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Crafting a Compelling Action Hero Movie: A Psychological Inquiry into the Identification of Key Elements in Successful Storytelling through Film

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

**Crafting a Compelling Action Hero Movie: A Psychological Inquiry into the
Identification of Key Elements in Successful Storytelling through Film**

SUBMITTED TO

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Crafting a Compelling Action Hero Movie: A Psychological Inquiry into the
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Abstract

Since the time humans have developed speech, storytelling has been a crucial part of society. Its values lie in the ability to communicate potential dangers about the world to generating laughter and tears as a form of entertainment. A central theme in stories that continues to reoccur over the course of history is the story of the hero. Carl Jung theorizes that the hero is an archetype in the collective unconscious, which explains humans' innate inclinations towards heroes. Throughout history, the forms of storytelling have evolved due to technological and intellectual advancements. In modern times, film has risen as the leading modality for storytelling. The central theme of heroes continues to reoccur in this modality and is testified by the dominance of action hero movies in the box office. The purpose of this paper is to develop a model that details how to craft a compelling action hero movie based on empirical psychological research. The paper defines a compelling action hero movie as a movie with an action hero protagonist that maximizes narrative transportation, persuasion and enjoyment. By dissecting the construction of the film into its plot, character/diction, theme, melody and spectacle, the paper develops the PCTMS-NTPE Model that maximizes narrative transportation, persuasion and enjoyment in each aforementioned components. The beneficiaries of this paper are filmmakers and individuals who want to understand the inner psychological mechanics of a compelling action hero movie.

Keywords: media psychology, film, hero, narrative, narrative transportation

CRAFTING A COMPELLING ACTION HERO MOVIE

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“The very meaninglessness of life forces man to create his own meaning. Children, of course, begin life with an untarnished sense of wonder, a capacity to experience total joy at something as simple as the greenness of a leaf; but as they grow older, the awareness of death and decay begins to impinge on their consciousness and subtly erode their joie de vivre, their idealism – and their assumption of immortality. As a child matures, he sees death and pain everywhere about him, and begins to lose faith in the ultimate goodness of man. But, if he’s reasonably strong – and lucky – he can emerge from this twilight of the soul into a rebirth of life’s elan. Both because of and in spite of his awareness of the meaninglessness of life, he can forge a fresh sense of purpose and affirmation. He may not recapture the same pure sense of wonder he was born with, but he can shape something far more enduring and sustaining. The most terrifying fact about the universe is not that it is hostile but that it is indifferent; but if we can come to terms with this indifference and accept the challenges of life within the boundaries of death – however mutable man may be able to make them – our existence as a species can have genuine meaning and fulfillment. However vast the darkness, we must supply our own light.”

– Stanley Kubrick

Introduction

Behind the veil of cinema is an ancient art form that has persisted through the age of mankind. Since the time humans developed speech, storytelling has been an important component of society. It holds the power to communicate human knowledge, emotions and morals in a social context, and allows human beings to inform and learn about each other's subjective human experience in the unknown context of the world (Cajete, Eder & Holyan, 2010); thus, stories help us transmit vital information – from dangers and insights about the world, to educating a community through the instillation of morals and ethics, to driving laughter and tears through entertainment (Zipes, 2013). Storytelling therefore is crucial to the preservation and progression of human culture.

In modern times, storytelling through film has been a popular form of entertainment. But beneath the laughter and tears, there is an intentional installation of themes and morals purposefully initiated by the filmmakers to drive both the primal emotions of the audience and to challenge them to question and expand their awareness pertaining to the mysteries of the human condition. It is important to realize that while the functions and benefits of stories can be far-reaching, its effects are capped by the structure and mechanisms that envelopes the content. Simply put, a well-structured and well-told story that captivates its audience will get more across than an ill-structured and ill-told story. The potential benefits of stories and its historical connection to the human psyche gives this paper the motivation to identify the key elements of successful story telling through the modality of film.

The inception of American New Wave cinema in post-classical Hollywood witnessed a meteoric rise in popularity and success of action hero films, both in artistic and economic forms. According to Box Office Mojo (2015), an algorithmic box office revenue tracker widely used in the movie industry, here is the composition of Hollywood's all-time top 30 highest grossing franchises and film series - we see familiar titles: Marvel Cinematic Universe, Harry Potter, Star Wars, James Bond, Batman, The Lord of the Rings, Spider-man, Transformers, X-Men, Pirates of the Caribbean, Star Trek, The Hunger Games, Iron Man, Indiana Jones, Superman, Mission: Impossible, The Hobbit, The Avengers, Bourne, Men in Black and The Matrix. An example of the sheer economic significance a single action hero film can hold, Box Office Mojo (2015) indicates that The Dark Knight of the Batman series grossed over \$600 million after adjusting for inflation in 2008. Thus a quick extrapolation of such figures can easily exemplify the relevance and sheer economic significance of the action hero movie industry.

Over the last 10 years, action hero movies have consistently led the overall market share in Hollywood in terms of gross figures per movie releases. According to The Numbers (2012), another widely used box office revenue tracker in the film industry, with only four releases in 2012 (The Avengers, The Dark Night Rises, The Amazing Spiderman and Mugamoodi), the action hero genre held a market share of 12.04% (grossing close to \$1.4 billion), two places behind Contemporary Fiction, whose gross figures represented 344 movie releases versus the four of the action hero movie genre. Thus the undeniable appeal of action hero movies to the human psyche, testified by its

success and dominance in the box office in recent years, gives this paper a preliminary motivation to further investigate this area of interest.

The success of action hero movies is inextricably linked to humans' adoration for heroes. What explains this link? From the perspective of Carl Jung, the hero is one of the core archetypes of our collective unconscious (Jung & Hull, 1980). The figure of the hero therefore stands alone as a unique concept in our minds, explaining our inexplicable attraction towards action hero films. From the perspective of identification theory, individuals form a bond with a character who they admire due to their desires to adopt the traits, attitudes and other favorable characteristics of the character under question – namely a heroic character (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2009). The hero, being the lighthouse of moral ideals and courage, therefore serves as a figure of reverence that allows individuals to project their admiration and desire to become.

Implications of the findings of this paper point towards executives in film studios, filmmakers, audience members and other stakeholders interested in gaining an objective set of psychological criteria grounded in empirical research regarding the determinants of a compelling action hero movie. The findings can be most potentially useful in the developmental stage of a film production; by learning more about empirically tested theories regarding the different mechanics of successful storytelling and action hero construction, the filmmaker can create a more effective story arc, coupled with an emphatic character development and a better understanding of cinematic features that can enhance the effectiveness of the film as a whole.

Before introducing the overall intention of the paper, it's important to define the research question to greater detail. A "compelling action hero movie" is defined as a movie that follows an action hero as its protagonist and embodies particular cinematic features and a story structure that lead to high narrative transportation, persuasion of messages and enjoyment to the viewers. Therefore the goal of this paper is to prescribe a model for crafting a compelling action hero movie through exploring relevant major frameworks within three scopes: successful narrative construction, cinematic storytelling and heroism. Throughout the paper, the terms hero, character and protagonist will be used interchangeably. The investigation will begin with a literature review in the three relevant areas of interest. Combining the major frameworks and central psychological theories and principles identified in the literature review, the paper will prescribe a model regarding the crafting of a compelling action hero movie. A discussion of the effectiveness and limitations of the prescriptive model will conclude the investigation. Ultimately, the findings of this paper will attempt to paint an objective picture of the seemingly subjective mechanisms of successful storytelling of action heroes through the agency of film to provide an intellectual reasoning pertaining to the level of success action hero movies have reached in this modern era of cinema as well as the frameworks required to craft a compelling action hero movie.

Major Frameworks of Successful Narrative Construction

In order to prescribe a robust model for crafting a compelling action hero movie, we must first identify the major frameworks within the scope of successful narrative construction. What makes a good story? What are the central psychological theories that

underlie good stories from bad ones? These are some questions that this part of the paper aims to uncover. In overview, this section will begin with a discussion of Aristotle's six elements of drama and classical unities that are the necessary "organs" of a narrative. Then an examination of the Extended Transportation-Imagery Model, Elaboration Likelihood Model, PEFiC Model and the Affective Disposition Theory will ensue; all accounting for either the narrative transportability, persuasiveness and enjoyment of a narrative.

Aristotle – Six Elements of Drama & Classical Unities

In *Poetics* (Aristotle & Heath, 1996), Aristotle expresses that a story must embody a beginning, middle and end, with the climax occurring somewhere along the way. A story must be composed of six essential elements - Plot, character, theme/thought, diction, melody and spectacle. Plot refers to the actions, or "structure of incidents" (Aristotle & Heath, 1996) that the character goes through. For a more compelling drama, Aristotle recommends the plot to be structured with more complexity, thus the character must experience numerous reversals of fortunes that will incur higher elations and more devastating sufferings, which will allow the character to obtain a deeper understanding of his environment and arrive to a clearer resolution. Characters should also be developed in a way that emphasizes recognition and realization of hidden personal strengths and weaknesses. The sequences of events in the plot should follow logically from one and another; Aristotle recommends that more complex plots should have events sequenced in such a manner that is surprising to the audience until a resolution that deems the sequence of events reasonable occurs later in the plot.

In driving the drama forward, Aristotle purports a criteria for the protagonist of the story: firstly, the character should serve as the moral and ethical lighthouse of the story – therefore the character’s motivations should be reflected by his/her actions, which in turn should be stimulated by the sequence of events in the story. Secondly, the protagonist must be “good” in the way that establishes the protagonist’s moral high ground; thus the protagonist’s sufferings and elations can be better sympathized with by the viewers. Thirdly, the protagonist must be appropriate in the manner that if the character is athletic, the character should also have an athletic body. Lastly, in addition to being appropriate, the protagonist must be consistent in his behaviors, thoughts and motivations to avoid confusion in the story.

A story must embody a theme, or a setting, that is essentially the location where the story takes place, as well as an overarching theme that gives the story a wholesome understanding (for example, a story about love, a story about war – more on themes later). In addition, characters should display their individual cognitions, worldviews and natures through their actions to increase plausibility and perceived realism of their characterization.

The extension of thought is diction in which the character’s quality of speech should consistently reflect the beliefs and themes of its human nature, and uphold the morals and ethics of the story and the character. Diction can be demonstrated through dialogues and monologues as its main utility is in defining the character, driving the plot forward and revealing important information regarding events and characters throughout the story.

