

## “I hunt. He bakes.”: Constructing and Deconstructing Gender Identity in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games Trilogy*

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### Abstract

This article aims to investigate the construction of the gender identity of the young-adult female protagonist in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Through the lens of Judith Butler’s gender performativity, both male and female characters in the trilogy manifest different perspectives of masculinity and femininity through the deconstruction of the gender binary. Similar to the *muttation* of the mockingjays, the female protagonist hybridizes masculinity and femininity. Katniss Everdeen embraces both masculine and feminine attributes simultaneously, and this adoption promotes an alternative way of performing gender. Gender, hence, becomes a choice for characters to perform to present themselves. In this regard, Judith Butler’s gender performativity is applied to analyze Katniss’s gender identity that deconstructs the ideologies of the traditional gender binary. The adoption of gender performativity may encourage awareness and empowerment of gender equality in the trilogy.

**Keywords:** *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, gender performativity, identity, masculinity, femininity, gender fluid

### 1. Introduction

The American novelist Suzanne Collins whose works are mostly related to children wrote *The Hunger Games* trilogy in the voice of the young female protagonist Katniss Everdeen. Katniss notably exhibits the characteristics of bravery, toughness, and independence. She has been widely recognized as a role model for young women in various articles written by renowned news agencies such as BBC, The Guardian, The New York Times and Bloomberg (Cox, 2013; Ellis, 2014; Moore, 2013; Scott & Dargis, 2012). In The Guardian’s article, Samantha Ellis (2014) values Katniss as ‘a great female role model’ regarding her multidimensional skills and her independence. The New York Times’ writer also published the article *A Radical Female Hero from Dystopia* with a proclamation that the trilogy illustrates ‘a new kind of female character’ through an alternative gender role presented by the protagonist who occupies both masculine and feminine attributes. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Katniss Everdeen is metaphorically recognized as the mockingjay that is originally from the hybridization of male jabberjays and female mockingbirds. The jabberjays are genetically modified to eavesdrop on the Capital’s enemies and rebels. Later, they are abandoned to die off in the woods by the Capital. Nevertheless, they can still survive because they mate with the female mockingbirds, and their offspring are known as mockingjays. Similarly, the protagonist learns to struggle and survive in the poorest District of Panem after the death of her father since the age of eleven. She becomes a breadwinner who earns a living in the public sphere like any other male workers. After participating in the annual Hunger Games, she is widely recognized as ‘the Mockingjay’ on account of her hybrid characteristics of masculinity and femininity that are presented through her personality and behaviors. The performative acts of masculine and feminine characteristics help Katniss survive in the Games and also in Panem. In the meantime, the hybridization of masculinity and femininity embraced by Katniss encourages people in Panem and the reader to realize gender fluid that deconstructs the notion of a gender binary. Throughout the trilogy, the amalgamation of two traditional genders has been reflected outwardly through the notion of androgyny in which individuals adopt both masculine and feminine characteristics. “I hunt. He bakes.” is a clear example of alternative gender identity, that is, characters can perform their gender alternatively and independently (Collins, 2009, p. 17). Therefore, Judith Butler’s gender performativity is adopted to analyze the trilogy in order to shed light on an alternative way of performing genders.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Review of Primary Text

To underline the deconstruction of gender identity, this section provides in-depth information about the theory of gender performativity developed by a gender theorist Judith Butler. Subsequently, the theoretical framework is adopted to analyze the construction of gender identity in the female characters and to discuss the influences of gender performativity that may empower the gender equality.

### 2.1 Judith Butler's Gender Performativity

According to the concept of gender performativity, Judith Butler (1999) distinguishes gender from sex under the consideration of biology and socialization. To clarify, people are categorized through sexes. On the other hand, gender is primarily based on social norms and values. Even though people are limited by their sexes, they still have their right to perform gender as they prefer, since Butler emphasizes gender as a choice, and simultaneously, as an improvising practice. Apart from that, Butler points out that gender is “nothing more than the bodily appearance” (Ferguson, 2005, p. 7). In an interview, Butler emphasizes that gender is a performance that people act out the way they want to be perceived (Big Think, 2011). Moreover, the theory of gender performativity firmly ties with social norms and values using language to differentiate and define people and things in society. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler clarifies that language plays a significant role in reproducing the notion of heteronormativity, that is, the discourse of ‘performativity’ implies the binaries of gender identity (Ferguson, 2005). Consequently, gender, for Butler, is “what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (p. 531). In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler also claims “masculine and feminine are notoriously changeable” under the geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints (p. 10). Therefore, gender doesn't happen once and for all; it is reconstructed and reproduced under social constraints all the time. To summarize, the concept of gender performativity has been transformed from gender as a role we put on into gender as an act of doing driven by desires originated from social norms. Interestingly, the notion of gender performativity deconstructs (Note 1) the representation of traditional masculine and feminine characteristics. Masculinity (Note 2) cannot be distinctly defined by men's performances, interactions with others, and remarkable traits such as protectiveness, leadership, and bravery (Connell, 2000). Likewise, femininity goes beyond the attributes of tenderness, compliance, and servitude.

