

Framing Roles of Protagonists and Antagonists in Visual Media.

By

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M.A. Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Professional Communication: Promotional and Video Communication in the School of
Communication and the Arts
at Liberty University Lynchburg, Virginia

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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This Master's Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the school of Communication and The Arts at Liberty University

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Acknowledgments

I would like to first acknowledge and thank my thesis chair and supervisor, Dr. Carey Martin. Thank you for all of your support and honest feedback. You have pushed me to make this project into what it is today and allowed for my creativity to show in the academic world. I would also like to thank the two other members of my committee, Dr. Marie Mallory and Professor John Rost. Without the help of you two, I would not have had the direction to take this project in the way that it went.

I would also like to thank my family and friends that stood alongside me every step of the journey and encouraged me to keep pushing forward. I would also like to personally thank Hunter Richards, who was the gaffer on the project, as he helped me make many creative decisions throughout the filming of the story. I would also like to thank the rest of the cast and crew for an outstanding performance that I will remember forever.

Abstract

Many characters and stories have been interpreted over the past few thousand years. Humans are innate storytellers and make connections through various communication methods. Heroes and villains have affected many lives and given people a lens through which to view the world. The perception of stories and their characters in the visual media may not be as subjective as many people think. The framing communication theory was used to study the perception of audience member's view of protagonists and antagonists in a visual story. Two short films were produced and screened to an audience that filled out surveys on their perception of the story, characters, and filmmaking techniques. The impact of framing a message can be seen through various visual outlets such as the news or documentary filmmaking. A story is crafted and presented to an audience to persuade them of a viewpoint. This study aimed to answer if framing in creative visual media can persuade an audience's perception.

Keywords: Framing, protagonist, antagonist, media, visual

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Chapter I: Introduction

Film is full of iconic heroes and villains. There is good versus evil displayed in an industry that has billions watching each year. Many people cry when their hero is losing and subsequently cheer when their hero defeats the enemy. These characters are represented as protagonists and antagonists within the visual story. The writer of the story carefully crafts a story that guides the hero of the story to victory. They also guide the villain of the story to defeat. What happens when the audience member relates more to the villain of the story? Is this a mistake of the writer of the story, or is this a flaw of the spectator having a flawed sense of judgment? There are many relatable characters in film, but who decides who will be the protagonist and the antagonist?

In this study, the roles of protagonists and antagonists in narrative visual stories were analyzed. Writers of the story have an intrinsic authority when crafting a story to persuade the audience to root for one character and against another. When presented with information crafted by the writer, the audience members do not have the full context of both sides to be able to craft a genuine opinion on who is truly the protagonist of the story. For the purposes of this study, the terms hero and protagonist are synonymous. The terms villain and antagonist are also synonymous.

Background of Study

The study was designed by creating two similar short films with the same plot and same characters. In the first film, Character A was framed as the protagonist, and Character B was framed as the antagonist. In the second film, Character B was framed as the protagonist, and Character A was framed as the antagonist. The plot points did not change between the two films. The point of view was shifted from one character to the other in order to force the audience

members to root for the proposed protagonist in each film. The two films were then shown to two separate audiences with a survey immediately after to measure their perceptions of each character.

Societal Background

When looking at the effects of film on a nation, there is an abundance of effects to study within the American culture. Americans tend to look to the film industry as a window into the past as well as a window into different cultures. The way people and places are portrayed in film is almost always dramatized in a way that makes it more interesting for the viewer at home to enjoy. Because so much of the world is misrepresented, it does not give an honest dialogue among the culture to discuss the true state of the world. This not only represents the world in a false light, but it also tends to also leave the American culture represented in a false light as well (Burazer, 2020, p. 71). The way that stories, places, and people are framed are for a specific purpose not always aimed at accuracy but rather the enhancement of the story.

Within the context of the 2022 culture, there has been a shift to individual truth. Because of the film and television realm, there is a tremendous impact on people's minds about who they are as well as who others are in relation to them (Duncombe, 2018, para. 2). People look to themselves as the main character in the story of their life. It is then conceptualized that they also agree that other people are the main character of their lives as well. It is very uncommon in this society that people are more concerned with others than themselves, but they recognize that everyone has their own truth that they represent in their own life.

Professional Background

This has been displayed in many films and television shows in recent years. Breaking Bad, created by Vince Gilligan in 2008, may be the best example of this. The main character,

Walter White, is a cancer patient that cannot afford to pay his medical bills, nor leave any money for his family after his inevitable passing. He begins to cook and distribute methamphetamines to solve this problem. There is an objective truth within this story that the creation and selling of meth is an illegal act against the U.S. government where this story takes place. There are lives lost, families broken, and unimaginable damages from the product being mass-distributed all over the country due to Walter's decisions. With all this considered, there is still a strong urge to root for his success in this show. It may be his displayed humanity that draws the viewer into his story. The love he has for his family and the willingness to do whatever it takes to protect them are still noble characteristics of heroes. In many other stories crafted like this, Walter would almost always be the antagonist, while the federal agents seeking to find him would be the protagonists. The one who framed the story was able to convince the audience members against their own personal beliefs to root for someone committing acts that most would not even consider.

The danger in having films like this in nature is that many people can be desensitized to acts of violence, especially when they are illegal. Framing people in a positive light when they are doing questionable actions is something that needs to be actively questioned within the mind of the viewer so as to avoid blindly supporting someone due to the way the story is crafted. This is something that is not regulated by any means within the film industry and has to be something monitored in the mind of the viewer.

Intellectual Background

One of the most simple and widespread ideas of protagonist and antagonist in film can be seen through the development of superheroes and villains in film. Many times, this is how children learn the differences between good and evil when they are in their developmental stages

of life. It is very easy to associate many positive attributes with heroes as well as many negative attributes with villains. This model is also brought into account in many child psychology counseling sessions to deal with the emotions the child is having. Being able to differentiate between positive and negative emotions by associating them with the characters they see on screen helps the child realize that they are not wrong for feeling the way that they do. When children see that they are embodying negative emotions and relate themselves to the villains of their favorite stories, they begin to think that they are not able to be recovered (Rubin, 2020, p. 12). It is extremely important for children to have positive role models framed for them on screen as many times this is on whom they base their life's actions.

Problem Statement

There are many characteristics that define a person and their motives for how they live their life. Within the aspect of a film, there are usually many positive factors describing the protagonist while they overcome a fatal flaw within themselves. When looking at an antagonist, there is usually an abundance of negative characteristics with the occasional positive aspects thrown in to make them unique. When two opposing forces in a film are both striving towards the same goal, there is still a clear protagonist and antagonist. Within a subjective, morality-perceiving audience, there should be more opinions about whom to root for. This then brings the issue forward in the film industry. Are the protagonist and antagonist of a visual narrative story decided by the audience or the one who frames the story?

Professional Significance

This study provides a greater understanding by revealing the motivations of the writers of narrative visual stories as well as the perception of the viewers watching the stories. The ability to persuade the viewers of the message of a film has been significant and will continue to be a

major factor in the future, as propaganda has been proven to be an effective storytelling device. Propaganda has been historically on the documentary spectrum, being shown on the news and other information-receiving channels. The average person in the modern day struggles to differentiate the difference between propaganda and unbiased news. This then leads to individuals believing they are alone in their thinking when it goes against a popular narrative (DeMars, 2022, para. 3). The significance of this study was designed to reveal how careful the writer of the story must be not to construe a message that could be harmful to the community if damaging behaviors or facts were accepted as true.

The framing analysis theory was at the center of this study and drove the methodology forward. The framing analysis theory (also known as framing communication theory) is a subsection of the agenda-setting theory developed by Shaw in 1972. Erving, the founder of the framing analysis theory (1974), states it has two different functions – keying and fabricating.

Keying represents a basic way in which activity is vulnerable. A second transformational vulnerability is now considered: fabrication. I refer to the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on. A nefarious design is involved, a plot or treacherous plan leading - when realized - to a falsification of some part of the world. So it would appear that a strip of activity can litter the world in two ways, can serve as a model from whose design two types of reworking can be produced: a keying or a fabrication. (Erving, 1974, p. 83)

The agenda-setting theory focuses on what to show the viewers while the framing analysis theory focuses on how they should interpret the message. Shaw (1972) describes the theory as such:

Because of newspapers, television, and other news media, people are aware or not aware, pay attention to or neglect, play up or downgrade specific features of the public scene.

People tend to include or exclude from their cognitions what the media include or exclude from their content. People also tend to assign an importance to what they include that closely resembles the emphasis given to events, issues, and persons by the mass media. (p. 96)

While the agenda-setting theory is not central to this study, it is important to view the framing analysis theory in the way that it was originally founded. The impact of the agenda-setting theory will influence the study in many ways as it is similar to the framing analysis theory in its essence.

Overview of Methodology

This is a qualitative study with surveys consisting of open-ended questions. Two films were shown to audiences totaling 85 participants. The participants only watched one version of the two films before they gave responses to their perceptions of the story, characters, and filmmaking techniques. Immediately after each showing, a QR code was presented on the screen for the participants to scan with their smart devices. If there was anyone present without a smart device, a paper copy of the survey was available to be administered and later imputed electronically. The QR code brought participants to a survey prepared in Qualtrics. The data was then analyzed using the six-step process for analyzing qualitative interviews by Creswell (2014, pp. 197-201).

Limitations and Delimitations

The primary source of participants was anyone over the age of 18 to be included in the study. This could be a delimitation as it is not specific to any one age range or group of people.

Although films are made for society as a whole, it would not give specific data on how different generations perceived the films.

One of the limitations of this study is that it is unique in nature. There have not been two short films created to show the difference between the protagonist and antagonist when they are framed alternatively in the film. The framing analysis theory has primarily been used within the context of news and documentary filmmaking and has not been applied to the creative narrative world in the same manner. This could possibly be a limitation as there are not many resources available to study its effects on fictional narrative films.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The Search Process

The research process that was used focused on visual media outlets that have been known to use the framing analysis theory within their practice. There have been outlets more well-known to practice framing their media, such as the news and advertising channels. The research found on creative and fiction media outlets was limited in comparison. The search process revealed how the framing analysis was traditionally used to promote factual stories and then compared how creative outlets have been affected by such applications. The application of the framing theory has major gaps between available research of non-fiction and fiction visual media outlets.

Theoretical Literature

The two main theories used to analyze the literature were the agenda-setting theory created by Shaw in 1972 and the framing analysis theory created by Goffman in 1974. The basis for the agenda-setting theory was the primary framework in which the framing analysis was created. It was credited by Goffman as the starting point for his work with the framing theory. The two theories go together as a two-step process in which one proposes a frame and the other guides how it should be interpreted. Both will be compared to each other as relevant considerations for the literature that will be reviewed.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Shaw outlines how prevalent the agenda-setting theory is within the context of visual media. This theory differs from that of the framing theory in the sense that it does not try to persuade anyone about anything. It rather acts as the gate which allows for specific information to pass through from the source to the recipient (Shaw, 1972, p. 96). This theory describes how

the media has the ability to control what is in the public eye to create a dialogue among the masses. It presents the population with an idea of what is out there and forces them to determine facts and reality for themselves through interpersonal dialogue with their peers (Shaw, p. 97). There is an inherent power that comes with the use of agenda-setting in visual media. "For the basic claim of agenda-setting theory is that people's understanding of much of social reality is copied from the media" (Shaw, p. 101). This then proposes the idea that those who shape what the mass audience will talk about will also have a major impact on how the individuals will view the topic as well.

The media is posed with the responsibility to show relevant messages to the viewers that they should be aware of. This comes to a crossroads where the media has the power to conceal stories that they deem unimportant. This is an act of omission that the public would not have had the opportunity to gather opinions on. These decisions can either be intentional or unintentional in nature, but the consequences remain the same (Shaw, 1972, p. 104). The information is not sent or received by the two parties and, therefore, cannot have a dialogue created about the issue. The agenda-setting theory explains a unique ability to control the spread of information by allowing which stories to be public and which to be private.

The media is not only in control of what narratives are being displayed to the people within their market, but they are also in control of how long it persists in the eyes of the viewers. The continual messages repeatedly presented to the public have been classified as a measure of propaganda (Shaw, 1972, p. 102). The media has the role of selecting which stories to show due to the failure of most people not searching for other perspectives. This can allow for the control of information from the media by limiting the amount of diversity of perspectives for the people

the outlets are aiming to serve (Shaw, p. 103). When looking at the overview of the use of agenda setting theory, it is viewed that it is overall good for society.

Framing Analysis Theory

Goffman specified an attribute of the agenda-setting theory by creating the framing analysis theory in 1974. The purpose of this distinction for him was to create a lens through which individuals can look at a frame and accurately decide for themselves the reason behind it. There are many reasons a frame can be separated from reality – humor, entertainment, deceit, idealistic dreams, etc. (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). This theory was designed by Goffman to create a deeper understanding of the experiences of the individual rather than the reality of the current social system. He holds society in a much broader sense that is not affected by framing theory. He claims that society is not affected by framing theory. It is the individual and their experience that is posed and directed by framing (Goffman, p. 13).

