

## **Propaganda for Kids: Comparing IS-Produced Propaganda to Depictions of Propaganda in *The Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter* Film Series**

KATHERINE A. ELDER  
University of Southern California, USA

The *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* films are wildly popular with adolescents and adults alike, despite touching on themes that parallel the horrors in our own world's geopolitical climate. The Islamic State (IS) promotes its own messages of violence, brutality, and even utopia through sophisticated propaganda disseminated via social media. This article discusses the extent to which propaganda depicted in *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* approximates—in content and/or medium—that produced by IS in recent years. Propaganda in the *Harry Potter* films, largely produced in written form, resembles propaganda of the past, whereas propaganda in *The Hunger Games* makes use of contemporary mediums and techniques that resemble that which originates from IS. It is worthwhile to explore whether fiction provides audiences with a realistic portrayal of propaganda, as it may assist viewers in turning a critical eye toward the themes and technologies that are used in their own world to disseminate propaganda.

*Keywords: Harry Potter, Hunger Games, propaganda, Islamic State*

Since the United States' release of the *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* book in 1998 and of *The Hunger Games* book in 2008, teenagers and grown-ups alike have been captivated by the epic tales of Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen. This enthusiasm translated to the box office. The films, despite telling a story in a fictional world, touch on themes that parallel the horrors in our own world. War, torture, and murder pervade, and these scenes are not dissimilar to those we see on the news covering current events in our own world. The Islamic State (IS) promotes its own messages of violence, brutality, and even utopia through sophisticated propaganda disseminated via social media. This propaganda has convinced many young adults to leave their homes (often in the United States and Great Britain) to join the fight in the Middle East and North Africa for IS; in the past few years, we have seen regular reports of teenagers leaving their homes in places like London and Colorado to travel to Syria (Kaplan, 2015).

The present inquiry discusses the depiction of propaganda in fiction by examining the extent to which propaganda issued by governments and insurgencies alike in the *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* film series resemble—in content and/or medium—that produced by IS in recent years. Even though IS suffered major losses in 2017 (resulting in a declaration in December 2017 by the Iraqi prime

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Katherine A. Elder: [katherine.elder@gmail.com](mailto:katherine.elder@gmail.com)

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minister that its war with IS has ended), the decision to use IS propaganda as a point of comparison in this piece was due to significant journalistic endeavors analyzing IS propaganda and to the technological sophistication of the group's propaganda efforts. This discussion provides insight into how propaganda is depicted in fiction, ultimately shedding light on whether young viewers are exposed to accurate messages about the nature and consequence of propaganda. It is worthwhile to explore whether fiction provides audiences with a realistic portrayal of propaganda, as it may assist viewers in turning a critical eye toward the themes and technologies that are used in their own world to disseminate propaganda.

### Literature Review

#### **Harry Potter and The Hunger Games in Scholarship**

The popularity of the *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* series in contemporary popular culture cannot be overstated. The *Harry Potter* books held the record for the all-time best-selling book series until it was supplanted by *The Hunger Games* trilogy in 2012 (Gaudiosi, 2012). The reception of these stories was not limited to their written form; when the final film in the *Harry Potter* series debuted in 2011, it sold more than \$168 million in opening weekend tickets. This staggering level of viewership beat sales for the premiere of *The Dark Knight*, the previous record holder. This final film installment of the *Harry Potter* series also set a record for the biggest one-day ticket sales, edging out *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* by almost \$20 million (Barnes, 2011). Not to be outdone, *The Hunger Games*, the first movie in the franchise by the same name, released in 2012, drew a record \$155 million opening weekend in North America (Barnes, 2012). The books, and the films they inspired, have been and continue to be extraordinarily popular, often with an audience that reflects the age of the young protagonists of the series.

It was not long before academia took on the task of analyzing these stories and films. Scholars have, since the publication of the first book in the *Harry Potter* series, tackled myriad issues and questions related to the story and the societal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal problems involved. Early scholarly work on *Harry Potter* focused largely on the impact the books had or would have on a child's development of various concepts, including sense of self, institutional and societal power dynamics, and the distinction between right and wrong (Natov, 2001; Trites, 2001; Tucker, 1999). As the series continued to gain popularity, scholars turned a more critical eye toward the books and films, with discussions of heteronormativity and the omission of queer characters (Pugh & Wallace, 2006) and hegemony and the postmodern childhood (Chappell, 2008), among others. Interestingly, literature on the *Harry Potter* series is particularly abundant in law reviews and law journals. Legal scholars have used the text to understand various law-related and legal-practice-related issues (Cromer, 2006; Hershovitz, 2010; Robbins, 2005). Others critique the fictional legal and justice systems found in the novels (Barton, 2006; MacNeil, 2002; Schwabach, 2006).

