

A CULTURAL CRITIQUE OF
CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE FICTION FILM

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

Christopher Guy Henry

San Marcos, Texas
May 2014

A CULTURAL CRITIQUE OF
CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE FICTION FILM

Thesis Supervisor:

Roseann Mandziuk, Ph.D.
Department of Communication Studies

Approved:

Heather C. Galloway Ph.D
Dean, Honors College

Acknowledgements

Dr. Roseann Mandziuk:

Thank you for your hours of editing, guidance, and advice. Words cannot express the admiration I have for you as a professor and cultural savant. When I first walked into your Rhetoric of Social Movement and Protest course years ago, I had no idea what an impact your teachings would have on my life and how I view the world. Your Media Criticism course was the inspiration for this thesis and it is my hope that my work and research did your teachings justice.

Christopher & Christina Henry:

I truly could not have worked nor completed this thesis without your constant support. Thank you for listening to my seemingly endless babbles about “pivotal” scenes in certain films or how important Gwyneth Paltrow’s body posture was in Iron Man III. Whether it was 2 p.m. or 2 a.m., I always knew you would be there for me and let me complain for hours about the most mundane and childish matters. Dad, you instilled a love and appreciation of popular culture in me at a young age and know it will carry with me through my life. Mom, your tenacity and perseverance when it came to education affected me in such amazing ways and I believe that this thesis is evidence of that.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	Page 2
Chapter 2: Class	Page 12
Chapter 3: Gender	Page 33
Chapter 4: Violence	Page 50
Chapter 5: Conclusion	Page 71
Bibliography	Page 73

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: *Elysium* movie poster

Figure 2: *Gamer* movie poster

Figure 3: *In Time* movie poster

Figure 4: *The Hunger Games* movie poster

Figure 5: *Iron Man III* movie poster

Figure 6: *The Hunger Games* reaping scene

Figure 7: *Gamer* rape scene

Figure 8: *Elysium* Earth shot

Figure 9: *Elysium* Elysium shot

Figure 10: *Iron Man III* poor looking Aldrich Killian shot

Figure 11: *Iron Man III* wealthy looking Aldrich Killian shot

Figure 12: *Gamer* Society program shot

Figure 13: *In Time* mother Salas death scene

Figure 14: *In Time* Weis family introduction

Figure 15: *Iron Man III* Pepper kills Aldrich scene

Figure 16: *The Hunger Games* Cornucopia scene

Figure 17: *Elysium* Max displays his CHEMRAIL

Figure 18: *Gamer* Kable kills Rick scene

Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of how gender, class and violence are portrayed in current American science fiction films. The examination was based on viewing, reporting, and analyzing a set of recent popular movies: *Elysium*, *Iron Man III*, *The Hunger Games*, *Gamer*, and *In Time*. Within the science fiction genre, the directors, writers, and actors are not constrained by any factual cultural rules or precedents, so in essence, these people have the creative power to create any society they want. As this analysis reveals, however, these films actually contain extremely misogynistic, classist, and violent messages. Through the application of sociological categories and semiology, this analysis demonstrates how powerful these messages are in shaping audience perceptions. The research concludes that these films are very profitable, influential, and reflective of what the current culture desires, and perhaps, demands, of entertainment. This research is significant and vital because it reveals that even in science fiction, where there is the power to change conceptions of gender, class, and violence, as a culture we ultimately choose to promote and consume regressive and detrimental messages.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Science Fiction is very much a genre of ideas. As one might expect, SF films have provided the popular imagination with some of its most compelling visions of both the possibilities and dangers of a future increasingly dominated by advanced technologies. Perhaps more importantly, such films, despite being widely regarded as mere entertainments, have often provided serious and thoughtful explorations of important contemporary social and political issues. Indeed, the very fact that genre films such as science fiction have generally not been taken as works of ‘serious’ cinema has sometimes allowed them a special freedom to address controversial topics. – Alternate Americas

The genre of science fiction is at the very heart of the cinema industry, the first film ever made, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) by Georges Melies, is not only considered revolutionary for its time but also is classified as science fiction. Furthermore, with science fiction films, directors, writers and producers are able to create, edit and promote any type of reality they desire, but as history shows through films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), films produced by American studios in this genre tend to reflect current American culture. The movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* provided critical insight into Americans’ fears of Communism and McCarthy’s investigations in the 1950s (Samuels). Simply put, these films are allowed to create any society possible, set in the most distant future, and yet they also vividly resemble the current one. A significant question is how current issues such as violence, class, and gender are exposed and how we as a culture are able to learn what messages are actually being communicated to the

average audience member. For the purpose of this research only contemporary films, from 2009-present, are critiqued. This selection limits the films discussed as well as allows examination of movies that have yet to be critically analyzed. The research specifically examines socioeconomic class, gender, and violence in a small but influential selection of films through a sociological lens. The four sociological interrelated themes are identity, interaction, inequality, and institutions. Furthermore, parallelism and similarities between themes, storylines, and messages are also observed. The qualitative research is primary, based on the researcher's observation, interpretation, and reporting of the findings. Published materials concerning science fiction film also are used to better understand and analyze the topics, thus producing an in-depth study of how class, gender, and violence are portrayed in contemporary science fiction film.

The importance of science fiction films, and film in general, cannot be underestimated; according to the Pew Research Center, 71% of Americans watch at least one movie a week (Pew). Film is a very influential medium for idea and thoughts. First, because of its length, it is able to provide the audience with a well-developed audio/visual example of the opinion or theory the filmmakers are trying to promote. Second, unlike other mediums such as radio and television, most Americans regard watching movies as an activity that must not be interrupted nor multitasked. People can use radio or television as background noise while completing other tasks, but movies are not used in this manner, suggesting that the messages in movies are more important and easily absorbed by the audience. Third, though movies are consumed by all types of people, from the CEOs to the local baristas, the messages of the movie never changes; this suggests that film, unlike television, has a much broader target audience and influences a far larger

number of people. Fourth, film in itself is an amazing translator; though written for the common person, it is able to ask philosophical or deep questions with little to no confusion about the director's viewpoint. Finally, film box office figures provide a key insight in the American and world population for the simple reason that people only see movies they have a desire to see. When an American-made movie produces over a billion dollars in worldwide ticket sales it is clear that the movie's values, messages, and themes are ones that people prefer and applaud. This of course has an inherent butterfly effect on other films in the industry; for example, when was the last time you saw a movie where the villain won? Furthermore, films that are considered successful are ones that attract a large audience and the messages of that film are enacted in the society as a whole – simply put, you are what you see. With the increasing number of theater houses, movies, and record box office profits it seems that the industry has no plans to slow down any time soon.

Film messages are at the discretion of the makers of the movie, with little government regulation especially when compared to other countries; nothing is controlled besides the MPAA rating system. Due the lack of government influence, any message, no matter how illegal or immoral, can glorified in such a powerful manner it can affect people outside of the theater: “What we see influences what we do... violence in films, racism in films, or simple incivility can influence our behavior by increasing our tolerance for such behavior” (Franklin). Human tolerance is not the only attitude that is persuaded by the silver screen. Ideas, symbols and concepts exhibited in films can have a powerful and lasting effect on the current-day culture. As Franklin concludes “Since, as we have seen, many people get their information about the world from the entertainment

media (talk radio, for instance), the hidden meaning of films may be reinforcing idea or behaviors that do have a public policy impact. Certainly, Arnold Schwarzenegger’s election to the governorship of California is related in some way to the fantasy persona that he cultivated in his film roles.”

Science fiction films in particular allow for provocative and often controversial ideas to be explored, disseminated, and critiqued. Also, note that though many of these films are set in distant futures or unknown lands their values, as a whole, are recognizably American, which is referred to as the claim of presentness. This suggests in that fiction films, especially those set in the future, typically represent the fictional events as occurring in the viewer’s present (Currie). This allows for the viewer to not be shocked or uncomfortable about the images presented, as they are more relatable and the audience will more easily understand, enjoy, and agree with the film.

A summary of each film analyzed is provided for contextual clarity. The five contemporary science fiction films chosen are: *Elysium*, *Gamer*, *The Hunger Games*, *In Time* and *Iron Man III*.¹

Elysium (2013) set in 2154, features Max Da Costa (Matt Damon) a parolee and working-class man who works in a weapons factory that supplies artillery for Elysium. Elysium is a utopian world where only

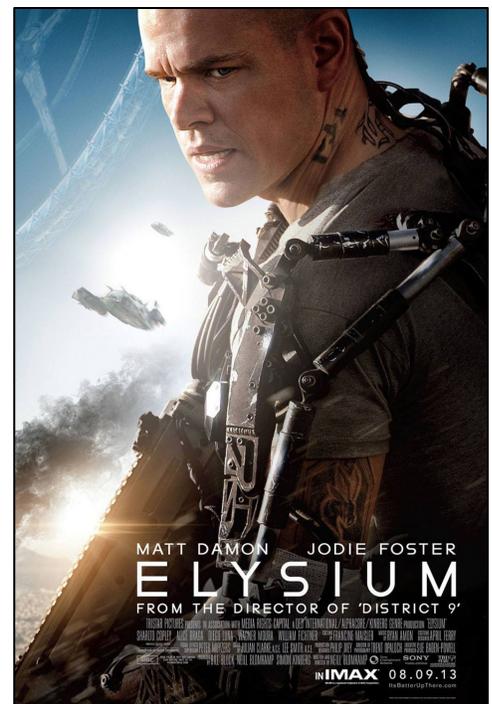


Figure 1

¹ This movie poster and other similar images throughout this paper, is used under the Fair Use Doctrine in the Copyright Act of 1976, which allows for criticism, news reporting, teaching, scholarship and research. All rights are reserved by the copyright owner.

the very wealthy reside. On Elysium due to far reaching technological advances all health illness, violence, poverty, hunger, and basically any other mundane life problems are eliminated. The central crux of the film is that for the people on Elysium to live in bliss they must be ignorant of the extreme poor who live on earth. Due to an extreme exposure to radiation, Da Costa decides that the only way for him to live beyond his six-day expiration date is to go to Elysium and use one of their infamous Versace health pods. As the story progresses he meets his damsel in distress and her daughter, making him want to save not just himself but all of the poor on earth. After Jessica Delacourt (Jodie Foster), who represents Elysium, learns of Da Costa's plan, she declares war with him and his allies. With a large number of fight scenes and casualties, the climax of the movie comes when Da Costa finds the core of Elysium and reprograms it to make all citizens of Earth considered citizens of Elysium. Because such a large portion of Elysium is robotic, the massive sweeping change is taken without resistance with the final scene showing a fleet of medical ships headed to earth to heal the poor. Financially, the film was a success with budget of 115 million and a box office gross of \$286,140,700 (IMDb).

Gamer (2009) set in the year 2020, is about Kable (Gerald Butler) a death row inmate who is a player in the worldwide entertainment phenomenon Slayers. Slayers is best described as a mix of the video games, Sims and Call of Duty. People in the

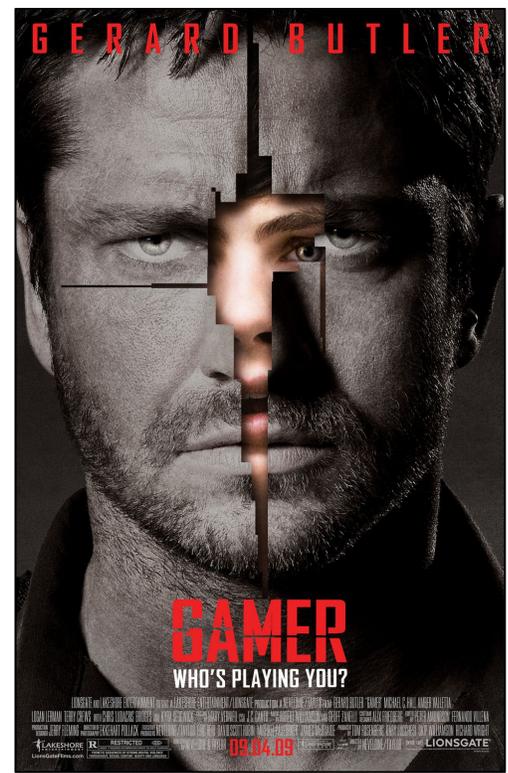


Figure 2

real world digitally control a death row inmate, who is set free if he/she makes it through a number of rounds of kill or be killed arenas. Kable is one of the most famous inmates because he has made it through the largest number of levels. He was framed for his crime and vows to beat the game so he can be reunited with his family. His wife Angie (Amber Valletta) has lost custody of their daughter due to financial issues and works in Society, which is another game from the makers of Slayers where average people, though most of the poor, can be paid to give control of their minds to other people in the world, basically a real life Sims. With this control, nothing is off limits and most people are “forced” to commit acts of ill repute. There is another layer to the storyline where a resistant group called the Humanz tries to destroy the system by jamming signals and inspiring Kable to go against the system. In the final round, Kable escapes the area and the Humanz get rid of his brain-controlling device. He goes to the home of the creator of the game, Ken Castle (Michael Hall), and with a secret video recording device unmasks him for the real evil person he is. In the final scene, Castle dies by Kable’s hands and Kable is walking away with his family. Financially, the film was a disappointment with budget of 50 million and a box office gross of \$40,828,540 (IMDb).

