

**Biopower, Discipline, and Resistance in
The Hunger Games (2012): A Foucauldian Analysis**

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*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”*
— **Galatians 5:1, NIV**

ABSTRACT

This study examines *The Hunger Games* (2012), directed by Gary Ross, through Michel Foucault’s concepts of power, discipline, and biopolitics. Using qualitative content analysis, the research investigates how the Capitol maintains dominance over the districts and how resistance emerges within oppressive systems. The findings reveal: **1)** the Capitol’s exercise of biopower reduces life to political control, exemplified in the ritual of the Reaping where sacrifice is normalized as governance. **2)** disciplinary power is reinforced through spectacle and propaganda, such as televised ceremonies and the constant reminder of rebellion, which embed fear and institutionalize trauma across generations. **3)** despite these mechanisms of control, acts of resistance emerge: Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark subvert Capitol authority through personal defiance, illustrating Foucault’s view that power inevitably produces resistance. By highlighting these dynamics, the film underscores how power operates not only through coercion but also through cultural production, surveillance, and ideology. This analysis contributes to the understanding of how popular culture reflects and critiques structures of domination and the possibilities of resistance in both fictional and real-world contexts.

Keywords: *The Hunger Games* (2012), Michel Foucault, biopower, disciplinary power, resistance, popular culture, dystopia

INTRODUCTION

Literature is important because it helps us to understand life and people better. It tells stories that reflect our own experiences and show us a new perspective. Through their characters and journeys, we learn to care about others and see the world differently. Literature also keeps history and culture alive by sharing the lessons and stories of the past. It makes us think, sparks our imagination, and it inspires us to grow. Whether it's for learning or fun, literature connects us to humanity and helps us understand the world around us better. *"Literature is the human*

activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty." — Lionel Trilling (1950) , American literary critic and author.

The Hunger Games (2012), a movie based on Suzanne Collins' novel, portrays a society where power abuse, inequality, and systemic oppression are central to its narrative. Set in the fictional nation of Panem, the story highlights the Capitol's exploitation of the poor districts, forcing them to provide resources and participate in the brutal Hunger Games as a means of control. Literature and film often mirror social realities, offering insights into power, inequality, and human struggle. *The Hunger Games* (2012), based on Suzanne Collins' novel, depicts systemic oppression in Panem, where the Capitol maintains dominance over the districts through fear, spectacle, and deprivation. These dynamics resonate with contemporary issues of inequality, such as global wealth disparity and limited access to education (UNESCO, 2021; World Inequality Report, 2021).

The Capitol enforces further its dominance over the districts through a combination of brutal spectacle, media manipulation, and resource exploitation. The annual Hunger Games serve as a public display of the Capitol's power, where children from the districts over media and information ensures that its narrative remains unchallenged, while the districts are kept in a state of poverty and dependency, their resources extracted to sustain the Capitol's opulent lifestyle. The historical context of the Dark Days, a failed rebellion by the districts, is used to justify the Capitol's oppressive policies; these systems rely on surveillance and repression to maintain order, with citizens living under constant fear of punishment for dissent.

The Hunger Games (2012), directed by Gary Ross, was a major commercial success, grossing over \$694 million worldwide. The film earned widespread recognition through awards for Jennifer Lawrence's performance, its music, and technical achievements, while also receiving multiple fan-driven honors. Though it did not secure major accolades like the Oscars, it resonated strongly with global audiences.

Hunger games (2012) are placed in a dystopian society. Placed a nation called Panem with 12 districts that ruled by the capitol. A rebellion that had happened, from a punishment given by the capitol, called the hunger games. Each district must send a girl and a boy to participate in the annual hunger games to fight until death, every year, that will be televised to the whole nation. In the 74th hunger games, primrose everdeen was chosen as tribute, not until

Katniss, her sister, volunteers to take her place. Alongside Peeta Mellark, chosen as the male tribute, they both depend on each other to come across the deadly arena of the hunger games.

Michel Foucault's theory of power explains that power is not just something people or institutions "have" and use to control others. Instead, power is everywhere and works through relationships, systems, and actions. It shapes how people think, behave, and understand the world. Power is not only about forcing people to do things, it also creates rules, ideas, and identities. This is called productive power because it produces new ways of thinking and organizing life.

