Alterity and Innocence: *The Hunger Games,* Rue, and Black Girl Adultification

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Critically analyzing Rue's characterization in *The Hunger Games*, Toliver investigates how societally embedded discourses can influence a reader's ability to perceive Black girls as young, childlike, and innocent.

A PUBLISHING MARVEL that has radically impacted popular culture, *The Hunger Games* (S. Collins, 2008) is one of the best-selling fiction books for young people in the United States (Calta, 2014). Although classified as dystopian literature, *The Hunger Games* is situated within the larger literary category of science fiction, a genre often defined by the presence of strange, yet plausible, innovations; the manifestation of extrapolative and realistic possibilities; and the interpretation of themes and issues in modern society through a futuristic lens. Each of these elements creates a space for readers to challenge their conceptions of normalcy and to confront dominant modes of thought to which they have grown accustomed (McKitterick, 2015). However, readers often reach a point where the challenge becomes too great, a point where they cannot move beyond their comfort zones because they have been socialized to embrace narrowed views of the world and the people who inhabit it. This juncture is the level of alterity.

Alterity is created when texts ask readers to push beyond their comfort zones in order to understand concepts that require them to expand their beliefs. This defamiliarization and estrangement from established beliefs moves the reader away from restrictive categories and toward an anomalous Other (Rospide & Sorlin, 2015). This Other is an unfamiliar entity that claims the reader's attention because of its novelty and extension beyond perceived conceptions of normalcy. Consequently, the Other will remain elusive to readers because it exists outside their spheres of knowledge, creating an opaqueness so great that the reader cannot "see" the difference adequately, despite the writer's attempts at flagrant visibility (Harding & Martin, 2008). Science fiction texts often incorporate ideas that are beyond the reach of readers' ability to see and, therefore, to comprehend, even when the words needed to access the difference are right there on the page. However, how a reader responds to alterity in science fiction will depend on the individual, their willingness to grasp at something unfamiliar, and their access to tools that can assist them in disrupting negative responses to the obscure.

An example of a response to alterity is exemplified in several Twitter reactions written by young adolescents in response to Rue's casting in the film adaptation of *The Hunger Games*. In the novel, S. Collins (2008) first describes Rue as having "dark brown skin and eyes" (p. 45), and she later writes that Rue has "bright, dark eyes and satiny brown skin" (p. 98). Both descriptions indicate that Rue could be a Black girl. However, even

though the description of Rue's skin color is explicit, some readers envisioned a young, innocent White girl. Essentially, the characterization of Rue reached a level of alterity so great for some readers that they could not "see" her as Black when they read the novel.

Upon the film's release, readers were forced to see Rue as Black because the actor Amandla Stenberg assumed the role of the young female character. With Stenberg functioning in the role of Rue, Collins's novel descriptions came to life; yet, some readers refused to accept her characterization, even with a visual from the film and a description from the book. They refused to embrace the challenge of understanding why they believed Rue to be White even though Collins provided obvious racial descriptions. Instead, they commented about the inaccuracy of the film adaptation and openly described how the character they imagined while reading was not the character that played the role in the film. Their responses to alterity were hindered by their inability to push past their comfort zones. They did not have the tools necessary to deconstruct their previous belief systems.

The bulleted list below includes selected examples of Twitter responses that represent readers' reactions to Rue's film representation. These responses were retrieved from hungergamestweets (2012), a Tumblr page created by an anonymous fan of Collins's books who decided to create a page that would "expose the Hunger Games fans on Twitter who dare to call themselves fans." These responses, culled from a long list of negative tweets and comments, were written by teens who have since deleted their Twitter accounts (Anderson, 2012; Holmes, 2012).

- *Kk call me racist but when I found out rue was black her death wasn't as sad #ihatemyself*
- *Awkward moment when Rue is some black girl and not the little blonde innocent girl you picture*
- *why does rue have to be black not gonna lie kinda ruined the movie*
- *Some ugly little girl with nappy add hair. Pissed me off. She was supposed to be cute and at least remind her of Prim!*
- *I don't know, I reread the bit where Rue and Katniss are talking but imagined Rue being white and it seemed better, meeeh*
- *Nah, I just pictured darker skin, didn't really take it all the way to black*
- *Rue is a Black girl in the movie?! I was totally picturing a younger Dakota Fanning.*

After these tweets were posted, various writers chastised these Twitter users for their comments, stating that racist intent, conditional empathy, and stereotypical

representations caused readers to lack the imagination possible to perceive Rue as Black (Holmes, 2012; Sastry, 2012; Stewart, 2012). However, one concept that has not received enough attention is how readers inscribed racial Whiteness onto a character who is explicitly described as a character of color. The purpose of this analysis, then, is to examine Rue's characterization in the novel *The Hunger Games* and to investigate the underlying influences that could have made Rue, as a portrayal of Black girlhood, radically alien to the readers' spheres of knowledge.