### 2.2 Review of Primary Text

Suzanne Collins, an American writer whose first career was a screenwriter for children's television, was born in 1962 in Connecticut. She worked for an American cable television *Nickelodeon*, and she was a part of a writing team in several shows such as *Clarissa Explains it All* and *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 became a well-known author before publishing her first dystopian book of *The Hunger Games* in 2008, followed by *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010) respectively. The publication of the trilogy has affected the growth of the contemporary dystopian novel among readers. Finally, the film adaptation of the first book was released in 2012, and the film adaptation of *Catching Fire* was released in the following year. Likewise, the first part of the film adaptation of *Mockingjay* was released in 2014, followed by the second part of *Mockingjay* released in 2015. Most of her works mainly focus on children who are in the process of growing up (coming-of-age) due to her strong background in writing books for children and adolescents.

#### *The Hunger Games (2008)*

The totalitarian government called the Capitol arranges the annual Hunger Games that the male and female tributes at the age of 12–18 from 12 districts are chosen to take part. The protagonist Katniss Everdeen volunteers for her sister Prim to take part in the 74th Hunger Games together with the male tribute Peeta Mellark. During the interview, Peeta reveals his love for Katniss. When the Games begins, all tributes kill one another savagely. Katniss gets angry when she sees Rue, a young innocent girl from District 11, is killed by another tribute. She covers Rue's body with flowers and shows the three-fingered salute to the camera to show her wrath towards the Gamemakers and the Capitol. The annual survivor is limited only one, but both Katniss and Peeta survive (win) because they will kill themselves with poisonous berries if the Capitol wants either of them to win, and this makes President Snow angry because he considers the berries as an act of defiance.

#### *Catching Fire (2009)*

Peeta and Katniss are obliged to take a tour to all districts, and they pretend to love each other to appease President Snow. However, President Snow announces the 75th anniversary of the Games and the past winners of the Games are selected to be the tributes for this anniversary. Katniss and Peeta are selected to take part in this

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. Finally, 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.

#### *Mockingjay (2010)*

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 Coin of District 13 to spread propaganda resisting President Snow. The propaganda battle between the Capitol and District becomes more violent and savage. Prim, Katniss's sister, is killed by President Snow's bombing mission, and people start to kill one another savagely. Finally, President Snow is captured. Coin wants to take Snow's place and maintains the Hunger Games. However, Katniss doesn't want to maintain this Games, so she killed Coin during the inauguration of the Hunger Games. After killing Coin, she gets married to Peeta and lives a simple life in the countryside.

### **3. Hybridization, Deconstruction and Performativity**

In the patriarchal world, women are destined to serve men because women are "naturally born to be wife and mother" (Sittichane, 2009, p. 25). The patriarchal society expects women to conform to the domestic ideology and embrace the positions of a submissive person or "a heteronormative object of desire" (Woloshyn et al., 2013, p. 155). This implies that the biological sexes play an important role in determining gender as Beauvoir (1973) claims that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Note 3) (p. 301). Nevertheless, *The Hunger Games* trilogy controversially presents the deconstruction of the concepts of traditional masculinity and femininity through visualizing the amalgamation of masculinity and femininity in many characters, especially the protagonist who performs both masculine and feminine characteristics. Throughout the trilogy, Katniss demonstrates her performance of toughness through hunting and killing as well as her performance of tenderness through caring and sympathy towards her family and other tributes in the Games.