Carrying significant associations with the multimedia platform of film, Aristotle purports that a good drama must also contain melody. Melody therefore can increase the pleasure of a drama by contributing to its theme, introducing characters and setting the mood for the scene, which can ultimately amplify the emotional reception of the narrative by the viewers.

Lastly, spectacle refers to the visual-auditory experience of the story. In film, this may suggest costumes, settings, special effects and so forth. Aristotle contends that spectacle is the least “artistic” component as it is simply stage design, something of the ilk of icing on the cake. However in the grand scheme of crafting a compelling story, visual-auditory engagement by the audience is certainly an important component to consider.

In addition to identifying the six major elements of a good drama, Aristotle demonstrates what is known as the “Classical Unities”. Essentially, Aristotle purports that for a good drama to occur, there must be an emphasis placed on controlling for three unities: Unity of Action, Unity of Time and Unity of Place. Unity of Action refers to the logical sequential ordering of action with minimal subplots between each successive scene to avoid confusion. Unity of Time purports that the action of a story should occur over a period of 24 hours. Unity of Place means the story should strive to limit and minimize the number of settings it takes place in. The reasoning for these unities is to limit volatility and disturbances that may confuse and over-complicate the flow of the story.

Extended Transportation-Imagery Model

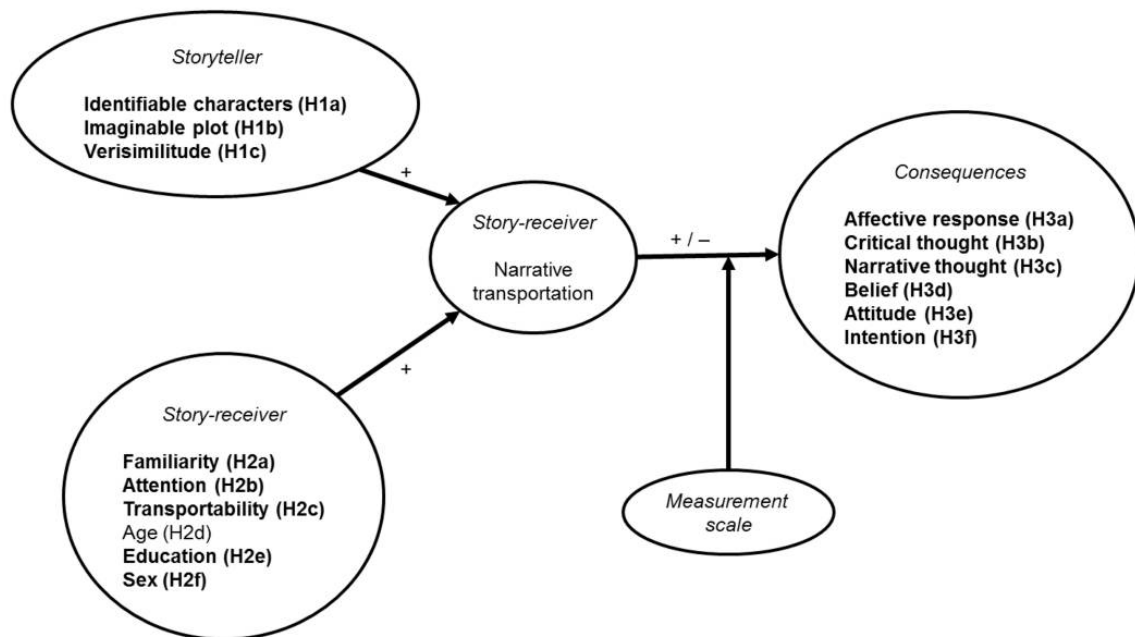


Figure 1. Extended Transportation-Imagery Model (Laer, Ruyter, Visconti & Wetzels, 2014)

For an effective story to take place, viewers must be narratively transported. In essence, “transportation entails imagery, emotional response, and attentional focus; state of cognitive and emotional immersion; completely focused on the story world, may lose track of time, fail to notice events going on around them, and experience vivid mental images of settings and characters” (Green et al., 2008). The two primary components of narrative transportation are empathy for the character which allows the viewer to feel the world as it is for the character, and mental imagery whereby the plot of the story activates the viewer’s imagination which temporarily transports them away from reality (while they construct the story’s reality in their minds) and to place themselves in the same environment as the character. Viewers who are narratively transported are more

entertained with the experience and more likely to adopt attitudes and beliefs of the narrative (Green et al., 2008).

The Extended Transportation-Imagery Model (ETIM) (Laer et al., 2014) shown in Appendix A demonstrates the determinants and consequences of narrative transportation through identifying the antecedents of the storyteller, story-receiver and the consequences of the story reception dependent on the level of narrative transportation. In terms of the antecedents for the storyteller, identifiable characters are defined as “invented personas the story receiver clearly pinpoints from the storyteller’s use of context-derived assumptions” (Laer et al., 2014), thereby aiding viewers’ ability to empathize with the characters and view the story from the characters’ emotional perspective. Given the importance of mental imagery to narrative transportation, story plots must be accessible to the viewers’ imagination. Lastly, a story must contain verisimilitude, which is defined “as the likelihood that story events may actually happen [in real life]” (Laer et al., 2014).

Considering the antecedents for the story receiver, if the viewer is more familiar with the story’s topic or genre and possess enhanced cultural knowledge, then they may experience the story on a deeper level, thus increasing narrative transportation. For example, individuals who watched a film after reading the book version first reported greater narrative transportation (Green et al., 2008). Naturally, viewers who are exposed to fewer distractions will pay more attention to the story, thus increasing narrative transportation. Transportability of individuals in their differing levels of empathetic and image-producing capabilities serve as an individual function of the level of narrative transportation the viewer can achieve. Lastly, the demographics of the story receiver can

influence the level of narrative transportation. In a study conducted by Mares, Oliver and Cantor (2008), they found that younger adults (18 – 25) are more attracted to negative emotions and therefore search for dark, creepy and violent content in films. Older adults (50 and over) are more attracted to emotional stability and therefore look for uplifting and heartwarming content. Banerjee, Greene, Krcmar, Bagdasarov and Ruginyte (2008) found that females report higher inclination for happy-mood films than their male counterparts, while no significance gender differences are found for sad-mood films. Lastly, while no significant interaction effects can be found for age, females and higher education levels are positively correlated with narrative transportation - females report higher familiarity scores and therefore narrative transportation as they're more likely to be a reader and have received higher education (Green & Brock, 2000).

While the examination of the consequences of narrative transportation exceeds the scope of this area of investigation (defining components of storytelling), it's important to describe the advantages of narrative transportation. Narrative transportation enhances viewers' responses to the narrative's affective cues and increases the congruency between the narrative and the viewers' beliefs, attitudes and intentions. On the other hand, narrative transportation decreases critical thoughts, which increases persuasiveness of the overall messages elicited by the narrative (Laer et al., 2014).

Elaboration Likelihood Model

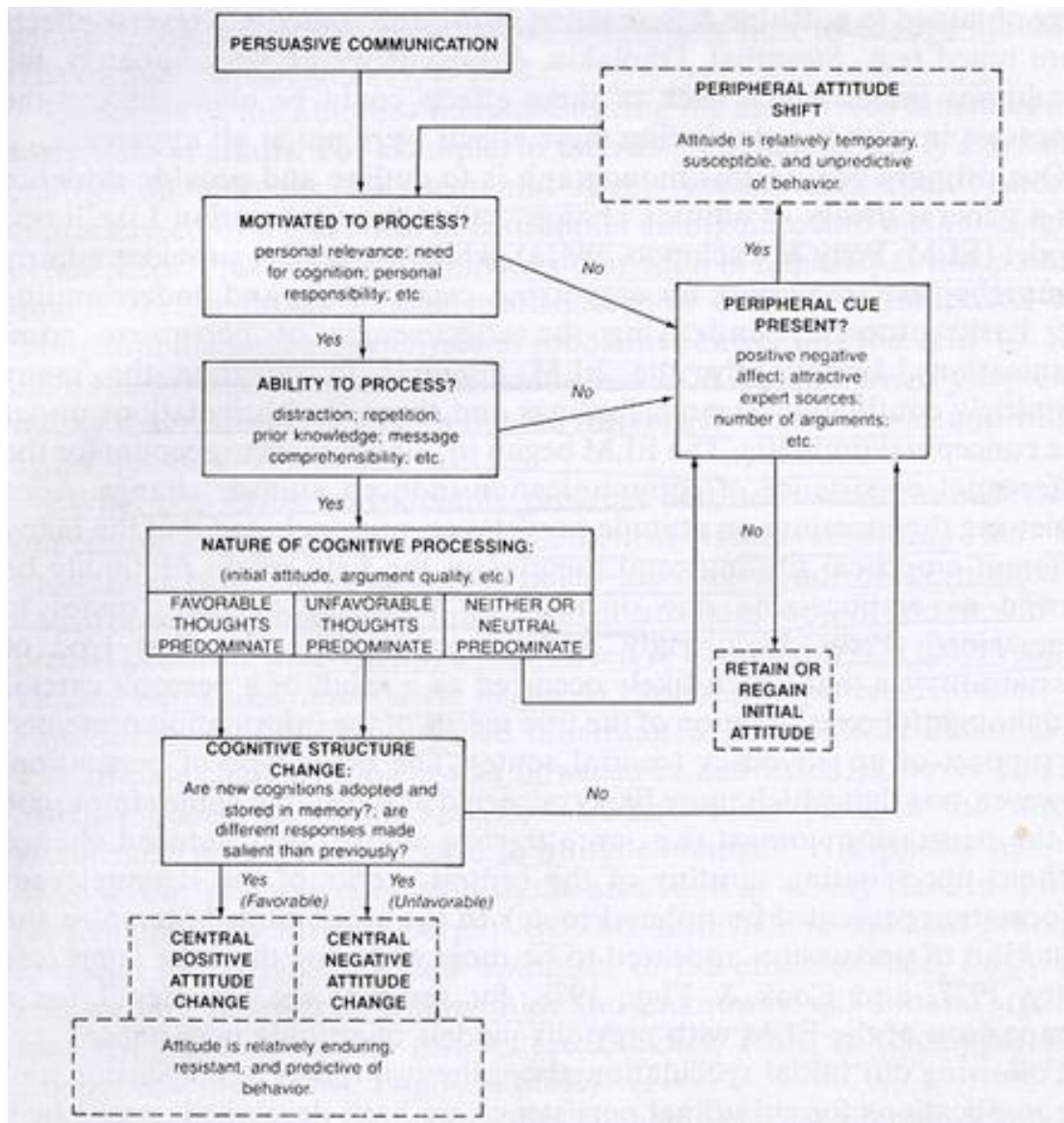


Figure 2. Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)

