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# Techniques for the Construction of Meaning and the Elicitation of Emotion in The Hunger Games

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Techniques for the Construction of Meaning and the Elicitation of Emotion in  
*The Hunger Games*

An honors thesis presented to the  
Department of Communication,  
University at Albany, State University Of New York  
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**Abstract**

This thesis analyzes techniques for the elicitation of meaning and emotion within *The Hunger Games*. It takes a look at the ways in which a story is told and the different elements found within a story that when put together are likely to produce reactions from audience members. This paper draws principally from ideas about film techniques described by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2008) in *Film Art: An Introduction*, and ideas about how films elicit emotions discussed by Carl Plantinga (2009) in *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Plantinga's work complements Bordwell and Thompson's. This is because while Bordwell and Thompson focus primarily on issues of meaning, Plantinga discusses how audience emotions can be evoked by the meaningful contents they witness on the screen.

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## Introduction

A key component of most films is their ability to tell a story. Many viewers find the narrative aspect of a film most intriguing. Through close analysis of a film's narrative, critics and readers can identify components that are critical to a film's ability to produce a particular message or messages. Kristin Thompson (2013) describes close observation or close analysis of film as "noting patterns in the relationship of the individual devices in a film (devices being techniques of style and form) to each other and figuring out why those patterns are there." It is up to critics to identify the techniques and devices that filmmakers put in films, and then to analyze the effectiveness with which those devices advance the film's narrative.

All films contain elements that deserve a closer look. Thompson (2013) points out that the purposes for analyzing a film are diverse. These include: (1) "to find out more about it because it's appealing or intriguing"; (2) "to answer a question often to do with the nature of cinema in general"; (3) "to make a case that a film is significant and suggest why others should pay attention to it"; and (4) to engage in a "Close analysis [that] can be vital for writing about film history." Critics and scholars may be motivated to use these purposes as a basis for studying films.

The current writer is motivated by an interest in using close analysis to uncover ways that meanings and emotions are elicited by various meaningful and emotional elicitation elements of the film *The Hunger Games*. *The Hunger Games* was first introduced as a novel written by Suzanne Collins and published in 2008. The novel was adapted as a feature film that was released in 2013.

### ***The Hunger Games* and its heroine, Katniss**

*The Hunger Games* tells the story of a dystopian society, ruled by an oppressive President Snow, who punishes twelve districts for an uprising that occurred in the past. This punishment consists of sending two tributes from each district to compete in a televised show called *The Hunger Games*, where each “player” fights to his/her death in an arena, leaving one victorious survivor in the end.

Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist in the film, volunteers as tribute for the games in place of her sister, Prim. She is one of two tributes from District 12, the other being Peeta Mellark. The events that occur mostly revolve around Katniss.

In *Film Art* (2008), David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson describe elements and techniques employed by filmmakers to advance a film’s story. The techniques they describe can help us understand Katniss’s character and the role she plays within the film. As the heroine in the story, it is her duty to make a major contribution throughout the narrative.

The characteristics of *The Hunger Games* can be compared to the characteristics that make up the classical Hollywood cinema. Many films use the conventions found in this type of narrative. As Bordwell and Thompson (2008) point out, “This [the Classical Hollywood cinema] conception of narrative depends on the assumption that the action will spring primarily from *individual characters as causal agents*. Natural causes...or societal causes...may affect the action, but the narrative centers on personal psychological causes: decisions, choices, and traits of characters,” (p. 94). In the case of *The Hunger Games*, the narrative is based upon a type of war/disaster that occurred in the city of Panem, which is the root cause of the events depicted in the film. The plot of *The*

*Hunger Games* centers on the main character's desire to challenge President's Snow oppressive regime, and to ultimately alter the way he runs Panem. Katniss's character development, her actions, and her influence on the other characters in the film demonstrate her willingness to defeat this totalitarian regime.

### **Meaning**

The meanings developed throughout a film are important to audience members. The types of meanings that viewers identify in films vary due to the interpretations given to a particular element. Bordwell and Thompson identify four types of meaning (referential, explicit, implicit, and symptomatic). These meaning types can be applied to *The Hunger Games* in the following ways:

1. ***Referential Meaning.*** *A young woman volunteers to take her sister's place in a competition to protect her. After many struggles, she emerges victorious.*

In the film, one referential meaning that exists includes the protagonist's bravery for volunteering for the Hunger Games in place of her sister. After multiple setbacks, Katniss comes out victorious in the end, making her one of the survivors of the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. As Bordwell and Thompson (2008) mention, referential meaning "is very concrete, close to bare-bones plot summary. Here, the meaning depends on the spectator's ability to identify specific items..." (p. 60). These particular items include the purpose of the Hunger Games, Katniss and her relationship with her sister, and the winners of the game. "We can call such tangible meanings *referential*, since the film

refers to things or places already invested with significance” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 61). For example, if Katniss hadn’t volunteered, the movie’s outcome would have been completely different, mainly because Katniss and Prim have two different personalities. While Katniss is more courageous and daring (especially since she hunts although it’s illegal), Prim is more reserved and quiet.

2. ***Explicit Meaning.*** *A young girl, Katniss, faces the reality that she must win the Hunger Games not just for her sister, but also for her entire family. Because she is the sole provider and caretaker of her family, winning means that they survive as well.*

“This assertion is still fairly concrete in the meaning it attributes to the film. If someone were to ask [a spectator] the *point* of the film—what it seems to be trying to get across—she might answer with something like this” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 61).

Katniss is a hunter and gatherer. In the beginning of the film, she is seen hunting for game to sell to peacekeepers (the police of Panem) in order to get money for her family. She also acts as a mother figure to Prim and their own mother as well. For example, after Prim tells Katniss that she has to win and they finish embracing, Katniss makes her way to her mother to remind her what not to do. She sternly states:

*Katniss:* You can’t tune out again.

*Mother:* I won’t.

*Katniss:* No! You can’t...not like when Dad died. I won’t be here anymore.

You’re all she has. No matter what you feel, you be there for her. Do you understand?



*Mother:* (She nods her head yes.)

*Katniss:* Don't cry. (Katniss embraces her mother.)

This suggests that Katniss is the protector of her family. "Like referential meanings, explicit meanings function within the film's overall form. They are defined by context" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 61).

3. ***Implicit Meanings.*** *An adolescent is forced to grow up and accept the responsibilities of the adult world, and despite her desires to the contrary, she eventually comes to accept her fate.*

Implicit meanings go beyond what is seen on the surface. "When perceivers ascribe implicit meanings to an artwork, they're usually said to be *interpreting* it" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 62). Taking a closer look at the film, viewers can make the assumption that the main meaning in the film focuses on growing up. "This is more abstract than the first two statements. It goes beyond what is explicitly stated in the film..." (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 62).

At the beginning of the film, Katniss is in the woods with Gale, her best friend and hunting partner. The two discuss possibilities of running off into the woods, far away from District 12, until it dawns on Katniss that she cannot because of her responsibility to her sister. Their conversation goes as follows:

*Gale:* We could do it, you know. Take off; live in the woods. That's what we do anyway.

*Katniss:* They'd catch us.

*Gale:* Maybe not.

*Katniss:* Cut out our tongues or worse. We wouldn't make it five miles.

*Gale:* No, I'd get five miles. I'd go that way. (He points off in the distance.)

*Katniss:* Well I have Prim and you have your brothers.

*Gale:* They can come too.

*Katniss:* Prim in the woods?

*Gale:* Maybe not.

As much as Katniss despises District 12 and the horrible conditions she has to live in (i.e. many of the individuals living there barely have enough food to survive, which is why she hunts to sell animals to sell to peacekeepers for extra money), she cannot leave simply because she has to stay home to take care of her sister. With this responsibility weighing on her, Katniss's actions imply that she stopped being a child a long time ago, and that she is ready to accept the greater responsibilities of adulthood that The Hunger Games serve upon her.

4. ***Symptomatic Meaning.*** *In a society where a strict government institutionalizes games in order to cast off many individuals to serve as a reminder to the entire public, an imbalance between wealth and power is created.*

The last meaning that Bordwell and Thompson (2008) describe is symptomatic meaning. They state, "it's possible to understand a film's explicit or implicit meanings as bearing traces of a particular set of social values. We can call this *symptomatic meaning*, and the

set of values that get revealed can be considered a social **ideology**” (p. 63). This meaning takes the film’s narrative and places it into a societal context.