I use this examination as an opportunity not only to analyze a literary portrayal of a young Black girl but also to investigate how Black girl representations in literature impact the lives of the real Black girls who attend various middle schools across the country. Specifically, by using critical discourse analysis (CDA) and systemic functional linguistics (SFL), I acknowledge how S. Collins's portrayal of Rue as an ordinary, 12-year-old Black girl, whose characterization did not align with Black girl stereotypes, created an increased level of alterity for some readers.

I begin this analysis by describing CDA and stereotypes about Black women that lead to the early adultification of Black girls and by acknowledging how CDA can be used to deconstruct discourse that affects the reification of deficit labeling. I then conduct a microanalysis of *The Hunger Games* using SFL to examine how Rue's character is constructed in the text. Next, I connect the microanalysis of the book to the macro constructions of Black girl stereotypes by situating Rue as a non-stereotypical depiction of Black girlhood, which created a space of alterity to which readers responded. I then consider the implications of the misinterpretations by aligning the negative responses to Rue's on-screen character representation with the socioemotional violence often enacted against real Black girls. Last, I discuss the ways in which middle school students and teachers can apply the analytical methods used in this article to examine more accurately and effectively Black girl representations in various texts beyond *The Hunger Games*. To support my analysis, I focused on the following research questions:

1. *How is Rue characterized in the first* Hunger Games *novel?*
2. *How does the characterization of Rue defy stereotypical portrayals of Black girls?*
3. *What are the implications of critically examining sites of alterity in texts?*

Conceptual Framework

Negative stereotypes that define Black women as lascivious, asexual, angry, and servile have been activated so frequently that they are often considered natural, normal, and inevita-

ble (P. Collins, 2002; West, 2008). Although scholars have worked to dismantle these oppressive characterizations in favor of a more nuanced vision of Black womanhood (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010), the negative presentation of Black female existence is so deeply ingrained in American culture that the phantoms of negative stereotypes continue to haunt various books, magazines, music videos, and films. Just a few examples of this extensive phenomenon have been identified in characters such as Melinda in the movie *Acrimony* (Bowen, 2018), Zya in the book *Supreme Clientele* (Gibson, 2016), and Karlie Redd on the reality television franchise *Love and Hip Hop* (Lundy, 2018).

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In fact, racist public discourse includes these stereotypic apparitions so often that they have been explicitly named. The *jezebel* is hypersexualized, naturally promiscuous, and sexually deviant; the *sapphire* is loud, rude, malicious, overbearing, and angry; the *mammy* is desexualized and so loyal she cares more for her masters than she does for herself; and the *magical Negro* is only present to support, uplift, and provide wisdom to the White protagonist (Harris, 2015; Okorafor, 2004; Washington & Washington, 2015). Of course, there are numerous other categorizations as well as transformations of the classic tropes, including the *welfare mother*, the *breeder*, the *matriarch*, and the *gold digger*. The large number of these classifications suggests the predominance of tropes used to constrict Black women's identities.

The stereotypes do not classify only adult women, however. Various scholars have argued that society's perception of Black girls is also misinformed by stereotypical depictions that create deleterious restrictions on and glaring misrepresentations of Black girl identities (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016). These distortions of Black girlhood create a form of age compression, in which the young girls are likened more to adults than children, rendering Black girlhood interchangeable with Black womanhood (Morris, 2016). Due to this compression and misrepresentation, Black girls are often seen as less innocent than their White peers. Specifically, a study

conducted by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017) found that Black girls between the ages of 5 and 14 were perceived to be more independent, know more about adult topics and sex, and require less nurturing, protection, support, and comfort than White girls.

Each of these perceptions directly correlates to the stereotypical tropes: Mammies provide nurturing and support to everyone but themselves; jezebels are cognizant of adult topics and sex because of their hypersexualization; sapphires need less nurturing and comfort because of their intrinsic independence and overbearing presence; and magical Negroes need no support at all because they exist to support others. Thus, the racialized bodies of young, elementary to middle school–aged Black girls are seen less as children and more as adults, with hegemonic, stereotypical specters consistently framing and bounding perceptions of their identities.

