

FEMINISM IN SUZANNE COLLINS' NOVEL *THE HUNGER GAMES*

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Abstract

This study explores the feminist themes embedded within Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, focusing on the character of Katniss Everdeen as a symbol of resistance and empowerment. The research aims to analyze the different types of feminism manifested in the novel, examining how Collins challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations through her protagonist. The study applies sociology of literature approach, which considers the social context and implications of literary works, and utilizes feminist theories, including liberal and radical feminism, to interpret Katniss's journey. The findings suggest that Katniss embodies both liberal and radical feminist ideals, using her defiance of oppressive authority to fight for personal freedom and gender equality. Katniss's actions, from assuming the role of family provider to resisting the Capitol's control, exemplify the themes of self-determination, independence, and the rejection of traditional gender norms. The portrayal of Katniss as a resourceful and brave figure, often adopting traits typically associated with masculinity, reveals the novel's critique of gender stereotypes and its call for a more inclusive understanding of strength and leadership. Ultimately, *The Hunger Games* serves as a powerful narrative for discussing feminism, challenging the boundaries of gender roles, and highlighting the potential for individual actions to spark social change.

Keywords: *feminism; feminist ideals; feminist theory; societal norms*

1. Introduction

Gender is a characteristic inherent in men and women that is constructed socially and culturally (Fakih, 2012: 8). The concept of gender produces two dichotomous categories, namely femininity, which is inherent in women, and masculinity, which is identical to men. Most people interpret the concept of gender by connecting the characteristics inherent in humans. Men are depicted as tough, strong, rational, manly, and powerful. Meanwhile, women are known to be soft, beautiful, emotional, and nurturing (Mustikawati, 2022). Gender is a distinction between men and women in roles, functions, rights, and conduct that is influenced by traditional norms, societal values, religion, and patriarchal culture, all of which contribute to men and women being treated unequally. Gender differences are not actually a problem as long as they do not result in gender inequality. However, in its practice, gender differences have resulted in gender inequality, especially for women (Fakih, 2012: 12).

In media and society, the presence of female roles often highlights the vulnerable and emotional side of women, reinforcing the notion that women are inherently weak or unstable. This one-dimensional portrayal not only limits women's agency and autonomy but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes that undermine their true capabilities.

Feminism advocates for a more balanced representation of women that recognizes their struggles, strengths, and achievements. It emphasizes the importance of showcasing women in a multidimensional light, highlighting not just their vulnerabilities but also their resilience, intelligence, and courage. By acknowledging and celebrating the diverse experiences and talents of women, feminism aims to empower women and challenge societal expectations that confine them to narrow roles and labels.

Today, many writers worldwide are using literature as a powerful medium to challenge gender norms and address the various forms of inequality faced by women. Through their works, these writers aim to dismantle stereotypes, advocate for gender equality, and amplify the voices of women who have long been marginalized or silenced. By shedding light on the complexities of women's experiences and the pervasive nature of gender inequality, these literary works serve as catalysts for social change and empower women to embrace their true worth and potential.

Literature work is the expression of artistic and imaginative facts as a manifestation of human life and society through language as a medium, which has a positive impact on human life or humanity. Kartikasari & Suprpto (2018: 3) stated that literature is the manifestation of the life of the soul, which is incarnated through writing or written language that describes or reflects events in the life of society or members of society. In line with Long (2008: 11), literature is the expression of life through words of truth and beauty. Literature is a written record of the human spirit, ideas, emotions, and aspirations. This is history, and the only history of the human soul. In short, literature is the result of human creative activities in expressing their appreciation through language. Literature is a record of things that the writer has seen, experienced, thought about, and felt in life.

Novel is one of the literary works that is still developing. By blending imagination with reality, writers infuse their works with profound truths, effectively dramatizing human connections and interpersonal dynamics. As Al-Ma'ruf, and Nugrahani (2017) mentioned, novels capture human experience, serving as a nuanced reflection of society's intricacies. Through the artful crafting of fiction, creators articulate profound insights, shedding light on the profound intricacies of the human condition. Thus, the novel emerges not merely as a work of literature but as a profound exploration of the human psyche, unveiling the complexities of our existence and offering poignant reflections on the tapestry of life itself.

The Hunger Games not only resonates with readers through its engrossing storyline and well-developed characters but also serves as a vehicle for exploring powerful themes, including resilience, sacrifice, and the complexities of power dynamics. Particularly noteworthy is its portrayal of feminist ideals embodied by the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, whose strength, agency, and defiance challenge traditional gender roles.