Like the third statement (i.e. the definition of implicit meaning), this is abstract and general. ...But there is something else worth noticing about the statement. It treats an explicit meaning [and an implicit meaning]...as a manifestation of a whole society. ... It’s possible to understand a film’s explicit or implicit meanings as bearing traces of a particular set of social values. (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, pp. 62-63)

Viewers can make this claim about the way President Snow runs Panem. The Capitol, the place where President Snow resides, contains much of the country’s wealth, which allows the government to wield power over the districts. By controlling the government, President Snow is allowed to force the citizens of Panem to fight in the Hunger Games, coercing the residents to kill each other off. Keeping the districts separated, he ensures that the people of Panem won’t join forces to rebel against the Capitol.

### **Film Form and Meaning**

The meaning derived from particular scenes serves an important purpose for a film overall. “As an alert perceiver, the spectator is constantly testing the work for larger significance, for what it says or suggests. The sorts of meanings that the spectator attributes to a film may vary considerably” (Bordwell and Thompson. 2008, p. 60). The meanings that viewers derive are enabled by a variety of formal techniques and elements filmmakers include in a film. These help produce the overall significance of the film.

Several of these formal techniques, and the role they play in *The Hunger Games*, are discussed below.

### **Expectations in *The Hunger Games***

As viewers of *The Hunger Games*, we expect certain events to occur. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) note, “Film form can even make us perceive things anew, shaking us out of our accustomed habits and suggesting fresh ways of hearing, seeing, feeling, and thinking” (pp. 56-57). Based on the ways characters act within a film or the way that scenes play out, we form beliefs about what events will follow. Sometimes these expectations will not be immediately satisfied, causing a delay in these hopes. Unsatisfied expectations may trigger *suspense*, *surprise*, and *curiosity*.

Expectations make us view experiences differently. One expectation that causes this type of reaction is suspense. “What we normally call *suspense* involves a delay in fulfilling an established expectation. As the term implies, suspense leaves something suspended—not only the next element in a pattern but also our urge for completion” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 57). By the end of the film, when Katniss and Peeta are on the train ride back to District 12, Katniss intends to forget about her victory in the games and everything else that has occurred. This is indicated in the following brief exchange:

*Peeta*: What happens when you get back?

*Katniss*: I don’t know. I guess we try to forget.

*Peeta*: I don’t want to forget.

As viewers, we do not expect to forget about Katniss's accomplishments or all that has occurred throughout *The Hunger Games*. Katniss made several pivotal achievements within the film. She served as the first volunteer of District 12 for the games; she was a victor of the 74<sup>th</sup> *Annual Hunger Games*; and she managed to make the citizens of Panem realize how damaging the games may be. It is almost impossible to forget her, and as Peeta says of himself, "I don't want to forget." Katniss and Peeta are co-winners of the games, but she is the only one who wishes to erase the memories that she has endured. As we are suspended in the expectations of the narrative, we still yearn to know what happens next.

When observing a scene from a film, many audience members feel that their expectations of a scene or character are not met. This type of expectation is called a surprise. "In general, *surprise* is a result of an expectation that is revealed to be incorrect" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 57). In *The Hunger Games*, one scene that surprises viewers occurs during the rule changes in the arena. We do not expect the rules of the games to change, especially since they have been the same for 73 years. The rules are simple: the Hunger Games yields one survivor. However, the rules change after a character named Rue dies. Rue is a tribute from District 11 who Katniss befriends and tries to protect. When Rue dies, Katniss makes a three-fingered gesture to which the people of District 11 respond with a riot. (The meaning of the gesture will be described later in further detail [see p. 20]). Uneasy with these events, Seneca, the head game maker, sees Katniss as a potential threat to the districts. Before Seneca reacts, Haymitch, one of the Hunger Games's former victors and also Katniss's and Peeta's mentor, interjects to suggest a way he should handle Katniss and the situation. Haymitch says,

“Don’t kill her. You’ll just create a martyr.... I know you know how to handle a mob; you’ve done it before. If you can’t scare them, give them something to hope for.” When Seneca asks for an example, Haymitch responds with “young love.” Haymitch attempted to have the game maker spare Katniss’s life. As a result, the rules were changed. Seneca makes the following announcement: “Attention Tributes, attention! The regulations requiring a single victor have been...suspended. From now on, two victors may be crowned if both originate from the same district. This will be the only announcement.” Upon hearing this, Katniss takes off running in search of Peeta. She races through the woods and runs through the water in hopes of finding him. We may find it peculiar that this has occurred because it has never happened before. This announcement means that two tributes will remain alive instead of one. Now, we have to make adjustments to our understanding of how the Hunger Games works and its purpose.

Finally, unsatisfied expectations may trigger curiosity. “Sometimes an artwork will cue us to hazard guesses about what has come *before* [a specific scene] in the work” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 57). The film opens with words displayed across the screen that state:

From the Treaty of the Treason: In penance for their uprising, each district shall offer up a male and female between the ages of 12 and 18 at a public “Reaping.” These Tributes shall be delivered to the custody of The Capitol. And then transferred to a public arena where they will Fight to the Death, until a lone victor remains. Henceforth and forevermore this pageant shall be known as The Hunger Games.

Within these lines, explanations about what the Hunger Games are and why they exist are briefly mentioned. These lines leave viewers curious about what occurred during the uprising in Panem, and what is to come.

Following the statements that appear on the screen, the main game leader, Seneca Crane, discusses remnants of the past, and the reason why the games exist. As he sits on the couch talking to Caesar, the game's television host, he states,

I think it's our tradition. It comes out of a particularly painful part of our history. But it's been the way we've been able to heal. At first it was a reminder of the rebellions, the price the districts had to pay. But I think it has grown from that. I think it's something that knits us all together.

These lines leave viewers more curious about the specificities of the rebellion and how the districts had to suffer as a result.

As we observe *The Hunger Games*, our expectations about the events differ. Sometimes our expectations are met; other times they change later in the film. These expectations shape our experience of the film.

### **Motifs and Symbols**

Similarities and repetitions in a film serve as important principles of the development of that film. A repeated pattern is termed a *motif*, which is "any significant repeated element in a film" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 66). In *The Hunger Games*, the phrase: "May the odds be ever in your favor" is the most repeated line throughout the movie. It is first uttered in the beginning of the film when Katniss and Gale are seen in the woods discussing the games. (Gale is Katniss's best friend and also

her hunting partner.) Gale passes Katniss bread and sarcastically declares: “Happy Hunger Games!”, to which Katniss responds with the much-repeated phrase “May the odds be ever in your favor.” The phrase is heard moments later during the reaping, (a ceremony where everyone in District 12 gathers together to hear if they have been selected to compete in this year’s Hunger Games), by Effie Trinket, the escort of the District 12 tributes, Katniss and Peeta. Katniss and Peeta shake hands, and Effie exclaims: “Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor.” The third time the line is mentioned in the first part of the film is during the tribute parade, this time announced by President Snow. (The tribute parade is a parade where all tributes from each district dress in garments from their hometowns and enter on chariot rides, presenting themselves to the audience. This moment gives the tributes a chance to make a first impression on the people from the Capitol.) Before uttering the phrase, President Snow states, “We wish you Happy Hunger Games!”

Each time the phrase “Happy Hunger Games” is repeated, the phrase about odds follows. And although the word ‘happy’ is supposed to have a positive connotation, it is paired with ‘odds,’ which takes on a negative meaning. It is ironic that these words are paired together because there can only be one victor, meaning 23 tributes will be killed. This makes it seem almost impossible for the games to have a happy feel to them, especially knowing that many individuals will have sacrificed their lives for the sake of keeping everyone else in Panem under control.

The formulation, “Happy Hunger Games. May the odds be ever in your favor,” takes on a different meaning depending on the character stating it and the situation s/he is in. As Bordwell and Thompson (2008) mention, “Form needs its stable background of



similarity and repetition, but it also demands that differences be created. This means that although motifs (scenes, settings, actions, objects, stylistic devices) may be repeated, those motifs will seldom be repeated exactly. Variation will appear” (p. 68). For instance, when Gale says “Happy Hunger Games!” he does so ironically because no one in the districts, especially District 12, looks forward to the reaping. This is the moment when Gale and Katniss sit in the forest and share bread and discuss what life would be like if they lived elsewhere. When Katniss responds with: “And may the odds be ever in your favor,” she soon realizes that the odds aren’t necessarily in Gale’s favor, since his chances of being picked for the games are extremely high. The two get quiet and Katniss’s tone takes on a serious note as she asks, “How many times is your name in today?” Gale responds, “42. Guess the odds aren’t exactly in my favor.” In a matter of seconds, this expression goes from having a jocular tone to a solemn tone.