There is tremendous power in the hands of the one who frames a story. The perception of reality can be decided by those who write the script and those who say the lines. The one who is left to hear the carefully constructed script is left to question every ideal presented before them (Goffman, 1974, p. 1). There are instances in which the framing theory will fall short in its attempts to present a story in an effective manner. Goffman explains how the theory can easily fall short if the one who frames the story does not use effective methods. He uses examples such as intentionally misspelling words or using improper speech to convey a message of being improper or impersonal (Goffman, p. 18). This can work against the very vision that the one who is framing the story is trying to achieve.

The basis of understanding is described as a framework. It is traditionally a specific act that may or may not have a specific intention behind it (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). The frameworks

are then separated into two characterizations. The first is a natural framework, which is guided by natural circumstances that do not flag the mind of the perceiver as anything other than natural happenings around them. The second is a social framework. The viewer is then guided by an agent in their perception of a circumstance (Goffman, p. 22). There is a disconnect in objective reality between the motivation of the event and the perception of the event, in many cases, as many individual minds create and search for meaning.

Goffman then explains how the framing theory is used to alter the perceptions of others, whom he names as dupes. The first he discusses is the act of “Playful deceit.” This is the act wherein deceit is typically contained within a small number of people for the sake of humor. The people being deceived will most often be corrected by the end of the interaction and will hopefully accept the deceit without any ill will (Goffman, 1974, p. 87). The counterpart of this would be what Goffman coins the “Surprise party.” He describes this mode of framing as very similar to the playful deceit, but the key difference is that it is deceit with an intention of great pleasure arising for all parties without a negative view of the deceit used to arrive at this point (Goffman, p. 89). The third fabrication Goffman refers to is the “Training hoax.” This is most common within a workplace as new members will need to be trained on positions and roles that will be vital for minimal mistakes. The dupe is not aware that the training is not taking place within real measures of the job. After the training session has ended, the dupe is then aware of the situational fabrication (Goffman, p. 96). The fourth frame Goffman coins the “Vital test.” Within this measure, the subject is offered a test in which an attribute of themselves will be revealed through their handling of the situation. This is done through the management of the information in a strategic manner. Information is given to either the dupe who will be analyzed on how they use it or information will be given to a third party to test the dupe (Goffman, p. 97).

The fifth fabrication is referred to as “Paternal construction.” These fabrications are built off of the relationship between parent and child, where one knows more about the world than the other and will deceive the other in order to protect and guide them. Information can be withheld or altered to give the dupe a frame that had been approved by the sender (Goffman, p. 99). On a broader scale, this can be seen within organizations and even countries. Doctors can withhold information from a terminal patient that has no hope of recovery. Government agencies withhold information from their civilians about secret operations and foreign affairs that would cause mass panic or outrage (Goffman, p. 101). These methods are considered to be benign in nature as they do not achieve anything more than social interaction between the participants. These fabrications are meant to be held in a manner that is void of any malicious intent and is constructed for the good of the recipient. Goffman makes the claim that there is no moral failure by the one who is misleading the dupe. The fabricator may only be judged on the effectiveness of the tactics used to mislead for the betterment of the dupe (Goffman, p. 102). There are then fabrications that can be made with an intention of deceiving another by imposing one’s own ideology over their own.

Goffman then goes into the next categorization of fabrications which he deems malicious and exploitive. The most popular form of this is when a fabricator takes an idea or circumstance of a second party and misrepresents it to a third party. The second party is not there to represent itself and is left at the mercy of the fabricator (Goffman, 1974, p. 107). Indirect fabrication is a very powerful tool and includes three modes of framing. The first is the intentional placement of false information for the sake of exploitation. The second is manipulating a dupe into a circumstance that would not be normal for them with the intention of others witnessing. The third is to simply make claims that cannot easily be refuted by the opposing party without explicit eye-witness testimony (Goffman, p. 108). This has been seen all over the world,

especially in the United States as there is a division of mainstream news outlets between the two political parties.

Empirical Literature

The empirical literature focuses on the studies done in the field of media that relate or pertain to how a message is framed from the sender to the recipient. The modes of media are focused primarily on visual forms. News has been the primary foundation of the framing analysis theory in the past, and more recent studies have begun to branch out into different fields of media, such as documentary and fiction cinema.

Implications in News Framing

The primary medium for receiving information on current events and politics has traditionally been through news outlets in either written, audible, or visual form. This opens the area of study for the framing communication theory to a large network of media outlets, not only within the context of American news but also international news. The literature reviewed in this section will provide a greater depth to the understanding of how framing can be used to influence the perception of information given from a source to an audience.

Framing Politics. Throughout the campaign and presidency of American President Barack Obama, he used a variety of framing techniques in his speeches to persuade an audience of his message. Plemenitaš did a study in 2020 that examined speeches made by Obama throughout his presidential career. Obama first made references to race in a speech during his campaign in 2008. The purpose was to create an emotional response to his message by framing his perceived reality of the situation into a narrative story that would be presented to thousands of watching voters (Plemenitaš, 2020, p. 142). Obama was acting as an advocate in this situation by applying his own interpretation of the events and relaying it to the voters watching. This is done by the use

of paternal fabrication. Within the context of framing theory, it is in the best interest of those receiving the information from Obama to receive the information that he chooses most important about the given circumstance. This falls under the category of a leader choosing what information to give to the masses (Goffman, 1974, p. 100). Obama's desire is to keep the peace while also causing a disturbance within the hearts of those listening. In one of the speeches he frames, he discusses a murder of a young African American male –Trayvon Martin. The way that he does this is by framing the act of murder as a tragedy but then framing the entirety of the event as a positive for future change (Plemenitaš, p. 146). In a second speech he made on the police killing of Michael Brown, Obama used similar techniques as in the first speech. He framed the killing as an adverse event that should never happen. Subsequently, he framed the character of Brown as someone who will be missed by society and that the country should learn from this and foster an environment where tragedies like these do not happen (Plemenitaš, p. 147). In the third speech analyzed, Obama reacted to the killing of Eric Garner. Obama used very neutral words as he addressed this topic and did not frame this as the fault of either side but rather as a tragedy for everyone (Plemenitaš, p. 149). Obama was able to use a combination of positive and negative framing techniques to unite the people without causing a divide between racial parties. This study focused on how President Obama framed his message to the audience and how the audience perceived the information given to them. Comparing this to the framing theory that Goffman puts forth, Plemenitaš connected paternal fabrication to how Obama framed his messages. There was no falsity in his messages but rather a careful consideration of the facts he presented.

The news can also frame political figures as well. Nelson Mandela is no stranger to worldwide news and has been displayed on many news outlets. It is particularly interesting in

this study as Rosas-Moreno and Joyce collect frames from a multitude of news outlet stories all about the same person but have different perspectives. One of the news frames from the South African Star news station reflected on Mandela as being a man of unity between nations and races and framed his loss as one that would destabilize the continent of Africa (Rosas-Moreno & Joyce, 2017, p. 71). M&G, another South African news outlet, framed Mandela as a man of principles that represented more of an idealistic future for not only his country but also the world. They focused on what he left behind in an intangible form that would affect the rising generations going to lead the country next (Rosas-Moreno & Joyce, p. 73). In an international news outlet based in Brazil, they framed Mandela in more of a negative light. He was known to be a model father figure across the world. This news outlet, however, painted him in a negative light as he was imprisoned for over two decades of his life and could not spend time caring for his children. He spent much of his life for the cause but could not dedicate the same time to his family (Rosas-Moreno & Joyce, p. 76). Other news stories in Brazil framed Mandela as the man who ended racism in South Africa. These same stories also framed Mandela as failing to address the racism that they still endured in their country of Brazil (Rosas-Moreno & Joyce, p. 78). These stories all framed Mandela in their own perspective on the life that he lived and tried to best apply it to the market they lived within. The way these stories relate to the audience depends on the anchoring of the framing activity outlined by Goffman. The frame is a complex structure that cannot be understood without acknowledging underlying factors such as the environment they are in (Goffman, 1974, p. 248). Although there is a global application to Nelson Mandela's teachings, there still needs to be a local interpretation of how these teachings apply to particular areas, which are framed through the lens of the media.

An alternative viewpoint on news framing can be seen with fake news and attribution framing theory. Attribution-framing theory focuses on the favorability of one statement or idea instead of the inverse of the statement. This can be seen as a student taking a test and framing their grade of 90/100 as either a positive 90% correct or a negative – 10% wrong. It depends on which attribute they are focused (Kreiner & Gamliel, 2022, p. 188). A study by Kreiner and Gamliel focused on the perception of fake news by having participants categorize news on the level of trustworthiness in a favorable, neutral, and unfavorable manner. Participants would then be presented with facts framed differently to record responses (p. 190). The study proved to be successful in showing the reliability that was perceived by those who viewed the news in a positive frame. There was no connection made between the intermediate and negative conditions in the reliability of the statements (Kreiner & Gamliel, p. 191). Attribution-framing theory was used to show that having a positive frame of a news story was proven to show a higher relative reliability rating compared to the same statements referred to in the opposite manner. If framing analysis theory were to be used in this study, it would most closely resemble an indirect method of framing information. The exploitive aspects of framing theory would not have been the most appropriate for this study as it was not intended to deceive the participants into thinking the stories were completely true.

The outcome of framing theory is not always as expected. In a study done comparing the use of positive and negative framing of vaccines in Australia and New Zealand, there were opposite reactions to the use of framing. The researchers used a positive light to paint a picture of why vaccines are beneficial for a population. Conversely, they used a negative frame of the dangers of not being vaccinated (Ashwell & Murray, 2020, p. 5632). The use of framing in this situation was not out of deception in the information but rather in how the information was

presented. The results of the study showed that the positive frames did not achieve perceived credibility from the viewpoint of those who viewed the news story. The negative frames, however, did create the desired credibility among those who viewed the story (Ashwell & Murray, p. 5632). The results lead the researchers to believe that how the frame is presented is directly related to how the frame will be perceived by the one who views the frame. It is then suggested that when an outside influence is detected, the target rejects the message. Positive framing is much easier to detect as a tactic in framing an ideology (Ashwell & Murray, p. 5631). It stands to suggest that there exists within the framing theory inverse relationships in which there can be negative reactions due to positive framing and vice versa.

Responsibility in News Framing. Congruent frames have the same ability to shift perspectives on crises as well as conflicting frames. The news has a powerful ability to shift the perspective of a tragedy through the way they frame the event. Researchers tested the emotional perception of how organizations were able to manipulate the emotional perception of an external organizational crisis (Kim & Cameron, 2011, p. 839). The steps that were taken to study this were to show a group a crisis in which they framed it in two separate emotional frames –anger and sadness. Once the group read the story framed for them in a specific emotion, the researchers then presented how the organization responded to the tragedy. They also did this in two separate frames. The first frame was that of punishment for the activity. The other was relief for the victims (Kim & Cameron, p. 839). The study found that the use of relief and sympathy for the victims were significantly more influential in creating credibility on behalf of the organization. This is similar to how frames are dedicated to either focus on the negative frames or the positive frames. In the same way that frames can work by the use of conflicting frames as shown in vaccination adverts, congruent framing can also be a viable option to achieve the desired goal.

Frames can also be used in a way that they are combined in the way they are presented. When presenting participants with testimonies about sexual assault, researchers studied a combination of positive and negative frames to see which would have a stronger effect on the subjects (Siefkes-Andrew & Alexopoulos, 2019, p. 751). The samples would include the usage of conflicting vernacular to support the victim, while also almost half of the research included vernacular discrediting the victim. While there was no key frame that was consistently used for the victims, there was a key frame that would consistently be used to reflect positively on the accused. Past accolades were used to describe the character of the accused to show how they were not capable of committing such an act (Siefkes-Andrew & Alexopoulos, p. 755). The implication of this study is that there can be a mixture of positive and negative frames used whether the media is aware of it or not. The use of some negative frames can drastically reduce the credibility of a source by adding an element of doubt. It is up to the journalist that is reporting on such issues to use the framing theory to choose which elements to include in the frame and which to omit (Siefkes-Andrew & Alexopoulos, p. 756). Frames are a powerful tool that can either support or discredit the reliability of a source. They must be taken with the utmost integrity in matters such as sexual assault.