Foucault argued about discipline, "*where systems regulate behavior through rules and monitoring.*" (Foucault, 1977/1975). The Capitol enforces discipline by using surveillance, such as Peacekeepers and public punishments, to ensure compliance. He also introduced the idea of biopower, where governments manage populations by controlling health, reproduction, and life itself. (Foucault, 1978/1976) In the movie, the Capitol controls resources like food and medicine, deciding who lives or suffers, to maintain its authority. Another key concept is the connection between power and knowledge, those who control knowledge decide what is "true" or "normal." The Capitol manipulates information and history to shape how people see the world, keeping them submissive. Importantly, Foucault said that wherever there is power, there is resistance. In *The Hunger Games*, characters like Katniss resist the Capitol's power, though their rebellion often leads to new forms of control. Through this lens, the movie highlights how power operates in hidden but pervasive ways.

Similar research has been conducted on *The Hunger Games* movie, in the study *The Omnipresent and The Omnipotent – Surveillance and Power (2021 by Anjely Aravindan & Aiswarya R Nair)*. This research examines how the Capitol uses constant surveillance to assert dominance over Panem's citizens. It explores the psychological impact of continuous monitoring, drawing parallels to Foucault's concept of the Panopticon and highlighting the erosion of individual privacy and identity. However, our research takes a different approach by focusing on the struggles faced by each district in contrast to the glorified Capitol. Rather than emphasizing surveillance alone, we examine the broader conflict between powerful, wealthy institutions and the poor, oppressed districts, shedding light on the inequalities that fuel their resistance.

The Hunger Games (2012), a dystopian movie that focuses on the Capitol's power in oppressing the other 12th district, in using surveillance, discipline, institution and separation to

maintain power over the remaining district. This movie reflects Foucault's theory, power, as a manufactured force that operates through institutes and societal norms to keep control over other societies. This movie uses a mechanism of life to death games that manipulates the reinforcement power towards other districts, gaslighting each opponent to keep under control. Through thoroughly analyzing *The Hunger Games* (2012), Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark's crucial strategy ignites rebellion. It is evident that their acts of survival proves an exploited system in oppression to sustain power within the capitol—where each district burns in the agency to live, forgetting compatibility to ignite rebellion together.

District residents (resistance)	Capitol (governmentality)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The district residents live in poverty, suffer from hunger, and live in fear as they are forced to obey the Capitol's rules and sacrifice their children for the Hunger Games. - Katniss Everdeen lives in poverty, suffers from hunger, and lives in fear, volunteers herself for the Hunger Games, setting in motion the events of the story. - Peeta Mellark, a son of a baker, lives in fear in the districts. He plays the Capitol's game through charm and strategy, living in the manufactured spotlight while his true self suffers the arena's brutal reality in misery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Capitol rules the districts through fear and brutal entertainment, living in luxury while the districts suffer in misery. - <i>"Hope, it is the only thing stronger than fear."</i> – President Snow. The Capitol creates false hope but still relies on fear to maintain its power..

METHOD

This study applies qualitative content analysis to *The Hunger Games* (2012) using Michel Foucault's theories of power, discipline, and biopolitics. The analysis focused on key scenes, dialogue, and cinematic techniques to examine how control and resistance are represented in Panem. Foucault's works (*Discipline and Punish*, 1977; *The History of Sexuality*, 1978) provided the theoretical framework. The research process involved identifying significant scenes, interpreting their symbols and visuals through Foucauldian concepts, and drawing conclusions

about how power operates within the film and reflects broader sociopolitical realities. As no human participants were involved, ethical concerns were minimal, limited to ensuring accurate and responsible interpretation.