The phrase takes on a more upbeat tone when Effie recites it. She tries to encourage everyone to be excited about this year’s game, especially since this is the first time District 12 has ever had a volunteer. The first name that Effie calls is Primrose Everdeen, Katniss’s younger sister. Everyone stares at Prim and steps aside, leaving a clear path for her to make it to the stage. As she slowly makes her way to the stage, Katniss also separates from the crowd and screams out her sister’s name. Being protective of her sister, Katniss feels obligated to volunteer in place of Prim. She grabs hold of her sister and tells her that she needs to leave the reaping and find their mother, to which Prim responds over and over, “No!” Because Prim doesn’t want to let her sister go, Gale rushes over and carries Prim away, leaving her screaming as Katniss proceeds to the stage. After calling Katniss’s name, Effie says, “Dramatic turn of events for District 12.

District 12's very first volunteer. Let's have a big hand for our very first volunteer, Katniss Everdeen." She then proceeds to smile and clap, but is met with a cold response from the citizens of District 12, as they remain silent. Compared to Katniss's recitation of the phrase, Effie's performance of the words is rehearsed, yet genuinely sincere. Once Katniss and Peeta shake hands after being picked for the games, Effie states, "Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be *ever* in your favor."

During the tribute parade, the line is repeated again, this time by President Snow. His response is calculated, cold, impassive, representing his character. Unlike Effie, who smiles at the crowd, President Snow's facial expression remains blank, as he stands before the crowd and recites: "Welcome. Welcome. Tributes, we welcome you. We salute your courage and your sacrifice. And we wish you Happy Hunger Games, and may the odds be ever in your favor."

Another motif in the film is when Katniss meets/familiarizes herself with Peeta, the baker's son of District 12. He is also someone who has been in love with Katniss since he was a young boy, but never had the courage to confess his feelings for her. Upon meeting him, she has flashbacks to the time when Peeta helped her. Although each flashback scene is different, strung together, they play out Katniss's full connection to her encounter with Peeta in the past. This memory is triggered first before Katniss shakes his hand at the reaping. The scene flashes back to a moment where Katniss observes Peeta and his mother arguing outside of their family's bakery. Katniss observes the two from a distance as she sits on the ground with her head against a tree. Peeta makes eye contact with Katniss, and then the flashback scene concludes. Every moment after this scene,

each time Katniss and Peeta are in close contact, the film flashes back to the moment where Peeta tossed Katniss bread.

Along with motifs, symbols are also elements of a film that become important. One repeated symbol in *The Hunger Games* is the mockingjay, which has several meanings. Readers of the novel learn that the mockingjay is a cross between a mockingbird and a jabberjay. The creation of these birds was a mistake. The jabberjays (a male species) were initially created to eavesdrop on the rebels during the Dark Ages in Panem. The birds would return this information to the Capitol. However, the rebels discovered the Capitol's plans and decided to feed the birds with false information that they would repeat. As a result, the Capitol stopped producing jabberjays and released them into the wild. The Capitol didn't expect these birds to live. Before they became extinct they mated with female mockingbirds, thus producing a new species of birds, the mockingjays.

The backstory behind the mockingjay is not provided in the film. Instead, the audience is given indirect indications of the mockingjay's symbolic significance for the oppressed people of District 12. It is first introduced in the beginning of the film, before the games, when Katniss receives a mockingjay pin from a street vendor. When Katniss spots the pin, she asks the street vendor for the cost of it. The vendor gives the pin to Katniss for free, but the vendor looks at her with a concerned expression. At this point, viewers don't get to find out the exact meaning of this pin or the reason for the vendor's sad look because the scene quickly changes. Katniss gives the pin to her sister as a form of protection. When Katniss goes to say goodbye to her family (after she is chosen in the games), Prim returns the pin back to her: "To protect you," she says. The pin is seen

again when Cinna, the makeup artist and costume designer for Katniss and Peeta, secretly pins it on her jacket.

In a scene with Katniss and Rue, the symbol of the mockingjay reappears. Rue eventually forms an alliance with Katniss. They hope to destroy Cato and his alliance's supplies. (Cato is a member of District 2 and also the leader of the Career Pack, an alliance formed by wealthy members from District's 1, 2, and 4 who are trained in a special combat for the Hunger Games.) Rue suggests that the two of them create a signal in case one of them is in danger. Rue recognizes Katniss's pin and makes a sound recognizable by mockingjays found in the arena. The two intend to use it as a signal to let one know the other is safe. "If we hear that it means 'we're ok and we'll be back real soon,'" Rue states.

Another hint that suggests the importance of the mockingjay pin is given when Katniss and Cinna part ways. He pins it on the inside of her costume and puts a finger to his lips, signifying that she should keep the pin a secret. On the surface, the various forms of the mockingjay symbol represent safety and protection. The film doesn't transfer the novel's fuller account of the mockingjay, but it implicitly suggests its importance throughout the film.

The death of Rue is an additional symbol that deserves a closer look. In *The Hunger Games*, Rue screams out for Katniss to release her from being trapped in a net. After Katniss frees her, the two embrace. As Katniss releases the girl to make sure she is unharmed, Rue's eyes grow wide as she stares into the distance and tries to warn Katniss that someone is behind them. One of the tributes shoots an arrow in their direction, and Katniss fires her arrow at him, thus killing him. In the midst of all of this, Katniss soon

realizes that Rue has been pierced in the chest. After she fires her arrow at the boy, she turns to Rue, noticing that the young girl looks down at the arrow lodged in her chest. Subsequently, Rue pulls the arrow from her body, and Katniss catches her as she falls. This moment builds suspense (for reference see p. 11). During this intimate scene, Rue whispers to Katniss: “You have to win,” to which Katniss grows silent. From this moment on, audience members will expect Katniss to fulfill Rue’s wishes of Katniss winning the games. Rue knows that Katniss has the potential to change the dynamics of the games, which is why she tells Katniss she has to win. Katniss winning offers hope that the Hunger Games will cease to exist, and no one from the districts will have to sacrifice his/her life to maintain ‘order’ in Panem. When Rue finally dies, Katniss goes on a frenzy, crying, screaming, and throwing her arrows. She pulls herself together and prepares a small funeral for Rue. Once this is done, Katniss kisses three fingers and holds them up high. This gesture is seen several times (see below), each posing different meanings, one of those implying rebellion. In the novel, Suzanne Collins (the author of *The Hunger Games*) has Katniss describe the scene as follows:

At first one, then another, then almost every member of the crowd touches the three middle fingers of their left hand to their lips and holds it out to me. It is an old and rarely used gesture of our district, occasionally seen at funerals. It means thanks, it means admiration, it means goodbye to someone you love. (*The Hunger Games*, p. 24)

Like the mockingjay symbol, the meaning of the three-finger gesture is not as precisely communicated in the film as it is in the novel. It is first seen during the reaping ceremony. After Katniss volunteers, Effie asks that everyone applaud for Katniss. Instead

of applauding, the people of District 12 remain silent, kiss their three fingers, and raise them in the air as a form of salutation. Where it appears as a symbol of admiration for Katniss's brave act at the beginning as a result of her volunteering for her sister or wishing Katniss good luck with her battle, by the middle of the film, this gesture takes on a different meaning. When Katniss makes this gesture after Rue's death it retains a similar meaning to its meaning in the beginning. Just as the people of District 12 use the gesture to send Katniss off, Katniss now uses the gesture to send Rue off. However, the people of District 11 (the district that Rue is from) equate it with something entirely different. The individuals there mimic Katniss's gesture, but they react violently afterwards. Their violent reaction suggests that the three-finger salute signifies revolution. It is seen as a way for the citizens to send off, or say goodbye, to their oppressive government rules.

### **Goal-Oriented Plot**

A goal-oriented plot is common in many narratives of classical Hollywood cinema. This is a plot "in which a character takes steps to achieve a desired object or state of affairs" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 86). In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is motivated by several desires that drive the plot. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) state, "Often an important trait that functions to get the narrative moving is a *desire*. The character wants something. The desire sets up a *goal*, and the course of the narrative's development will most likely involve the process of achieving that goal" (p. 95).

Katniss's goals change as the plot develops.

The first desire that Katniss wishes to fulfill occurs when she volunteers as tribute for the games. During the reaping, Effie pulls Prim's name from the bucket of names. Upon hearing her name called, Prim freezes in her spot as the crowd separates and backs away from her. Off in the distance, Katniss, too, looks startled as she hears her sister's name being called. Prim slowly makes her way to the stage as everyone stares at her in silence. Nearing the front, Katniss calls out her sister's name. As she tries to reach her sister, two guards grab her, and then she screams out, "I volunteer! I volunteer. I volunteer as tribute." This displays Katniss's first desire, taking the place of her sister in the games, and also shows the basis upon which the plot is set in motion. In essence, the story is made possible because Katniss volunteers for her sister.

