

***THE HUNGER GAMES: KATNISS EVERDEEN'S EFFORT  
TO GAIN AMERICAN PRAGMATISM GOALS  
IN TERMS OF AMERICAN VALUES***

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***THE HUNGER GAMES: KATNISS EVERDEEN'S EFFORT  
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**Abstract**

As one of a popular American novel which was published recently, *The Hunger Games* composed by Suzanne Collins, provides a significant description about the manifestation of American values portrayed by the main character, Katniss Everdeen. Katniss' efforts in the novel are in line with the principle of American Pragmatism, which later on can be analyzed by its relation with the idea of American values, the grounding idea of the framing of this great American philosophy. By applying a sociological approach, this study discover the existence of the two roots of American culture known as American values and American Pragmatism, are still preserved. Katniss successfully manifests the goals of American Pragmatism that certainly taken from American values' idea through her struggle told in the novel. This result leads to the comprehension of how American values influence American's mind in fulfilling their goals or achievements.

**Keywords:** American Values, American Pragmatism, Manifestation of Effort, *The Hunger Games*.

Literary work is the place where "humans as the part of society express their ideas, feelings, and experiences in various form" (Langland, 1984, p.4). It is also mentioned in Plato's theory that literary work is an imitation of truth which had a tremendous influence upon early literary critics and theorists during the Renaissance and 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of whom often speculated as to the role and function of art as imitation of reality (Plato, 429-347 BCE).

The inspiration of an author to compose a literary work could come from real phenomena or his/her imaginations. It is also possible that authors combine the story with real and imaginative occasions to help them to make the plot of the story more interesting. Yet, those imaginative occasions usually are taken from

various social phenomena happen in particular society which is combined into one completed story. Here, it can be concluded that social phenomena are the starting point of an author to compose a literary work.

As a part of American society, American authors have their own characteristics in composing their literary works. Several of them, tend to explore “the uniqueness of the American character and experience” (Grolier, 2004, p.314). Through a character, authors describe the behaviors of Americans representing both of individual and society’s minds which also means representing the belief, values, behavior and condition of the society in America. Basically, based on Williams, Jr. (1970), there are fifteen basic values in America (see on Appendix 2). But, from all of those lists of American values, five of them are the main concept of American Pragmatism goals, which are (1) Activity and Work, (2) Efficiency and Practicality, (3) Progress, (4) Freedom and (5) Achievement and Success.

In writing *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins, an American author, was influenced by several basic classical and temporary inspirations such as Greek mythology, Roman Gladiator games and also the reality show which is televised in America nowadays as known as Survivor. She used the inspirations as her guideline to develop the plot of the story and she combined all the aspect of those inspirations with the real social phenomena happen in America.

*The Hunger Games* begins with the setting of a dystopian world of North America which has been damaged by natural causes. One place remaining is called Panem, with the Capitol ruling over 12 Districts under the strict governmental system of a tyranny upper class and President Snow as the leader. In District 12, there is a girl, Katniss Everdeen, who has volunteered herself to take part on 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games to replace Prim, her only sister. She delivered into the custody of Capitol to have a battle with the other tributes so that Capitol can provide one champion remains.

This battle is televised throughout all Panem, so not only people in Capitol, who are very happy to see the program, but also all people in each district can watch the show. They can see their own families die day by day in the arena.

Katniss, on the other hand, is very good in archery because she and Gale, her loving friend in District 12, always hunt together in the wood near their home to get food. Katniss' journey in *The Hunger Games* brings her into a tangle of lies, deceptions, politics, love, and violence. In the end, Katniss wins this game with Peeta, her relative that becomes the only man that she can trust in the arena. She brings glory and also material comfort to her District.

Because the struggle of Katniss Everdeen, the main character of *The Hunger Games*, to gain American Pragmatism goals in terms of American values is very inspiring, this problem is studied.

In connecting with the main character's struggle to reach her goals, this research aims to: (1) analyze the struggle of Katniss Everdeen to gain American Pragmatism goals, and (2) explore American values manifested in *The Hunger Games* through the perspectives of American Pragmatism.