Scholarship examining *The Hunger Games* has been no less prolific; the popularity and relatability of the series have generated a substantial body of scholarly work. Researchers have captured how fans engage with the story (Curwood, 2013) and the series' impact on the development of its fans' sense of self and conceptions of nation (Tan, 2013). Scholars have also critically engaged with the series, with some praising its accurate depiction of teenage life (Simmons, 2012) and others disapproving of its

heteronormative constraints (Woloshyn, Taber, & Lane, 2013) and suggesting the series does little to expand notions of race and femininity (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014). Finally, some argue that *The Hunger Games* be incorporated into school curricula (Saunders, 2014) to assist in teaching concepts such as violence, slavery, hunger, the sex trade, and social action (Simmons, 2012).

Scholars have also argued that the governments of Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen parallel our own governments. The government that oversees and regulates Harry's wizard society bears a resemblance to our own in that it is described as a large bureaucracy, with several departments and subdepartments, and junior ministers to govern them (Barton, 2006). This could provide an opportunity for young readers to see Harry's conflicts with the bureaucracy and make comparisons by reflecting on their own governments and legal institutions (Schwabach, 2006). Although Katniss' government of Panem bears little resemblance to our own institutions, the stories in *The Hunger Games* take place in what is left of North America after considerable war and destruction. "Indeed, the power of the trilogy seems to lie in this vision: in an engagement with the uncomfortable tensions between real, current culture, and this all-destructive world" (Tan, 2013, p. 55). Further, the strain described between adolescent gladiators and their tyrannical government may touch on a deep, possibly subconscious resentment that teenage consumers of the story feel toward an older generation and the economic instability created by their parents (Fisher, 2012). This article accepts these comparisons between bureaucracies depicted in the film and those in our own societies and extends them by including an analysis of propaganda produced by government or nonstate organizations.

### **Overview of the Series**

The two series share important similarities, many of them relating to the fictional societies in which Harry and Katniss live. First, the protagonists are everyday teenagers, unwillingly catapulted to fame as a result of actions taken by their government. Second, both characters were initially used as a promotional tool by their government (though with different end goals in mind). Further, the series depict both Harry and Katniss as eventual leaders of insurgent movements operating during wartime. Finally, these young heroes are often at odds with their fictional government, and both governments attempt to maintain power by managing public opinion and behavior through mass propaganda efforts.

The stories diverge in noteworthy ways as well, providing young readers who are relatively unfamiliar with concepts of bureaucracy and governance with a range of potential behavior by unethical leadership and policy. Harry Potter, unlike *The Hunger Games'* Katniss Everdeen, begins the series as a famous member of society and only gradually embraces the role of a symbol of the opposition. A once-sympathetic government (the "Ministry of Magic," or "Ministry") turns on him and uses the state-run newspaper, *The Daily Prophet*, to spread lies about what it characterizes as a troubled and untrustworthy Potter. This propaganda is less overt than what we see in *The Hunger Games* film series and is not a central storyline in most of the *Harry Potter* films. The exception is in the fifth installment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, in which we see propaganda posters with Harry's likeness proclaiming him to be "Undesirable Number One" and asking citizens to contact the Ministry of Magic with any information on his whereabouts.

In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Katniss Everdeen, once an unwilling propaganda tool used by the government of Panem, is at once quickly and reluctantly situated as the leader of the antigovernment opposition. In fact, a common theme throughout the series is Katniss' lack of agency, which further differentiates her from Harry. Though her government uses her image to simultaneously encourage national pride and subdue the citizens of Panem, Katniss quickly learns to embrace her role as a leader of a rebel movement seeking to overthrow the government. The dictatorial nature of the government of Panem is the central storyline. In the first film installment of *The Hunger Games* series, we see the government subjugating its citizens, symbolized most dramatically by an annual competition that requires each district to send two teenagers to fight to the death in a televised tournament.

Propaganda takes many forms in both film series, and it is important to have a basic understanding of unifying features of and variations in propaganda to assess whether fictional depictions of propaganda approximate propaganda used in our own world.

### Understanding Propaganda

Arriving at a unifying definition of propaganda is a difficult task, not only because of the conceptual overlap with other communications (e.g., marketing, persuasion) but also because of a rapidly evolving technological and political landscape. Although the term "propaganda" was first introduced in 1622 by the Roman Catholic Church (Black, 2001), a majority of scholarship on propaganda has taken place in the past century because of the invention, development, and proliferation of different forms of mass media (Ross, 2002), mostly during wartime. Scholars have argued that propaganda necessitates several features, including bias, manipulation, and intent to influence (O'Shaughnessy, 1996); epistemically defective content (Ross, 2002); and a reduction of groups and individuals to in-groups and out-groups (Black, 2001), among others.