In Time (2011), set in 2169, features Will Salas (Justin Timberlake) as a working class factory man who lives in a world where people do not age past 25. Due to major advances in biotechnology,



Figure 3

people are able to live forever if they can afford it. Time is literally money, where you are paid in time and purchase things with time. People can give time away and steal it from others, when a person runs out of time, they die, thus giving the upper class immortality and forcing the lower class to live day by day. Salas is given a century by a traveling drifter just as his mother dies. He decides to travel to the extremely wealthy New Greenwich time zone to live the good life. The drifter, Henry Hamilton, commits suicide and it is revealed he was a citizen of New Greenwich. Because of Salas's class he is considered responsible for Hamilton's death. While in New Greenwich he is apprehended at a lavish party. To escape arrest Salas then kidnaps Sylvia Weis (Amanda Seyfried), the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in the world, and she convinces him to take down the "unnatural" society. The futuristic Bonnie and Clyde fall in love, rob multiple time banks, and give the stolen time to the extreme poor. In the climax of the film, they steal one million years from Sylvia's father and distribute it to Salas's impoverished hometown. With the system crippled, the poor move into New Greenwich and Salas and Weis decide to continue to living life on the lam by robbing bigger time banks.

Financially, the film was extremely lucrative with budget of 40 million and a box office gross of \$173,930,596 (IMDb).

The Hunger Games (2012), though no definite year is set, it is understood due to the technological advances that this movie is set in the in the far future. The nation of Panem is broken into 12 districts and the capitol. Seventy-four years before the action in the film begins, the districts rose

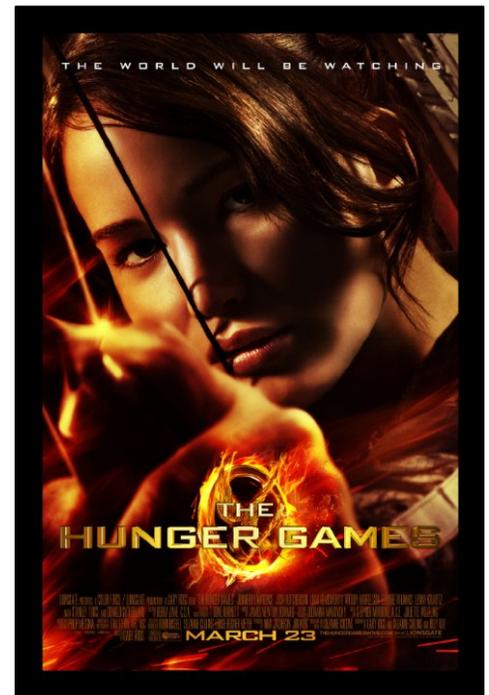


Figure 4

against the capitol and lost the rebellion. Every year there is a competition called the Hunger Games in which one male and one female “tribute” are chosen at random from each district to compete in a gladiator-styled battle to the death. The Hunger Games came about as punishment to remind the districts of their past failed revolt against the Capitol. The film follows Katniss Everdeen (Jenifer Lawrence), a District 12 teenager, who volunteers as tribute so that her younger sister, who was selected, does not have to fight. Katniss and Peeta, the male tribute from District 12, are sent to the Capitol as celebrities to wine and dine with the wealthiest, knowing that sponsorships from them can greatly increase their chances of survival. They also pretend to be in love to garner more support. During the actual games, Katniss meets Rue, a young District 11 girl; they bond and help one another throughout the games until a competitor kills Rue. Katniss grieves over this loss and gives Rue a proper funeral, something that is rarely seen during the history of games. Seeing her death angers the districts who begin to rebel again. The game master, a person who runs the Hunger Games, decides to allow two winners as long as they are from the same district in an effort to control the masses and make them focus more on Katniss’s and Peeta’s love. By the end of the games they are the last two standing and the games master changes the rules again, stating that there can only be one winner. Katniss tests him by telling Peeta to commit suicide with her. At the last moment, the games master quickly declares them both winners. Katniss and Peeta are the first couple to win The Hunger Games; they defy the capitol and spark a new rebellion. The film was a financial success and is considered one of the most lucrative film franchises ever. *Hunger Games* had a budget of 78 million and garnered a box office gross of \$691,247,768 (IMDb).

Iron Man III (2013), set in present day, is the third film in the Iron Man trilogy. Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) is a genius, billionaire, playboy, and philanthropist whose company, Stark Industries, used to make military weapons but now works on other technological advances. Stark is also known as the superhero, Iron Man, who through science, advanced weapons, and his technologically supreme metal suit saves the world on a regular basis. This film focuses partly on Stark's deteriorating relationship with his girlfriend Pepper Potts (Gwyneth Paltrow), but mostly



Figure 5

focuses on the new evil villain/terrorist called “The Mandarin”. All around the U.S. bombs are going off; however, there is only a strong heat signature and the shadows of the eviscerated victims left, no bomb fragments or detonation signals of any sort. One of the bombs goes off near one of Stark's close friends and Stark makes an on air-threat to The Mandarin. The Mandarin strikes first and destroys Stark's Malibu mansion. Stark is hit but is saved by one of his 42 suits and is sent to Rose Hill, Tennessee, one of the bombsites, by accident. Stark meets with the mother of the assumed bomber, and he realizes that her son did not murder any one. Stark finds out that there is a program that injects a serum into the human body and unlocks a part of the brain, which allows for full instant-regeneration of the body and super human heat radiation by touch. However, if the person's body rejects the serum then they are essentially a ticking time bomb. Once realizing this Stark tracks down The Mandarin in Miami and finds out that he is nothing

more than a poor English actor who is being used by Aldrich Killian (Guy Pierce). During this time, Killian injects Pepper with the serum and kidnaps her and the U.S. President. In a climactic battle Stark initiates program “Family Reunion” and all 42 of the iron men suits arrive instantly. It is a battle of the super humans versus the super suits, in which the suits just clearly dominate. Killian takes on Stark himself and is about to kill Stark when Pepper comes out of nowhere and with her superhuman powers kills Killian. Stark then decides to symbolically destroy all of the Iron Men thus choosing Pepper as his main priority. *Iron Man III* was the second highest grossing film of 2013 totaling at \$1,215,439,994. The budget for the film was 200 million (IMDb).

Chapter 2: Class

Class was chosen as one of the three main research inquiries because in any society, no matter how fair the government is, there always are class distinctions. The haves and the have-nots have existed since the dawn of time and continue to thrive today. Class at its core is just a group of people who share strong similarities and identify with one another. However, these movies suggest and exhibit through constant repetition that class means more than just simple separation. These films politicize class in a way that teaches the audience that one class is inherently better than another.

For the purpose of this research, specifically socio-economic class will be discussed and examined. Interestingly, in science fiction films when there is a utopia there is usually an equal dystopia and they both closely coexist. (Booker) All of the films selected show a form of class warfare: the have-nots or the dystopian society takes arms against their utopian counterparts. This idea is morphed into a very anti-capitalistic message sent to the audience. Furthermore, the films selected not only show class differences but tend to show a hyper version in that money equates to more than just wealth but rather life, freedom, and happiness.

The Hunger Games

The Hunger Games opens with the visual class battle. The camera goes from the calm, serene Capitol image to an unknown female screaming in District 12; this an effort to shock the audience and make them uncomfortable as a flurry of three second photos of the dismal life of District 12 appear on the screen. It is also important to note that this is

the first scene the audience sees; it is not Katniss nor the Hunger Games preparation but rather the stark contrast between the utopian and dystopian worlds.

The movie focuses on average life more in District 12 than any other district or the Capitol; this emphasis functions to garner audience support for them in the upcoming revolution. The audience is shown that they have been reduced to a pioneer lifestyle, using bartering as their main economic system. They do not have any sort of health, government or educational programs. Furthermore, the idea that numbers rather than names are used to designate the districts is extremely dehumanizing. Because the only city name is the Capitol, it widens the gap between the wealthy Capitol and the poor districts.

The government leaders in the Capitol do not allow the districts to set their own regional laws. The metal fence, set by the Capitol, encloses the district but also restricts them from leaving the area for something like good hunting, which further cripples their small district. The fence is symbolic of the control the Capitol has over the districts. The large amount of economic inequality is also vividly shown when Katniss hunts for a deer with a primitive bow and arrow just as a large Capitol hovercraft flies overhead. The hovercraft is also representative of the idea of big brother watching, in that the Capitol can be anywhere at any time without the permission or knowledge of the other districts. This shows class warfare because if the districts had any economic fortune near the amount that the Capitol possesses, they would be able to resist these unfair and invasive laws. Katniss tells Gale, her boyfriend, that she would not want to start a family – not because she does not want children, but rather she would not want them have to live a life of poverty. The economy of the districts plays a significant role in a person's life choices;

if Katniss lived in the Capitol, she would be more than happy to have children. Another way the Capitol controls the districts is not just through Hunger Games but also the year round mental and emotional effects it causes on the citizens. The nightmares that characters experience suggest how the games exploit non-tributes on a subconscious level.

Another key sign of class is the clothing the citizens wear on a regular basis. The people of District 12 wear similar dirty, tattered pioneer clothing. The cotton garments are very practical, dull, and don't allow for free much free expression thereof. In strong contrast, the people of the Capitol wear extravagant, vibrant, clean garments. This type of clothing provides the freedom of self-expression and is made of high-quality fabrics such as silk. For example, Effie, a resident of the Capitol, wears a magenta silk garment with a



Figure 6

peplum jacket a mutton sleeves to create unique proportions that add to the avant-garde look of the ensemble and character. Actually, throughout the film Effie is used as a bourgeois comic relief for the audience. With a painted face, body modification and extreme love of material things, she is an agent that allows the audience to laugh at and trivialize the upper class. Most of the citizens of the Capitol dress outlandishly in a manner similar to French bourgeoisie figures such as Marie Antoinette; this is not just a

way to show how highly they think of themselves but also to provide the greatest amount of contrast between the poor pioneer-looking residents of District 12.

The train ride to the Capitol, especially the initial scene of Katniss and Peeta boarding the train, speaks volumes about the class mobility in *The Hunger Games*. First, class mobility is something that is not even discussed in the film, but how Katniss and Peeta act when boarding the train shows the audience that there is indeed none. The train is so luxurious and extravagant that the items aboard actually seem very foreign to them; this is interesting because it proves that there are no trade magazines that circulate the districts. For instance in America we have *Vogue*, a fashion magazine that displays products aimed at the upper class; however, someone from the lower class can purchase the five-dollar magazine and then want to aspire to be in the upper class. In Panem, these magazines of class mobility do not exist or the train's luxuriousness would not have seen so foreign to Katniss and Peeta.

Most of the rules during the actual Hunger Games favor the upper class as well. If a person in the game is in need of water, he or she can have a sponsor pay a large sum of money to have a canteen air dropped to the player. Of course, only the citizens of the Capitol have the means to be sponsors of players. Also, for the players to garner sponsors they have to morph their personalities into what the Capitol society wants. Furthermore, even if the people of District 12 were able to afford to sponsor Katniss with lifesaving materials they would not have that right. What this movie begins to do is blur the lines between government and class, giving rights to some and taking rights from others. It is not that foreign for members of the film audience to think that those who are wealthy can have better lawyers, better education, and better healthcare. However, what this movie

conveys is that the class system is not just extremely flawed, but that we have come to accept it, agree with it, and ultimately champion it.

