

VIOLENCE IN POP-CULTURE MEDIA AND THE HUNGER GAMES AS A PRIME ARTIFACT

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This paper uses the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology to analyze the meanings conveyed in relation to violence in Suzanne Collins' popular novel The Hunger Games and its film. As a representational popular-culture artifact marketed to young adults and teens, it is a primary example for the exposure of this age group to the levels of violence regularly displayed in contemporary popular media. This analysis seeks to critique the assertion that the types of violent exposure in the novel and the film are possibly inappropriate for the audience targeted. A new wave of attention and awareness on the part of producers of popular media and people of contemporary society alike is necessary.

Keywords: violence, pop-culture, Hunger Games, desensitization, children, parenting

The impact of two of contemporary pop culture's most consumed current artifacts; Suzanne Collins' novel *The Hunger Games*, and its film adaptation have been monumental. Both artifacts are marketed to the audience often referred to as young adult, but the content in both the film and the novel could be argued to be inappropriate for such audiences. There are distinct references to death, dismemberment, and gladiator-style fighting that expose the nature of contemporary popular culture and the texts it is producing.

The *Hunger Games* novel has amassed a large amount of controversy in media circles. Most articles are quick to cite Dr. Michael Rich, who claims that the movie and the book are entirely different. According to Nina Metz of *The Chicago Tribune*, "...what a child is able to envision is limited to the boundaries of his or her imagination. 'But when you put an image or an idea into a movie, someone else has translated that.' And quite suddenly, the picture a child has created in their mind is augmented by the more vivid and sophisticated imaginations of savvy Hollywood filmmakers" (Betz, 2012). The idea is that the book is reliant upon the child's imagination on an individual level and the interpretation

varies. The film, on the other hand is created from another's imagination. Therefore, the imagery is interpreted on the creator's level. Since in this case, the book was extremely graphic and violent, the film would therefore be even more vividly graphic for the viewer. The issue with this is that if the book was gory, then the film should likely not be rated PG-13 or 12A.

A parenting guide to movies is provided by a site called Parent Preview. The site watches popular texts and then grades the text on certain aspects that the people might be concerned about. The film *The Hunger Games* received a D+ for violence. According to the site, a D means, "Excessive violence deemed gratuitous, unnecessary, or which serves only as an entertainment attraction. Violence is used without any consideration for non-violent conflict resolution. Explicit scenes of death, destruction, injuries or mutilation would also be assigned this grade" (Parent Previews.com, 2012). A D+ means this is the general consensus, but that the film is not quite this terrible. C ratings include much of the same aspects; however, "Some justification in preserving life, liberty, or fundamental laws of society or an attempt to solve a situation through reasonable negotiation or conflict resolution must be evident" (Parent Previews.com, 2012).

The film modeled after the popular book, *The Hunger Games* received a PG-13 and 12A rating. Ratings are a major component of debates that are currently circulating in academic and political arenas alike. Recent studies have noted that a phenomenon called *ratings creep*, coined by Johnson & Yokota (2004, as cited by Strain, 2010) may be a real issue to be studied further. The hypothesis suggests that ratings have become more lax as time goes on for the MPAA. Strain (2010) posits that the ratings are indeed becoming more likely to allow certain behaviors and scenes to be rated with a PG-13 whereas the same content would have warranted an R rating just ten years ago. (2010).

Further, Potts and Belden (2009) devised their own study to test the hypothesis and confirmed that the ratings were indeed being subjected to a change in content-driven restraints that are in place to inhibit the consumption by children of movies with violence. They found, "Collective results of the present study and those of Thompson and Yokota confirm that American children are exposed to more mature content, most notably violence, sexuality, adult language, and substance use, in today's G, PG, and PG-13 movies than they were only a few years ago" (p. 14). Considering the UK granted the film a 12A rating, this phenomenon could be occurring internationally. The most important concept to take from this controversy is that kids are consuming it on a grand scale, and in order to understand the relationship between violent content consumed and the reactions from the young adult cognitive mind, an analysis of the actual content must be performed. This is one way to get to the actual heart of the argument; is *The Hunger Games* providing a spectacle of human violence and marketing it to a young audience? Also, what are the implications of allowing the younger audience to be exposed to it, and is there a real consequence to being exposed when one is forming a social self, as teens and pre-teens are trying to do?

The novel is the prevalent text for this discussion and analysis, but the film, as a related text will also be considered. An analysis will be conducted to identify where the overlap is and how the evidence exemplifies the use of violence as a screen by which the audience is exposed to the levels and effects of the violent artifacts that make up the whole. In the later discussion, the theories that have been presented in the introduction will be used to interpret the text using the critical discourse analysis method.

