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Constructing Reality: The Role of Mass Media in The Hunger Games Series

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Constructing Reality: The Role of Mass Media in *The Hunger Games* Series

by

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Abstract

The Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins is an incredibly popular Young Adult series that has had a large impact on both children and adults. The media environment within *The Hunger Games* trilogy can provide insight into our own world. This thesis seeks to discuss how governing structures in the trilogy, the Capitol and District 13, manipulate the media to secure their own power. Using contemporary research on media theories, media methods, and media effects, this thesis focuses primarily on the Capitol and District 13's efforts to create and use the media image of Katniss Everdeen, the central character of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. It shows that in the midst of this battle for her image and identity, Katniss must develop her media literacy skills if she is to achieve and maintain any control over her own life and image.

Key Terms: media effects, spiral of silence, priming, framing and *The Hunger Games*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Katniss Everdeen, the heroine of Suzanne Collins' extremely popular *The Hunger Games* trilogy, which includes *The Hunger Games* (2008), *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2009), and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* (2010), has become a household name for avid fans and even for many unfamiliar with the books. Katniss' charisma was noted early on in the first reviews of the series. For example, in 2008, *The New York Times* published a review of *The Hunger Games* titled "Scary New World" in which author John Green described Katniss as "tough and resourceful, but kind and sentimental." In addition, Katniss Everdeen has proved to be exceedingly marketable. In 2010, *The Hunger Games* trilogy sold 4.3 million copies. After the release of the first film in 2012, this number increased to 277 million copies (Roback 33). One remarkable thing about *The Hunger Games* trilogy, therefore, is the large amount of positive feedback – centered around Katniss – that it has generated and continues to generate. Often praised for her strength and bravery, Katniss' influence extends beyond the pages of Suzanne Collins' books to aspects of everyday life. One example of her influence can be detected through an examination of statistics related to archery participation. Katniss is well known for her skillful use of the bow and arrow. Between 2011 and 2013, participation in archery increased by 104 percent. Between 2013 and 2014, participation increased by another 121 percent (Taylor 16). The increased archery participation mirrored the years the series was at its highest popularity, illustrating one way *The Hunger Games* trilogy, and specifically the character of Katniss, has influenced modern culture. The popularity of

Katniss' character, demonstrated by the series' impressive commercial success and the increased interest in archery, also mirrors the popularity of Katniss within the series itself. This popularity is created in large part through media representations of Katniss created by the Capitol, the leader of the twelve Districts known as Panem, and District 13, the rebellious faction that was part of Panem before the first rebellion. The Capitol hopes to represent Katniss as a love-struck tribute whose actions reflect her romantic feelings for Peeta rather than a desire to rebel. District 13, however, hopes to do the opposite by representing her as a fiery rebel leader who will inspire Panem's citizens to rebel against the Capitol.

Both the Capitol and District 13 recognize the effect Katniss' image is capable of having on audiences. In response, they manipulate her image in their television broadcasts to foster and perpetuate particular attitudes of viewers toward themselves as governing institutions. Television is a powerful tool in mass communication, especially in Panem where certain broadcasts are mandatory and all broadcasts are governmentally sanctioned. By using televised broadcasts in these ways, the Capitol and District 13 reveal their knowledge that the "continual repetition of stories . . . serve to define the world and legitimize a particular social order" (Grebner 44). The effect is to threaten Panem's citizens in order to control and subjugate them. In the first and second books, the Capitol maintains a monopoly over media output; this monopoly is disrupted, however, by the increasing strength of District 13. As this analysis will show, both of these media powers use similar methods for influencing Panem despite the fact that they have oppositional aims. But as George Grebner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, Nancy Signorielli, and James Shanahan observe,

Programs that seem to be intended for very different market segments are cut from the same mold; when surface-level differences are wiped away, what remains are often surprisingly similar and complementary visions of life and society, consistent ideologies, and stable accounts of the ‘facts’ of life (44).

Likewise, even though the Capitol and District 13 appear different on the surface, their methodologies of controlling through media outlets are similar.

With the Capitol and District 13 both constructing oppositional representations of reality, *The Hunger Games* trilogy revolves around a struggle for media control and, thus, for influence within and over Panem. To do so, both the Capitol and District 13 rely heavily on priming and framing images of their society and of celebrity figures like Katniss. However, neither media power expects a third player to appear who will offer a different framework for viewing and constructing reality. This third player emerges from within their manipulation of their media gaze: Katniss Everdeen. As we will see, Katniss’ media literacy develops and expands from an initial, rather elementary, understanding of how the media in her society works to a strong level of media literacy that allows her to manipulate media moments for herself while in the oppressive media powers’ spotlight. This thesis will examine the purpose-driven use of media by both the Capitol and District 13 as well as Katniss’ ultimate claim on her own image and identity through her understanding and manipulation of the very methods used to control her.

Chapter Two

Media Methods in *The Hunger Games*

Priming and Framing

In order to analyze the use of media by the Capitol and District 13, this thesis discusses five key methods –priming, framing, spiral of silence, propaganda, and panopticon– and how they are utilized within the media of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Two of the primary media methods used in media communications in *The Hunger Games* trilogy are priming and framing. Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder define priming as the way media portray certain aspects of life while ignoring others (136). The emphasis on particular images allows the media to encourage audiences to accept that certain issues are more important than others; essentially, it tells viewers what to think about. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the Capitol primes images that visually demonstrate its power and control. Later, it primes images indicating that Katniss and Peeta are “madly in love” and could not be held responsible for attempting to eat the poisonous berries; an action that would have robbed the Games of a victor (Collins, *Hunger Games* 135). Thus, the Capitol ignores rebellion as a subject by focusing the audience’s attention on romance. In order to force viewers to think about the consequences of rebellion, the Capitol primes the Hunger Games in an annual broadcast and steadily streams propaganda to Panem’s citizens. This ensures that Panem’s citizens are paying attention to the issues the Capitol deems important, such as its power over Panem, rather than evidence that resistance against the Capitol could be possible.