Because stereotypes of Black girls are often seen as natural, normal, and inevitable, it is necessary to disrupt the stereotypical boundaries by examining texts and investigating their connections to larger societal discourse. One way to achieve this disruption is through CDA. Theorists using this type of analysis adhere to the belief that every utterance is simultaneously dialogic and social, suggesting a continual interdependence that chains every text to the wider social practices that affect the creation, distribution, and consumption of texts (Fairclough, 1993; Rogers, 2003). In other words, no text exists outside of society; instead, each text has an integral part in mirroring, constructing, constituting, reifying, and dismantling social identities and relations (Fairclough, 1993). Yet, because the connecting chains of discourse are embedded covertly in the texts that readers consume, researchers use CDA to illuminate the way that hegemony and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted in text (van Dijk, 2003). This goal makes CDA a useful frame for analyzing how stereotypes of Black girlhood are reified or dismantled in *The Hunger Games*, particularly because it assists in uncovering dominant ideologies hidden in a refuge of normalcy.

Microanalysis of Rue's Characterization

Rospide and Sorlin (2015) contended that alterity is a process of defamiliarization that attempts to conceptualize the relationship between language and reality, so it was essential to use a language-focused tool for the microanalysis. I relied on SFL, a systematic approach to language and usage that can assist researchers in analyzing how various strands of meaning are expressed in text and talk (Eggins, 2004). This system works to elucidate how words and phrases connect to create meaning, moving beyond the

words themselves and focalizing on the meaning created. In other words, SFL builds on traditional conceptions of grammar, but instead of focusing on a more prescriptive compartmentalization of words, this linguistics approach focuses on how language functions in the text—what language does and how language does it.

To focus on characterization, I relied on the three aspects of SFL applicable to character analysis—appraisal, ideation, and identification (Martin & Rose, 2003). Instead of analyzing every clause in the book, however, I selected pages from the novel that were relevant to the study (van Dijk, 2001) by locating passages that included interactions with or discussions of Rue. I then eliminated sections referencing Rue after she died because her death represents the elimination of innocence (Thomas, in press), the innocence that the Twitter responders connected to Whiteness. The eliminations left approximately 85 pages to be examined for the identification, ideation, and appraisal microanalysis of Rue's character, which is almost one quarter of the novel. In the following three sections, I will elaborate on each of these aspects as I connect them to specific instantiations related to Rue in *The Hunger Games*.

IDENTIFICATION

Identification can be used to pinpoint when and where a character is introduced and to observe how the character is used or abandoned throughout the text (Martin & Rose, 2003). By evaluating this characterization, researchers can examine power relationships and analyze how a character is viewed by the author, other characters, or society in general (Simmons, 2016). To track Rue's

identification throughout the text, I analyzed passages for every instance in which Rue was mentioned by name (*Rue*), pronoun (e.g., *she/we*), or descriptor (e.g., *little bird*). Each case was then categorized into sections to determine whether Rue was identified by herself, represented with Katniss, or recognized as a part of her district. Additionally, I placed descriptors in a category to identify which words were used to characterize Rue outside of proper nouns, common nouns, and pronouns. Table 1 presents the identification tracking of Rue along with a numerical value in parentheses to represent the number of times each term was used to describe the character.

Identification data show that Rue was referenced on her own approximately 79% of the time. S. Collins used the pronoun *she* and Rue's name most often in identifying her, although *she* was used 4% more often than Rue's formal name. Also, Rue was mentioned four times more in connection with Katniss than she was mentioned in connection with her home district. This information is consistent with first-person narratives, where the protagonist constantly identifies other characters to avoid confusion about which characters are speaking or acting in the text. Additionally, the column representing synonyms and descriptors shows characteristics associated with Rue. Words such as *shadow*, *wisp/wispy*, and *bird* show that Rue is small, unassuming, and closer to phantasm than concrete reality, while words like *child*, *young girl*, *little girl*, and *the twelve-year-old* suggest Rue's youth and innocence. However, although it is important to track how a character is named throughout a text, it is also important to identify how that character acts as the text progresses.