The term *text* is referred to often in this paper and should be defined first. A text is any presented object for consumption that can be interpreted to discover meaning from its many parts or *artifacts* which make up its whole (Foss, 2004). The texts in this discussion

then, are the novel, *The Hunger Games*, and the film sharing this name that has recently been presented by director Gary Ross and produced by Nina Jacobson and Jon Kilik. Throughout this paper, this group will be called *the filmmakers* for convenience.

There are several functions of this analysis that will be introduced, studied, and discussed in depth to fortify the overall thesis. The violent content in the novel and film is the main problem that will be addressed here, with particular attention being paid to the nature of the rhetorical and especially the cultural discourse of the content and artifacts within the two texts discussed. The questions to be analyzed and answered in this paper are as follows: First, is the level of violence and how it is presented in the book something parents should be alarmed about if their children between the ages of 11 and 17 are reading it? According to Joni Bodart from Scholastic, the book's target readership group is between the sixth and eighth grades, but is compared to *Twilight's* audience, which includes teens. This means the target age group communicated by a children's book publisher is situated between 11 and 13 years. Second, is the lens through which violence in its many forms in the book and the film are presented appropriate for children? Finally, is the metaphorical nature of the text's overall message something that should be introduced to the leaders of tomorrow, before they actually experience the world as adults?

As with any critical discourse analysis, the author of this paper does have some biases that should be disclosed. First, I am a middle-class, white, thirty-something, mother of two young children. However, that context helps actualize my assumptions that violence presented by popular media does not cause detriment to the masses in general, while allowing insight to evidence that marketing *The Hunger Games* to a young adult audience may have some negative connotations and should be considered as a cause for concern in Western society.

VIOLENCE AND THE CURRENT DEBATE

Violence in the media and its impact on children and their cognitive processes engenders debate within academic and scientific arenas. Joanne Cantor (2002), a scholar of note on violence and exposure contends, "Today's youth have greater opportunities for desensitization to media violence than ever before. We now have so many television channels, so many movies on video, and so many video-, computer-, and Internet-based games available, that media-violence aficionados have a virtually limitless supply and can play intensely gruesome images over and over, often in the privacy of their own bedrooms" (p. 2). The effects violence has on the impressionable ages of the young adult group is an earnest concern to popular culture analysis as the reach and access of media texts are introduced in the news, books, films, the internet, and television (2008).

One reason for this phenomenon of violent content assisting with the popularity of mainstream texts is posited that consumerism is behind the "ratings creep" currently being enacted on American pop-culture texts, stating "...the MPAA, an organization whose primary function is to maximize the financial success of motion pictures... may have intentionally invoked guidelines that resulted in increased frequency of assignments of unrestricted ratings, especially PG-13 ratings, to movies with adult content that would have received R ratings in previous years" (p. 15). If this is a realistic summation of the contemporary guidelines in young adult and teen exposure to violent acts in movies, and in particular, *The Hunger Games*, there is real cause for societal alarm. (2009).

Social forming in children. Bandura, Ross, Ross & Ross postulated that violence in mediated communication could possibly produce a real-life reaction wherein aggressive behavior is mimicked because the subject has been exposed and while forming the social self,

reacted to that exposure by emulating a behavior (Bandura et al, 1963). Lasch-Quinn (2003) would have the population of contemporary Western society recognize that the world has changed, and with it, ushered in by the manipulative tactics of advertisers and marketing campaigns, a perfunctory and inevitable downsizing in sensitivity and self-image that is healthy for the development of America's children. Lasch-Quinn writes that "One of the glaring effects of...desensitization to violence is the tendency to objectify human beings-to see them not as living, breathing, persons...but as replaceable objects" (p. 50). Further, she posits that the day-to-day exposure to violence in popular media produces a twisted mixture of self-loathing, fear, and aggressive reactions which young people feel can be tempered or even abolished through consumerism by "...getting customers to scrutinize themselves ruthlessly and measure themselves against a manufactured image" (p. 53).

Katniss, the main character of Collins' *The Hunger Games*, is by default a role-model character for young women, simply because of the popularity of the novel and as such holds a very real power in just 'being' because she is the object for consumption. Her character provides the attitude, the reactivity, and the desensitization to violence that inspires young people to push themselves to reflect a toughness that combats the fear and a negative self-image that society promotes them to feel.

