

Dirassat & Abhath

The Arabic Journal of Human
and Social Sciences



مجلة دراسات وأبحاث

المجلة العربية في العلوم الإنسانية
والاجتماعية

EISSN: 2253-0363

ISSN : 1112-9751

From Masculine to Feminine Roles in The Hunger Games Trilogy

من الأدوار الذكورية إلى الأدوار الأنثوية في رواية ثلاثية ألعاب الجوع

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تاريخ القبول: 2023-03-09

تاريخ الاستلام: 2022-10-28

Abstract:

This paper explores the representation of gender performativity in the young adult dystopian literature through the examination of Suzanne Collin's trilogy of the Hunger Games, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* novels with a focus on the protagonist Katniss Everdeen. This study aims at investigating the evolution of Katniss's gender role over the course of the storyline employing Judith Butler's basic aspects of Gender Performativity theory. It tends to depict the construction of gender identity of the young adult female protagonist who fought for liberation against totalitarian government and analyse particular gender identities in which Katniss is supposed to perform. This thesis shows how Katniss gender performance transits from one role to another according to the state of acts. The trilogy of the Hunger Games helps, through this study, to promote women's empowerment and gender equality as well as to explain how gender performativity can play an important role in today's society.

Keywords: Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, gender performativity, identity construction, gender equality

الملخص باللغة العربية: تستكشف هذه الورقة تمثيل الأداء الجندري في الأدب البائس للبالغين من خلال فحص ثلاثية سوزان كوليز لألعاب الجوع وروايات الصيد بالنار وموكينغ جاي مع التركيز على بطلة الرواية كاتنيس إيفردين. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في تطور الدور الجنساني لكاتنيس خلال مسار القصة باستخدام الجوانب الأساسية لجوديث بتلر لنظرية الأداء الجندري. إنه يميل إلى تصوير تخريب الهوية الجندرية للبطلة الشابة البالغة التي قاتلت من أجل التحرر ضد الحكومة الشمولية وتحليل الهويات الجنسية الخاصة التي من المفترض أن تؤديها كاتنيس. توضح هذه الأطروحة كيف ينتقل أداء الجندري من دور إلى آخر وفقًا لحالة الأفعال. تساعد ثلاثية ألعاب الجوع، من خلال هذه الدراسة، على تعزيز تمكين المرأة والمساواة بين الجنسين وكذلك شرح كيف يمكن للأداء الجنساني أن يلعب دورًا مهمًا في مجتمع اليوم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سوزان كوليز، ثلاثية ألعاب الجوع، الأداء الجنساني، بناء الهوية والمساواة بين الجنسين

1. INTRODUCTION

The Hunger Games trilogy, which involves the three novels: *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, is rooted in the genre of dystopian literature. Due to

Suzanne's use of young adult dystopian elements that influences her depiction of the development of katniss character. The Hunger Games trilogy is one of the fascinating novels that tend to be more exciting and enriched by science fiction

rather than the classical literary genre. The Hunger games has recently attracted many young readers who found it as a source of extraordinary adventures and actions. The Hunger Games trilogy has created an alluring literature of fantasy, imagination, fiction and symbols. Consistently, it gained tremendous positive points of views among young readers. This study attempts to explore gender performance in the young adults dystopian literature through the female character and the protagonist Katniss Everdeen over the storyline of the Hunger Games trilogy. It focuses on Everdeen's gender identity based on Butler's aspect of 'repeated stylization of the body' from her Gender Performativity theory, identity is continuously shifting and reinvented, which means gender can change through different states. And this is what this paper will explore by examining the different texts of the novel. The focal point will be about Katniss, the protagonist, as a character by exploring the characteristics that affect her development through the theory of performativity.

