society has no narrative or ideology for people like him. Travis' character arc is therefore about figuring out who "Travis" is, what has changed and what has stayed the same. Travis is helped by his friends
and family from before the procedure, the friends he makes after the procedure, and Lawrence Ramsey, the only other person to have successfully undergone the procedure.

One method that Travis uses to make sense of his identity is through comparison to other groups. Interestingly, though it would seem logical for Travis to compare himself to the disabled, those who use medical aids, or those who are chronically ill, at no point does he identify himself with these groups. Even before the procedure while battling cancer, Travis never makes reference to any feelings of solidarity or identification with others going through similar experiences, nor does the text represent anyone else who could be considered disabled or chronically ill. Instead, Travis and other characters frequently compare his experiences to his friend Kyle, who is gay and closeted. Another character draws a parallel between Kyle's experience being gay and Travis' experiences post-procedure, giving the quote provided at the beginning of this section:

I mean, you're both living these lives you didn't choose to live with a world full of people telling you what that's supposed to mean. It's messed up. (Whaley 2014:104)

While this comparison does lead Travis to have more empathy for his friend, this parallel between gay people and Travis overlooks a serious consideration of what it means to be a member of these two groups. Namely that Travis did choose to sign up for the procedure while Kyle did not choose to be gay. This is a flawed, dangerous comparison because it obscures the reality of the object of comparison. This was a concept I initially referred to as the Fantasy Oppression Comparison in my previous research on young adult fiction, but this term is not an entirely accurate descriptor of what is happening in Noggin. Despite the obvious emotional distress that Travis and Lawrence both experience due to their membership in their mutual group, there is not enough textual evidence to conclude that they are oppressed because of their
group identity. Members of their group are not exploited, marginalized, or subjected to cultural imperialism. Arguably they do experience violence, as there is mention of both Travis and Lawrence receiving threatening, hateful letters calling them "unnatural" and "abominations." However, these correspondences come from private citizens and there appears to be no institutionalized oppression against them, largely because society as whole is still trying to make sense of the new medical technologies that allow them to exist. This narrative provides a space for adolescents to navigate young adulthood, personal change, and the process of discovering and defining their identity, but provides very little in way of the type of spaces for critical reflection on an individual's society that Ames describes.

This lack of institutionalized oppression bleeds over in Travis' comparisons between his experiences and the experience of gay people. When Travis commits himself to helping Kyle come out, Travis says that he wants to show Kyle that being gay "doesn't matter." When another character says that it does matter, Travis responds that it does not matter to "good people" (Whaley 2014:103, italics in original). Here, institutionalized elements of oppression that would discourage people from coming out, such as job and housing discrimination and violence, are collapsed into a matter of "good" vs. "bad" people. The text later reaffirms Travis' viewpoint by having Kyle say that he was right, and that since coming out he has received no negative backlash therefore his fears were unwarranted. Oppression in Noggin is constructed as a matter of individual people not "understand[ing] things they aren't a part of" (Whaley, 2014:114), rather than hierarchy between social groups established and maintained for the specific purpose of one group dominating and exploiting the other. This representation of oppression is not only different than the representations in the other case study novels, but it also does not provide the space for readers to imagine social change as anything other than encouraging individuals to
change their minds. This framing of social change conflicts not only with the methods of actual youth activists, but also with Freire, Sidanius and Pratto, and Young's conceptualizations of oppression as a systemic social structure rather than just the result of individual prejudice.

The representations of group membership in these novels support the idea that our identities as individuals are tied up in our membership to social groups. These group memberships affect how we experience and engage with our societies, from what opportunities we are given to succeed to what relationships we form with others. Also, as Berger and Luckmann described, while these narratives are finite provinces of meaning where worlds with different rules and norms exist—magic is real, America no longer exists, teenage girls can see the future, people can be brought back to life—the recognizable similarities between representations of fictional social groups and group hierarchies to real-world social groups firmly establishes these texts as still existing in the reality of everyday life.

**Themes**

These four themes are derived from my initial coding of my seven case study novels. After my initial coding, I examined my codes, identified the most frequent codes, and recoded these codes and similar codes as larger concepts or themes that I identified across my case study novels. I then wrote detailed summaries of each text's narrative with a focus on these themes that formed the basis for this analysis. These themes describe the representations of oppression in these texts as related to the fictional group hierarchies described above.

**Punishment**

One theme of the case study novels was the idea of punishment as a mechanism of the state to dominate oppressed groups and uphold group hierarchies. This use of punishment is similar to Sidanius and Pratto's definition official terror as "the public and legally sanctioned
violence and threat of violence perpetrated by organs of the state and disproportionately directed against subordinates” (1999:41). In addition to official terror, there is also semiofficial terror: "violence or intimidation directed against subordinates, carried out by officials of the state...but not publicly, overtly, officially, or legally sanctioned by the state" (1999:42). Within these the case study texts, examples of official and semiofficial terror are accompanied by justifying rhetoric, similar to the concept of legitimizing myths. The presence and prominence of this justifying rhetoric, which was also sometimes internalized by the characters, is why I refer to this theme as "punishment" and consider it distinct from either "official/semiofficial terror" or "violence." The only case study novel where this theme was not present was Noggin.