TABLE 1
Identification Tracking of Rue

On Her Own	With Katniss	With Her District	Descriptors
she (97)	we (25)	District 11 (10)	shadow (2)
Rue (85)	us (9)		little girl (1)
her—possessive (43)	our (6)		bird (1)
her (30)			small, yellow flower (1)
I (25)			child (3)
Rue's (4)			the twelve-year-old (1)
me (2)			magical wisp of a tribute (1)
myself (1)			young girl (2)
yourself (1)			wispy child (1)
your—possessive (1)			ally (4)
			agriculture (1)
			oldest of six kids (1)
			a baby animal (1)
			Mockingjay (1)
			Prim (8)
APPROXIMATE TOTALS			
289 (78.5%)	40 (10.9%)	10 (2.7%)	29 (7.9%)

IDEATION

Ideation is concerned with how specific sentence processes, or verbs, assist in creating a picture of people or things. Therefore, it focuses on the kinds of activities participants in the text undertake as well as how these activities are described and classified (Martin & Rose, 2003). To assist researchers in identifying how participants are being created through sentence elements, Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, and Yallop (2003) provided a way to categorize the processes in a text. The categories they suggested are as follows: material (action verbs—e.g., *given*, *move*); behavioral (physiological verbs—e.g., *decided*, *noticed*); mental (psychological verbs—e.g., *imagine*, *realize*); verbal (to denote speech—e.g., *say*, *whispered*); and relational (linking verbs—e.g., *is*, *was*, *seems*). Each of these processes assists in helping readers to cognize characters based on what they do, how they do it, and how they are described within the text.

For this part of the analysis, I examined the sentences within the 85 pages of analysis and identified 437 collective independent and subordinate clauses. I then eliminated clauses that did not include Katniss or Rue as a direct or implied subject or object to ensure the focus was on the description of these characters within the text. After this elimination, there were 331 clauses left for analysis; however, because I identified clauses with both Rue and Katniss as participants, some processes were counted doubly—once for each character. This raised the number of available clauses to 347, and the results of this analysis are displayed in Table 2.

Based on the data, there were more material processes than any other process forms. Rue acted more than 50% of the time, while Katniss acted just under 50% of the time. However, Katniss had more mental and behavioral processes, with mental processes attributed to

TABLE 2
Distribution of Process Types With Percentages

Process Types	Rue Total	Katniss Total	Total Number
Material Processes ex. *moved*	83 (53.5%)	72 (46.5%)	155
Behavioral Processes ex. *noticed*	4 (40%)	6 (60%)	10
Mental Processes ex. *imagined*	8 (17.8%)	37 (82.2%)	45
Verbal Processes ex. *said*	48 (49.5%)	49 (51.5%)	97
Relational Processes ex. *was*	25 (62.5%)	15 (37.5%)	40
TOTAL	168 (48.4%)	179 (51.6%)	347

Katniss over four times more than Rue, resulting in a 20% gap between the behavioral processes of the two characters. These traits are consistent with the first-person narrative genre form because the source from which the reader gets information is Katniss. It would be inconsistent with the point of view for the main character to define all actions or for the secondary character's thoughts and feelings to be prominent when the narration is supposed to be from inside the protagonist's head.

Verbal processes accounted for 28% of the analyzed clauses and showed equal turn-taking between Katniss and Rue, with Rue speaking just over 49% of the time and Katniss speaking just under 51% of the time. Additionally, approximately 12% of the clauses were categorized as relational processes, with Rue being described well over 50% of the time. Relational processes further identified Rue by classifying her as a child who was shy, slender, graceful, clever, and caring, aligning with the descriptors present in the identification analysis.

APPRAISAL

Appraisal provides a way for researchers to analyze the interpersonal meanings within a text because it is concerned with people's perceptions (judgment) and people's feelings (affect). Therefore, researchers using this strand of analysis can "explore how readers are being aligned rhetorically as a text unfolds" (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 27). In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is the source of the judgments and feelings, so it is impossible to know if these expressions are the direct feelings and judgments of the author or if they are separated from the author through the creation of a character. However, Katniss does provide direct and indirect emotions and judgments of Rue, so this function must be used in an analysis of the character.

While collecting data for the ideation and identification analyses, I noticed how often Rue was compared with Prim, Katniss's younger sister. This comparison was important because S. Collins (2008) describes Prim as having "light hair and blue eyes" (p. 9), attributes that stand in stark contrast to Rue's "dark eyes and satiny brown skin" (p. 98). Based on this finding, I began gathering quotes for an appraisal analysis of specific clauses in which Katniss connects Rue and Prim. To collect appraisal data, I located all clauses that described Prim's character before Rue was introduced in the novel in order to provide context for the comparison. I then found all quotes that connected Rue to Prim and separated the phrases into appraisal categories specifically related to affect and judgment. Exemplars of the appraisal data are included in Table 3.

The affective portion of the appraisal analysis showed that the words and phrases used to compare Rue to Prim were usually connected to negative emotions of fear, sadness,

pity, and loss. Although positive emotions were attributed to Rue throughout the text, when Rue is directly connected to Prim, positive emotions were not often applied. Judgments in the form of criticism of Rue's ability to survive in the games because of her stature, age, and innocence were more common. Katniss's ability to protect Rue from her possible fate was criticized, as was the government entity that held the games and required the deaths of children in the first place. In other words, because Rue reminded Katniss of Prim and because Katniss had assumed the role of Rue's pseudo older sibling, Katniss showed concern over Rue's safety and ability to survive. She cared for Rue as she would have cared for her real sister, Prim.