Instinctual aggression theories. According to Christopher Strain, (2010) another argument often presented suggests that the popularity of violence in media is largely due to human instinct and an instinctual need for posturing and aggressive behavior to promote acquiescence in others. In other words, we as humans are aggressive in order to be the most powerful within the social arenas in which we function. Strain cites, "Since our animal ancestors were instinctively violent creatures, and since we have evolved from them, we bear the genetic imprint of their violence and act accordingly" (p. 20).

Strain (2010) discusses the debate in detail and comes to the conclusion that while natural science can indeed illustrate evidence that suggests human beings have a natural tendency toward violence bred from instinctual fear and desire, the social sciences have illustrated that the instincts are generally promoted to action by the influence of violence in popular media. Strain insists that while the biological cannot be dismissed, the cultural influences should be calculated as well; influence through cultural social norming is a part of the hegemonic rules of a society and this has impact upon reactions and actions in relation to violent deeds.

Cultivation effect. Another point of contention as presented by other research is that the violence presented by pop-culture mediums in contemporary society is specifically aimed to create a panic response. The argument here is that panic and fear are sewn through the many forms of violent behaviors and actions fed to the masses through popular culture artifacts like *The Hunger Games* and its descendent film. Another take on this theory assumes that the consumers are driven to buy to things they believe will represent safety in response to what they feel can be harmful. (Cantor, 2002; Wilson et. al., 2002).

Consider the argument made by Gerbner, in his multiple studies throughout the years, (1976; 1986) which posits the theory of the cultivation effect, which produces a fearful response to media that depicts violence. (Cited by Kunkel & Zwarun; 2003). Kunkel and Zwaren (2003) maintain a definition for the cultivation effect as follows: "...viewers exposed to heavy doses of television violence come to believe that their world is a violent and scary place...leads to an exaggerated fear of crime or victimization that persists over time" (p. 206). Violence has been researched in connection with public fear or panic at length. In considering the dystopian nature of the future world depicted by Panem in *The Hunger Games*,

fear is the ultimate goal of the powerful Capitol; the power that decides the names of the children who will be sacrificed to the cause of keeping the nation under control is ultimately inducing fear in the population.

Further, psychologists and sociologists argue the points that violence seen and read or consumed in any other form are precursors to violent acts and behavior directly. Scholars have researched this particular facet at length and concluded that there is a link, often associated or sprung from the ground-breaking research and what is referred to as The Social Learning Theory, coined by Bandura in the 1960's. (Gerbner, Signorielli, & Morgan; 1995, Bandura; 1963, etc.) This argument assumes a sort of monkey-see-monkey-do type of ideology.

Contemporary empirical social sciences research presents the consumption of films and novels to evidence the theory that violence consumed begets violence in real life by the age groups discussed. An interesting study published in *Science*, by Johnson et. al. (2002) suggests through quantitative and qualitative evidence that the exposure of violent acts causes an increase in aggression from the age of consumption at 14 to the stage of acting aggressively at 22.] The information gathered suggests that:

"In the male subsample, television viewing at mean age 22 was associated with subsequent assaults or fights resulting in injury. In the female subsample, television viewing at mean age 22 was associated with subsequent assaults or fights resulting in injury, robbery, threats to injure someone, or use of a weapon to commit a crime, and any aggressive act against another person. The association between television viewing at mean age 22 and any aggressive act against another person was significantly stronger in the female subsample than in the male subsample" (p. 4).

What is fascinating about this research is that it is not primarily focused on male aggression, as most studies are. This study demonstrates that female viewers or readers are also impacted by the violence they consume and that young girls may indeed be impacted negatively by the violence they are exposed to in the novel and the film.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to analyze the texts *The Hunger Games* and its descendent film is commonly referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Its use is qualitative in nature and function and uses the interpretation of artifacts within a larger text to illustrate meaning and contextual reliability. This paper will assist the likelihood of its thematic discovery of meanings and possible interpretations using violence as a lens through which the audience assembles that meaning is accomplished through criticism and identification of certain themes and presentations of information to the viewer or reader.

CDA

The methodology used to analyze the novel and the relevant parts of the film, is described and defined by Teun A. van Dijk in his article, "Discourse & Society: Principles of Discourse Analysis" (1993). van Dijk claims, critical discourse analysis "is primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues, which it hopes to better understand through discourse analysis...their critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice" (p. 252). What this means for the purposes outlined here, is that within the consumption of pop-culture texts, the power struggles in-

herent within the contemporary society from which the text is written and enacted reflect realities of power and marginalization.