Soon, the desire of Katniss to save her sister becomes fulfilled. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) state,

If this desire to reach a goal were the only element present, there would be nothing to stop the character from moving quickly to achieve it. But there is a counterforce in the classical narrative: an opposition that creates conflict. The protagonist comes up against a character whose traits and goals are opposed to his or hers. As a result, the protagonist must seek to change the situation so that he or she can achieve the goal. (p. 95)

Katniss's desires are actually a result of President Snow's desire. He expects Panem to remain under a totalitarian regime, where the Hunger Games continues, as a reminder to the people of the districts to never rebel against the Capitol. Katniss opposes Snow's ideologies. Her winning signifies the potential for defeating Snow. For purposes of

forwarding the narrative, it is imperative that President Snow and Katniss's desires are in opposition to each other.

The next goal is for Katniss to leave a good impression on the judges, a goal whose achievement is necessary for Katniss to have a chance of winning the games. As Haymitch points out, making a good impression can determine a life or death situation in the arena. In a scene where Katniss is on a train with Peeta and Haymitch heading to the Capitol, Katniss presents herself as unlikeable to Haymitch. She isn't pleased with his drunkenness or his inability to help her and Peeta, so she lashes out at Haymitch by stabbing a knife into the table. Peeta, on the other hand, is persistent and tries to get Haymitch to talk even though it is clear that he doesn't want to help them. Haymitch eventually tells Katniss that she needs to become more likeable and get people to like her so that sponsors will send items to keep her alive in the games.

Katniss makes her first positive impression when she shoots the arrow at the critics from the Capitol. During the evaluations, Katniss showcases her shooting skills. After she grabs a bow and arrow from the rack, she notices that the critics don't take notice of her at first; they are too busy talking to each other. She then states her name and the district she is from to get their attention. When she takes her first shot at the target, she misses. As a result, the critics laugh at her actions and continue talking to one another. Knowing she can do better, Katniss grabs another arrow, steadies her focus, and shoots her arrow right in the center of the target's chest. However, the critics miss the opportunity to witness because they completely disregard her presence. They are too busy socializing, drinking and eating. Recognizing this, Katniss stares back at them in confusion. She then notices the pig with an apple in its mouth, left for the critics to eat.



She takes an arrow for a third time and shoots at a new target, this time hitting the apple, which happens to be close to where the critics are standing. Everyone grows silent and stares down at her. Katniss bows and says, “Thank you for your consideration” before leaving the room. This time, the critics cannot keep their eyes off her. This is an exhibition both of her brave desire to somehow win the games and the skill necessary to do so – a dual exhibition that helps her achieve the goal of winning favor with the judges.

### **Function and Motivation**

Each element in the film serves a unique purpose in the film’s overall storyline, whether intentional or unintentional. These elements function in a way that produces a certain meaning when placed together with the other events in a film.

In *The Hunger Games*, the individual observing the film can analyze every element and interpret its function as having a particular meaning. For example, Rue’s death created a stir not only in the games, but also in District 11 (her home district), due to Katniss’s reaction. Rue eventually trusts Katniss and forms an alliance with her. The three-finger gesture that Katniss makes after Rue dies creates a stir within the districts (for reference see p. 20). After Katniss arranges flowers around Rue’s body, Katniss walks a few paces between a few trees, and raises her three fingers into the air. The scene then switches to District 11, where the citizens there watch Katniss’s action on a television screen. In return, they too kiss their three fingers and raise them above their heads. Then, one of the citizens runs off in the distance and pushes a guard. As a result, several other people throw their rice buckets at the gates, break down supplies, and attack multiple guards. Katniss’s gesture in memory of Rue has triggered a riot in District 11.

Rue's death during the games could be seen as minor to some, especially when compared with the film in its entirety; however, this simple scene has several functions. Rue's death causes a change within Panem. The riot suggested that the people of Panem no longer wanted to follow strict orders from the Capitol.

Katniss serves another function as well. She represents change and an act of rebellion; however, she must appear as something different, as someone who is acting out of love. Towards the end of the film after her discussion with Haymitch, they discuss why the Capitol isn't happy with Katniss. It is agreed between the two of them that she must pretend that she didn't comply with the Hunger Games' rules of having one victor because she couldn't let Peeta die because she loved him. Haymitch states, "If they ask, you say you couldn't help yourself. You were so in love with this boy that the thought of not being with him was unthinkable. You'd rather die than not be with him. You understand?" Katniss's appearance is even different by this point. No longer "the girl on fire," she looks like a doll during her final sit down with the game's television host, Caesar. Her attire is childlike (she wears a puffy dress that flares out); and she seems almost giddy.

Caesar: How did you feel when you found him by that river?

Katniss: I felt like the happiest person in the world. I couldn't imagine life without him.

When Caesar asks this, the camera focuses in on the studio audience. Everyone is entranced and captivated by Katniss's responses and the idea of a love story. As a result of her response, Caesar cannot help but give a sigh of relief, as if only love caused Katniss's act of defiance. Katniss continues to take Haymitch's advice by pretending that

her actions were due to love. She grabs hold of Peeta's hand and smiles innocently at the audience. Caesar then concludes their talk by identifying Katniss and Peeta as "the star crossed lovers."

Katniss's appearance and character change from rebellious warrior to beaming lover for several reasons. When changes within the plot of a film occur, it is because there are particular motives behind those changes. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) use the term motivation to mean "any element in the film that the viewer justifies on some grounds" (p. 66). Viewers of the film recognize that Katniss's transformation into beaming lover is motivated by a desire to mask her opposition to the Capitol. This is why Haymich tells Katniss that she has to pretend to be in love with Peeta. If the people of Panem were to sense a trace of Katniss's outright defiance, they would act off of that, and soon Panem would reflect how it was in the past before the Hunger Games existed.

In contrast to Katniss's loving demeanor, the poisonous nightlock berries, which instantly kill people once consumed, function to explicitly illustrate Katniss and Peeta's rebellious feelings toward the Capitol. Towards the end of the Games, the rules change for a second time, this time announcing that there can only be one winner instead of two from the same district. Frustrated with these new changes, Katniss and Peeta agree to swallow the berries, which would cause both of them to die, so that there will be no victor in the Hunger Games. Aware of what is about to transpire, the game makers alter the rules for a third time. As mentioned earlier in the film, during Effie's presentation of the purpose of the games, it was mentioned that there could only be one survivor because that person will serve as a physical reminder of the consequences for rebelling. The

appearance of the berries justifies Katniss's willingness to die rather than submit to the Capitol's rules.

### **Development**

Explaining the development of a film can help one understand the similarities and differences produced within a film. "Development constitutes some patterning of similar and differing elements. Our pattern ABACA is based not only on repetition (the recurring motif of A) and difference (the varied insertion of B and C) but also on a principle of *progression* that we could state as a rule..." (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 68).

The development of *The Hunger Games* may not be the easiest to follow, due to its several flashbacks to the past and an overall form that doesn't follow the basic story structure of a beginning, middle, and end. However, the Hunger Games's developmental structure does invite viewers to see how different elements operate within the film.

Viewers can observe the development of *The Hunger Games* in several ways. A core element of the film is the televised presentation of the competition in which Katniss is a participant – the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. Like most televised games, the history prior to the game depicted in the film doesn't affect the action; the game just starts. Consistent with this, the historical part of the purpose of the games is only partially explained to viewers.

As a film narrative, the structure of events isn't linear, leaving viewers (the same way one is immersed in a game) having to pay close attention to all of the surroundings in the film and to the elements that appear to be out of place. For example, viewers need to focus on the actual games that involve the victors, the game makers controlling the

games, and the viewers of Panem watching this game show, all the while paying attention to the sequence of events throughout the entire film.

Bordwell and Thompson suggest that a segmentation of a film will assist with identifying the major and minor scenes, the similarities and differences, and the overall form. A following sample segmentation of *The Hunger Games* would look something like this:

C. Credits

1. District 12

- a. Katniss and Gale are in the forest worrying about the reaping.
- b. Katniss returns home and prepares for it.
- c. Prim gets called for the game; Katniss volunteers to replace Prim.

2. The Capitol (the train ride there)

- a. Katniss meets Haymitch and the rest of the team on the way there.
- b. They discuss strategies on how to stay alive.
- c. Haymitch tells Katniss she needs to be likeable.

3. The Capitol (inside)

- a. The tributes prepare for introductions. President Snow looks worried about “the girl on fire.”
- b. Katniss shows her skills at practice.