The intention of the storyteller is to successfully transmit messages encoded within the story to the viewers. These messages can include plot, themes and characters. In the process of identifying the determinants of a compelling movie, it is necessary to agree that compelling movies are more persuasive in the messages it tells to viewers than

dull movies. Therefore it becomes crucial for the storyteller to recognize the mechanisms of what makes a message persuasive. Green and Dill (2012) claim that an essential factor to experience the immersion of narrative transportation is through the viewer adopting new values and beliefs about the real world after their engagement with a narrative. Berliner (2013) purports that “pleasure derives from the mental activities that narration stimulates, the result not just of watching stories but of constructing stories in one’s mind”. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) accounts for the persuasion process by reasoning that more effortful elaboration of a message will lead to higher persuasiveness of the message. A point should be made that a narrative can be persuasive without the viewer choosing to adopt new beliefs, as long as the viewer engages the information via central processing. Central processing is activated “if sufficient processing motivation and ability are present” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Processing motivation is governed by the individual’s need for cognition, personal responsibility and personal relevance for the message; processing ability is governed by the message’s distractibility, repetition, prior knowledge and comprehensibility. Engagement with central processing leads to more effortful and thoughtful cognitive activities undertaken by the viewer, which results in a more enduring and stable attitude change or reinforcement by the viewer, depending on the position the viewer takes regarding the message. If insufficient processing motivation and ability are present, then the message is routed to the peripheral processing agent, in which less thoughtful cognitive activities take place and the likelihood for thought elaboration will be low.

Therefore to understand the different agents that make a message possible to be routed to the viewer’s central processing is important if we want to identify what makes a

movie more persuasive, and hence compelling. In looking at the ELM diagram, there are several variables which must be considered. Firstly, the quality of the argument put forth must be strong – to identify a strong argument from a weak one, a strong argument must generate more favorable thoughts in relation to its position by the message receiver. A weak argument will subsequently generate more unfavorable thoughts which are critical of the position of the argument. In Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) explanation of the ELM, distraction is defined as a thought disrupting agent. Green and Dill (2012) claim there is a positive correlation between narrative transportation and reduction in counterarguments, or otherwise distractions. The model postulates that if there is distraction, then the persuasiveness of the message is reduced. This is because distraction leads to more critical thoughts, which in turn will lower the likelihood of the message being elaborated. The second factor is repetition of the message – essentially Petty and Cacioppo (1986) purport that moderate and not excessive repetition will benefit viewers because it increases opportunities for viewers to process the full implications of the message, especially in instances when the message is more complex. Thirdly, the presence of personal relevant messages increases motivation for viewers to process the message more critically. This is supported by the fact that there is more at stake if the message does not agree with the viewer's prior beliefs or values, therefore driving them harder to engage in harder cognitive work to decipher the true meaning of the message. Fourthly, individual variation in needs for cognition is a function of the persuasiveness of message delivered – those that are higher in need for cognition will engage in harder cognitive work, which in turns increases the persuasiveness of the message; the otherwise can be said for those with low need for cognition. Lastly, when an individual is given more responsibility to

evaluate a message (for example, being one of four evaluators vs. one of eight evaluators), then their willingness to engage in harder cognitive work increases thus increasing the persuasiveness of the message involved.

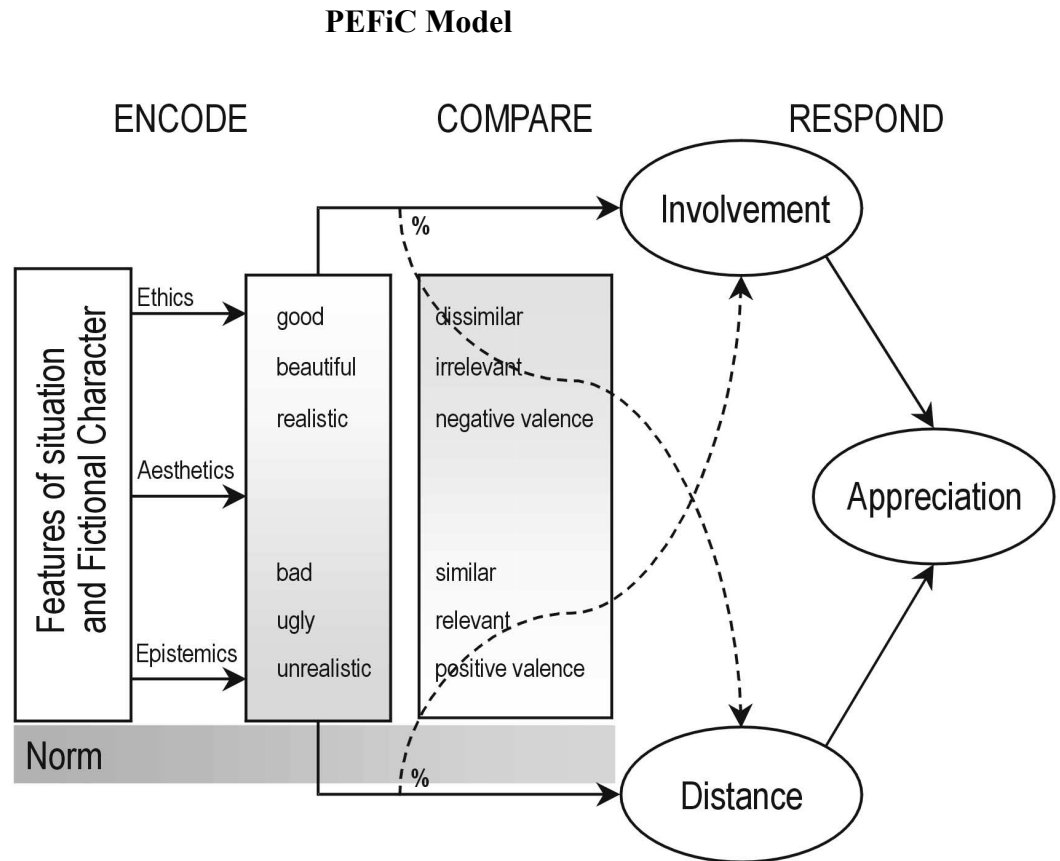


Figure 3. Graphic Representation of PEFiC Model (Konijn & Hoorn, 2009)

In most of the frameworks this paper has discussed so far, the construction of the protagonist (and other characters) and the interaction between the narrative characters and the viewers are important functions of whether a movie is compelling or dull. The Perceiving and Experiencing Fictional Character Model (PEFiC Model) serves as a lens for the aspect of character formation, in particular in a fictional sense, and identifies the

factors required for the viewer to feel involved with or distanced by the narrative character. There are three steps to this process: encode, compare and respond. In the encoding stage, the viewer makes three appraisals regarding the ethics (good or bad), aesthetics (beautiful or ugly) and epistemics (realistic or unrealistic) of the narrative character. In the compare stage, the viewer compares his perceived features of the narrative character to his own personal significance under three lenses: similarity, relevance and valence. In the respond stage, the viewer will “appreciate” the character on a continuum ranging from involvement to distance. The model purports that positive appraisals of the character (good, beautiful and realistic), who are also similar, relevant and embody a positive valence with the viewer will lead to highest involvement response. In association to storytelling, the PEFiC Model highlights two important factors: Firstly, it describes the optimum package of perceptual features a narrative character should embody. Second, it takes into consideration the “beholder’s share”, which takes into consideration the beliefs, values and personal significance of each viewer in the summation of their overall response to a narrative character.

Affective Disposition Theory

According to Zillman and Cantor’s (1977) account of the Affective Disposition Theory, “enjoyment is a function of a viewer’s emotional reactions to (a) characters, in the form of liking; (b) the successes and failures the characters encounter as the story unfolds, in the form of anticipatory hopes and fears; and (c) the ultimate outcomes experienced by the characters in the narrative resolution, in the form of pleasure or enjoyment”.

Affective Disposition Theory (ADT) purports that our enjoyment of a narrative is a function of our affective dispositions for the characters in the story and their subsequent story line outcomes. In a study conducted by Suckfüll (2009), using a heart rate monitor to identify attentional processes, she found that narrative structures associated with the protagonists lead to higher attentional processes for the viewer in contrast to general “moments of impact” in which the protagonists hold no stake in. Essentially, a postulate of the ADT holds that the viewer will always have a moral dichotomy; that is to always root for the “good” guy and not the “bad guy”. As such, the viewer forms an alliance with the “good” guy in the narrative and gains enjoyment when the “good” guy receives positive outcomes and the “bad” guy receives negative outcomes. However in more complex and modern narratives, the line dividing “good” and “bad” may become blurry – the consequence of this is the activation of story schemas of the viewers (through prior experiences with literature, films and other modes of storytelling) which in turn will aid the viewer to identify the “good” and “bad” guys in the narrative. Certainly, the notion of moral subjectivity is raised and Zillman (2000) explains that viewers act as “untiring moral monitors” who render moral judgments of characters in the narratives which are partially dependent on the initial moral judgments they made about the character and the viewers’ idiosyncratic story schemas they’ve accumulated over their lifetime. The leniency lent towards this form of moral judgment gives rise to the role of moral justification, and its relationship to the overall enjoyment of a narrative. As discussed previously, ADT purports that viewers gain enjoyment when “good” guys in the narrative they have formed an alliance with are given positive outcomes, the opposite situation for the “bad” guys. However, a second level of enjoyment comes from the viewers’ moral

justifications for the characters they deem “good” even in moments when their actions say otherwise – Raney (2004) calls this mechanism “selective perception”, when viewers “reinterpret media messages in a way that serves to maintain existing beliefs and attitudes”. Therefore after identifying the “good” and “bad” guys of the narrative, viewers gain enjoyment by their willingness and desire to render moral justifications to the characters they support and hate.