If exposure to morally ambiguous actions and deeds promote the actions themselves, as Bandura suggests then the texts individuals consume are overtly important to understanding the social motivations behind their consumption. Schrobsdorff et. al. suggest that the activity of priming is directly responsible for constructing ideas that support the hegemonic structure of the Western culture. Priming is a manner in which the commercializing powers that target consumers can create social norms and ideologies for a society (Schrobsdorff et. al., 2012).

The effect of priming is an answering hegemony; one for which commercialism and consumption can be mechanisms, and specific messages can be communicated to the masses to assert control of social and cultural conventions. Media are priming the population that consumes them for some purpose or other. The effect has a vast power of influence over the population. The people of Western society are being primed (Schrobsdorff et. al., 2012). We consume; therefore we must consider that there is a cognitive and psychosocial reaction to this priming, not unlike Pavlov's dog (Myers, 2004). These are some of the integral considerations of Critical Discourse Analysis.

If this is true, then the specific people that control the content overtly control hegemonic structures as well. There would be a balance of power then, not unlike Katniss's Panem. While people of Western civilization may believe they can consume what parts of popular culture texts and artifacts they wish, the underlying truth is that those whom control the content control the messages, and this is the main issue. This awesome power wielded by a few, when compared with the screening of specific content as controlled in Panem in the book and film are not so different. If there is actually a relationship in power dynamics, then Panem could become far less a point of Science Fiction and far more a reflection of modern day society. According to Mckee, "...by analyzing a text you can find out about the sense-making practices that were in place in a culture where it is circulated as meaningful" (p. 49). What Mckee suggests is that the context of a text, when it was made, how it influences the audience, and what it communicates is as important as the messages within it.

Critical Discourse Analysis uses a mixture of Rhetorical critical methodology and the newer, more targeted cultural studies which are concerned with the way culture shapes attitudes and ideas through the use of messages and meaning in order to influence or shape that culture to be something. Most often in CDA, those messages and meanings are associated with the dynamics and relationships that shape the interactions of people with a larger force such as the products of those who hold the power to create the messages themselves.

A Critical Discourse analyst looks at questions that people rarely take the time to consider in the store and looks for the messages in each of these questions using a method called *coding*. (Foss, 2004). This is the primary method in this paper used to discern the messages and meaning of them to form conclusions. Foss (2004) contends that the collection of symbols and their meaning form a rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation combines the reasons, ideas, attitudes, and codes that each of the symbols in any text come together to semiotically form a single concept.

THE CODIFIED MESSAGES

Another consideration in how to gather the kind of intelligence required to discover the meanings in a text and how the messages presented fit together to make that meaning is *dominance*. In the case of this analysis, the use of dominance is analyzed in detail by coding

the primary texts, *The Hunger Games* book and film for several specific categories of messages. These include: (1) Exposure to violence, (2) reactions to exposure, (3) recognition of violent acts and ideals, (4) emotive responses (or lack thereof) to the violence, (5) power and associative oppression, (6) literary archetypes, (7) binary relationships, (8) metaphorical meanings conveyed, and (9) resulting reactions and attitudes. Using the 9 categories of codified messages, this paper will seek to answer the two main questions that were related in the introduction. The analysis has a certain subjective tint to it. This is why bias is important to a CDA.

THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE AS A LENS

Violence is not simply the use of one person's physical force to hurt another person. Rather, for the purposes defined here, there are several types of violence. In other words, the action is causal to the effect of misery or pain being experienced. *The Hunger Games* is teeming with all three types of violence and its repercussions. By using the coding methodology described, this paper will seek to illustrate the relationship between the defined recognition of what violence is, and the connection with the questions raised.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this paper is to inform the reader about the different types of violence and its repercussions, attitudes, ideologies, and uses, and the issues incumbent to allowing the intended audience of violence to be exposed to it in *The Hunger Games* and popular culture texts as a whole. The society that produces violent content in its most base and brutish formats must be held accountable for the effects caused that could include desensitization and increase in violence in childrens' lives.

The texts analyzed here will illustrate the types of violent relationships in the socio-political and economical conceptions of a fantasy-based world that contains a metaphorical comparison to current American society. The overall allusion in the story is that in the current state of technological literacy, access, and advance, social norms are being mutated to allow more accessible forms of violent behaviors and situations available for consumption.