4. The Arena

- a. Katniss is on her own; she eventually teams with Rue.
- b. Rue dies.
- c. Katniss and Peeta find each other.

- d. The two of them remain alive, and outsmart the Capitol.
5. District 12
  - a. Everyone appears to be proud.
6. Capitol—Ends with Snow watching the events unfold and then dramatically exiting
- E. End credits

Comparing the beginning and end of a film is essential to understanding the development of the storyline and how everything falls into place. The ending of *The Hunger Games* is important because it explains the reasons why the games have been instituted in the first place. For example, Katniss has upset the balance of Panem. The purpose of the Hunger Games is to have tributes fight to their death, with one tribute remaining, as a punishment for a previous uprising. By the end of the film, Katniss changes the rules by making two tributes victorious (Peeta and herself being the first to do so). Based on Katniss's actions, some of the individuals in the districts show that they want a change in the way Panem is run. To reiterate *The Hunger Games's* development, the ending sheds light on why the Games were instituted in the first place.

Bordwell and Thompson (2008) state, "A film does not just start, it *begins*. The opening provides a basis for what is to come and initiates us into the narrative. In some cases, the plot will seek to arouse curiosity by bringing us into a series of actions that have already started" (p. 86). In the first few minutes of the film, Effie plays a short clip that adds more to the reason behind the installation of the games. During the reaping, Effie announces that she will be showing a clip to District 12 brought from the Capitol where President Snow's voiceover is heard. He states:

War. Terrible war. Widows. Orphans. A motherless child. This was the uprising that rocked our land. Thirteen districts rebelled against the country that fed them, loved them, protected them. Brother turned on brother until nothing remained. And then came the peace. Hard fought, sorely won. A people rose up from the ashes. And a new era was born. But freedom has a cost. When the traitors were defeated, we swore as a nation we would never know this treason again. And so it was decreed that each year, the various districts of Panem would offer up in tribute one young man and woman, to fight to the death in a pageant of honor, courage, and sacrifice. The lone victor, bathed in riches, would serve as a reminder of our generosity and our forgiveness. This is how we remember our past. This is how we safeguard our future.

As these words are being said, the children of District 12 nervously glance at one another and rock from side to side. This scene gives some background to the uprising that President Snow speaks of during the clip. As Bordwell and Thompson mention, the first few minutes of a film familiarize viewers with characters and events foreshadowing what will occur.

By the end of the film, the events appear to connect back to the beginning, and help viewers understand what President Snow meant when he described the importance of the games in light of the uprising. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) state, “A film doesn’t simply stop; it *ends*. The narrative will typically resolve its causal issues by bringing the development to a high point, or *climax*. In the climax, the action is represented as having a narrow range of possible outcomes” (p. 88). During the closing, Katniss and Peeta arrive back at District 12, where their fellow citizens applaud them.

The two of them grab hands and hold them high into the sky as they smile back at their audience. While all of this takes place, President Snow observes everything on the television screen from the Capitol. At this point, the causal issues are resolved. The main issue in the film was for Katniss to challenge the Capitol's harsh rule. By the end of the film she accomplished that. Both Katniss and Peeta managed to alter Panem's history by making it so that two victors remain instead of one.

Although the causal issues have been resolved, the ending still remains open ended. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) describe this as anticlimactic.

In such films, the ending remains relatively open. That is, the plot leaves us uncertain about the final consequences of the story events. Our response becomes less firm than it does when a film has a clear-cut climax and resolution. The form may encourage us to imagine what might happen next or to reflect on other ways in which our expectations might have been fulfilled. (p. 88)

For example, *The Hunger Games* ends with Snow's exit. The camera zooms in on his face, and then he is seen turning his back on the audience. Here, audience members can't help but imagine what is to come in the next film, especially due to Snow's dramatic exit.



### **Introduction to Emotions in *The Hunger Games***

After analyzing a film for its structural components or the meaning derived from specific scenes and characters, it becomes clear that there is more left to analyze, and that those surface readings of a film deserve a closer, deeper look. This section will explore some of the potential emotional effects of *The Hunger Games* by drawing on the work of Carl Plantinga in *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (2009). In his work, Carl Plantinga explores the variety of emotions that viewers may experience as they watch a film. He states, "Strong emotions have a tendency to make a mark, leaving lasting impressions that transform our psyches and imprint our memories. For that reason alone, the means by which the movies elicit emotion are worth taking seriously" (2009, p. 2). Plantinga "argue[s] that the expression and elicitation of emotion in film is a central element of the film experience, an experience that is worthy of study in its own right. Moreover, emotion and affect are fundamental to what makes films artistically successful, rhetorically powerful, and culturally influential" (p. 5). The remainder of this paper will discuss the emotions that audience members may feel in response to particular scenes and characters in *The Hunger Games*, with particular emphasis on possible viewer reactions to Katniss.

### **Pleasures**

Hollywood films produce many different feelings and reactions. In addition to understanding the meanings of a film (as these are projected by the various techniques and elements described by Bordwell and Thompson) viewers can also engage with a film at a more emotional level. Plantinga (2009) notes that one strand of film theory rejects the

idea of emotional engagement. He observes that for those who see film as ideology, “The ideological function of classical Hollywood films was to mystify audiences, to lure them through pleasure into trancelike, passive psychological states that made the spectator prone to ideological subjugation” (p. 20). By contrast, Plantinga believes that there is no singular reaction that comes from watching films.

With regard to the experience of emotion, Plantinga feels that one person might feel excitement, while another might feel anger when watching a film. Either way, films produce more than one act of pleasure. Plantinga states, “The promise of pleasure plays an important role in narrative because it elicits spectator desires for various narrative outcomes and ensures forward-looking mental activity on the spectator’s part” (p. 21). Two of the pleasures that he discusses are “cognitive play” and “emotional trajectories rooted in narrative scenarios”.

Plantinga (2009) describes cognitive play as “a desire for comprehension” (p. 21). Spectators take pleasure in understanding the elements, characters, environment, etc. in a film. Since *The Hunger Games* is a science fiction film, some of these cognitive pleasures would come from wanting to discover more about the oppressive, futuristic society that the film depicts. Cognitive pleasure might also derive from wanting to understand how this oppressive society relates to the societies of the viewers. “The implied premise of much cognitive theory has been that spectators are motivated by curiosity, suspense, anticipation, and other narrative emotions; delight in discovery, and the pleasures of orienting themselves to the unfolding narrative events of a fictional world” (Plantinga, 2009, p. 22).

Although viewers may be interested in the science fiction genre of this film, and how it details a change within a dystopian society, they may also take interest in how the protagonist intends on carrying out her plans to alter that society. Consider, for example, the scene in which Katniss and Peeta are about to consume the poisonous berries. In this scene, Katniss becomes aware that she and Peeta will not comply with the Capitol's edict that there can only be one winner. Here, viewers derive pleasure from coming to know that she plans to defeat the Capitol, more specifically, President Snow.

Another type of pleasure that Plantinga describes relates to the satisfaction of "emotional trajectories rooted in narrative scenarios" (p. 21). According to Plantinga, the narrative structure of a film "shapes the overall [emotional] experience it offers" (p. 33).

Therapists commonly hear the complaint that friends or family members are simply unable or unwilling to empathize because it is too threatening. In classical Hollywood films, on the other hand, conventions such as the happy ending, characteristics of characters and other genres, make it probable that empathy will bring the rewards of an eventual favorable outcome for the protagonist; thus, emotional investment will likely yield psychically pleasing results. (Plantinga, 2009, pp. 33-4)

The resolution of *The Hunger Games* has Katniss and Peeta smiling and pretending that they are in love, despite the events in the arena that they were previously involved in. During their conversation with Caesar, he asks, "How did you feel when you found him by the river?" Katniss responds, "I felt like the happiest person in the world. I couldn't imagine life without him." Caesar then directs his attention to Peeta, asking him to respond to the same question. Peeta interlocks hands with Katniss and states, "I mean,

she saved my life,” and Katniss finishes by stating, “We saved each other.” This moment implies that everything will turn out good for the both of them. Although viewers can sense that they are only maintaining their act for the people of Panem, the viewer can find comfort in knowing that both Katniss and Peeta will survive and live on as “star-crossed lovers,” (labeled by Haymitch).

Plantinga’s comments about narrative structure and emotion provide a basis for understanding how viewers’ feelings toward protagonists may change over the course of a film.

