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Ecofeminism in *The Hunger Games*

The movie *Hunger Games*, directed by Gary Ross in 2012, is a movie about 12 districts that all of the **lower class** people live in and a capital where all of the wealthy live. Each year, two people from every district are chosen to fight to their death in what they call the **“hunger games”**. During these games they are forced to use the resources around them in the environment **of the arena** in order to survive. The games are held in a dome where the game creators have full control of the weather around them. **Within the plot of the movie, *Hunger Games*** shows different examples of gender roles and stereotypes that have to do with how people interact with nature. The movie *The Hunger Games* uses both the critical discourse of ecofeminism and the dominant discourse of the nature-culture binary through the ways that the characters are shown in relation to the environment during the games. Throughout the movie, different views of gender roles and wealth are represented through the characters and the environment around them.

Ecofeminism is the critical discourse that explains how there is a connection between the way that women are viewed and the way that nature is represented in the media. The way that this discourse connects them is through the way **they are both seen as being oppressed and not strong**. In the article **“Ecofeminism” Gaard and Gruen explain:** “Ecofeminism’s central claim is that these problems stem from mutually reinforcing the oppression of humans and of the natural

world” (Gaard and Gruen, 236). This critical discourse is portrayed a lot throughout the movie, especially in the way that the main character Katniss interacts with the environment compared to the other male characters. One example of Katniss being portrayed with an ecofeminist view is through the way that she uses the resources **to her advantage** during the games. When the games first begin, Katniss is unable to collect enough supplies or weapons for her to be able to survive the rest of the games. This forces Katniss to have to use the resources around her to make the tools she will need in order to survive. Katniss is shown **throughout many scenes of the movie** using the natural resources to make tools and weapons. This shows her as being connected and one with nature because she is able to use the resources in ways that help her. This follows the critical discourse ecofeminism because it shows Katniss, a female character, as being skilled with using resources, which portrays her as being connected to nature.

When women are the main character of a movie that is about the environment, they are many times portrayed in two different ways according to David Ingram. In the article *Gender and Encounters with Wilderness* Ingram **explains**: “Environmentalism movies in which women are the main protagonists tend to either position the female as an action heroine, or to evoke the spiritual aspects of ecofeminism” (Ingram, 39). This is true in the movie *The Hunger Games* because Katniss, as the female main character, is shown as being an action heroine. She is shown differently than the rest of the characters in the way that she uses the resources and fights in the games. The other female characters in the movie tend to hide or follow **the male characters’** lead. This follows the typical gender role of how female characters are usually represented in the media. Katniss is represented differently as she is her own leader and makes up her own mind in the way that she uses the environment to her advantage.

The dominant discourse that is shown in the movie that goes against ecofeminism is the nature-culture binary, which is represented through the patriarchy. The article by Gaard and Gruen also explains how ecofeminists use separation from nature to compare to the way the patriarchy is portrayed in connection to the environment. The authors state: “Still other ecofeminists use metaphorical or ideological explanations of the separation of culture from nature and look at the way that patriarchal culture describes the world in terms of self and other dualisms” (Gaard and Gruen, 237). An example of this from the film is through the character Cato. Cato, a strong male character, is portrayed in the movie as being strong and using all of the weapons that he was able to obtain in the beginning of the games. He is not shown using any natural resources and relies on his strength to fight and kill his way through the games. His character is very masculine in the way that he fights and shows his assertiveness through the way that he kills the others and takes their tools. What this also represents is an opposite discourse from ecofeminism, which is the representation of the environment through the patriarchy.

A big part of how the dominant discourse of patriarchy is shown in the movie is through hegemonic masculinity. This is when genders are portrayed to act in the way that they are expected to based on gender roles. With this belief, men are seen as being strong and dominant and women are seen as being weak and passive. This is shown in the movie through a lot of the characters. One character that shows this a lot throughout the movie is the character Haymitch. Haymitch is the mentor for District 12 and helps Peeta and Katniss prepare for the games. One way that Haymitch shows hegemonic masculinity is through the way he gives different advice to Peeta than he does to Katniss. He gives Katniss the advice to become more likable so that the viewers would be more motivated to give her gifts during the game. This implies that she is weak and will need extra help in order for her to survive. He does not give Peeta the same, or even as

much advice which shows that he believes that he will be better and stronger in the games. This shows that he follows the patriarchy because of the difference in what he says to Peeta and Katniss based on their genders.

Another example of hegemonic masculinity from the Hunger Games is also through the character Cato and how he speaks and interacts with Katniss in the games. One example is a scene in the movie where Katniss is hiding in a tree from Cato and his allies. When he finds her, he screams at her and calls her names that she is weak and going to die. This shows hegemonic masculinity because he is being portrayed as being strong and Katniss is being portrayed as being scared and weak. This is an example of hegemonic masculinity because it reinforces the idea that women are weak, and men are strong.

A major part of the dominant discourse of the patriarchy is the control over females and nature. A character that shows this throughout the movie is President Snow. President Snow is in charge of putting the games together and controls what happens inside while the games are happening. He is able to control the weather and change parts of nature to get the players to do what he wants. He is a good example of the patriarchy because he uses his power over the players, who are weaker, and also the environment inside the arena. His character is portrayed in a way where he does not seem to care about anything that he destroys and will use his power to get the players to do whatever he wants.