The media as a whole has a responsibility to create an atmosphere of public knowledge of current events. There are particular groups of people that are vulnerable to negative media portrayals that need to be protected. Children are one of these groups that do not have the capacity to defend themselves or provide a response to a story. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has international implications on how journalists should be portraying children within the frames of media (Khan et al., 2020, p. 152). Researchers studied almost one hundred episodes as well as almost 200 news stories on children within a one-month period in

2019. From these stories, researchers analyzed the privacy of the children being framed, the amount of visual portrayal, and the viewpoint of the journalist (Khan et al., p. 157). The social responsibility theory was used in this study to reveal the responsibility of the journalist. This focuses on the motivation of the journalist whereas if framing theory was used it would show the practical ways that the journalist would be able to conceal the private information of the minors in the article. Some of the ways that the privacy of the minors was breached in the articles studied were full names being disclosed, pictures of them and family uncensored, as well as talking to minors without consent from their parents (Khan et al., p. 160). While there are implications in the research that suggests that journalists overlook these steps in protecting minors due to hurried information and lack of editing, there was no consistent data showing compliance with the UNCRC regulations on child censorship. Media outlets typically have multiple steps which stories need to pass through to catch any guidelines that may have been violated (Khan et al., p. 162). While the responsibility lies within the organization to be aware of the content that needs to be censored, the techniques can be explained through the use of framing theory. Paternal constructions can be used to withhold information that is not pertinent to the story, or that would need to protect the one whose information should not be shared (Goffman, 1974, p. 100). It would be in the best interest of multiple parties if the information of minors was not something shared on a public news forum

Sensitive topics should be treaded on lightly and should not be exploited in any type of media. There are many people groups that are framed poorly due to a lack of understanding of the topic. There is considerable coverage of the autism community that is framed in a multitude of ways. Researchers compared news stories within a timeframe of a month in 2014. They analyzed over four-hundred news articles that appeared in a variety of media outlets and

categorizations. There were five communication theories attached to each division of the research, including the following: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict frame, morality frame, and economic consequence frame (Muhamad & Yang, 2017, p. 194). These theories were used to analyze the frames that these major news outlets used to portray people with autism. The results showed that there were major differences in how local and national news outlets portrayed the frames. It was revealed that within the realm of local news, the human interest frame was most often used to represent the autistic community. This is believed to be the case because there is more room for individualistic framing on a smaller scaled platform of a local media outlet (Muhamad & Yang, p. 195). When comparing this data to the national level, there is a larger implication of attribution of responsibility frame used. Muhamad and Yang suggest that

There is a strong presence of the “burden” label within autism news items that gives prominence to a disabled discourse and further divides communities. Beyond the discriminatory nature of this blame-placing, the reattribution of responsibility might serve other purposes, specifically the allocation of responsibility to services, resources, or research funding. Therefore, it is not surprising that stories would choose to highlight that an individual or group is to blame. (p. 195)

This study reveals the implication of the power that the media has over the perception of an entire group of people.

There are times when the media can allow a regular person to frame important events through their media outlet and achieve a greater frame than if the organization was to speak. In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that there is a new mental illness classification for those addicted to video games. It has many commonalities with other mental

illnesses, such as it replaces the time spent doing healthy activities in one's life including daily exercise, healthy diet and hygiene, and socialization (Parrott et al., 2020, p. 816). Within this study, researchers analyzed many articles written within a three-month period in 2018 about the decision made by the WHO. Many of these articles focused on the positive frame of how to help people with such addictions. They used voices from people who have been struggling with the addiction themselves to frame a new perspective for the people watching (Parrott et al., p. 829). Because the gaming industry has such a wide variety of games, it is not always immediately known what could have been included in this decision. By having these outside voices come into a place of media framing, it allowed for a diverse group of people to ask themselves and close ones about their habits and how they spend time on the internet and gaming devices (Parrott et al., p. 829). The use of framing in this case is trusting another source to place a frame in a better light than the organization possibly could because they do not have the same relationship with the viewer as the ordinary person who is addicted to video games.

Implications in Documentary

The framing used in documentary filmmaking is similar to that of news framing. Documentaries focus on facts about a given topic and use frames to persuade the audience toward a desired perception of the information. While there is a wide variety of documentary sub-genres, framing is most often found in investigative journalism. The amount of research done in this area typically points toward social change in relation to how frames are constructed. There are strong implications for the use of framing theory in documentary work. Within the field of documentary filmmaking is where much of the past lives. It is up to the one who frames the story to accurately represent the reality of the subject. The future of the present is in the hands of those who frame the past.

Tactics in Documentary. There are many aspects within a documentary that can be used to help frame a story for an audience. One of the major aspects of a documentary is the use of narration to impact the audience's perception. The narrator is the one who frames the story for the viewer. The use of narration in a documentary is called voice-of-God narration. This is when there is an external voice of the documentary explaining and directing the perception of the frames shown to the audience (Bradbury & Guadagno, 2020, p. 341). The narrator does not have complete control over the perception of the documentary. There still needs to be visuals in addition to what the narrator is explaining for the audience to make the connection between the two.

Research has shown that the use of narration can drastically change the perception of the images being shown. In a study focusing on colonialism in humanitarian aid, there were various types of narration included in the documentary "Poverty Inc." The documentary focuses on the voices of the people within the colonialism-affected areas of Africa. The voices share a mixed range from voice-of-God to testimonials. The visuals of the documentary reflect many Africans doing work that people in America do as well (O'Loughlin, 2020, p. 353).

These images, paired with the purportedly visionary rhetoric of the entrepreneur, become the promise of a possible future. As the sequence builds to a musical and visual crescendo, the film abruptly concludes with a slogan, 'It's time to rethink poverty', and an encouragement to visit the film's website. Poverty, Inc. thus does not solicit donations like other humanitarian documentaries, but instead proposes a critical consciousness to its viewers, inviting them to 'rethink poverty' alongside its core group of entrepreneurial authorities. (O'Loughlin, p. 353)

The use of this type of paternal framing is to get the audience to introspectively view poverty in a more subjective way. The entirety of the documentary focused on how poverty is assumed and projected by Western civilizations. The framing intended is to force those watching to reflect on the stigmas they may be used to when watching documentaries about countries within Africa as well as other perceived impoverished countries. The desired representation of the documentary was described as “The sooner we begin to tell a beautiful story about the African entrepreneur, that he or she is resident in this continent and is doing amazing work, then we will begin to shift mindsets” (O’Loughlin, p. 353). Framing in documentary filmmaking can use a variety of techniques to achieve its desired message.

The use of framing in the documentary genre has had a reputation for being more credible as a source of information. Research shows this to be an accurate assumption. A study done by Bradbury and Guadagno in 2020 researched the correlation between the framing of a documentary and its perceived credibility. Of the available types of documentaries, there were three of the more common types selected for the study – observational, expository and participatory (p. 343). The results of the study showed that documentaries were overwhelmingly preferred over other sources of media for accurate information gathering. When analyzing the differences between the documentaries, there were a number of characteristics that added to the perceived degree of credibility. One of these frames was in relation to the voice of the narrator. If the narration did not have an authoritative voice, the perceived credibility suffered (p. 348). People like having a connection with the creators of pieces of art. Another strong framing tactic is when the documentary creator appears in the film (p. 348).

These results support our expectation that the structure of documentary narrative visualization, using the modes and techniques of documentary film, is well suited for the

presentation of factual information in narrative visualization. The participants in our study affirmed documentary to be the genre of first selection when it comes to the identification of factual information and learning. Thus, the results of this research indicated that the answer to our first research question is yes—people do associate documentary films with factual content more so than other genres. (Bradbury & Guadagno, 2020, p. 350)

Moving from this perspective toward other documentaries reveals the importance of the documentary filmmaker's role in framing the information for those watching.

Documentaries allow for pieces of the past to be analyzed with the knowledge of the current data. One of the sub-genres that has grown in popularity revolves around true crime and death penalty victims. By looking into past police investigations, documentaries can look at all of the relevant information and can build a case for either the defendant or the victim. In a study researching wrongful convictions, researchers analyzed the tactics in how these subjects were framed in their respective documentaries. The way the defendants were portrayed within a documentary varied from case to case. How the defendants were perceived by the way the documentary was framed, remained consistent (Vac, 2022, p. 24). The defendants were framed as the focal point of the documentary instead of the victim. The defendants had testimonials speaking on their behalf as well as some speaking for themselves. Many times, the law officials would not be depicted as well as many of the victims. This portrayed the defendants in a much more human tone which then led the audience to sympathy (Vac, 2022, p. 27). The role of documentaries can be used to correct the perceptions that opposing media outlets have previously framed people in.

Implications in Film and Television

Framing in visual media has many forms. Within the realm of fiction visual media, the cinema has the biggest grasp on framing the perceptions of plots, characters, and ideologies. Movies are notorious for picking some of the most unique characters and framing them as protagonists or antagonists. Many times, there is not an objective morality attached to the characters, but rather a subjective motivation for achieving their goals. The way a movie or series has been created relies heavily on not only the motivation of the writer but also the director. There are many implications for the effects that this can have on an individual that consumes multiple hours of visual media in a week's time.

Framing Ideas. The implication that films have on society are being studied by how effective they are at countering current ideology. Research shows that films have the ability to present new ideas to people while their guard is down. Most will watch media as a form of entertainment, as many have been conditioned to do (D'Olimpio & Levine, 2019, p. 82). While many people do view the world of film as an art form, there has been recent discussion about the impact that this art has on society.

Film, as a technological art form, can be viewed and understood by many people virtually on first contact and can elicit powerful responses. The nature of the audience's various responses to mass art and media is still under debate but includes responding to the emotional quality of film, images, and realistic representations that can depict various aspects of society, character, and politics. In this way, art is not merely harmless, light-weight "entertainment" objects; to the extent that it reflects the values and prejudices of society, critical spectatorship and active engagement with art and film is preferable over passive receivership of such art and mass art objects. (D'Olimpio & Levine, p. 83)

Because there are many ideas and ideologies being introduced every time the television is turned on, there needs to be a filter in place to keep harmful ideologies at bay.

Within the dramatized world of fiction films, there are always extreme ideas that make for more entertaining media. When looking at the world of Gotham City in the Dark Knight trilogy, there are numerous political and ideological claims made by both sides on how to fix the city (Wills, 2018, p. 165). When looking at the three main villains, there are three attempts at creating their achieved goals. Ra's Al Ghul frames Gotham City as a lost cause and decides the best way to save the city is to destroy it. In contrast, the Joker looks at the city and wants to give power to those who have none by creating organized chaos. Bane then takes the city for himself and declares that it has been saved because he has turned it into his own dystopian state (Wills, 2018, p. 165). Bruce Wayne, on the other hand, sees the city as it is. In his eyes, the city cannot be won by the same measures that it is already held captive within. While searching the globe, he formulates his own solution through the eyes of the ethics he has found along the way (Wills, 2018, p. 157). The ideologies of this film have been framed through the context of the characters portrayed within it. While there is a fight between the two sides, the city turns to chaos to give itself a sense of control.

There are movies that attempt to frame ideologies for the viewer but can fail at the overall mission. In the case of *Brokeback Mountain*, the story was intended to bring more awareness to the homosexual community. There is a disconnect in media where they believe that more exposure to the homosexual community equates to increased acceptance. This was not the case for *Brokeback Mountain* (Cooper & Pease, 2008, p. 262). The way that the creators decided to frame the movie was to show the events in an era that was unfamiliar to the viewer's personal understanding. Because it was set in the 1960s, it felt less familiar to the audience than if the film

was set in a modern time (Cooper & Pease, p. 261). After the film was released, the critics of the film released many reviews explaining away the objectives of the film. They assured the heterosexual community that this was not the norm for the future of cinema. Because the film was such a controversial topic at the time of release, many looked to critics to guide them in understanding the film's ideologies (Cooper & Pease, p. 263).

In the aftermath of *Brokeback Mountain*, when some thought the film might forever alter the landscape of American culture, the attitudinal contours of heterosexism in America seem pretty much unchanged. The increased visibility that the film brought to queer issues was fleeting at best. Perhaps by framing the story of Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist as so universal, while paradoxically positioning queers into peculiar heteronormative space, and simultaneously framing homophobia as a past problem that has been basically solved in the 21st century, critics inadvertently marginalized *Brokeback's* potential to help society effect real change in the lives of gays and lesbians. (Cooper & Pease, p. 265)

In the end, the creator of the film did not have the ability to frame the ideology of the film in the intended way because critics had such an influence on the audience's perception of the film. There was then a missed opportunity on behalf of the movie to frame a change in ideology from the current American view of the homosexual community.

One of the ways that Hollywood has a worldwide impact is through the use of war movies. The vast majority of war movies created in the United States revolve around its conflict with other countries. Because of the way these movies frame the United States as the protagonist it automatically frames other countries and sometimes religions as the antagonists (Gul, 2013, p. 2). Recent research shows that post-9/11 war movies have framed a large anti-Muslim agenda. This can frame an entire country's perception of other nationalities and religions by what they

view as normal or patriotic from Hollywood (Gul, p. 3). The study consisted of analyzing war movies made in Hollywood post-9/11 to see the disparity in representation between American-biased films and non-American-biased films. The results concluded that the majority of films made in Hollywood framed America as the protagonist while simultaneously framing other countries as the antagonists. There have been many accusations worldwide about these films being used as propaganda to the American people (Gul, p. 24). These frames are very effective within the American culture and can influence the perceptions of the American people about the entire war industry.

Framing Characters. There is a multitude of characters that could be taken to either side of the aisle when laying out their qualities on a piece of paper. Unlike superhero movies, there are many messy attributes within a person's life to consider when looking at their motivations. Although the protagonist may have many abhorrent attributes, they can still be framed as the protagonist. In the same breath, the antagonist may have no objective negative qualities but still be framed as the antagonist for the sole purpose of conflict against the protagonist.

Framing Problematic Characters as Protagonists. One of the most notable conflicting protagonists is Walter White in the series *Breaking Bad*. Walt is a high school chemistry teacher that is diagnosed with lung cancer. Medical professionals lead him to believe he will most likely not survive treatment. He then turns to sell methamphetamines with a past student in order to pay for his treatments and ensure that his family is financially free after his passing (Pribram, 2021, p. 152).