#### *3.1 Hybridizing (Note 4) Masculinity and Femininity*

Mayer and McHugh (2016) consider gender as a combination of characteristics that individuals possess, and it has been reflected through individuals' traits and behaviors. Accordingly, gender identity is an individual sense of one's gender that can be in harmony with one's biological sex or different from it. Tate (2014) defines gender identity as 'a personality process' based upon an awareness of anatomy. In consideration of gender identity as 'reflected attributes and behaviors', the protagonist's characteristics amalgamating masculine attributes with feminine traits are in parallel with the notion of androgyny. Heilbrun Jr. (1986) defines androgyny as "blended masculine and feminine behaviors" performed by individuals (p. 124). It can be assumed that individuals perform gender beyond the traditional masculine and feminine ideologies. In this regard, the concepts of androgyny and gender performativity are concordant in terms of interchangeable gender, as Butler asserts, masculine and feminine are changeable (Butler, 2004). To go into detail, Katniss and Peeta present 'blended masculine and feminine behaviors' consciously and unconsciously, and these behaviors considerably reflect the 'transgressed or reversed' gender roles and gender fluid in which gender identity can change across space and over time (Heilbrun Jr., 1986). Indeed, the fluid gender identity embraced by the protagonist can be seen from the alternative markers of femininity that are firstly presented in the form of style of dress since the alternative style is "a form of resistance to the dominant style of dress" to which the dominant style of dress can be inferred the conventional femininity (Holland, 2004, p. 15). Through an investigation of Katniss's style of dress and appearances, it can be noticed that Katniss's preferred clothes such as "hunting boots", "trousers", "shirt" and "cap" obviously demonstrate how much she would rather "transcend and transform what was available, seeking to feminize ideas about the meanings of 'alternative' and resistance" (Collins, 2008, p. 4; Holland, 2004, p. 148). With regards to Katniss's father, he influences Katniss's dressing style since the clothes Katniss normally wears in daily life in District 12 are not different from her father's daily clothes as well as other male characters in the district. This style of dress encourages Katniss's adoption of masculinity, as we all know, men are expected to wear trousers instead of dress; otherwise, they will be considered effeminate. Katniss's dressing style, hence, is changeable and adaptive. For instance, Katniss dresses like a tomboy in her daily life in the district, but once she is required to attend the formal ceremony like 'the Reaping', she adapts herself to dress more feminine as she mentions "my mother has laid out one of her own lovely dresses for me. A soft blue thing with matching shoes" (Collins, 2008, p. 17). Even though the lovely dress prepared by her mother is "nothing like myself", she still wears it because of the

social norms in *The Hunger Games* that expect girls to wear the dress, not trousers, as she likes (Collins, 2008, p. 17). This point is buttressed by Butler as she writes that “what we put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (Butler, 1988, p. 531). The tomboyish outfits illustrate Katniss’s free will in presenting her non-conforming gender. Meanwhile, the girlish dress implies that gender is sometimes restricted by society. The hybridization of masculinity and femininity is reflected through her attire as well as her characteristics and behaviors. It can, accordingly, be perceived that Katniss realizes when she can perform her gender alternatively and when she should not. Katniss performs her gender in contemplation of social norms and values, and this redounds to her advantages both in the Games and in her real life.

### 3.2 Deconstructing Gender Binary

Butler argues that gender is “the mechanism” producing and naturalizing the notions of masculinity and femininity, and they are sometimes “deconstructed and denaturalized” (Butler, 2004, p. 42). In Butler’s (1999) *Gender Trouble*, she points out that gender is culturally and socially constructed. For that reason, the construction of gender identity inescapably associates with social norms and values that “define and constrain the space for women to exercise their agency” (IBRD, 2011, p. 169). Nevertheless, Katniss reveals the deconstruction of the naturalized binary through Katniss’s self-reliance, that is, she expunges gender stereotype and ideology that make women subservient to men, not least in terms of financial support. She becomes the breadwinner of her family. The protagonist chooses to work outside instead of inside the house, and this act displays an avoidance of conforming to the social values of domesticity and true womanhood. Besides, the denaturalization of gender is portrayed through an expression of gender that does not align with individuals’ sex. According to patriarchy, the concept of heteronormativity expects men and women to perform their gender roles in accordance with their sex. Hence, the traditional masculinity and femininity that individuals in the patriarchal society adopt are naturalized. To deviate from the heteronormativity, men and women need to denaturalize the gender norms by breaking the gender ideology instilled by discourses on sexuality. To clarify, Butler asserts that

The dogged effort to denaturalize gender in this text emerges, I think, from a strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality. (Butler, 1999, p. xxi)