A male character that is shown going against the dominant discourse of the patriarchy is Peeta, who is the other tribute from district 12. Peeta is a baker and is more creative than all of the other male characters. He goes against the patriarchy discourse because of the way that he interacts with the environment and resources, as well as with Katniss. As part of the patriarchy, males are shown to be aggressive and dominant in the way that they treat both women and the

environment. Peeta does not follow this and is shown as being more connected to the environment than the other male characters. An example of this is when he hides from the rest of the tributes in the game by camouflaging himself into the ground. This shows him as being connected to nature more than the other male characters in the movie.

Along with the male characters being represented following the nature culture binary, there are also female characters besides Katniss who are portrayed in this way. The first example is the character Rue. Rue is a female character that throughout the movie is seen following Katniss. She is very timid and depends on Katniss a lot throughout the movie. She is a character that follows the culture binary discourse as she is a girl who is dependent on someone who is bigger and stronger than she is. Rue is also very young and represented in a way that shows as being a weak female **with** the way that she is shown with the environment. Another character that is represented following the nature culture binary is Clove. She is a female character that depends on the male characters in order to survive and stay in the game. This follows the nature culture binary because she is shown as being weaker than the male characters and not able to fend for herself. She ends up dying when she is alone, which proves that she was not able to stick up for herself. A final female character that follows the nature culture binary is Glimmer. She is another character, **like** Clove, who follows the stronger male characters. She survives her time in the game relying on Cato, who is one of the strongest male characters. Later in the game, Glimmer is killed by tracker jackers, which are killer bees released into the game dome. As she is being attacked and dying, she screams out for Cato. This shows that she is dependent and relying on him in order to survive. This portrays her as being weak and following the female gender roles that are shown in many films.

The Hunger Games movie adds complexity to the topic of gender roles and representation through the way that Katniss is portrayed. Katniss has both feminine and masculine qualities throughout the movie in the way that she plays in the game. Her masculine side is shown through the way that she is independent and is able to fend for herself. She is portrayed as strong with the way that she is able to use the resources around her and not rely on what is given during the games, compared to some of the other female players. What makes Katniss different in the way that she is represented in the movie is how she is also represented with female gender roles as well. One example of this in the movie is how she protects both her sister Primrose and Rue. In the beginning of the movie, Katniss shows her nurturing side with Primrose when she is nervous about the reaping of who will be called to play the games. Katniss is shown following her female instincts through the way that she comforts her and reassures that she will be safe. When the reaping happens, Primrose's name is called for her to be the tribute. Katniss immediately jumps in and volunteers to protect her sister. Another example is shown when she is in the games and meets Rue. Rue is around her sister's age and Katniss takes on the same motherly role that she had in the beginning of the movie with Primrose. Katniss helps her survive by helping her with shelter and food and by protecting her from the other players. Rue ends up getting killed and Katniss shows a lot of emotion by crying and comforting her telling her she is going to be okay. She buries her and is shown mourning her loss, which shows her "feminine" side.

Another big way that the environment is represented in the *Hunger Games* movie is through the different symbolic constructions that the people of the district and the capital have. The idea of symbolic construction is defined in the textbook *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* by Pezzulo and Cox as the communication about nature that: "emphasizes the figurative way that the world that we know it is assembled and disassembled through

communication” (Pezzulo and Cox, 52). The first way that this is represented in the movie is the difference in views of the environment between the players and the spectators. Both the players and the spectators are technically in the same environment, but they view it very differently because of the position that they are in regards to the games. The players’ view of nature is based on survival and is very. The players must be resourceful and careful with how they use the resources around them. The spectators, who are made up of people in the capital, view nature as being controlled and able to be used in their favor. They see it as plentiful and the opposite of how the players of the games are forced to view it. Another way that symbolic construction is represented in the movie is the difference in environment between the Capital and the Districts. The people of the districts see the environment as being limited. They see nature as being valuable and use it as a form of payment. The people in the capital are wealthy so they do not see the value of the environment like the rest of the people in the districts.

Wealth throughout the movie is shown through the way that the environment is portrayed differently in the capital than in the districts. This is done through the cinematic devices that the movie uses to show the difference in wealth among the people. In the capital, they use bright colors and the environment around them looks vibrant and plentiful. The environment in the districts is very dark and gray. The environment around them is scarce, which represents the poverty that they live in. This affects the way that the characters act, towards resources. The people of the capital overuse them and never run out while the people of the districts have to ration with everything that they have.

Throughout the film there are many examples of both dominant and critical discourses. The main discourses that are found throughout the movie are the dominant discourses of the nature-culture binary and patriarchy, and the critical discourse of ecofeminism. The way that

these discourses were mainly shown is through how differently the characters are shown throughout the film based on their gender. In the movie *The Hunger Games* the environment is represented in many different ways based on gender and status. Katniss as a female main character is represented in a way that follows ecofeminism. She is shown as being one with nature and connected to the environment. This is a common theme in ecofeminist movies where the female character is shown being different from the other female characters in how she interacts with the environment. In many movies, gender roles are followed along with patriarchal society beliefs. The male characters are shown as being more dominant and stronger than the female characters. This is true in *The Hunger Games* with the way that most of the other male and female characters act with each other. The film uses both Katniss and Peeta to go against the dominant discourse of the nature culture binary and interact with the environment differently.

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