The case study texts that provided the clearest examples of punishment were The Hunger Games trilogy. In The Hunger Games, The Games themselves are a form of punishment for the Districts that also meets the definition of official terror. As a result of a failed rebellion against the Capitol several decades ago, the Districts are forced to participate in the Games, which are organized by the Capitol, for the purpose of inspiring terror and helplessness in District citizens. The Games are only one example of many through which the Capitol uses official terror under the guise of punishment to control the Districts. Other examples include Rue's account of public whipping and execution by Peacekeepers that occurs in District 11 and the increasingly punitive measures leveled against District 12 in Catching Fire by the Capitol. Whipping posts and gallows are erected in the square and laws that had been allowed to slide into obscurity are suddenly re-enforced. The mines, the only reliable source of employment in District 12, are closed without warning, causing families to starve. Katniss suspects that all of these actions are the Capitol's punishment for her failure to quell growing discontent and rebellion in the Districts after her victory in the Games. The text also suggests that that year's Games, the Quarter Quell
that pulls its tributes from each District's pool of Victors, is an attempt to kill Katniss specifically as punishment for her role in the country-wide unrest as the symbol of rebellion. At the end of *Catching Fire*, District 12 is fire-bombed, seemingly for the sole purpose of punishing Katniss for escaping the Quarter Quell with the rebels as District 12 was not in rebellion.

The final novel, *Mockingjay*, explicitly addresses the cycle of state-sanctioned violence as punishment. The leader of District 13, President Alma Coin's, willingness to hold another Hunger Games to punish the Capitol is an indication of the corruption already present in her new government and a commentary on the cyclical nature of history, power and violence. While Katniss does vote for this new Hunger Game, she ultimately rejects this new system by killing President Coin when she is supposed to be executing former President Snow and returning to District 12 to focus on re-building and moving forward rather than forcing others to atone for past wrongs. This ending of *The Hunger Games* trilogy emphasizes moving away from the idea of punishing past wrongs, real and imaginary, in favor of working to build new, more humanistic and just systems that benefit all people.

Like *The Hunger Games*, punishment is most often conceptualized in *Harry Potter* as violence perpetuated by the state. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry has numerous encounters with the Ministry of Magic and their ideas regarding punishment. Harry is made to attend a disciplinary hearing for his use of magic outside of school, though he claims it was in self-defense. It quickly becomes obvious that the hearing is a sham trial. The time and place is changed at the last minute without Harry's knowledge and he is eventually heard in a room designed for criminal trials in order to intimidate him. It becomes clear that the Ministry wants to convict, expel, and discredit Harry so that the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, will not have to acknowledge that Harry's account about Voldemort's return--which Harry witnessed at the end
of the previous book--is true. Fudge goes so far as to threaten to change the laws on the spot in order to convict Harry though he eventually lets him go.

While Harry is officially cleared, the imposition of the Ministry's political agenda does not end there. Harry is also dogged by the presence of Dolores Umbridge, a new teacher at Howarts who represents the Ministry and has unprecedented power over students and teachers. Umbridge continually references that her power comes directly from the Minister and uses her position as an educator and High Inquisitor to push the Ministry's ideology on students. This takes the form of repeated punishments against Harry for speaking openly about Voldemort, in which Umbridge gives him detention where he writes the line "I will not tell lies" with a magical pen that uses his own blood and carves the words into his hand. Her punishments also tend to disproportionately target the Ministry's detractors and their allies. Additionally, Umbridge believes strongly in wizard-superiority and is prejudiced against non-human magical races and "half-breeds." Her position as High Inquisitor allows her to institutionalize her prejudices, such as when she tries have Hagrid fired for being half-giant. Umbridge also creates her own Inquisitorial Squad of students from Slytherin, the Hogwarts house that was founded on the tenants of pureblood superiority, who are given special privileges such as the power to punish other students by deducting points from other students' houses. These students are seen using their authority to deduct points from other houses based on both personal grudges and blood-purity prejudices. The Ministry and the Ministry-controlled media, The Daily Prophet, also explicitly support Umbridge using her position to oppress half-humans. Umbridge's tenure at Hogwarts is therefore both a mechanism of state-sponsored violence and of oppression against non-human magical races and non-pureblood wizards.
While Umbridge is acting as a representative of the state, her true loyalty is to upholding oppressive hierarchies against non-human magical races and Muggle-borns. In *The Deathly Hallows*, after Voldemort takes control of the Ministry of Magic, Umbridge is revealed to be the head of the Muggle-Born Registration Commission. Muggle-born witches and wizards are forced to attend trials similar to Harry's hearing about their Wizarding ancestry. What happens to those who are found guilty of the "crime" of having non-magical ancestry—which is assumed to go hand-in-hand with the theft of a pureblood, real wizard's magic—is unclear, but is implied they are imprisoned. The similarity of Umbridge's and role policies under the Ministry in *The Order of the Phoenix* and under a Voldemort-controlled Ministry in *The Deathly Hallows* suggests that wizard supremacy and prejudice against Muggle-borns are institutional problems rather than individual ones. *The Harry Potter* series' depiction of the Ministry of Magic suggests that oppressive hierarchies are not the results of individuals, but institutionalized systems.