In a chapter of the book *Propaganda and Rhetoric in Democracy: History, Theory, and Analysis*, Huckin (2016) compiles various definitions of propaganda found in both scholarship and dictionaries. In doing this, he identifies six common, defining features of propaganda: (1) information found in propaganda is false or misleading; (2) propaganda is manipulative and persuades using unfair means; (3) propaganda necessitates a mass audience; (4) propaganda serves the propagandist's interests and/or damages opposing interests; (5) propaganda is disseminated systematically; and (6) propaganda conceals information that would allow the audience to critically evaluate content (pp. 125–126). The definition that Huckin derives from these common features is that "propaganda is *false or misleading* information or ideas addressed to a *mass audience* by parties who thereby gain *advantage*. Propaganda is created and disseminated *systematically* and *does not invite critical analysis or response*" (p. 126, emphasis in original). To use the Islamic State as an example (discussed more thoroughly later in this section), communication pieces produced by IS satisfy all six of these requirements: The information presented is not wholly truthful, nor does it invite a critical response. The message is in the interest of IS and contains images and messages designed to manipulate its audience. Finally, the pieces are disseminated systematically and to a mass audience. Huckin's definition does not, however, explicitly discuss the intent to reveal or conceal the source of the propaganda; as such, a bit more detail on the types or degrees of propaganda is provided in the subsection that follows.

### ***Types of Propaganda***

There is considerable variation among propaganda pieces with respect to ethics, source, techniques, mediums, and accuracy of information, to name just a few features. Distinguishing forms of propaganda is important insofar as it allows us to assess the motivations and nuance of its production, though few scholarly works have acknowledged these distinctions. Of these works, however, one common approach to understanding types of propaganda is to assign the labels of white, gray, and black (Guth, 2009; Hiebert, 2003; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006), or, similarly, overt and covert propaganda (Parry-Giles, 1996). These distinctions largely surround the intention of the source to reveal or conceal itself as having produced the propaganda. White propaganda is presumably regarded as the most benign. White propaganda comes from a clearly identifiable source (often government). The information contained in the message tends to be mostly accurate, because a failure to meet standards of truth might negatively impact the credibility of the source. The goal, then, of white propaganda is to convince the audience of the benefits or superiority of a particular idea, ideology, and/or group or individual (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006; Welch, 2003c), while presumably, consistent with Huckin's definition, failing to invite critical engagement. An example of white propaganda can be found in American posters produced during World War II, encouraging women to do their part to help the war effort (immortalized in the iconic image of Rosie the Riveter; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006).

If one conceptualizes white propaganda to be one extreme, then black propaganda must be considered the other. Unlike white propaganda, black propaganda not only conceals its source but credits another individual, group, or organization with its generation. In addition to attribution to a false source, black propaganda spreads lies, deceptions, and generally inaccurate information (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006; Welch, 2003a). A compelling example of black propaganda is the case of Sefton Delmer, the British journalist turned spy who established German-language radio stations designed to undermine Hitler during World War II. Broadcasts on these stations were meant to promote misinformation and rumors to German soldiers under the pretense that this broadcaster was himself pro-Hitler and pro-Nazi (L'Etang, 1998).

Gray propaganda, finally, falls somewhere on the spectrum between white and black propaganda: The source may or may not be identified, and the accuracy of the information is unclear (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006; Welch, 2003b). An example of gray propaganda can be found during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when a book was published that detailed atrocities committed by Iraqi troops. It was not widely known, however, that the book had actually been subsidized by the government of Kuwait (Eyth, 2002).

### ***Evolution of Propaganda***

Although propaganda can be traced to ancient societies, including Greece and Egypt, the rapid advancements made in technology in the past century have allowed for propaganda to define the course of history (Huckin, 2016; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). In no story is this more apparent than the horrifically effective and innovative work produced and/or supported by Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany. In the past year alone, scholarly research on propaganda has tackled various subjects,

including using the social media platform Instagram as a propaganda tool (Kohn, 2017), the psychological impact of antigay propaganda in Russia (Hylton et al., 2017), online propaganda and disinformation during the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Faris et al., 2017), the distinction between journalists and propagandists in China (Simons, Nolan, & Wright, 2017), and propaganda and information warfare during the Crimea crisis (Boyd-Barrett, 2017), to name just a few.