Priming is closely related to the concept of framing. As Robert Entman explains:

To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and . . . promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. [emphasis in the original] (qtd. in McCombs 87)

In other words, while priming seeks to establish what is important, framing seeks to foster an attitude or behavior toward the object that the media primes. Dietram A. Scheufele and David Tewksbury further explain that framing “is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences” (11). In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the Capitol primes displays of its strength while excluding any images that may dispute that strength, thereby developing a frame that encourages audiences to adopt an attitude of fear, obedience, and submission toward the powerful Capitol.

Spiral of Silence

Another media-effects technique important to *The Hunger Games* trilogy is what is known as the spiral of silence. This term or phrase is used to describe how certain opinions in a society become dominant and remain dominant. According to Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, public opinion exerts pressure on the people in a society (76). As she further explains, members of a society experience a “largely subconscious fear of isolation” that leads them to either accept a popular opinion or conceal a minority opinion (78). A spiral of silence, therefore, is a useful tool for totalitarian governments because once created it allows for the perpetuation of dominant opinions that benefit such institutions. Since the Capitol has full control of the media, it is able to present public

opinion in ways that will benefit it the most. The purpose of using such a strategy is to effectively silence minority opinions.

Propaganda

The creation of dominant opinions relates, of course, to propaganda. Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell define propaganda as “the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (4), and they outline several components that make up a propaganda process. The first step in this process is the *Institution*. The institution is responsible for developing propaganda that “may be [used] to maintain the institution’s legitimacy, its position in society, and its activities” (213). In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the Capitol endeavors to maintain its position as the ruling power and disseminates propaganda throughout the series to do so. Thus, the Capitol functions as an institution that depends on propaganda. However, according to Jowett and O'Donnell, the primary institution, in this case the Capitol, may encounter propaganda from outside institutions that intend “to demonstrate support for a counter-ideology or concern over an issue” (213). In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, District 13 acts as an outside institution that disseminates propaganda in direct contradiction to the Capitol, the primary institution.

The second step in the process is the deployment of *Propaganda Agents* who are responsible for carrying out the propaganda. These agents may be “powerful and charismatic figures” or “low-key disseminators” (213). Although the Capitol usually disseminates propaganda messages itself, the first clear instance of the Capitol using a propaganda agent is in *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* when interviews with Peeta Mellark are broadcast throughout Panem. Having captured Peeta after the Third Quarter

Quell, the Capitol has easy access to him and, therefore, to his image. Its manipulation of Peeta's image, as we will see, counteracts District 13's use of Katniss Everdeen as a propaganda agent. Having rescued her from the arena during the Third Quarter Quell, District 13 is able to use her to disseminate a message of rebellion. The third step of the propaganda process is the *Media Method*, the selected means used to disseminate the message. According to Jowett and O'Donnell, "Access to and control of the media literally means access to and potential control of public opinion" (214). In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the primary medium used for propaganda is television. But as Jowett and O'Donnell further explain if a "society allows competing messages to come from the media ... the propagandist's message ... can be diffused" (214). Before District 13 emerges as a media power in the third volume, *Mockingjay*, the Capitol does not have to deal with competing messages from another institution. While the introduction of District 13 could have indicated the emergence of a more open governing institution, such is not the case because; as this analysis will show, District 13 also wants sole control of the media and Panem. Neither institution is willing to rule in a society in which its messages are intermingled with or threatened by competing messages.

The fourth step in the propaganda process is the *Social Network*. This network is composed of opinion leaders, small groups of people – which may include propaganda agents – and individuals who "facilitate rumors innocently or deliberately" (215). Thus, this type of social network acts as a mediator between the media institution and community. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Katniss and Peeta play a large role within the social network of the Capitol and District 13 both innocently and deliberately facilitating from time to time the aims of these institutions. The social-network step is followed by

the final step in the process: the *Public*. This public may “form communities” based on the propaganda message it receives and may respond favorably or unfavorably to it (216). Aware of such possibilities, the Capitol and District 13 try to influence their public to support their cause in the rebellion.

Panopticon

All of these methods may be used to understand how the Capitol’s media use constructs panopticon. A panopticon is a type of prison in which an unseen, centrally located guard may or may not be currently watching a prisoner (Wezner 149). Prisoners will often act as if they are always being surveyed, fearing punishment. In this type of system, punishment often becomes “a spectacle staged more for the watchers” than for the “rehabilitation of the prisoner” (149). After witnessing the punishment of prisoners who are caught in misconduct, other prisoners will often behave as if they are constantly being watched, motivating them to avoid punishment themselves. Like a panopticon, the Capitol uses punishments as “theatrical reminders” to highlight its power (149). As Kelly Wezner explains, “The Capitol’s punishments . . . have a physical and psychological impact on the immediate victim, but are constructed to affect the wider audience through the idea of punishment” (150). While some public punishments are intended to affect the Districts in which they are enforced – such as Gale’s public whipping that leaves his back “a raw, bloody slab of meat” – other punishments make use of the media to reach a much wider audience (Collins, *Catching Fire* 105). The Hunger Games are one such public punishment orchestrated by the Capitol and broadcast to “every screen in the country” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 344).