ANALYSIS OF THE HUNGER GAMES

The Hunger Games is the name of the annual spectacle for which the novel is titled in which 24 children between the ages of 12 and 18 are chosen in a lottery to compete against one another to the death. The contestants are called tributes and there are two for each of the outlying 12 Districts. These tributes are offered against their will to maintain peace in the country of Panem, which is ruled over by a Capitol located where Denver is in the real world. The main character, Katniss Everdeen is the narrator and the female tribute from District 12. The poorer an eligible girl or boy, the more names they have in the lottery as they can trade more names for yearly surpluses of grain and foodstuffs. Despite her name being in the bucket 24 times, her sister Prim who has only 1 is chosen and Katniss volunteers to save her.

The story evolves to capture Katniss's viewpoint as she experiences being one of the tributes who must win where the absolute object of the game is to kill all of the other contestants and reign in the end as the single victor. The main characters consist of the tributes from each of the Districts and the few people in Katniss's life who have made an impact on her. Many of the tributes are barely mentioned but there is a group called the Careers, which includes the District 2 male, Cato, District 1's female, Glimmer, and District 2's female, Clove. These are the volunteers. The other tributes who are discussed are Peeta, who

is Katniss's male counterpart from her District, and Rue and Thresh who are the tributes from the African American District, 11. The only other character that is discussed often is the one referred to as Foxface, who is a clever girl who works alone and often outsmarts the others, from District 5. Finally, Gale, who is Katniss's hunting partner is often mentioned throughout the story, although he is not a tribute.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The novel's title is three simple words, and yet linguistically, the meaning can be interchanged to refer to several different themes in the story. First the word *Hunger*, can mean literally starving, or it can mean yearning or wanting. If it is taken by the first meaning, it likely refers to an individual or a group being hungry for food and sustenance. Katniss is often conscious of the need for food as she refers to being hungry many times. Perhaps the word stands for the need for food by Katniss, the main character of the narrative. She mentions that starving is one of the key motivators for her routine law breakage, (which is hunting).

There is an inherent quality of violence by the Capitol on the smaller socio-economies within its borders as each of the Districts must adhere to the rules imposed or face punishment. The quality of fear is violence in itself because the Capitol uses it to control the masses in general. Hungry, weak people cannot be acknowledged as the type of threat healthy, well-fed and strong ones are. Therefore, the imposed hunger is a form of oppressive physical and emotional violence constructed by the Capitol to exert its dominance over its residents in the outlying Districts. According to Katniss, the further the District from the Capitol, the more oppressed its inhabitants.

Perhaps the word *Hunger* denotes a feeling of yearning or wanting. Reality TV is a function of voyeuristic tendency in humankind. The audience number surges when someone is punched, hit by a car, or attacked by wild animals. The violence itself is not the main concern if this meaning of hunger is the intended one; but rather, the ideal that human beings actually hunger for others' deaths in the most violent manners possible. Consider also, the word *Games* and how it fits within the current analysis of the meanings for *hunger*. The concept of gladiatorial competition is representative of this type of hunger.

The games were all the rage in ancient Roman times. Several times a week the arena was used for something that did not involve the gladiator competitions. These events were actually titled, *The Games*. Any citizen was invited to watch the executions of that week's criminals. In fact, the citizens were encouraged to attend the Games for entertainment purposes. Since the Roman gladiator times, popular media culture seems to have adapted the use of violence for entertainment purposes as well in contemporary books, movies, and television. Because of this phenomenon, the alarms of academics and critics have been raised that the inherent political message is anything but oblique; society is allowing too much violent media into the accessible homes of today's contemporary families and its children, who are impressionable and should be entitled to their childhoods.

The Hunger Games functions rather akin to the earlier blockbuster, *Gladiator* (2000). It has been proven that people are fascinated by violent acts (Weaver, 2011). Whether the masses enjoy watching or are simply drawn to the shock, an emotion that is in constant decline due to desensitization and objectification of the human body, or are responding to the arousal researched in the brain's response to violence watched has yet to be determined, (Lasch-Quinn, 2006; Kostas et. al., 2009). Something draws people into wanting to watch. The voyeurism of watching what appears to be reality is a contemporary fascination revived in much the same manner as *The Games* of Roman times. It has been suggested that

the fascination of voyeuristic reality TV watching is a prevalent habit of today's American pop-cultural fascination. (Biltereyst, 2004)