DISCUSSION

1. Biopower

In the opening scene of *The Hunger Games*, Stanley Tucci and Seneca Crane are seen in an interview, wearing lavish outfits in vibrant blue lighting that crudely contrasts the dull color grading that follow, discussing Crane's role as a 'game maker,' in such a casual manner as if the Hunger Games itself were a straightforward matter. In a close-up shot, Crane states: "*It was a price that districts had to pay,*" such that it captures the Capitol's exercise of biopower, where human life becomes a kind of political currency in maintaining social order. Sacrifice becoming normalized, specifically the offering of children, is represented by the state's power to "*make live and let die,*" (Foucault, 1978/1976) a cornerstone of modern biopolitical governance. The Capitol's annual harvest of youth serves as a paired function of biopolitical: the control of population through mortality and psychological subjugation through fear and trauma. This institutionalized violence is not just mere punishment, as it constitutes an apparatus that transforms human bodies into instruments of the state's power. As Foucault studied, this form of biopower operates as a political technology that brings life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations.



The districts' acceptance of this 'price' is rooted from the profound internalization of oppression and the reminiscent of global patterns, where left-over populations bear disproportionate burdens, analogous to UNESCO's (2021) findings that educational deprivation continues to be concentrated amongst the poorest sides of society. The Capitol's biopower extends not just in physical control, but also to the configuration of the people's consciousness where citizens become unwilling participants in their own subjugation.

2. Biopower

In a close-up shot during their final farewell, Gale urgently and desperately tells Katniss, “*You’re stronger than they are,*” adds yet another counterpoint to the Capitol’s biopower, shown in which resistance emerges despite and perhaps because of



biopolitical control. One observes in this discursive resistance that forms at the precise points where power is exercised. The normalization techniques that impose homogeneity while simultaneously individualizing by making it possible to measure gaps necessitate their own contestation. It is not that this contestation stands outside power, but rather that it functions as an integral component within this network of relations. Koopman (2018) explains this irreducibility of power modalities: it is not that infopolitics stands in opposition to, or cancels out, disciplinary power and biopower, but rather that its primary focus lies in a different domain. While it may overlap with these forms of power in certain ways, it cannot be fully reduced to them. (p.107).

What one sees in the Capitol’s production of the tribute as spectacle is the double movement through which bodies are simultaneously homogenized as satirical objects and individualized as units of entertainment value—yet within this process comes the very space wherein resistance must necessarily form. As Foucault articulates, “*power is coextensive within the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network*” and in addition, “*relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, admit, sexuality) for which they play at once a conditioning and a conditioned role*” (Interview, “Power and Strength”, 142). Hence the subject’s resistance, manifested in the refusal to accept these redefinitions of worth, must be understood as part of the ascending analysis of power, which refers to gradual mechanisms that evolve over time and eventually shape larger systems of control. The significance of this interaction reveals itself: at the precise moment when biopower executes the integration of bodies into the production system and aligns population dynamics with economic processes, it also creates the conditions that limit its own power. This process ends up making it more difficult to control people, in which it inevitably leads to resistance against these efforts.

3. Disciplinary power

The central motif of *The Hunger Games* is clearly seen during the Reaping ceremony and annual television broadcasts, the true purpose behind the Games is made adequately clear. The given quote that has stated, traditionally invoked by Capitol representatives



or repeated in the Districts to torture citizens' consciousness, that the Games are "*A Reminder of the Rebellion*," this is the embodiment of the key mechanism of state control. It is not a reminder just about history, but an active psychological instrument used in the districts. The visual and narrative that are showing close up scenes and dark colored schemes serves to remind us of the Capitol's constant power and imposed memory. The obvious differences between high-tech, wealthy Capitol and oppressed and Districts with poverty, most strikingly displayed the Reaping itself. It is meant as a reminder of the winner-loser in this current state. The yearly ritual to harvest children as tribute, to commute these trauma into a fear for each generation.

The Games, therefore, act here as an upgraded tool of discipline meant to prolong fear and keep the district institutionalized traumatic memory. This is in accordance with Michel Foucault's (1975) analysis of power, that is his argument that "*Power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.*" The Capitol, via the Hunger Games, produces the "*reality*" of Panem: a reality in which the districts are supposed to suffer, to control the districts in thinking this is the "*natural*" consequence of what they did in the past. Thus the memories of the dark days of rebellions are not allowed to fade; rather, the memory is kept deeply and continually alive, transforming past trauma into an occurring present, ensuring the district's dependency through fear. The announcement "*Reminder of the rebellion*" thus represents a shift that reveals the Game as a disciplinary tool of profound psychological manipulation and social discipline through institution—as called for the Capitol.

