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The Lion King Analysis

In the 1994 film, “The Lion King”, we examined multiple theories and factors that contribute to an audience's thought process, behaviors, and emotions. This movie follows the life of a lion cub, Simba, son of the King of the Pride Lands. We watch the obstacles that Simba faces while growing up after major life changes and family betrayal. When reviewing this film, the following were portrayed and studied in depth: Cognitive Dissonance, Process and Cultural Premises, Rank’s Model of Intensifying and Downplaying, and Narrative Theory.

Narrative Theory

The basic premise of this theory is very simple. This theory states that all humans are storytellers. During this film, I looked for ways the narrator incorporated the narrative paradigm into perspective. Humans are always compelled to convince others to see their viewpoint or turn to their position on a certain topic in their favor. The narrative theory is displayed when Mufasa was talking to his son in 2 scenes of the movie. In the first scene, Mufasa spoke to Simba in the morning as the sun was coming up. The second scene was when Simba disobeyed his father and went into a forbidden area of the land. The scene where Mufasa talks to Simba is called under the stars. These two scenes demonstrate good societal values. These values of coherence and

fidelity are shown strongly throughout the whole film. Coherence refers to the way the film or story sticks together in order to make sense. Fidelity is to see if the story rings true to what we see and feel is morally correct and corresponds to our values. the premise that is called the value of challenge.

The value of challenge is a very simple and persuasive myth. It suggests that a certain level of wisdom can be gained through intense suffering and testing. People who are persuaded by this premise are driven by the hope that they will become great and successful.

Cognitive Dissonance

According to Charles Larson, “cognitive dissonance theory predicts that when we experience psychological tension, or dissonance, we try to reduce it in some way instead of totally resolving the tension” (Larson, pg. 219). The theory was brought about by Leon Festinger in 1962. This psychological tension is caused by either a belief and behavior that are conflicting, or a new-found piece of information that challenges the individual’s previous knowledge. The individual may try to relieve that tension by reevaluating their beliefs, avoidance, rationalizing, or denial. In the case of the Lion King, the shaping of Simba’s character is followed in the journey of his struggle with dissonance.

Early in the film, Mufasa explains to Simba how the kingdom will soon be his to rule over. “Everything the light touches is our kingdom...A king’s time as ruler rises and falls like the sun. One day Simba, the sun will set on my time here and will rise with you as the new king” (08:57). The destiny laid out for Simba’s life is for him to be king like his dad. He is expected to be as great of a ruler as Mufasa. Simba knows this and believes it, too. This is shown in the song,

“I Just Can’t Wait to be King.” In this scene, Simba and Nala are singing about how he is going to be a mighty and brave king. He truly believes that this is who he is meant to be.

This belief system is challenged after a stampede that leaves Mufasa dead and Simba at the scene. Scar approaches Simba and tells the story that he wants the young lion to believe instead. “What have you done? No one ever means for these things to happen, but the king is dead. And if it weren’t for you, he would still be alive. Oh, what will your mother think? Run away, Simba. Run away and never return” (37:55). Simba is told that he can no longer be king because it is his fault that his father is dead. He now thinks that going home is not an option. This psychological tension is caused when his dream of being a heroic ruler is crushed. Simba listens to Scar and runs away and plans to never return.

The way that Simba copes with this dissonance is shown when he meets Timon and Pumba. They teach him to forget about the past. Their motto is “Hakuna Matata” which means, “no worries.” Even though it seems as though it is a good mindset to have, Simba uses this lifestyle to avoid facing Scar and the dissonance he experienced. He does this to avoid possible future dissonance and tension. It relieves the uneasiness. If Simba were to return home, he would have to be met with the uncertainty of what would happen. To him, it is a much safer option to stay with Timon and Pumba in their paradise.

It is not until Rafiki, the baboon, teaches Simba a lesson that allows him to refocus on his original belief system. With the help of Mufasa’s spirit, Simba is told to remember the past and to look inside himself. He must reclaim his place in the circle of life. “Oh yes, the past can hurt. But the way I see it, you can either run from it or learn from it” (1:08:12). Once again, Simba’s

thoughts are being challenged, but this time it created a positive development for his character. After this, he no longer chooses to avoid the conflict at Pride Rock, but instead goes to confront it.

Process Premises

Process Premises can be broken down into four different categories including, attitudes, emotions, consistency, and needs. These premises can be defined as the “psychological and emotional process that are evident in most people” (Larson, p. 186). Premises can be described in two different ways, one being referred to as a major premise when the premise is not clear or was not previously stated. We can also refer to them as appeals, this is when they are used in a more persuasive setting, for example, advertisements or politics. Analyzing the fourth process premise, consistency, explains our need for our perceptions or expectations to be met. When we feel like our expectations were not met in a relationship or in an interaction, we feel an imbalance or psychic discomfort. A feeling of imbalance then puts us into a more vulnerable position to be persuaded.

When analyzing “The Lion King”, sources of consonance from process premises was evident throughout the film. The “Use of Rewards” can be described as a source of consonance. In characters like Mufasa, Simba, and Scar, the use of rewards is primarily motivation to become King. In one of the first scenes in “The Lion King”, Simba and his father, Mufasa, are discussing what it means to be a King while overlooking the land. Mufasa tells Simba once he is King, all that he will inherit. His father promises everything that the light touches will be his. Stating that if Simba does well, he will be King and everything will be his. This idea that he will

obtain and be the ruler of all the land, trees, and water is what “motivates” Simba and will be his reward. (9:20)

On the other hand, a source of dissonance is oftentimes a feeling of a sense of loss, respect, or a disconnect between people or in an individual. One specific source of dissonance is a sense of guilt. This sense of guilt was portrayed very strongly in Simba’s character. When Mufasa is trampled in a stampede and ultimately dies trying to save Simba from a tree, Scar approaches him and blames him for his fathers death. As Simba is grieving, Scar proceeds to tell Simba if it weren't for him, Mufasa would still be alive. Scar tells him it is unacceptable to kill a king and that he will never be forgiven. Simba is overwhelmed by guilt and is told to run away and never come back. Simba experiences a sense of guilt throughout the rest of the film and is too ashamed to face anyone (38:20).