Such contemporary melodramas still cast their moral universe in terms of the old characterological trio of victim, hero, and villain. Even when positioned as no longer tenable, the equation as social consciousness endures, even if it fails to operate as it used

to. American television series like *Breaking Bad* suggest an era in which we still wish to believe in the possibility of heroism, the recognition of villainy, and the unfairness of suffering victims. Yet we no longer feel able, with the same ease or certainty, to identify which is which. (Pribram, p. 156)

It is series like *Breaking bad* that question the roles of traditional protagonists and antagonists. One of the key framing techniques used to convince the audience of Walt's protagonist role is the use of pathos in framing him. He is a very emotional person that seems to run into problems step he takes. The use of emotions such as empathy and pity is most often associated with the protagonist of a film (Pribram, p. 160). One of the implications of a show such as *Breaking Bad* is that it reveals how subjective the fight between good and evil can be in contemporary society. It is a much more subjective perception of the battle against injustice. Walt falls victim to many of life's tragedies and in turn, is framed as the one fighting to overcome those opposing him (Pribram, p. 161).

Framing Characters as Antagonists. Without antagonists, there would be no conflict throughout the entirety of a film. In the case of a well-known antagonist in the Marvel films, Loki creates tension in a variety of ways when confronting the protagonists. Loki often takes control of the narrative of the film and forces the protagonists to act in ways not according to their heroic nature (Nuttall, 2016 p. 70). Loki also has many attributions and character arcs of a protagonist and could be viewed as such if framed differently from Marvel. When looking at his development, he falls into this disparity when he learns of his true origins being adopted into the family of Odin. He then realizes he cannot achieve the same level of acceptance from his father that his brother Thor seems to achieve naturally (Nutall, p. 69). He then goes on a journey to earn characteristics that will earn him approval and accolades. "Perhaps Loki's story arc allows him

to adopt another aspect of Gothic duality, occupying a paradoxical space as both villain and, occasionally, hero” (Nuttall, p. 71).

Innocence and villainy construct each other: while the villain is necessary to the production and revelation of innocence, innocence defines the boundaries of the forbidden which the villain breaks. Thus, virtue became delineated by the forces of evil that surrounded and threatened it, just as villainy was identified by the innocence that stood steadfast in its face, regardless of ensuing pain or punishment. (Pribram, 2021 p. 156)

It is proposed here by researchers that antagonists can be created by the opposition that the hero in the story faces. It does not always need to be the protagonist seeking the antagonist out to defeat them such as in many popular superhero arcs.

Relation of Research

Visual media shares a commonality in the way it presents information to the viewer. All visual media needs to frame their information in a strategic way to persuade their audience. There is a disparity of research done in the creative field about how framing ideas and characters influences the audience’s perception of those qualities. News is one of the most common fields in which framing a story takes place. The effects of framing a story can impact masses across the globe. When looking at the field of documentary work, there is a similar goal of information sharing that is instead comprised over the span of weeks and months. Documentaries have the advantage of being one of the most trusted media sources for factual information. They have the ability to frame their narrative for a longer period of time compared to news outlets. They use the tactic of storytelling to draw an audience through entertainment for a greater purpose. Finally, when looking at the cinematic approach of framing, there are not many studies related to this

field. The door is open to the idea of how characters are represented on screen and the influence it has on the audience's perception. The ability to create tension around a very specific topic can create a discussion on the greater impact on society. The research done in this study expounded on the use of framing theory in the creative field.

Chapter III: Methodology

The script for the research study was written with the intention of breaking the story into two distinct perspectives for each lead character. The combined script length was 29 pages long and was broken into a 23-page script (Film 1) and a 26-page script (Film 2). The context was removed in the form of scenes that would lead the audience to believe each character would fit into the roles of the protagonist and antagonist. The writing took place over the course of Fall 2022. Filming took place over nine full days in January 2023 using high-end cinema quality equipment, including –Arri Alexa Classic, Sigma Cine lenses, and Davinci Resolve to edit. Editing took place between the months of February-March 2023, and the two films were shown at the end of March 2023 for data collection.

Research Method

A qualitative method was selected because the study focuses on audience members' perceptions of characters within a short film. Both short films were shown to audiences totaling eighty-five participants in multiple theater-style rooms. Both films are centered around the same characters and story. In film 1, Character A was framed as the protagonist, and Character B was framed as the antagonist. In film 2, Character B was framed as the protagonist, and Character A was framed as the antagonist. Although nothing about the film's plot changes, the characters are framed positively or negatively through various filmmaking techniques such as lighting, camera angles, and context. Film 1 and film 2 were shown on three separate days. The first and only showing for film 1 was done with a sample size of 55 participants in a movie theater. The second and third showing focused on film 2 to a combined sample size of 30 participants. The results were compared and analyzed to see if perceptions of the characters changed between the two films. Open-ended questions were provided after each viewing. This method was selected to

avoid framing the questions in any leading way. Questions were neutral towards both the protagonist and antagonist.

Research Context

The two films were shown in a theater-style room on three separate days in March of 2023. The singular showing of film 1 was done at a local movie theater that had 55 attendees. After the initial showing, a QR code was presented on screen to lead each participant to the qualitative survey in which they could record their responses to the characters and story. Film 2 followed a similar structure in which the film was shown in a theater-style classroom at a private religious university on the east coast on two separate nights and gathered 30 total surveys.

Participants

The participants included anyone over the age of 18 to engage in the survey. Based off observation of those participating in surveys, the primary generations surveyed were Generation Y and Generation Z. These are the most popular generations that were attending the university at the time of the study as well as faculty members who also participated in the surveys. Flyers were advertised within a private, religious university as well as local bulletins in coffee shops. Generation Y and Z are among the highest digital media users in their daily lives. There does not seem to be a difference between genders in the use of digital media. The use and consumption of digital media have proven to play a key role in the development of identity within the two generations (Laor & Galily, 2022, p. 7). Participants did not give any personal, identifying information for this research. Participants only watched one of the two films and were not made aware there is an alternatively framed version before the data was gathered.

Instrumentation

Surveys were selected for this research due to the nature of anonymity and broad

implementation within a group of people. The surveys were open-ended questions revolving around the perceptions of the short film, characters, story, and filmmaking techniques. The surveys were administered immediately after the showing of the short film. Subjects had the opportunity to be as broad or specific with their answers to reflect their understanding of the short film. The data was then analyzed using the six-step process proposed by Creswell, 2014, pp. 197-201). The data was winnowed into three descriptions and five themes that were relevant to the characters and story.

Survey Questions

There was a selection of 15 survey questions to gain a complete understanding of the film and its attributes. Some questions had a similar focus so that a more well-rounded answer may be received from the subject. A complete, condensed list of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

Who was the protagonist of the short film? The film's protagonist, or the hero, is the "good guy" whom the short film is centered around. This question is asked to understand which character the audience deems the story is about. The subjects may not always identify with the protagonist of a film, but it is to recognize the power struggle of good versus evil in a story. This character encounters different forms of conflict, which they need to overcome in order to achieve their mission.

Who was the antagonist of the short film? The counter to the protagonist is the antagonist. This is the character that inhibits the protagonist from achieving their goal. By the participant revealing who the antagonist is in the film, it helps answer the research question. Can the one who frames the story decide who the protagonist and antagonist are, or are the characters subjective to the audience?

What obstacles did the protagonist overcome? This question aimed to answer the core details of the protagonist. The protagonist must struggle through some force or events to create a story. Recognizing the protagonist's struggles and obstacles they overcome adds to the profile of the protagonist they identify in the survey. This helps create a separation between the protagonist and antagonist by classifying one as overcoming struggles compared to the opposing force creating the struggle.

What conflict did the antagonist create? The antagonist's primary role is to oppose the protagonist and create a conflict that makes a compelling story. The hero must overcome the evil that stands against it—identifying the conflict that is created by a character further details their role in the short film. This question aimed to add to the profile of the antagonist versus the protagonist.

Who or what helped the protagonist overcome the obstacles? The characters within a film can have various people or things that help them get through the journey they are undertaking. The answers to this question lead to the reasons why the protagonist succeeded in their journey. It also helps further develop the profile of the protagonist and the characteristics they exhibit throughout the film.

What did the protagonist learn throughout the story? The protagonist will learn valuable lessons about themselves, others, and the world around them throughout the story. The audience's perception of the protagonist will reflect how they answer this question on the development of the character throughout the story. The protagonist's profile will be further developed if there are a number of positive growth characteristics attributed to the character by the participants.

What character qualities did the protagonist have? The protagonists and antagonists

will be compared to each other from Film 1 to Film 2. This question is proposed to view the differences in identifying if the character's attributes are consistent when they are framed as the protagonists compared to when they are framed as the antagonist. There were similar comparisons for both characters.

What character qualities did the antagonist have? By identifying the qualities of the antagonist and comparing them to the qualities of when they are framed as the protagonist, it was more easily identified if the research was successful. Each character did have similar qualities in both representations to be perceived as essentially the same. This helped add to both the protagonist's and antagonist's character arc profiles.

What was the overall theme of the film? Each character had their own motivations for achieving their goals in the film. The film's theme depicts the story's meaning and explains the characters' actions. The theme helped categorize the characters into good and evil based on their actions in the world they live in.

What is your emotional response to the events the protagonist went through? It is typical to see a strong emotional response from the audience to the protagonist of the film when they are facing conflict. This question is aimed at understanding the impact the protagonist's struggles had on the audience. The responses was then compared to when the character is depicted as the antagonist.

What is your emotional response to the events the antagonist went through? Just as there is a typical response to the protagonist of the film, there is most often just as strong of an emotional response to the antagonist of the film. This helped understand the audience member's interpretation of the antagonist by assigning certain emotions to how the character acted in the

film. These responses were compared to how the character is perceived when framed as the protagonist.

What did the protagonist learn in this film? The protagonist in a traditional three-act structure will often learn something or have a transformation throughout the film. This helped gain a deeper understanding of how the audience perceives a difference in the character from the beginning to the end of the film. These lessons were then compared to how the audience perceives lessons learned through the lens of the antagonist character arc.

What did the antagonist learn in this film? There is not typically a positive lesson that people can learn from the antagonist in a film. Many times, the lesson is that good prevails over evil. This question forced the audience members to think of the antagonist in a different way than they normally would after a showing of a film. These lessons were compared to the lessons the character would learn when framed as the protagonist to see similarities.

What filmmaking techniques were used to tell the protagonist's story? The method of media consumption in this research is entirely through visual narrative storytelling. There are several aspects of storytelling that are easily identifiable by the audience on how a protagonist can be framed. This allowed for a deeper understanding of how the film affected the subconscious of the audience member. The audience was allowed to think critically about how they felt during each scene and why they felt this way. They then gave an answer about what modes of storytelling were most apparent in their perception of the character through the lens of storytelling. This was contrasted to the data collected about the same character framed as the antagonist.

What filmmaking techniques were used to tell the antagonist's story? The same method used to allow the audience to think critically about how a character is portrayed as the

protagonist allowed them to answer why a character is portrayed as the antagonist. Many aspects can be covered in relation to this in the response. It allowed for a better understanding of the aspects of the character as portrayed by the filmmaker rather than the character qualities that are exhibited throughout the film. This was compared to how the techniques were used differently when the character was framed as the protagonist.

Data Collection

In this qualitative study, surveys were administered through an online survey company – Qualtrics. A QR code was displayed on the theater screen after the short film had ended. Participants were then able to scan the QR with a smart device and were taken to the website to collect the data for the study. If a participant did not have a smart device, a paper copy of the survey was administered to them. Paper copy answers were imported into Qualtrics to be analyzed with the rest of the online data. Qualtrics was selected as the data analyst software to formulate the findings into quantitative data. After each initial showing, the time stamps of the surveys were cross-analyzed to ensure all surveys were completed before showing the second film for those participants interested in watching both films.

Data Analysis

The data was then assessed and applied to Character A and Character B. Each character had two separate profiles. Character A had data collected as framed as the protagonist and as the antagonist. Character B had data collected being framed as the protagonist and as the antagonist. In total, four separate profiles were completed between the two characters and the two films.

Summary

A qualitative research method was selected to gain in-depth perceptions of how characters are framed through visual media to an audience. After the showing of each version of

the film, a QR code was presented on the screen to bring participants to an online survey.

Participants filled out a survey completing open-ended questions about their perceptions of the character, story, theme, and filmmaking techniques used to frame the story. Data was then collected through Qualtrics software to be quantified into organized data and be analyzed using Creswell's six-step process for qualitative interviews (2014, pp. 197-201).

Chapter IV: Results and Data Analysis

The data was collected in three showings between the two films. Participants included 88 individuals from Generation Z and generation Y. The film showings were made available to the public. The showings were advertised through the use of flyers both digital and physical. Film A had a showing in a local movie theater that recorded 55 surveys. Film B had two separate showings in a higher educational classroom at a private, religious university on the east coast that totaled 33 surveys between the two showings. The data was recorded using open-ended survey questions found in Appendix A. CSV reports were created using Qualtrics to sort and display the information for the coding procedure to begin. The framework for analysis follows the six-step process for analyzing qualitative interviews presented by Creswell (2014, pp. 197-201). A hierarchal structure was used to sort the descriptions and themes that emerged from the data. Each character was analyzed, compared, and contrasted to their counter-part in the subsequent film. Inductive coding was used when winnowing the data into themes and descriptions. The following codes emerged when comparing the data between the two films.