President Snow is the general controller of the class system. Throughout the film Snow worries about the damage that Katniss is singlehandedly doing. He worries about the hope she is creating, about the celebrity she is becoming, and Snow takes every action she does into consideration. These short scenes of Snow's insecurity communicate to the audience how fragile and weak the classist system truly is. Furthermore, the parallelism between Panem and America is far greater than once thought; so great actually, that one is clearly inspired by the other. Even though this film is set in another space and time there is a clear amount of presentness that makes the audience able to relate to and understand the film.

The class conflict in *The Hunger Games* is not only highlighted by the games themselves but also through visual evidence of the parallel societies. In District 12 the audience is drawn into the sullen mood by the grey hues of the buildings, the cloudy skies, and even the dirty floors. This visual array of subjects helps the audience connect with the District 12 citizens. At the Capitol it is always sunny and the vibrant clean buildings only add to the excitement of the metropolis. Furthermore, scenes that are based in the capitol city life are only shown for a few seconds. Because of the short exposure time the audiences have less of a reason to connect with the bourgeoisie Capitol citizens.

Gamer

By great contrast, *Gamer* unlike *The Hunger Games*, does not explicitly discuss class throughout the film. For the purposes of this section, the in-movie program, Society, is used as a vessel to identify images and messages related to class.

In the very real, but seemingly virtual reality world of Society, people essentially give up control of their minds and are forced to watch as their bodies are misused and directed by some unknown person. Angie, like most people in Society, sees this as her only way to

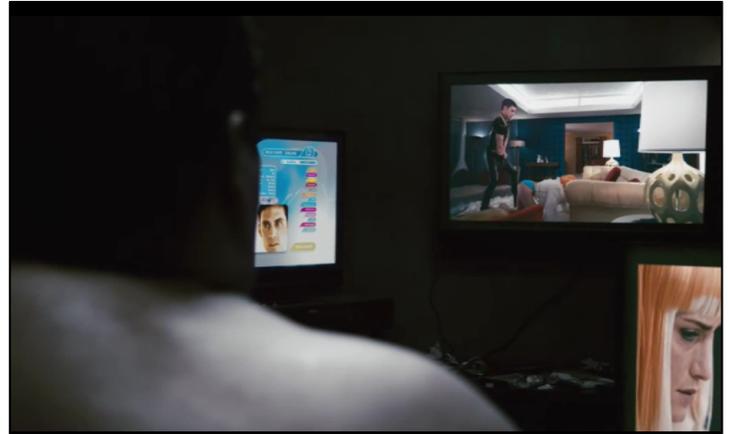


Figure 7

make money. Because there are arguably thousands of people in Society, the film implies that only the lower class would subject themselves to this unseemly lifestyle. Society and the people who participate in it are not held in high regard by the general culture. Angie is trying to regain custody of her daughter and though working in Society is a stable, paying job she is turned down for leading such an immoral life. To the average middle/upper-class person there isn't much difference between Society workers and prostitutes, especially since explicit, perhaps violent, sex is quite common in Society. Society possesses qualities that distance it from the regular world. In Society, colors are more vivid, actions seem quicker and without second thought, it is extremely sunny, the playable areas are always clean, and there seems to be a vast array of techno music

playing at all times. The initial scene for a controller is very similar to the character selection of a current-day role-playing video game.

In *Slayers*, the class battle is based in freedom as the players on death row are selected to battle to the death whereas those who are free, purchase them. An interesting aspect of the film's classism is how random homeless people are taken off the streets of current-day cities and are also selected to be in the *Slayer* rounds for the sole purpose of making the game seem more "realistic," according to its creator Ken Castle. Of course, almost all of the homeless people die with no regard or sorrow. Though they are physically killed by the death row inmates, they are actually killed by the mainly upper-class players controlling the inmates. Since the homeless people have no power or interest to the games besides providing "realism" their untimely death are nothing more than a symbolic example of what the upper-class think of them – disposable.

The game programs *Society* and *Slayers* are extremely influential in American culture especially since they fund government institutions such as the entire prison system. However, the programs are also extremely delicate in that the entire program was shut down in a matter of six seconds by the game programmers once their leader, Ken Castle, died at the hands of Kable. The battle between Ken and Kable is very symbolic of the class warfare that occurred in the film. Kable is the poster boy of the disenfranchised lower-class and Ken is one of the richest men in the world. Due to Ken's death and the subsequent destruction of *Slayers* and *Society*, thousands of jobs are terminated within seconds, and a class system sent into chaos. The movie ends with the toppling of this system, yet provides no explanation of how thousands of lower-class people will make a living now that their jobs are gone and their only skill is having low self-worth.

In conclusion, *Gamer* provided the audience with visual examples of a cultural class battle through the use of socially-accepted mind-control programs. The upperclass is empowered to command the poor and the lower-class is reduced nothing more than slaves.

Elysium

In comparison to all of the films selected, *Elysium*'s director Neill Blomkamp actually wrote the screenplay and directed the film because he wanted to create a film about the very rich and very poor. Cast and crew interviews reveal that for Blomkamp the movie was a metaphor about how the rich and the poor are so unlike one another that it seems that they even live on different planets (DVD Special Features). He also set it in the year 2154, perhaps as a warning to the current generation of what is to come.



Figures 8, 9

Elysium starts with a visual class conflict. The first scene shows a young orphan named Max whose only desire is to be on the satellite Elysium. This opening scene indicates to the audience that the inhabitants of Earth, even at a young age, only have the one goal in life, to make it to the paradise known as Elysium. Due to environmental pollution, over population, and other issues, Earth becomes a dirty wasteland especially

after all of the wealthy flee to the new satellite. Audience members may take offense at how race is intertwined with socioeconomic class, as the citizens of Earth all speak Spanish and most appear to be of Hispanic descent, while the majority of the citizens of Elysium are French-speaking Caucasians. In addition, to get the destroyed 2154 Los Angeles look the director chose present day Mexico City for the filming location. Buildings, streets, and landscapes remained unchanged for filming, which indicates that dominant race of current day Mexico City will become the lower class population of future Los Angeles.

In the first scene, there is a large amount of hopelessness in the community, as if Elysium is just a distant dream. One of the supporting Earth characters says, “Things are just the way they are.” This sentiment suggests that the lower class not only is poor but also lacks ambition, intelligence, and optimism. Furthermore, instead of coming together as a community, Earthlings begin to steal from one another. Violence and crime rates increase while education programs falter. This is depicted through not only the number of onscreen crimes committed or discussed, but also by the overcrowded hospitals and the large number of children committing petty thefts and not attending school. This whole scene showing the decay of Earth really pulls at the heartstrings of the audience and again paints class relations in an extremely negative light. The film almost suggests that the lower class leaches onto the upper class for survival, but just as this impression begins to settle, the factory scene starts.

Max works as a low-level factory worker who is exposed to a large dose of radiation in a work accident and is given only a few days to live. While incapacitated on a medical bed, he groggily sees the Elysium owner of the factory look at him through the

door window. The corporation owner's only concern is the sheet he is laying on, hoping he does not get his germs on it. The owner also asks the Earth-manager not to breathe on him with his disgusting earthling breath. He proudly represents the worst qualities of the upper-class citizens of Elysium. However, exploiting and disregarding Max's life is necessary so that the audience will side with the Earthlings in the upcoming battle and not perceive them as lethargic but rather as abused. *Elysium*, much like *The Hunger Games*, omits key details such as perceptions of the founders of Elysium, why Elysium came to be, or the people who work their way up to Elysium. The film is biased because it only focuses on one perspective to sway the mind of the audience into wanting a more classless "equal" society.

Earth is literally and figuratively in the shadow of Elysium. Social, health, and technological programs are all stunted on Earth. The disparity is clearly shown when scenes of a rundown Earth hospital is compared to sleek designer medical bays on Elysium. This interesting point is at the core of the film: Who deserves to live and who has to die? On Elysium, disease is eradicated, from Lupus to HIV; people live in perfect health, which compliments their perfect mansions and servant robots. Of course, these luxurious medical pods are only for Elysium residents. In one of the early scenes, the audience is exposed to a group of people, mostly Hispanic, who illegally land on Elysium. An Earth mother, who is seen carrying her paraplegic daughter, breaks into one of the mansions and uses the medical bay, instantly healing her young daughter of multiple bone fractures. All of the illegals are captured by the Elysium robots and sent to deportation. Though only seen for a split second it is more than enough time for the audience to see the abuse of the Earthlings: dozens of people are contained in a giant

overcrowded rusty cage guarded by robots. This scene really epitomizes what Elysium thinks of Earthlings – they are nothing more than caged animals.

Due to the radiation exposure, Max desperately needed one of the Elysium medical pods and the only way he could get a black market ticket to Elysium was to steal the codes for the Elysium network. Since his body was beginning to shut down, he underwent an extremely painful procedure and received a metal skeletal system screwed into his bones and attached to his nervous system, a sacrifice he had to endure for better strength, stamina and endurance. These are classic hero traits that he must possess to fight against the film's villains. For the audience, this whole idea of Earth being saved by only one man is very influential, but also very debilitating. If we leave society's problems for the one then we all will expect the one to appear and make no efforts to problem-solve as a collective – this is a theory seen throughout most science fiction films. Of course, Max succeeded and heroically sacrificed himself to reboot the Elysium network so that all Earthlings were considered citizens of Elysium and subject to the same rights. The final scene shows dozens of medical bay ships leaving for the sickly planet. This movie is a clear metaphor for America's need for universal health care. Furthermore the film is symbolic of the current society's strong class boundaries, and its thickening of the glass ceiling.

If this film is looked at logically, it is an argument in favor of the rich and their view of the poor. Max stole the information, illegally arrived on Elysium, and changed the entire system of life with no regard for the rich, whose money and hard work built the satellite and technological advances. Max's actions were exactly why the Elysium network was created and him stealing, killing and breaking laws only proves that the

Elysium theories of the lower-class were true. This suggested the argument that the lower class Earthlings take advantage of the rich. However, due to the composition and perspectives selected, the film audiences tend to look at this relationship from an emotional standpoint. These poor, sick, defenseless Earthlings cannot even have decent health care while those French speaking rich people relax all day in pure bliss.

In Time

In this utopian/dystopian movie, time is money and time is life. The class relations are very interesting and have strong similarities to *The Hunger Games* and *Elysium*. In this world, if you can afford it you can look 25 and possess immortality. This scientific advancement is amazing, but was morphed into the pre-existing capitalistic system—pennies equate to seconds. This makes the rich live forever and the poor live day-by-day.

The time zones are a fixed system controlled to weed out the poor for population control, which is unknown to the general public. However, if everyone could live forever then everyone would die. They weed out the poor by increasing the cost of living: Instead of it costing one hour for a sandwich it is now two hours. This inflation does not affect the rich much, but for the poor it is a matter of life and death.

Each time zone represents a different class. New Greenwich, the wealthiest time zone, features people in the latest fashions and best technology, who walk slowly because they have time to waste. Salas's time zone features a society with dirty clothes, high crime rates, and lots of running. Decisions like love, family, and friends are decided not by the person but by what zone they are in. Some class mobility exists if the characters

can pay to enter each district; however, they have to come up with the time as they enter, and if they have too much time they may be robbed. Audiences identify with this, as it is reminiscent to city life in that there are some areas that are extremely affluent living only a few miles away from the extremely poor. Due to the close proximity of the rich and poor, giant walls were erected to segregate the classes. Furthermore, the rich are guarded at all times for fear of the poor stealing their time.

The film starts out with Will hitting the daily grind as a factory worker in the poorest time zone. What Will lacks in money/time he makes up for in character; he always gives to those who are poorer and helps strangers in need. This is important evidence for the audience to agree with his actions throughout the movie. Doesn't the man with the heart of gold deserve to live? This idea of believing in morally righteous heroes is compounded when the audience watches Salas experience a tragedy when his mother "times out" and dies in his arms. Because of this event Will, and the audience, now blame the unfair system and want revenge.

A very wealthy man, Henry Hamilton, comes to his area and decides to commit suicide for he believes that we as humans are not meant to live forever. Note that he is not saying the system is wrong, but rather the science is wrong. The man gives Will all of his remaining years and jumps into the river. This is important because, for Will and the movie to continue he first had to receive the help from an upper-class man. Without this help, he would have been unable to leave the time zone and ultimately destroy the system. Though there were causalities, mostly of the poor, none of the other characters really noticed. However, Henry's death mattered; his death was important. Even though

this film argues for the importance of the lower class, it seems that the upper class is still calling the shots.