Literature and research about propaganda unsurprisingly proliferated after the conclusion of World War II, and in 1953, Harter and Sullivan identified eight steps of propaganda analysis (p. 7): (1) Who is the propagandist? (2) What is the propagandist's goal? (3) At whom is the propagandist directing their message? (4) What attitudes are exploited in the propaganda? (5) What organizational machinery connects the propagandist and the public? (6) What techniques are used in the propaganda (i.e., what methods are used to present the propagandist's ideas? This excludes media and attitudes and may take the form of exaggeration, lying, etc.)? (7) What forms does the propaganda take? (8) Is the propagandist successful? Although there is merit in considering all eight of these aspects of propaganda in conducting any analysis, this discussion focuses mostly on Steps 4 (attitudes exploited), 6 (techniques used), and 7 (forms taken). This decision is due to a desire to focus on the actual examples of propaganda as depicted in the film series, as opposed to the context and political climate in which they are produced, facilitating a comparison to propaganda produced by IS.

Given the focus of the present discussion, it is important to understand the potential of the film series themselves to serve as persuasive and/or propagandist messages. History is full of examples of art and fiction as propaganda (Ross, 2002), and in the 19th century, authors often used fiction to communicate nationalist sentiments (Levine, 2008; Sarkar, 1987; Wright, 2007). This shifted in the early 20th century, when fiction was at times used as a tool to impart antiwar messages (famously exemplified by Erich Maria Remarque's antiwar masterpiece, *All Quiet on the Western Front*; Cull, 2003). Following this discussion, then, *The Hunger Games* series could be viewed as antiwar propaganda. In a 2008 interview with the *School Library Journal*, Suzanne Collins responded to a question about her motivation for writing the series by saying,

One night, I was lying in bed, and I was channel surfing between reality TV programs and actual war coverage. On one channel, there's a group of young people competing for I don't even know; and on the next, there's a group of young people fighting in an actual war. I was really tired, and the lines between these stories started to blur in a very unsettling way . . . there is so much programming, and I worry that we're all getting a little desensitized to the images on our television. (Margolis, paras. 3–4)

If authors use fiction to communicate antiwar perspectives, we can logically conclude that individuals and groups use propaganda to promote the opposite. Nowhere is this more prevalent and consequential in our own contemporary world than in the strategies used by the Islamic State. This force has in recent years caught the attention of the global audience with its ruthless and inhumane approach to warfare; the actions of the extremists that comprise IS have resulted in a worldwide refugee crisis, strategic challenges to military and intelligence agencies, and the instillation of fear in societies both within and far from the Middle East. Comparing the viciousness of combat and torture methods used by IS with those we see in

these film series is outside the scope of this article, however. I am presently concerned with discussing the extent to which propaganda techniques depicted in *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* films resemble those used by IS.

### ***Islamic State Propaganda***

The Islamic State is known for using technologically sophisticated methods to recruit followers and instill fear in (what it perceives as) enemies. The messages employed, however, are not necessarily novel, and those following propaganda created by IS describe a marriage between old-world brutality and futuristic mediums. As two journalists from *The New York Times* (both of whom cover IS extensively, and one of whom was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2015 for his reporting on IS recruiting efforts) covering the group have it, "If [IS's] bigotry and beheadings seem to come from a distant century, its use of media is up to the moment" (Shane & Hubbard, 2014, para. 2). Others similarly describe a communication strategy resembling a "medieval reality show" (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015, para. 7).

In 2015, the Quilliam Foundation published a thorough and rigorous report that analyzed 30 days' worth of published propaganda by IS (1,146 propaganda events between July 15 and August 15, 2015). The author of the report found that the narrative in IS propaganda is consistent, but the thematic approaches used to promote the narrative are not. This report identified six propaganda themes, ranked here in order from least to most frequently used: mercy (0.45%; suggestions that IS will be merciful to its enemies who surrender); belonging in the caliphate (0.89%); brutality designed to position the group as going against the status quo (2.13%); victimhood and persecution by the global community (6.84%); war (37.12%; providing a message of victory in mostly offensive warfare due to the courageous and heroic IS soldiers); and, perhaps counterintuitively given the five previous themes, utopia, both in the form of eventual statehood (distinguishing IS from other jihadist groups) and of the afterlife (52.57%; Winter, 2015).

The same report also coded IS propaganda events released in the same time period by medium: An overwhelming majority of these events were visual (78% photo and 7% video), with 11% of output in written form and 4% in audio form (Winter, 2015). IS manages online magazines and daily radio broadcasts and, where people cannot access the Internet, the group often sets up viewing screens in public squares (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015). The process involved in producing these messages requires considerable skill, time, and deliberation. In 2015, *The Washington Post* interviewed more than a dozen IS defectors in an attempt to capture the development of these messages. These men describe the use of high-tech filming and photography equipment, professionally trained media producers, and the constant presence of camera crews. These crews were deliberate in staging the scenes they would film; one interviewee described crew members recovering, cleaning, and arranging corpses of soldiers with their index fingers raised (a symbol used by IS) to best capture the sacrifice of these heroes. Even the beheadings are staged, with executioners sometimes reading from cue cards. Those involved in producing the propaganda are described by one defector as being more important to the IS cause than the soldiers (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015).