In the dystopian world of Panem, ruled by President Snow, the annual Hunger Games serve as a brutal reminder of the Capitol's control over the twelve impoverished districts. Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist, inadvertently becomes a symbol of

resistance and hope through her defiance of the Capitol's oppressive rule. Her courage and refusal to conform inspire a spirit of rebellion among the oppressed populace, sparking a movement against the authoritarian regime. The novel portrays a story of survival, defiance, and the power of individual actions to challenge and change oppressive systems.

Feminism extends beyond mere rhetoric and activism. It is intricately woven into the fabric of various forms of mass media, including literary works such as novels. Suzanne Collins' seminal work, *The Hunger Games*, stands as a testament to the influence of feminism in shaping narratives and challenging societal norms. Through the lens of literature, feminism emerges as a dynamic force that transcends the confines of traditional activism, offering a nuanced and compelling perspective on gender equality and empowerment.

The research objectives are to find out the types of feminism embodied by the main character, Katniss Everdeen, and how feminism is portrayed in the novel *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociology of Literature

Literature presents a picture of life, which is a social reality. In this sense, life includes relationships within society. Between society and individuals, people, and events that occur in a person's mind. However, the events that occur in a person's mind, which frequently become material for literature, are a reflection of a person's relationship with other people or with society and develop certain social attitudes or even trigger certain social events. Damono stated that sociology of literature is an approach to literature that considers social aspects and uses text analysis to determine its structure, which is then used to understand more deeply the social phenomena that exist outside literature (Al-Ma'ruf and Nugrahani, 2017: 134).

In the perspective of sociology of literature, literary works can be viewed as products of society, as a means of representing reality in society. The sociology of literary works is considered a development of the mimetic approach proposed by Plato, which understands literary works in relation to reality and social aspects of society. This view is driven by the fact that the existence of literary works cannot be separated from the social realities that occur in society (Wiyatmi, 2013: 8).

2.2 Novel

A novel is a long piece of prose that contains a series of stories about a person's life and the people around him, highlighting the character and nature of each character (Sugiyono & Maryani, 2008). In line with Kosasih, a novel is an imaginative work that tells the entirety of the problematic lives of one or several characters. Imaginative works are not just imaginary stories but an imagination produced by the author based on reality or a phenomenon that can be seen and felt (Sanjaya et al., 2022). The essence of a novel extends beyond mere entertainment. It serves as a mirror, reflecting the complexities of the human condition and the myriad challenges inherent in the human experience. Each character, meticulously crafted by the author, embodies a unique set of traits, motivations, and struggles, allowing readers to empathize with their joys, sorrows, triumphs, and failures. Through these characters, a novel transcends the boundaries of fiction to offer profound insights into the depths of the human psyche and the nuances of interpersonal relationships.

2.3 Feminism

Feminism in general is a discussion about the patterns of social relationships between men and women, as well as the rights, status, and position of women in the household and public sectors. Feminism believes that society promotes men and women inequally. Brunell and Burkett explained that feminism is a social movement, political movement, and ideology all working toward the same goal: defining, building, and achieving gender equality in the political, economic, personal, and social arenas (Andestend, 2020). The primary aim of feminism is to elevate the position and degree of women so that they are equal to the position and degree of men. Feminism is a movement of women to reject everything that is marginalized, subordinated, and degraded by the dominant culture, both in the political and economic fields and in social life in general (Raharjo & Nugraha, 2022: 49).

Feminism is not a single thought but has many varieties, whose emergence and development often mutually support, correct, and deny previous feminist thoughts (Tong in Wiyatmi, 2012: 19). Tong and Botts (2018) categorized various kinds of feminism into ten types: liberal, radical, Marxist/Socialist, Women of Color Feminism in the US, Women-of-Color Feminism on the World Stage (Global, Postcolonial, and Transnational), psychoanalytic, care-focused, ecofeminism, postmodern, and Third Wave, and queer feminism.

3. Research Method

The research design is qualitative, utilizing the novel *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins as the data source, translated into Indonesian and published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. The data, comprising words, dialogues, sentences, and passages from the novel, is collected through in-depth reading and note-taking. The main instrument is the researcher, with note-taking serving as an additional data collection tool. The data analysis involves selecting, organizing, and analyzing relevant data based on the study's objectives and problems using sociology of literature approach, culminating in the presentation of findings on the concept of feminism and drawing conclusions from the analyzed data (Creswell, 2010).