2. The author of the Hunger Games Trilogy

Suzane Collins, an American novelist and television writer, is the famous author of the Hunger Games series and she was a part of a writing team in several shows such as Clarissa Explains It All, the Mystery Files of Shelby Woo since 1991. Later she was the head writer for Scholastic Entertainment's Clifford's Puppy Days, and after that, she published the New York Times best-selling fantasy series between 2003 and 2007 called The Underland Chronicles. She published her first

dystopian book of the Hunger Games in 2008, followed by Catching Fire (2009) and Mockingjay (2010) respectively. In 2008, one of the most successful written works in history, Suzanne Collins Young Adult Dystopian trilogy the Hunger Games has found an audience. These series show how history was immensely an important topic for Collins family. Much of that affection was caused by Collins' father, who taught history at the college and was open with his kids about his military experience. In addition to the knowledge she gained from her father, Collins was highly interested in Greek mythology and gladiatorial games that she thought of a future dystopian government called 'the Capitol' in The Hunger Games (Collins, 2008). She found that three parts were always present in the gladiator paradigm : '(1) ruthless government that (2) forces people to fight to death (3) uses these fights to the death as a form of popular entertainment'' (Blasingame, 2009, p. 727).)Clearly, the dystopian setting and events in the Hunger Games mirrors these parts and expounds the power in the novel's society while simultaneously exposing it in today's society. Collins dystopian trilogy The Hunger Games has found an audience of all ages and it has affected the growth of the contemporary dystopian novel among readers. The film adaption of the first book was released in 2012, and the film adaption of Catching Fire was released in 2013. Likewise, the first part of the film adaption of

Mockingjay was released in 2014, followed by the second part of Mockingjay released in 2015. Collins' work mostly focus on children who are in the process of growing up due to her strong background in writing books for children and adolescents.

3. Overview of the Hunger Games Trilogy

The Hunger Games Trilogy takes place in the reality television where the Capitol is the cruel government which controls North America. The districts have to survive a gladiator-like battle with a modern twist in order to pay for their past rebellion. Two tributes (one boy and a girl aged twelve to eighteen) are chosen from each district to fight to death in the Hunger Games. The main character Katniss Everdeen, who volunteers to take the place younger sister Prim from District 12, emerged as a fierce competitor. She seems to have a flexible career that offers her more advantage as gaining the sympathy and help of the audience while being in the arena. The other male tribute from district acts as her ally. These events are developed into three novels : the Hunger Games, Catching Fire and Mockingjay

1. The Hunger Games

It started when the male and female tributes at the age of 12 to 18 from 12 districts are chosen to take part in the annual Hunger Games arranged by the Capitol. They are supposed to fight to death, only one tribute who remains alive from all the twelve participated districts. The protagonist

Katniss Everdeen volunteers for her sister Prim to take part in the 74th Hunger Games together with the male tribute Peeta Mellark. Peeta, in an interview, in front of all Panem audiences, where he reveals his love to Katniss. This makes her feels upset since he portrays her as a weak person that is not able to win the games. When the games begin, all the tributes were killed only Katniss and Peeta who survive. In the game, it is supposed that only one tribute survives, but the Gamesmakers announce a new rule. So they both won the hunger games. Katniss was confused about whom she loves either Gale or Peeta who decided to distance himself from her and this makes her much confused about who she really loves.

2 . Catching Fire

The second novel, Catching Fire, is about another revolution. It explores how Katniss uses her performance to survive again in another version of the Hunger Games 'Quarter Quell'. President Snow wants to convince the rest of Panem that her actions in the last Hunger Games are out of love and rebellion. Katniss has to perform the romantic role of Peeta's devoted lover. They are selected to take part part in the 75th anniversary of the games again. In the interview, Cinna designs Katniss the black Mockingjay dress, which is revealed once she twirls. People in several districts begin to protest the Capitol after watching Katniss in the Games. At the end, Katniss destroys the artificial arena by using her arrows. She loses consciousness and she is taken to District 13 where the Capitol destroys because of people's rebellion against the

Capitol. Meanwhile, Peeta is captured by President Snow. District 12 is bombed by the Capitol after the Games because of Katniss's defiance toward the Capitol. At the end of this part, Katniss strikes and refuses to neither eat nor talk until Peeta shows up.

