

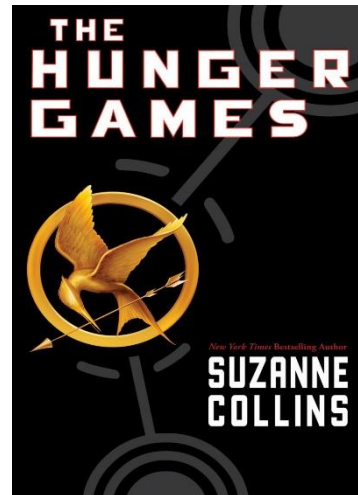
Gender Stereotypes in *The Hunger Games*

By Bethanie Hodgkinson

Written in 2008, Suzanne Collins subverts gender stereotypes within her novel *The Hunger Games*. This is most notably seen within the lead female character, Katniss Everdeen. Having a lead female character automatically puts Collins above those who go towards the typical male protagonist, thus subverting gender roles from the outset of her writing.

From the very beginning of this teenage fiction novel, we see how Katniss must take on the role of mother and father after her father's tragic death in a mining accident: 'I had not only lost a father, but a mother as well'. Her mother enters a state of crippling depression and Katniss must not only care for her mother, but her younger sister, Prim. Katniss becomes the sole provider for the family but after volunteering herself for the Hunger Games, her responsibility is taken away: 'There's no me now to keep you both alive'. Here we clearly see Collins' subversion of gender roles as not only does Katniss take on the parental role in the family, she is also the sole provider for the family. This is very experimental for Collins' as there is a risk that the male readership may not be interested in a female protagonist, but by giving Katniss male characteristics she succeeds and appeals to a vast audience.

Male/female gender subversion is also reflected through the relationship between Katniss and Peeta. Peeta subverts gender stereotypes within their relationship as Katniss is certainly the alpha. When in the arena, she is the character who saves his life by going to the Cornucopia to get the medicine he needs: 'I'm at the table now, my fingers closing over the tiny orange backpack'. It is clear from the reaping that Katniss is characterised with stronger will,



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which is portrayed through her volunteering: 'I volunteer as tribute!'. This directly reflects the relationship between Peeta and Katniss.

Katniss is the stronger of the two, she is the killer, the hunter and the more active character.

Peeta is more in touch with his feelings in comparison to Katniss, this is seen through their reunion after thinking they lost each other in the woods; 'I push away, trying to sort out my feelings'. Peeta is easily swept up in the predictable teen romance whereas Katniss thinks this will make the ending of the Games harder, as to their knowledge there can only be one survivor. This again subverts the expectations of each gender, as you would assume the female character would be the one swept up by their feelings towards the other, yet this is completely switched as Peeta is the one more concerned about their relationship than survival.

Androgyny is a key feature within the novel, shown not only through the characters living in the Capitol, but also Katniss and Peeta. Androgyny refers to someone with both male and female characteristics or appearances. When

considering Katniss' appearance, masculinity would not be completely applicable to her, as she maintains her 'trademark braid' throughout the games. This choice goes against the masculine image of cropped or short hair. She takes a more feminine look when she arrives in the Capitol and must attend various interviews and events. 'You almost look like a human being now!' is used to describe Katniss after her vast transformation of intense bathing and shaving. Although she didn't have a masculine appearance when in District 12, her feminine aspects are drawn upon within the Capitol. This creates the idea that the Capitol is more forceful with expectations given to each gender. Despite this, we see female aspects within the characters originating from the Capitol such as Flavius, a male character who wears 'a fresh coat of purple lipstick'. Flavius can be compared to the character of Cinna, who is Katniss' stylist. He is described as only wearing 'metallic gold eyeliner', which makes him the least feminised character out of all the Capitol residents. It is important to consider that the character with the least facial alterations or modifications is the one Katniss trusts the most. It is undeniable that Collins' here ties a feminised appearance with unlikability, whether this was a conscious decision or not is questionable.

Despite this, it is also important to recognise the explicit feminine side to Katniss' character. We see her maternal instincts throughout the novel, originating from her care for Prim. When discussing running away from District 12 with Gale, they say their siblings 'might as well be [our kids]', furthering this maternal aspect to her character.

Katniss sacrificing herself for her sister could also be said to be an act of maternal love, but others would dispute this and say it was

merely sisterly love and should be taken as nothing more.

Another character which highlights Katniss' parental nature is Rue. Although her actions towards Rue would not necessarily be maternal, the fact that she sings her to sleep when she dies creates the idea of a lullaby which is mainly considered to be used within a parent-child relationship. Here we see how Collins' brings in a more delicate and caring side to Katniss' character which removes the idea of her being masculine.

It is accurate to conclude that Suzanne Collins subverts gender roles within *The Hunger Games*. Katniss' appears to be a very masculine character, with her hardness to events in the games and her domestic obligations. She takes on responsibilities of her late father and stands in for her mother through her depressive phase. She is also the sole carer for her sister Prim before she enters the games, thus associating her with the idea of a breadwinner. However, Collins' creates a balanced character by including maternal characteristics, giving Katniss a more feminised stance with regards to younger characters within the novel. We can also see how Collins' subverts gender roles within the character of Peeta. He is the more passive character out of the two and is more in touch with his feelings which are characteristics you would consider to be more associated with females. It is also useful to bring in characters living in the Capitol and comparing their appearances with those of people coming from each District, with both men and women taking a more feminist appearance. It is therefore accurate to conclude that Collins' successfully subverts gender roles within her novel *The Hunger Games*.