Like the Capitol, District 13 operates as a panopticon. Those living within its borders must adhere to strict rules and rituals that are overseen by electronic surveillance and President Coin, the “rigidly controlled” leader of District 13 (Wezner 152). Moreover, even though District 13 does not carry out public punishments in the same way that the Capitol does, its punishments are still designed to send a message to particular audiences. For instance, after finding her prep team “half-naked, bruised, and shackled to wall” for stealing bread, Katniss tells two rebel leaders from the Capitol, “Punishing my prep team’s a warning . . . [a]bout who’s really in control” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 46, 50). Although the prep team’s crime seems relatively minor, the subsequent punishment is severe; Katniss interprets that the punishment is a message meant for her and the rebel leaders from the Capitol, namely, that District 13 is powerful and should not be crossed. Once obtaining power in *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*, District 13 follows the example of the Capitol by planning a final Hunger Games and public execution of President Snow.

Chapter 3

The Media Games of the Capitol and District 13

The pinnacle of the Capitol's most effective display of media technology and control occurs during the annually broadcasted television program known as the Hunger Games – referred to hereafter as the Games. The Games have been one of the Capitol's primary means of control ever since the first rebellion 74 years earlier. These Games force each district to supply tributes, one boy and one girl, to fight against each other to the death in an arena especially designed for this “sport.” The tributes are selected from a random lottery with other citizens having the option to take the place of those whose names are drawn. This selection, known as the reaping, is held in every District and televised so that every citizen of Panem can witness the reapings in the other Districts. During the reapings, the Capitol presents itself as a “shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, [that] brought peace and prosperity to its citizens” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 18). Despite the imminent death of children, the Mayor of District 12 says, “It is both a time for repentance and a time for thanks” (19). Thus, while presenting itself as an authoritative power with complete control, the Capitol also attempts to present itself as the beneficent savior of Panem. However, Katniss understands that the underlying purpose is to prevent the Districts from ever rebelling again (18). While awaiting the selection of tributes of the seventy-fourth Games, Katniss explains her understanding of the Games' purposes:

...this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy.

How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words

they use, the real message is clear. “Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen. (18)

The Games, then, are not merely retribution for a past rebellion that most of Panem’s citizens would not have been alive to participate in, but an attempt by the Capitol to influence the attitudes of the Districts. From this perspective, we see two media techniques used by the Capitol, priming – choosing an object to present as important – and framing – encouraging viewers to adopt an attitude toward that object. That is, through the Games, the Capitol primes its audience to focus on its power. By using the framework of the Games, the Capitol encourages viewers to accept and obey that power. To make sure their methods of priming and framing are effective, the Capitol makes viewing “mandatory unless you are on death’s door” (16). By making it required for citizens to watch the Games, the Capitol has primed its viewers to think about the Games and established a framework for them to accept the Capitol as ultimate authority.

To ensure that citizens are paying attention to the Games, the Capitol treats the event like “a festivity, a sporting event” (19). For instance, tributes arrive at the opening ceremonies in “chariots pulled by four teams of horses,” as if they were Roman gladiators (68). This strategy not only fosters a competitive atmosphere but turns tributes into celebrities. In fact, Kathleen Wright compares the Games to current reality competition shows like *The Bachelor*, *American Idol*, and *Top Chef*. Like these reality television shows, the Games feature romance, audience participation, and reunion appearances. This works on multiple levels: it solidifies the Capitol’s power to manipulate the lives of those in the arena, it provides a distracting source of ‘entertainment,’ and it divides the Districts

by giving viewers a chance to root for the tribute from their District. Audience members become especially invested in the tributes from their own District because the winner of the Games is the only one who remains alive and, as a reward, brings food back to the citizens of his or her District.

Like reality television stars, tributes maintain some level of control over the audience's perception of them through their actions and appearance; however, their images are ultimately, and indefinitely, tied to the Capitol. For example, the victors' eventual status as a celebrity is cultivated while they are still tributes inside the arena where the Games occur. During this time, the Capitol carefully presents "highly constructed" choreographed footage of the tributes' activities so that Panem will view each one in a particular way (Wright 101). Although the cameras are always recording the tributes while they are in the arena, the footage is not simply streamed to viewers in its unedited form. Wright explains, "the Gamemakers affect how people feel by structuring the narrative of the media event to evoke whatever collective emotional response the Capitol desires" (99). Even after winning the Games, victors do not have complete control over their image. Although the Games are intended to frame an audience's perception of the Capitol as an insurmountable force, the final victor represents an individual in Panem who was able to survive the difficult conditions in the arena. Therefore, the Capitol must keep victors under a close and watchful eye to prevent their survival from being interpreted as evidence that resistance is possible even under nearly impossible odds.

One way the Capitol directly maintains control of the victors' images after they leave the arena is through the Victor's Village, a separate area of town with "fine houses"

designated for the winners of the Games (Collins, *Hunger Games* 304). Although given a new “life of ease,” the victors are separated from their previous lives (19). As Peeta points out to Katniss while they are in the arena, “You won’t be a girl from the Seam [anymore], you’ll be a girl from the Victor’s Village” (304). Through the Victor’s Village, the Capitol effectively isolates victors and forces them to deal with a new celebrity image status. Through this physical and social isolation, the Capitol ensures that it can watch the victors closely and prevent them from becoming symbols of resistance to the Districts.

The idea of an institution maintaining control over the image of a former reality television contestant is not unfamiliar. In the article “Making the Most out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV’s Dispensable Celebrity,” Sue Collins reports that there is a section in the contracts for the CBS reality show *Survivor* that “effectively binds the signatory into relinquishing control over his or her life story and public image” (98). Like the victors in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, *Survivor* contestants do not have total control over their image or lives after the show. Deborah Halbert, who has worked with reality television and publicity rights, explains:

CBS controls their ability to appear in public . . . their ability to talk about the show, and their life stories. CBS owns their public identities . . . CBS owns the telling of the experiences that made them who they are . . . CBS owns these rights throughout the universe forever (98).