Will makes it to New Greenwich, where the police chase him because they believe that he stole the years from Henry Hamilton, a New Greenwich citizen. This shows that the police not only work for the rich, but also take the opinion of a wealthy person over that of a poor one. Seeing that he is out of options Will kidnaps the richest man's daughter, Sylvia. They run away and fall in love. Her father puts a warrant out for Will's arrest and prices his daughter's safe return at one thousand years. This low-price offer, by New Greenwich standards, offends both Sylvia and the audience; he is worth millions of years and only coughs up a grand for the life of his only daughter. This shows the audience how selfish and time-hungry the upper class has become and justifies why they should be robbed especially by the golden-hearted, salt of the earth Will.

At this point the audience is overjoyed when Will and Sylvia break into the time banks and begin to give out thousands of years to the poor. The influx of money immediately makes the local area somewhat safer, with citizens now having the time to buy standard security.

"Here we don't stop living 'til we are actually dead" is the lower class mantra heard and suggested throughout the film. Though the sentiment is powerful in itself, it is more damaging to the upper class because it suggests that they do not "live", but rather lounge around in immortal bliss. All of the images the audience views of the upper class are of them gambling, partying, or slowly walking with bodyguards around their luxurious metropolis. This influences the audience's perception of the rich as wasteful and selfish as they squander their immortality.

In powerful contrast, the mantra of the upper class is “for a few to be immortal many must die.” This negative statement suggests the question of who deserves to live and who deserves to die: Does your bank account prove the worth of your life?

In the end, the movie answers that question for the audience with Will and Sylvia stealing millions of years from the wealthy and giving them to the poor. This act destroys the incredibly fragile system and causes a great deal of chaos, but the couple still comes out looking extraordinarily heroic. This final scene is very important because it depicts how the poor becoming equals to the rich brings worldwide economic and ecological disaster, yet the audience does not really care. The audience has been so persuaded by Will and Sylvia’s communistic efforts that they are okay with society collapsing as long as the wealthy learn their lesson and the extremely poor get to live another day.

Iron Man III

This film most closely is set in the current American society compared to the other films analyzed. Though it is considered science fiction, it is far less imaginative with its plot, characters and setting. Actually, the classism that occurs is not near the magnitude that is featured in the other films, but is nevertheless important, especially since this was the second highest grossing film worldwide in 2013.

This film starts off with the playboy/billionaire/philanthropist Tony in Bern, Switzerland where he meets Aldrich, the movie’s villain, in an elevator. Stark makes fun of his low class status, by pointing out his worn t-shirt, dirty hair, and general unappealing features. Because Aldrich looks lower class he is treated with less dignity and is disrespected by Stark. Over a decade later, Aldrich resurfaces, almost



Figures 10, 11

unrecognizable, in an expensive suit and short haircut and receives tons of respect; he is seen as an equal rather than as a lesser person. Aldrich's "apparent" class greatly influenced other's perceptions of him; to the audience these scenes prove that class equates to dignity, respect and importance. Furthermore, it normalizes and promotes the mistreatment of the lower class.

Stark ends up stranded in Rose Hill, Tennessee without money, food, or proper clothing, yet he seems completely at ease. He finds his way to a local garage and breaks into it, for mechanical parts, as if he has lived there before. For Stark to break into the private property is acceptable because he is wealthy and thus the audience believes that he will compensate the owners, which he does at the end of the film. Though he is worth billions of dollars and was raised with a silver spoon, he fits in completely with the rural citizens of the town; from clothing to conversation he is seen as one of them. This trait is not only extremely unrealistic, but also very classist. He is able to travel with ease through the classes because he is at the top of the socio-economic pyramid; however, someone from the bottom of the pyramid is completely immobile. Negative stereotypes

are used to define the lower class town. Everybody meets at the bar, single parents leave their children alone at home unprotected, and all of the buildings look old and worn, especially in contrast to Stark Tower or the Malibu mansion. Also, when it is discovered that the Mandarin is hiding out in Miami, Stark immediately travels to the city in a sleek, new BMW. Where he got this car in Rose Hill or how he could afford it are both very good questions that are not answered in the film. However, the audience doesn't focus much on that, but rather on how handsome he looks speeding down the highway.

The Mandarin was not only the presumed villain of the film, but also where most of the class comedy resides. Seeing that the big bad Mandarin was just a low class British actor was extremely humorous to the audience. When looked at closely, the messages that the Mandarin sends to the audience are probably the most detrimental class messages of the entire film. The struggling actor is hired by Aldrich to become the new face of evil and in return for world hate the Mandarin receives large sums of money. The actor spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on drugs, alcohol, and prostitutes who play bikini Ping-Pong in his Miami villa. The lower-class actor might have put the majority of the money in a savings account or donated to charity or invested it, but the audience never sees that. The only thing audience sees is a dumb lower-class man who squandered every penny paid to him on immoral or illegal things. This of course does not prove that all lower class people will act in this manner, but it does convey that impression to the audience.

The last scene of the film is comprised of a montage of final clips, including a shot of Tony visiting his destroyed mansion and underground laboratory. Arguably he seems pretty unfazed by the loss of millions crumbled before him. This is very interesting

because Tony's material possessions define him. His 2014 Bugatti Veyron Hyper Sport car define his carefree, bad boy attitude, his technological advanced lair proves his intelligence, and his Iron Man suits make him the American hero. Perhaps it is because he is so wealthy that the cost of a new house means nothing to him and his upper class status allows him not to worry about such trivial things as living quarters. Or perhaps it would show a negative image if an upper class icon cared about material things. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how the destruction of his home, the place where he created the Iron Man, a major piece of his being, is not seen as significant to him.

Similarities

Though these films are critiqued on their own merit, it is important to observe the key parallel messages between these films because these messages are the ones that are repeatedly conveyed to the audience. The more times a message is repeated the more likely it will be viewed by the audience as fact. Furthermore, when a movie is financially successful the messages it contains are more likely to be seen in future films and thus they become a cinema precedent. In *Elysium*, *Gamer*, *The Hunger Games*, *In Time*, and *Iron Man III* there are a number of surprisingly parallel class messages that are communicated to the audience.

First, as seen in *Elysium*, *Gamer*, *The Hunger Games*, and *In Time*, these capitalistic class societies are extremely fragile and can be easily destroyed by one or two people. These revolutionary people are almost always from the lower, disenfranchised class, the only ones who benefit from the destruction of the society. Another similarity seen in these films is that in the future the upper class uses their wealth to exploit the

lower class as means of maintaining control and continuing their lifestyle. Elysium would not be Elysium if everyone were allowed to live there.

These films also demonstrate that money means more than just the ability to purchase items. For *Elysium*, money equals happiness; once you are wealthy enough to reach Elysium you will live the most blissful life imaginable. In *Gamer*, money equals control; if you are wealthy enough you can participate in a mind controlling video game where you can make another real-life person do whatever you want. In *The Hunger Games*, money equals identity or self-expression; only the people in the Capitol can afford to wear vibrant extravagant clothing while those in the districts wear the similar blue pioneer outfits. For *Iron Man III*, money equals respect; people respect Stark and rich Aldrich, but do not respect the poor Aldrich or the Mandarin once it is revealed that he is a low class actor. Last, with *In Time* money equals life; the commoditization of time and life force ensures that only the wealthy can live forever.

Also, the beginning of the class decay is final scene in each of the movies, which leaves audiences happy but leaves many questions about its improbability unanswered. Could Elysium really medically support all of Earth? With everyone immortal won't food and space become scarce? The reason why the audiences are happy with these "open" endings is because they simply do not care as long as the perceived enemy, the bourgeois class is destroyed. The end of the bourgeois is so satisfying for the audience because the film portrays the upper-class as inexplicably flawless. They do not rummage for food like Katniss or fight for basic rights like Max. Specific scenes create tension between the current-day audience and the seemingly perfect upper class. With that, it comes with no surprise that an audience would find comfort in the collapse of the bourgeois.

Furthermore, how we view these upper class citizens is different from how we view or idolize our current-day wealth icons. We adore people like Donald Trump or Mark Cuban because we, as a culture, believe or force ourselves to believe that they deserve to be in that tax bracket because they worked hard for their finances. This is in stark contrast to how the upper class in *Elysium* is portrayed. Because the bourgeois in these films are not shown as hardworking but rather lethargic, the audience perceptions of these classes are different—and, their demise seems deserved.

Conclusion

The utopian/dystopian messages clearly are conveyed to the audience with great veracity, but also other class theories and perhaps warnings also are seamlessly delivered. These films vilify the upper-class citizens' socio-economic class in such a strong manner that it is rather astounding that they come from American production companies. Class is something that will always exist, but with these films we as a society are able realize how powerful and possibly fragile the system truly is. Undoubtedly, these films have and continue to affect America's class structure. By repeatedly showing the fragility of the class system in film, it creates the perception that the current-day class systems may be equally delicate. Because of this, audience members, especially those who receive the most benefit from the current system, are more likely to increase class boundaries as a way of strengthening the system particularly when they observe their system's demise. The American class system is socially constructed and because of that, the laws that suggest class bias adapt with the mood and views of the culture. Currently, we find that the gap between the rich and poor is not shrinking like these films may suggest, but rather

growing and becoming a more permanent and legitimized structure in society.

Furthermore, the films garner popularity through their apparent use of a hero complex.

The films feature this specific type of protagonist as a way to evoke cathartic feeling amongst the audience. Due to this emotional release, it allows for the unfiltered acceptance of the current society and its own bourgeois heroes.

Chapter 3: Gender

Gender is present in almost every facet of life, from the differences between femininity and masculinity to social stereotypes. However, society has been unable to truly set bounds and guidelines for what equates to femininity or masculinity. This of course leads to vast amounts of cultural discussion, confusion, and conflict. Gender is socially constructed with the current society to define acceptable gender-specific behavior and it is presumed that as a society grows so will its gender roles. In science fiction film, we tend to find extreme versions of gender where the women are exceedingly more feminine and men more masculine. Moreover, we find that glass ceilings are thicker and social stereotypes are remarkably stronger. Because science fiction allows the creators to create any society they so please, for most science fiction films to be so stagnant in their views of gender is quite noteworthy.

The Bechdel Test is an American film gender study that rates a film by three basic questions. First, are there at least two named women in the film? Second, do these women speak to one another? Third, do these women discuss something besides a man? If the film possesses all three of these traits, it passes the Bechdel Test. This test will be applied to all of the films selected. The Bechdel Test application is important for this research because it is a legitimate unbiased survey of all major films and their use of female characters. For the general audience it becomes rather noteworthy that many high grossing films do not pass this simple three question test. By having this test in the research, it not only compounds the thesis's gender arguments but also brings light upon the lack of female character complexity in famous films.

The Hunger Games

Unlike most science fiction film, *The Hunger Games* actually featured a noteworthy change of fluidity in the film's gender roles. The main character, though female, had an assortment of masculine traits and responsibilities. Katniss was the hunter and provided for her small family. She was also extremely independent, aggressive, strong (mentally and physically), and was seen by her peers as a natural born leader. Peeta, on the other hand, was a baker's boy who spent most of his time in the house as a dependent. He was passive, self-conscious, weak (mentally), fragile, and had extraordinary cosmetic skills that gave him the ability to hide from his enemies. As the movie progressed, Peeta also voiced concerns about being controlled and giving off the wrong impression to others.

The gender comparisons of Katniss and Peeta highlight and illustrate the cultural diversity of the film. When the two reached the Capitol, Peeta was able to easily morph his personality into what others, especially Capitol citizens, wanted him to be. However, Katniss was far too self-assured to feel this need or could not even easily change who she is if she so desired. Katniss physically assaulted Peeta after his confession of love because she saw it as a weakness whereas he viewed his emotion as strength. During the actual games, Katniss actively searched for and defeated her enemies, usually in battle, whereas Peeta first attached himself to a group for survival and later camouflaged himself to hide near a cave. Even in the final scene, she was the one who made the final blow; she was the one who told Peeta and the games master, for that matter, what to do. This noteworthy because it is the first time throughout the entire film where the audience saw a female stand against a patriarchal system.