4. Biopower

In *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012), Peeta Melark's declaration, "*They don't own me,*" is a compelling expression showing a rigid system of oppression. This statement displays a reflection of him, resolving himself, particularly as he is oppressed and forced into the deadly arena. This shows his defiance against

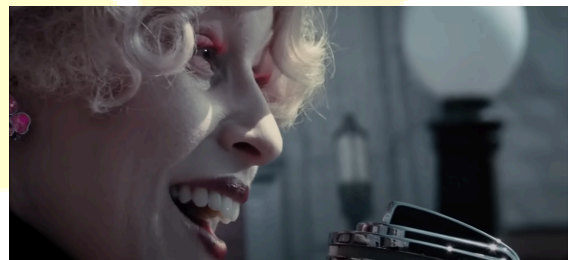


the Capitol's control. The games itself, is designed to demonstrate the Capitol's full control over the individuals rights in the districts, having power to control in reducing human life to the level of commodity for entertainment and Capitol's need.

This moment, a quote given by Peeta abridges a continuous perception, in addressing the concept of biopower, a subject Michel Foucault is known for (Foucault, 1978/1976). Biopower refers to the means by which political power controls and manages the lives of populations: their life, health, and most of all, their existence (Foucault, 1978). The Hunger Games are a revolutionary in movie making as it deepens the idea and use of biopower. in which the state has the authority to order conditions under which life may be maintained, processed, to live abruptly. Peeta's statement, *"They don't own me,"* is a direct denial of this biopower. It signifies his refusal to be controlled physically and spiritually. Even though, objectively, his physical body is caught up in the Capitol's deadly plans. He asserts personal agency, in seizing hold of his self and soul while challenging the Capitol's attempts to take away his individuality. This assertion of agency displayed in Peeta's character is well defended by Foucault's (Foucault, 1980) corollary axiom: "Where there is power, there is resistance." This idea explains that power relations are an inevitable exercise. Because furthermore power would generate sites of resistance. Peeta's statement is a graphic example with full determination, full close-up shots, with underlying shadows showing such a resistance. Initially, it is nota physical act of defiance, but rather an internal and psychological for his deemed human self. By denying the Capitol's right to his life, He reclaims himself as an individual, not letting the Capitol own him. The words "They don't own me" thus display an act of assertion of self embodiment of individuality against the designed system, affirming human's desire to resist oppressive control.

5. Disciplinary power

In The Hunger Games (2012) , there's a powerful scene during the Reaping Ceremony in District 12. This is when one boy and one girl are picked to go to the Hunger Games, a deadly competition where most people die. Effie Trinket, who works for the Capitol, stands on stage and



says the famous line: *"Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favor."* This moment is shot with close-up camera shots that focus directly on Effie's face, highlighting her

exaggerated, artificial smile. The bright and unnatural lighting adds to the fake, show-like atmosphere of the event, reflecting the Capitol's obsession with glamour and spectacle. While Effie speaks cheerfully and confidently, the people of District 12 stand behind her looking anxious, sad, or angry which creates a strong visual contrast between her joy and their fear. Her smile does not look warm or real; it looks forced, showing how deeply she believes in the Capitol's propaganda. This scene reveals how the Capitol turns something horrifying which is sending children to fight to the death into a yearly celebration. Effie's uncaring attitude represents the Capitol's complete emotional distance from the suffering of the districts. Her words, though meant to sound hopeful, are full of dark irony, because for most tributes, the odds are definitely not in their favor. This moment shows how the Capitol uses fake happiness, bright images, and entertainment to control the people and hide the truth of its cruelty.