The information on American Pragmatism perspectives to discover the meaning of American values obtained in this research hopefully can enrich the understanding about America and its values. This understanding will lead to a comprehension of how American values influence American's mind to reach their achievements.

American Pragmatism and American values are the two ideologies that cannot be separated from Americans, both as individual and as society, in their life. American Pragmatism is a classical philosophy in America which is constructed based on the values of America itself. Generally, American society refers to all the people who were born, raised and/or lives in America. Therefore they absorb the culture which then they share certain values and assumptions. In novels, several American authors who also live among American society felt that they are obliged to describe it into their literary work to give the visualization of the social conditions related to the values and philosophy that Americans have. In conclusion, in elevating American society, American authors cannot detach from American identity which is tied firmly with its values.

The most important part of a novel is how the author attracts the reader from the very first page of the novel. In addition, to be specific, "usually, the

sociological novels weight the conflict between individuals and society in such a way that the most admirable characters are most subject to destruction since their best qualities, rather than setting them apart from society” (Langland, 1984, p.12). The characters which are created by the author are not merely selected and given varying degrees of importance, authors may also use them as types, spokesmen, symbols, myths, hints, criticism or rhubarb-noises” (Boulton, 1975, p.76). In *The Hunger Games*, the main character, Katniss Everdeen, plays the role as the heroine that has to struggle to gain her dream, as well as society in the district’s dream and has to face various problems in the process of gaining it. This becomes attractive for the reader to know the main character’s dream as American in individual and also as the part of society and how she struggled for that. This, of course, has a close relation with the values and philosophy perspectives in America.

American pragmatism is a belief that things are not true or right because of some theoretical meaning. Pragmatists believe that Americans must have an application and impact in the real world. According to James (1987, cited in Blau, 1952, p.252), the whole idea of pragmatism was named and framed in America. Pragmatism comes from the word “practice” and “practical”. In Greek, this term known as “*pragma*” which has mean “action”. As the pioneer of philosophy of pragmatism in 1878s; Charles Pierce presented his idea in the article entitled ‘*How to make our ideas clear*’. However, William James was known as the great champion of pragmatism because his ideas of this philosophy have a great influence to the society throughout the world.

James insists that all knowledge is pragmatic. James’ idea about this philosophy, with an account of the “present dilemma of philosophy”, works between two obviously deficient alternatives: a “tender-minded” religious idealism and a “tough-minded” scientific materialism. In one hand, “tender minded” comprises of rationalistic (going by ‘principles’), intellectualistic, idealistic, optimistic, religious, free-will, monistic and dogmatical. On the other hand, “tough-minded” covers empiricist (going by ‘facts’), sensualistic, materialistic, pessimistic, irreligious, fatalistic, pluralistic and skeptical (Hollinger

and Capper, 2001, p.112). Those ideas somehow have affected American society to behave as it is repeated and nurtured from the American culture. Pragmatist believes that reflective thinking is always a stage in activity, and it comes to the problem-solving stage or inquiry. Those ideas of Pragmatism have a close relation to the concept of several American values because of course in philosophical or other aims; American value has a tremendous influence to its society.

American values are the belief that every American has. It is unique because American has their own dream, the American Dream, and they have a different way to gain the dream. According to Kohls (1984, p.1), "it is possible that the list of those values could never be applied to most of American society". Yet, there are still several American values which become the set of their behavior and construct the American society in general.