This portion of the investigation firstly establishes a backbone for constructing a narrative through Aristotle’s six elements of drama and classical unities. Secondly, the paper dissected what a compelling narrative needs to contain in terms of central psychological theories in narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment. Thirdly, the paper explored several models that account for the aforementioned psychological theories in the ETIM, ELM, PEFiC Model and ADT. The next section of this paper will focus on identifying the major frameworks of cinematic storytelling and exploring exclusive cinematic features that can progress a movie.

Major Frameworks of Cinematic Storytelling

Now that the first lens of successfully constructing a compelling narrative has been uncovered, the next section will focus on identifying tools and features exclusive to cinematic storytelling that can increase the compelling nature of a film. This will result in an extension of our current findings from constructing a compelling narrative to constructing a compelling narrative through the modality of film. The section will begin by highlighting some exclusive advantages that film holds as a story medium. Next, a

discussion of the Three Act Structure will serve as a backbone for narratives told through film; this will sit nicely on top of Aristotle's six elements of drama and classical unities as a tool for structuring and maximizing the effects of the narrative. A discussion of the Intention-Sensation, Knowledge, and Emotion Model will illustrate the importance of the interaction between the filmmaker's intentions and the viewers' idiosyncrasies. Lastly, an examination of psychological theories pertaining to visual activity and melody will aid the development of a robust model that can take advantage of the exclusive advantages offered by cinematic storytelling.

Advantages of Film as a Story Medium

In deciding the best medium for telling a story, it's important to consider two components that influence narrative transportation: vividness and effort (Green et al., 2008). For example, in comparison between film and print, film is more vivid in terms of the information it gives out due to its audio and visual nature of output. Specifically, given our previous discussion of narrative transportation, empathy and mental imagery, films provide viewers with a fully fleshed out concept of the narrative imagery thereby easing the transition of the viewer to be transported into the narrative world. Secondly, the audio nature of films can enhance the construction of the narrative world for the viewers, heightening affective responses through the implementation of mood accompaniment and developing richer characterizations which can positively influence the emphatic qualities of the film (Green et al., 2008). The use of film can also serve as a control agent for the idiosyncratic levels of transportability in viewers; for example, a viewer who has low image-producing capability will experience higher narrative transportation through film than print.

In terms of effort, its effects are debatable for films. One can argue that films in contrast to print require less effort as everything is generously presented to the viewer. However another possibility is that while print is more likely to explicitly demonstrate the thoughts and narratives of the characters and story, films are more implicit in that the viewer must take into consideration non-verbal cues of characters to gauge their motivations and reactions. In both cases, while the extent of processing effort required between film and print is arguable, there is agreement that films require at least a certain level of processing effort, which ultimately positively affects the viewer's level of narrative transportation.

Three Act Structure

In screenwriting, most modern writers abide to the Three Act Structure in which a story is split into three parts: The Setup, the Confrontation and the Resolution. The Three Act Structure cleanly organizes a film to maximize the effects of building momentum, raising the stakes and release at the climax. The Setup illustrates the world or status quo that the story takes place in, as well as the characters and the relationships they share. The protagonist then experiences an Inciting Incident which escalates to the First Turning Point – the point at which the protagonist faces the emergence of a major conflict that will forever change the status quo of his/her world. The emergence of the major conflict cues for the break of the first act and will ultimately be answered in the Resolution.

The Confrontation refers to the period of time when the protagonist attempts to deal with the confronting problem initiated in the first act. However, the situation worsens as the protagonist attempts to deal with the problem as he/she has not developed

adequate skills to face and conquer the antagonism that confronts him/her. This is usually represented in a dark manner in which the character must go through trials and tribulations to arrive at a higher self-awareness and ultimately undergo a transformation that is required for the completion of the journey.

The Resolution occurs when the protagonist confronts his/her antagonist with an improved and different sense of self in contrast to the first act. The Resolution reaches its climax when the main tensions of the story are brought to its pinnacle and the overarching confronting problem initiated in the Setup is resolved. The story ends with the protagonist achieving enlightenment and a higher sense of understanding of the self.

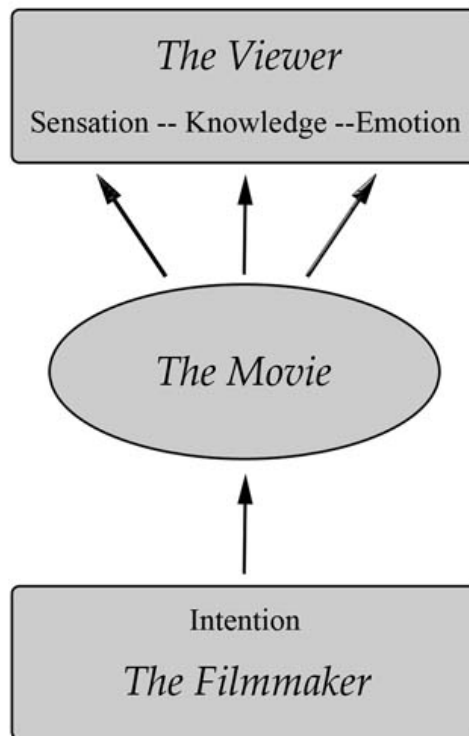
I-SKE Model

Figure 4. I-SKE Model (Shimamura, 2013)

The Intention – Sensation, Knowledge and Emotion (I-SKE) Model developed by Arthur Shimamura, a professor of psychology at UC Berkeley, is used to theorize the interactions of processes in the viewer’s movie watching experience. In what he claims as the “beholder’s share”, a movie draws upon half storytelling and half simulation of how the viewer experiences his/her subjective world. The movie begins with the intentions of the filmmaker in all regards (story, cinematic features etc.) and completes with the immersion of cultural knowledge, prior experiences and idiosyncratic natures of each viewer. Because viewers have “different life experiences, levels of maturity, and degrees of patience, the concerns and contruals displayed by movie narratives must be interesting, accessible, exaggerated, and compact” (Plantinga, 2013). According to this framework of

movie engagement, narrative transportation is at its highest when the viewer's sensation, knowledge and emotion are maximized. Thus by recognizing different methods that can enhance the "beholder's share", we can develop a stronger model that can maximize the viewers' level of narrative transportation in a movie experience (Shimamura, 2013).

Visual Activity

Constructing the different pictures and scenes that viewers experience is probably the most important and distinguishing factor of filmmaking. Therefore this paper will refer to this process as visual activity. Movement (all types of action) drives attention (Shimamura, 2013). In film theory, there are two types of visual activity. The first is motion in which the subject in front of the camera engages in action. The second is movement in which the camera shooting the subject engages in action (pan, close-up etc.). Visual activity serves to mimic real life on the silver screen, therefore careful allocations of motions and movements by the director and cinematographer can control the way viewers perceive and understand a movie. Interestingly, visual activity is very distinguishable by its genre – for example, action and adventure films tend to embody higher levels of visual activity than other genres (Brunick, Cutting & DeLong, 2013). In a study conducted by Visch and Tan (2007), they found that scenes of high velocity elicit a comical response from viewers whereas scenes of low velocity elicit a dramatic response from viewers. In addition to its ability to signify a genre, visual activity is also associated with levels of memory; "viewers of an action film like *Die Hard 2* (1990) tend to remember the so-called high-octane sequences with more vividness, such as the sequence where John McClane, [the protagonist of the movie] leaps from a circular helicopter to engage the traitorous Colonel Stuart in combat on the wing of his escape plane. We tend

to remember less from low-action sequences, though these tend to dominate the movie.” (Brunick et al., 2013). Lastly, variations in visual activity can also be used to aid viewers in parsing event sequencing in the movie. For example, fine grained events are marked by an increase in motion where scene boundaries are marked by an increase in movement. In terms of color use, Chen, Wu and Lin (2012) found that action films tend to have lower contrast and brightness and are rich in red, green, yellow and blue. The role of shot duration plays an important role in storytelling through the modality of film. Shot duration controls how much information we can extract and encode from a single shot; the briefer the shot, the less information we can extract and encode. The average shot duration (ASD) over the years in Hollywood from 1913 to 2006 has decreased in a linear fashion (Salt, 2009). The reason for this may be due to increasing demand and production of action films. Since shot duration affects the tempo and pace of the movie, short shots are clustered together to form action scenes whereas long shots are clustered together to form dramatic sequences (Cutting, 2010).

Melody

The visual-audio processing nature of film sets it apart from other modes of storytelling, therefore it serves a particular importance to investigate not only what’s happening on the silver screen, but also the accompanying sounds that arrives with each picture. An indicator of whether the viewer is narratively transported, persuaded and has enjoyed the movie is how much they can recall the movie after watching it – the more of an impression the movie made on the viewer, the more likely the viewer will remember the filmed events. In a study conducted by Boltz, Schulkind and Kantra (1991), they found that mood-incongruent music played as a foreshadowing agent to a particular scene

of affect increases recall from viewers; on the other hand, mood-congruent music played as an accompanying agent to a scene of affect increases recall from viewers. Partially agreeing with the previous study, Costabile and Terman (2013) found that background music congruent to the film's affective tone increases psychological transportation and persuasiveness of film. In a study conducted by Carpentier and Potter (2007), they found using skin conductance response that fast-paced music activates higher sympathetic arousal than low-paced music; in addition, high-paced classical music leads to higher sympathetic arousal than that of rock music and low-paced rock music leads to a more significant decrease in sympathetic arousal than low-paced classical music. In terms of a character's likeability and the viewer's certainty of the character's thoughts, Hoeckner, Wyatt, Decety and Nusbaum (2011) found that thriller music when accompanying a scene with a character, led to lower likeability and certainty about the character's thoughts when compared to melodramatic music; in recalling the scene, thriller music led to increased anger attributions and decreased sadness attributions whereas melodramatic music increased love attributions and decreased fear attributions.

In this section of the investigation, the paper identified major frameworks related exclusively to storytelling through the modality of film. The utility of such cinematic features can be used in conjunction with our findings regarding central psychological theories to develop a more robust model pertaining to crafting a compelling action hero movie. The introduction of the Three Act Structure now gives our narrative a structure that is appropriate for the silver screen. In addition, the I-SKE Model illustrates the importance of catering to the idiosyncrasies of the viewers, which will play a crucial part in the prescriptive model. Lastly, the visual-audio nature of film sets it apart from other

storytelling mediums therefore understanding how to manipulate visual activity and melody of a film based on empirical evidence will aid the development of a strong model. The next section will focus on major frameworks pertaining to hero development and profiles. The findings will complete the background research required to fully answer the research question of this paper.