3. Mockingjay

Mockingjay is the third and final title in Collins' trilogy. It tells the story of Katniss who leads the revolution against the Capitol and President Snow. In this part of her book, Katniss develops her character and becomes a symbol of rebellion called 'The Mockingjay'. Katniss becomes a symbol of revolution. People in all districts start to protest against the Capitol more and more. Peeta is used by President Snow for the sake of propaganda against Katniss whereas Katniss is used by President Snow of District 13 to spread propaganda resisting President Snow. The propaganda battle between the Capitol and District becomes more violent and savage. Finally, President Snow is captured and Katniss was killed by Katniss during the inauguration of the Hunger Games. After that, she gets married to Peeta and lives a simple life in the countryside. Peeta has convinced her to have children, and now they have a boy and a girl.

Young Adult Dystopian Literature

In 2008, the New York Times Sunday Book Review displays a piece titled 'Scary New World' which captured the notice of a growing trend in children's publishing marketplace. There was an explosion of dystopian fiction.

John Green, the young adults' novelist, reviewed in one of his articles the productivity of this genre. He says 'The past year has seen the publication of more than a dozen post-apocalyptic young adult novels that explore what a future could and look like once our unsustainable life styles cease to be sustained (Spoiler alert : it's gonna be bad)'. His article identified two texts to spotlight on : Susan Beth Pfeffer's *The Dead and the Gone* and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. The second basis of the review, Collins' trilogy, ensured that its genre has made an extraordinary success and have surprised the market power by the offer of a young adult privilege. Contemporary young adult dystopian literature has become increasingly famous. As long as dystopian young adult literature is concerned, there will be a focus on a mortal crisis, be it environmental, political, or social, dystopian literature often functions to scare and alert young readers. Carries Hintz, Blaka Basu, and Katherine Broad indicate that 'dystopian writing engages with pressing global concerns : liberty-determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self'. This means that young readers are supposed to look and better understand their position in the world through enthralling adventures and catchy plots which are full of warnings. This dystopian fiction depicts ' a post-apocalyptic struggle

for survival or valiant attempt to retain individuality in a totalitarian world” (Blaka Basu, 2012) which allows young adults to overcome real-world troubles and encourage them to seek for new ways to think about social or political problems.

The Hunger Games Trilogy as a Young Adult Dystopian Literature :

Suzanne Collins trilogy is assorted as adult dystopian literature due to many characteristics. First, there is an immediate picture of the dystopian society given by the narrator of the trilogy, Katniss Everdeen. In *The Hunger Games*, she lives in the very poor District 12 “ where you can starve to death in safety” as there is a “ high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops” (Collins, 2008, pp. 5-6) . These descriptions reflect the bleakness of the horrific realm. “ The result was Panem, a shining capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which peace and prosperity to its citizens” (Collins, 2008, p. 18) , this was once the utopian era and then came the dystopian blur, “ the history of Panem”, in fact , a whole country collapsed that another can arise ‘out of the ashes of a place’” (Collins S. , 2008, p. 18) T the dystopian society of Panem. Through her novel, Collins wants to depicts how the districts have suffer from hunger and fight for bread in order to survive the brutality of the capitol, as well as paying for the debt of the first rebellion that was made by their ancestors. According to Connors (2014), many critics of Collins series build their evidence around ‘ the assumption that the capitol is a totalitarian regime with absolute power over the citizens of Panem’’.Throughout the events, katniss is aware of the inequality between Panem and the rulers of the nation which clarifies the

differences between the dystopian setting in the districts and the utopian setting in the capitol. In her district, there are people called the Peacekeepers who make sure that people behave the way the Capitol approves on to be appropriate, so katniss murmurs while referring to surveillance camera in *The Hunger Times* : ‘so I learned to hold my tongue and turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts’ (p 7). Second, one other characteristic that makes Collins’ trilogy being as a young adult dystopian literature is the sallowness of the dystopian future. Young adults dystopian novels rarely set their plot within the frame of a present place and time, but it rather be in the future. The futuristic setting gives young adult readers a sense of horror, especially with the development of technology. Some dystopian societies which are facing wars imagine the possibility of the occurrence with such advanced tools of technologies available in the real world. Seventy-four years before the events of the *Hunger Games*, the various districts of Panem rebelled against the Capitol that was due to the oppression and brutality and the political abuse practiced by the government. Those years are the Dark Days of Panem as the protagonist, katniss, utters in the *Hunger Games* : ‘’ Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark days must never be repeated, it gave us the *Hunger Games*’ (Collins S. , 2008, p. 19) . In this sense, adolescent readers of dystopian fiction reflect assumptions around the sallowness of the future in dystopias to the world since the Young Adult Dystopian fiction offers “a context for students to