As mentioned in the analysis of group-membership, in *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* the state-sponsored official terror employed by the future government of New America is foreshadowed by the internalized prejudices of individuals in Glory's present. The Family Protection Act and the Father's Count Law are for the explicit purpose of punishing women who advocate for equal pay and live independent from men. Women who leave their husband, flee New America, or are exiled are hunted down and killed by Ferret Company as another way of enforcing New America's oppressive gender ideologies.

All of these case study texts depict punishment as reaction to threats to established social hierarchies. In *The Hunger Games*, this threat is the idea of District rebellion, in *Harry Potter* it is the threat of a student rebellion, and in *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* it is the Equal Pay Act for women. The theme of punishment is therefore fundamentally about the
reproduction, maintenance and legitimization of oppression. Punishment is a form of terroristic violence employed to maintain the status quo and resist any social upheavals that might result in a more equitable society. The portrayal of these social upheavals and threats that prompt this violence and what these representations of social change might mean for readers are discussed at length in my next theme: Resistance.

**Resistance**

Resistance features heavily in all seven case study texts, though the manner and goals differ significantly. This resistance can be both individual or a result of collective action. Individual action tends to manifest as defiance of authority and the status quo, to the point that one of my original codes that was placed under the umbrella of resistance was "defiance."

Katniss, Harry, and Glory all demonstrate defiance towards authority figures and expectations for their behavior, from Katniss' refusal to obey the Gamemakers' command that she or Peeta kill the other at the end of the Games, Harry's persistence in telling the truth in spite of Umbridge's continued punishments, to Glory's explicit identification as a feminist. Collective action takes the form of both organized resistance and unorganized, unplanned acts of resistance and solidarity. *The Hunger Games* trilogy showcases both resistance as an individual action and resistance as a collective action. When Katniss volunteers for her sister, the citizens of District 12 all raise the three fingers of their left hand as a form of collective action. Katniss describes this gesture as conveying "admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love" (Collins 2008:24). In Panem, where Districts are strictly segregated and intra-District polices, such as the tesserae, are designed to keep citizens of different classes divided, this kind of collective action is inherently and dangerously resistant. Similarly, after Rue, the District 11 tribute who forms an alliance with Katniss, is killed, Katniss covers her body in flowers and makes the three-finger salute at the
cameras. As participants in the Games are supposed to celebrate the death of other tributes as one less competitor, Katniss' actions explicitly defy the spirit and purpose of the Games. Katniss' knowledge of the Game's protocol—that the recovery of a tribute's body is always televised—allows her to broadcast her actions to the entire country. The rebelliousness of Katniss' public mourning of Rue are expanded upon by Peeta in *Catching Fire* as a desire to hold the Capitol accountable for the deaths of children like Rue in the Games (Collins 2009:240).

In addition to shaming the Capitol, Katniss' actions are also an example of inter-District solidarity. After Rue's death in *The Hunger Games*, Katniss receives Rue's sponsor gift: bread from District 11. Katniss notes that this gift was probably collectively funded by the people of District 11 and thinks that this the first time she's ever seen a sponsor gift delivered to a different District's tribute in the Games. Later, Rue's District partner, Thresh, spares Katniss' life when he learns that she was Rue's friend. After hearing of Thresh's death, Katniss becomes distraught, and internally calls his death "murder" as a condemnation of the Game's injustice (Collins 2008:308). These actions and relationships set the stage for the inter-District collective action and solidarity seen in *Catching Fire*. In *Catching Fire*, after Katniss speaks emotionally about Rue and Thresh on their Victory Tour in District 11, Peeta promises a share of their winnings as Victors to Rue and Thresh's families, which Katniss notes has never been done before (Collins 2009:59). District 11 then engages in collective action: signaled by Rue's mockingjay whistle, the entire District raises their hands in District 12's three-finger salute. Katniss notes that this action was not spontaneous, and is the first example of organized collective action as protest in the novels (Collins 2009:61).

*Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* both portray more organized collective action and resistance. *Catching Fire* alludes to multiple rebellions across the Districts. The end of the novel
reveals that there was an organized plot between the previous Victors to protect Katniss during the Quarter Quell and to escape from the arena. *Mockingjay* portrays a much more organized resistance lead by District 13, a literal "underground" community comprised of the remains of the former 13th District of Panem, widely believed to have been destroyed in the first District rebellion. *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* similarly portrays an underground resistance group where the "underground" aspect is literal. Rebels against New America make use of underground tunnels to help escaping exiles and refugees and to commit acts of sabotage against New America. Among these rebels, Glory has frequent visions of a woman called the Sniper, "the leader of the resistance and enemy number one" (King 2014:282). She comes to realize that the Sniper is herself, and her last vision of the future is her final confrontation with New America in the tunnels, where both the Sniper and her husband set off an explosion under the New American Army and are critically—potentially fatally—injured by New America's second-in-command. This kind of collective action and underground organizing is also similar to the portrayal of resistance in *Harry Potter*. The Order of the Phoenix is an anti-Voldemort group of witches and wizards that organizes and meets in secret. Their plans and missions are shrouded in secrecy even from Harry and the organization is plagued by covert assassinations and assassination attempts. Dumbledore's Army ("the DA") is a similarly secretive group of students created in *The Order of the Phoenix* by Harry, ostensibly under the label of a study group. The DA meet to practice defense against the dark arts spells in defiance of the rule that no student groups may organize without the permission of Umbridge. By *The Deathly Hallows* however, the DA has become much more similar to the Order of the Phoenix in that they actively resist and undermine Voldemort's forces at Hogwarts. Both the DA and the Order of the Phoenix help
Harry—who similar to Glory, is referred to by Voldemort's forces as "Undesirable Number One" (Rowling 2007:252)—in the battle of Hogwarts.