4. Discussion

4.1 The Types of Feminism Emerged in the Novel

4.1.1 Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism emerged as a form of resistance to injustice and oppression. In line with Jaggar (1983: 184), liberal feminists believe that every person has the liberty to seek their own definition of self-fulfillment. In the novel, values that should be protected by the government, such as freedom and human rights, are actually ignored by the Capitol government. This then led to a resistance carried out by Katniss.

One example of repressive actions carried out by the Capitol is that the Capitol considers all forms of criticism of the government as a rebellion, as narrated in the following passage:

“When I was younger, the things I said about District 12 and the people who are in control over us, Panem, from a far away place called the Capitol genuinely scared my mother. Ultimately, I realized that this kind of conversation would only lead to more problems for us. So that no one could hear what was going through my mind, I bit my tongue and put on a detached, cold face.” (Collins, 2009: 13)

The passage discusses the oppressive regime of the Capitol in the novel, highlighting how any form of dissent or criticism is equated with rebellion. The protagonist's experience reveals the fear and surveillance that pervade Panem, leading individuals to self-censor to avoid consequences. The Capitol's ruthless enforcement of the Hunger Games reinforces its power and control over the districts, instilling fear and compliance. The annual games serve as a tool for the Capitol to assert dominance and suppress dissent, perpetuating a cycle of fear and oppression. Katniss's rebellion can be seen as a liberal feminist challenge to the Capitol's authoritarian rule, symbolizing resistance against systemic inequality and the erosion of individual agency.

As the flames of rebellion within her intensify, she bravely challenges the oppressive government during the climax of the deadly games. With unwavering courage, she defies the Capitol's decree by daringly confronting the game makers and devising a plan with Peeta to disrupt the established rules. In a bold move, she proposes consuming poisonous berries to ensure the Games end without a victor, signalling her defiance against the regime and her determination to resist its power.

“Yes, they must have a winner. The entire situation would collapse in the faces of the Gamemakers if there was no winner. The Capitol would have failed them. Perhaps even put to death, slowly and painfully, as the cameras aired it on every television in the nation. If Peeta and I both died, or at least they believed we would... -...The funny thing is that I didn't consider how my actions would affect the Capitol when I was spitting those berries in the arena, my only thought was how to fool the Gamemakers.” (Collins, 2009: 375-376, 390)

Katniss cleverly outwits the minds of the Capitol and the fearsome President Snow with her audacious prank, leaving them fuming with disbelief and frustration. As the tension escalates in the treacherous arena of the Games, Katniss fearlessly seizes control of her own fate, boldly defying the ruthless demands of the Gamemakers. By ingeniously utilizing the berries to outsmart the Capitol, she emerges as the fearless commander of her own destiny, a beacon of indomitable will in a sea of darkness where others seek to manipulate and control her every move.

4.1.2 Radical Feminism

Radical feminism advocates for the idea that individuals should be free to embody a spectrum of traits, whether deemed masculine or feminine, without being confined by societal expectations (Tong, 2018). By encouraging men to explore and embrace their feminine qualities without fear of judgment, society can cultivate a more inclusive and diverse understanding of masculinity. Similarly, granting women the freedom to delve into their masculine facets.

In the novel, most of the time, Katniss behaves masculine rather than feminine, as she should be according to her gender. The inner conflict within Katniss Everdeen is palpable as she grapples with societal expectations. Instead, as a female, she embraces masculinity by being a man of the house, being resourceful, not caring about fashion or the beauty of external looks, and being passionate about being strong. Her refusal to embrace feminine traits elucidates her fierce determination to uphold a facade of strength and resilience.

"Prim, let go of me," I snapped at her harshly, because this made me upset and I didn't want to cry. Later tonight when they re-air the election show, everyone will remember my crying, and I will be labeled an easy target. Weak person. I don't want to give them that satisfaction. "Let go!" (Collins, 2009: 31)

By harshly snapping at her sister, Prim, and demanding to be let go, Katniss exhibits a stoic demeanor rooted in self-preservation. Her fear of being perceived as weak is underscored by her belief that shedding tears could render her an "easy target" in the perilous arena of the Hunger Games. The meticulous portrayal of Katniss' reluctance to exhibit her emotions functions as a tough characterization, highlighting her strategic mindset and the calculated nature of her actions to navigate the treacherous circumstances she finds herself in.