become conscious of their operative worldview and to examine critically alternative social relation'' (Connors, 2014, p. 140). One other characteristic of Young Adult dystopian literature that is included in Collins' trilogy is the inclusion of the adolescent characters in the dystopian Panem. Defining young adult dystopian character might appear like a simple mission, but after exploring the dystopian genre that is targeted to readers between the ages of twelve and eighteen, it is possible to recognize the young adult dystopian figures. In the Hunger Games, for instance, both of female and male tributes are adolescents, Katniss and Peeta are the sixteen years old main characters of the first novel (2008) since the topics of dystopian fiction are presented to the young audience.

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity :

The theorist Judith Butler discusses the performativity of gender in her essay'' Performative Acts and Gender Constitution : An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory ' specially, her theory ' Gender Performativity where she explains how the performative acts contribute to the construction of gender and identity. Butler argues that performativity is realized through certain behaviors, acts , gestures and desires produce the effect of an internal core or substance signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that essence or identity manufactured and sustained through

corporeal signs and other discursive means' (Butler, 1988, p. 185). Butler notes that gender is performative as all what is taken to be internal essence of gender is manufactured through '' a sustained set of acts'' (Butler, p xv). Butler believes that gender is not something one is but something one does. From this regard, she is intent on questioning how society plays a role in gender identity as she distinguishes gender from sex under the consideration of biology and socialization (Butler, 1999). According to Butler, 'gender is performatively produced, and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence' (Butler, 1988, p. 34).

Additionally, she states that ' [g]ender is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within. Further she notes that performativity is realized through specific behaviors, stating : ' Acts, gestures and desires produce the effect of an internal core or substance signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that essence or identity manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means ((Butler, 1988, p. 185). Therefore the ongoing performative acts contribute to the construction of gender and identity. In this term, gender is not a stable identity, but rather is continually reinvented performance through repetition. The expression of gender

performance is essential because it means that individual's behavior is the interpretation of what ones consider gender to be. It is through individual performance that gender categories are replicated. Butler's theory of performativity is strongly related to the constitution of identity. The most important embodiment of her focus is that sex cannot be grasped as a characteristic of the natural body. This is one of the embodiments that can be extracted from her *Gender Trouble* and the resources that she based on. Therefore, individuals are able to guess the close ties between corporality and identity through the sense of culture as it has an important role in the constitution of identity. Butler states that 'Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.' (Collins S., 2008, p. 179)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Hunger Games Trilogy and Gender Performativity
Conceptions of masculinity and femininity are widely and obviously

included in the *Hunger Games* texts. Gender performativity is presented throughout the *Hunger Games* trilogy in the sense that characters perform certain gender, masculine or feminine, depending on their behavior. According to Butler's gender performativity, the characters' behaviors in these texts do not delineate who the characters are but rather demonstrate how their behavior reflects their upbringing or the circumstances they are in. The research interrogates Katniss' gender by focusing on articles which consider different aspects of gender and identity from Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Critics have examined how Katniss' identity reflects two genders and how it rejects both masculinity and femininity for a performed gender. Judith Butler's gender performativity is implemented to examine Katniss' gender identity that deconstructs the gender stereotypes and the ideologies of the traditional gender binary. Mitchell Jennifer suggests that her gender is a result of biology and environment. According to Mitchell, Katniss possesses 'innate femaleness' (Jennifer, 2012, p. 12) as well as masculine traits (p. 128). This means that Katniss' ability to transition from one gender to the other, 'male' and 'female' or 'masculine' and 'feminine' become circumstantial parts that she plays (Jennifer, 2012, p. 129). She argues that the Capitol surroundings also allow gender identity to change in and out the arena. Mitchell writes 'Katniss' personal affinity for