Major Frameworks of Hero Development and Profiles

Insofar, the paper has established major frameworks regarding the successful construction of a narrative through the modality of film. Therefore the last aspect required of our research question is still amiss – what makes a compelling action hero in an action hero movie? This section of the paper will shift its focus towards the necessary frameworks surrounding the development of the hero and the different profiles that a hero can take. Firstly, a discussion of Joseph Campbell’s (2008) “Hero’s Journey” gives flesh to the narrative, weaving between the organs of Aristotle’s six elements of drama and classical unities and the backbone of the Three Act Structure. The following sections will examine the psychological research surrounding the core types of heroes, fictional heroes vs non-fictional heroes and the role of the underdog which will ultimately paint a clearer picture as to the different avenues the filmmaker can take to develop and build the hero of the narrative.

The Hero’s Journey

In developing his theory of the human psyche, Carl Jung put forth his idea of the collective unconscious. In contrast to the idea of the personal unconscious by Sigmund Freud, “where the concept of the unconscious was limited to denoting the state of

repressed or forgotten contents” (Jung & Hull, 1980) of an individual, the collective unconscious belongs not on an individual basis but universally, “it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us” (Jung & Hull, 1980). Thus the collective unconscious is something that resides in all of our psyches through a process of evolutionary heredity, in which certain figures, ideas and thoughts hold particular significance and familiarity when brought into our consciousness. The development of the collective unconscious led to Jung’s theorizing of the 12 core archetypes, the Hero being one of the 12. Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious is also similar to the Universal Narrative Prototypes coined by Patrick Colm Hogan in which he purports three archetypal themes of stories that draws upon our primary emotions: The Romantic (a story regarding romantic union), the heroic (domination and/or survival) and the sacrificial (triumph of life) (Plantinga, 2013). Therefore one can infer the particular psychic importance of the Hero – perhaps this has something to do with the modern obsession with Hero movies.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2008), Joseph Campbell extends Jung’s conceptualization of the archetypes and illustrates the universal story or quest that a character must endure to become a hero – Campbell called this the “Hero’s Journey”, or the “Monomyth”. Interesting, the Hero’s Journey is perceived as a necessary and important component of modern day cinema – George Lucas notably referred to Campbell’s work during his creation of *Star Wars*.

There are three components to the Hero's Journey: The Departure, the Initiation and the Return. The Departure begins with The Call to Adventure when the protagonist is prompted with the opportunity to leave his place of habit and venture into the unknown. The Refusal of the Call follows as the protagonist declines the prompt to venture into the unknown due to personal fears or existing obligations. Through some sort of process, the protagonist commits to the adventure and a guide (metaphysical or physical) will become known to the protagonist, this is known as Supernatural Aid. The Crossing of the First Threshold describes the point at which the protagonist leaves the known and comfortable limits of his world and ventures into the unknown. The Belly of the Whale refers to the final stages of separation that the protagonist experiences between his known world and the unknown – it is usually a dark period where the protagonist relinquishes any associations he has made with his old world and ventures into the unknown with the willingness to experience a profound metamorphosis.

The Initiation embodies the part of the journey when the protagonist must experience physical and spiritual tribulations to prove his worth as a hero. It begins with the Road of Trials, where the protagonist will fail in the first few tests of his worth. The Meeting with the Goddess illustrates the point of adventure when the protagonist meets an entity (may or may not be a woman) that provides a powerful and unconditional love – consequently, the protagonist begins to form a bond with the entity. The Woman and the Temptress ensues in which the protagonist tackles the temptations of his mortal desires (the loving entity) with the immortality of his spiritual journey. The protagonist then experiences the center point of the journey called the Atonement with the Father where he confronts the entity that holds the most power/fear over his life; a significant

transformation occurs at this point which leads to the protagonist becoming the hero.

After the protagonist's transformation into the hero, the Apotheosis occurs in which the protagonist moves from his prior realm to a higher realm of knowledge – reaching an ethereal level of love, bliss and compassion. The Initiation concludes with the Ultimate Boon, in which the hero has achieved the goals of his quest.

The Return begins with the Refusal of the Return in which the hero tackles his desire to stay in the higher realm. In cases where the retrieval of an object is part of the protagonist's mission, The Magic Flight will be the adventure needed to escape the higher realm. The Rescue from Without occurs when the hero receives guidance and assistance to return back to his previous realm. The Cross of the Return Threshold deals with the conundrum of integrating the wisdom the hero gained through his journey and implementing them with the rest of his world. The Hero is marked as the Master of the Two Worlds when he achieves a balance between his old realm and the higher realm. The last stage is the Freedom to Live in which the Hero lives with a new vigor and energy due to all that he's experienced.

Three Core Types of Heroes

In light of the pervading variation and ambiguity of views pertaining to the constitutions of heroes in current literature, Franco, Blau and Zimbardo (2011) set out to comprehensively define the different types of heroism. In their investigation, they identified three core types of heroes: martial heroes, civil heroes and social heroes. Appendix A demonstrates the descriptions and situations for each core type of heroes. Martial heroes are individuals bound to a code of conduct (paramedics, firefighters, policemen etc.) who are willing to take bold actions in the face of unfavorable events and

put their lives in danger for the benefit of others. Civil heroes are comparative to martial heroes in their willingness to take bold and courageous actions in the face of their peers; the difference is that civil heroes are not bound to a code of conduct, thus an individual fighting off a ward of thugs mugging a victim is an act of civil heroism. Social heroes differ from martial and civil Heroes in that physical peril plays less of an important role. In contrast, there are considerable risks in other aspects of life for the social hero such as significant financial loss, loss of social status, social ostracism etc. Their mission is to uphold or rebel against certain moral ideals. A good example of a social hero is Martin Luther King in his social struggle for racial equality in the United States.

The findings of the study can be used as a potential framework for the development of heroic characters. First off, the study clearly distinguishes fundamental differences between heroism and altruism; through a survey, the respondents significantly agree that “altruism seems to involve helping a group of people directly – there is a sacrifice, but it is more sharing what you have than sacrificing yourself... While heroic acts are always in some sense altruistic, an act of altruism isn’t always heroic” (Franco, Blau & Zimbardo, 2011). The study found that respondents reacted to cases of civil heroism more favorable (viewed the acts as more “heroic” than “altruistic”) than martial heroism. Thus the study concludes that current perceptions ascribe more heroic value to acts of heroism when there is no specific duty to serve. Interestingly, they also found that heroes with a dark background (criminality) can be reappraised as hero figures if they act in certain heroic manners. Respondents generally rated acts of social heroism as less heroic than civil or martial heroism: only four subtypes of social heroism received predominant heroic ratings by respondents – politico-religious figures, good Samaritans,

individuals fighting an unjust bureaucracy and whistleblowers. Ultimately, the study found that martial and civil heroes who encounter physical perils in their acts of heroism are consistently rated more heroic than social heroes who undergo social sacrifices for a moral good.

Fiction vs Non-fiction

In “Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them” written by Allison and Goethals (2010), the authors conducted a study to investigate differences in moral judgments for fictional and non-fictional heroes and villains. For example, a score of 10 means the character under question is “extremely good” and a score of 0 means the character is “extremely bad”. They began the study by randomly selecting 10 fictional heroes, 10 fictional villains, 10 non-fictional heroes and 10 non-fictional villains. 75 participants were then asked to rate each character by the scale aforementioned. Their results showed that fictional heroes and villains were rated significantly higher and lower, respectively, than their non-fictional counterparts. The rationale they gave was that fictional heroes afforded the creators the freedom to draw upon and synthesize different prototypical traits of archetypal heroes and villains that most effectively represent the best and worst of humanity.

Underdog

Considering the previous discussion of Joseph Campbell’s (2008) Hero’s Journey and the importance for the hero to conquer adversities, this section will now examine the role of the underdog in the context of hero stories. Are the most effective and identifiable heroes underdogs? Perhaps one of the earliest underdog stories, David versus Goliath

demonstrates a certain archetypal human understanding and sympathy for the underdog story. In “Rooting for (and Then Abandoning) the Underdog” (Kim et al., 2008), their study gives five plausible rationales for this particular endearment. Firstly, rooting for the underdog is seen as unconventional and for the individual who seeks to be unique, rooting for the underdog is certainly an endearing option. Secondly, individuals may root for the underdog due to the projection of their individual moral compass of what is fair. Thirdly, individuals may identify with the underdog in the way that its success over adversity will lead to greater optimism and hope for the individual. Fourthly, a story about an unlikely hero overcoming seemingly impossible obstacles makes for a steeper story arc, which in turns leads to more effective entertainment. Lastly, there are minimal costs to rooting for the underdog as the underdog is expected to lose, therefore their success will lead to a higher reward in positive emotions (Allison & Goethals, 2010).

The findings of this study demonstrate the human tendency to root for the underdog. In the study, participants sat in front of a computer screen which showed a ball traversing along a horizontal line and over a hill at the mid-point (as shown below)



Figure 5. The position of a circle as it struggles to traverse an obstacle (Kim et al., 2008)

There were four conditions: The first showed the ball going over the hill at the same speed it went along the horizontal path. The second showed the ball noticeably decelerating as it traversed over the hill. The third showed the ball noticeably

decelerating as it traversed over the hill while a second ball went over the hill at the same speed it went along the horizontal path. The fourth showed not only the second ball passing the first ball, but also the second ball bumping the first ball back down the hill.

When asked to rate how much they liked and sympathized for each ball, the participants liked the ball that was struggling up the hill more than the ball that maintained its speed. Secondly, the participants displayed even stronger liking for the first ball when it was overtaken by the second ball. Lastly, the participants showed strongest liking and sympathy for the first ball when it was struggling over the hill but was bumped down the hill by the second ball; consequently, the participants rated strongest dislike for the second ball.

In addition to confirming the phenomenon of rooting for the underdog, the study also found limitations to its effect. Essentially, we only root for the underdog if it has minimal impact on our lives, if the underdogs are expending maximum effort to perform at their highest level and if the underdogs have an unlikely but possible chance of success. The study also made it clear that while emotional support for the underdog was present, it did not directly reflect the respect it garnered – work by the underdog was seen as inferior to the top dog, until the point it reached success (Allison & Goethals, 2010).