In addition to resisting societal powers and authority, resistance can also mean resistance to change, or resistance to becoming resistant. Committing to taking an active role in initiating social change is not an easy decision for these young adult protagonists. While Katniss is given the title of Mockingjay and is seen as the symbol of the Districts' rebellion against the Capitol after the first novel, much of the series focuses on Katniss' conflict with the idea of rebellion. After the Games in the first novel, Katniss insists that her suicide gambit with Peeta was primarily motivated by self-preservation and did not intend for her actions to be perceived as rebellious. Upon returning to District 12, Katniss' only desire is for things to go back to how they were before, to uphold the status quo. When President Snow confronts her about her actions in the Games inspiring unrest in other Districts, Katniss agrees to help quash potential rebellion in exchange for her safety and the safety of her loved ones (Collins 2009:29). When it appears that rebellion is inevitable, Katniss initially intends to flee with her family and friends to escape the wrath of the Capitol. It is not until the end of Catching Fire that Katniss comes to the conclusion that the Capitol must be opposed, and much of Katniss' interactions with the rebels in Mockingjay show her negotiating what her role as the Mockingjay entails and challenging the actions of the rebels.

Another case study novel where resisting often means resisting change is Noggin. There are some examples of defiance, Travis encourages his friend Kyle to resist homophobia and come out in order to live an authentic future. However, for most of the novel Travis refuses to look towards his own future. He actively resists attempts from his friends and family to get him to realize that his and their lives have changed since his procedure, though the people in his life
often do not provide the best examples—for example, his parents pretend to still be together for his sake though they divorced several years ago. The novel does not present any collective action to oppose or support the procedure by the larger society. There is one scene in the novel where it is revealed that his school's Christian organization has organized all the letters the school has received since his reanimation and presents them to him, but he is not interested in reading them. The novel eventually ends with Travis coming to terms with the fact that his life is not the same as before his procedure, but also states he is not ready to move on just yet.

Sambell argues that young adult dystopian novels that have protagonists successfully resist their society undermine the purpose of dystopian fiction by failing to convey a sense of urgency that the reader needs to address societal problems before it is too late. My analysis of the case study texts contradicts Sambell's argument that the success of the protagonist and the inclusion of hope does not make the need for societal change less urgent. Both *The Hunger Games* and *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* depict classically dystopian societies where the protagonist arguably "succeeds," but at great cost. The Capitol is defeated, but Katniss loses a family member and struggles to deal with the trauma of the rebellion. New America falls, but at the possible expense of Glory's life, her future husband's, and the lives of countless others. There is no "return-to-normality closure" (Sambell 2003:165) in these texts, with the possible exception of the *Harry Potter* series. The portrayal of resistance in these texts shows that resisting one's society often comes at a personal cost, but that justice and equality are goals worth fighting for and that such collective action can have real effects. *Glory O'Brien* even ends with Glory directly addressing the audience, asking them if they can handle the role they will have in shaping the future. The fact that the protagonists of these novels are all young adults themselves, may
possibly have the additional benefit of providing young adult readers with role models, affirming that they too are social actors capable of influencing real change regardless of their age.

**Reference to history**

Ideas about resistance and change necessarily invoke the concept of the present, future, and past. All the texts I studied have a preoccupation with the past, whether a completely fictional or drawing from the “real world.” The novels often explored the dangers of not knowing, or caring about, one's history, the inevitability of history repeating itself, and questioned the abilities of characters and their societies to create a better future.

This is especially true of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Throughout the trilogy, there are a number of references to known history. Most of these references are to the fictional early period of Panem mired in rebellion, the Dark Days, but a few are to real-world history. The country's name Panem, comes from the Latin phrase *panem et circenses*, referring to how it was alleged that Rome pacified its people with "bread and circuses," or food and spectacle (Collins 2010:223). In Panem, the districts provide the Capitol with food and spectacle, the Hunger Games. The use of Roman names for Capitol citizens further emphasizes the identification with the Capitol to the fragments of a collapsing, oppressive empire.

In *Mockingjay*, the rebels specifically claim that they are trying to get Capitol citizens to view them, or more specifically District 13, as the new provider of food and spectacle (Collins 2010:224). In retrospect, this is only one of many instances in *Mockingjay* that suggest that District 13 intends to use the rebellion to replace the Capitol as the dominant power in Panem rather than liberate the Districts. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire describes that the oppressed must enter the struggle for liberation as humans not as objects: "Propaganda, management, manipulation—all arms of domination—cannot be the instruments of their
rehumanization" (2005: 68). All three of these "arms of domination" are characteristic of the Capitol's control over the Districts. District 13 is entirely willing to continue to disseminate propaganda "propo" pieces and view both District and Capitol citizens as objects to be controlled and manipulated. The citizens of District 13, as well as other District refugees and Capitol defectors, are methodically managed by 13. All residents are given daily schedules, which are tattooed on their arms, and required to follow it. Food intake is also highly managed and individuals, such as Katniss' prep team, are brutally punished for disobeying rules. Katniss in particular is the subject of manipulation by District 13's leader Alma Coin. Coin wants to use Katniss as a symbol of the rebellion, but dislikes Katniss's lack of obedience and loyalty to her and the demands that Katniss makes in return for her participation. Eventually, Coin places Katniss in a situation where she will most likely die in the hopes that her influence will no longer be a threat to Coin and Coin can safely continue to manipulate her image.