Although the tributes and victors of the Games are forced to compete in the Games and do not willingly sign their lives away, their images are, nevertheless, bound to the Capitol from the moment they become tributes until death or victory.

Crucial to the Capitol's goal of putting down the rebellion, Katniss and Peeta's images must revolve around their love for one another, rather than rebellious intent. To accomplish this, the Capitol works to develop a solid framework of their relationship without threats from conflicting images. To maintain Katniss' image as a love-struck girl who is free from thoughts of rebellion, the Capitol does not mind interfering directly in her personal life. For instance, when Katniss returns as a victor to District 12, her mother incorrectly refers to Gale – a male friend for whom Katniss may have romantic feelings – and his family as her cousins (Collins, *Catching Fire* 12). Gale and his family are an obstacle to the Capitol because they represent a close connection between Katniss and a male who is not her relative. Katniss later reflects that Gale was “too handsome, too male” to be her best friend, so “some genius made him [her] cousin” (12). It is integral to the Capitol that Peeta and Katniss be hopelessly in love; if Katniss has romantic feelings for a friend from District 12, then the explanation that Katniss and Peeta attempted to eat the poisonous berries because they could not live without each other appears false. Even before the kiss between Katniss and Gale in the woods, the Capitol recognizes the threat a handsome male friend poses to the Capitol's desired image of Katniss and Peeta. If anyone begins to speculate that there could be a romantic relationship between Gale and Katniss, then the carefully constructed image of Katniss as hopelessly in love with Peeta could begin to unravel.

Although Katniss may not be on camera while she is in District 12, the Capitol still requires that its desired image of her be consistent. Because of the brewing rebellion, maintaining control of Katniss and Peeta's images is a matter of utmost importance to the Capitol. During his visit to the Victor's Village, President Snow directly explains to

Katniss why he is so concerned with maintaining her image as a compliant citizen: “[I]f a girl from District Twelve of all places can defy the Capitol and walk away unharmed, what is to stop them from doing the same?” (21). In order to prevent Panem’s citizens from taking this viewpoint, it is imperative to the Capitol that the Districts thoroughly believe Katniss and Peeta are in love. After President Snow’s threatens her loved ones, Katniss tells President Snow that she will be in love with Peeta “just as [she] was [in the arena]” (28). President Snow immediately corrects her by saying, “Just as you are” (28). Although the correction seems slight, it draws attention to Katniss' use of the past tense. President Snow is not content with Katniss merely acting the part of the ‘love-crazed schoolgirl’ in front of the camera but requires that she profess her love for Peeta even in the privacy of her own home. This solidifies the “dynamic with Peeta” that President Snow wants to display that will, in turn, “[affects] the mood in the districts” (28).

To secure the image as a ‘love-crazed school girl’ even more emphatically, the Capitol demands that Katniss and Peeta convince the Districts that they are in love. To accomplish this, Katniss encourages Peeta to propose during an interview, thereby initiating the public wedding process. The Capitol quickly reacts to the proposal by broadcasting it throughout Panem, hoping viewers will believe the pair are “crazy with love,” (29). Not only is it in the Capitol’s best interests that viewers believe Katniss and Peeta to be hopelessly in love, but also that viewers believe that a majority of Panem are in agreement on this point. To make sure citizens are able to witness the excitement from across the Districts, the Capitol broadcasts “shots of crowds around Panem [that] show a country besotted with happiness” (73). In doing so, the Capitol fosters a spiral of silence. As explained earlier, a spiral of silence works under the assumption that people desire to

be part of a community and will keep personal opinions to themselves if they believe they are in the minority. By broadcasting a flood of images that reveal only thrilled responses to the marriage proposal, the Capitol hopes to convince viewers that excitement about Katniss and Peeta's marriage is the overwhelming consensus, promoting the idea that Panem is a collective group in agreement about how to view the proposal. If the Capitol can successfully establish a spiral of silence and a perceived collective identity, then viewers who have contrary opinions may choose to remain silent, fearing the isolation and repercussions of being community outsiders.

In addition to broadcasting the proposal and audience response, the Capitol chooses to publicize every aspect of Katniss and Peeta's wedding preparation, thereby providing the Capitol with another way of manipulating Katniss' image into a stereotypical ecstatic fiancé. In her book *The Bride Factory: Mass Media Portrayals of Women and Weddings*, Erika Engstrom explains, "The portrayal of women in bridal media reaffirms the assumed identity that 'society' expects women to take: that of the beautiful, ecstatic bride" (5). Therefore, by portraying Katniss as the 'beautiful, ecstatic bride' the Capitol hopes to perpetuate the ideas associated with the bridal image and discourage citizens from linking Katniss to rebellion. The bride's role in a wedding seems fundamentally at odds with rebellion and is instead rooted in long held traditions. The Capitol's appeal to the traditional bridal image is indicated by the wedding dress selected for Katniss. The bridal ensemble includes a dress of "heavy white silk . . . and pearls . . . stitched into the dress" and a veil (Collins, *Catching Fire* 247). Katniss' bridal attire does not sound dissimilar from the bridal attire we are accustomed to, but that similarity is shocking when compared to the typically outlandish Capitol fashions such as "aqua hair

and gold tattoos above [the] eyebrows” and skin that has been “dyed a pale shade of pea green” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 61, 62). Through their focus on Katniss’ wedding, the Capitol hopes to frame its audience’s attitude towards Katniss as a traditional blushing bride-to-be, rather than an instigator of rebellion. The Capitol also hopes to foster a dominant opinion that these two perceptions of Katniss do not intersect.