Common Themes

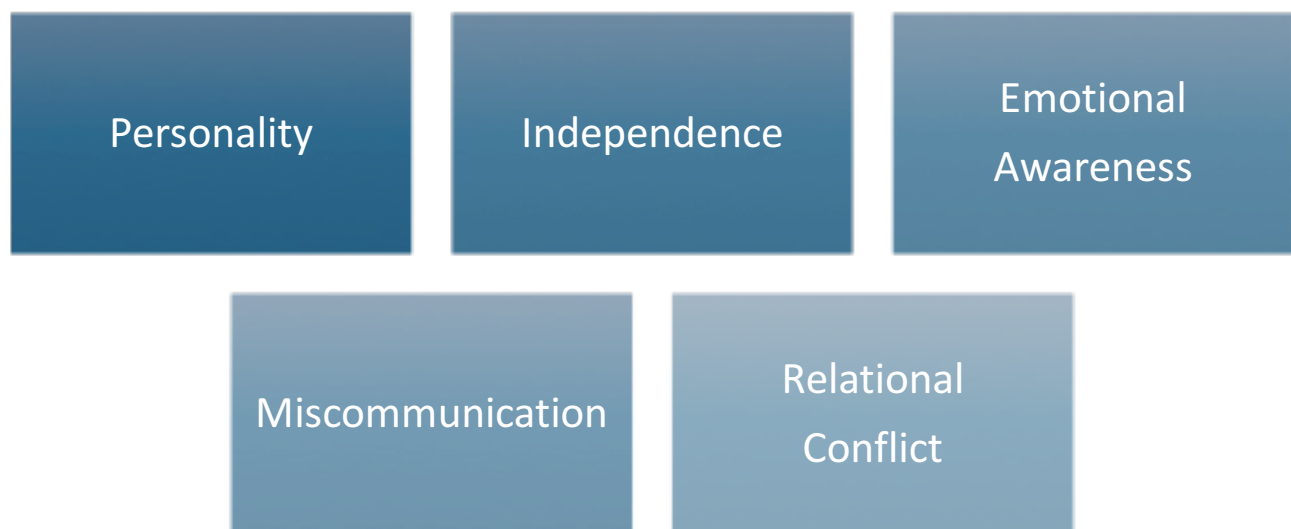


Table 1.1

The study focused on the problem of who truly decides who the protagonist and antagonist are in a visual narrative story. The data collected for Film A gathered that 52 out of 55 participants viewed Character A (Danni) as the protagonist. When looking at the antagonist, 45 of 55 viewed Character B (Ella) as the antagonist. The remaining gaps for both the protagonist and antagonist were filled in by supporting characters within the film. This was then contrasted to Film B. Out of 30 participants, 22 participants saw Character B (Ella) as the protagonist while 15 saw Character A as the antagonist. The characters then had survey questions surrounding their character arcs and traits.

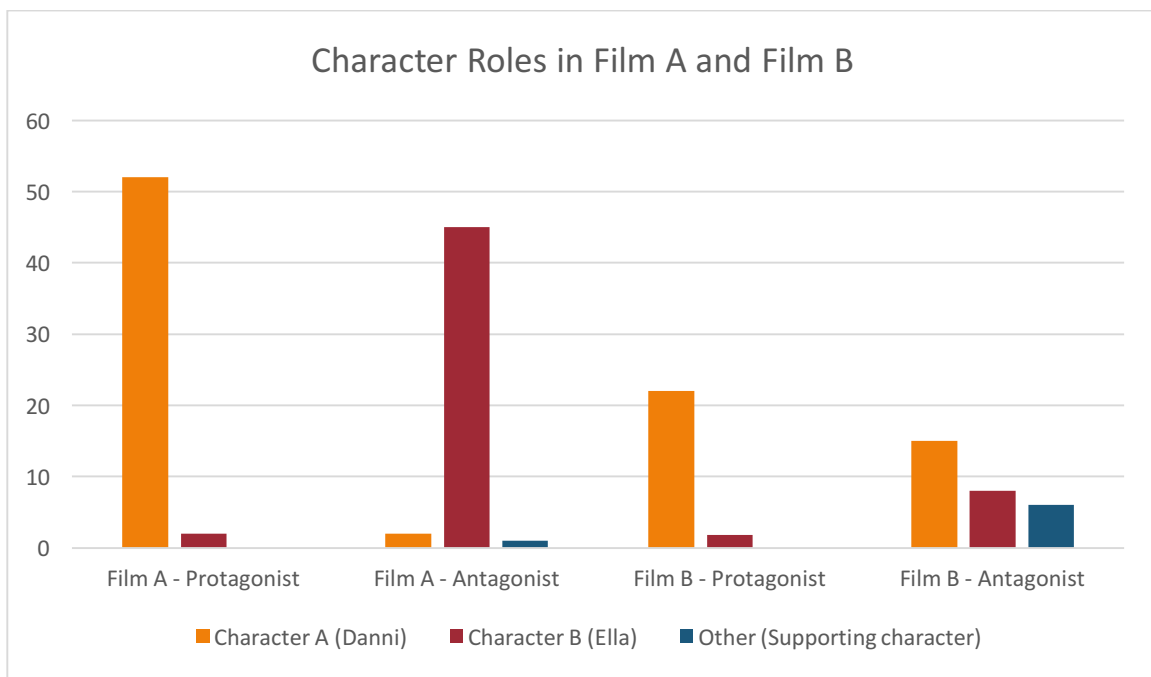


Table 1.2

Character Traits

Both characters were viewed as a protagonist and antagonist respectively in the films that were framed accordingly for them. The character traits that were attributed to them remained consistent while the perception from the audience shifted when viewing in the separate portrayals. The themes derived from the survey data revealed that each character was uniquely perceived by the audience as either a positive or negative force within the visual narrative.

Protagonist Traits

Personality. When looking at Character A (Danni) as the protagonist in Film A, the theme that was inducted was centered around personality. Character A was viewed as an introvert being a quiet and shy protagonist that had the world against her. The story followed along the relational conflict between two sisters. Because Character A was more of a quiet and reserved person, there was conflict with Character B being more outgoing and social seeking. Participants viewed Character A as one to be pitied based off her personality being one associated with push-overs. Since she was not able to speak up for herself, she had a character flaw to overcome. Participants saw this as a positive protagonist trait that added to her struggle to overcome.

Character B (Ella) was then framed as the protagonist in Film B and had similar labels pertaining to personality assigned by the participants. The personality of Character B was viewed as more extroverted and social. This led to a host of other characteristics that were positively associated with an extroverted personality. The participants assigned labels such as independent to the character as she was able to navigate many different scenarios within the film on her own without the consultation of her sister. Being the extroverted sister, she was responsible for confronting the opposing sister in the major climax of the film. This was seen as reflective of her personality as someone who valued communication and tried to repair a broken relationship. Her personality was associated with high ambition that was portrayed in the film as she attempted to achieve her dreams. Although both characters were then viewed as antagonists in the opposingly framed film, the themes were consistent with their personalities.

Independence. Within Film A, Character A (Danni) was framed as the protagonist and was labeled as such by the participants viewing the film. An emerging theme from the film was

the independence of the character, or the lack thereof. Character A was viewed as someone that had started the film in a very dependent relationship on her sister. The perception of the participants reflected the idea that the protagonist had a character flaw to overcome and did eventually overcome the obstacle. Throughout the duration of the film, the protagonist was able to gain more independence through the conflict brought about by the opposing forces against her.

Character B (Ella), when framed as the protagonist in Film B, was also considered independent. This was not a character flaw that had to be overcome as displayed in Character A. Participants saw the independence of Character B as ambition and something that helped the character go through the obstacles set before her in the film. This theme will be recurring when contrasted to the antagonist traits.

Antagonist Traits

Personality. In Film A, Character B (Ella) was viewed as the antagonist by the viewers. This was then compared to Film B where Character B was framed as the antagonist. The theme was consistent with the character traits when compared to the counter frame of the same character. Character B was consistently seen as an outgoing, extroverted character between the two films. Instead of this being a positive trait, this was described by participants to be an area of contention between the protagonist and antagonist. The same character quality that was seen to support Character B as the protagonist in Film B, was the same character quality that presented evidence for being framed as the antagonist in Film A.

Similarly, the same recurring theme for Character A (Danni) as the protagonist in Film A was also seen in Film B. Character A was consistently seen as a very timid and shy person embodying an introvert's personality. When Character B was framed as the antagonist, the same character qualities were placed on the character but in a different category than when she was

framed as the protagonist. Based off observations from participants, she was seen as a destructive character based off of these characteristics describing her personality. This theme of a quiet and reserved personality was directly correlated to the character creating conflict according to the responses from the viewing participants.

Independence. When comparing the data collected from each character's qualities as the protagonist, the themes remained consistent with the data collected on each character as the antagonist. Within Film A, Character B (Ella) was labeled by the majority of viewers as the antagonist. The same character quality that was labeled to assist the protagonist in Film B was attributed to the conflict caused by Character B in Film A. She was viewed as a character that was ignorant of the needs of her sister due to her social behavior and people seeking tendencies. Her extroversion was the focus of the participant's criticism regarding the antagonistic behaviors she exhibited in Film B.

When comparing the perceptions of Character A (Danni) in both films, the themes also remained consistent for her as well. Her introversion was perceived as a positive trait that added to her obstacles that she overcame in the Film A. However, when she was framed as the antagonist in Film B, she was perceived as distant, moody, and standoffish. Her personality was consistent between the two films as a shy and introverted character as described by the participants in the survey questions. By framing her as the antagonist, the perceptions of the character were altered by audience, even though the theme of her character traits remained consistent.

Perception of Growth

Each character was analyzed by the audience for their perceptions of growth as the protagonist and as the antagonist. These were then compared to the themes coded for the second

film to see how the characters grew in the way that they were framed by the storyteller. While growth happened for each character, it was only apparent to the audience when the character was framed as the protagonist.

Protagonist. Within Film A, the protagonist labeled Character A (Danni) was perceived by the audience to have the greatest amount of growth. The theme that emerged from the data centered around emotional awareness. The protagonist underwent the hero's journey and, after the resolution, was perceived to have overcome miscommunication of emotions caused by the antagonist. The protagonist was praised for the efforts she made regarding confronting her sister at the climax of the film. The perceptions of the audience reflected that the character was right for having no tolerance for a lack of emotional awareness. She was perceived as someone who overcame multiple obstacles in pursuit of her dreams.

When looking at the audience's perception of Character B (Ella) in Film B, she was perceived to have great emotional awareness. Throughout the film, she is faced with multiple conflicting scenarios that she has to navigate through friends and family. She was forced to make the best decision based on the knowledge she had at the time. The participants explained that she had to emotionally engage with each party to balance her own life with the others in her life.

Antagonist. Within the framework of Film A, Character B (Ela) was framed as the antagonist. The data suggested that one of the major themes regarding what the main character learned was nothing. A consistent answer among those who viewed the film did not see any character arc or journey from the antagonist throughout the entirety of the film. Other responses suggested that although there was no positive growth, there was negative growth or negative impact on the protagonist throughout the film. A further observation made by the participants remained consistent with the theme of emotional awareness. The character was seen in this

variation of the film as one that needed more emotional awareness, specifically when it came to her counter-lead. She was not considered to have any positive growth, according to the viewers.

Within the framework of Film B, Character A (Danni) was mostly considered to be the antagonist. There was consistency compared to the antagonist of Film A. The perceptions reflected that the antagonist did not learn anything. This was explicitly stated by multiple individuals that labeled Character A as the antagonist. The other responses centered around the theme of emotional awareness or the lack thereof on account of the antagonist. Character A was deemed to have a low emotional awareness and would need to have more development to not have antagonizing behaviors towards the protagonist.

Short Film Themes

When comparing the two short films created, the themes drawn from each were analyzed against each other to see if the two films truly had the same plot to be considered the same story. This is important to keep the data consistent when comparing the characters to each other to ensure that the variation is only within how the characters are framed.

Miscommunication

One of the major themes in both films that was drawn from the perceptions of the participants was centered around the theme of miscommunication. This was represented by each character in both films. The protagonists of each film were thought of as the ones who struggled to find a place of healthy communication. The antagonists were then thought of as the ones that were disrupting the communication channels between the two lead characters. The two films remained consistent with how they portrayed the protagonist and antagonist of Film A to Film B. The data did not differ based on who was portrayed as the protagonist and who was the antagonist. The data was consistent between the two films in that the protagonist was the one that

suffered from the miscommunication, and the antagonist was the one who created the conflict in each film.

Relational Conflict

The second major theme in both stories was centered around the relational conflict between the two main characters as well as the supporting characters. These familial and intimate relationships were the main causes of conflict throughout each film and remained consistent with the perceptions of the audience when comparing the plots of Film A and Film B. The participants viewed the protagonist as the one that was the victim of the relational conflict. The antagonist was then seen as the one who was the cause of the main conflict throughout each film. It did not differ based on the character that was framed as the antagonist. Each participant group viewed each film in similar regards when considering the themes of each film and how they affected the protagonist and antagonist.

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the results of the data collected from 85 participants on their perception of the protagonists and antagonists in the variation of films they watched. The audience was instructed to watch one variation of the film and give feedback to open-ended questions about whom they perceived to be the protagonist and antagonist, the story, and the themes. The five themes that emerged from the data as key instruments in filmmaking included: personality, independence, emotional awareness, miscommunication, and relational conflict. The key findings will be discussed, as well as the limitations and theoretical contributions this study offers.