The extent to which Coin and those loyal to her are willing to objectify the people they claim to be liberating comes to a head at the end of the rebellion, when Coin targets rebel first responders and Capitol children with fire-bombs with Capitol symbols for the sole purpose of winning Capitol and District citizens to their side. Coin's actions, disguised as the Capitol's, ironically serves to illustrate how, under her leadership, District 13 has become indistinguishable from the Capitol. Coin's plan mirrors the Capitol's fire-bombing of District 12, which was also primarily a symbolic action meant to manipulate and demoralize rebels. At the end of the novel, former President Snow reveals what Katniss has suspected, that District 13 used the districts to overthrow the Capitol and that District 13 will now take over Panem for their own gain. Also at the end of the novel, the new President Coin gives the Victors the opportunity to vote on whether the new government will host a Hunger Game with Capitol children. Katniss wonders if this was
how the games were first implemented 75 years ago and if it was possible that things would ever change.

Similarly, *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* portrays the future conflict between New and Old America as the "Second U.S. Civil War." Knowing one's history is an important theme in this text. Ellie, who previously told Glory that the women's movement had already achieved equality in the past so there is no need for anyone to be a feminist anymore, is similarly ignorant about the idea that a civil war could be anything but a distant event confined to the past:

"The whole idea of another civil war is creepy if you ask me."

"I don’t get it," she said. "How can we divide over anything anymore? It’s not like we still have slavery, right?" (King 2014:157)

On the other hand, when Glory sees that her visions of the Second U.S. Civil War feature tunnels she does research on what role tunnels played in previous wars, including the U.S. Civil War. Her decision to title her recordings of her future visions as the "history of the future" likewise demonstrates her understanding that the past and the future are interconnected. Glory knows the relevance of the past on a personal level, feeling that her future is intrinsically linked to her mother's suicide when she was a toddler, and her efforts to record her visions coincide with her attempts to understand her mother's history: her art, her conflict with her ideology, and her relationship with Ellie's mother Jasmine Blue Heffner. *Noggin* takes a similar approach to intertwining the personal past with the present and future. While in *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future*, excerpts from Glory's History of the Future are interspersed throughout the present narrative, *Noggin* often interrupts the narrative with flashbacks to the Travis' past before his cryogenic reanimation procedure. Both Glory and Travis feel immobilized, held captive, by their past. For Glory this manifests as hopelessness and anxiety, as she fears she is destined to commit suicide young like her mother. For Travis, this means attempting to relive his past by making his
past and present, and the lives of everyone around him, conform to what he feels like they should be. As a result, the trajectory of the characters diverges. Travis briefly realizes what it would be like to move forward and stop clinging to the past, but decides he is not ready to move on yet. Glory, on the other hand, embraces the future. Like Katniss, Glory is demoralized by seeing so much war and conflict ahead for the future of humanity. But also like Katniss, Glory resolves to do her best to move forward into the future. Both of these texts emphasize the importance of the past, but also the dangers of being too obsessed with the past to take action in the future.

Knowledge of the past is also necessary for shaping the future in the *Harry Potter* novels. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the titular "hallows" are three magical objects from a fairy tale told to wizard children. However, throughout the course of the novel, Harry learns that the hallows are real and have played a large role in Wizard history. Wizards who believe in the existence of the hallows believe that possessing all three will make the owner the "master of Death," which initially leads Harry to seek out these historical-mystical objects as he believes that only by possessing all three will he be able to survive his prophesied final battle with Voldemort. Voldemort also pursues the hallows or, more specifically one hallow: the Elder Wand, an unbeatable wand more powerful than any other in existence, that's ownership is passed down only by killing the previous owner. Similarly to Glory, Harry's interest in the history and mythology around the hallows corresponds with his personal interest in Dumbledore's past. Harry eventually realizes that he has become obsessed with the hallows and ends his search for them, and his resolve to sacrifice himself in his battle with Voldemort leads to him rendering Voldemort mortal and killing him. Defeating Voldemort allows Harry to come into possession of the Elder Wand, which he uses only once to repair his old wand that had been destroyed earlier in the novel. He resolves to bury the Elder Wand in Dumbledore's tomb, so that when he dies a
natural death the cycle of violence surrounding the wand will be broken. Like Katniss and Glory, Harry balances both knowledge of the past and his vision for the future to triumph over his external and internal conflicts and create meaningful social change.

What I find most interesting about this theme is that it rejects the idea that progress is an inevitable trajectory towards the future. In order to enact real social change, individuals and communities must actively strive to challenge the status quo. At the same time, the past continues to affect us far into the future, so it is important that we understand and take ownership of our society’s past. This acknowledgement of a larger societal structure brings us back to the various theorists who conceptualized oppression as central to the structure of society. This is an incredibly powerful and necessary message for young adults who are just realizing their role as social actors to be given, and is a perfect example of why representations of oppression, resistance, and social change in young adult fiction are so important to study.