The Capitol hopes to prime the spectacle of Katniss and Peeta’s wedding in order to distract Panem’s citizens from thinking about the rebellion and, instead, to become caught up in the enthusiasm and anticipation surrounding a wedding. The Capitol accomplishes this by transforming the wedding process into a collective event that viewers are able to directly participate in. In many contemporary publicized celebrity weddings, such as the wedding of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, it is common to “[divulge] all the intricate details about guests, rings, vows, menu, cake, wedding dress” of the weddings of well-known celebrity couples (Engstrom 9). *Life & Style Weekly* featured an article that discussed specific details about the wedding such as the ‘diamond-studded white-gold Cartier wedding bands’ and the ‘five- tiered white chocolate wedding cake’ decorated with ‘marzipan roses and white chocolate chips, and filled with white-chocolate mouse and cream’ (8). However, rather than merely “[giving] viewers a look at the backstage goings-on of one of the most revered front stage performances of a woman’s life,” the Capitol directly involves viewers in the preparation process (2). The Capitol promises to “[throw] them a wedding right [there] in the Capitol” and sets up a system that allows viewers to vote for their favorite wedding dress (Collins, *Catching Fire* 76).

By priming and framing elements of reality, the Capitol maintains its dominant position in society. With complete control over the media, the Capitol ensures that the citizens of Panem are not influenced by outside media messages. However, the Capitol's various maneuvers to control Panem reveal that the media can be a battleground between a ruling authority and individuals, a battleground with its own sorts of dangers. Another field of battle emerges when the disproportionate amount of control the Capitol has over Panem is disrupted by District 13. District 13 is one, if not the most, powerful, institutional adversary that the Capitol faces, and a media propaganda war quickly ensues. For this battle, the Capitol, just as it has with Katniss, Peeta, and other tributes, meticulously selects information and images to represent the cost of rebellion. Through this selection, the Capitol hopes to prime its audience to think about the Capitol's destructive retaliation and to frame its audience's attitudes so that they surrender to the Capitol. To accomplish its goal, the Capitol broadcasts a constant stream of propaganda to influence viewers' emotions and to incite fear. One such video depicts, "A broken dam in 7. A derailed train with a pool of toxic waste spilling from the tank cars. A granary collapsing after a fire" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 132). These images illustrate the Capitol's representation of the destructive consequences of rebellion.

District 13, on the other hand, wants to prime its audience to think about the strides it is making in the rebellion. In this way, it hopes to frame rebellion to show Panem's citizens that the Capitol can be overthrown if they support District 13 and that District 13 will be a preferable replacement. For example, after the broadcast of one of the Capitol's propaganda videos, District 13 retaliates with its own "arsenal of five-to-ten-second clips" that are "choice shots from the propos" (133). Two of the shots that

make it through the Capitol's tight security are Katniss "standing in the rubble of the bakery" and Finnick "talking about Rue" (132). Both of these clips encourage citizens to think about the Capitol's destructive actions and to frame their outrage at the personal losses that were suffered during the Games. Like the Capitol, District 13 tries to prime and frame its audience's reactions by carefully selecting effective clips, rather than using all of its available footage. Through this meticulous selection, District 13 presents Panem with a different version of reality than what the Capitol has constructed.

In addition to constructing a different image of the rebellion, District 13 also aims to construct a different image of Katniss. Realizing Katniss' ability to influence audiences, District 13 intends for her to fill an important role within the rebellion's media output as "the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution" (10). To accomplish this goal, it constructs artificial situations in which Katniss epitomizes a fierce, worthy leader. Before shooting her first propaganda video, Katniss remarks that the woman – in reference to her own image – on the monitor is large in stature, imposing, sexy, and defiant (70-71). District 13 has successfully transformed Katniss' appearance into a visual representation of the rebellion but to an extent that Katniss is not even able to recognize herself.

Unlike the Capitol, an institution that manipulates Katniss' image but does not provide her with a direct script, District 13 gives specific lines to Katniss to speak in its media broadcasts. Lines such as: "People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice!" are intended to portray Katniss as the fierce, angry leader of a collective 'we' (72). As Katniss noted when she first read her lines, it seemed like "[they'd] spent months, maybe years, working [the script] out" (71). If Katniss' hunch is correct and the

script has been prepared for a long time, then District 13 knew what type of leader it wanted to construct before Katniss acquired her celebrity status. Therefore, District's 13's use of Katniss as the Mockingjay is due partially to the convenience of her ability to reach and connect with Panem's citizens. Under different circumstances, District 13 would have found another face to be its 'face of the rebellion:' a face that would have fulfilled the same role as Katniss. In its eagerness to turn Katniss into its preconceived idea of the rebel leader, District 13 is met with "a dead silence on the set" (72). Katniss' words were meant to move and inspire her audience to rebel against the Capitol. Instead, as Haymitch notes, "that . . . is how a revolution dies" (72). Katniss' failure derives from District 13's disregard of who Katniss really is in favor of placing her in preconceived mold of the rebel leader. District 13 finally has success with their media communications when they allow Katniss to act authentically. For example, after the Capitol bombs a hospital in District 8, she stands in front of the camera and speaks to the rebels from the heart. She says: "I want to tell the rebels that I am alive . . . the Capitol has just bombed a hospital full of unarmed men, women, and children . . . we must fight back!" (99). Working with Katniss' authentic outrage allows District 13 to collect footage that can effectively be used to inspire the rebels.