That spectator emotion is so dependent on narrative makes sense in light of the nature of emotion. We sometimes think of emotions as static mental states, but emotions are a temporal process. ...Emotions occur in time and have a structure; they ebb and flow according to the subject’s evolving situation and response to it. Viewers’ emotional experiences may change dramatically as their expectations are met or thwarted, and as the situation takes unexpected turns. (p. 34)

Viewers’ emotions may change once Katniss grows attached to Rue. Before her encounter with the young girl, viewers are aware that there can only be one winner of the games. Conscious of this fact, they root for Katniss to be the sole victor. However, during the middle of the film, Katniss finds herself taking on a big sister role with Rue. Upon their first real encounter, Katniss provides food and shelter for the young girl, taking Rue under her wing. At this moment, viewers’ emotions toward the pair change. They are still aware of the rules of the games, but at the same time, they wouldn’t want anything to happen to Rue. Furthermore,

Some viewers...look for something more profound than the simple pleasure of happy endings and favorable outcomes. The stories that deeply move audiences and provide the kind of experience that make an indelible impression on their memories must intersect with their lives in significant ways. (Plantinga, 2009, p. 34)

The relationship between Katniss and Rue goes beyond simple, temporary pleasures that a viewer may feel from observing their encounter. This moment may move past what viewers witness and may speak to their unconscious mind. The idea of being protected despite the bad situation that one is in may arise. For instance, Katniss isn't thinking about winning or losing when she meets Rue. Her intentions include protecting Rue from any and everything. (We witness this when the two part and Katniss repeats to Rue to use the mockingjays' call as a signal to let Katniss know that she is safe [for reference see p. 18].) This moment speaks to viewers watching *The Hunger Games* on a different level than the ending because it leaves an everlasting impression on them, suggesting that the televised series of the hunger games is about more than just winning. It is about protecting those you care about.

In *Moving Viewers*, Plantinga describes another use of film viewing. He states: Movies can offer audiences a sense of enlarged possibilities; movies can demonstrate what we can be like or how life might be. Their adventures, heroisms, strong ideals, and excitements can affirm individual identity and allow spectators to see possibilities, to feel again a sense of individual potency. Thus, movies are not mere distractions, they are also visions. (2009, p. 35)

Movies, in short, enable viewers to participate with the characters of a film in more ways than one. In essence, movies, and the characters involved in them, can help viewers think about traits within themselves.

The latter point is supported by ideas about viewer engagement presented by Emily Moyer-Gusé (2008). She discusses similar issues in her article “Toward a Theory of Entertainment Persuasion: Explaining the Persuasive Effects of the Entertainment Education Messages.” For example, through what Moyer-Gusé describes as “wishful identification”, viewers can be posited as being able to spot Katniss’s caring nature, and wanting to emulate that. “Wishful identification occurs when a viewer wants to be like the character, experiences an active ‘desire to emulate the figure,’ and looks up to the character” (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 410). In the film, viewers may wish they could adopt traits similar to those that Katniss displays.

In harmony with this idea, Plantinga (2009) states, “It is relatively easy for filmmakers to engage the sympathies and antipathies of audiences, because viewers seem to take inherent pleasure in strongly desiring various outcomes for the central characters of a narrative” (p. 31). Viewers almost become attached to the characters in a film. Whether the characters are heroes or villains, “...sympathy is one of the primary means through which many films engage emotional response. Sympathy provides a moral and ideological compass for the viewer, a means of appraising situations according to their implications for favored characters” (Plantinga, 2008, p. 31). During Rue’s death, viewers sympathize with Katniss’s loss. They feel the anger that Katniss feels toward the Capitol, her frustration with the boy who shot Rue, and her overall dissatisfaction with Rue’s death.

In contrast to *wishful* identification, there is a mode of audience involvement with film characters that Moyer-Gusé specifies with the single term “identification”. This concept “refers to an emotional and cognitive process whereby a viewer takes on the role of a character in a narrative. The viewer forgets about his or her own reality and temporarily becomes the character, taking on the character’s perspective” (p. 410). Although this may occur within viewers when viewing certain films, Plantinga regards it as almost impossible for viewers to experience pleasure if they live vicariously through a character and forget their own surroundings. He states, “Some would tell us that when spectators identify with a character, they feel and experience exactly what the character does. But this could hardly be the case; if it were true, it would be difficult to account for the pleasure of the film experience” (Plantinga, 2009, p. 32). In the scene with Rue, viewers may find it difficult to identify with Katniss. She experiences pain and guilt when Rue dies. Viewers may be able to sympathize with Katniss, but not share her feelings.

Contrasting with the notion of identification is the concept of antipathy. According to Plantinga:

In film viewing, at least, a strong and interesting antagonist—someone who is appropriately loathed and otherwise hated—is necessary to provide the pleasures of antipathy that cannot be ignored. Strong antipathies often result in a desire for vengeance, harm, retribution, or punishment. (Plantinga, 2008, p. 32)

Snow is the main antagonist in *The Hunger Games*. He introduces the televised games into society in order to maintain order and to subdue any forms of uprising. When he notices that Katniss poses a potential threat to his oppressive rule, he intends to put a stop

to it. In one scene, President Snow meets with Seneca Crane to discuss Katniss's individual evaluation when she shot an arrow at an apple near the spectator's head. (This evaluation is an assessment of the skills tributes are rated on, which determines if they will receive sponsors while they are fighting in the Game's arena.) The conversation goes as follows:

*President Snow:* An 11? (Snow asked in response to the rating Katniss scored)

*Seneca Crane:* She earned it.

*President Snow:* She shot an arrow at your head

*Seneca Crane:* Well, at an apple...

*President Snow:* ...near your head. Seneca, why do you think we have a winner?

*Seneca Crane:* What do you mean?

*President Snow:* I mean, why do we have a winner? I mean if we just wanted to intimidate the districts, why not round up 24 of them at random and execute them all at once? It'd be a lot faster. Hope.... It is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous. Spark a fire, as long as it's contained.

*Seneca Crane:* So...?

*President Snow:* So, *contain* it.

President Snow implies that Seneca needs to keep Katniss contained. Because Katniss is a liked character, viewers' feelings toward Snow may be that of hatred. He wants to eliminate, or at least "contain" the protagonist; therefore, audience members take pleasure in wanting to witness his downfall.



### **Cognitive-Perceptual Approach**

With pleasures that viewers gain from viewing a film also come deeper emotions. Plantinga posits that emotions may arise beyond what audience members may feel on the surface, which is where the unconscious mind comes into play.

“Some critics of cognitive theories have assumed that all cognitive theorists insist on purely conscious evaluations in the genesis of human emotion. ... On the contrary, much of what leads a person to have an emotion must occur at the level of what I call, after Gerard O’Brien and Jon Jureidini, the ‘cognitive unconscious.’” (Plantinga, 2009, p. 49)

Plantinga believes that most of viewers’ emotions are a result of their unconscious mind. “Our ability to exercise conscious, intentional control over our behavior and responses is limited. Much of our behavior and many responses occur as a result of unconscious mental processes. In other words, they are automatic and not mediated by deliberate consideration” (p. 51). Plantinga goes on to describe automaticity and how it relates to the unconscious mind.

Automaticity refers to the idea that certain patterns of human response in relation to perceived stimuli occur without conscious deliberation. They are not carefully considered but rather immediate, as though they were programmed into us. The three forms of automaticity include: (1) the automatic effect of perception on tendencies toward action, (2) the automatic pursuit of goals, and (3) the continued automatic evaluation of one’s experience. [2009, pp. 51-2]

Taking this into consideration in reference to *The Hunger Games*, automaticity can be applied during the beginning scene, where Katniss volunteers for her sister, Prim. During

the call of Prim's name at the Reaping, not only do the citizens of District 12 remain silent, but the audience falls silent too as Prim looks around, unaware of what to do. Viewers' responses are likely to become automatic as they hold their breath upon hearing Effie call Prim's name, and as they hope for some change of events that would possibly spare the young girl's life.

Sometimes, an individual's feelings for a character or scene depend on how s/he perceives the situation. "A cognitive-perceptual approach to emotions claims that kinds of emotions are distinguished in part according to kinds of individual appraisals or construals of a situation" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 54). During the Reaping scene when Effie announces Prim's name, audience members may focus on Prim, because her name was picked, and Katniss, because Prim is her younger sister. As a result, this may cause viewers to react differently to each character because "in many cases, the individual's construal of the situation determines the kind of emotion that is experienced" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 55). When Prim's name is called, audience members may feel shocked because this is the first time her name was entered in the reaping. What are the odds of that? Their concern also lies in the fact that Prim is a fragile child who doesn't seem like she'll survive in the arena. After Katniss volunteers, viewers breathe a sigh of relief because Prim's life is spared; however, now they may fear for Katniss's life as well.