**Post-racialism**

The last major theme I observed in my case-study texts is the theme of post-racialism. Unlike the other themes which analyze how oppression is represented, post-racialism refers to a lack of representation.

My analysis of post-racialism draws from the concept I previously referred to as the Fantasy Oppression Comparison. The Fantasy Oppression Comparison is a concept I generated in my Monroe research to describe the use of the language, rhetoric, and aesthetics of oppression as associated with real-world social groups to fictional, fantastical social groups. When I conceptualized the Fantasy Oppression Comparison, one of my greatest concerns was that in texts that made these comparisons, despite drawing from language, rhetoric, and aesthetics of oppression associated with real-world social groups, members of these social groups were either
not represented in these texts or members of these groups were not represented as oppressed on the basis of membership to these groups. I found this to be the case in all of my case study texts, with *Harry Potter* both largely not representing non-White characters and not portraying them as oppressed for their membership in their racial group, while the other novels either represented or overtly discussed non-White individuals but denied the existence of oppression on the basis of membership to a certain racial group.

The two *Harry Potter* novels I studied draw heavily from the language, rhetoric, and aesthetics of racial oppression to describe the fictional subordinate groups in the text, despite the fact that Black and other non-White characters are largely not represented. This rhetoric and language of racial oppression is instead used in reference to group hierarchies among, mostly White, Wizards. In the *Harry Potter* novels, the construction of Wizards as a separate race draws heavily from real-world concepts of race as biological categories, specifically the idea of Whiteness as a race that needs to be protected from interference from other racial groups. The language used to describe these sub-groups of Wizards, as well as other major non-human magical groups, is highly-racialized. An individual's membership to one of the different sub-groups within Wizards is determined by percentages of Wizarding "blood," or ancestry. The less Muggle ancestry a person has the more pure they are, with individuals with no known magical ancestry being pejoratively referred to as "Mudbloods," suggesting darkness, dirtiness, and pollution in contrast to the white, cleanness of "Purebloods." Individuals who marry Muggles and Muggle-borns are seen as tainting Wizards as a whole and pureblood wizards who marry Muggle-borns or reject the ideals of blood-purity are called "blood traitors," a term similar in meaning and use to "race traitors." Individuals who have non-human magical ancestry are called "half-breeds," as are werewolves, who are wizards who at some point contracted lycanthropy,
drawing comparisons to mixed-race individuals that similarly suggests contamination. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort openly talks about purifying the Wizard race by killing Muggle-borns, half-breeds, and werewolves. Despite the overt parallels between the representation of Wizard superiority and purity and real-world ideals of racial purity, racial oppression is never described or even alluded to in these texts. There are also some elements of the *Harry Potter* worldbuilding that do not support its silence on racial oppression. While I am not as familiar with the British class system as the American one, in *Harry Potter* pureblood families seem to be identified to the elite, old-moneyed British aristocracy, while Muggle-born characters overwhelmingly have working and middle class backgrounds. This identification suggests that pureblood Wizards should be disproportionately White, while non-White witches and wizards should disproportionately be Muggle-born—unable to establish Wizarding ancestry due to family histories of slavery, immigration, and diaspora. The oppression of Muggle-born witches and wizards would therefore be directly related to their membership to non-White racial groups.

However, this does not appear to be the case, and no explicit connection is ever made between racial identity and blood identity outside of the use of the Fantasy Oppression Comparison.

In *The Hunger Games* universe, the residents of District 11 are highly implied to be non-White. Throughout the novels, characters' skin tones are described without these descriptions marking them as the member of any specific group, with the exception of the "Seam look" and the description of citizens from District 11 having dark skin, dark hair, and golden eyes. Not specifically naming characters as racially Black or White does not prevent characters in *The Hunger Games* from potentially being identified with real-world racial groups. While Katniss

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6 While the Weasleys are very prominently working-class and pureblood, there is evidence to suggest that this is not the norm. Notably, in *The Deathly Hallows*, during the trial of an accused Muggle-born witch, Umbridge mocks the defendant for listing her parents' occupations as "greengrocers" (Rowling 2007:261)
refers to all District citizens as the Capitol's slaves, the District 11 citizens can be most identified with enslaved African-Americans. District 11 is the agricultural District, and its residents are responsible for the harvesting of most of the food for the Capitol and other Districts. The District 11 residents, particularly the field laborers, also have a rich musical culture, with the symbolic mockingjay whistle originating from Rue's song-call to let the other laborers know that the work day is over. District 11 is also the most devastatingly poor District, even more than the Seam in District 12, with most of its residents living in squalid huts and almost never getting enough to eat. It is also the most brutally oppressed, surrounded by guard towers and barbed wire fences, where developmentally disabled children are publically executed for minor offences, and people are commonly whipped in the streets. The brutal treatment of District 11, which Katniss recognizes as much worse than the treatment of her own, evokes parallels to police brutality and extrajudicial killings disproportionately experienced by Black people in America from Reconstruction to the present.