switching gender roles is distinctly parallel to the Capitol's priority of gender malleability' (p, 134). That signifies that external factors play role in gender identity construction. Film the Hunger Games represents different gender roles. The main characters Katniss and Peeta show a gendered portrayal of the storyline. In several scenes, katniss represents more of her masculine nature while Peeta shows less of her feminine character in the story due to many circumstances. Mitchell points out from Butler's theory that Katniss' identity is due to biological reasons and the environment that surrounds her ,as Butler states, gender can be performed based on experience.

Katniss' Gender Performance in the Hunger Games

Through the lens of gender performativity theory, characters have constructed their gender identity through an amalgamation of masculine and feminine attributes. Here is an elaboration on the emergence of the gender of the main character Katniss who has many masculine traits in the movie The Hunger Games. Katniss shows several scenes along the storyline that show that she has that masculine trait and intentionally allows her to grow up in katniss, as follows : Katniss' role in The Hunger Games focusses on keeping the family alive since her father's death and her mother's catatonic depression. This protagonist has a role that is often kept for men as protector and a provider which are traditional gender duties of males. In order to fulfill this role, she fights in order not starve and survive in District 12 . Katniss turns masculine when she has to practice fighting in the Capitol

while fighting is traditionally identic to men. Katniss had to hunt and to trade through illegal acts that are punished by death. Katniss at the Capitol showed a lot about her masculine side as wore her day-to-day pants, as she says," I swing my legs off the bed and slide into my hunting boots supple leather that has modeled to my feet. I pull on trousers, a shirt, tuck my long dark braid up into a cap, and grab my forage bag" (Collins S. , 2008, p. 5). In this term, she is forced to adopt masculine behaviors through hunting skills so that the hardship of life in her district are beaten down. Even others admit how a strong hunter she is, 'You are the best hunter I know' (Collins S. , 2008, p. 40)

Katniss is a very masculine woman who is good at using arrows and is good at shooting games. The masculine side also appeared when Katniss dared to dress in a fiery fire. Katniss is a fearless hunter, brave, and skilled in making bows. Broad mentions how 'Collins boldly flouts literary stereotypes that keep female protagonists waiting at home, and proclaims that girls can do anything boys do, including strategize, make demands, and even hunt and kill' (Collins S. , 2008, p. 117) . Katniss also shows the masculine side when she had to kill the lynx since she needs to resist hunger as an enemy ; eventhough, her inner self suggests that she might need this animal's company. Her performance of killing animals is because of the lack of time to sympathize instead she must fight against the hardship of life through the construction of an identity for a female hunter, as she state ' I finally had to kill the lynx because he scared off game. I almost regretted it because he was not bad company. But I got a decent price for his pelt' (Collins S. , 2008, p. 8)

Katniss's identity is completely different from her mother and sister Prim's identities. Katniss's mother and sister represent the traditional expectation of women as being emotional, weak, and passive. Both of her sister Prim and mother portray a weak female, as for Prim, when Katniss took her to the woods to learn hunting skills but the wood frightened her. Her mother as well is a passive member of the family. Therefore, Katniss was forced to construct an identity of an active male and a caretaker. By contrast, Katniss's identity shifts from masculine to feminine. She did not only perform a masculine role, she performed an innate femaleness too as she declared how she motherly feels towards her younger sister, protect her, help her to get dressed, and provide food for her. She states ' I protect Prim in every way I can' (The Hunger Games, p 16), showing a soft feminine side of her towards her sister.