Masculinity asserts a rigid code of behavior that dictates men must suppress their emotions and vulnerabilities in order to exude a facade of stoic strength. This societal expectation places immense pressure on men to uphold a tough and unyielding persona, often at the expense of their emotional well-being. Rooted in the notion that men are the designated protectors for both themselves and their loved ones, this traditional view of masculinity perpetuates harmful stereotypes and restricts individuals from expressing their true selves authentically.

4.2. The Portrayal of Feminism in the Novel

4.2.1 Katniss as Rebellious and Brave Character

Stamper (2012: 32) mentioned that the pursuit of freedom defines and directs the masculine, who cuts through any and all obstacles to seek freedom. Katniss faces a challenging life in Panem after her father's death in a mine accident, taking on the role of provider for her family by hunting, despite it being illegal. The district is surrounded by an electrified barrier, but at times, it is deactivated, allowing people to enter the forest to hunt. This act of defiance against the Capitol reveals Katniss' determination to survive and provide for her family, highlighting her resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity.

"Now, this fence is as quiet as a rock. I deflated my stomach and pushed myself half a meter beneath the loose section of the fence. The breach had been there for years, but it was hidden beneath bushes. There are a couple loose parts in this fence, but this one is the closest to the home, so I almost always enter the woods through it." (Collins, 2009: 11)

Crossing the barrier is against the rules, but Katniss is willing to take the risk to provide for her family. She risks her life to keep them alive. She defies authority every time she goes into the forest to hunt.

"Although trespassing and entering the forest is considered illegal and hunting without a permission can be severely punished, many people are willing to take that risk if they have a gun. But most people don't have the courage to go out with just a knife." (Collins, 2009: 12)

Through the passage, most people do not have the courage to go hunting. It shows that Katniss is one of the only few people who are brave enough to go hunting in the

forest. Her decision to travel alone in the wilderness demonstrates her independence and bravery. Take a solo trip to the center of the woods with only the essentials for survival. This act of rebellion across the fence demonstrates her untamed nature and masculinity, which are further developed as the story goes on.

On the third day of training leading up to the competition, Katniss found herself seething with anger at the Gamemakers for neglecting her completely, making her feel invisible and utterly unimportant, like she was no more valuable than a lifeless pig. As narrated below:

“I am furious all of a sudden because they didn't even want to take the time to listen to me while my life was on the line. I'm no more prestigious than a lifeless pig. My cheeks was flaming with wrath, and my heart was racing. I took a dart out of my pocket and pointed it without even thinking toward the judges' table. People scrambled backwards, and I heard yells of surprise. The pig's apple was pierced by my arrow, which caused the fruit to become embedded in the wall behind it. Everyone gave me an unbelieving look.” (Collins, 2009: 115-116)

Feeling ignored and frustrated, Katniss takes matters into her own hands by boldly shooting an arrow, defying the rules and expectations of the Hunger Games. Her rebellious act disrupts the silence and commands attention, leaving the Gamemakers stunned as she exits the room. This defiant move challenges the established order and shows Katniss's refusal to be controlled by their regulations any longer.

4.2.2 Picking Up the Father's Role

A father ought to be the unwavering leader of his family, exhibiting diligence, dedication, and a lack of self-indulgence (Figes, 1986: 136). Katniss defies traditional gender roles and societal expectations by bravely stepping into the roles of both a mother and father after her father's death. She shows strength, nurturing, toughness, and determination in caring for her family when her mother falls into deep sadness. Katniss's actions demonstrate that gender roles should not limit a person's capabilities, showcasing her courage, resilience, and unwavering love for her family. She challenges traditional norms, proving that true leadership transcends gender boundaries and emphasizing the importance of inner strength and perseverance in facing adversity.

“I became the man of the house when Prim was only seven year old, and I was eleven. There is no other way. I go to the market, buy food, cook it as best I can, and make an effort to look decent for Prim and myself. Prim and I would be placed in a community house by the district if it was discovered that my mother was no longer able to take care of us.” (Collins, 2009: 36)

At this point, it is clear that Katniss has completely embraced a more masculine manner. She has assumed the role that the patriarch has historically played in the family, carrying out her late father's responsibilities with courage and authority. She exhibits characteristics usually associated with men, such as taking on the burden of family chores and making decisive decisions, demonstrating a newly discovered strength and independence. Katniss symbolizes perseverance and adaptation through her actions and

manners. She also embodies a solid and powerful presence that resonates with attributes commonly associated with the male figure in society.