Additionally, the characters from District 11 presented in the book have many characteristics in common with stereotypical images of Black people. They are frequently identified with animals, Rue with birds and Thresh, the male tribute from District 11 in *The Hunger Games*, is described as "built like an ox" (Collins 2008:287). While animal comparisons are not limited to characters that the reader might identify as non-White--a redheaded female tribute is referred to as "Foxface"--Thresh is also represented in many ways that are evocative of stereotypical images of Black men. He is mostly silent, and Katniss notes that he appears sullen and hostile. When he does speak his speech is short and stilted, almost broken. He is defined by his physicality. While other tributes use weapons like bows, knives, swords, and even bombs, Thresh makes his first major appearance in the games by killing a tribute with a rock—
characterizing him as comparatively primitive to the other characters, similar to how Mary Couzelis argues that Rue grinding medicinal herbs with her teeth marks her as primitive (2015:140). In *Catching Fire*, in her speech to District 11, Katniss thanks Thresh "For his power" (Collins 2009:60), again emphasizing his distinctive, almost freakish, physical strength.

Despite these similarities to stereotypical images of Black people, citizens of District 11 are not conceptualized as being oppressed because of their membership to a specific racial group. The oppression District 11 faces in *The Hunger Games trilogy* is not because District 11's citizens are non-White, but because they are District citizens rather than Capitol citizens. While District 11 plays a large role in *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, by *Mockingjay* it has become clear that the rebellion against the Capitol is not about District 11. Even though District 11 arguably started the rebellion, no citizens of District 11 are represented in *Mockingjay*, and it is not suggested that District 11 might have different concerns or needs than District 13 or the other rebel Districts.

My other two novels, *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* and *Noggin*, talked more explicitly about race in societies that are more identifiable to our real-world than Wizard Britain and Panem. However, both these texts also rely heavily on the ideas of post-racialism. In *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future*, mentions of race are largely confined to visions of the past. Race is only brought up in the context of the future to describe how racial group membership is not important to the workings of New America. "They won't discriminate. They will steal a white girl as fast as they'll steal a black girl," Glory notes in her description of K-Duty Club (King 2014:154). This is the only direct mention of race in the context of Glory's future visions and it is a direct rejection of any idea of racial inequality or oppression. The novel's vision of a post-racial future in the context of the continuous references to a Second U.S. Civil War is jarring. That
Glory's assertion about the lack of discrimination K-Duty Club shows in abducting girls to sell to breeding camps is a refutation of racism is especially disturbing, as it overlooks the history of Black women sexual exploitation and use as breeders under slavery. Another glaring omission is how, while the gender wage gap is an important plot point in Glory's future visions, there is no mention of a race wage gap, either between White women and women of color or between White men and men of color. The only other references to race occur in Glory's vision of the past, which all contain examples of violence, marginalization, and exploitation of Black people. In one vision, she sees that Jasmine Blue's ancestor tried to help a family of fugitive slaves escape North, only to discover that the family was later caught and hanged. In perhaps the most chilling vision in the entire novel, Glory sees the history of a Black cashier in the mall:

*His great-great-great grandfather was a slave on a plantation in Alabama and was abused endlessly by the men he worked for. He killed two of them with his bare hands before he was beaten to death in punishment. That man's son was also a slave. His great-grandfather knew freedom, but not from anger and abuse. His grandfather moved north but still wasn't free. His father rioted in Newark in 1967. He lit houses on fire. No transmission from the future. The man has no children.* (King 2014:61, italics from original, bolding by me)

In *Glory O'Brien’s History of the Future* the only representations of Black people in the past are of suffering, pain, and death. In the future, Black people are either absent, omitted, or implicated in even more suffering. It is not a stretch to extrapolate from Glory's vision of the cashier and conclude that, in the world created by this text, Black people have no future.

This conception of racial inequality as a relic of the past is also represented in how *Noggin* portrays race. Like *Glory O'Brien’s History of the Future*, *Noggin* also mentions race but does not actually portray any non-White characters. Travis states that the community he lived in used to be segregated, and that Black and Jewish people were not allowed to live there. Though this is an explicit acknowledgement of institutionalized systems of segregation and
marginalization against oppressed groups, the explanation for why few Black and Jewish individuals live in the community in the present is reduced to individual, emotional causes: they're "pissed off about it" (Whaley 2014:20). Like *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future*, this is another example of post-racial logic. Racism and anti-Semitism as institutions are firmly rooted in the past and are not relevant to the present or future except to members of these formerly oppressed groups who are still brooding over past wrongs. Implicit in this conception of oppression is the idea that there is nothing currently limiting Black and Jewish people, or any other oppressed group, from achieving the same status as Whites and Christians, or any other dominant group, except for their own personal grievances.

**Conclusion**

In this thesis I have sought to explore how contemporary young adult fiction represents oppression. I have identified numerous patterns and themes and drawn parallels between them and the real world issues of oppression, inequality, and social change. My analysis indicates that in these texts, like in the real world, social group membership and identity is a critical part of the worldbuilding, that oppression and inequality is maintained and reproduced by social systems and institutions rather than by individuals' prejudice and discrimination, and that these institutions will always oppose threats to the status quo but social change can be brought about through collective action. These findings support a holistic view of young adult fiction as works of social criticism and potential visions of how social change can be brought about in the real-world.