Researchers struggle to understand what motivates human beings to watch the gore in horror movies. As violence presented by various types of media is intrinsically rife with conflict and suffering, the masses tune in or read it in such numbers that the widespread sociological fascination with it becomes inarguable. Wilson claims, (2002), that "Delighting in the reign of reason and law as in the display of combat and will to carnival excess, Coliseum spectacle paradoxically circulates to empower the state and ruler at the expense of the actors and citizens" (p. 68). The significance of power and manipulation is no less apparent in the novel than in the movie *Gladiator*, which was given a deserved rating of R while *The Hunger Games* receives a PG-13. The same ideals and political agendas are present in *The Hunger Games*, portraying the same concepts but even in a more ruthless fashion because it involves the deaths of children. Consider a thematic, allegorical comparison of *The Hunger Games* to the remnant empire-driven Roman spectacle of long ago. Wilson (2002) notes that the gladiatorial contests, "...served to entertain, elicit support for, if not to ratify their own power on the pulses of their amazed and terrorized populace" (p. 66).

The use of *Games* in the title and central spectacle itself in the book suggests that this quality of control is present and used to excess to prove the very point Wilson makes. The Capitol's opening speech at the beginning of the reaping is paramount in proving this ideology. During the Capitol's speech, the audience is made aware of the motivation for the Games. The reason this merciless competition is in existence is because over 8 decades ago, the people of Panem rose up against the Capitol in rebellion. All 12 Districts were punished and the outlying District 13 was destroyed.

Collins, the author, admits a kind of desensitization of herself, however, in an interview, stating, "...there is so much programming, and I worry that we're all getting a little desensitized to the images on our televisions. If you're watching a sitcom, that's fine. But if there's a real-life tragedy unfolding, you should not be thinking of yourself as an audience member" (Interview, 2008). A concern for desensitization was a motivational factor in creating the story. She seems to imply that real-life violence such as that on the news, or in blogs and podcasts during situations of conflict is wrong, while blatantly communicating that a fantasy-based moment of violent conflict is fine.

THE ARCHETYPAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

The opening pages of the book immediately construct the relationships of several binary constructs which ultimately lead the reader to inclined approximations of good and evil within the contextual arena of Panem. For example, consider the names and character traits of Katniss Everdeen and her sister, Primrose. The clothing Katniss wears is generally dark, deeply colored, or black. Her demeanor is often referred to as being dark, somber, or sullen as well.

Katniss's whole consciousness is completely interwoven with violence in all of its forms. She is oppressed and displays the consequences of being traumatized, and yet this quality gives her the best shot of winning the games and becoming a celebrity, which in turn affects the welfare of her helpless sister and mother if she wins. She breaks the law at every turn, uses her ability to hunt to provide for her family, cannot admit any emotional attachment to anyone but her sister, and cannot accept help or guidance from others. She is stubborn to a fault. This set of personality traits has inspired young girls around the country to take up the bow and learn archery, proving Katniss's character represents a role-model for girls to mimic, (Grimm, 2012).

Grimm mentions that the archery teachers are concerned because of the use of the bow to hurt people in the books. However, they are happy about the increased interest that has not ever been mirrored. Rambo inspired an interest in archery, as well as the Lord of the Rings, but it generally was most inspiring to men, not women. (2012). The sister, on the other hand represents the archetypal damsel in distress and allegorically calls to mind the traditional softer side of girls from the late nineteenth century, in its purest most used traditional storybook form.

Primrose's character resonates with the light, fresh connotations associated with love and perfection. Prim is described by Cat, saying, "Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named" (p.3). The lingual use of *fresh*, *raindrop*, and *lovely* denote that the girl is innocent and good. The connotations connected with that description are suggestive that she cannot protect herself and is inherently feminine in the traditional literary sense that generally includes the ideal that girls are breakable, innocuous, and require protection. Katniss reiterates this point further as she claims, "I protect Prim in every way I can, but I'm powerless against the reaping" (p. 15). Prim is the feminine damsel who requires protecting and Katniss rejects her own femininity perhaps in order to face the violence, the brutality of her life. She will always step up to protect those who cannot, however. It's in her nature as the hero to do so. Levels of privilege and power are inextricable woven through the levels of archetypal and metaphorical representations in the novel, and primarily represented by female characters.

CALLOUS OR DESENSITIZED?

The level of desensitization in Katniss's character is nearly comprehensive, as she narrates, "It's the first time I've ever kissed a boy, which should make some sort of impression I guess, but all I can register is how unnaturally hot his lips are from the fever" (p. 261). Peeta's character seems almost irrelevant other than to give Katniss an edge in attracting voyeuristically masochistic sponsors. She intentionally romanticizes the relationship with Peeta in order to attain the upper hand in the Games and receive gifts from sponsors.