From Micro- to Macroanalysis

The complexity and difference inherent in young Black girlhood is neither new nor an anomalous singular occurrence (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). However, common stereotypes of hypersexuality, servility, hostility, and dispensability typecast Black women and girls, demonizing and dehumanizing them in the process (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Additionally, these confining tropes further add to society's adultification of Black girls which robs them of the innocence and complexity that is automatically given to their White peers (Epstein et al., 2017). Thus, because socially constructed perceptions of Black girlhood often represent monolithic and stereotypical portrayals, a young Black girl who is independent, innocent, and childlike exists beyond the boundaries of common representation. Instead, this young Black girl exists in a space of alterity for various members of society.

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outside of common mainstream depictions but also breaks the confines of liminal childhood that position Black girls as simultaneously adult and child (Ocen, 2015). Therefore, when Amandla Stenberg was cast as Rue, the level of alterity was too great for some readers to fathom because the social experience of visualizing Black girl innocence was so far removed from their spheres of knowledge that they could not make the connection even though details were explicitly given in the early sections of the novel.

RUE VS. THE SAPPHIRE

The microanalysis of ideation, identification, and appraisal strands of SFL provides a linguistic base to fortify this position because each controlling image of Black girlhood was debunked by the author's use of language to characterize Rue. For example, the verbal processes showed equal turn-taking between Katniss and Rue, creating the perception that no character significantly dominated the interactions. This turn-taking is shown in the brief excerpt below:

TABLE 3
Rue Appraisal Analysis

Quote	Affect	Judgment
She has dark brown skin and eyes, but other than that, she's very like **Prim** in size and demeanor. (p. 45)	The connection to Prim shows feelings of sadness and pity for the child.	Based on initial comments about Prim's character, Rue seems personable and innocent, which is a judgment on her character.
I **bit my lip**…Rue, **Primrose**. Neither of them could tip the scale at **seventy pounds soaking wet**. (p. 99)	The connection to Prim as well as the mention of her weight shows feelings of sadness and disbelief that this small child could be chosen.	The comment about Rue's weight is an implied judgment on Rue's ability to survive the games as well as a condemnation of the use of young children in the games.
Because she's a **survivor**, and I **trust** her, and why not admit it? She reminds me of **Prim**. (p. 201)	The connection to Prim shows feelings of sadness, but also feelings of empathy and respect for Rue.	There is a direct judgment on Rue as a survivor. She is also viewed as someone to be trusted.
…feeling somehow **worried**. About Rue being killed, and the two of us being **left for last**, about leaving Rue **alone**, about **Prim** alone at home… (p. 213)	A feeling of worry is a direct emotion about the survival of Rue. Fear is implied in her comment about both of them being left for last because one would have to kill the other.	The criticism here is not on Rue, but on Katniss leaving Prim alone with no one to care for her. Additionally, as Rue's pseudo older sister, Katniss is judging her ability to kill Rue if they both survive until the end.

Rue: "Do you get all the coal you want?"

Katniss: "No," I answer. "Just what we buy and whatever we track in on our boots."

Rue: "They feed us a bit extra during harvest, so that people can keep going longer," says Rue.

Katniss: "Don't you have to be in school?" I ask.

Rue: "Not during harvest. Everyone works then," says Rue. (p. 203)

Here, Rue and Katniss participated jointly in speaking, with both characters taking part in asking questions and answering them. Neither character controlled the verbal interaction, and the use of interrogative and declarative statements, rather than imperative ones, showed a mutual respect in speech. Additionally, although she was referred to as her own person throughout the identification analysis, Rue used the pronoun *I* to indicate herself less than 9% of the time, even though she spoke an equal number of times in the text and had the ability to insert herself as much as Katniss did during conversation. Based on these findings, Rue does not fit the mold of the sapphire because she was not domineering, overbearing, angry, loud, or rude. Instead, she was quiet, polite, and reserved.

RUE VS. THE JEZEBEL

To combat the stereotype of the jezebel, it is best to look at the relational processes, identification descriptors, and appraisal connections to Prim. For instance, throughout the text, Rue was described as a small, 12-year-old girl who looked about 10, a child who never should have been brought into the games in the first place. She was called a young girl, a wispy child, and a shadow, traits that denoted her childlike nature and her fragility. Each of these descriptors suggested that Rue was innocent and uncorrupted, not hypersexualized. The following passage is another example of the negation.