According to Guy Debord (1967), *"The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images."* In this context, the Reaping Ceremony is not merely a televised event, but a structured social relationship maintained through media and imagery. The Capitol uses these visuals to normalize its authority and mask the brutality of the Hunger Games beneath a veneer of tradition and celebration. The spectacle becomes a tool for ideological reinforcement, ensuring that the districts remain passive participants in their own subjugation. Furthermore, Michel Foucault argues that *"Where there is power, there is resistance."* (Foucault, 1980) While the Capitol exerts significant control over the districts through surveillance, punishment, and propaganda, the movie also showcases acts of defiance, such as Katniss Everdeen's self-sacrifice to protect her sister and her symbolic gestures throughout the games. These moments challenge the oppressive structures of the Capitol and demonstrate that even within systems of extreme power, resistance can emerge often in unexpected ways. The Reaping Ceremony, therefore, functions as more than just an opening act; it is a political performance designed to maintain dominance through ritual, image, and narrative. It reflects broader societal mechanisms where power is exercised not only through force, but through cultural production and spectacle. As Debord suggests, the spectacle mediates relationships between individuals and institutions, shaping perceptions of reality and normalizing injustice. In conclusion, the scene in which Effie Trinket says, *"Happy Hunger Games. And may the odds be ever in your favor;"* encapsulates the transformation of violence into entertainment and highlights how the Capitol maintains control through performative rituals. By using

spectacle to mediate social relations, the regime distracts from its oppressive policies while enforcing conformity to its ideology. However, as Foucault reminds us, power is never absolute, resistance is always possible, and *The Hunger Games* ultimately tells a story of defiance against a system built on inequality.

6. Disciplinary power

The opening scene of *The Hunger Games* (2012) immediately shows the movie's central themes of power, control, and manipulation, *"This is how we remember our past, this is how we safeguard our future."* It is not just a throwaway phrase; it shows the



Capitol's cold strategy. They are not just punishing the districts for rebelling back, but also putting on a yearly show, a brutal reminder of who's in charge. By forcing everyone to watch kids fight to the death, year after year, making sure no one forgets what happens when someone tries to fight back: *"Remember this pain, remember your loss."* For the folks in the Capitol, it becomes just another form of entertainment, something to watch and maybe even bet on, making them numb to the suffering. But for the districts, it is a constant, gut-wrenching reminder of their powerlessness and the terrible cost of defiance. This whole *Hunger Games* thing, as Snow makes clear, a never ending lesson in obedience created in blood and fear. So, this scene is not just setting the stage, it is a harsh look at how those in power twist history and tragedy to keep everyone else down. The opening scene's cinematography in *The Hunger Games*, uses grand, wide shots of the Capitol to show its immense power. Close-ups, A still camera emphasizes the Capitol's rigid order, and looking down on others makes Snow seem dominant. Overall, these visual choices highlight how the Capitol uses its power and manipulates memory to stay in control.

Right at the start of *The Hunger Games*, the movie about remembering the past and keeping the future safe is not just some formal announcement. It is a cold, hard look at how the Capitol keeps its grip on everyone. That idea of power shaping people, making them both the ones being controlled and the tools of that control, that's exactly what the quote from Foucault is about: "Discipline 'makes' individuals (Foucault, 1977/1975); it is the specific technique of a

power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise." In the movie, the kids in the Games are the ones being hurt, the objects of the Capitol's cruelty. But they are also forced to fight each other, becoming instruments in this violent game that keeps the districts scared and the Capitol in charge. Snow's speech just highlights how the Capitol uses this brutal tradition to control everyone's memory, making sure no one forgets the rebellion and why they should not try it again.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *The Hunger Games* (2012) provides a critical lens for examining Michel Foucault's theories of power. The analysis identified three key dynamics. First, the Capitol's use of **biopower** reduces human life to political control, normalizing sacrifice through practices such as the Reaping. Second, **disciplinary power** is enacted through spectacle, propaganda, and institutionalized trauma, embedding fear and obedience across generations. Third, despite these mechanisms of domination, the film highlights how **resistance** emerges within systems of control, as seen in Katniss and Peeta's acts of defiance.

By illustrating how surveillance, ideology, and spectacle sustain inequality, the film mirrors broader sociopolitical realities, including global disparities in wealth, education, and access to resources. This analysis underscores the relevance of Foucauldian concepts in understanding how power operates in modern societies and how resistance is always possible, even within highly regulated systems. Ultimately, *The Hunger Games* is more than a dystopian narrative; it is a cultural text that exposes mechanisms of domination while showcasing the persistent potential for defiance and change.

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