While Katniss is being primed as the leader of the rebellion by District 13, the Capitol must devise new ways of manipulating her image. In *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*, the Capitol begins to use broadcasts of Peeta to influence viewers' attitudes about the war and Katniss. Although Peeta's words seem genuine in the initial post-Quarter Quell interview, they simultaneously benefit the Capitol. In the first interview, Caesar suggests that because Katniss blew out the force field that led to the victors'

escape, she may have been involved in the rebel plan. Peeta angrily replies, “She didn’t know [what she was doing] Caesar! Neither of us knew anything except that we were trying to keep each other alive!” (24). The outburst is a genuine reaction to a false accusation, but the response coincidentally serves an important function for the Capitol. If Katniss never knew anything about the rebellion before she left the arena, then the Capitol’s image of her as a love-struck girl is still plausible. Katniss’ lack of knowledge about the rebellion could be detrimental to District 13 and discredit her as the rebellion’s fiery leader. Even before Katniss enters the arena for the second time, people have already started to look to Katniss as a rebel. Bonnie and Twill, escapees from District 8, are genuinely surprised and affected when they realize Katniss is not as knowledgeable about the rebellion as they expected. Peeta’s words, therefore, diminish some of Katniss’ credibility as a rebel leader, which in turn furthers the Capitol’s goal of ending the rebellion.

As Peeta physically declines, his responses in interviews seem coached, as if he were being used as a mouthpiece for the Capitol. Although his responses in the first interview are a genuine reaction to Caesar’s accusation, Peeta attempts to undermine Katniss’ credibility in a later interview. He tells Caesar, “They’re using her, obviously . . . to whip up the rebels. I doubt she even really knows what’s going on in the war” (113). This time, Peeta’s words are calm and collected, lacking the passion of his response in the original interview, a change that indicates his words are no longer genuine but scripted by the Capitol. His expression of doubt in Katniss’ understanding of the war could be even more damaging than his claim that Katniss was unaware of the rebellion while they were in the arena. Peeta declares now that Katniss is likely *still* in the dark

about the war and the rebel operation. He questions her prominence in the war effort by saying, “If you’ve got any real influence, put the brakes on this thing” (113). By implying the possibility of Katniss having no influence in the rebellion, Peeta calls into question Katniss’ status as the Mockingjay and insinuates that she may be a false symbol. If the Capitol can successfully falsify District 13’s image of Katniss in the minds of Panem, then the rebels could lose influence.

Although Peeta never directly endorses the Capitol, his words consistently align with its objectives. In addition to discrediting Katniss as a leader of the rebellion, Peeta urges, “I want everyone watching – whether you’re on the Capitol or rebel side – to stop for just a moment and think about what this war could mean...Is this really what we want to do? Kill ourselves off completely? . . .I’m calling for a cease-fire.” (26) Here, Peeta emerges as a pacifist, appealing to both sides to end the war. But a cease-fire would ultimately favor the Capitol because it is still the ruling power in Panem. Whether or not Peeta’s initial cease-fire call was coached, the Capitol seems to adopt the strategy of encouraging an immediate end to the war. During a later broadcast Peeta, “speaks[s] in a frustrated tone about the need for the cease-fire. He highlights the damage done to key infrastructure in various districts, and as he speaks, parts of the map light up, showing images of the destruction” (132). Because Peeta uses technological visual aids, the reader can infer that the Capitol provided the equipment and coached Peeta’s dialogue.

Peeta’s interviews are especially important considering his popularity with viewers. This popularity is made evident during his first televised interview in *The Hunger Games*. At the time, Katniss mused, “He has the audience from the get-go . . . I can hear them laughing, shouting out” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 130). Peeta’s easy

likeability accompanies him throughout *The Hunger Games* and *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. In using Peeta to further their goals, the Capitol has fashioned him into an opinion leader for the Capitol. Edward L. Bernays describes what it means to be an opinion leader,

public opinion is influenced powerfully by group leaders and opinion molders – journalists, politicians, businessmen, scientists, professional men, authors, society leaders, teachers, actors, women of fashion and so on” to provide influential messages that a public will listen to out of connection to the speaker. (73)

Because Peeta is so well liked and admired by Panem, the Capitol knows that viewers may be more effectively influenced by Peeta than a government official.

The Capitol not only wants to use Peeta to influence Panem’s citizens, but it also wants to manipulate Katniss’ emotions by revealing its harsh treatment of Peeta. Since Peeta appears in a physically injured condition that progressively worsens, the Capitol sends a tacit message to Katniss: she can stop the mistreatment of him. This strategy has some effect. In one interview, for instance, Katniss notices that “underneath the paint that cannot cover the bags under his eyes, and the fine clothes that cannot conceal the pain he feels when he moves, is a person badly damaged,” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 112) For the Capitol, allowing Peeta to slowly deteriorate is less about punishing its captive and more about providing a spectacle for Katniss and other viewers. Immediately after witnessing Peeta’s image Katniss notes, “My mind reels, trying to make sense of it” (113). Although the Capitol is unsuccessful at completely unnerving Katniss, the broadcasts of Peeta do emotionally affect her. Through its manipulation of Peeta, the Capitol is able to reach Katniss who is being simultaneously manipulated by District 13.

Both institutions employ the same strategies in the media to achieve success in the war; a success that often hinges on citizens' perceptions of Katniss and Peeta.

Chapter 4

Katniss' Appropriation of the Media

Despite the Capitol and District 13's manipulation of her image to benefit their respective designs, Katniss ultimately undermines both institutions by adopting the tactics that are used against her. As Latham and Hollister argue, the control of the flow of information is vital in a totalitarian institution, but by depicting real people in the Games, the Capitol relinquishes some control over that information (35). Therefore, Katniss is granted a certain amount of freedom to speak and take action when on camera, so long as she stays within the structures and rules that the Capitol establishes. Because Katniss is media literate, or knowledgeable about the methods and goals of the mass media, she poses a dangerous threat to the Capitol and District 13. The Framework for 21st Learning defines media literacy as "the ability to understand how media messages are constructed and the ability to use media to create effective messages for particular purposes (35). Early in *The Hunger Games* Katniss describes what she understands is "the real message" of the games, revealing that she has been decoding media usage before the series even begins (Collins, *Hunger Games* 18). Throughout the rest of series, Katniss' media literacy expands to the point that she is able to actively manipulate the media using the same methods used against her. She is partially aided in this process through the guidance of experienced instructors.