Up close she looks about ten. She has bright, dark eyes, and satiny brown skin and stands tilted up on her toes with her arms slightly extended to her sides, as if ready to take wing at the slightest sound. It's impossible not to think of a bird. (pp. 98–99)

In this excerpt, Rue was not defined by adult woman characteristics; in fact, she was shown to possess qualities that are usually attributed to small girls (i.e., "looks about ten"; "impossible not to think of a bird"). The comparison to Rue's birdlike nature was representative of agility and grace, and her description as a 12-year-old girl who looked 10 showed how young she appeared in comparison to other girls her age. Additionally, Katniss made judgments and emotional connections to Rue based on her association with Prim and her position as Katniss's pseudo younger sister. All of this information negates the overly sexual nature of the jezebel because characters who embody that stereotype usually lack the innocence and childlike nature that was depicted in Rue's characterization.

RUE VS. THE MAMMY

The mammy stereotype is discredited because although Rue was shown as caring when it came to Katniss, she was not overly concerned with Katniss's well-being; she did not prioritize Katniss's welfare over her own. Rue was an animate participant in the story; she was not acted upon by other characters. As shown in Table 2 on process data distribution, Rue had more material processes than Katniss, which means that she was more active in her role, but her actions were not solely prompted by Katniss. The following excerpt is an example of this.

I [Katniss] pause for a moment, to gather my courage. Rue has given specific instructions on how to reach the best spying place near the lake from this point…. I make it to the copse Rue has told me about and again have to admire her cleverness. (pp. 214–215)

In this passage, Katniss was following instructions given by Rue and mentioned her intelligence. This interaction suggests that Rue was not following orders from Katniss and that the pair had come up with a plan together. Also, Rue did not take on the dangerous feat by herself in an effort to save Katniss from dying; the work was placed on both characters, proving that Rue wanted to survive, too. Rue only needed an ally to assist in her survival—just as the other tributes did when they allied together to increase their chances of living.

RUE VS. THE MAGICAL NEGRO

The magical Negro stereotype is negated as Rue does not fit within the features commonly associated with this trope. Ideational processes suggest that she was not plot fodder to move the story forward, for she was an active, agentic being who had her own story that was important to the plot of the novel. Additionally, the identification descriptors show that she was young and slight, but there was no indication of supreme wisdom or an overzealous need for Rue to support and uplift Katniss. Moreover, appraisal analysis provides the connection between Rue and Prim, showing that Katniss saw Rue as a pseudo sister who had taken Prim's place as Katniss competed in the games. So, Katniss protected and assisted Rue just as much as Rue helped Katniss. Essentially, Rue was not

included as an auxiliary character whose purpose in the story was to help Katniss throughout the novel. In fact, Rue was situated as a major character, and the revolution of Panem started with Rue, not with Katniss (Garcia & Haddix, 2014; Thomas, in press).

The negation of the magical Negro stereotype is also shown in the following excerpt:

> Caesar's very sweet with her, complimenting her seven in training, an excellent score for one so small. When he asks her what her greatest strength in the arena will be, she doesn't hesitate. "I'm very hard to catch," she says in a tremulous voice. "And if they can't catch me, they can't kill me. So, don't count me out." (p. 126)

In this passage, Rue showed that one of her main goals was survival. She may have been small, but she knew that she could evade the other tributes who attempted to kill her. She did not possess magical or spiritual powers, but she still earned a 7 out of 12 in training for her slingshot skills and climbing prowess. These strengths were not tied to the future of a White character; instead, the skills would be used to keep Rue safe, to ensure that she could survive for as long as possible in the Hunger Games. Furthermore, she used her intelligence to keep her strengths hidden from the other tributes, providing an elusive response to the reporter's question. This tactic suggests her intelligence, her textured background story, and her existence beyond Katniss.

CONNECTING DISCOURSES

Essentially, the microanalysis of *The Hunger Games* connected to the macroanalysis of stereotypes about Black girls creates a foundation to explore why some readers believed Rue to be White. Particularly, Fairclough (2003) contended that texts assume and create implicit interpretative positions for subjects who are supposed to be capable of using presuppositions created from their prior knowledge to make connections across diverse elements of texts and to generate logical interpretations. These interpretations are not only influenced by the intertextual nature of discourse, but interpreters also have "particular accumulated social experiences…with resources variously oriented to the multiple dimensions of social life" that affect how they interpret a text (p. 136). These claims suggest that consumers of discourse will naturally make intertextual connections to other modes of discourse and to society as a whole, whether they know it or not.