Finally, IS demonstrates great aptitude in reaching mass audiences via social media. Twitter has been the most popular platform for jihadists to recruit and indoctrinate, instill fear in the enemy (whether local or distant), and build a global network of extremists (Klausen, 2015). IS makes use of dozens of multilingual Twitter accounts (Shane & Hubbard, 2014), resulting in nearly 2 million mentions on the platform per month (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015). This use of social media (also including Facebook, Kik, and Telegram) means that IS has become more accessible and visible to other social media users (Winter, 2015).

This fluency in using social media and online platforms to disseminate the IS message is effective; in the interviews conducted with IS defectors by *The Washington Post*, all but one indicated that their decision to join the fight for IS was prompted by what they saw online (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015). John G. Horgan, a psychologist at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, who studies terrorism, is quoted as saying, "[IS is] very adept at targeting a young audience. There's an urgency: 'Be part of something that's bigger than yourself and be part of it now'" (Shane & Hubbard, 2014, para. 14).

If the propaganda strategies used by IS are this effective (and evidence suggests they are), it is worthwhile to assess whether fictional depictions of propaganda in the *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* films bear any resemblance to propaganda that young adults might encounter in online environments and on social media platforms. If teenagers comprehend and learn about their own world through fiction, understanding whether these fictional depictions are accurate or exaggerated could shed light on the potential of young adults to be desensitized to or critical of propagandist messages they encounter. It is with that context that I turn now to an analysis of propaganda depictions in the *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* films and the degree to which they overlap with propaganda produced by IS.

### **Analyzing Propaganda in the *Harry Potter* Films**

In one of the many law review articles that examine *Harry Potter*, Barton (2006) effectively and succinctly summarizes a reader's concerns with leadership of the wizarding world under the Ministry of Magic:

What would you think of a government that engaged in this list of tyrannical activities: tortured children for lying; designed its prison specifically to suck all life and hope out of the inmates; placed citizens in that prison without a hearing; ordered the death penalty without a trial; allowed the powerful, rich, or famous to control policy; selectively prosecuted crimes (the powerful go unpunished and the unpopular face trumped-up charges); conducted criminal trials without defense counsel; used truth serums to force confessions; maintained constant surveillance over all citizens; offered no elections and no democratic lawmaking process; and controlled the press? (pp. 1523–1524)

The Ministry of Magic makes use of traditional forms of propaganda. Contrary to what fans of the *Harry Potter* series might believe about the power and potential of using magic to conduct business in a wizarding world, propaganda—and, indeed, communication in general—is conducted through relatively

traditional mediums. A huge memorial depicting the subjugation of Muggles (nonmagic people) by wizards looms large in the lobby of the Ministry of Magic, evoking Soviet-era memorials designed to promote Soviet ideology (Connelly, 2003). Wanted posters warning citizens about fugitives and enemies of the state are posted on buildings and in the newspaper. In what most closely resembles a technique used by IS propagandists, leaflets with the us-versus-them message "Mudbloods and the Dangers They Pose to a Perfect Pure-Blood Society" are manufactured by the Ministry during the series' penultimate installment: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* (Barron, Rowling, & Yates, 2010). These mediums reflect the evolution of mass communication techniques in our own world history since the invention of the printing press (Culbert, 2003).

The wizarding newspaper, *The Daily Prophet*, is the most frequently depicted mode of mass communication in Harry's world. Although *The Daily Prophet* is ultimately portrayed as an unreliable publication that is easily influenced by outside powers and plays fast and loose with the facts, the reporting is nonetheless impactful on its witch and wizard readers. Because propaganda messages disseminated via *The Daily Prophet* appear to be understood by the films' characters as having origins in a person or body outside of an editorial board, I classify this as gray propaganda. The source is not always correctly identified, but it is not credited to a false source. Once again, this text-heavy form of off-line propaganda does not reflect the truncated tweets and compelling images favored by IS propagandists that proliferate online.

Although evidence of propaganda can be found in most of the films, it is only a central storyline in the series' fifth installment, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. One of the propaganda techniques used by the Ministry and *The Daily Prophet* in *Order of the Phoenix* is known as the Big Lie. The Big Lie refers to one central untruth promoted by an organization, ideology, or movement that (a) provides the justification for that organization and (b) helps establish a series of other untruths related to the central lie (Cole, 1998a). Flirtations with the Big Lie technique actually begin and overlap throughout with another propaganda technique—character assassination—when the Ministry continues to situate Sirius Black, exonerated to film viewers, as a central villain in the wizarding world. Character assassination refers to the systematic attacking of an individual's moral fortitude, strength, integrity, and other positive qualities through messages of exaggeration, innuendo, and, at times, blatant untruths (Cole, 1998b).