Effie was not just the first image of wealth but also the first image of hyper-femininity in the film. She appeared to the impoverished citizens of District 12 with heavy amounts of pancake make-up, as well as high heels and serious body modifications meant to elongate her legs, shrink her waist and accentuate her feminine features. The amount of physical feminization Effie had undergone was almost comical. She also showed a deep appreciation for material possessions such as her mahogany table. This, of course, suggests that even in fictitious worlds, women are still subjected to altering their appearance for men and take pride in the objects they possess. From the amount of wealth Effie possessed, presumably she represents how women are to look in the Capitol. The women of District 12 do not wear make-up or participate in body modifications because they cannot afford it. This cultural evidence suggested by society's standards considered Effie, though physically comical, the perfect woman whereas Katniss and the other women of the district would be considered socially undesirable by the Capitol standards of beauty. Furthermore, a masculine Katniss offset a hyper-feminine Effie. The men in the film did not participate in any major body modifications. They did not seem materialistic and wore simple suits throughout the film. Although Caesar Flicker, the Hunger Games host, and other male Capitol citizens did style their hair in unique fashions, they did not alter their bodies nearly as much as their female counterparts did.

In many American science fiction films there are certain types of gendered characters that tend to exist, and *The Hunger Games* is no exception. Some of the token characters in the film are the hyper-masculine male, the weak, passive mother figure, the flamboyant fashion designer, and the innocent young girl. These characters are extremely static and stereotypical – this is in part due to the audience perception of how these

characters should act. The Male fashion designer is expected to be very flamboyant. A young girl should be as innocent as possible and never commit an act of violence, as shown with Rue. The hyper-masculine man is defined by his aggression and violent acts. This perpetuation of gendered characters creates a movie stigma that influences daily life. *The Hunger Games*, as discussed earlier, does stand out from the general science fiction film pack by having a strong female hero as the main role. This change is not as groundbreaking because there has been a plethora of strong sci-fi heroines in the past. The *Alien* Trilogy, for instance, revolved around main protagonist Ellen Ripley.

In addition, men hold all of the positions of power in Panem and the Hunger Games. President Snow, the games master, the military officer, and even the Hunger Games mentor are males. Effie, though female, was not in a position of power and was more as a tour guide than leader. Katniss filled this female leader void, but her power is in her defiance of authority rather than an actual legitimate authority.

Gamer

“Stop menstruating and just tell me if we f*cking have it.”

This is one of the first lines spoken to a female during the film, and though the character who spoke it is not of importance, the statement is extremely significant as it highlights the status of women in the near present-day world. An unnamed corporate executive uttered the statement to journalist Gina Parker during a discussion with her boss about whether they had gotten an interview with Ken Castle. Gina acted nonchalantly, as if being spoken to in this manner was perfectly acceptable, and raised no concern to his outlandishly sexist comment. Gina was the only semi-positive female role

model in the film; she was a single professional journalist who takes pride in her work and puts her own life on the line to save others. However, she was constantly degraded in the film by comments, like being called a “media whore,” that were slung at her regularly by both men and women.

Throughout the film, most of the female characters are static, used as nothing more than trophies or sexual toys. In one of the more cringe-worthy scenes, an unseemly, sweaty man controlled Angie’s body in *Society* and “forced” her not only to make-out with random strangers but also to make sexual advances with Rick Rape, a rapist who had been kicked out of *Society* for undisclosed activities. In one of the more pivotal scenes she, controlled by the unidentified man, prowled and crawled on a white shag rug as Rick vigorously grabs his genitals as a symbol of his desire to fornicate with her. Rick Rape’s sexual dominance and the random male’s control over Angie’s actions almost create a scene of sexual rape. Angie’s mind is gone but her body continues to be sexually exploited. At this exact moment Kable, her real-life husband, broke down the door, broke Rick’s spine over his knee and threw him against a wall. Having Kable valiantly swoop in to save her reinforces to the audience the notion of gender stereotypes. The woman was weak, defenseless, and in need of saving by a brawny man.

Though there were 750,000 players in *Society*, only males were shown, onscreen, as the controllers in the real-life video game. This visual choice is interesting because a majority of the playable members



Figure 12

are female, thus suggesting that men are usually the ones that control the women. Some of the degrading tasks the women are “forced” to complete are making-out with one another, fighting with one another, and groping one another, all in an open public setting. Most of the conduct is of a sexual nature, unlike the behaviors in their brother program, *Slayers*.

If *Society* exploited sex, then *Slayers* exploited violence. For every level of the game’s program dozens of men are violently killed. Throughout the course of the film there is only one female in *Slayers*, who was hit for talking too much. This movie clearly emphasized archaic stereotypes that not only marginalize women but men as well. Men were constantly shown fighting and killing one another throughout the film; men were only able to advance the plot with their fists. Though the film is heavily man-centered, it is actually a woman who saved the day in an effort to destroy *Slayers* and *Society*.

At the end of the film, Gina appeared with a female friend and uploaded a live feed of the battle between Kable and Ken to every computer in the world. She was able to expose Ken, the program creator, for the monster he truly is by displaying his callous disregard for human life. Even though Gina and her friend were the ones who essentially saved the day, they were given no credit whatsoever for their actions. Kable is viewed as the movie hero because he violently killed Ken Castle.

For the audience, this movie not only condones violence and sexual misconduct but also almost promotes it as a means towards an end. Consequently, there are no positive messages for females in this film at all. There are no women in positions of power in the film. Kable had to save Angie and men forced only women to commit unsavory acts, not the other way around. Furthermore, although Gina saved the day, she

received no recognition and was constantly demeaned by sexist remarks. The potential for this film to affect the audience's view of gender is great. The sexism in *Gamer* was so vast it was almost comical, thus making the general audience more likely to accept it as typical or appropriate behavior. The large amount of prejudice, discrimination, and misogyny showcased throughout *Gamer* increases our general tolerance and acceptance of it.

Elysium

Elysium's gender conflicts do not stem from new concepts but rather the lack of growth from current times through 125 years in the future, when the movie is set. Gender roles, stereotypes, and ideas have not evolved. Males are depicted as rough, masculine factory workers or violent killers and females shown are nuns, nurses, and frigid professionals. By painting such a bleak portrait of futuristic gender identity, the film's content inhibits the current day audience from advancing past its current unequal state.

There are only two supporting female characters in the film, Delacourt and Frey; both represent women in stagnant, static ways. Frey was a selfless, single mother who devoted her life to nurse others, including her daughter, back to health. Throughout the film, she constantly needed protection, help, and guidance from male characters, specifically Max who saved her life on multiple occasions. In great contrast, Delacourt, the Secretary of Defense of Elysium, was aggressive, manipulative, and treacherous. She was strong-willed and powerful, but extremely cold to others. The wardrobe choices also played a key role in these women's perception by others. Frey wore soft colors, comfortable clothing and sneakers to accentuate her calm and pleasant personality.

Delacourt fashioned sharp colors, hard fabrics, and formal clothing to highlight her distant and often standoffish behavior.

The only quality that the two characters shared was that their motivation for all of their actions stems from their children. They both sacrificed themselves for the protection of their children. When men break into Frey's home, she cradled her daughter and endured physical assaults. She begged Max to take her daughter to Elysium to heal her leukemia. Delacourt justified the destruction of the illegal Earth passenger ships for the safety of her family. Actually, Delacourt's pro-war views are so strong that she argued with her superior and suggested that his lack of children caused impairment in judgment. Though this film featured a strong female character in a position of power, she is vilified for the duration of the film and was seen irrational and monstrous.

In addition, the male gender has not evolved in the 125 years in the future that the film depicts. All of the minimum-wage factory workers seen are men, and men hold almost all of the positions of societal power. Actually, Delacourt's character, the only strong female character, even was initially written for a male. Capable of using brute force to problem-solve, men constantly fought to the death with the winner being the physically strongest. Women used trickery and deception to fight their battles, particularly Delacourt. This is seen when she lied to the President about the attack on Elysium to usurp his authority.

This film suggests that by the year 2154, gender roles, identity and stereotypes will not change and for the audience this suggestion is very detrimental. The impressions these characters have on the audience, especially as role models, are exceedingly strong. Because the film only shows two categories of women, strong, frigid, professional and

weak, compassionate nurse, it limits the audience's perception of females. The film persuades women to perceive that they must fit one of the categories and men identify women as one of the two. This film reduces the number of women's positions, which can have a lasting effect on the current culture especially since the film promoted gender roles that have not evolved in over a hundred years.

In Time

Even though the futuristic film's premise showed a world with unfathomable biological advances, its depiction of women and gender has regressed to Stepford-esque lifestyles. The men of the film are the ones with power. They are the breadwinners, the providers, and are the ones who make the impactful decisions. Women, on the other hand, are nothing more than beautiful fragile toys. They submit to the man's decision though they may not agree. The female characters change their appearance to fit the man's and society's pleasure and are only considered trophies, arm candy, or dolls.

Will's mother, for instance, is played by the strikingly beautiful



Figure 13

Olivia Wilde and it seems as if she is more of a girlfriend than a mother figure to Will. Her death is visual evidence of this limited fragile view of women. She, in the final

seconds of her life, falls into Will's arms as instant rigor mortis sets in. From her pointed toe to straight spine and un-bent arms, she possesses a striking resemblance to a porcelain figurine. She also fell right into Will's arms and was placed gently onto the ground.

The wardrobe choices exemplify how gender regressive the movie is, especially in regard to women. Since the aging process stops at age 25, men and society suggest that all women shed their

individualism and dress exactly alike. This theory of cookie-cutter clothing is proven when Phillip Weis introduced his mother, wife, and



Figure 14

daughter to Will with

all of them wearing similar body hugging, revealing cocktail dresses. Throughout the film, even when Sylvia was on the lam with Will, she selected short designer dresses and high heels as the best way to outpace the police over the multiple day chase. During one of the few sexually charged scenes in a motel bedroom, Sylvia and Will played strip poker and though she was in her underwear, Will was completely clothed. He actually removed her clothing in such a delicate manner as if he was undressing a doll. Almost immediately, they kiss and Will took a dominant sexual position, he grabbed her and at the angle of the shot it is clear that he was physically on top of her and completely in control of the situation. In a matter of seconds, Will heard a noise outside and commanded her to put her clothes back on.

The opinions of females in this film are either disregarded or not important enough to deserve consideration. Two short but powerful scenes prove this idea of voiceless women. The first scene was when Phillip Weis watched his daughter on the news report about the fugitives. His unnamed wife walked in and he asked her why Sylvia acted so disrespectful. His wife said quietly, “you smother her—you smother all of us.” This scene not only suggests that he regularly overpowers her but also that she resents him for it. Furthermore, she begrudgingly abides by Phillip’s rules because only in his state of severe uncertainty did she offer her opinion. The second scene where a woman’s voice is stifled is when Will kidnaps Sylvia. Will held Sylvia at gunpoint and she pleaded with him for hours for her release. She tried to make deals with him and be the voice of reason, but he ignored her voice until she started to agree with his opinion. Once she began to submit to Will’s views then her voice and her actions became slightly more important.

Throughout the film, there are no strong female characters; men hold all of the positions of wealth and power in and out of the home. The lack of visible, strong women can have a powerful persuasive effect on an impressionable audience. In this future society, while women’s roles regressed, great scientific advancements occurred with disease, health concerns, and aging eradicated. These facts suggest to the audience that the progression of women’s rights is not necessary or even preferred for a society to advance.

In Time objectifies and marginalizes women by clothing choice, constant voicelessness, and scenes of submission. Furthermore, the lack of powerful and important

women in this advanced world provides no role model for any aspiring or impressionable female audience member.

Iron Man III

Iron Man III conveys gender through a lens of power. The male characters use their misogyny, cockiness, and distrust of women to increase their masculine influence and power. On the other hand, female characters display a lack of power while their male counterparts control, disregard, and view them as mere trophies.