Cultural Premises

Cultural myths can be defined as “real or imagined narratives that illustrate a society’s values and our value system” (Larson, p. 259). One persuasive appeal that resonates as a heroic, valued individual is “Wisdom of the Rustic”. Wisdom of the rustic comes from a heroic figure, one who has an old time feeling and has done good by everyone. When Simba runs away following his fathers death, he is found by Pumbaa and Timon. Pumbaa and Timon take Simba in as he is still a small cub. During their time together, Pumbaa and Timon teach Simba important lessons of life. One being “Hakuna Matata ” which means “No worries”. They teach Simba this phrase and how to live by it so he can be “problem free”. As Pumbaa and Timon are much older than Simba, they are installing wisdom of the rustic here in this scene. (45:37)

Another cultural premise that was very evident throughout this movie was “Coming of a Messiah”. This cultural premise revolves around the idea that someone is coming to save everybody from a terrible loss, that help is coming and then everything will be solved. This cultural myth was portrayed in Scar’s character, specifically during his song about killing Mufasa, the King. While Scar plans to kill Mufasa so that he is promoted to King, he reinstates to the hyena’s why he should be king and why he is the best. During Scar’s song he sings the words “Stick with me and you’ll never go hungry again” following his song, the hyena’s chant together “Long live the King” multiple times. This example portrayed the “coming of a messiah” myth very well and was a common theme throughout this movie (27:30)

The last cultural premise that was very evident in this film happens all throughout but particularly In the first scenes of “The Lion King”, they make it very clear that the lions do not get along with the hyenas. The lions are not to go into the “dark shadows” where most of the hyenas reside as they will most likely be eaten and killed. The hyenas are always looking for a lion to hunt and kill which portrays the “Mob at the Gates” cultural premise. Mob at the gates can be best explained as the “us vs them” mentality. A group that is trying to get in that everyone is also trying to keep out. The lions and hyenas are constantly at war in a predator vs prey relationship.

Rank’s Model of Intensifying and Downplaying

This persuasion model was developed by Hugh Rank, breaks persuasive messages down into two strategies, intensify and downplay. These messages can be given to the audience in any of these four ways. First is to intensify their own good points within the message. Second, to intensify the weak points of the claims that go against the message. Thirdly, to downplay the

weak points of the ideas and claims of the message. And lastly, to downplay the valid reasoning in the counter argument or message. For the persuader to elaborate on these methods, tactics for both intensifying and downplaying can be used. The tactics for intensifying are repetition, association, and composition. As for downplaying, the tactics are diversion, omission, and confusion. Using this system given to us by Rank, it allows for the audience to create a better understanding of the meaning.

As this relates to *The Lion King*, there are two scenes in which applying Rank's Model will help convey the message the movie is trying to tell. Both examples show intensifying as well as downplaying due to multiple messages being told during these scenes. The first scene is the morning lesson that takes place with Mufasa and Simba on top of Pride Rock early on in the film. During this scene, you can see the sun rising over the setting and Mufasa tells Simba that "Everything the light touches, is our kingdom. A king's time as ruler rises and falls like the sun. One day Simba, the sun will set on my time here and will rise with you as the new king". This is an example of intensification. The repetition tactic is used with the word "king". Using royal words let's Simba and the audience feel the scope of how big of a position being a king is. The association comes from the light during the sunrise. Within the quote, it is implied that if you see anything with light, it is their kingdom. The composition tactic is the setting. The movie chose to have this scene take place during the sunrise to give more importance to the previously mentioned quote. The downplaying of the message comes later when Simba asks about the part of the kingdom that the light does not touch. Mufasa then uses the omission tactic by not telling Simba what the dark part is. Instead, Mufasa tells Simba to never set foot in the dark ominous

part. This illustrates the use of diversion. And finally, this causes confusion to Simba since he is under the impression that a king can do whatever he would want to do.

The second scene that shows Rank's Model very well is during Scar's villain song, "Be Prepared". There are multiple messages being conveyed throughout this scene that tell us for the first-time what Scar's plan is. Firstly, the message that is being intensified here is that there is going to be a change in a king after his plan. The repetition of the words "Be Prepared" are very apparent throughout the scene. This tells the hyenas and the audience that there will be a significant change coming shortly. Scar's use of the hyenas to help him carry out his plan is also described in this scene. He uses them because of their low intelligence and associates it to being "as wet as a warthog's backside". How the composition of this message works is how the character of Scar is written and executed. He is very villainous and has a way of speaking and acting that makes his plan a lot more sinister. The downplaying shown in this song is of the fact that they will have to kill Mufasa. The biggest way this is shown is using diversion. Instead of making a good argument with the hyenas on why Mufasa needs to die, Scar instead says "Stick with me, and you will never go hungry again". Omission comes into effect with the lack of mentioning the current king will have to be assassinated. And finally, the confusion aspect, as stated before, plays into the hyena's intelligence and that Scar's word choice already confuses them.

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