The use of this Big Lie technique by the Ministry and via *The Daily Prophet* helps set the stage for all Ministry-directed propaganda activities in *Order of the Phoenix*, most of which use a fear-based approach to promoting a message. Harry Potter, once "the boy who lived," is referred to in *The Daily Prophet* headlines as "The Boy Who Lies." Subscribers to the newspaper are asked whether Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, Harry's chief advocate, is "Daft or Dangerous?" (Barron & Yates, 2007). Characters in the film were not unmoved by these propaganda; Seamus Finnegan, one of Harry's friends, indicated that his mother did not want him to return to school because of Harry, concluding that "*The Daily Prophet's* been saying a lot of things about you, Harry, and about Dumbledore as well" (Barron & Yates, 2007). This narrative, the collective big lie attacking the trustworthiness and credibility of Harry Potter and his supporters (including administrators at Harry's school, Hogwarts), provides justification for the Ministry to intervene at Hogwarts. They appoint Dolores Umbridge, a vile Ministry executive, to head the school. She begins ushering in various regressive reforms, all of which are reported with a positive spin in *The Daily*

*Prophet* (with headlines such as, "Ministry Seeks Educational Reform: New Era Dawns at Hogwarts" and "Parents Endorse Ministry Move"; Barron & Yates, 2007). All of these are at least misleading and are predicated on and justified by the idea that Harry Potter is an enemy of the wizarding community. One could argue that the Big Lie technique is present in some IS propaganda, namely, that a caliphate must be established, and that violence is the only way to do so.

The Big Lie is a term that was infamously coined by Goebbels (McLaren & Martin, 2004) and is epitomized by the Nazis' claim that Germans are the master race. This foundational untruth helped justify other untruths in Nazi ideology (which were played up in Goebbels' propaganda pieces), including that the Jewish people were racially inferior and that Hitler was designed by nature to lead this supremacist movement (Cole, 1998a). Another loose similarity between propaganda used by the Ministry of Magic and Hitler's Germany is that Nazi-produced propaganda was not always identified as coming from Goebbels' office. Aside from those parallels, however, propaganda in Harry's world is relatively harmless throughout a majority of the series, and untruths promoted by propagandists in *Order of the Phoenix* are quickly and cleanly resolved. Moreover, propaganda (and anger directed at government efforts generally) seems to tie back to only one person: Umbridge. Viewers might walk away with an impression that the bureaucracy is well meaning, if misguided and encumbered by poor leadership, and that propaganda created by this bureaucracy is inconsequential and ultimately not worthy of concern. This rosy view of the devastating components and consequences of propaganda fails to reflect the history and current events of our own world.

The propaganda depicted in the *Harry Potter* films represents, for millennials, propaganda of the past, largely due to the mediums used by the propagandists. Despite taking place in contemporary society, the story involves propagandists who make use of the printed press as a medium. Messages do not tend to communicate brutality but focus on promoting a distorted truth and attacking the character of its enemies. Messages that inspire fear were designed to inspire fear against a person, not fear of an imminent threat of violence or of jeopardizing one's place in the afterlife. One parallel that can be drawn between propaganda depicted in the *Harry Potter* films and that used by IS is the absence of a charismatic leader in their messages, marking a deviation from a lot of propaganda produced in the past century (e.g., Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union). Although portraits of Minister Fudge hang in the Ministry and Fudge hints at a personal motivation to be seen as a source of strength by the wizarding community, propaganda in *The Daily Prophet* does not focus on enhancing his, or his successor's, leadership.

### **Analyzing Propaganda in *The Hunger Games* Films**

#### ***Summary of Propagandists***

Those looking for uplifting fairy-tales and satisfying conclusions in the fantasy *The Hunger Games* story will do so in vain; similar to events taking place in our own world, the series deals with incidents of war, brutality, and torture, all at the hands of the government of Panem (referred to throughout as "the Capitol," a term that variably alludes to the government and/or the upper class society in which it is housed). Panem, occupying a postapocalyptic North America, is composed of 13 districts (though District 13 is understood during the first two film installments not to be operational). A long-past and unsuccessful

uprising against the dictatorship of the Capitol means that, every year, each district must send two teenagers to compete in an annual fight to the death (known as the Hunger Games). Katniss Everdeen, the series protagonist, along with her friend and eventual partner Peeta, wins the Hunger Games in the first film. President Snow, recognizing that her rebellious and rule-bending behavior has inspired citizens of Panem to protest their treatment by their government, forces Katniss to compete again in the Games in the series' second installment, *Catching Fire*. At the end of that film, however, viewers are clued in that District 13 has been occupied and organizing a national rebellion for decades, and Katniss is rescued from the Hunger Games arena to serve as their symbol. The two films that capture the third and final book in the series—*Mockingjay: Part 1* and *Mockingjay: Part 2*—involve a messaging war between District 13—the rebels—and the Capitol. Both of these groups claiming political legitimacy engage in a propaganda war, and both are analyzed in this section.