Because Tony, the title character, is the most prominent and important person in the film, it is vital to critique and understand the messages he exhibits to the audience. First, Tony is extremely cocky and overly self-assured throughout the film. He even proclaims, "I am the best" and when other characters save him, he disregards them and offers no words of appreciation. Tony is known by the public to exploit women sexually and is a self-identified playboy, which suggests he is proud of his conquests. In the beginning of the film, he had a one-night stand with Maya and left her while she was asleep; he experienced no repercussions and showed no care for her. He demonstrated to the audience that this behavior and treatment of women is acceptable. Later in the film when she saw him again, he acted as though he did not remember her name. Though it was a joke she honestly believed him, which suggested not only the low opinion she has of herself, but also the large number of women Tony has sexually used and disregarded. When Aldrich visited Stark Tower, Tony did not remember him though they had met before. Tony's bodyguard, Happy Hogan, remarked, "of course you don't remember him, he is not a blonde with a big rack." Though his statement was humorous, it objectified

females and suggested that only women with physical appeal are worth remembering. Tony and his male friends relied on humor to veil their misogynistic comments, such as “I have dated hotter chicks than you.” This quote insinuated male superiority. Tony lied to Pepper regularly about mundane topics, but was distrustful of her relationship with Aldrich. Women constantly bombarded Tony with sexual advances, but Pepper showed trust in Tony. Tony also talked to Jarvis, his male computer program, more than any other character in the film. This fact suggests that their male bond is the most important.

The female characters in this film are props, trophies, or prostitutes. When Aldrich kidnapped Pepper, she underwent the regeneration surgery and was forced, off-screen, into a skimpy sports bra. Pepper’s revealing wardrobe change is in clear contrast to her normally well-covered body. This detail is important because this state of undress was unnecessary for the plot; therefore not only did the clothing change objectify women, it showed that Pepper, the film’s strongest female role model, is still subject to a man’s control. And, with that power, he sexually exposed her against will. Tony later asked Aldrich why he chose to kidnap Pepper and it was revealed that Aldrich wanted her as a trophy to showcase his power. When held prisoner, Pepper was literally a trophy much like the bikini-clad prostitutes who frolicked around the Mandarin’s Miami compound. These women had no lines, no names, and their only purpose was to make the Mandarin happy and lower the audience’s opinion of women.

In an emotionally intense scene, Maya had a change of heart and tried to help Tony by using her own life as leverage. However, Aldrich immediately shot her without a second thought or remorse. Since Aldrich proved he did not need her, the scene implied that her character’s life and death was meaningless. To Aldrich and the audience, Maya

was nothing more than a pawn or a tool to be used and discarded. On the DVD's alternate scenes the original outcome was that Aldrich shot her and left. Maya survived the gunshot, crawled over to a computer, and transferred the regeneration data to Tony's company so that he could find a way to take down Aldrich. In her final moment, she stared at her regeneration plant prototype as it exploded and killed her, a poetic death. It is unsure why Maya's original death did not make the final cut, but her being killed by Aldrich rather than her life's work added emphasis to his power and removed the control she had over her own death. It is more important to increase the man's power than a female have control over her life.

All of the plot-advancing characters are men, from the boy who helps Tony at Rose Hill to nefarious villain Aldrich. Pepper should be considered important, especially since it was her, not Tony, who saved the day and killed Aldrich, but she is never thanked nor congratulated on her climatic efforts. Throughout the film she appears to be more of a nag or liability to Tony and the audience than anything else.

The scene where Pepper killed Aldrich is essential in how the film displayed gender roles. When it is understood that she has survived her fall into the fiery pit, her body posture, actions, and expressions alter. The lighting forces her to look backlit and creates darker facial features; her hunched-back posture, and her animalistic grunts



Figure 15

portrayed her as extremely masculine, even beast-like, throughout the fight. When she glanced at Tony, he was startled by her apparent change and seemed not to recognize her. Her fight with Aldrich focused heavily on punches and kicks. She used a beam to hit an explosive projectile, much like a baseball, to land the final blow. After Aldrich died, she straightened her back, pushed out her breasts and was dismayed with her own actions, and stated, “oh my god, that was so violent,” in a bewildered and shocked tone. The line and physical efforts re-feminized her and suggested that she, as a woman, was not in control of her masculine actions. After Pepper saved Tony’s life, he offered no gratitude for her actions nor did he congratulate her on her efforts.

The final scene is comprised of clips from each of the characters in the film. Tony’s bodyguard, Happy, was confined to a hospital bed for most of the film and in his final clip an attractive nurse came to comfort him. He was taken by her beauty, but is distracted by her prominent breasts, which he glanced back and forth at while he tried to talk to her. Happy’s inability to look away from the nurse’s physical assets was a clear objectification of her and women in general.

The women of *Iron Man III* possess little-to-no power whatsoever. The little power they do display, such as Pepper saving Tony, is disregarded and overpowered by the degrading images of women as prostitutes and trophies.

Similarities

There are many surprising similarities regarding gender among the films. First, in every film, excluding *The Hunger Games*, women are considered lesser than men on political, social and physical levels. The women in *In Time*, *Iron Man III*, and *Gamer* are

all objectified sexually and are seen by the audience in states of undress. Furthermore, the films condone sexually misogynistic actions. In all of the movies, men hold positions of power; even in *Elysium* though powerful, Delacourt is portrayed as unfit for the role.

The Hunger Games is the only film to pass the Bechdel Test without qualification. *Iron Man III* and *Elysium* passed the test but with a critiqued decision because though the women did speak about something besides a man, their comments to one another were not of importance because they did not advance the main plot. Both *Gamer* and *In Time* did not pass the test because they did not have two female characters speak to one another. This is important for the analysis because it shows how female characters' figurative and literal voices are reduced. Moreover, the test reveals how unnecessary and unimportant they are for the plot advancement of the film. It is surprising that during a 90-minute film, where arguably anything is possible, two women do not even speak to one another.

Since most of the films are set in the future it is important to note whether the gender roles have evolved from their current state. The roles of women have not evolved in the slightest and in certain cases, such as with *In Time*, their roles have actually regressed. Also, the number of female identities or stereotypes promoted is small especially when compared to the complexities of their male counterparts. *Elysium* and *Gamer* only have women characters that are either the submissive, weak mother or the aggressive, unreasonable tyrant. Women do have a voice in these films, but it is too quiet to make a difference.

Conclusion

Analyzing and studying the gender-based messages in popular films is important because movies possess an ability to shape the personalities, aspirations, and interests of their audience. If audiences are repeatedly shown images that contain a specific unaltered message, for example, objectified, degraded, and submissive women, this has a strong affect on the audience. The audience will not only become tolerant of those ideas as they gain collective legitimacy but also expect women in their daily life to embody them. For a female-specific audience, the lack of strong role models and the plethora of submissive women will either persuade women to identify with the characters or cause emotional stress and force them alter themselves to fit the mold the films suggest.

These static characters were not always a cornerstone of the industry; in fact, many films promoted complex, intelligent women and dubbed them *femme fatales*. When audiences and critics alike applaud these films it increases the probability and persistence of gender regressive characters in our society. Furthermore, because these roles are deemed acceptable and appropriate by the general public it tells us that we as a culture prefer to have simple static characters and perhaps people who also are not progressive or complex. Our constant subjection to images of simple film characters causes us to want the same out of people in our daily life. Instead of championing human complexities, we as a culture begin to vilify them as confusing, bizarre, or weird.

Chapter 4: Violence

Our current society has a love/hate relationship with violence; we usually look for nonviolent solutions to answer life's problems, but we ultimately, perhaps begrudgingly, use violence as a tool for societal advancement. We worry that violence in the media will negatively affect our nation's youth and yet we continue to stay motionless in curbing the large amount of violence seen in films.

As previously discussed, movies are very influential and though this thesis is not about censorship, it is important to examine the connection between our current society and violence and a science fiction society and violence. In both current America and futuristic science fiction film the views of violence, promotion of violence, and publicly endorsed violence are the same. In addition, the weapons featured in these advanced films are oddly similar to current ones used by today's military.

Furthermore, when the average audience sees that not much has changed in 125 years regarding violence, as in *Elysium*, they will be less likely to expect or want change; this theory is similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The power and influence of violent images should not be understated and there is a fair amount of research that proves the link between violent images seen and violent actions committed. Interestingly enough, violent movie content coincides with prevailing crime rates (Franklin). In other words, if a year produces more violent films than the one before, then there will be an increase in crime. This statement should be clarified in that just because movie violence tracks the crime rate does not mean that they have a causal relationship. However, according to John P. Murray from the American Psychological Association, "Children and adults who

more frequently watch violent programs tend to hold attitudes and values which favor the use of aggression to resolve conflict. They also tend to behave more aggressively.”

The Hunger Games

The film revolves around the Hunger Games event; it commands most of the movie time and the attention of every character in the film. The Hunger Games is a coliseum-styled battle in which 24 tributes are forced to kill one another with the victor then receiving fame, fortune, and life. Every citizen in Pamen watches the Hunger Games; people bet on, talk about, and host celebrations in honor of the games. This perpetuates the idea that the Hunger Games are more of a socially accepted sport rather than a government-sanctioned bloody death match. The violence shown in the Hunger Games event is compounded by the various riots that occur in the districts. This film contained virtually non-stop violence from the starting scene when Katniss shot an arrow at a deer to the final scene when the Games Master was forced to eat the deadly nightshade berries. Interestingly enough, the film's title does not refer to the main character, the society, or its people, it only references the violent competition they participate in annually. *The Hunger Games* promotes, glorifies and normalizes violence in way that makes it seem as though it should be the cornerstone of common-day society.

The reaping is an event that occurs early in the film where district citizens were selected to be tributes for the Hunger Games. There are strong Nazi parallels between the reaping and concentration camps. First, everyone in the community must attend with or without their personal consent. Second, everyone must complete a form that identifies who he or she is with a blood sample. Third, families were broken up by gender and age.

Fourth, they were forced to stand in organized lines and rows. Fifth, any disruption would result in bodily harm by the nearest soldier. Sixth, once your name is read you must immediately say good-bye and leave against your will. And seventh, the reaping soldiers used violent examples such as public beatings to promote fear, keep control, and gain power over the citizens. The Nazis were known as one of the most violent, hate-filled groups in the world and the movie uses these visual examples to allow the audience to make comparisons between the Capitol government and the Third Reich.

Unlike the other films, guns are not the weapon of choice. The Games Master, the person in charge of the Hunger Games, selected only medieval weapons, such as swords, axes, daggers and arrows, to be used as killing methods for the games. These weapons are extremely graphic, bloody, and require the most force to kill someone with. It is interesting that the Capitol society has advanced greatly with technology, but still selected the most archaic weapons for the tributes to kill with. To learn how to use these weapons the tributes underwent a rigorous training session that created competition and animosity between the tributes so that during the games they would act even more violent toward one another. After the initial training session, the tributes are asked to display their combat skills to a panel with a weapon of the tribute's choice. Based on how well they performed they are given a rank and that rank not only determined how good of a fighter they are, but also helped garner sponsors, who donate life-saving materials such as antidotes or burn salve.

The cornucopia was a metal dome that was full of weapons and was placed at the center of the game layout. Its position in the layout suggested that it was the most important landmark of the Hunger Games. When the players begin the battle, they all

start on metal
platforms that
surround the
cornucopia. This
ensured a violent
start to the games



Figure 16

as eleven of the players died within the first day. The final scene of the Hunger Games event also occurred on the cornucopia, which compounds its importance and links to the idea of justice as it is the moment when Katniss and Peeta win the hunger games. Furthermore, the film alters what a common day cornucopia usually symbolizes. A cornucopia is most frequently seen during Thanksgiving and signifies a coming together of people from different origins. In *The Hunger Games*, the cornucopia possesses a darker meaning as it symbolizes a deadly armory for the tributes.

The games are set up in way that a tribute was only able to win through the death of others. Even a tribute from District 4 killed another competitor to thank Katniss for Rue's funeral. Rue and Katniss became acquainted with one another during training but did not bond until the games started. Their relationship grew as their trust and care for one another reached the level of close sisters. The two were separated for a few minutes and Rue was killed by a competitor. Rue's compassionate funeral was so rare that it sparked public outrage. This showed the audience the power of persuasion that death may hold. During the games and the reaping there was no remorse shown over the fallen. Districts, specifically District 4, began to attack Capitol soldiers, destroy buildings, and fight the control the Capitol possesses. These riot scenes not only condone violence but

also suggest that violent riots are an acceptable, positive way to express dissent or disapproval of government authority.

In a climactic scene, Katniss parlayed her own life to bargain with the Games Master and suggested suicide as a way to get what she wanted. After the Games Master bent the rules for Katniss, she stated that she knew he would not call her bluff.