This section concludes the literature review required to prescribe a model that can adequately answer the research question of the paper. The Hero's Journey serves as the flesh to the plot, providing ample creative freedom for the filmmaker to establish different scenarios that can satisfy every checkpoint of the journey while remaining unique story wise. The findings regarding the three core types of heroes illuminate the

prototypical hero profiles shared by the public and can aid the filmmaker in creating a universally identifiable and admired hero. Lastly, the findings regarding fictional heroes and the role of the underdog offer the filmmaker a level of depth to utilize when building the hero. The next section of the paper will combine the major frameworks identified in the past three sections to develop a prescriptive model that will account the antecedents required to craft a compelling action hero movie.

Prescriptive Model: PCTMS - NTPE Model

Scope of Model

As previously discussed, the “organs” of the narrative consist of Aristotle’s six elements of drama and classical unities. This narrative structure is considered the leading framework for creating a narrative picture in Hollywood (Isbouts & Ohler, 2011) and therefore will be reflected as the first order organization of the model. This will involve plot, character/diction, theme, melody and spectacle. The model will combine character and diction since diction can be interpreted as an extension of the character, and therefore can be synergized for simplicity. Within each element, the model will identify antecedents based on major frameworks discussed in the previous sections that lead to narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment of a compelling action hero movie. A note to highlight is this model takes the “beholder’s share” and transfers it to the construction of each Aristotelian element. So for example, if a certain age range of viewers are more attracted to an aspect of a film, this point will be demonstrated as a key element in the construction of the plot, rather than an individual antecedent of the viewer. Using major frameworks identified in previous sections of this paper, the model will

provide an empirical and theoretical justification of the key elements required to create a compelling action hero movie. What should be made clear is that this model will provide several avenues for the filmmaker to use as a prescriptive tool for filmmakers and other interested individuals to use after they've chosen a particular demographic target or intention to pursue. For example, if the filmmaker is targeting a younger demographic, this model will provide certain empirically tested avenues for the filmmaker to explore; likewise for if the filmmaker is targeting an older demographic.

PCTMS-NTPE Model

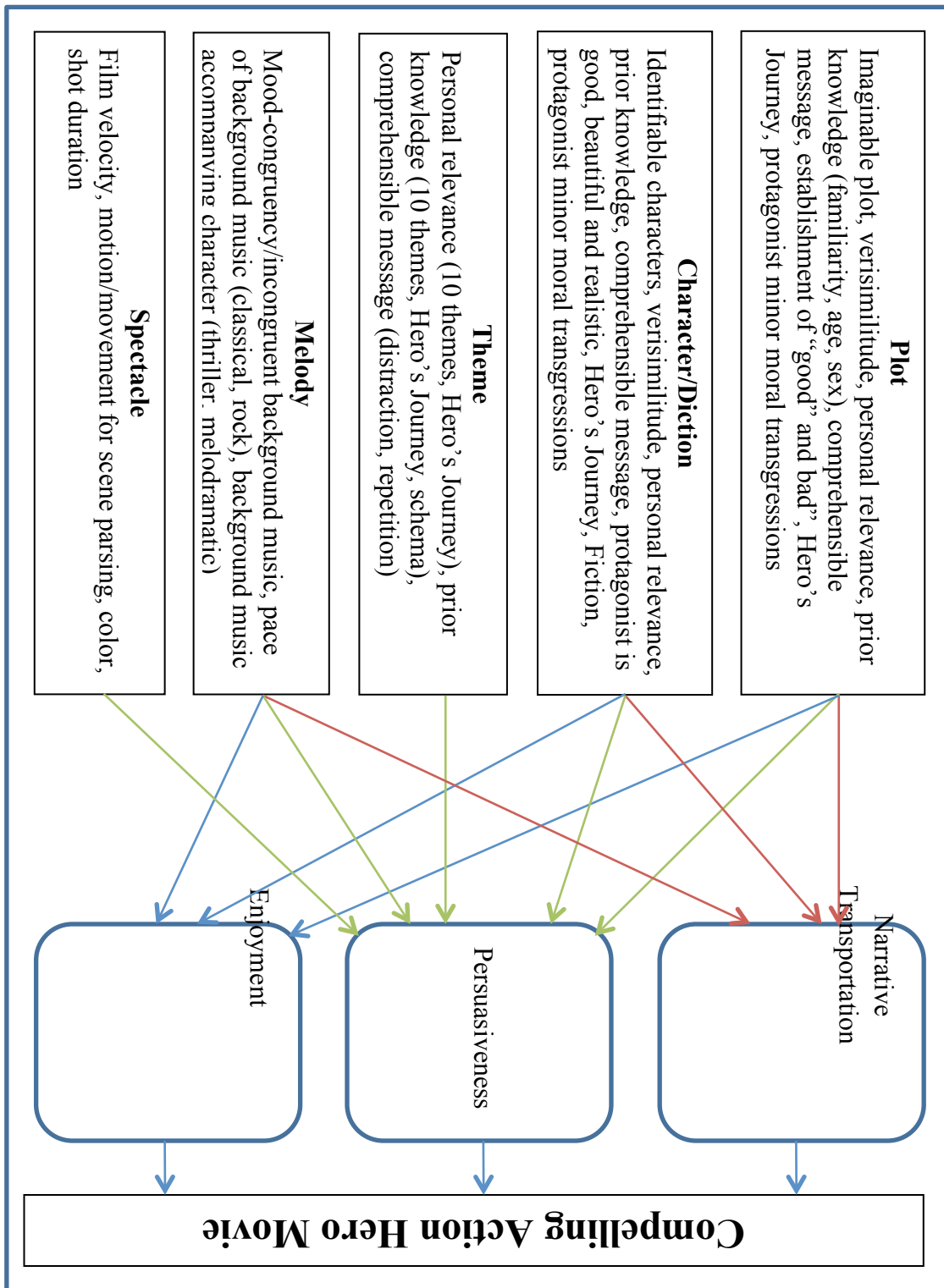


Figure 6. Graphical illustration of the PCTMS-NTPE Model

Key Elements of Plot

While the plot of movies will inevitably differ from one another, using empirical frameworks identified in previous sections of this paper, this model will draw upon essential elements that are needed to craft the plot of a compelling action hero movie. As previously discussed, a “compelling” movie is a movie that can successfully transport the viewers. Using this foundation as inference, the model prescribes the use of the Extended Transportation-Imagery Model (ETIM) to determine certain criteria for the plot. Firstly, the plot should be crafted in a way that can be imaginable. The visual nature of film will certainly aid this process, however having an imaginable (not excessively abstract) plot will ease the process for the viewer to further construct mental imagery for the film, which in turn increases the likelihood for the viewer to become transported. This means the plot should be logical and coherent to follow, and this can be aided by Aristotle’s Classical Unities, the Three Act Structure and the Hero’s Journey. The second recommendation based on the ETIM is for the plot to embody verisimilitude, defined as the “likelihood that story events may actually happen” (Laer et al., 2014) or “lifelikeness”. While this doesn’t mean filmmakers should stray from imagination beyond the scope of the real world (think Superman, Spiderman, Batman etc.), story events such as the struggle of the hero, romantic interests of the hero and the fight between the hero and the antagonist should be easily accessible to the viewer and be fundamentally realistic, beneath the cover of fantastical colorings. In addition, the essence of cinema (darkroom, minimal distraction and visual aid) controls for transportability and attention of the viewer.

In terms of increasing the plot's persuasiveness, using the ELM, the model recommends the plot to hold personal relevance, prior knowledge (in the form of familiarity in respects to the viewer's age and sex) and effective message comprehensibility. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) inferred from previous research that personal relevance means that the issue under question has significant consequences to the viewers' personal lives. In this case, the filmmaker can take several approaches as personal relevance can be quite subjective to the demographic the filmmaker is trying to target. For example, "American Sniper" which debuted in 2015 and grossed over \$540 million worldwide (the highest grossing film of 2014 in the United States), was so successful partially due to its high personal relevance. The last decade of American history witnessed the return of troops from the Middle-East and the issues of broken families and PTSD rising to national consciousness. Given this demographic, which also encapsulates veterans of different deployments and patriotic American citizens, and their desires to find meaning in the war abroad, "American Sniper" successfully captures this "personal relevance" and this is reflected by its wide-acclaimed success. According to the ELM, the presence of such a challenging and personal issue to many Americans forces them to engage in higher cognitive work when watching the film, which in turn activates their central processing and makes the messages contained in "American Sniper" more persuasive to the viewer. Like personal relevance, the film should encompass prior knowledge that the viewer can access – this part of the model will combine aspects of the ETIM which includes familiarity, age and sex to define prior knowledge. In a study conducted by Green et al. (2008), they found that viewers who watched a movie after reading its book version reported significantly higher levels of narrative transportation.

This agrees with ELM such that little prior knowledge results in lower likelihood the viewer will engage in higher cognitive work, which in turns reduces the persuasiveness of the subject (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Therefore this model recommends the filmmaker to pick a plot that is familiar to a wide range of viewers; for example, Batman, Superman, Harry Potter etc. – all of which are originally print and then adapted into screenplay. According to Green and Brock (2000), females are more likely to be readers therefore attention paid towards the types of books they read (The Hunger Games, Twilight, Divergent etc.) can benefit the narrative transportation and persuasiveness of the movie if the filmmaker is targeting the female demographic. In the same study, the plot should elicit more negative emotions through dark, creepy and violent contents if the filmmaker is targeting a demographic between the ages of 18 and 25 –this particular demographic is also more exposed to comic book heroes such as Batman, Spiderman and Ironman etc. If the filmmaker is targeting an older demographic (50 years or older), then the plot should reflect more uplifting and heartwarming content to elicit a sense of emotional stability (Mares, Oliver & Cantor, 2008). Lastly, the plot should have clear and high quality messages to increase persuasiveness – this means that the viewer must respond with more favorable thoughts (and less critical thoughts) to the messages contained in the plot. Aristotle’s classical unities (Unity of Action, Unity of Time and Unity of Place) and the three act structure (The Setup, the Confrontation and the Resolution) can be used here to limit volatility and disturbances that may confuse and over-complicate the flow of the story.