### **Analysis**

Analyzing propaganda in *The Hunger Games* series is more complicated than doing so for the *Harry Potter* series for two primary reasons: (1) government-induced horrors are the central storyline in all four *The Hunger Games* films, and (2) the resistance movement, symbolically led by Katniss, created its own propaganda, whereas the Order of the Phoenix (Harry Potter's resistance movement) did not. To summarize the distinction, propaganda produced by the Ministry of Magic is minimal in volume and straightforward in technique, whereas that produced by the Capitol is prominent and diverse in medium and technique. As a result, in this section, I will not only endeavor to capture the broad range of techniques and mediums of propaganda in the film series but will also structure the following discussion around government-produced versus resistance-produced propaganda.

Propaganda produced by the Capitol is very clearly motivated by President Snow's belief that instilling fear in the citizens of Panem is the Capitol's best chance to maintain power. This belief is also the reason Katniss—a sympathetic figure and eventual symbol of rebellion—causes him such disquiet; he states in private conversation in the first film of the series that hope is the only thing stronger than fear. In the second film, he says of Katniss: "She has become a beacon of hope for the rebellion and she must be eliminated. . . . Fear does not work as long as [the citizens of Panem] have hope, and Katniss Everdeen gives them hope" (Jacobson, Kilik, & Lawrence, 2013). This approach is hardly novel. Examples of fear campaigns are not only rooted in our history (e.g., Nazi Germany communicating to its neighbors that they would suffer if they did not cooperate) but also in our everyday social experience (e.g., the National Rifle Association tailoring its messages to inspire anxiety by focusing on crime rates; Cole, 1998c). IS also makes use of fear campaigns in its attempts not only to intimidate the west but also to instill anxiety in nearby governments and individuals (Klausen, 2015).

The Capitol goes to great lengths to produce propaganda to reinforce feelings of fear. A propaganda film showed in public squares of each district at the annual reaping (selection of children to participate in the Hunger Games) contains two general themes: war/atrocity and a new beginning/utopia (which are, incidentally, the two most common themes in IS propaganda cited in the Quilliam Foundation report; Winter, 2015). Throughout this propaganda film, President Snow's own voice frames the Hunger Games as a condition of peace and an enduring reminder of the generosity and forgiveness of the Capitol,

all while making use of various propaganda techniques, including atrocity propaganda (which vilifies the group responsible for the hardship and violence), historical falsification and revisionism (a particularly notable trend in our own global society after World War I), fear campaigns (in which the propagandist plays on present anxieties and uncertainties about the future), national anthems, and festivals/holidays (traditionally used in our world to boost popular support for a government or group Mork, 1998). Examples of all of these techniques can be found in IS propaganda published online (Winter, 2015).

As previously discussed, IS does not rely on using a spokesperson for the movement. The same is not true for the Capitol. The Capitol makes use of Caesar Flickerman, an amiable television show host, to disseminate propaganda. He is a clear Capitol mouthpiece and interviews all tributes (competitors in the Hunger Games) to help fabricate story lines to enrapture those watching at home. In the film's second installment—*Catching Fire*—Caesar's interviews with Katniss and Peeta promote the fabrication that the two young tributes are in love. They embark on a speaking tour to all districts and deliver carefully crafted speeches that focus on a collective message, concluding with, "Panem today, Panem tomorrow, Panem forever" (Jacobson et al., 2013).

In *Mockingjay: Part 1* and *Mockingjay: Part 2*, the story shifts to include a resistance movement that challenges President Snow militarily and on the airwaves. This resistance movement comes equipped with its own robust infrastructure for the creation and dissemination of propaganda, entirely in video format. This movement produces a series of "propos," or propaganda spots, to advance the cause of the rebellion. Film crews are dispatched with Katniss, now a member of the rebellion, to follow her around the rubble of cities destroyed by the Capitol (which is certainly reminiscent of the frequently used IS tactic of filming and photographing battle scenes and destruction). Though Katniss' own speeches are unscripted, the camera crews are deliberate in selecting scenes for filming. Katniss addresses two audiences: the citizens of Panem, and the Capitol and its President Snow. The conclusion of the series suggests that President Coin—the president of the rebellion—was more similar to Snow than she was different, which allows viewers to compare propaganda produced by the rebellion and the Capitol as having even more similarities in technique, medium, and motivation.