Readers' social experiences, often imbued with visual and textual references of Black girls who do not possess innocent and childlike qualities, could create an implicit foundation for reading biases that affects how they

interpret the text. Specifically, if readers are supposed to create intertextual connections based on prior knowledge, then it would be difficult to imagine Rue as Black because the presuppositions attached to Black girlhood are often haunted by negative tropes that adultify Black girls, positioning them as lascivious, overbearing, servile, or angry. Goodness, beauty, truth, and innocence are often racialized as White in various texts (Thomas, in press); so, to imagine Rue as a young, innocent, clever, childlike, caring, survival-driven Black female character exists beyond common depictions. Thus, with the readers who commented on Twitter, a space of defamiliarization was created, and instead of "seeing" Rue's character as she was written on the page, they created a more manageable racial designation, such as a cute, White, innocent blond girl who possibly looked "like a younger Dakota Fanning."

Implications

Although any text can be analyzed using a similar method of micro- and macroanalysis, it is essential to note science fiction's role in bringing about this level of alterity. Particularly, a major goal of science fiction is to push beyond the known and disrupt common ideologies that bound individually and societally constructed perceptions of people, places, and concepts (McKitterick, 2015). In attempting to represent new ways of thinking about people and the world, science fiction authors endeavor to destabilize and sometimes collapse current belief systems. However, an author's attempts at destabilization may not be accepted by the reader. Readers are not blank slates reacting to a ready-made message, for they are active, drawing on "elements in…past experience—external reference, internal response—that have become linked with the verbal symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 11). In other words, the disruption of negative responses to alterity will require more than just an author's attempts to discuss the unfamiliar. It will require a disruption that changes the entire system of negativity that confines Black girl identities and limits their access to childhood and innocence.

The adultification of Black girls provides a base to dehumanize them, robs them of their childhood, contributes to the narrative that their transgressions are intentional, eliminates the idea that they are learning and growing, and creates a viewpoint that situates them as undeserving of love and care (Epstein et al., 2017). These repercussions of adultification are shown explicitly in the Twitter users' responses to Rue's casting. For instance, when readers assumed Rue was a young, blond White girl, she needed and deserved protection, nurturing, support, and comfort. She warranted their empathy. However, upon seeing the book adapted to film, some readers refused to accept the challenge to expand their spheres of knowledge

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to grasp an unbounded representation of Black girl childhood. This response to alterity resulted in readers attacking not only the fictional character, but also the real 13-year-old Black girl who portrayed her. This reaction should be a cause for concern, especially for elementary and middle school teachers and children's literature researchers, because it represents much more than a racial limit of the imagination. Instead, the responses to Rue's fictional characterization had real-world repercussions.

These implications suggest a need to destabilize societally constructed perceptions that confine the identities of Black female characters because these characters can affect how real Black girls are labeled. This connection is important to note because "the ways in which societies categorize and build identities for their members is a fundamental aspect of how they work, how power relations are imposed and exercised, [and] how societies are reproduced and changed" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168). What this means is that the ways in which characters are created and interpreted can have a great impact on the dismantling or reification of hegemonic power relations and oppressive identity stereotypes that affect the real people being characterized through discourse.

Black girls' innocence and childhood is questioned as soon as they enter the education system because stereotypical specters made real in dominant discourse consistently hover over them. These tropes stalk Black girls throughout their young lives to the point where their existence is questioned ("Why is Rue a little black girl?"), their beauty is maligned ("some ugly little girl with nappy add [sic] hair"), and their pain is viewed as inconsequential ("when I found out rue was black her death wasn't as sad"). Sadly, these dominant depictions of fictional Black girlhood have added to the societal narrative that brutalizes and discriminates against real Black girls. This violence manifests as the adultification of Black girlhood that typecasts them as loud, angry, lascivious, servile, and expendable.

Moreover, as adultification remains a staple in the construction of Black girl identities, it establishes a base to insist upon harsher punishments, fewer leadership and mentorship opportunities, greater use of physical force, and numerous barriers to their academic success (Sealey-Ruiz, 2016). Thus, the Twitter users' responses to Rue exist as part of a larger narrative of misogynoir (Bailey, 2010)— that is, a narrative of violence, mistreatment, and erasure specifically aimed at Black women and girls.