Based on Williams, Jr. (1970), there are 10 basic values in America, which are: Equal opportunity, Individual achievement and personal success, Material comfort, Activity and work, Practicality and efficiency, Progress, Science, Democracy and free enterprise, Freedom, Racism and group superiority. Additionally, his original 1970's list included five more not commonly found on modern listings. These are: Moral Orientation, Humanitarian Motives, External Conformity, Nationalism and Individualism. So basically there are fifteen basic values which American has. From those lists of values, there are only five basic American values related to the American Pragmatism perspectives consisting of: (1) activity and work which focus on someone's business and action. This value absorbed from the frontier idea of work for survival and Puritan's ethic of work before play, (2) efficiency and practicality, this value emphasize on being an extremely realistic, practical and efficient people. The practical consideration is likely to be given highest priority in making any important decision in Americans daily life, (3) progress which focuses on the finding of best through change and progress, (4) freedom which becomes Americans' concern about having a confidence in the individual, seek freedom from some restraint. This also related to the progress, individual choice and equality, and (5) achievement and success

which emphasize on the accomplishment of personal achievement and lead to the rewards as well as material comfort as the goal of someone's success.

So far, there are two researchers who have conducted research about American values. First, Hermawan did a research on the movie entitled *The Pursuit of Happiness*. This thesis focuses on the struggle and the attempt of Chris Gardner to reach his American dream. The study emphasizes on the racial problems and the unfair competition atmosphere faced by Chris Gardner and how he struggled for the equality, gaining the pursuit of happiness, as the achievement and success value (Hermawan, 2007). Second, Kharisma (2005) performed research on *Toy's Story 3* Film, which focuses on the Manifestation of American Old West Culture in Modern American Society depicted by Woody in *Toy's Story 3* Film. Her finding shows how the spirit of American old west culture are portrayed by Woody in the movie through his cowboy character which refers to the history of America when cowboys were exist. This study emphasizes on the importance of one of American history in modern American society's life.

## **Methods**

Considering that *The Hunger Games* is a trilogy novels, which will made the research is too abroad, the first book is chosen as the material object because *The Hunger Games* is portrayed the struggle of the main character who have to struggle for herself and society in general, which became the focus of the study. This novel also highlights the behavior of American society as the practical form to apply American values which have constructed their mindset. Therefore, from the perspective of American Pragmatism, this study focus on the manifestation of American values depicted by the main character in this novel, Katniss Everdeen, which is served as the formal object. In executing these activities, there are five steps taken, they are: (1) Reading *The Hunger Games*, the novel, (2) Applying sociological approach, (3) Using American pragmatism perspective, (4) Serving American values as the basic theory, and (5) Formulating the findings in the discussion into a brief explanation as the conclusion.

## **Findings**

In concerning with the idea of activity and work value which was absorbed from the frontier idea of work for survival and Puritan's ethic of work before play, this value "favored above leisure and laziness, action/doing over reflection, controlling events and not just letting things happen" (William Jr., 1970). For Americans, work is a calling, a sacred task, a divine duty as a powerful motive to produce more than what is required to survive. From the perspective of American Pragmatism, this value has an important role to the pragmatist's belief because they believe that someone in whatever condition, such as insecurity or doubts about the foundations of their knowledge, cannot permit those obstacles to paralyze their actions. They must act; they must make ethical choices (Blau, 1952, p.231). Katniss represents the idea of this two unseparated concepts in the novel. It is mentioned that when Katniss was eleven years old, her father died in a mine explosion, which then made her become the breadwinner for her family. She has to hunt to look for food in the woods. Sometimes she also trades the animal at the Hob, a black market in Panem, to get some fresh bread. She decided to do so because her mother did nothing for this family after one month of grieving. Katniss knows that her mother is the one who has the responsibility to feed her and Prim, to work and to make some money to live. But, the fact that her mother prefers to mourn all day long after her husband passed away, Katniss cannot take the risk that her sister would die because of starvation. Katniss' decision implies the behavior of American who often feel "impatient with people they see as passively accepting conditions that are less than desirable" (Althen, 2001, p.10). The question of 'Why don't they do something about it?' frequently appears when the people among of them doing some useless attempts just like Katniss' mother does.