The denaturalized gender brings about the breakage between masculinity/femininity and maleness/femaleness (Lazarevic, 2019). Either men or women who deviate from the stereotypical gender roles of heteronormativity are prone to denaturalize their gender. Katniss denaturalizes her gender through the denial of performing the traditionally feminine roles of a wife and a mother—expected by the heteronormative society—at the beginning of the trilogy as she proclaims that “I didn’t want a boyfriend and never planned on marrying” (Collins, 2009, p. 31). Throughout the trilogy, Katniss herself attempts to be free from ‘the biological conditioning’ through challenging the boundary of traditional femininity by simultaneously adopting masculinity together with alternative femininity. To exemplify, Katniss shows adoption of masculinity through her boldness and toughness throughout *The Hunger Games* trilogy as she firstly hunts in the restricted wood, volunteers for her sister, fights with other tributes in the games, protects Peeta from being attacked by other tributes, destroys the artificial arena in the games, becomes a revolutionary symbol, and finally dares to kill Coin for annihilating the Hunger Games. Concurrently, she manifests alternative femininity through refusing to follow the traditionally feminine norm of marriage as she repeatedly proclaims that “I’ll never marry”, “I didn’t want a boyfriend and never planned on marrying”, and “I still wouldn’t have wanted to marry anyone” (Collins, 2008, p. 365; Collins, 2009, p. 31, 210). The repeated refusal to get married in *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire* illustrates how Katniss gives herself an alternative of not getting married and settling down. In Butler’s estimation, all individuals have a free will to construct their gender identity based on their preference. Similarly, Katniss also has the rights to construct and perform her gender identity without concerning herself with the “predetermination linked to [her] essential constitution”, which means her gender identity should not be destined by the biological conditioning (p. 11). Budgeon (2014) defines ‘new girl’ as “assertive, dynamic and free from the confines of passive femininity against the image of the vulnerable, voiceless and fragile girl” (p. 330). In this regard, Katniss deconstructs the gender binary by presenting herself as a new feminine who can live independently without men’s coattails.

### 3.3 Performing Gender

Katniss’s blended masculine and feminine behaviors are illustrated through performing toughness in the form of hunting and killing other tributes, and sensitivity in the form of caring and sympathy towards others. However, the ‘deconstructed and denaturalized’ gender roles are delineated when she determines to become the revolutionary icon or the Mockingjay. Katniss asserts her gender role through “I hunt. He bakes.” in *Catching Fire*.

Consequently, performing as ‘the Mockingjay’ is inevitable to adopt both feminine and, especially, masculine attributes as the mockingjay bird itself is a hybridization of male jabberjays and female mockingbirds. Accordingly, it is safe to assume that the protagonist who symbolizes the Mockingjay to which “the Capitol never intended exist” constructs her gender identity through an amalgamation of masculinity and femininity in accordance with social constraints (Collins, 2009, p. 105). Referring to Butler, gender performativity is “a phenomenon that is being produced and reproduced all the time” (Big Think, 2011, 1:23). What Katniss, as the Mockingjay, performs is like a phenomenon that is being produced and reproduced, and her performativity becomes recognized and lauded by people in all districts because it helps emancipate the people from the Capitol’s oppression. Katniss adopts the hegemonic masculinity in order to rouse rebels to fight against totalitarianism, and this adoption empowers her to negotiate with the totalitarian government as Plutarch points out “[w]hile you live, the revolution lives” (Collins, 2009, p. 433). The masculine qualities Katniss manifests are accordant with the notion of hegemony, that is, hegemonic men perform traditional masculine traits to attain “power, legitimacy and privilege” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 2). Katniss herself is able to possess ‘power, legitimacy and privilege’ once she performs masculine attributes on behalf of the Mockingjay as she states that she possesses “a kind of power I never knew I possessed” (Collins, 2010, p. 101). Taking on the role of the Mockingjay, Katniss reminds herself that

I must now become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution. The person who the districts—most of which are now openly at war with the Capitol—can count on to blaze the path to victory. (Collins, 2010, p. 11)