Key Findings

The primary focus of this study was to answer the question of who decides who the protagonist and antagonist are within a visual narrative. The two parties being analyzed are the one who frames the story and the one who perceives it. In Film A, Character A (Danni) was viewed as the protagonist by 52 out of 55 participants. Character B (Ella) was viewed as the antagonist by 45 of 55 participants. In Film B, Character B (Ella) was viewed as the protagonist by 22 out of 30 participants. Character A (Danni) was viewed as the antagonist by 15 out of 30 participants.

Each theme was analyzed with respect to either the character or story to ensure that the data was consistent between the two films. The character qualities were the first to be analyzed by the participant's data. The data suggests that the characters did not change from Film A to Film B based on the same defining characteristics assigned to them by the viewers. The perception of characters was different based on the role they were assigned in the film. The same exact character qualities that were used to praise the determination of Character A (Danni) in

Film A where used to vilify the character in Film B. Character A was seen to have introverted, quiet tendencies, which would add to a positive reputation in Film A while it was used to explain how detached she was from her sister in Film B.

In the same manner, the same character qualities of Character B (Ella) used to describe her as the antagonist in Film A were used to describe her as the protagonist in Film B. The data suggests that she embodied an extrovert personality with a strong social tendency. In Film A, she was vilified to the point of antagonizing her quiet counter-lead and was labeled responsible for causing the conflict throughout the film. These characteristics were then used to explain how she was the protagonist in Film B. Although she embodied the same characteristics when labeled as the antagonist, it was used to support her journey as the protagonist.

The themes between the two films were also analyzed to ensure that the story remained consistent between the two showings. The data suggested that the two major themes between Film A and Film B were consistent to be miscommunication and relational conflict. Although there was miscommunication on both sides of the lead characters, the character that was viewed as the protagonist was suggested to be the character that was excused from any blame in miscommunicating. The second theme of relational conflict also remained consistent between the two films. The protagonist in both films was seen as the victim of the conflict surrounding each character. Subsequently, the antagonist was seen as the cause of all relational conflict in both films.

Finally, the personal growth of each character was analyzed by the participants in the study to determine how each character's arc was developed throughout each film. In both Film A and Film B, the protagonist was seen as the one who learned most of the life lessons through conflict with the antagonist. Furthermore, when the participants were asked to analyze the

antagonist's growth throughout the film, the major theme was that they did not learn anything.

This research suggests that when characters are framed as the protagonist, they have more room for positive growth in the eyes of the viewer. The antagonist was then seen as a lost cause whose only responsibility was to create tension for the protagonist to learn and grow from. Although the conflict remained the same from Film A to Film B, the perceptions of growth differed based on who was framed as the protagonist and who was framed as the antagonist and presented to the viewers.

Theoretical Contribution

The theory that was used to create the framework for this study was the framing analysis theory created by Goffman in 1974. This theory presents that the one who frames a fabrication holds the largest contribution to perceived knowledge in a communication setting. This was then applied to this study by analyzing how visual narrative stories can be interpreted by a large audience. There are multiple steps of interpretation in a visual narrative when it goes through a long process of creation. The information is translated from writing to directing to editing to viewing from the audience. The framing was done by the same researcher in control of every aspect up to the point of showing the films to the audience to ensure that there were no variables of translation open to outside influence. The framing analysis theory provided a large capacity to create frames that the audience would be able to ingest naturally.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that it is not yet able to be universalized due to the lack of research in this area of storytelling. There is a need for research to be done in this area to prove that this can be replicated. Although each story has multiple sides to it and can be interpreted in different ways, there are strong influences from the one who frames the story. This

story was told with the intention of deception for the audience to attribute characteristics to predetermined characters. More visual stories would need to attempt this research before it could be considered repeatable. Another limitation would be the small sample size of 85 participants for the viewing of the two films. A broader expanse of participants would be able to label more character qualities and themes used to describe the film and its qualities.

Implications for Future Research

This study suggests that the one who frames the story has a large position to control the perceptions of the viewer within a visual narrative story. This is an important topic to discuss as it pertains to not only film but also other mediums of visual narratives. Other categories analyzed in the literature review included news and documentaries. The modes of news and information-sharing mediums are highly persuasive and have very similar storytelling techniques to film. The framing analysis theory has already been applied and studied within those fields to be a powerful tool in persuading the audience of a certain belief. It is highly important to study this further to see the implications of how these stories affect those that are watching these carefully crafted stories.

Summary

This study was able to focus on the perceptions of the characters and story of a carefully framed visual narrative by an audience. The results suggested that characters and story are able to be manipulated by the one who frames the story. Two films were produced with the same exact plot. Film A followed Character A as the protagonist and Character B as the antagonist. Film B followed Character B as the protagonist and Character A as the antagonist. The data then suggested that each film showed each character in a different light even though they were attributed the same characteristics in both films. This study is unique in its design as there are no

past studies that have attempted to understand the relationship between the one who frames a fiction visual story and the one who watches and perceives it.

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Appendix A

A. Survey Questions

1. Who was the protagonist?
2. Who was the antagonist?
3. What obstacles did the protagonist overcome?
4. What conflict did the antagonist create?
5. Who or what helped the protagonist overcome the obstacles?
6. What did the protagonist learn throughout the story?
7. What character qualities did the protagonist have?
8. What character qualities did the antagonist have?
9. What was the overall theme of the film?
10. What is your emotional response to the events the protagonist went through?
11. What is your emotional response to the events the antagonist went through?
12. What did the protagonist learn in this film?
13. What did the antagonist learn in this film?
14. What filmmaking techniques were used to tell the protagonist's story?
15. What filmmaking techniques were used to tell the antagonist's story?

Appendix B

CHARACTER A - DANNI POV

Written by

Jonas Larson

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The morning sun beams through the curtains into a tidy room. The only sound to pierce through the walls of the home is the sound of song birds. Everything is in its place.

DANNI, a dainty twenty-something woman, carefully strokes a brush against a colorful canvas. As she plans her next brush stroke, she dips the brush into the muddied mason jar of water.

Danni drops her brush into the jar, dries her hands off with her well-worn rag, and pushes the hair off of her face. She takes a step back as she analyzes her vision.

Loud music from the other room starts to play as her sister ELLA, a boisterous personality, wakes up and gets ready for her day. She walks down the stairs and into the living room as Danni begins typing on her computer on the couch with a blanket wrapped around her.

Ella hugs Danni from behind.

ELLA

Did you make extra coffee?

DANNI

Yeah there should still be a cup left in the pot.

Ella walks over into the kitchen.

ELLA

It's cold!

DANNI

It's 10:30.

Ella sets her mug in the microwave to heat up the lukewarm coffee. She scampers back over to Danni.

ELLA

Can I read it?

Ella scoots close to Danni. Danni closes her laptop and pulls the blanket tight around her.

DANNI

It's not ready yet.

ELLA

Like that painting you've been working on for months?

DANNI

I was thinking more like that song you've been working on. How long has that been now?

ELLA

Oh please.

DANNI

How many boyfriends has it been through? Three?

Danni moves over to her isle chair.

ELLA

Two. Jared doesn't count.

DANNI

Well he was the majority of the content.

ELLA

Well at least I have a deadline for it now. I got a gig next week at Waterdog.

DANNI

Oh when did that happen?

ELLA

Abby's boyfriend knows this agent and he might be able to get him to come to the show. You're coming right?

Danni turns around and faces her painting as she starts cleaning her brushes.

DANNI

I have my pitch meeting with that publisher next week.

Ella pauses.

ELLA

I thought you were coming.

Danni turns her head slightly.

DANNI

I can't miss this.

ELLA

Why don't you just come after?

Ella stands up and walks over next to Danni and gives her a side hug.

DANNI

I'll try my best. It's over an hour away and I don't know how

long the meeting will go. And you know I don't do well in big crowds. It's just not my comfort zone...

Ella cuts her off.

ELLA
It's okay, really.

Ella pats Danni on the shoulder.

ELLA
Don't forget, dad's coming over for dinner.

Ella walks back to the kitchen.

DANNI
(sighs)
Yep.

ELLA
What?

Danni turns around with a fake smile.

DANNI
Sounds good.

Danni turns back around and throws her brush back into the jar.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Danni gets out of her car and locks it before walking up her porch to her front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Danni opens the door revealing Ella and PAUL, her emotionally absent father.

DANNI
Hey guys.

ELLA
Welcome back!

PAUL
Finally, now we can eat.

Paul starts walking over to the table.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Danni STRIKES a match and lights a candle at the dinner table.

PAUL

This is really good Ella.

ELLA

Actually Danni made this before she left this morning. I just put it into the oven. She's turned into a really good cook lately.

PAUL

Well at least something productive has come from all that time you spend alone.

Ella glances over at Danni, Danni glances down and away, Ella then glances back to her father.

ELLA

She's been super busy lately. She's been working on that painting for her book cover. I think she's pretty much done writing right?

Ella looks back at Danni with an encouraging look.

DANNI

Yeah...It's just about ready.

ELLA

She even has a pitch meeting next week!

Danni smiles at Ella.

DANNI

Yeah Friday is a big day for both of us.

Ella motions at Paul to initiate a nice gesture to Danni.

PAUL

Danni... I can drive you to your meeting if you want. I mean we're both going to the show anyways so we can save parking.

DANNI

Oh, I actually don't think I can go.

PAUL

What do you mean?

Danni looks down again.

ELLA

It's ok, we actually worked that out already.

Paul looks judgmentally at Danni.

PAUL

You can't miss your sister's show Danni. She's worked really hard on this.

Danni starts to shrink back.

DANNI

I know she has. I've worked hard on my book too...

ELLA

Dad, it's fine.

Paul sets his silverware down on his plate.

PAUL

You know, back when your mother and I were dating, she had plenty of opportunities that she sacrificed for me. We had a discussion and she gave up some of her time and chose to support me. This is what being a team is all about...

Danni stares down at her plate as she hears this story for the innumerable time.

EXT. DANNI'S CAR - DAY

Danni sits in her car for a moment after a long day at work. She gets out and walks up to the front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ella and her boyfriend WILL, a tall and charming man, are sitting on the couch as Danni walks through the front door.

ELLA

Hey! How was work?

Danni hangs her jacket up on the rack before turning around to her sister.

DANNI

It was fine, Jerry pissed me off again. I don't know how he still has a job when all he does is ask other people to do his work for him.

She walks into the living room to see Will sitting on her couch.

WILL

Hey Danni!

Danni's demeanor shifts and she becomes more reserved.

DANNI

Oh, hi Will.

WILL

Who's this Jerry character?

Danni sits on the chair on the other side of the living room. She begins to explain, but is cut off by her sister.

ELLA

He's this guy that always cuts her off when she's talking. She can't stand him.

WILL

Oh, so kinda like you?

ELLA

Wait what?

Danni, seeing where this conversation will lead, interrupts them.

DANNI

He actually wasn't that bad today. What are you two doing tonight.

ELLA

We're seeing a movie! Do you want to come with?

DANNI

I think I'm alright. It was a long day, I just wanted some me-time tonight.

WILL

Oh c'mon you get plenty of that already.

ELLA

You need a little night out

DANNI

I really don't know if I can.

Ella gets up to grab her jacket.

ELLA

Go change, you have five minutes until we drag you out.

DANNI

Fine, but you're buying me popcorn.

Danni walks upstairs to her room to change.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Danni sits in the dark theater eating her popcorn. Ella and Will sit a few rows behind her.

Will stands up in the middle of the movie and leaves the room. A few moments go by before Ella stands up and does the same.

The movie ends. Danni gets up and notices they are not behind her anymore. She checks her phone which shows no messages. She exits the theater

EXT. THEATER - NIGHT

Danni stands on the sidewalk outside the theater as she tries calling her sister repeatedly. She sits on the sidewalk as she waits for her cab to arrive.

A car pulls up next to her and rolls the window down.

CAB DRIVER

Danni?

DANNI

Yeah that's me.

Danni gets in the cab.

EXT. DANNI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Danni gets out of the cab and walks up to the door of her unlit house.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

She walks inside the dark kitchen and throws her keys on the counter. She turns on a lamp and looks around the room for any trace of her sister. Once she realizes her abandonment, she goes up to her room to go to bed.

Danni lays down in bed and stares at the ceiling. She then reaches over and turns off the bedside lamp.

INT. DANNI'S BEDROOM - DAY

Danni sits on her bedroom floor folding laundry as her sister screams at

her from the other room.

ELLA

Danni!! Where is the stain remover? I can't find it anywhere.

Danni yells back from upstairs.

DANNI

You brought it upstairs after you spilled my coffee.

There is a moment of silence.

ELLA

Can you bring it down for me?

DANNI

No.

ELLA

Please?

Danni is silent. Ella enters into the doorframe as Danni continues folding her laundry.

ELLA

Are you still mad at me?

Danni remains silent.

ELLA

How many times do I have to say sorry?

Danni turns around.

DANNI

(Whispers)

Until you actually mean it.

Ella starts walking into the room.

ELLA

Danni, can you please talk to me?

Danni turns her head.

DANNI

Ella. Leave.

Ella turns around to leave the room but pauses at the doorframe.

ELLA

I blocked off tomorrow night. If you feel up to it, we can go to

dinner. Just me and you.

Danni sits with her back towards Ella, but smiles. Ella leaves the doorframe.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Danni gets out of her car after a long day of work. She walks up to her front door and hears a loud commotion inside. She looks in through the window and sees many of her sister's friends and enters cautiously into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

SARAH, the loudest personality of the group, has everyone's ear.