For pragmatism, efficiency and practicality values is a central principle because it emphasizes on the beliefs that in reality rules of action are important and must be tested by their practical consequences (Horton and Edwards, 1974, p.174). Amounts to the idea of American value which regard to the existence of "doing



something efficiently” means that to achieve something, people have to do it in the quickest and shortest way (Williams, Jr., 1970). In the novel, when Katniss arrived in Capitol, she tries to be the attention of Capitol citizen, which also means the Gamemakers and President Snow attention, at the opening ceremony. She understands that Hunger Games are not a beauty contest, but the best-looking tributes always seem to pull more sponsors. Katniss tries to find out what kind of costume that will make her appearance representative enough for the opening ceremony. Luckily, Cinna, as Katniss’ stylist, is clever enough to decide what to wear. He has a plan to light a synthetic fire to dramatize Katniss’ costume which is mostly black with a little red on it. Then, as Katniss and Peeta, her relative from District 12, parade on a chariot, she finally realizes that the fire idea is not bad at all, turns out the crowd admires their performance very much. Katniss is happy when she was called as “Katniss, the girl who was on fire” which means she gets the attention from the crowd so that she could get some sponsors to help her when she needed something in the arena later. She ignores the fact that she is treated like an animal to amuse Capitol. She prefers to see it in the good side that she has the most attractive performance at the opening ceremony. It is the shortcut to get a ticket to win the games which had the same idea as Kohls (1984, p.6) stated that Americans occasionally asked a question “What can I gain from this activity?” meaning to ask their practical pursuit.

As pragmatists work between the two ideas of ‘idealist’ and ‘realist’, they reply both positions is that each is a half-truth. Pragmatists underline that “reality exists completely neither in physical fact nor in a mental fact, but in a situation which includes both” (Blau, 1952, p.235). In pragmatist belief, the word “reality” is more commonly called as “experience” and has meaning of ‘change’, ‘coming’, ‘movement’ and ‘process’. In American mind, change is strongly linked to development, improvement, progress, and growth (Kohls, 1984, p.2). During the battle in the arena, Katniss made a progress of herself in terms of her skill and appearance. The hunting skill, for example, results in the development of skills that are useful to her in the Games, such as her proficiency with the bow and arrow. Back in the woods, she used to use her skill only to find something to eat or to trade, while in the arena, she improves her skill not only to hunt but also to defend herself. In

terms of appearance, in District 12, Katniss wore nothing but a hunting boots, trousers, and a shirt, while in the Capitol, Katniss is forced to dress as attractively as possible to make the sponsors notice her. She is not the type of a girl who ever wore a dress, high-heeled stiletto or make-up. So, she makes the progress by wearing the most sensational costume in the opening ceremony of the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games and absolutely makes her recognized by everyone. This progress remarkably in line with James (1987, cited in Blau, 1952, p.257) idea that “it was a divine progress when it make any difference”. Katniss’ transformation in facing the difficulties highlighted the idea of “can-do” spirit which has been Americans inspiration through their life. As Detesmen et al. (2005, p.181) proposed that “Americans take pride in meeting challenges and overcoming difficult obstacles.”

Inasmuch as pragmatists make the claim that there is always “conscious act of willing to believe that every person had the freedom to conceive of the universe and their own destiny in one way rather than another because they chose to believe it so” (James, 1870 cited in Horton and Edwards, 1974, p.171), Americans also seek freedom from some restraint, having confidence in the individual. Freedom enters into free enterprise, progress, individual choice, and equality. It has not meant the absence of social control (Williams, Jr., 1960). Capitol has been ruling over 12 districts with a strict governmental system, or for short, Capitol is a tyranny upper class. Unintentionally, Katniss characterization represents the concept of “to seek freedom” in *The Hunger Games*. She does not deliberately propose to provoke another rebellion against Capitol, but somehow her attitude and what she has done before, during and after the Games begin, triggers Panem society to start another rebellion. For example, at the end of the games, when only Katniss and Peeta survive in the arena, suddenly the Gamemakers announce another surprising change of rule that Capitol decided to deal with the usual games rule that only one victor remains. Katniss is confused, does not knowing what to do and the fact that she will not kill Peeta in such condition. Then, she remembers that she still has the poisonous berries she found in the woods to trick the hungry enemies and asked Peeta to eat it together with her. She knows that *The Hunger Games* should provide a winner because if there is no winner “the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers’ faces”