Becoming ‘the actual leader’, Katniss needs to position herself as ‘the face’, ‘the voice’, and ‘the embodiment of the revolutionary’. According to Bogg’s branding of Katniss as “the face of the rebellion”, it is widely recognized that what Katniss does or performs will exceedingly influence the revolutionary movement (Collins, 2010, p. 406). By conducting herself as ‘the face’ of the revolution, Katniss is unavoidable to perform gender properly, otherwise, the improper performance will bring about the failure of the conspiratorial revolution. Byrne (2015) emphasizes that clothes help create and reflect one’s identity, and they are also “powerful markers of ideological affiliation and control” (p. 59). Therefore, dressing style significantly empowers the leader to perform the role. Regarding the clothes and appearances of the revolutionary leader, Katniss’s uniform comprises “[t]he carefully tailored layers of body armor, the hidden weapons in the boots and belt, the special reinforcement over my heart”, and most importantly, the mockingjay pin (Collins, 2010, p. 49). The uniform Katniss wears, as Coin says, helps to “build you, our rebel leader, from the outside...in” (Collins, 2010, p. 50, emphasis in original). From the outside in, Coin thinks that the uniform could help Katniss adopt leadership and bravery. Seeing herself wearing uniform with “ragged” look, “uneven skin”, “tired eyes”, and “the ugly scar from the tracker”, Katniss dearly embraces masculine attributes in which men don’t concern much about physical beauty as she emphasizes “[t]hat looks like me” (Collins, 2010, p. 87). Katniss intently represents her identity with “[t]he damage, the fatigue, the imperfections” instead of beautified appearances (Collins, 2010, p. 101). In this regard, Katniss’s disregard for physical appearance and ideal beauty conformity emphasizes the contradiction of traditional femininity, which demands women to look desirable and attractive “regardless of their strength” (Charles, 2007; Taber et al., 2013, p. 1031). With regards to an internalization of the attributes of hegemonic masculinity, Katniss wears uniform specially designed for warfare, and this uniform encourages Katniss to perform the role righteously as we can see when Katniss, on behalf of the rebel leader, boldly declares war against the Capitol: “And if we burn, you burn with us!” (Collins, 2010, p. 112). Accordingly, the uniform symbolizing the leader of the revolution bestows her “power, legitimacy and privilege”, like hegemonic men, as she mentions that she has “a kind of power I never knew I possessed” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 2; Collins, 2010, p. 101). It can be perceived that the adoption of masculinity and fluid gender allows the female protagonist to access the power that is generally reserved for men, especially those who adopt the idea of hegemonic masculinity, and this access inspires gender equality in society as well.

Besides ‘the face’, being ‘the voice’ for suppressed people from all districts drives Katniss to present herself with bold, forceful, and reconcilable through her non-binary gender. After declaring herself as the Mockingjay, Katniss starts to perform her gender with a recognition that she needs to gain popularity and support from the people. Katniss’s statement that “I’ll perform when you’ve made the announcement” reflects her consciousness of performing gender based on people’s desire (Collins, 2010, p. 47). Thus, Katniss needs to perform gender properly so that she could gain popularity and support from the people in Panem. Once she is popular among them, she could become a voice for the people being oppressed by the Capitol. Accordingly, Katniss’s voice is also reflected through “The Hanging Tree” song that makes Katniss reconsider her life in Panem and implicitly rouses the uprising among rebels. When Katniss mentions that “I have not sung “The Hanging Tree” out loud for ten years, because it’s forbidden”, this quote strengthens that this song is considered a rebel song. The Capitol, hence,

outlaws this song as it would stimulate the uprising in Panem again. However, Katniss retrieves the song of revolution past and it successfully urges rebels to join her in bringing down the totalitarianism. The rebel song unintentionally sung by Katniss becomes an igniter of the successful revolution. To take the forbidden song into account, it is a song told from the point of view of “an alleged murderer who calls on his lover to join him in death” (Torkelson, 2012, p. 33). The song has four stanzas as follows:

Are you, are you  
Coming to the tree  
Where they strung up a man they say murdered three.  
Strange things did happen here  
No stranger would it be  
If we met up at midnight in the hanging tree. (Collins, 2010, p. 138)

The lyrics of “The Hanging Tree” metaphorically portray Katniss’s voice that provokes the oppressed people to fight against dictatorship, like the hanged man calling on his lover to join him in death. The song rouses people in all districts to protest against the Capitol by implicitly asking “Are you, are you coming to the tree” which means whether you join this uprising or not. “Strange things” can be comparable to innocents being hanged, and this hanging brings about an acknowledgment of exploitation and oppression among people in all districts (Wherry, 2014). That is why “[n]o stranger would it be, if we met at midnight in the hanging tree” which can be inferred that it is not a strange thing to sacrifice your life for emancipation because we will fight together through metaphorically “wear[ing] a necklace of rope, side by side with me” (Wherry, 2014). Taking the people’s side, Katniss wrathfully retorts the Capitol when she sees the Capitol bombs the hospital in District 8 by stating:

I want to tell people that if you think for one second the Capitol will treat us fairly if there’s a cease-fire, you’re deluding yourself. Because you know who they are and what they do...This is what they do! And we must fight back! (Collins, 2010, p. 111)

Once the anti-Capitol song sung by Katniss together with a provocative statement, mentioned above, is propagandized on the screen throughout Panem. Katniss’s voice is so pronounced that she can flare up people’s resentment towards the Capitol and create an uprising in several districts in Panem. She eventually becomes ‘the voice’ for people in Panem to fight against totalitarianism because everything she says can create a great impact on rebels and the Capitol. What she says can provoke rebels as well as frighten the Capitol simultaneously as Boggs affirms that “[y]ou may have more influence than any other single person” (Collins, 2010, p. 406). It can be perceived that Katniss’s gender identity during performing as the Mockingjay has been manifested through personality and behaviors. Katniss’s adoption of masculine traits such as bold, assertive, and forceful has been illustrated, apart from hunting skills, through propaganda produced to fight against President Snow. In the meantime, she shows feminine traits of sensitivity and empathy towards those who are punished and abused by the Capitol. The female protagonist boldly declares her resentment and defiance towards the most powerful man in Panem: “Fire is catching!...And if we burn, you burn with us!” (Collins, 2010, p. 112). The protagonist is so brave and assertive that she defies the most powerful person whom no one can overcome. This kind of defiant act illustrates that the leader position propels Katniss to go beyond the ideologies of the traditional gender binary to the new standard of gender that ‘a girl on fire’ like Katniss can also become a leader and a voice for suppressed people like any other men. Katniss’s role has been shifted from ‘a girl on fire’ to ‘a mockingjay’ symbolizing mutations, or mutts for short, between male jabbajays and female mockingbirds. In fact, the Mockingjay—a central metaphor in *The Hunger Games* trilogy—is initially rejected by Katniss because she doesn’t want to be in trouble if she accepts to take on the role. However, she eventually embraces and even adopts it for the sake of revolution and emancipation. The hybridization of masculinity and femininity assists Katniss to survive in the cruel totalitarian world and to overthrow the Capitol as Peeta indicates: “She’s some kind of mutt the Capitol created to use against the rest of us!”, like the mockingjay (Collins, 2010, p. 190). Katniss properly adopts the masculine and feminine attributes, and then she is empowered: “[y]ou may have more influence than any other single person” (Collins, 2010, p. 406). Noticeably, Katniss’s favor is not only recognized by the aforementioned statement, but also by an embellishment of the mockingjay pin, which is considered as “a symbol used by the rebel” (Collins, 2009, p. 214). Katniss can get to this point because of her adaptive gender identity; she knows when to perform her gender, especially in front of cameras, as she states “I should be acting with more caution” (Collins, 2008, p. 195). Consequently, she can shift from a masculinized role to a feminized role when she knows that the performance will benefit her as she points out: “Our romance became a key strategy for our survival in the arena” (Collins, 2009, p. 10).

According to Katniss's adoption of gender performativity, women's empowerment and gender equality have been promoted in the trilogy through women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (IBRD, 2011). In the trilogy, both Coin and Katniss take leadership roles. To clarify, Alma Coin is the president of District 13, in the meantime, she is a mastermind of the second rebellion against the Capitol. Coin's roles as the president and the rebellious leader demonstrate empowerment of women in terms of political participation, that is, women can participate in political affairs and occupy the leading positions like men. By doing so, power is distributed to women, and the distribution of political power remarkably encourages gender equality. Similarly, the appointment of the female political leaders in *The Hunger Games* trilogy portrays women's political empowerment that may lead to gender equality starting from political participation. Correspondingly, Katniss Everdeen paves the way to gender equality by making people recognize the political participation of women. Initially, Katniss is just an ordinary girl living in District 12, but the Capitol's oppression impels her to express her amalgamation of feminine and masculine traits through the performative acts. Eventually, the performative acts bring her to the point that she becomes the female political leader overthrowing the Capitol. As the rebellious leader Mockingjay, Katniss is invited to join an important meeting regarding the existence of the Hunger Games after President Snow's capture. Katniss, together with other victors, fully takes part in decision-making in politics, and her voice towards the existence of the Games is equally respected. Interestingly, Paylor—the female leader of the rebel forces in District 8—is elected to be the new president of Panem as Katniss states: “Paylor was voted in as president” (Collins, 2010, p. 425). The presidency is not preserved only for men. It can be assumed that women can partially and fully participate in political activities like men. Additionally, the democratic revolution propels changes in society, especially women's empowerment and gender equality, as we can see from an augmentation of women's leadership roles and participation in the political area such as Katniss, Coin, and Paylor. Therefore, granting women an opportunity to engage and participate in political activities is crucial for the empowerment of gender equality (IBRD, 2011; UN Women, 2018).