Another type of cognitive approach involves the idea of concern-based construals. This type of construal goes beyond the conscious mind.

First, the construals of an emotion are not necessarily conscious states or carefully considered reflective appraisals. . . . A concern-based construal is like a perception in the extended sense of the word. It is the experiencing of a situation in its

import; it may be felt as much as thought, it may be pre-reflective as much as reflective, and it may be, but is not necessarily, automatic. Although an emotion can be described in terms of a deliberative and conscious appraisal, it often results from what are, at least initially, unconscious and automatic processes. (Plantinga, 2009, p. 56)

This type of construal is likely to occur towards the end of the film, in a scene with Katniss and Haymitch. After winning the Games, audience members may view Katniss as vulnerable and may fear for her life. Because they are aware that there was supposed to be only one winner and that Katniss broke that rule, their automatic concern may be one of worry about Katniss in light of the events that occurred.

*Haymitch:* They're not happy with you.

*Katniss:* Why, because I didn't die?

*Haymitch:* You showed them up.

*Katniss:* Well, I'm sorry it didn't go the way they planned. You know I'm not very happy with them either.

*Haymitch:* Katniss! This is serious, not just for you. They don't take these things lightly.

Before the discussion with Caesar, Haymitch offers Katniss advice. He states, "If they ask, you say you couldn't help yourself. You were so in love with this boy that the thought of not being with him was...unthinkable. You'd rather die than not be with him." In reaction to this scene, audience members may respond similarly to Haymitch's reaction—with fear. At this point, Katniss appears as the Capitol's target. She has outsmarted the Capitol, forcing the game makers to choose two winners instead of one.

Audience members have already witnessed that keeping the rules intact is important to President Snow. Aware of this knowledge, they may react with a deep level of concern for Katniss's life.

### **Affective Trajectories and Synesthesia**

Plantinga's notion of "affective trajectories and synesthesia" concern audience members' reactions to particular events displayed in a film and how those responses relate to their "overall experience" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 140). The affects viewers may feel in response to elements produced in the film are interrelated with their overall life experience. This can be shown through sympathy, a feeling that "leads the spectator to take a strong interest in the character's well-being and develop strong concerns about story outcomes" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 149). When viewers feel sympathetic toward a character, they may identify with that particular character. Plantinga describes this as "'the identification hypothesis,' [which] holds that spectators share the thoughts and emotions of the sympathetic protagonist through processes of simulation and empathy" (p. 149). Like Moyer-Gusé, therefore, Plantinga also treats the concept of identification.

Both sympathy and identification are interrelated because once viewers develop a strong connection or concern for characters they may begin to identify with that character. However, there are some viewers who don't identify with the characters in a film and may feel the complete opposite of that character's emotions or reactions.

Plantinga identifies this notion as "'ineliminable egocentrism,' [which is] the position that the viewer's cognition and responses are not the same as the assumed thoughts and emotions of the protagonist or any other character" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 149). In other

words, the spectator feels or experiences emotions that may differ from that of the characters.

Plantinga's notions of identification and ineliminable egocentrism invite us to explore the way in which viewers may feel either sympathy or antipathy for film characters. This exploration can be enhanced by considering audience members' feelings about characters in relationship to the idea of protagonist structure and type. According to Plantinga, protagonist structure and type are helpful in understanding "...the ways in which spectator and character concern-based construals differ" (p. 151). In other words, by identifying different types of protagonist structures, viewers will be able to gain a better understanding of the differences between their understanding of events occurring in a film and of a character's understanding of those events.

Among the protagonist structures discussed by Plantinga, the two that best apply to Katniss and Peeta's relationship is the structure labeled *initially misaligned dual protagonists* and the structure labeled *conflicted or confused protagonist*. Plantinga describes the initially misaligned dual protagonists structure as follows:

"Protagonists...are opposed initially but...come to share a goal by story's end" (2009, p. 151). Initially, Katniss has no desire to build a relationship with anyone, especially not with her companion, Peeta. Consider the Opening Ceremony in which Katniss and Peeta ride in on their district's chariot. As he reaches for her hand, Katniss flinches and pulls back, to which Peeta responds, "Come on, they'll love it." Katniss takes several scenes to warm up to the idea of building any type of relationship with Peeta. However, by the end of the film, Katniss and Peeta have reached a common goal. They both want to survive the games, and as a result, they find a way to work together.

Plantinga's notion of a *Conflicted or confused protagonist* is also applicable to *The Hunger Games*, specifically to the character of Katniss. A conflicted or confused protagonist "...has conflicting goals and is troubled by ambiguity or conflict, sometimes having to make a difficult choice" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 152). Analyzing the initial relationship between Katniss and Peeta, Katniss realizes that she has to make a difficult decision by teaming up with Peeta if she wants to survive. While on the train ride to the Capitol, Haymitch tells Katniss that she "Better keep this knife; he [Peeta] knows what he's doing." During this scene, Katniss appears hostile and unwilling to work with anyone once she stabs a knife into a tablemat when Haymitch refuses to respond to her question. In contrast to her, Peeta appears friendlier. Haymitch warns her that in order to stay alive, she must get people to like her. This—between feelings of hostility and friendliness—is apparent in Katniss.

Based on the relationship between Katniss and Peeta, spectators can have different feelings and emotions toward them. They may experience congruence or have mixed concerns and construals toward these characters. Plantinga (2009) posits, "If spectator emotion is a concern-based construal, then a spectator can never entirely share the character's presumed emotions" (p. 153). Spectators may be able to relate to the emotions that characters display, but not share their emotions completely.

The point is that the spectator's responses do not simply correspond with those of sympathetic characters, because sympathetic characters have conflicting, contradictory, and/or seemingly flawed responses, goals, and construals to which the spectator cannot entirely assent. (Plantinga, 2009, p. 156)

Even though this is the case, spectators may be able to relate to the character in other ways.

Spectators can experience a character's emotions by having their emotions fit with those of the character instead of identifying with that character.

Although the spectator will not typically have the *same* emotions as those experienced by a character, a film scene may nonetheless provide for an affective experience that participates in the affective shading or color of that experience, or that is *fitting* with it. (Plantinga, 2009, p. 157)

For example, audience members feel the same emotions about a certain scene or character, but other affects related to that scene may arise. Plantinga calls this "synesthetic affect". Within this concept,

Certain elements of a film have affective charges that are congruent in tone and valence, fitting in the means by which they express and elicit a 'feeling tone' that the spectator experiences as unified and coherent. This is bottom-up processing, because the viewer may find the elements to be fitting in their felt similarities prior to or independent of any narrative coherence imposed from above.

(Plantinga, 2009, p. 157)

This allows spectators to connect with certain aspects within a film without having to experience them directly.

Two affects that spectators may feel as a result of characters' emotions are shame and guilt. "Shame typically implies the perception of defects in the self, or in a person or group with whom one closely associates, with respect to some standard or goal one would like to have attained" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 160). In *The Hunger Games*, Peeta

experiences shame as a result of the bread incident he had with Katniss prior to having become closer to her in the arena. During one of Katniss's flashbacks, she remembers sitting outside of the bakery where Peeta tosses her bread. Peeta recalls this moment in the middle of the film when both he and Katniss are in a cave. Peeta's leg is injured and Katniss attends to his needs, one of which includes feeding him. She states, "You fed me once," to which he replies, "I think about that all the time...how I tossed you that bread. I should've gone to you. I should've just gone out in the rain." He cannot help but feel shame. He blames himself for not rescuing her. In another instance, Peeta's shame becomes guilt when Katniss attempts to help him. "Guilt, unlike shame, occurs when one finds moral fault with one's own actions or the actions of an individual or group with which one closely associated" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 160). Before reaching the cave, Katniss finds Peeta near the stream, camouflaged by rocks and grass. As she cleans out the cut from his leg, Peeta implicitly suggests that Katniss leave him. He repeats her name, but each time she interrupts him. By the second time he calls her name, she states, "I'm not gonna leave you. I'm not gonna do that." Reflecting back on his actions, Peeta asks, "Why not?" The reason he asks is because throughout the majority of the time that he and the other tributes are in the arena, Peeta forms an alliance with one of the antagonists, Cato, instead of Katniss. Cato and the rest of his group are looking to kill Katniss, and Peeta eventually leads them to her location. Even though Katniss believes that he disobeys her trust, she still helps him. This produces guilt within Peeta. For his own personal reasons, he sided against Katniss. Plantinga states, "according to Susan Millar, wrongdoing experienced as voluntary produces guilt, while wrongdoing experienced as involuntary produces shame 'both in relation to the action itself and to the



failure of self-control” (Plantinga, 2009, p. 160). Based on this, Peeta feels both shame and guilt on two occasions.