While she feels a connection with her hunting partner Gale, she is quick to deny any emotion stating, "...the way the girls stare at him...It makes me jealous but not for the reason people think. Good hunting partners are hard to find" (18). Katniss appears to be a textbook case of the effects of desensitization. According to Fanti et. al. (2009), "after prolonged and repeated exposure across a person's lifetime, the psychological impact of...violence ...reduces or habituates; the observer becomes emotionally and cognitively desensitized to...violence across time" (p. 179). This World, Panem condones the loss of compassion as it televises the Games to be sure everyone watches the violent punishment for rebellion. Katniss then, is a product of her environment in that she appears desensitized because of the violent trauma that has been imposed upon her by her own socio-political status and the keen economic hardship bread from it.

KILLING

One of the staunchest examples of the repercussions of violence and its impact can be found in the methods and motivations that create the killing scenes in the novel. There are several types of killing that are described by Katniss in her adventure. Some of these are killing for revenge, killing out of necessity, killing by accident, and even compassionate killing. All of which are creatively written situations in which murder is excused and considered necessary for survival.

Also, all of the murder done in the arena is justifiable, which is one of the main argu-

ments within the current debate about violence portrayed by popular media. Weaver (2011) cites this paradigm saying, "...violence that is justified and perpetrated against unliked characters may be more enjoyable than violence that is unjustified and perpetrated against liked characters (Raney, 2004; Weaver, p. 15). Research shows that the justification of violent behavior in popular media constructs a platform for both desensitization and traumatization for children. (Cantor, 2003). Further, If the perpetrator, or the character committing violent acts, is "engaging or attractive," this can increase the likelihood that viewers will be negatively affected by such a violent portrayal, specifically increasing the chances that viewers "will learn aggression" from that portrayal" (Timmer, 2011; p. 31, citing Wilson, et. al.; 2002). Regardless of the author's nonchalant admission that violence in real-life media is devastating to children, she considers the violence in fantasy stories to be less damaging.

The levels of violence interwoven into the narrative and the plot line of the novel are synonymous in many ways with the killing that takes place throughout the story. The metaphorical meaning that is reconciled through murder in this book rings with a real-life sense. Consider the first death of the story. The death of Katniss's father is inherently the fault of the Capitol that forces the District 12 men to work in the coal mines if they want to support their families. The nature of his death, being blown up inside the mine to the point that there are no remains is a very violent end to meet, and to consider as a young girl.

The Capitol forces the men to mine and so, in Katniss's perception, her father's death is in fact the direct fault of the oppressive government which facilitated the means by which he died. The Capitol, which to her signifies the enemy, is therefore at the center, responsible for all of the killing. It almost seems that throughout the ordeal of the arena, the Capitol is blamed for the killing because otherwise Katniss would die herself. Following this logic, all killing in the world of Panem is in some degree, the Capitol's fault, and therefore, justifiable in the eyes of the reader who identifies with the hero girl who is forced to do the work of death dealing in order to survive.

There are several ways to be killed in the arena, each described in vividly realistic detail. In the first moments of release into the Coliseum-like area of the arena, the death and dismemberment are described realistically as a bloodbath. Eight die in the first 10 minutes. Katniss describes the scene in garish detail recounting, "...then he coughs, splattering my face with blood. I stagger back, repulsed by the warm, sticky spray. Then the boy slips to the ground. That's when I see the knife in his back...All the general fear I've been feeling condenses into an immediate fear of this girl, this predator who might kill me in seconds" (p. 158). This is the first moment Katniss relays to the audience through her viewpoint of the opening seconds of the Games. Not only is she afraid, but she is sprayed by blood, someone attempts to kill her, and she begins to associate the tributes with the word, "predator". She has no real reaction, however to this boy spraying her with blood as he dies, except to recognize that the blood is warm and sticky and repulsive. His actual death moves her character philosophically no more than watching a rabbit die.

Consider the words of warning from Lasch-Quinn (2003) as she states, "Psychologists agree that the basic minimal requirement for the formation of moral conscious is empathy for others. Thus, it is possible that the objectification of human beings in popular culture acts directly against basic requirements for moral development" (p. 50). Consider the pop-culture exposure the residents of District 12 have with the world they live in. Only the Games are televised without fail in her area. Therefore, as a product of her environment, Katniss cannot have a conscious as she was never truly exposed to the moral requirements in her society to form one. What is fascinating here, is that the very goal Collins cites, mentioned earlier in this paper for having written the story; that she felt violence was too pre-

valent in society because of popular media, is exposed as a central theme to the story she wrote. The metaphorical value of such a comparison cannot escape notice; that the reader is literally being exposed to the violent acts of morally underdeveloped children who were exposed from birth to the consequences of being the victim turned predator if he or she was picked to compete as tributes.