Katniss' Gender Performance in Catching Fire

The female protagonist Katniss manifest different perspectives of masculinity and femininity through the deconstruction of the gender binary by moving from one role to another according to circumstances as, Butler asserts, masculine and feminine are changeable (Butler, 2004). Katniss, in *Catching Fire*, shows how skillful she becomes in her performance. At first, the protagonist appears as a radical female as President Snow pays Katniss a warning visit that makes her promote her feminine forcefully. President Snow frightens her safety and her family as he uses the expression of 'a girl from District 12' that makes katniss look as a

weak traditional female who took the risk to defy the Capitol and there is no way that she will walk away alive. Hence, she must maintain the power of performance once again since her life and others depend on it. Furthermore, katniss's performance depends on continuing her feminine role as she was passionately in love with Peeta. Through the Victory Tour, Katniss and Peeta have to play the role of lovers and build a relationship that further add up to the story. Though katniss is described as a strong female character and a potential threat to Panem, she needs to perform an identity that satisfies society without having a choice. Thus, katniss ensured to make more efforts and worked on her feminized performance in a way that pleases both Panem and President Snow. This couple are affected by government control as katniss looks as a convincing lover for Peeta into an irrational reaction, far behind her will. In this case, katniss was obliged to perform in certain way due to the Capitol's social constraints and threats of punishment. Butler states that 'Gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraint. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threat of punishment operate in the ritualized repletion of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization.' Besides, katniss appears as a voiceless feminine as audiences are

the ones who take votes for the best wedding dress for her forthcoming wedding.

Katniss' Gender Performance as Mockingjay

In the final trilogy, Katniss adopts a new role. Contrary to the previous books in which Katniss is forced to act out the female partner of Peeta with the aim to convince the crowd and President Snow, this time she is not reliant on persons at all. To go in detail, at the end of *Catching Fire* Katniss realizes after the rescue by District 13 that it is not just herself that President Snow needs but also her symbolic role that she must perform and what she represents. Moreover, in the previous novels Katniss' performance was based on a convincing act that provides survival in the arena and from the brutal government. Yet here the gender role becomes a political figure that supports Districts. President Snow uses Katniss as 'the embodiment of the revolution' in order to unify rebels against the Capitol. Furthermore, there is a continuous role of the Mockingjay position in *Catching Fire*. Nevertheless, instead of constructing a rebellious identity, Katniss will create a figure that supplies a voice for change. Her personal actions in the Hunger Games and *Catching Fire* of poisoned berries and standing out for Rue's family are essential parts in the basics of the Mockingjay identity.

3. CONCLUSION

The study of *The Hunger Games* trilogy through the lens of gender performativity enables us to see multidimensional aspects

of gender as performative acts that empower individuals to express their inward desires liberally. Based on the feminist perspective of gender performativity in which masculine and feminine are interchangeable, the construction of the gender identity of the female protagonist is discussed in this paper. Through the Hunger Games Trilogy, the protagonist Katniss challenges the stereotypical thoughts of young adults. Katniss demonstrates an alternative way of performing gender identity by deconstructing the notion of gender binary. Through a feminist lens, Katniss's gender identity goes beyond the gender binary, that is, gender is an improvising practice. Katniss, hence, has the rights to perform gender as she prefers. Influenced by family and community, Katniss inevitably presents herself as a breadwinner and a hunter, otherwise, Katniss and her family can't survive in the poorest district in Panem. Concurrently, state, social values, and the Games affect the protagonist's gender performativity as well... The deep-rooted problems concerning oppression and inequality have been exposed straightforwardly through the struggles for equality of the young-adult female protagonist who demonstrates a performance in terms of gender in order to overcome the circumstances of District 12 and even the oppression of the arena. Throughout the trilogy, Katniss could perform a masculine role as she had to take care of herself and her family; we can see from the roles she takes on such as 'a girl on fire', 'the star-crossed lover', and most importantly, 'the Mockingjay'. She sets herself for masculine attributes because she needs to protect her beloved ones and also fight against totalitarianism. As well as Katniss sometimes shifts her gender role as

she ties to have a stable life by choosing to be feminine once again but by her own decision. Performing feminine attributes also brings her to the point that she can negotiate with the most powerful man in Panem like President Snow. The protagonist's gender identity is adaptive and changeable. Katniss's performative acts considerably promote an awareness of women's empowerment and gender equality. Hence, women exercise agency in order to express their inward desires and identity outwardly.

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