#### 4. Conclusion

The construction of the gender identity of the female protagonist is discussed based on the feminist perspective of gender performativity in which masculine and feminine are interchangeable. The notion of gender binary is deconstructed by the protagonist. Katniss demonstrates an alternative way of performing gender identity. 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. To survive in and after the Games, Katniss needs to perform her gender under social constraints. Katniss is inescapable to perform her gender based on people's desire. Throughout the trilogy, Katniss sometimes shifts her gender as we can see from the roles she takes on such as 'a girl on fire', 'the star-crossed lover', and most importantly, 'the Mockingjay'. To put it differently, when she needs to protect her beloved ones and fight against totalitarianism, she considerably manifests masculine attributes. The performativity of masculine traits brings her power she never expects, and it can be seen from the Mockingjay role. 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. The bodily acts transcending gender binary help promote women's agency to the extent that political power has been distributed to women increasingly.

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## Notes

Note 1. Concerning the deconstruction of the gender binary, Jacque Derrida’s *Signature Event Context* (1972) creates a great impact on Butler’s gender performativity, that is, the binary opposition of the concepts of femininity and masculinity has been reconsidered and deconstructed through intensifying gender as a kind of doing and proposing the idea of intersex in *Undoing Gender* (2004). Derrida’s deconstruction dismantles the social norms and gender stereotypes in terms of reexamining the social construction of gender and undermining gender dichotomy.

Note 2. The term ‘masculinity’ was primarily developed from the fields of sociology and social psychology (McGinley, 2013). The Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell whose book *Masculinities* was voted by the Australian Sociological Association as one of the 10 most influential books in Australian sociology initiated study and theory of masculinity. She recognized gender as “a structure or a system of social inequality, with its own logic and its own internal complexities” (Wedgwood, 2009, p. 330). Pursuant to the prospect of gender as ‘a reflection of the social inequality’ that Connell found in an Australian educational system, especially in high schools, Connell criticizes and delineates the three components of masculinity in her famous book *Masculinities* (1995), that is, (1) a social location of each individual enforces individuals to adopt (2) “a set of practices and characteristics” of masculine, and these practices are finally embodied by men and women until the practices become (3) culture and social values (p. 86). In this regard, masculinity is considered as a social position and an identifiable set of practice that happens across space and through time, in the meantime, masculinity has been achieved through men’s performances and interactions with others e.g. breadwinner and sexual aggressor, and it is sometimes celebrated through “buddydom” as well (Beynon, 2002, p. 17; Connell, 2000; McGinley, 2013). This can be assumed that “the individual’s endorsement and *internalization* of cultural belief systems about masculinity and the male gender” unavoidably engender masculinity ideology (Thompson & Bennett, 2015, p. 116, emphasis in original).

Note 3. Judith Butler agrees with Beauvoir that one “becomes” a woman, but this “becoming” stems from a cultural compulsion. In the same vein, she warns against any misinterpretation of Beauvoir’s words, positing that the “compulsion does not come from ‘sex’”. In other words, explains Butler, “*There is nothing in her [Beauvoir’s] account that guarantees that the ‘one’ who becomes a woman is necessarily female*” (12).

Note 4. Hybridity is a term used in a postcolonial discourse to refer to new trans-cultural forms produced by colonization. It is initially a term of abuse for those who are descendants of miscegenation or a mixture of races (the colonizer and the colonized). Later, it is considered as “diversity or multiculturalism” (Smith, 2004, p. 251). Hybridity has been developed from racial intermingling to cultural mixture. Therefore, the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and the colonized generates new hybrid identities.

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