It is through the instructors like Effie, Haymitch, and Cinna that Katniss receives the training necessary for her growth as a media agent. Effie may be the least successful of the instructors - Katniss never seems to fully master walking in heels - but she does

provide Katniss with an early glimpse of what is necessary for survival in the Capitol. She also primes Katniss and Peeta to potential sponsors before their interviews. Effie tells Katniss and Peeta that she has been talking to important people in the Capitol about, “How Katniss sacrificed herself for her sister. How [they’ve] both successfully struggled to overcome the barbarism of [their] district” (74). By doing this, Effie hopes to influence her listeners to focus on particular actions that reveal the tributes from District 12’s love, bravery, and fortitude. Sponsors – who are able to provide food, weapons, and other items of assistance to tributes – are integral for survival in the arena and leaving them with a good impression can be the difference between life and death.

Although Katniss’ lessons with Haymitch often end in aggravation, he serves as an important teacher for her. Haymitch teaches Katniss that her words and actions, or the way she presents herself, on camera can have an effect on people. He urges her to frame herself with a personality angle that will influence her audience to find her desirable. When considering what angles could help Katniss achieve that desirability he notes, “when you open your mouth, you come across more as sullen and hostile” (116). Here, Haymitch indicates the importance of finding an angle to replace how she is currently perceived. This mentor realizes that sullen and hostile will not help Katniss while she is in the arena. He further notes, “It’s all a big show. It’s all how you’re perceived” (135). Haymitch’s strategy of selecting an angle for viewer perception is similar to the strategy of current reality television producers when they are casting. Sue Collins explains that, “The shows’ producers, then, ‘cast’ the applicants into predictable ‘types,’ and as the series repeat, the new players learn to perform the roles that get media attention” (100). For instance, on shows like *Survivor* there will always be a “villainous Jerri Manthey,

conniving ‘Boston Rob,’ and sweetheart-in-crime Amber Brkich” (100). Following his emphasis on selecting a particular angle, Haymitch wonders whether he should make Katniss, “charming? Aloof? Fierce?” (Collins, *Hunger Games* 116). Haymitch realizes that playing the Games from an angle will ensure the acquisition of more sponsors, an important lesson for Katniss to learn.

Cinna is also an important instructor for Katniss and begins to subvert her understanding about the importance of physical appearance in the Capitol from the moment she meets him. Katniss’ expectation for the opening ceremonies’ costume is that it will be synonymous with a “skimpy outfits and hats with headlamps” (66). Katniss is initially resistant to the outrageous costumes in the Capitol, noting her “disgust with the Capitol and their hideous fashions (63). However, she begins to learn through Cinna that appearances can be an effective tool for influencing viewers, rather than merely being a display of vanity. Cinna sets Katniss and Peeta apart from the other contestants by clothing them in a fiery costume and making them hold hands. The fire and solidarity of the tributes primes the audience to think about the tributes and frames them to regard Katniss and Peeta as powerful contenders in the Games. His efforts are successful. During her fiery entrance, Katniss notes, “The people of the Capitol are going nuts . . . shouting out . . . our first names, which they have bothered to find on the program” (70). The fact that audience members have put in the effort to find Katniss and Peeta’s names indicates that they are developing an interest in the two tributes. The growth of this initial interest into a fan base is demonstrated by the way the audience excitedly shouts out their names. Katniss recognizes Cinna’s effective use of image when she muses, “Cinna has given me a great advantage. No one will forget me. Not my look, not my name” (70).

This comment indicates Katniss' growing knowledge of the role of appearances in sending media messages.

Before she fully understands the instructions given by Effie, Haymitch, and Cinna, Katniss is deceived at times by the Capitol's media messages. For example, Katniss believes the Capitol's media broadcasts claiming District 13 was demolished in the first uprising. The first time District 13 is mentioned in the series, Katniss lets the reader know that "[mining graphite] was part of District 13's job until they were destroyed" (74). Katniss' use of the past tense 'was' and 'destroyed' indicates her belief that District 13 no longer exists. Although generally skeptical of the Capitol, Katniss has yet to discover, or even suspect, that the remnants of District 13 have become a thriving community that is planning the Capitol's overthrow. Also, through interactions with previous victors, Katniss realizes how incorrect media representations can be. For example, before knowing Finnick Odair, Katniss believes the Capitol's constructed image of him as the playboy victor with the "famous sea green eyes" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 208). This incorrect understanding is revealed through several of Katniss' thoughts about Finnick's romantic exploits: "No one retains his favor for long. He can go through four or five [Capitol admirers] in his annual visit . . . but he never stays, and once he's gone he never comes back" (209). In addition, when considering why she does not personally find Finnick attractive she thinks, "maybe he's too easy to get, or maybe it's really that he'd just be too easy to lose" (209). These specific assumptions are based purely on his representation in the media. Katniss is shocked to discover that Finnick was actually a virtual sex slave that President Snow used to sell or give as a reward to increase Snow's power (Collins, *Mockingjay* 170).