(Collins: *The Hunger Games*, 2008, p.337), then she decided to make the games have no winners. So, Peeta and Katniss take the berries, but before they swallow it, the Gamemakers announce that they are the victors. This attitude is assumed as a rebellion by President Snow, the leader of the Capitol. He feels threatened that the Capitol will be seen as a deadly machine who kills teenagers for nothing but their own pleasure. Katniss knows that she is already in trouble, but it was all her idea and decision and she cannot take it back. Katniss' venture in order to provoke the anger about anything wrong which has happened for a long time is to reconcile the idea of freedom in Americans' life. Athlen (2001, p.6) stated that "the individual that Americans idealize prefers an atmosphere of freedom, where neither the government nor any other external force or agency dictates what the individual does." For Americans, the idea of individual freedom has strong, positive connotations.

In Pragmatist belief, achievement and success value is worth as the reward of someone's hard work because it works between the idea of "idealistic" and "materialistic" (James, cited in Hollinger and Capper, 2001, p.112). The idea works equally with American values that "in their competitive society, stress is placed on personal achievement. This is measured by accomplishments and success emphasizes rewards" (William, Jr., 1960). As the victors of 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games, Katniss and Peeta get the glorious of their winning things such as a homecoming celebration which never happened since thirty years ago, when Haymitch remained as the only champion. Katniss testifies that her belief in her own struggle will turn out positive in some way. Katniss' hard work in the story emphasizes on the idea of "success is involved with activity" as William, Jr. (1960) stated. Failure is often assigned to character defects.

James' idea in Pragmatism perspective is in line with the five values which become the root of the philosophy itself. Of course, without hard work and progress, Katniss will not get the success and achievement that become her goals. In doing so, she also needs to show her willingness to find the efficient and practical way in achieving the set of goals. The obstacle should not stifle Katniss because it has been her rights and so does everybody in the Districts to have the freedom to achieve something that they deserve.

## **Conclusion and Suggestion**

The position of American Values and American Philosophy, which is known as American Pragmatism among Americans, are still preserved. They are the roots of American culture that build the character both individual and group of people in America. In *The Hunger Games*, it is obviously found from Katniss' struggle for gaining her goals by being the girl who fight for everything which portrays American characters. She manifests five American values: Activity and Work, Efficiency and Practicality, Progress, Freedom and Achievement and Success. *The Hunger Games* provides a detail information about KatnissEverdeen's personality towards the problem she has to face in her life and how she endures those problems.

The concept of "From Zero to Hero" in *The Hunger Games* is the message of Collins in composing this novel. Katniss' progress during her life after her father died until she wins the game, manifests American in individual character on undergo with their life. The survival of Katniss in the games provoking the idea of freedom portrays how one perspective of individual hatred against the state, could change the silence which lingered around Districts society previously. Katniss as the central ordinary girl character in *The Hunger Games* merges into someone important and becomes the symbol of Americans' minds.

*The Hunger Games* tells about the story from the point of view of Katniss as the female hero character. Moreover, this novel provides a challenging information about how science becomes the important part in Americans life from the perspective of Capitol. Capitol citizens have a life when everything is easier to be handle with the help of the technology in every aspect of their life. In fact, this technology also helps the Gamemakers design the arena of the Hunger Games. It is just with a single click and all computerized system, then everything is done or can be done. That is why, it is recommended for the future researchers to conduct research about American ideas in evolving the world by using science and technology. By any chance, it will cover one value which is tremendously important for Americans who run corporates by using a high technology system nowadays.

In addition, there is also possibility for the next researcher to analyze the shifting of “macho” concept of hero character and their position in literary works. *The Hunger Games* gives the information of anew shape of hero in literary work. It can be one of the data that will help to find out how and why the shifting concept of heroes change from time to time.

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