The large amount of violent scenes actually sterilizes the audience's reaction to the deaths. The movie disconnects the audience from certain characters so that when they die there is no emotional response. When Rue died there was a strong emotional response; her death was important for the plot because it caused Katniss to fight her opponents with a renewed vigor. However, the sudden deaths of the other unnamed tributes were not even winced at by the other characters or the audience. Almost every death scene shows the victim seconds before their death, the actual death, and a small glimpse at their lifeless body. It is telling of the film's message of how these bodies become not important almost instantly. The strong disregard for life that the film promotes can transfer to an impressionable young audience. Furthermore, the movie guides the audience into hating certain characters, such as Glimmer who was killed by the tracker jacker nest, so that when they experience a violent death the audience feels satisfaction. The more violent scenes, such as the bashing of the tribute's head with a stone, are revisited and commented in later years on by the announcers and hosts of the Hunger Games in a positive, passionate light.

Current day audiences note that *The Hunger Games* was set in a different world and is based on a novel. This separation could undermine the influence of the film's violent messages. However, even though the film is set in a fictitious world, it conveys

messages that are applicable to current day situations. *The Hunger Games* shows a world that promotes archaic styles and views of violence. Much like the Roman gladiators, these tributes are chosen and forced to fight to the death. These people do not kill for patriotism or political reasons, they kill because their society states that during the Hunger Games they must kill or be killed. During the actual games event, there are various riots and public outcries in the different districts. Since the audience was shown how much these communities suffered before their riots, it is likely that the viewer agrees with their violent uprising. The film suggests that if the system is unjust the only way to bring about political or social change is violence. The audiences that consume these messages will not only tolerate the violence shown, but come to understand violence as a necessary means for justice to occur.

Gamer

In *Gamer*, violence is a condoned and government supported sport. The program, *Slayers*, uses real death row inmates as murderous puppets to compete in a pseudo urban war. Anyone who makes it past 30 rounds in the area receives a death pardon. *Slayers* is enjoyed by millions of people from all ages, creeds and races. The concept of *Slayers* is violent at its core. A person, any age, is able to control another and force them to commit unspeakable acts of violence against their will. The death row inmate has no control over their body but is still mentally active and does feel physical pain when shot or hit. *Slayers* is broadcast across public airways and on the sides of public buildings such as Times Square. This suggests that not only does the *Gamer* society condone *Slayers* and the large amount of war-like violence it produces, but it also has no reservations about promoting

it to people of all ages. The public has responded to this program with open arms and wallets. As the celebrity of the most prominent death row, the merchandizing of Kable has led to advertisements, t-shirts, and general economic growth. The positive celebrity status of Kable sends an appalling message to the society. He is a convicted killer that society suggests people should aspire to be like.

The first scene of *Gamer* threw the audience into the pseudo war atmosphere. Players used grenades, AK-47s, and even flamethrowers without any thought or regard for others. Since they used these identifiable weapons prominently, it created a claim to presentness that allowed the audience to relate or connect to the film. If futuristic or unknown weapons were used instead, the film would have had a stronger disconnect with the audience and its messages may not have been as persuasive. By watching the film, the audience learned combat tactics and skills that are used in a military setting and since the film can be re-watched any number of times, a viewer could learn these fighting skills with ease.

Combative violence is not the only type of violence encouraged during the film. Sexual violence toward women also appeared in some scenes. The scenes where the unidentified man commands Angie to applaud Rick Rape's ass slap and entice Rick to sodomize her underscore the approval of these actions. The audience understands that she was not in control of her actions but the scene still displayed her as weak, defenseless, and sexually promiscuous.

The film used violent actions to advance the plot and the climax of the film is highlighted through Ken's death by the hands of Kable. His death, not repentance for his evil actions, is what is shown to the audience to bring satisfaction. The film provides

audiences with only the benefits of an eye for an eye mantra; Ken had Kable attacked, Kable kills Ken. After he killed Ken, Kable was free to be with his wife, Angie, and his daughter who was adopted by Ken while Kable was on *Slayers*. The message of justice through deadly violence is painfully obvious to audience. One of the main messages of the film is that nothing was wrong with the violent system except for the man who was running it.

In Time

In Time, much like the other films analyzed, used violence as its main way to enact change and equality in the socio-economic society. The movie plot and actions of Will Salas, the protagonist, are based around his desire for revenge. Actions such as destruction of property, kidnapping, and murder are all condoned by the film as collateral damage in Will's emotionally charged effort for revenge and equality. Since the film was based on the premise of revenge, the film itself gives merit to Salas's violent actions.

The film also provides unrealistic expectations regarding violent actions. When Will kidnapped Sylvia, he lost control of the getaway car and veered off the elevated road onto a concreted underpass. The car was completely totaled and the two were both left unconscious. Once they woke up, Will laughed at the near death experience and they quickly fled the scene with only minor scrapes and bruises. This appearance of invincibility suggests to the audience that certain types of car accidents like the one in the film will yield similar impractical results. Later in the film, when Sylvia started to agree with Will, there was a moment when he was about to be shot by a police officer. Sylvia saw him about to die, seamlessly grabbed her gun, shot the officer, and delivered a

bloodless shoulder flesh wound. Before that moment, she had never used a gun and Will thanked her for her life saving efforts. This scene proved to the audience how easy weapons, specifically guns, are to use and how there are no repercussions if used correctly. Sylvia realized that she did not know how to use a gun correctly so Will taught her, and the audience, how to use a handgun effectively onscreen.

One of the main storylines of the film was the personality shift of Sylvia. When the audience and Will first met her, she was an innocent, shy, wealthy woman. However, after she was kidnapped she slowly became more confident, outspoken, and even proud of her illegal actions. One example of this change is when they smash a truck into a bank full of people and only warn the bystanders a few seconds before with a loud honk. Sylvia's sudden increase of confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth implies that her kidnapping was a positive event in her life. This personality change was also viewed as positive because without Will's kidnapping of Sylvia, he would have been unable to enact the society-altering change that was the basis of the film. These scenes may not alter the views of kidnapping but they definitely frame the act as benevolent.

The lower class, and perhaps the audience, viewed the couple as heroes for their life-saving actions. Arguably, the film did have some merit in the reasons for these violent crimes. Will and Sylvia proved repeatedly throughout the film they were only robbing banks to give time to those who need it most. After one of the robberies, the camera showed each of them giving time to a homeless woman and a charity organization in the poorest time zone. The scene demonstrated the Robin Hood-esque motives that Will and Sylvia had for their crimes and complicated judgment about their illegal actions.

This film possesses striking parallels to the 1967 crime film, *Bonnie and Clyde*. Two attractive young people from different backgrounds come together and receive great enjoyment from robbing banks as a couple; as they go on multiple robbing sprees they fall in love. The main difference in the films, however, is that Bonnie and Clyde are killed for their illegal escapades, unlike Will and Sylvia, who are idolized as heroes for their selfless actions. Since at the end of *In Time* they receive no consequences for their violent, illegal actions the film clearly argues to the audience that violence could be a penalty-free way to enact political and social change.

In conclusion, this film glorified the lawless lifestyle and promoted violence as a means to an end. However, the film did have a somewhat morally sound message in why they committed these crimes. Will's actions started out as revenge but later grew into a desire to help the poor. The promotion of kidnapping can definitely have a negative effect on an impressionable audience, especially since Will's kidnapping of Sylvia appeared to be a positive action that allowed her to blossom as an individual. *In Time*'s revenge-based plot normalized violence for the audience and further framed it as a positive way to avenge someone's death.

Elysium

Elysium is based in a decaying urban city. The setting itself-establishes the violent tone as the film showed people stealing from one another, farm animals running wild, and graffiti on most buildings. The film followed protagonist Max De Costa as the one-man revolution who brought about a new age by rebooting the technological programs of the discriminatory and unequal system. The film conveyed important political and social

messages through violent actions. *Elysium* started with a group of illegal immigrants who just landed onto the satellite. The earthlings fled the scene but most of the people are apprehended and beaten by the robotic police. Elysium agents forcefully send the immigrants back to the rotting earth. This was intentionally parallel to United States' policies toward immigrants. Throughout the film, robots are particularly violent especially toward earthlings. One key scene when an Elysium robot acted violently was when Max was in line to get on the bus and was confronted by the robot, who then broke Max's arm. This violent act showed the audience Elysium/Earthling tension through a symbolic act of violence. Later that day, Max underwent a traumatic work accident when he was locked in a radiation chamber. He was subjected to enough radiation that only allowed for him to live five more days. In the rest of the film, his actions and world altering decisions would have never occurred unless he was hit with the life-threatening amount of radiation. Max became a hero to millions for his violent actions, when he killed Kruger, the bounty hunter; consequently, he was able to reboot the Elysium network. Furthermore, the most violent scenes, such as the death of Delacourt or the loss of Max's best friend, are the most important to the advancement of the plot. The film puts emphasis on acts of violence and gives each action a reason, thereby arguing for the importance and necessity of violence in society. The film uses violence as the channel to promote class equality between the Earthlings and the people of Elysium.

Although the film is set in the year 2154, all of the weapons featured are identical to current-day American ones. In a DVD special features interview, director Neill Blomkamp said that he wanted weapons that looked like current day ones but were souped up with lasers. Having recognizable objects featured created a claim of

presentness that connected the audience to the futuristic film through actual current-day weapons. This claim of presentness establishes for the audience how important these weapons are, especially since they were able to stand the test of time. The film has numerous weapons on-screen and in action, but most of the scenes that involve weapons are shot at a

unique camera angle. The angle is usually profile to the weapon so that the audience can see the length, size, shape and power



Figure 17

of the item. Furthermore, if they watch closely enough the audience can see the character reload and use the weapon on their target, effectively teaching the audience how to use the weapon successfully. There were also parts of the film when a character used a weapon but the scene was put into slow motion to add emphasis on the character's harmful action.

There were many graphic violence sequences in *Elysium*. The film highlighted on-screen such violent actions such as barrages of bullets, slitting of throats, and bodies exploding. The scene where Kruger cuts Delacourt's throat is particularly violent as the audience watched him break a bathroom mirror with his fist, grab one of the broken shards and ram it into Delacourt's exposed throat. The scene showed how he pulled the

glass out of her neck and the blood as it began to pour out of the slit. The shot of her face and neck filled the screen so the audience could clearly and vividly see her facial reactions and the blood gushing out of her neck. The next shot showed Kruger throwing her limp body onto the floor where the camera zoomed in on her final moments of life. In the climax, Max defeated the bounty hunter in a hand-to-hand combat battle. Kruger was incapacitated on the ground, but Max still felt the need to attack him even more and end his life by throwing him off a very high bridge with a grenade attached to him. Kruger, on-screen, exploded into pieces as his body parts flew across the screen. These exceedingly graphic scenes may not convince audiences to part take in similar actions but they function to desensitize their reaction to these violent actions. Furthermore, these scenes cause the audience to rationalize less graphic acts of violence such as assault by comparison.

Interestingly enough, the three main characters of the film, Delacourt, Max, and Kruger, all died on-screen. The final and most important death was that of Max, who killed himself to implement the world changing policy. His violent actions were with merit because in the end he killed himself to benefit the greater good. Moreover, his death gave the film greater impact; the same audience reaction would not have occurred had he survived the film. Because there was no grieving over the fallen antagonists, the film argued that because they have bad intentions or desires to keep the status quo their sudden death is acceptable. The film advocates that one person's action can change the world; however, they must use violent force to make a true cultural impact.

Iron Man III

Unlike the other films analyzed, the main protagonist Iron Man has already reached celebrity status in the film's world. This made any message he sent out far more persuasive to his fictional world and perhaps the audience's real one. The film highlighted the importance of violence, in general, by having many scenes in which violent actions played a key role in advancing the plot. Only when Tony's friend, Happy, went into a coma did Tony begin to take the Mandarin threat seriously. When he left the hospital, Tony yelled at the paparazzi for the Mandarin to come to his home address and fight. The Mandarin took him up on his offer and sent military helicopters to destroy Tony's house in this powerful scene. The destruction of Tony's home by terrorist forces could influence an audience greatly since terrorism in American is such a prevalent issue. Though it is unrealistic that a terroristic group would target a residential home, the thought and consequent action was shown to the millions of people who watched the movie.

