

# Application of agnew's strain theory to the hunger games



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Hunger Games begins on the day of the reaping in District 12, the poorest region of Panem. The protagonist, Katniss Everdeen lives in the impoverished part of her district, the Seam, with her sister Prim, who is 4 years younger, and her mother, both of whom have depended upon Katniss for survival ever since Katniss' father died in a mine explosion when she was 11 (Trant, 2015). The reaping is a nerve-wracking time because it determines which boy and girl, ages 12 to 18, will serve as the district's tributes in the Hunger Games. Two tributes are drawn in each of the 12 districts, and those tributes are sent to an arena where they fight until only one tribute remains alive (Trant, 2015). The victor and their district are gifted many gifts, most importantly food. The Games, put on by the Capitol, are meant to remind the citizens of the Dark Days and how the 13th district was eliminated for its rebellion against the tyrannical and cruel Capitol as well as reprimand the 12 districts of Panem. Against all odds, Prim's name is selected at the reaping. Katniss volunteers to take the place of her younger sister and becomes District 12's girl tribute for the 74th Hunger Games (Trant, 2015). Peeta Mellark is selected as the other participant. After the opening ceremonies, the tributes begin their training. Finally, the time comes to start the Games. Everyone disperses and Katniss befriends Rue, a little girl from District 11 and forms a bond. Sadly, Rue is quickly killed by another Tribute.

Towards the end, when most of the Tributes have killed each other Katniss finds herself and Peeta in a stressful situation in which Cato from District 2 is attacking them. Katniss sees that there are strange creatures going after him, and they all run to a high mountain seeking protection. The creatures

are mutant animals created by the Capitol specifically to terrorize the Tributes. Using this moment of vulnerability and weakness, Cato attacks Peeta, but Katniss and Peeta manage to push him over the edge of the mountain (Trant, 2015). The creatures start to eat Cato alive, but because of the protective covering he is wearing he stays alive until Katniss shoots him to put him out of his misery. Just as Katniss and Peeta think they have won; another announcement is made that there can only be one winner again. Neither Katniss nor Peeta will kill the other, so Katniss takes out poisonous berries she had kept in case she needed them. Just as she and Peeta pop them in their mouths, the announcer shouts for them to stop and declares them both winners (Trant, 2015). Katniss and Peeta go back to the Hunger Games' headquarters and Katniss is in a separate room to recuperate from the injuries. When she is let out, Haymitch tells her that after what she did, her life has been placed in a troublesome situation. The Capitol took her stunt with the berries as an act of defiance, so in order for her to stay alive and have her life spare, she has to persuade everyone into thinking that she was desperate at the thought of losing Peeta and not being rebellious.

According to Agnew's general strain theory when the strain lowers the amount of social control on an individual, the person is more likely to cope with crime. In the film, *The Hunger Games*, is visible that Katniss resorts to illegal means to be able to provide for her family. She decides to illegally hunt animals in the forbidden area of the District to then sell them in the black market. Her mother is known to have neglected both Katniss and Primrose after her father died. The mother did not provide any consolation or sympathy for her daughters when they needed her the most. The little direct

control and lack of emotional bond Katniss had with her mother steered her towards deviant acts. Katniss was trying, in a non-conventional way, to move on with their lives after her mother failed to provide a traditional way of living. Katniss's mother was the only authoritative figure she had left in her life, but she failed on supervising Katniss's behavior and correct it. Katniss did not care what others thought about her deviant actions as she did not have any investment into conventional institutions, she was rather preoccupied on hunting illegally. Katniss's social bonds were not strong because of the lack of social control from her mother.

The purpose of the Hunger Games is to punish the citizens from a past rebellion against the Capitol. The Hunger Games remind the Districts of the Capitol's power and lack of forgetfulness, forgiveness, and remorse for the failed rebellion. One of the strategies Agnew's general strain theory uses to reduce the likelihood of individuals responding to strain with crime is increasing social control. With the creation of the Hunger Games, the Capitol has established total control over what citizens do in each District and has also created a constant reminder that they must behave accordingly by the rules. Another strategy according to Agnew is increasing social support. Throughout Katniss's experience in the Hunger Games, there was no social support that could help her steer away from engaging in criminal activities. Even her one and only friend Gale encouraged her to participate in the illegal hunting. Both of them went together to the prohibited area to hunt. Instead of advising Katniss of the dangers of their acts, he was also steered towards it.