The third criterion for a “compelling” action hero movie, as defined by this paper, is enjoyment. The Affective Disposition Theory states that viewers engage in more

enjoyment when positive outcomes happen for “good” characters. For this to happen, there must be a clear distinction of a morally “good” and morally “bad” character at the beginning of the film. According to Allison & Goethals (2011) this can be aided by introducing the “good” character with a morally “good” action, and likewise for a morally “bad” character (a fireman saving a kitten and a villain murdering an innocent victim, at its most elementary form). The use of the Hero’s Journey (which will be discussed in the next section) can enhance the alliance formed between the viewer and the protagonist and guarantee positive outcomes for the protagonist, which will ultimately increase the viewer’s enjoyment according to ADT. Once the moral dilemma has been solved by the viewer, the plot should include moments when the morally “good” character does questionable actions – according to ADT, the moral justification experienced by the viewer further increases their enjoyment of the narrative.

Key Elements of Character/Diction

For successful narrative transportation to occur, the protagonist should be identifiable and elicit verisimilitude, according to ETIM. Laer et al. (2014) infer the definition of identifiability of characters from previous research as the property a character must embody that allows the viewer to feel and experience the character’s world in the same way. Therefore to successfully identify with a character, the viewer must first form a bond with the character. However just like human relationships, a bond between two individuals is not guaranteed; there are many variables that mediate this relationship. One variable that this model can control for is wishful identification, which is defined as the desire of the viewer to become and act like the character. Our literature analyses reveal that men identify with male characters that are successful, intelligent and

violent and women identify with female characters that are successful, intelligent, attractive and admired (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2009). Depending on the target demographic of the filmmaker, the hero should embody these traits. The prescribed model recommends the hero to be an underdog to increase its identifiability with the viewer, which in turn will increase narrative transportation. In addition, the hero should elicit verisimilitude – this doesn't mean that the hero cannot be a fictional superhero but more so the context of the narrative should support and strengthen the hero's particular position no matter how fantastical.

In a movie, characters carry many messages such as their morality, worldview, personality and what they stand for etc. Therefore to increase the persuasiveness of the messages carried by the protagonist in the narrative, this model recommends the construction of the protagonist to demonstrate personal relevance and prior knowledge to the viewers, and have clear message comprehensibility under the basis of ELM. Drawing upon Jung's archetypes, the hero is an embedded character in the collective unconscious and therefore elicits a subconscious level of personal relevance and prior knowledge to the viewers. To strengthen both the personal relevance and prior knowledge of the protagonist, this model recommends the hero to undergo the Hero's Journey (The Departure, the Initiation and the Return). According to the PEFiC model, the level of involvement (or identification) of the viewer and the character hinges upon the features of the character and the idiosyncratic nature of the viewer. Given the difficulty of controlling for the latter factor, the model recommends the character to be good, beautiful and realistic at the very least. In terms of demonstrating prior knowledge, the hero should be familiar to the viewer such that the movie is not the first introduction of the hero

(Batman, Spiderman, Iron man etc. are all introduced in comics before their appearances in films). Secondly, the findings of the study conducted by Franco, Blau and Zimbardo (2011) demonstrate a strong character schema for three core types of heroes which strengthen the prior knowledge of the protagonist in its construction. This model therefore recommends the protagonist to be a martial hero, civil hero or a social hero (see Appendix A). The consequence of these two recommendations is increased personal relevance and prior knowledge of the protagonist, which leads to higher persuasiveness of messages carried by the protagonist throughout the narrative. To increase message comprehensibility, the filmmaker should take into consideration two factors grounded by the ELM: distraction and repetition. The problem of reducing distraction and increasing repetition can be alleviated by Aristotle's Unity of Action as well as Aristotle's postulate that the protagonist should be appropriate and consistent in his behaviors, appearance and thoughts. Lastly, the positive consequence of the ADT (increased enjoyment) can be enhanced by the Hero's Journey, as ultimately the hero is given a positive outcome at the very end. The establishment of the hero as "good" from the beginning is an important aspect of ADT – our research reveals that a fictional hero is rated more morally "good" than a non-fictional hero; therefore this model recommends the use of a fictional hero. In addition, the hero should experience minor moral transgression throughout the plot – showing Byronic qualities – which ultimately increases moral justifications from the viewer and increase enjoyment according to ADT.

Key Elements of Theme

According to Cron (2012), theme defines the subjective perspective of the storyteller regarding a certain aspect of the human condition. Hollywood in particular has

a formulaic usage of cinematic themes. According to The Script Lab (2015), a widely used online resource for professional screenwriters in the Hollywood industry, these are 10 central themes that can be found in most Hollywood movies: man vs nature, man vs self, loss of innocence, revenge, death as a part of life, the battle, individual vs society, triumph over adversity, love conquers all and good vs evil. One can infer that most narratives tell a story that wraps around at least one of the aforementioned themes (Catcher of the Rye – individual vs society/ loss of innocence, Matrix – man vs nature/ man vs self/ death as a part of life, Apocalypse Now – man vs self/individual vs society/ good vs evil etc.). Therefore given the heavy and empirically successful applications of the aforementioned themes, this model prescribes the use of at least one of the aforementioned themes when crafting a “compelling” action hero movie. One should note that the Hero’s Journey follows the central theme of man vs self.

The theme is the central focus of the movie; it is also the main message the filmmaker intends to make, therefore the theme should be made as persuasive as possible. Using the ELM, the prescribed model will demonstrate the required constitutions needed for the theme to maximize persuasiveness. Firstly, the theme can embody personal relevance by applying one of the ten regularly employed Hollywood cinematic themes described in the previous paragraph. The heavy application of the aforementioned themes illuminate two ideas: the undeniable attraction towards the aforementioned themes by viewers and the creation of a schema given its wide application of use. The latter point demonstrates a second ELM requirement that the theme must contain prior knowledge. Perhaps most importantly, the theme should be clear and comprehensible; this can be achieved by reducing distraction and increasing repetition. To limit distraction is to

simply be consistent and realistic with the theme so that it leads to reduction in counter-argument by the viewer. To increase repetition is to ensure that every sequence of the film contributes to the development, understanding and resolve of the theme. By taking into consideration these factors, the theme will entail a higher likelihood for elaboration, which in turn will lead to greater persuasion.

Key Elements of Melody

The PCTMS – NTPE model prescribes four methods of manipulating background melody in the crafting of a “compelling” action hero movie. Firstly, background melody should be congruent to the affect of the scene when accompanying it – our research demonstrates the effect of this method to increase psychological transportation and narrative persuasion. However when the background music is used to foreshadow scenes, mood incongruent music should be used as Boltz et al. (1991) show that this will lead to greater recall by the viewers, inferring higher attention processing by the viewer which consequently increases narrative transportation. Thirdly, the filmmaker can use high-paced music to increase attentional processing by viewers; specifically, high-paced classical music in contrast to rock music will lead to higher attentional processing by viewers and low-paced rock music in contrast to classical music will lead to lower attentional processing by viewers. The implication of these findings offers the filmmaker a wide array of melodic tools to manipulate how much attention the filmmaker wants to garner from the viewers at each scene (think plot twists and surprises). By taking advantage of these tools, the filmmaker can increase the viewers’ narrative transportation. Lastly, the model recommends melodramatic music to accompany protagonist of the story and thriller music to accompany antagonist of the story (to highlight the moral

superiority of the protagonist) – this will increase the likeability and certainty of thoughts for the protagonist and otherwise for the antagonist. This aspect of the model is supported by the ADT, thereby enhancing the bond between the viewer and the protagonist, which ultimately increases enjoyment of the film.

Key Elements of Spectacle

The main use of spectacle in our model is to increase the persuasiveness of the film, often through improving message comprehensibility. For example, our research shows that scenes of higher velocity elicit a comical response from viewers whereas scenes of lower velocity elicit a dramatic response from viewers. In the case of an action hero movie, there will be more dramatic scenes than comical scenes (though this can differ, think *Deadpool*); therefore this model recommends scene velocity to be moderate to slow, depending on the intentions of the filmmaker. Secondly, the parsing of scenes through the use of motion for fine-grained events and movement for scene boundaries can increase message comprehensibility of the film, which will ultimately increase its persuasiveness. Thirdly, genre-specific uses of color should be considered therefore when crafting an action hero movie, the filmmaker should use lower contrast and brightness and employ the colors of red, green, yellow and blue more abundantly. The effect of this is taking advantage of the color schema for action movies, which in turn will increase prior knowledge and message comprehensibility and ultimately persuasiveness. Lastly, filmmakers should cluster short shots for action scenes to infer high-octane sequences and cluster long shots for dramatic scenes. By taking advantage of the spectacle aspect of the model, the filmmaker can wield a higher degree of control when constructing the scene depending on his intentions.

By successfully applying the PCTMS-NTPE model, the filmmaker can take advantage of empirically tested psychological theories to increase narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment of his/her action hero movie. These include special attention paid towards the construction of the plot, character/diction, theme, melody and spectacle. In the next section, the paper will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the PCTMS-NTPE model.

Pros and Cons of Model

The first strength of this model is that it abides to the Aristotelian formula to a wholesome narrative construction. The six elements of drama and classical unities are used heavily in the Hollywood film industry (the leading film industry in the world) and are therefore held as requisites to a successful movie. By designing the prescriptive model in a way that explores each element in detail, it gives the filmmaker a degree of focus to maximize the effectiveness of each essential component of the movie, which when working simultaneously will lead to a synergizing effect. The Aristotelian design also makes the model much more coherent and easy to follow, providing the filmmaker with a clear path to achieve the goal of creating an action hero movie that maximizes narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment.

The second strength of this model is that the construction of the protagonist and characters is relatively restrictive and therefore quite specific. Firstly, the discussion of Jung's hero archetype and collective unconscious gives a partial answer as to why our society has an inextricable reverence for heroism. The application of Campbell's (2008)

Hero's Journey serves as a specific framework for the filmmaker to construct a plot and to characterize the protagonist. The study by Franco, Blau and Zimbardo (2011) further illustrates the schema of heroes in society and offers three core types of heroes for the filmmaker to pursue, each type bearing a unique definition and situation to their characterization. The model's inclusion of personal relevance and prior knowledge seem to be consistent with the current state of filmmaking given the heavy application of the Hero's Journey, the consideration of the external context of the movie (what's happening around the world) and the usage and success of heroes based on prior print literature references (Batman, Spiderman, Iron Man etc.) Lastly, the model's recommendation for the protagonist to undergo minor moral transgressions as a way for the viewer to engage in moral justification and subsequently increase enjoyment is realistic when one thinks about the wide presence of flawed heroes in modern cinema. Therefore the construction of the character is one of the strongest points of the PCTMS-NTPE model.