Later in the film during the final fight scene, Pepper tragically fell in a pit of fire. Tony, instead of being overwhelmed with grief, found a renewed vigor in her death to fight the villains. Arguably Pepper's death is seen as positive for the purpose of the scene. At the climax of the film Pepper returned and violently killed Aldrich. The death of the film villain ushered the audience into the resolution and without his death the character and the audience would not experience the sense of relief and satisfaction.

The major battle of the film is between Aldrich and Tony but it is important to recognize what the two symbolize. Both of them are extremely intelligent, wealthy, and handsome, but use their abilities in different fields. Tony continued his family legacy and

created the ultimate weapons and machines, whereas Aldrich devoted his life to biology and unlocked a key piece of the human brain. Tony symbolized the military and used bullets to fight his battles whereas Aldrich symbolized science and used his unlocked mind to fight. The idea that every human is able to regenerate at an accelerated rate is phenomenal and could positively impact the entire world. However, *Iron Man III* vilified the idea and promoted a bias toward it early in the film. Pepper decided not to fund Aldrich's remarkable project because it could be easily weaponized. Instead of scientists, the regeneration serum was used on military veterans, which proved Pepper's theory to the audience of how science can be so easily weaponized. *Iron Man III* portrays humans as weapons of mass destruction and argues that we would abuse these super-human abilities. Since Aldrich died because of an Iron Man grenade the film suggested that military weapons are not only inherently good, but also are superior to biological science.

People from around the world idolized Iron Man. The kid and camera man from Rose Hill, Tennessee both show great adoration toward Tony; the cameraman even styled his hair identical to Tony's. However, the devotion of his fans is directed at a violent symbol; at its core Iron Man was nothing more than a war machine with the main ability to attack, kill and destroy. The scene where the Iron Man suit attacked Pepper while she was sleeping clearly displayed this. The suit possessed an impressive arsenal of weapons from flames to bullets to lasers, but did not have much else besides military technology and firepower.

Since Tony was a public figure the messages he sent directly to the public are considered more important than those from the average person. When Tony was in Rose Hill he gave a child a non-lethal weapon as a way to stand up to his school bullies.

Essentially, he taught the child to solve his temporary problems through violent actions. Tony was a celebrity superhero who promoted aggression to children as a problem-solving tool. Later the weapon proved its helpfulness and importance as the kid used it against one of Aldrich's henchmen. People who view these scenes, especially children, are persuaded to interpret weapons as positive items that can be understood, handled, and promoted to any age.

The unapologetic violence in the film is channeled through different forms; one of the most common forms shown is comedy. When the unconscious Tony woke up in his Iron Man suit he realized that he was flying across the Tennessee wilderness. At this point his super suit lost power and he hit multiple tree branches on his way to the ground. The scene itself is not very comedic, but the music, facial expressions, and camera angles guided the audience to laugh at the violent scene. It was shot directly on Tony's face so that his reactions to the branches hitting him were clearly exhibited to the audience. The music set the mood of the scene so that people would view it as more joyful and fun. This showed the audience that falling through tree branches may not be very painful and could even be humorous. By promoting the humor in violence, the film persuades audiences to view violent actions as trivial or amusing.

One of the most commonly overlooked messages and arguably the most important of the film, was how Tony gave human-like qualities to all of his war machines. Tony gave names, personalities and emotions to each of his weapons. He treated his weapons on par with his relationships with people and even bonded with the similarly. In the beginning of the film, Tony regularly talked to his one arm robot helper. The robot helper consistently messed up simple tasks, but Tony enjoyed the robot's faults and treated it as

if it were a friend. Furthermore, the film highlighted the bonds Tony had with his machines by creating the most dialogue between him and his computer assistant, Jarvis. Though the film ends with him destroying the Iron Man suits, this action does not undo his celebrity status, the messages sent, or the violent acts he committed.

Similarities

The messages of these films have great impact when each is viewed in isolation, but when similar messages are shown in other films the impact and persuasiveness is compounded. The films selected all contained striking similarities in how they condone, promote, or normalize violence. First, all of the films gave meaning to violent actions, which in turn made them more important for the audience to see, understand, and remember. Every film included multiple on-screen deaths and used the death of the antagonist as the main climax, or most important part, of the film. Each of the films used violent actions such as murder or kidnapping as a way to advance the plot. Through these similarities, the violent actions receive legitimacy. Second, all of the protagonists are skilled fighters who used their combat skills to advance their political, social, and personal motives. Third, all of the films normalized and applauded violent actions onscreen; whether the supporting characters were cheering for Katniss, Kable, Will, Tony, or Max, they all condoned their violent actions. Surprisingly, if they were not celebrities at the start of the film, like Tony Stark or Kable, they later became famous with their aggressive actions leading to their fame. Will, Katniss, and Max only became culturally known after they started to fight or break the societal norms.

Fourth, during each of the films a close friend either died or remained comatose for the duration of the film. In *Elysium*, Max's best friend was killed when they stole the Elysium network information. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss's new companion Rue was killed in battle. In *Iron Man III*, Happy was in a coma for most of the film due to Aldrich's actions. In *Gamer*, Kable's closest friend was shot during one of the Slayer rounds, and in *In Time*, Will's best friend died of alcohol poisoning. The death of these supporting characters provided a reason for the main character to continue and fight. Their deaths are necessary and positive because they elicited culture- and society-changing results. Fifth, all of the films suggested to the audience that one should take cultural matters into one's own hands. In other words, none of the characters sought help in trying to take down the unjust system. In certain cases, such as in *Gamer* and *Elysium*, the main character was helped, but he did not ask for it; there was an either a deal made or common interest that caused the two parties to work together.

Finally, in both *Gamer* and *Elysium*, particular scenes exhibited strong sexual violence. The camera angles, background sounds, and character placement are all strikingly similar. In *Gamer*, Angie was on the floor as Rick Rape was standing about a foot away



Figure 18

from her. He made sexual noises and it is clear he was about to rape her. At that exact moment, Angie's husband, Kable, appeared directly behind him in the left side of the film shot. Kable then lifted up Rick and smashed his body on his bent knee. He then threw Rick against a nearby wall. In *Elysium*, Frey was sitting on the floor, locked in a medical room. Then one of Kruger's henchmen appeared and stood about a foot away from her as she stared at him intently and made comments about how "gentle" he will be to her, which implied his interest in having non-consensual sex. At that moment, Max appeared behind him in the left side of the frame. Max grabbed the guy, lifted him up and threw him on the floor. When the other henchman arrived Max threw the first one against a wall. It is unclear why both of these sexually violent scenes are so parallel to one another, but it does prove that there is a precedent set about how a rape or thwarting of one should look to an audience. Furthermore it reinforces the notion that women are helpless victims who must be saved by men's violence.

The similarities among these five different films highlight the messages that are repeatedly communicated to the audiences, such as the important and positive outcomes of violence or perhaps the fame that may come to those who exhibit it best. The messages alone possess great persuasive power, but when they are seen repeatedly in different films the messages themselves are legitimized and become ingrained in the minds of the audience members.

Conclusion

Society teaches us that violence, aggression and fighting are bad and yet our films promote this violence as benevolent. We see people killing one another on the news and

though our society does not condone it, our films do. The films collectively argued the importance of violence in society, for without violent actions such as the death of Delacourt, in *Elysium*, the film would have been unable to progress and the culture-changing outcome never would occur. The films that were critiqued increased our tolerance for such aggression and framed violent actions as positive. By doing so, they created negative role models and persuaded the audience members to want to act similarly. For example, Will from *In Time* avenged his mother's death by kidnapping, murder, and fighting and he became a hero for his actions; perhaps anyone could yield the same results. Furthermore, the film taught the audience that channeling one's frustration over the death of a loved one into violent behavior is completely acceptable.

These films provide a great deal of insight about not only the current culture, but also regarding what the current public wants to see. Since *Iron Man III* was one of the highest grossing films ever made, it demonstrates how strongly accepted and agreed upon its messages were by the audience, such as the promotion of weapons to children or the celebrity that owning weapons may bring. The weapons in each of the films are highlighted so that any audience member can learn how to use the weapon effectively. In *The Hunger Games*, the audience is clearly shown in multiple scenes the arm positions, body posture and power needed to use a bow and arrow. By watching the film, the audience understands the length an arrow can travel, the speed at which it moves, and even the size and shape of the inflicted wound. Each film possesses a strong education component that teaches audience members how to figuratively and literally pull the trigger.

The persistence of graphic violence in these films and their lucrative profits suggest that violence is something that is not only expected in film, but also wanted by the audience. Their extensive violence in indicates that perhaps the culture is inherently violent and the films just perpetuate what the audience wants, and what we have been persuaded to want, within a culture that glorifies violence. In any case, though the film's creation of aggressive scenes or our culture's desire to see them may never end, it is important to understand the violent messages to be able to resist its persuasive power.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Films are extremely important cultural artifacts; their power of persuasion, influence, and credibility should never be overlooked. Science fiction film specifically, unlike dramas or period pieces, has the creative ability to produce any society and culture it desires. However, within the films critiqued, the analysis revealed that the messages about class, gender and violence are not all that foreign. Clearly, these films do not produce a utopia-like world, but rather one that strongly reflects our current American values. Science fiction film encompasses all of the other film genres into a single powerful one; whether it is the humor in *Iron Man III* or the heartfelt moments in *Elysium*, sci-fi films can use elements from all other genres seamlessly. The films also use relevant life experiences to connect with the audience and increase the impact of their messages. *In Time* and *Iron Man III* exhibited such relatable images such as the death of a parent or the fear of terrorism.

From the President of the United States to the local middle school student, everyone consumes films. People may not agree with the messages revealed, but they are still absorbed and understood nevertheless. Furthermore, since the audience members have paid to consume the film they are more likely to want to enjoy it. If the film is enjoyed, the influential aspects such as behavior modification or attitudes regarding a certain idea become stronger as the audience member will later reflect on the film and perhaps identify with it. Films have the longest shelf life out of any media, which makes their messages far more important, legitimate, and credible. Additionally, the longevity of films allows their messages to travel between generations and hold stronger place in society.

These film messages hold great power not in just persuasion but also in influencing our degrees of tolerance. When images of sexism and violence are promoted throughout various films over time, it desensitizes our culture's reaction to them. When a society becomes desensitized to something like murder, the public starts to tolerate it more and even come to accept it as a part of the culture. Through repetition, these cultural artifacts teach us how to act in society and show us what counts as appropriate behavior. If in every film, the protagonist used violence to help society, then someone in its audience wanted to also help society, it could be understood that he or she also must use violence. On the other hand, if society constantly sees films in which women are held in positions of power than society will come to expect women be in positions of power. Furthermore, as these films showcase the fragility of society they persuade people to reinforce it by strengthening class boundaries and increasing the gap between the rich and the poor.

When a film attracts a large audience, especially as with *The Hunger Games* or the *Iron Man* series of films, its messages of violence, gender, and class are able to impact a large portion of society. Each film defines society and the people who are a part of it, and these images exert a strong persuasive force. Simply put you are what you see; this, of course, begs the question, what films have you seen lately?

Bibliography

- Berger, Arthur . *Media Analysis Techniques*. London: SAGE Publications, 2011. Print.
- Booker, M. Keith. *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006. Print.
- Cornea, Christine. *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2007. Print.
- Elysium*. Dir. Neill Blomkamp. Perf. Matt Damon. TriStar Pictures. 2013. DVD.
- Franklin, Daniel P. *Politics and Film: The Political Culture of Film in the United States*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. Print.
- Gamer*. Dirs. Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor. Perf. Gerard Butler. Roadshow, 2009. DVD.
- The Hunger Games*. Dir. Gary Ross. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence. Roadshow, 2012. DVD.
- In Time*. Dir. Andrew Niccol. Perf. Justin Timberlake, Amanda Seyfried. Twentieth Century Fox, 2011. DVD.
- Iron Man III*. Dir. Shane Black. Perf. Robert Downey Jr. Marvel Entertainment, 2013. DVD.
- Pew Research Center. 2006. "Increasingly, Americans Prefer Going to the Movies at Home, A Social Trends Report."
- Samuels, Stuart. "The Age of Conspiracy and Conformity." *Hollywood's America: Twentieth-century America through Film*. By Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. N. pag. Print.
- Sutherland, Jean-Anne, and Kathryn Feltey. *Cinematic Sociology: Social Life in Film*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 2010. Print.