Interestingly (and perhaps in defiance of our intuition), propaganda scholars would have the grounds to argue that the Capitol-produced propaganda falls within some ethical boundaries, as every piece is not only identified as coming from the government of Panem but includes, more often than not, the voice or likeness of President Snow. Every piece—including Flickerman's broadcasts—is understood by citizens of Panem and by *The Hunger Games* film audience alike as having as its origin the Capitol.

The propaganda depicted in *The Hunger Games* is arguably very modern with regard to mediums used and approximates propaganda produced by IS in its devastatingly brutal messages. The use in these pieces of advanced technology, inclusion of brutality, and claims of having the answer to an ideal society resemble in large part what we see originating from the propaganda machine of IS. Many of the scenes that we may find hyperbolic and dramatized in *The Hunger Games* series—including screening propaganda messages in public squares and elaborately staging a film set in the rubble of a recent battle—are tactics used by the Islamic State. Another similarity between rebel propaganda seen in *The Hunger Games* and that produced by IS is that IS propaganda, for the most part, does not include the group's leaders, opting

instead to promote its message by capturing a day in the life of soldiers and civilians (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015). However, rebel propaganda in *The Hunger Games* still relies on the presence of the hero Katniss, and this tactic is not used as frequently in IS propaganda. Although the most common theme in IS propaganda—utopia—is not as common in *The Hunger Games* propaganda (with the exception of the propaganda film shown at the annual reaping), images of war captured in photographic and video form proliferate.

### Discussion

That the propaganda and general antigovernment affect portrayed in these series differ not only in their frequency but also in their intensity should not come as a surprise; *The Hunger Games* films depict a brutality with which members of most modern societies are unfamiliar. That said, the mediums and methods used in propaganda in *The Hunger Games* approximate those used by the Islamic State. These similarities may impact the degree to which viewers of the film series—particularly younger viewers—are able to turn a critical eye to state- or group-produced propaganda they encounter in their own lives.

Although, in abstraction, IS and *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* share a target audience, it is unlikely that a majority of this audience will encounter IS propaganda. That said, with the rapid evolution of new media and technology in the mass communication landscape, understanding whether fiction provides audiences with a somewhat accurate depiction of propaganda in the modern world is worthwhile. There are two primary reasons for this. First, propaganda is everywhere in our world and certainly is not exclusive to IS. Perhaps predictably, propaganda can be found in closed societies such as North Korea. However, conversations about propaganda are not infrequent in the contemporary United States, a democracy where free speech and a free press are protected by the Constitution's First Amendment. The 2016 presidential election and subsequent presidency of Donald Trump to date have been characterized in part by two troubling, propaganda-related phenomena: (1) claims by the Trump administration that the mainstream media publish "fake news," or deliberate misinformation, and (2) investigations into social-network-based "bots"—many from Russia—disseminating inaccurate and destructive information. Further, major media outlets have been banned from press briefings, and Trump routinely publishes unverified and emotion-laden content on his personal Twitter account.

The second reason that this examination of how propaganda is depicted in fiction is worthwhile relates to the influence that film and television have on an audience's worldview. Providing audiences with a fictional depiction of propaganda that incorporates not only the content but also the technologies of what they may encounter in their own country may assist in their developing a critical eye toward mass communication pieces originating from government and insurgency institutions. In the past several decades, research on the impact of television and film media on adolescents has focused on two domains: behavior and attitudes/learning. The link between television/film viewership and adolescent behavior has largely been examined in public health contexts (Sargent et al., 2001; Tolman, Kim, Schooler, & Sorsoli, 2007; Ward & Friedman, 2006). The impact of television/film viewership and exposure on attitudes and learning is a more present concern for this article, and there is no shortage of literature claiming a link between the two (Larson, 1996; Signorielli, 1991, 1993; Ward & Friedman, 2006; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). If we accept that exposure to fiction in the form of film can influence an audience's worldview, it is

important to know whether abstract concepts such as propaganda are depicted in a way that is consistent with what exists in a viewer's own society.

### Conclusion

This article aimed to explore thematic content (e.g., war, victimhood) and real-world parallels of propaganda images and techniques found in *The Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter* film series, contributing to a scant understanding of how propaganda is depicted in fiction. The present analysis claims that there is considerable thematic and methodological overlap between propaganda as depicted in *The Hunger Games* and that which we see in the modern world. Propaganda in *Harry Potter*, on the other hand, largely reflects propaganda of the past, using outdated mediums and tactics. Because today's propaganda landscape includes IS presence online and social media "bots," fictional depictions of propaganda that emphasize the potential of new technologies are more likely to provide audiences with an accurate portrayal of these manipulative mass messaging efforts in the modern world. That the Islamic State has made such effective use of these new media in promoting its message only shows the great and terrible potential in the future of propaganda.

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