The third strength of this model is that it is demographic sensitive, therefore it enables the filmmaker to pursue different avenues according to his/her demographic target. For example, if the filmmaker is trying to make an action hero movie geared towards young female adults as the primary demographic, then this model can recommend the following steps: firstly identifying a theme that holds unique personal relevance to young female adults (this can be self-esteem, identity exploration or female equality etc.). Secondly, given the demographics are female and young adults, the model recommends the filmmaker to adapt a book into screenplay, given Green and Brock's (2000) findings that females are more likely to be readers than males, which in turn increases the likelihood for narrative transportation to occur in the movie. The second

demographic sensitive recommendation the model can give is for the film to explore more negative emotions through dark, creepy and violent contents, given the findings of Mares, Oliver and Cantor (2008). Similarly, this demographic sensitive rubric offered by the PCTMS-NTPE model can be applied to males and older adults.

Lastly, in addition to providing a framework for constructing a plot and hero, the PCTMS-NTPE model also accounts for manipulations exclusive to filmmaking in the constructions of melody and spectacle. The model offers specific recommendations to minute details of the visual-audio construction of films based on empirical psychological research. For example, the model enables the filmmaker to influence the level of attention processing required by scenes through the pace and genre of background music used, which can ultimately be used as a tool to construct the shape of the plot. In addition to influencing recall and attentional processing of scenes, the model also accounts for the interaction of background music and character presence on scenes to increase character's likeability and the bond between the viewer and the character, which ultimately leads to increased narrative transportation and enjoyment. These recommendations by the model are very specific and therefore can be easily employed by filmmakers wishing to elicit the desired effects.

With strengths will always come weaknesses and the first weakness of this model is the ambiguous nature of certain antecedents. While some antecedents such as identifiability or personal relevance can be supported and emphasized further by other empirical research, antecedents like verisimilitude and imaginable plot are harder to pinpoint as they behave more like an expansive description than a restrictive set of

requirements. For example, verisimilitude is defined as lifelikeness so while this eliminates a portion of potential avenues the filmmaker can pursue, the remaining pool of possibilities still remain quite large and therefore is quite unspecific to the filmmaker.

The second weakness of the model concerns the wholesomeness of its design. Part of the ambition of this paper is to design an objective model for a seemingly subjective process of filmmaking therefore the concept behind the design of the model draws upon identifying relevant antecedents related to the Aristotelian formula and bringing them into the model. The weakness of such a design is that in the grand scale, it is very likely the model only touches upon a few of the influencing antecedents, in relation to the large quantity of uncovered influencing antecedents still in the ether. Therefore while this model certainly identifies appropriate and significant influencing antecedents of a compelling action hero movie, it most likely does not tell the whole story. Certain voids of the model will further be discussed in the section of the paper that explores future directions for further research.

The third weakness of the model is the unequal emphasis placed on each essential Aristotelian component of a compelling action hero movie. For example, this paper places a large emphasis on uncovering the psychological frameworks regarding to constructing a narrative plot and an effective protagonist, however not the same level of emphasis can be found for visual activity and theme. This relatively lop-sided investigation may lead to an unbalanced model that is strong in some components but weaker in other components.

The fourth weakness of the model is similar to the weakness in the overall design of the model and is concerned with the depth of empirical research used to formulate the postulates of the model. While the literary analysis of the paper is certainly robust, there may be other empirical research uncovered that conflict with the postulates of the model. This possibility of uncertainty implies that while the model is supported by some empirical research, there is still room for error therefore it cannot be relied upon by the filmmaker as the penultimate model to create a compelling action hero movie (as much as the ambition of the paper desires it to be).

The fifth weakness of the model relates to the paper's main assumption that a compelling action hero movie is guided by three criteria: narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment. While these factors certainly contribute to a compelling action hero movie, it is likely that there are other psychological variables at play that might contribute to the construction of a compelling action hero. Therefore while this model effectively identifies and organizes relevant antecedents of narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment to each Aristotelian component, the absence of other uncovered psychological processes related to a compelling action hero movie may hinder the overall effectiveness of the model.

Through identifying the major strengths and weaknesses of the PCTMS-NTPE model, the next section will provide a conclusion and explore directions for future research that can remedy certain weaknesses of the model as well as expand the scope of research pertaining to the construction of a compelling action hero movie.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

Through the ages of mankind, stories have played a vital role in the way we communicate critical information to each other and as a source of entertainment. From cave drawings of ancient civilizations denoting hunting experiences to writings of Julius Caesar describing his Gallic conquests; from timeless plays penned by Shakespeare to morally challenging films directed by Frank Coppola, stories may have evolved in its external form but its core remain the same. The history of storytelling illuminates a theme that pops up over and over again – the story of the hero. Jung’s theory of the hero archetype in the collective unconscious serves as a perspective to understand society’s infatuation with the hero. In modern times, this is testified by the success of action hero movies in the film industry. Given the historic movement to continually evolve and improve on previous modes of storytelling, this paper develops the PCTMS-NTPE model to describe the antecedents required for an action hero movie to be compelling. The model achieves this goal by targeting to maximize narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment of an action hero movie. The filmmaker can successfully use the PCTMS-NTPE model by assessing their target demographics and applying the relevant identified antecedents to each component of the Aristotelian six elements of drama. By using the model as a framework to build the plot, character/diction, theme, melody and spectacle, the filmmaker will employ empirically tested psychological theories to maximize narrative transportation, persuasiveness and enjoyment of an action hero movie, which in turn will deem it compelling. The model is ambitious in that it offers an objective model to describe a seemingly subjective process in the arts, and

future research directed towards closing the gap between science and art can revolutionize the way we forever receive and create art.

A future research direction is to develop more support for empirical evidence used to form the postulates in the model. Given the relatively young age and research niche of media psychology especially pertaining to films, the volume of empirical research is low compared to other areas of psychological research. The difficulty lies in the lack of support and conflict of empirical research since the focuses of existing research are already spread so thin given the lack of empirical research in the field in the first place. By growing more research in this field of psychology, the construction of a model related to crafting a compelling action hero can be better substantiated with a wealth of empirical research to support its postulates.

Secondly, the PCTMS-NTPE model advocated by this paper focuses on the action hero genre. Future extrapolations of the PCTMS-NTPE model to other genres of movies (romantic, horror, family-style etc.) can illuminate the inner mechanics of a wide range of film genres, increase the versatility of the model and identify aggregate similarities and differences among all film genres which will be prove valuable to the growing field of research. In addition, while the model offers quite a specific route to constructing the hero of the narrative regardless of gender, a direction of future research can be investigating whether there are any differences in the receptions of a male and female hero constructed by the same principles put forth by the model.

Thirdly, the ETIM is one of the very few models used to account for narrative transportation. A direction for future research can be a deeper exploration into the

modelling of narrative transportation. For example, the ETIM postulates that identifiable characters and imaginable plot are antecedents to narrative transportation however the model does not provide a more specific investigation into the components of what makes an identifiable character and an imaginable plot. Future research in this area may lead to a deeper fundamental understanding of a plot structure and the construction of a character so that the postulates of a prescriptive model may move from a descriptive nature to a more explicitly structural nature.

Lastly, the field of Psychocinematics that describe the cognitive processes between the viewer and the motion picture is very young, which explains the weakness of the lack of empirical research pertaining to visual activity. Psychocinematics is currently at the stage of mapping the immediate cognitive responses of a viewer and a motion picture to describe the process in scientific forms. Therefore Psychocinematics is describing a process more than testing components within the process. With time and increasing research, this process will become more established and future research can focus more on manipulating independent variables within the process to determine antecedents that control a movie-goers experience.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Twelve Heroic Subtypes and Situations That Call Forth Heroic Action

This is an image of a table taken from “Heroism: A conceptual analysis and differentiation between heroic action and altruism” (Franco et al., 2011) that describes the three core types of heroes, their definitions and the situations that call forth heroic action.

Table 1
Twelve Heroic Subtypes and Situations That Call Forth Heroic Action

Risk type	Heroic subtype	Definition/situation
Physical Peril	1. Military and other duty-bound physical risk heroes	Individuals involved in military or emergency response careers that involve repeated exposure to high-risk situations. Heroic acts must exceed the call of duty.
	2. Civil heroes–nonduty bound physical risk heroes	Civilians who attempt to save others from physical harm or death while knowingly putting their own lives at risk.
Social Sacrifice	3. Religious figures	Dedicated, life-long religious service embodying highest principles or breaking new religious/spiritual ground. Often serves as a teacher or public exemplar of service.
	4. Politico-religious figures	Religious leaders who have turned to politics to affect wider change, or politicians who have a deep spiritual belief system that informs political practice.
	5. Martyrs	Religious or political figures who knowingly (sometimes deliberately) put their lives in jeopardy in the service of a cause or to gain attention to injustice.
	6. Political or military leaders	Typically lead a nation or group during a time of difficulty, such as a war or disaster. Serve to unify nation, provide shared vision, and may embody qualities that are seen as necessary for the group’s survival.
	7. Adventurer/explorer/discoverer	Individuals who explore unknown geographical areas or use novel and unproven transportation methods.
	8. Scientific (discovery) heroes	Individuals who explore unknown areas of science, use novel and unproven research methods, or discover new scientific information seen as valuable to humanity.
	9. Good Samaritan	Individuals who are first to step in to help others in need. Situation involves considerable disincentives for altruism. May/may not involve immediate physical risk.
	10. Odds beater/underdog	Individuals who overcame handicap or adverse conditions and succeed in spite of such negative circumstances, thereby provide a social, moral model for others.
	11. Bureaucracy heroes	Employees in large organizations in controversial arguments within or between agencies. Typically, involves standing firm on principle despite intense pressures to conform or blindly obey higher authorities.
	12. Whistleblowers	Individuals who are aware of illegal or unethical activities in an organization who report the activity publicly to effect change, without expectation of reward.

Appendix A. Twelve Heroic Subtypes and Situations That Call Forth Heroic Action (Franco et al., 2011)