Without challenging the space of alterity, society could continue to reproduce consumers of text who inherit the stereotypical categorizations and replicate this negative cycle, continuously enacting verbal, psychological, and sometimes physical violence against Black girls. However, although the challenge is essential, readers may not automatically accept the task. Readers' discourse practices are shaped by social structures and power relations that go beyond mere meaning making (Fairclough, 2003), which means that their views of the world and of the people in this world are biased, often unconsciously. Their interpretations of Black girls are bolstered by numerous monolithic portrayals, while diverse, non-stereotypical depictions are few. Therefore, readers may need assistance in moving beyond restrictive categories that create high levels of alterity.

In order to begin examining spaces of alterity, students and teachers can use CDA and SFL to begin assessing larger societal beliefs and how they systematically affect readers' interpretation of texts. If covert ideologies that bind society's constructions of identity are unearthed, then students can learn to recognize how the structures impact their beliefs. They can begin to think critically about the discourses they ingest and discover ways to incorporate new knowledge into their current spheres of comprehension. Specifically, students can use SFL to analyze how a text positions readers to categorize a character on the micro level, focusing on what the language does to create a character and how language maintains this characterization throughout the text.

For instance, students can conduct an identification analysis of a Black female character, focusing on how she is mentioned and abandoned throughout the text. They can monitor what nouns, pronouns, and adjectives are used to describe her in order to analyze how she is viewed by the author, other characters, and society. Students can also conduct ideation analyses to examine the activities of the character. They can monitor how she speaks, acts, thinks, behaves, and exists in order to scrutinize the portrait of the character that the author creates. Furthermore, students can conduct appraisal analyses to determine how the Black female character is judged by the author or other characters. They can observe whether she is tied to positive or negative judgments or emotions throughout the text. This type of

analysis will assist them in exploring how they are being aligned rhetorically to perceive the Black female character as the text unfolds.

After students conduct a microanalysis, they can use CDA to examine intertextual connections between the text and society, acknowledging the text's role in mirroring, constructing, constituting, reifying, and dismantling social identities. To do this, students can examine the Black girl stereotypes mentioned in this article as well as others that exist in society and determine whether the tropes are present in the character's textual representation. They can also investigate how Black girls are represented in the media, how Black girls are treated in their schools, and how Black girls are depicted in other texts they consume.

Educators can assist students in this step by extending the conversation beyond the text to support students in seeing the larger impact of the categories that confine Black girl identities, moving students from a microanalysis of the text to a macroanalysis of hegemonic systems that exist within the world. In this way, students not only assess how language positions them as readers, but they also can observe how the world positions them to read a text and how society restricts Black girls to monolithic roles.

By analyzing texts using SFL and CDA, students may be able to find numerous ways to move beyond levels of alterity that make reading about nuanced Black girlhood an unfamiliar space. In fact, they can break the confines that bound the unfamiliar territory of Black girl innocence and childhood, disrupting the cycle and eliminating that space of alterity altogether. As more novels and films include more diverse characters, there will be more spaces of alterity to examine, so teachers and students will need to use a plethora of critical literacy tools in the dissection of systems that bound Black girlhood. The combination of CDA and SFL is just one more tool they can use.

Conclusion

My analysis of Rue is not representative of every Black girl character portrayed in literature, for some novels will produce more stereotypical depictions of racially diverse characters and others will attempt to show diverse, complex characters, avoiding clichéd generalizations. Additionally, this analysis does not exist to vilify Black girls who are loud, angry, submissive, or sexual. Instead, this analysis is meant to speak in solidarity with researchers who acknowledge that Black girlhood is multiple, historical, collaborative, intellectual, political, critical, and tied to identities (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016). It is an attempt to recognize that Black girls can be "both/and" in terms of their identities, instead of monolithic. It is an effort to respond to calls for literacy researchers to provide viewpoints that do not consistently highlight pregnancy, sexuality, and aggression, among other deficit concerns, in their research about Black girls (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Nuanced Black girlhood should not be unfamiliar to readers, specifically, or society, in general.

Science fiction texts like *The Hunger Games* push readers beyond the boundaries of comfortability because of the genre's inherent goal to grasp alterity. In other words, science fiction creates sites of difference that can assist readers in examining society, the text, and themselves. S. Collins's (2008) description of Rue as small, childlike, and in need of protection aligns more closely with American conceptions of White childhood because society has decided who can and cannot be innocent, and according to hegemonic implicit discourses, Black girls are sparingly associated with innocence (Thomas, in press). However, students, educators, and researchers can use the genre of science fiction as well as CDA and SFL to connect micro- and macro-level discourses in an effort to challenge the embedded hegemonic tropes that forbid the inscription of innocence on Black girls. Possibly, by analyzing text in this way, all readers will one day be able to perceive that a young girl can be childlike, innocent, and Black. ▫

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