SARAH
I swear, it's like a superpower or something.

Danni walks quietly into the kitchen.

SARAH
Danni! Come in here!

Danni sets down her purse and keys on the counter and walks into the living room.

SARAH
How are you girl? I haven't seen you in forever!

Sarah remains seated and Danni stands at the end of the living room.

DANNI
Hi Sarah, how are you?

SARAH
I was just telling the girls about this crazy story I had when I got pulled over the other day, but I talked my way out of it.

DANNI
Yeah, you're really good at talking. Where's Ella?

SARAH
She's upstairs getting ready for tonight.

DANNI
Tonight?

ABBY, a very kind and inclusive person, sees Danni's confusion.

ABBY

We're going to that restaurant that Ella has her performance at next week. We thought it would be good to calm her nerves a little.

DANNI

Oh, I didn't realize you guys had plans tonight.

SARAH

It was my idea. We came over to surprise her.

Abby can see a discomfort with Danni's demeanor.

ABBY

We'd love if you came with us! But if you have plans don't worry about it.

DANNI

Oh yeah for sure...I'm just going to talk to Ella first.

Danni walks upstairs to find Ella getting ready in the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ella is putting her makeup on when Danni knocks on the door.

ELLA

It's open

Danni enters discretely.

DANNI

I thought we were hanging out tonight.

ELLA

I know. I didn't realize they were coming over tonight.

DANNI

Well can you make them leave?

ELLA

Danni, I can't just tell them to leave, they're our friends.

DANNI

If they're our friends, they would understand that we have plans already.

Ella continues to put on her makeup whilst staring in the mirror.

ELLA

I'm not going to tell them to leave. You can either come with or

have a pity party at home.

Danni glares at her sister as she continues getting ready.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Danni glares at her sister as Ella and her friends are into a lively conversation.

SARAH

I wonder where they'll have you come out from.

DANNI

They have a room back...

Danni is cut off by BRIE, another of Ella's boisterous friends.

BRIE

I think they have a room behind the bar!

Danni shrinks back into her chair.

ELLA

I can't believe it's only a week away.

SARAH

I can't believe one of my best friends will be famous in a week.

ELLA

I'm not going to be famous. Who knows if he'll even like me.

ABBY

He's going to love you. And if he doesn't we'll follow him out to his car and beat him up.

The group laughs except for Danni.

ELLA

Oh cause the three of you are so scary.

ABBY

I've pepper sprayed a man before.

SARAH

We don't have to worry about that because he is going to love you.

Ella looks gratefully over at Sarah. Danni sits up to engage the group.

DANNI

Are you guys going to order anything to eat...

Danni gets cut off again.

SARAH

So how's the song coming along? You've finished writing it right?

Danni sinks back into her chair again.

Ella looks away sheepishly.

SARAH

Ella!

ELLA

I'm basically done. Some of the words just aren't there yet.

BRIE

You're too much of a perfectionist. You should go up and perform tonight!

SARAH

Yeah! As a warm up!

ELLA

Oh I don't know if I could do that. The waitlist is probably super long.

ABBY

We have all night. We're not leaving until you do.

Ella stands up from her chair.

ELLA

Fine, someone come with me to go sign up.

Ella leaves with Sarah, Brie, and Abby to the sign up sheet. Danni flags down the waiter to order some food.

DANNI

Yeah, I'll just have the burger with a side of fries.

WAITER

Is anyone else ordering tonight?

DANNI

Nope, just me.

WAITER

Sounds good, we'll have that out for you shortly.

DANNI

Thanks.

Ella looks at the signup sheet

ELLA

There's at least 15 people on this list before me. We'll be here all night.

SARAH

Don't worry, we'll stay as long as it takes.

ELLA

I don't even have my guitar with me, this was a stupid idea.

Ella tries to leave but Brie stops her.

BRIE

Oh no you don't. We're staying. You can sing a cappella or find a way to plug your phone in.

ELLA

Fine. Sign me up.

Sarah puts Ella's information down.

ELLA

I'm so nervous. I have to go to the bathroom.

BRIE

I'll go with you.

Ella and Brie head towards the bathroom. Sarah and Abby linger by the sign up sheet.

The manager comes over and crosses a name off the sign up list.

SARAH

What are you doing that for?

MANAGER

They're too drunk. Had to cut them off.

After the manager walks off, Sarah looks over at Danni sitting alone at the table. She then tugs on Abby's shoulder.

SARAH

C'mon.

ABBY

What are you doing?

Sarah writes in Danni's information in the now vacant sign up spot.

ABBY

Sarah, I don't think that's a good idea.

SARAH

Oh she'll be fine. Danni is always bragging about how good she is at poetry. Now she has a chance to show it off.

Abby looks warily at Sarah.

SARAH

Let's go meet up with them in the bathroom.

ABBY

I think I'll go back to the table to check on Danni.

Sarah and Abby part ways. Danni is people watching as Abby sits next to her.

ABBY

This isn't your scene is it?

DANNI

Sometimes. Tonight I'm just not really feeling like being out.

ABBY

Why'd you come then.

DANNI

It's either this or I don't see her.

Abby and Danni sit in silence for a beat.

ABBY

I need to tell you something. I tried to stop them, but they wrote your name on the sign up sheet.

DANNI

Wait what?

ABBY

They're going to call your name next to do some spoken word or something. I wanted to cross it out, but the manager grabbed it again.

The waiter brings Danni's food to her. Danni is frozen with fear.

MANAGER

Alright next up is Danni with some...spoken word.

Danni cannot comprehend what is happening to her.

MANAGER

Second call for Danni.

Danni looks around and catches a glimpse of Sarah smiling at her.

MANAGER

Last call for Danni. Okay moving on we have Alex. Give it up for Alex.

Danni stands up and hurries out of the restaurant.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Danni hurries out to the corner of the street in tears.

INT. DANNI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Danni walks upstairs and stops in the hallway. She looks over at Ella's room and slowly makes her way into the doorway. She flips on the light switch and sees a her stack of papers next to her guitar.

Danni walks over and sits on Ella's bed as she reads the lyrics of her song. Her eyes begin to water and is filled with the emotion of the night. She takes the pages downstairs. She lights a match and burns the papers and drops it onto a plate.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Danni walks along the park sidewalk carrying a bag of groceries as she sees a woman sitting alone on the bench. She stops and stares for a moment. Another woman comes along and greets the person on the bench with a hug. Danni gives a soft smile and continues walking home.

EXT. DANNI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

There is a loud commotion inside as Danni makes her way to the door.

Danni walks in with her groceries. She looks at Ella holding a paint brush and then glances over at her painting and a large red streak of red across the front of it. Danni drops her bags of groceries.

Ella moves closer to Danni, but Danni turns around and leaves the house in tears.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Ella chases after Danni down the street as the sun is starting to disappear.

ELLA

Danni wait!

Danni continues walking.

ELLA

Danni please stop!

Danni again does not look back.

ELLA

DANNI!

Danni stops and turns around as Ella is about to catch up. She walks up to Ella.

DANNI

What? What do you have to say?

ELLA

It wasn't even me, I was in the other room...

DANNI

Do you hate me?

ELLA

What? Why would you accuse me of that?

DANNI

You never defend me.

ELLA

What are you talking about?

DANNI

I know your friends don't like me, and when they do things like this you never try to stop them.

ELLA

I always try to stop.

DANNI

By doing what? Cancelling plans you made with me? Or looking the other way when they embarrass me? Or what about leaving the room when they talk bad about me? You just sit back and let it happen.

ELLA

Danni.

DANNI

All I ever want is to have you around, and you just can't wait

to get rid of me.

Ella's demeanor changes.

ELLA

Get rid of you? You don't even want to go to my show. You ditched us at the restaurant. And then you don't even respond when I try to reach out to you.

DANNI

You don't know what you're talking about.

ELLA

You claim you just want to spend time with me but it feels like you're always ditching me anytime you can.

DANNI

That's not even what happened.

ELLA

How come every time I turn around, you're the one that's gone?

DANNI

Well. Now's your chance.

Ella stares at Danni for a beat, then turns and walks back home. Danni stands there frozen.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Danni walks down her hallway into the bathroom. She brushes her hair into a ponytail. She stares into the mirror for a moment. She walks past her empty room as she makes her way downstairs. She grabs her book and makes her way to the door.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Danni walks down a long, bright hallway with a conference room at the end of it. She walks through the door to see three middle-aged editors waiting to hear her pitch.

DANNI

Hi, I'm Daniella and the name of my book is "The Lion in Tiger Stripes".

FADE OUT.

THE END.

Appendix C

CHARACTER B - ELLA POV

Written by

JONAS LARSON

FADE IN:

INT. ELLA'S ROOM - DAY

A still morning descends as ELLA, a young boisterous woman, lay in her bed. Pads of paper flood the floor filled with possible song lyrics. Everything seems out of place. Her alarm clock RINGS waking her up. She fumbles out of bed and into the bathroom. She splashes water on her face and brushes her teeth.

Ella heads down the stairs into the living room where her sister DANNI, a quiet reserved woman, is on the couch with her computer and a blanket.

Ella hugs Danni from behind.

ELLA

Did you make extra coffee?

DANNI

Yeah there should still be a cup left in the pot.

Danni gets up from her chair and moves to the sofa. She grabs a blanket to wrap herself before she picks up her computer.

ELLA

It's cold!

DANNI

It's 10:30.

Ella sets her mug in the microwave to heat up the lukewarm coffee. She scampers over to Danni to see what she is doing.

ELLA

Can I read it?

Ella scoots close to Danni. Danni closes her laptop and pulls the blanket tight around her.

DANNI

It's not ready yet.

ELLA

Like that painting you've been working on for months?

DANNI

I was thinking more like that song you've been working on. How long has that been now?

ELLA

Oh please.

DANNI

How many boyfriends has it been through? Three?

Danni moves over to her isle chair.

ELLA

Two. Jared doesn't count.

DANNI

Well he was the majority of the content.

ELLA

Well at least I have a deadline for it now. I got a gig next week at Waterdog.

DANNI

Oh when did that happen?

ELLA

Abby's boyfriend knows this agent and he might be able to get him to come to the show. You're coming right?

Danni turns around and faces her painting as she starts cleaning her brushes.

DANNI

I have my pitch meeting with that publisher next week.

Ella pauses.

ELLA

I thought you were coming.

Danni turns her head slightly.

DANNI

I can't miss this.

ELLA

Why don't you just come after?

Ella stands up and walks over next to Danni and gives her a side hug.

DANNI

I'll try my best. It's over an hour away and I don't know how long the meeting will go. And you know I don't do well in big crowds. It's just not my comfort zone...

Ella cuts her off.

ELLA

It's okay, really.

Ella pats Danni on the shoulder.

ELLA

Don't forget, dad's coming over for dinner.

Ella walks back to the kitchen to open the fridge.

DANNI

(sighs)

Yep.

Ella turns around.

ELLA

What?

Danni turns around with a fake smile.

DANNI

Sounds good.

Ella grabs the milk and closes the fridge.

EXT. OUTSIDE ELLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PAUL, a firm and rough man, closes the door to his car and walks up to the door and RINGS the doorbell.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ella is tidying up the living room when she hears the doorbell. She opens the door revealing her father somewhat excited to see her.

ELLA

Hi dad!

Paul looks past Ella into the house looking for the smell of what is cooking.

PAUL

What's for dinner? I brought a pie.

Paul walks inside. Ella shuts the door behind him. He sets the pie down on the corner of the dining table and starts inspecting everything.

ELLA

We have to wait until Danni gets home from work.

PAUL

Is she still mad at me?

ELLA

She's not mad at you, she's just sensitive.

Ella grabs the pie and brings it into the kitchen. Paul sits down on the sofa.

PAUL

How can I raise two daughters the same way and one can't take my humor?

Ella starts setting the table with plates and silverware.

ELLA

Maybe because it's not humor, maybe you're just mean.

PAUL

That makes no sense. What time is your show again?

ELLA

They said 9 but I don't think I'll go on until probably 10 or 11pm.

PAUL

Oof that might be past my bedtime, but I could try to make it work.

ELLA

You could go to Danni's pitch meeting! You could pretend to be her agent or something. You're scary enough.

Paul rolls his eyes. Ella looks underneath the foil of the pie pan.

ELLA

Is this strawberry?

PAUL

Yeah, why?

ELLA

We're allergic.

PAUL

I can't keep track of these things.

Paul looks over at Danni's easel.

PAUL

What's this about?

Ella walks over and sits at the easel chair.

ELLA

Danni's painting. She's making it for her book.

Paul stands up and gets closer to it.

PAUL

What does it mean?

ELLA

I don't know. She doesn't talk about it much.

PAUL

Is that you?

ELLA

I don't know.

PAUL

Hmm. Maybe you should try getting her out of this house every once and awhile.

ELLA

Yeah...she might be a little lonely.

PAUL

Does she know books are this way and not that way?

Paul motions with his hands to the landscape orientation of the book. Ella notices that Danni's car pulls into the driveway.

ELLA

You better not make any comments like that to her.

Danni walks in through the front door. Paul and Ella turn.

DANNI

Hey guys.

ELLA

Welcome back!

PAUL

Finally, now we can eat.

Paul starts walking over to the table.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Danni STRIKES a match and lights a candle at the dinner table.

PAUL

This is really good Ella.