CAPITOL CONTROL AND POWER DYNAMICS

In the novel, who is truly in control? Is it Katniss or Effie Trinket, the promoter that represents District 12? Perhaps it is Haymish and the sponsors he is supposedly talking to while Katniss and Peeta fight the battle alone. Consider the word, "sponsors". These are the people of the Capitol. These are the privileged, the powerful, those who hold the potential for life or death in the form of gifts they can pay to have sent to the tributes depending upon each tribute's success, popularity, and potential for remaining entertaining during the long days of the battle for their lives. These are the population of Panem with the money. They are the rich, the elite, not unlike the Aristocrats from the Roman Republic who were known to bet upon certain Gladiators and send them gifts for winning. Within the confines of the novel, the audience must construct its own interpretations of the Capitol's people. This inner circle and its strange customs are beyond Katniss's removed conception of it. However, constructed within the negative space, the audience can visualize a group of elitist, well-fed and spoiled people who have all of the comforts in life that the outer layers of the Districts do not.

The film allows the audience some small glimpses into the Capitol's world; one which is very different and unknown to Katniss in the novel. The Gamemaker is profiled in the film and he has strange facial hair and an odd composure in the face of either complete success or complete failure. The power dynamics are made known in obvious ways to the audience as the Gamemakers are shown manipulating the arena as Katniss suspects they do, but does not hit on the actual level with which they have control from the technologically advanced game room. The reader of the novel must construct the implications of the political repercussions of Katniss's final rebellious act in the arena to kill herself or live if Peeta was allowed as well when the Gamemakers rescind their rule that would allow two tributes from one District to survive together.

The Capitol is presented as the precise technological opposite to the District 12 earthiness the reader is subjected to in learning the personal realities and trials of the people who live there. The hunger, the lack of heated water, and the loss of power at certain times are all completely and binarily presented from the descriptions of the Capitol. For example, Katniss notices the grandeur upon entering the city saying, "...the magnificence of the glistening buildings that in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal" (p. 59). She also proliferates upon the technology the Capitol has at its disposal that have helped to slaughter District 13 as she relates, "Since the rebels had to scale the mountains, they were easy targets for the Capitol's air forces" (p. 59). This level of technological advance to include sky-scrappers and jets is far beyond the hovel she equates with the idea of home.

The metaphorical meaning could be suggestive of the power that technology wields in a richer country as opposed to less advanced cultures, which the colonist ideologies prevalent in the first Americans boosted over the centuries to create a powerful autonomy over the less advanced cultures of the world they had intended to settle. The message then, is that whoever wields the technology has the power over those who do not have ready access

to it. Following that logic, America, which the country of Pamen is said to represent in the far future equates power with technology and so, the Capitol has the right to create the ideals and the social hegemony of its people that will provide for the most control. This is one of the key factors for how the elitists of the Capitol dominate the Districts. This concept innately ties back to who has the money. The money equals technological advance to use for the objective of totalitarian dominance, which in turn leads to the effectual grip of control over the less fortunate or the subjects of this regime.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, the main thesis questions to be analyzed were, (1) is the level of violence and how it is presented in the book something parents should be alarmed about if their children between the ages of 11 and 17 are reading it? (2) Is the lens through which violence in its many forms in the book and the film are presented appropriate for children? And (3), is the metaphorical nature of the text's overall message something that should be introduced to the leaders of tomorrow, before they actually experience the World as adults?

Through research, deep reading, and CDA methods, it seems that the answers to the questions asked are: (1) Yes, the depth of violent content should be considered further when marketing is conducted. Despite a rating that has been produced by those who are stakeholders in the revenue a specific text can generate, the content should be pre-screened for the best screening of material. (2) No. This paper has argued that the violence presented in the book and film is inappropriate for the teen audience to which it is marketed. (3) Possibly. The overall metaphor of *The Hunger Games* appears to be that the film industry is promoting desensitization, exposure, and oppression.

The truth is, as long as violence sells, it will be created and promoted. While the target audience cannot have the intellect to really comprehend the gravity of power and dominance dynamics in our society, the ethos is communicated that suffering, oppression, control through fear, and purposefully implementing social control mechanisms that marginalize a certain population are wrong. However, the serious amount of violence in the texts could be said to border on obscenity, and a parental guidance factor should be seriously considered.

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