According to Plantinga, shame and guilt are two emotions that viewers may not be able to experience through identification. “The spectator may have compassion for or experience suspense in relation to the guilt or shame of a character, but he or she typically will not experience guilt or shame merely in response to the behavior, motives, or desires of that character” (p. 162). While audience members may not experience shame and guilt via identification, they may be experienced as meta-emotions. “The spectator may well respond to elements of her or his own experience and behavior as a spectator. For example, I may become disgusted with myself for responding emotionally to a sentimental scene or for missing an obvious clue that is needed to understand a narrative development” (p. 162). Reconsidering the scenes where Katniss aids Peeta, spectators may be glad that he is hurt or may wish for Katniss to leave him and save herself because of Peeta’s betrayal toward Katniss. However, spectators can feel ashamed for having these feelings toward this character. Plantinga (2009) agrees with Robin Wood’s idea that “spectators may, in some instances, be induced to share some of the desires of, or to have parallel desires with, characters in a film” (p. 164). For instance, spectators may experience desire for Peeta’s suffering, but can also feel shame or guilt about that desire at the same time.

### **Paradigm Scenarios**

Emotions often arise when dealing with different elements of a film. Filmmakers embed many techniques within film stories to induce reactions and emotions from

audience members. Often, the same emotions exist when viewers are faced with scenes that occur frequently throughout a film. For example, if two characters died in a film at different times (whether one was murdered or the other died of natural causes) viewers may feel sad in both scenarios. These patterns are what Plantinga (2009) defines as paradigm scenarios, which are “types and sequences of events that are associated with certain emotions” (p. 80). Like in the example stated above, where viewers witness characters dying at different times and places in a film, viewers will still feel compelled to react in a similar manner, whether the character or event differs. In many ways, it can seem like viewers are programmed to react the same way to scenes with similar narrative structures. Plantinga describes how emotions found in paradigm scenarios are learned behaviors.

By the age of two or three, toddlers become aware of other people and of the fact that various participants in the same situation will respond differently to that situation depending on their role in it. By the age of three, children begin to understand that certain events are associated with particular emotions, and that their actions may lead to another’s distress or delight. Most importantly, infants first learn to talk about emotions via stories, and by the time they are four or five years old, they associate stories with corresponding emotions. (Plantinga, 2009, p. 81)

Many stories anticipate a specific emotion in light of a particular scenario. “We seem to be genetically programmed to respond with specific emotions to certain types of situations” (p. 81). For example, if a character’s family is killed, viewers are expected to feel grief or if a character marries her true love, the expected emotion will be that of

happiness. In *The Hunger Games*, several paradigm scenarios are enacted that may produce scenario appropriate emotions when they are viewed.

Throughout the film, the “survival of the fittest” paradigm scenario deserves a closer look. Katniss is a strong individual, who is able to survive her surroundings because of the advantages she has. One emotion that viewers may experience as they observe this character trying to outsmart the other victors is fear. As Katniss tries to remain the lone survivor of the games, the other victors and the game makers are constantly threatening her life. “Cross-culturally, a clear and immediate threat to one’s survival...elicits fear. ...Fear occurs when the subject construes her or his safety or well-being as being significantly threatened, and the object of the fear is the source of the threat” (Plantinga, 2009, p. 81). In one scene, the game makers try to get Katniss killed by throwing fireballs in her direction. In the event that she survives this, they also try to set other tributes to move into the same area as her so that someone could kill her. Katniss awakes to the forest being on fire. As she tries to escape the fire, several fireballs and a tree are put in place to stop her. Eventually, one of the fireballs makes contact with her leg, thus, injuring it. Her attempt to block the last hurdle ends up with her tumbling to the ground and into water where she meets several other tributes. Each time Katniss is in danger, viewers fear for her life.

The relationship of emotions to stories is a key to the ideological significance of Hollywood, because the movies show us how and what to fear by constructing and foregrounding objects of fear, formulating the nature of the threat, and demonstrating “proper” responses. (Plantinga, 2009, p. 81)

Viewers feel this type of emotion when the game makers try to eliminate Katniss. We witness the fear in her eyes as she tries to dodge the fireballs, and as a result, we fear for her safety as well. Katniss is the protagonist of the story; therefore, we, as viewers, want and expect her to be victorious in the end. When she is faced with a new challenge, viewers cannot help but hope she survives. Plantinga (2009) states, “The movies have an influence in altering and exaggerating our fears, in part based on the scenarios for fear that are consistently repeated” (p. 82). These paradigm scenarios cause viewers to have the same emotion throughout these scenes.

It should be noted that a paradigm scenario may trigger more than one kind of viewer emotion. With respect to the survival scenario discussed above, viewers may also become annoyed with Katniss. Even though we want her to survive and win the games, we cannot help but feel differently when she puts herself in danger trying to save others. On several occasions, Katniss commits the same offence repeatedly by putting herself in danger to save someone else. Towards the end of the film, Katniss puts her life in danger to save Peeta’s life. One of the game makers announced that there would be a feast at the Cornucopia (the place at the start of the games), where there will be a bag for each of the remaining districts that contain an item that the tributes each need. Before she leaves, Peeta states, “Katniss. You’re not gonna risk your life for me. I’m not gonna let you,” to which she responds, “You would do it for me. Wouldn’t you?” She agrees that she would stay with Peeta instead of going out to the Cornucopia, but when morning comes and Peeta is asleep, Katniss goes out to retrieve the bag anyway. As Katniss runs for her district’s bag, one of the other tributes throws a knife at her, attempting to kill her. The tribute almost succeeds at killing Katniss until a tribute from District 4 (the same district

Rue is from) steps in to save her. After he kills the tribute, he says, “Just this time 12. For Rue.” At this point, viewers may be angry with Katniss for putting her life in danger. If she had stayed in the cave with Peeta, he may have died or become severely injured, but she would not have been faced with any type of danger.

In *The Hunger Games*, paradigm scenarios of social integration/disintegration are also shown throughout the film. Katniss finds it difficult to leave her family when it is time for her to leave for the Capitol. The main reason is because she provides for her family. Now she has to rely on Gale to look after her mother and Prim to make sure that they remain safe. After the reaping when Katniss is allowed to have a few seconds with her family before she has to say goodbye, Gale comes in to see her. Before he leaves, she tells him, “Take care of them Gale. Whatever you do, don’t let them starve.” Katniss has to integrate into a different type of group once she arrives at the Capitol. She has to get accustomed to being around the tributes from the other districts. It is ironic that Katniss feels disconnected from a group of people that she shares a common goal with—the goal of surviving. However, as she enters the training room filled with all of the tributes, she recognizes how different each of them is. For example, the tributes from District 1 and 2 have physical strength and are skilled with weapons, whereas the tributes from 4 and 11 are cunning and quick. Although there can only be one survivor, the real enemy should be President Snow instead of one another. Many people could understand these scenarios of social integration, as they “retain core elements that are fundamental to human existence” (Plantinga, 2009, p. 83). They would be able to sympathize, and maybe empathize, with her experiences because as Plantinga noted, social integration behavior produces emotions that are common to many people.

The more familiar scenes are to viewers, the more they can relate to them. Filmmakers often embed paradigm scenarios into films with similar genres, which cause viewers to produce the same type of emotion for each film narrative. Plantinga (2009) states, "Hollywood uses genre classifications to allow audiences to choose kinds of scenarios that promise specific kinds of emotional experiences" (p. 84). Science fiction films, like *The Hunger Games*, all have similar concepts. They deal with futuristic ideas that explain the consequences of future technology. Because many of them share a common theme, viewers will appear to have a similar reaction or feeling towards certain scenes. These science fiction films are usually "action/adventure films [that] appeal to the supposed masculine concerns of survival, acquisition of goods, heroic fantasy, and power and aggression, eliciting emotions such as suspense, excitement, anger, and vengefulness, but most importantly offering a fast-moving and strongly visceral experience" (Plantinga, 2009, p. 84).

## **Conclusion**

In analyzing film, it is useful to identify the operation of both the formal aspects of cinema described by Bordwell and Thompson, and the techniques of emotional elicitation identified by Plantinga. This paper has attempted to do that in its analysis of *The Hunger Games*. As the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss alone produces a multitude of readings and explanations as a result of her actions and the scenes that she is involved in. In the film, she is a courageous, young girl who wishes to protect those she cares about. From watching her movements, audience members are obligated to

sympathize and experience Katniss's journey with her in some way. This paper described several ways viewers may have a fully engaged experience with the film.

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