But despite these lapses in media judgment, Katniss internalizes the lessons and experiences she has within the Capitol until she is eventually able to use the panopticon structure of the Capitol and its reliance on priming and framing to deliver her own messages (Wezner 155). Katniss is able to develop her own framework for reality by proving through her actions inside the arena that rebellion is possible from within a powerful panopticon structure. Foucault's premise that "[r]esistance to power is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" is crucial to understanding that Katniss is able to undermine the media institutions' powers, precisely because she is part of the society in which that institution wields control (Latham and Hollister 35). Wright argues that Katniss not only displays the Games' cruelty, but also "appropriates the meaning of the Games from the Capitol" so that "the Games come to symbolize the political potential of a population ready for a change" (104). The appropriation is made possible because of Katniss' media literacy.

One of the first times Katniss primes and frames reality differently from the Capitol's purpose is when she creates a literal frame for Rue, a young tribute from District 11 who is killed in the arena during the seventy-fourth Games. Drawing on the heartache the Districts have suffered through the Games, Katniss sings to Rue and decorates her body and wreathes her face in wildflowers (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 237). Reflecting on a previous conversation in which Peeta expresses his desire to show the Capitol that he is more than just their pawn, Katniss decides to honor Rue "to make [the Capitol] accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own" (237). Yet while she desires to send a message directly to the Capitol, Katniss realizes that that will not be the only outcome of

her actions. Katniss contemplates, "They'll have to show it . . . and everyone will see her then and know I did it" (237). Here she shows that she has learned her lessons well; that is, she understands that by wreathing Rue's body in flowers she has ensured that all of Panem will witness this memorial and small act of rebellion against the brutality of the Games. Even if the Capitol does not broadcast how Katniss pays her respects to Rue, it will have to show Rue's body when the helicopter arrives to take her away. Panem's last image of Rue will be and is the body of an innocent young girl surrounded by flowers. This image of Rue provides an alternate depiction of death that contrasts sharply with the standard depiction. Rather than a brutal murder scene in which the fallen tribute is neither buried nor honored, Katniss reminds Panem that the tributes in the arena are human beings. Another time that Katniss' actions provide a new framework for Panem is in the infamous scene with the poisonous berries. Realizing that the Games cannot end without a victor, Katniss encourages Peeta to take poisonous Nightshade berries with her because, "the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers' faces" if they both died (344). The Games are ended as soon as the berries enter their mouths, and Peeta and Katniss are both declared victors. Through her calculated actions, Katniss has provided a new framework that suggests to Panem that the Capitol does not have absolute power and that resistance is possible, attesting to her abilities not to only interpret but use media for her own purposes.

In addition to her reframing media events in the arena for Panem's viewers, she also uses the media to ensure the survival of herself and her loved ones, such as her mother, Gayle, and her sister. She accomplishes this by framing herself in a way that matches the Capitol's framework. According to Shannon R. Mortimore-Smith, Katniss

knows that “abandoning herself to viewer scrutiny will win her the ‘gaze’ of her audience and subsequently secure her survival” (160). Although still constrained by the Capitol, Katniss understands that by cooperating within the Capitol’s spotlight she can protect those who could be harmed by her resistance. For example, while in the arena, Katniss realizes that by being romantic towards Peeta, she is able to ensure gifts from her sponsors for herself and Peeta. Another time Katniss works within the Capitol’s spotlight is when she suggests that Peeta propose to her publicly. Realizing that she must play along with the idea that she and Peeta are madly in love to secure the safety of her loved ones, Katniss “pull[s] off girl-almost-catatonic-with-joy without a hitch” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 76). Although she would not have suggested the public proposal if she were not trying to appease the Capitol, publicizing Peeta’s proposal under her own terms allows Katniss to retain control over some elements her own image.

Katniss demonstrates her ultimate understanding of the media and the benefits of media spectacle at the end of *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* when she realizes that Panem, under Coin’s leadership, may be no better off than it was under Capitol rule. Katniss can no longer endure the similarities between the two institutions when President Coin proposes a final Games. The proposed Games would force the children of powerful people in the Capitol to participate in the same horrific event that Panem’s citizens endured for the last 75 years. Like the Capitol, District 13 will use the Games, and other expressions of media power, to disseminate its message of vengeance and authority. With this final realization, Katniss makes the ultimate decision to assassinate Coin in a public spectacle to prevent another leader from taking power who would perpetuate the violence and brutality of the Games. Katniss primes her audience to view the act, which could

have been perceived as treason. Katniss is able to accomplish this priming because she is already in the spotlight and being watched by crowds of “people down the side streets . . . Guards. Officials. Rebel leaders. Victors” who are waiting to see her assassinate President Snow (Collins, *Mockingjay* 371). The public execution of President Coin by the influential Mockingjay establishes a new framework for Panem’s citizens: a framework that allows citizens to realize that Panem can survive under different conditions than either the Capitol or District 13 would have provided. In the new society that Katniss paves the way for, the Games have become part of the history lessons taught to children in school (389). Rather than holding the Games to remind citizens of the Capitol’s authority, Panem teaches children about the Games so that the “recent horrors should never be repeated” (379).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The reader is not able to witness everything that happens in Panem after President Coin's assassination, but a society in which children "take . . . for granted" the words of a song that includes the lyrics "Here it's safe, here it's warm" is likely preferable to a society ruled by the brutal institution of the Capitol or District 13 (Collins, *Mockingjay* 389). The Capitol was able to maintain control over Panem for over 75 years due to its skillful use of the media, which included manipulating Katniss' image. Using the same media methods as the Capitol, District 13 challenges the Capitol's rule and attempts to use Katniss' image in its rebellion. Because of Katniss' development as a highly media literate individual, she works within the media spotlight until she is able to ultimately prime and frame a reality for Panem that influences its citizens to confine the Games to a history lesson. Katniss reminds readers of *The Hunger Games* trilogy of the importance of understanding how the media works in society even in their own reality.

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