Agnew's definition of general strain theory argues that there are multiple sources of strain. The stressors lead to crime which then helps the individual or individuals cope with, reduce, or escape strain and negative emotions. Agnew defines strain as conditions or events that are disliked by the individual. There are three categories of strain - failure to achieve positively valued goals, loss of positively valued stimuli and presentation of negative stimuli. After Rue's death Katniss loses the positively valued stimuli. She saw Rue as an unfortunate little girl that had been forcibly selected to participate thus Katniss had decided to protect her until the end despite there only being one winner. Katniss saw in Rue what could have been her younger sister had she not volunteered to participate instead in the Hunger Games. The presentation of negative stimuli is the years of abuse Katniss had endured from the Capitol's strictness. She was left to live in complete poverty, barely surviving. Agnew explains that the negative stimuli could cause individuals to engage in delinquent behavior as a way to escape or avoid, terminate, or seek revenge against the negative stimuli. In this case, Katniss's illegal hunting could also be interpreted as a way of trying to cope with the strain she lives in. Never being able to live a conventional life leads Katniss to fail at achieving the positively valued goals. Instead of having access to middle class resources, she was under the economic status that would allow her to achieve the level of social standard she needed to reach. Her family was poor and did not have much income.

At the final scene, when Katniss and Peeta both almost eat the poisonous berries that was the ultimate rebellious move they made. The Capitol is known for hosting the nation's most wealthy and powerful citizens. The

president Coriolanus Snow possesses total power in Panem's government and has proven to be a cruel and manipulative dictator, ruling over the Capitol and its contained districts. In order for Katniss to defy the Capitol and the president, she resorted to risking her life and Peeta's to prove her point that something must be done to stop the president from the dictatorship he has been carrying. Katniss knew that they would not have allowed for both of them to die as that would mean thousands of dollars lost in bets placed on who would win, and it would also defeat the purpose of the Hunger Games; entertain the audience with the survival of one sole winner. Through strain Katniss and Peeta create a new set of rules never seen before. After seeing that they had failed to achieve the positively valued goal; only one person would come out alive of the game as victorious, Katniss resorts to putting her plan in action. They become the first couple to ever win, whereas in other years only one person survives. This could be seen as an act of deviance after facing difficulties to achieve the goal. By almost committing suicide they force the Capitol to change their rules and choose between having two winner or having no entertainment.

Robert Agnew's general strain theory also focused on anticipated strain. It is defined as the individual's expectation that the current strains will continue into the future or new strains will be experienced. Once Katniss wakes up after winning the Games, she is told by Haymitch that the people at the Capitol did not like her act of defiance and that from then on, she would be watched very closely. This warning can be interpreted as an anticipated strain. Although vague, this threat foreshadows the hardships Katniss will face in the future due to her brave act of trying to survive. The Capitol saw it

as an act of opposition reminding them of the Dark Days. In the future, though it is not mentioned in this film, Katniss will continue to engage in criminal activity due to the strain she faces from the Capitol's increase in surveillance and social control. In the anticipation of the strain Katniss feels anger, frustration and fear. In general strain theory, people with negative emotionality tend to act without thinking, and to engage in risky behavior. In this case, the risky behavior is Katniss leading a revolution against the Capitol, who symbolizes the government, in preparation of the strain. The revolution would consist of killing people in the Capitol that oppose her ideas and also killing innocent people.

Using the general strain theory has helped in having a better understanding of the film because it can explain the social interactions in the film. Each deviant act in the movie can be given a throughout explanation as to why it originated with the use of the general strain theory. The behavior of the characters are responses from strains that arise from multiple factors within the districts such as unequal access to resources and the differences in treatment regarding the citizens' social status. Originally when the film was released, the deviant acts displayed were seen as rebellious and some might even argue seen as petty, but by applying the general strain theory, it can be explained that their actions are a cause of the repression they have been enduring for decades. The theory explains that the criminal acts are a coping mechanism some might engage in to reduce or escape the negative emotions they are experiencing.

## Work Cited

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