ELLA

Actually Danni made this before she left this morning. I just put it into the oven. She's turned into a really good cook lately.

PAUL

Well at least something productive has come from all that time you spend alone.

Ella glances over at Danni, Danni glances down and away, Ella then glances back to her father.

ELLA

She's been super busy lately. She's been working on that painting for her book cover. I think she's pretty much done writing right?

Ella looks back at Danni with an encouraging look.

DANNI

Yeah...It's just about ready.

ELLA

She even has a pitch meeting next week!

Danni smiles at Ella.

DANNI

Yeah Friday is a big day for both of us.

Ella motions at Paul to initiate a nice gesture to Danni.

PAUL

Danni... I can drive you to your meeting if you want. I mean we're both going to the show anyways so we can save parking.

DANNI

Oh, I actually don't think I can go.

PAUL

What do you mean?

Danni looks down again.

ELLA

It's ok, we actually worked that out already.

Paul looks judgmentally at Danni.

PAUL

You can't miss your sister's show Danni. She's worked really hard on this.

Danni starts to shrink back.

DANNI

I know she has. I've worked hard on my book too...

ELLA

Dad, it's fine.

Paul sets his silverware down on his plate.

PAUL

You know, back when your mother and I were dating, she had plenty of opportunities that she sacrificed for me. We had a discussion and she gave up some of her time and chose to support me. This is what being a team is all about.

Ella looks compassionately at Danni.

PAUL

Ella, pass those potatoes will ya?

Danni looks down at her plate.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ella is sitting on the couch as her boyfriend WILL, a tall and charming man, stares at Danni's painting.

WILL

There's no way.

ELLA

I feel like that's an insult.

WILL

No! Not at all. It's just...it's so good. I feel like I know her better now.

ELLA

What does that even mean?

Will walks over and sits next to Danni.

WILL

You know. She's put so much of herself into that painting.

Will glances back over at the painting as Danni walks through the front door.

WILL

(Whispering)

We should invite her to the movie tonight.

ELLA

Hey! How was work?

Danni hangs her jacket up on the rack before turning around to her sister.

DANNI

It was fine, Jerry pissed me off again. I don't know how he still has a job when all he does is ask other people to do his work for him.

She walks into the living room to see Will sitting on her couch.

WILL

Hey Danni!

Danni's demeanor shifts and she becomes more reserved.

DANNI

Oh, hi Will.

WILL

Who's this Jerry character?

Danni sits on the chair on the other side of the living room. She begins to explain, but is cut off by her sister.

ELLA

He's this guy that always cuts her off when she's talking. She can't stand him.

WILL

Oh, so kinda like you?

ELLA

Wait what?

Danni, seeing where this conversation will lead, interrupts them.

DANNI

He actually wasn't that bad today. What are you two doing tonight.

ELLA

We're seeing a movie! Do you want to come with?

DANNI

I think I'm alright. It was a long day, I just wanted some me-time tonight.

WILL

Oh c'mon you get plenty of that already.

ELLA

You need a little night out

DANNI

I really don't know if I can.

Ella gets up to grab her jacket.

ELLA

Go change, you have five minutes until we drag you out.

DANNI

Fine, but you're buying me popcorn.

Danni walks upstairs to her room to change.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Ella and Will as they are enjoying the movie as Danni sits a few rows ahead of them. Will pulls his phone out of his pocket and shows it to Ella.

WILL

It's my mom.

Will stands up in the middle of the movie and leaves the room. A few moments go by before Ella stands up and does the same. Ella meets will outside.

EXT. THEATER - NIGHT

Ella approaches Will who is still on the phone with his mother.

WILL

She's having another episode. Can you drive me there?

ELLA

Yeah, I just need to tell Danni.

WILL

I'll text her on the way that you're coming back.

ELLA

Ok, as long as it won't be too long.

Ella and Will get into their car and drive off.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ella opens the cupboard underneath the sink and searches for the stain remover. She moves the cleaners around but cannot find the correct bottle. She pops her head back from under the sink.

ELLA

Danni! Where is the stain remover? I can't find it anywhere.

Danni yells back from upstairs.

DANNI

You brought it upstairs after you spilled my coffee.

Ella sits up.

ELLA

Can you bring it down for me?

DANNI

No.

ELLA

Please?

Danni is silent. Ella gets up after a beat and walks up to Danni's room.

Danni is on the floor folding her laundry.

ELLA

Are you still mad at me?

Danni remains silent.

ELLA

How many times do I have to say sorry?

Danni remains silent.

Ella starts walking into the room.

ELLA

Danni, can you please talk to me?

Danni turns her head.

DANNI

Ella. Leave.

Ella turns around to leave the room but pauses at the doorframe.

ELLA

I blocked off tomorrow night. If you feel up to it, we can go to dinner. Just me and you.

Danni sits with her back towards Ella. Ella leaves the doorframe.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ella is sitting on the couch playing guitar. She scribbles down some words and continues to play. She then immediately crosses out what she wrote.

She hears the DOORBELL RING. She gets up from the couch and walks up to the front door where she sees a group of her friends waiting.

EXT. FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

A group of three girls wait for Ella to open the door. SARAH, the loudest personality of the group, speaks up first.

SARAH

Get ready for the best night of your life!

ELLA

What are you guys doing here?

BRIE

We're taking you out to the restaurant where your performance is!

ELLA

Oh.

SARAH

Yeah, you look so...not ready. Go change!

ELLA

I was actually going to go out with Danni tonight.

ABBY

You can bring her with!

The girls shoe Ella inside.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ella is putting her makeup on when she hears Danni come home. Indistinct chatter come from the group of girls. Ella pokes her head out the door to hear anything she can. Ella quickly jumps back to getting ready as Danni makes her way upstairs. Danni KNOCKS on the door.

ELLA

It's open.

Danni enters discretely.

DANNI

I thought we were hanging out tonight.

ELLA

I know. I didn't realize they were coming over tonight.

DANNI

Well can you make them leave?

ELLA

Danni, I can't just tell them to leave, they're our friends.

DANNI

If they're our friends, they would understand that we have plans already.

Ella continues staring in the mirror.

ELLA

I'm not going to tell them to leave. You can either come with or have a pity party at home.

Ella continues putting on her makeup.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Danni glares at her sister as Ella and her friends are into a lively conversation.

SARAH

I wonder where they'll have you come out from.

DANNI

They have a room back...

Danni is cut off by BRIE, another of Ella's boisterous friends.

BRIE

I think they have a room behind the bar!

Danni shrinks back into her chair.

ELLA

I can't believe it's only a week away.

SARAH

I can't believe one of my best friends will be famous in a week.

ELLA

I'm not going to be famous. Who knows if he'll even like me.

ABBY

He's going to love you. And if he doesn't we'll follow him out to his car and beat him up.

The group laughs except for Danni.

ELLA

Oh cause the three of you are so scary.

ABBY

I've pepper sprayed a man before.

SARAH

We don't have to worry about that because he is going to love you.

Ella looks gratefully over at Sarah. Danni sits up to engage the group.

DANNI

Are you guys going to order anything to eat...

Ella shifts her gaze to Danni, but Sarah grabs her attention.

SARAH

So how's the song coming along? You've finished writing it right?

Ella looks away sheepishly.

SARAH

Ella!

ELLA

I'm basically done. Some of the words just aren't there yet.

BRIE

You're too much of a perfectionist. You should go up and perform tonight!

SARAH

Yeah! As a warm up!

ELLA

Oh I don't know if I could do that. The waitlist is probably super long.

ABBY

We have all night. We're not leaving until you do.

Ella stands up from her chair.

ELLA

Fine, someone come with me to go sign up.

Ella leaves with Sarah, Brie, and Abby to the sign up sheet. Danni flags down the waiter to order some food.

Ella looks at the signup sheet

ELLA

There's at least 15 people on this list before me. We'll be here all night.

SARAH

Don't worry, we'll stay as long as it takes.

ELLA

I don't even have my guitar with me, this was a stupid idea.

Ella tries to leave but Brie stops her.

BRIE

Oh no you don't. We're staying. You can sing a cappella or find a way to plug your phone in.

ELLA

Fine. Sign me up.

Sarah puts Ella's information down.

ELLA

I'm so nervous. I have to go to the bathroom.

BRIE

I'll go with you.

Brie and Ella walk to the bathroom together.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ella stands at the sink with the water running. Brie walks up next to her.

BRIE

Are you alright?

ELLA

Yeah...the nerves are just hitting me I guess.

BRIE

But the show isn't for another week.

ELLA

Yeah, I know. It just seems so real now.

Brie turns the water off.

BRIE

You are the most talented person I know. Your worst performance would be better than anyone else's best performance on that stage.

Ella gives Brie a hug

ELLA

Thanks Brie.

BRIE

But also, if you die on stage can I have your guitar?

Ella leaves.

BRIE

I said "if"

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ella and Brie walk out of the bathroom and walk back to the table. Ella notices Danni's food, but her seat is empty.

ELLA

Where's Danni?

ABBY

Ella...

Sarah abruptly cuts off Abby.

SARAH

She got bored and left.

ELLA

She what?

SARAH

She didn't even say anything, just got up and left.

Ella sits back in disbelief. Abby glares at Sarah as she avoids Abby's eye contact.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ella and her friends (Sarah, Brie, and Abby) are sitting in the living room talking.

SARAH

So have you guys talked since last night?

ELLA

No, she left before I woke up this morning.

BRIE

I can't believe how moody she's been lately. So immature.

ELLA

I just wish I knew why she left. She won't even answer my texts.

SARAH

Well she didn't have to rip up your song lyrics. That was just petty of her.

Sarah brings her glass close and takes a sip.

ELLA

Abby, did you tell her?

ABBY

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. I thought they knew.

BRIE

I also think it was really petty.

ELLA

Well it doesn't matter, because it didn't happen to either of you, so let's just get past it.

Ella gets up and walks into the kitchen.

Sarah looks over at Danni's painting.

SARAH

You know... I bet Ella worked just as hard on her song as Danni did on that painting of hers.

Abby sits up in her seat.

ABBY

Sarah...

Sarah walks over to the painting and looks it up and down. Brie follows shortly after.

SARAH

It would be a shame if it had the same fate as Ella's song.

ABBY

Sarah, don't touch it.

Sarah opens a container of red paint and begins dipping a large brush in it.

Abby stands up and walks closer to Sarah.

ABBY

Put it down.

Sarah makes a large red streak across the canvas.

SARAH

Oops.

Abby is stunned in her tracks. Ella walks back in from the kitchen.

ELLA

Anyone want another drink?

Ella sees what Sarah has done to Danni's painting. She drops the bottle out of shock and it shatters across the floor.

ELLA

What did you do?

Sarah turns around with the paintbrush still in hand. Ella runs up and snatches it from her

SARAH

What? I just did to her what she did to you.

Danni walks in with her groceries. Her head is down as she hopes to pass by everyone. She sees a broken bottle on the floor. She looks up to see Ella holding a paint brush and then glances over at her painting and a large red streak of red across the front of it. Danni drops her bags of groceries.

Ella moves closer to Danni, but Danni turns around and leaves the house in tears. Ella looks back at Sarah.

ELLA

You are unbelievable.

SARAH

So you deserved it but she didn't?

ELLA

I have all my songs backed up on my phone. This is her only painting.

Ella turns around and pursues her sister. Sarah looks awkwardly around the room for validation, but Brie and Abby avoid eye contact with her.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Ella chases after Danni down the street as the sun is starting to disappear.

ELLA

Danni wait!

Danni continues walking.

ELLA

Danni please stop!

Danni again does not look back.

ELLA

DANNI!

Danni stops and turns around as Ella is about to catch up. She walks up to Ella.

DANNI

What? What do you have to say?

ELLA

It wasn't even me, I was in the other room...

DANNI

Do you hate me?

ELLA

What? Why would you accuse me of that?

DANNI

You never defend me.

ELLA

What are you talking about?

DANNI

I know your friends don't like me, and when they do things like this you never try to stop them.

ELLA

I always try to stop.

DANNI

By doing what? Cancelling plans you made with me? Or looking the other way when they embarrass me? Or what about leaving the room when they talk bad about me? You just sit back and let it happen.

ELLA

Danni.

DANNI

All I ever want is to have you around, and you just can't wait to get rid of me.

Ella's demeanor changes.

ELLA

Get rid of you? You don't even want to go to my show. You ditched us at the restaurant. And then you don't even respond when I try to reach out to you.

DANNI

You don't know what you're talking about.

ELLA

You claim you just want to spend time with me but it feels like you're always ditching me anytime you can.

DANNI

That's not even what happened.

ELLA

How come every time I turn around, you're the one that's gone?

DANNI

Well. Now's your chance.

Ella stares at Danni for a beat, then turns and walks back home. Danni stands there frozen.

INT. ELLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ella nervously gets ready for her audition. She comes out of the bathroom and walks past Danni's room which is completely clean. She goes downstairs, grabs her guitar, and walks out the door.

INT. BACKROOM OF RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ella walks nervously around the backroom of the restaurant as she hears a KNOCK at the door. She goes to open it as the manager is waiting outside.

MANAGER

You're on.

Ella follows the manager through the hallway and onto the stage. The bright lights flash onto her face as she plugs her guitar in.

DANIELLA

Hey everyone. My name is Daniella and this is a song I wrote. I hope you enjoy.

Daniella takes a deep breath and strums.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.