4.2.3 Be a Resourceful Person

Stamper (2012: 24) asserts that being resourceful is a characteristic often associated with masculinity. This trait is exemplified in Katniss during her harrowing journey in the Hunger Games arena, where her resourcefulness becomes essential for her survival. Her ability to adapt to her surroundings, makes the most of limited resources, and anticipate potential dangers sets her apart as a formidable contestant.

"The forest helps us to survive, and I traveled farther into it every day. I was committed to feed our family, even though it started slowly. I collected different plants that grew beneath my feet, took eggs from bird nests, caught fish with nets, and occasionally succeeded in shooting a squirrel or rabbit for stew. ... I kept us alive." (Collins, 2009: 61)

From the moment Katniss enters the arena, her resourcefulness is on full display. Drawing on her experience of providing for her family back in District 12, she quickly adapts to her new environment. She forages for edible plants, gathers eggs, catches fish, and hunts small game for sustenance. Her resourcefulness is not just a means of survival but a testament to her unwavering determination to keep her loved ones fed and safe.

4.2.4 Behaving Masculine

Pleck and Sawyer (1974: 101) mentioned that the societal pressure on men to conceal their emotions as a display of toughness underscores the gendered nature of emotional expression. Katniss is described as an example of a survivor. She engages in masculine behavior in almost all of her actions. Her dislike of feminine things is often depicted in the novel. She shows her masculine side in a variety of ways. One of the most obvious signs is how she dresses.

"I swing my legs out of bed and put on my hunting boots. The shoes were made of supple leather that was molded to my foot. I put on trousers, a shirt, and tucked a long dark braid into my hat, then I grabbed my hunting bag." (Collins, 2009: 10)

This has a lot to do with her being the breadwinner for her family, as she has to fill the shoes of her late father. We notice that Katniss often wears masculine attire, mostly pants and shirts. Yet, as we learn later, on some occasions, such as the annual *Reaping*, she wears a dress, although this is not often.

Katniss also does not like to show her emotions and vulnerability. With acts of masculine energy, she builds boundaries around her emotions. Prim attempts to stop her when she makes the decision to replace her sister during participation selection. Katniss in fact feels sad about this. She thinks, however, that she should not cry. To her, crying is a sign of weakness. She is worried that the other participants would find her as an easy target if they remember her crying. The novel often depicts Katniss' desire not to show her vulnerability.

"While sitting on the sofa, I couldn't help but stroke the velvet many times. The touch helped calm me as I prepared myself for the next moment. The time that is given to participants to say goodbye to their

loved ones. I must not feel miserable, then leave this room with swollen eyes and a puffy nose. Crying is not an option.” (Collins, 2009: 43)

Later when she is wounded, Katniss also states that she cannot show weakness because of her wound.

“I believe the cameras are focusing on my face. I can't show weakness because of this wound. In particular, if I need aid. You won't gain help from pity. What can aid you is the audience's admiration for your ability to keep going without assistance.” (Collins, 2009: 200)

5. Conclusion

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* presents a nuanced portrayal of feminism through the character of Katniss Everdeen, who embodies different aspects of feminist ideologies, particularly liberal and radical feminism. Katniss' actions challenge the traditional gender roles imposed by the oppressive society of Panem. As a strong, independent female protagonist, she defies the Capitol's control and works to protect the freedom and human rights of her people, exemplifying a liberal feminist resistance to systemic oppression. Furthermore, Katniss adopts many traits commonly associated with masculinity, such as resourcefulness, bravery, and emotional stoicism. This defiance of gender expectations reflects radical feminist ideas that reject the societal norms dictating how women and men should behave. Katniss steps into roles typically reserved for men, such as the primary provider for her family and the protector of her sister, demonstrating that leadership and strength are not defined by gender. Through her resourcefulness in the Hunger Games and her refusal to display vulnerability, Katniss redefines the conventional image of femininity. She combines strength and nurturing in ways that blur the lines between masculine and feminine traits, challenging both the Capitol's authoritarian rule and the rigid gender norms of her society. Ultimately, *The Hunger Games* showcases Katniss as a complex feminist character whose journey of survival and rebellion not only critiques oppressive political systems but also explores the fluidity and power of gender identity.

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