This findings are in line with Ames' argument that young adult novels have the potential to provide spaces for readers to engage with real-world issues of social inequality and social change. Though I was not able to talk with young adult self-identified readers and fans of these
texts, a critical qualitative analysis of the text suggests that themes of injustice, resistance, and social change are all prominent issues in these texts. The struggles of Muggle-born Wizards and the District citizens provide metaphors within the contexts of fictional worlds for readers to engage with concepts of inequality and oppression in the real social world. Additionally, like Totaro's analysis of young adult novels all of my case study novels also portray suffering, but they do so within the context of oppressive social systems. Personal suffering is therefore inextricable from larger societal problems and issues.

However, the texts largely avoid representing real-world oppression and when they do they generally do not portray oppression as a characteristic of a hierarchal relationship between a dominant and subordinate group maintained by exploitation, marginalization, and violence. Neither *Harry Potter* nor *The Hunger Games* represent real-world group hierarchies outside of possible metaphors and allegories. Both *Noggin* and *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* do, but in ways that create problematic and often contradictory images of oppression. *Noggin* attempts to address the stigma and inequality that exists for LGBT people, but the text's representation of LGBT characters at times actively reproduces potentially harmful stereotypes and ideologies about that group. For instance, after his reanimation, Travis discovers that his cousin, who he believed was a lesbian, now has a child. He concludes that his cousin's lesbianism was a "phase" or else a ploy for, despite Travis at other points in the novel insisting that being gay is not a phase. *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* addresses sexism and the difficult experience of being a young woman in America, but avoids representing or outright denies the existence of racism. Racism in general appears to be an untouchable subject even in these novels about oppression, resistance and social change, despite drawing heavily from ideas and language about race and racism.
As previously mentioned, my research so far does not allow for me to definitively describe how these themes are interpreted by the reader. It is most likely that how a reader engages with these texts and what messages, if any, they take away depend as much on the experiences and perceptions of the reader as the text itself. As a result, these findings leave us with several questions about what these representations, or lack thereof, mean for readers, scholars, creators, and educators. How, if at all, can these texts inspire real-world social engagement? What does it mean for young readers of color, young LGBT readers, young disabled readers, and young readers from other marginalized groups to not only not see themselves in the fiction they read, but to see issues their communities face invalidated or projected onto White characters? What does it mean for young readers of color not to see themselves represented in visions of the future? Do White readers and non-White readers take away different messages from these texts? Are metaphors and allegories helpful rhetorical tools for representing inequality and oppression or are they dehumanizing ways to discuss inequality without actually representing marginalized individuals? There is no one answer to any of these questions and I do not presume to answer them here, but rather to present them as motivators for both personal reflection, interpersonal discussion, and further scholarship.

**Future Directions**

To attempt to answer some of these questions, I have several planned additions to this project. Most pressing is to conduct the focus groups with young adult readers referred to in the methodology section. As part of my sociology capstone course, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with current William & Mary students who identified as fans of fantasy and science fiction media. Participants were asked about their favorite works, what they liked and disliked about fantasy and science fiction as genres, and what role, if any, fantasy media had in activism
and social engagement. My future plan is conduct similar interviews, though this time within a focus group setting with high school aged self-identified readers and fans of young adult fiction. A focus group framework is preferable because I want my interaction with these students to be more of a conversation than my interview, and it is my hope that listening to their peers will also inspire and shape their own participation and ideas.

Another future project I have planned is the creation of an online syllabus for young adult readers in the style of the viral Trump, Brexit, and Charleston syllabi. This syllabus would contain a resource list of both print and online content, including books, articles, videos and websites, with the intent of providing a starting point for young adults interested in thinking critically about young adult fiction and media in general. I would also combine the creation of this syllabus with my focus group initiative. I would hope to meet with these participants at least twice: once to talk about their experiences with young adult fiction more generally and once to show them the syllabus and get feedback from the readers of the type of media I am compiling a list of resources about. This feedback will hopefully assess the accessibility of the syllabus, the layout of its online hosting site, and whether it contains the type of content that young adult readers are interested in. Ideally, there would be one more focus group meeting where participants view and comment on a new version of the syllabus with changes made based on their feedback.

Both the focus groups and the syllabus are important additions to this thesis project, as they allow for the analysis of reader, or receiver, responses and interpretation of young adult fiction that is not possible at this stage of the project. Additionally, the creation of a syllabus will able to be accessed by young adult readers themselves and will hopefully provide personally helpful to these individuals in their future engagement with media. This syllabus will also
hopefully be a beneficial resource for educators who are interested in using young adult fiction in an educational setting and engage with issues of inequality, oppression, and social change in a sociological way. As I described in my introduction, it is my intent for my research to be an addition to the conversation on representation and fiction that has taken place in various forms over the past few years. This thesis is my addition to this conversation, as well as an affirmation that young adult fiction, fantasy and speculative fiction are important features of our media landscape and social world and deserve the continued engagement of scholars, educators, and critics.
Appendix A

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Figure 2: Table of unique exploratory codes by author

Appendix B

Figure 3: Chart of distribution of codes by number of times used
References


Thomas, Ebony E. 2018. "The Dark Fantastic: Race and Imagination in Youth Literature, Media, and Culture." Presented at The University of Georgia Hotel and Conference Center, February 3, Athens, GA.


