

## Research Article

# AN ANALYSIS OF FEMINISM AND CLASS INEQUALITY: A CASE STUDY OF KATNISS EVERDEEN IN *THE HUNGER GAMES*

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the feminist representation of Katniss Everdeen. The development of Katniss' feminist characteristics from the beginning to the end of the movie and class inequality in the novel. For this reason, *The Hunger Games* was used as the main data source for yielding research findings. The study is viewed under Marxist feminism. This study is qualitative research. Close reading techniques were employed to extract related quotes. The critical lens of literary works was used as the analysis tool in the present study. The findings revealed that Marxist feminism confirmed that Katniss must survive because she is the only leader of her family after her father's death. Katniss is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. She is a strong, practical sixteen-year-old girl who is far more mature than her real age. Her character does not change from the beginning, but after meeting Peeta, she develops her love for Peeta. There are differences between the rich and the poor in terms of class inequality. Rich people have a better life than the poor. The fight against class inequality in the novel showed that there is a powerful character in Katniss who has a strong desire to change the nation. She takes down the Capitol and destroys the dictatorship. Finally, real democracy has arrived. Class inequality was destroyed. People live happily in this nation.

**Keywords:** Class Inequality, Marxist Feminism, *The Hunger Games*

## Introduction

A novel is a literary work that many people around the world read for pleasure. There are many kinds of stories in the novel. The novel is a part of the fiction. Fiction can enhance readers' imaginations because readers have to understand the message that the author wants to convey. Not only people can enhance their imagination but also their vocabulary and reading skills. Nowadays, many novels are waiting for people to explore them.

The Hunger Games is a series of young adult dystopian novels written by Suzanne Collins. The first three novels are part of a trilogy. Katniss Everdeen plays the protagonist. The novels in the trilogy are titled *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010), respectively. Each novel was adapted for film making. The Hunger Games film series, with the film adaptation of *Mockingjay*, split into two feature-length movies. According to the New York Times, two books in the series were best sellers. The last series, *Mockingjay*, topped all American best-sellers upon its release. By the time the film adaptation of *The Hunger Games* was released in 2012, the publisher had reported over 26 million copies of *The Hunger Games* trilogy in print

(Wikipedia, 2022). Based on the results of the best-selling of the books as well as the movie, it was popular throughout the world. The present study aims to explore the character of Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist in the movie and novel. She is the female protagonist who fights against the Capitol, controlled by President Snow, the main antagonist in the series. There are different class struggles in the entire series. Katniss has to fight for freedom.

According to the number of positive reviews of the novels and film adaptations' success, some top critics have stated that the movies are undeniably progressive in making Katniss as a protagonist so brave, independent, and self-actualizing as a young woman. Moreover, Rue's presence in the film *The Hunger Games* (2008) provided a pivotal point in the plot. In addition, the novel is famous for a reason—the readers could hardly put the book down while reading it. The story is unique, and the plot is always exciting (Goldman & Howard, 2021; Hoberman, 2019; Leong, n.d.).

There is some information about Katniss Everdeen that has to be revealed in the novels and the movies. There are many

interesting aspects to consider in the movie. Feminism and class inequality are obviously seen throughout the novels and movies themselves.

Moreover, Katniss is the only female protagonist who fights for class inequality. She wants to see everyone has an equal chance in life. Marx and Engels (1848) stated that the two great classes emerged with capitalism. It means that economic and political systems are controlled by private owners rather than by the state (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). The ruling class and working class are explained in Marx and Engels (1848). The ruling class is in charge of the ruling society.

Meanwhile, feminism plays a huge role in the novel as well as the film adaptation. Katniss is the symbol of the female protagonist who fights against class inequality in the series. Feminist issue suggests that women can fulfill their life requirements on their own (Anwar, 2012). It is obvious that the working class in the movie does not have many choices in life. Thus, Katniss sees this point and tries to resolve it with her allies for a better life.

As far as this research could determine, there has been no research conducted on this topic. The present

study aims to investigate the feminist representation of Katniss. The development of Katniss' feminist characteristics from the beginning to the end of the movie. The class inequality in this movie will be explained. For this reason, The Hunger Games was used as the main data source for yielding research findings. The critical lens of literary works was used as the analysis tool in the present study.

### Research Questions

1. How does Katniss represent feminism?
2. What is the development of Katniss' feminist characteristics from the beginning to the end of the novel?
3. How is class inequality represented in the novel?
4. How are the feminist characteristics used for the fight against class inequality in the novel?

### Literature Review

The literature review can be divided into The Hunger Games, Marxist Feminism, Class Inequality, and Related Studies.

#### 1. The Hunger Games

The Hunger Games is a complicated story with many characters in the novel. The story was written

by Suzanne Collin. There are three series of the novel. It was released by Scholastic Press on September 14, 2008. The two other books in the trilogy are *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*. She co-wrote and co-directed the 2013 film adaptation of *The Hunger Games* (*The Hunger Games*, 2013)

The *Hunger Games* trilogy takes place in the future time in the nation of Panem. It is located in North America. Capitol City is a wealthy city, located in the Rocky Mountains. It was surrounded by twelve districts. The Capitol is excessively rich and technologically advanced, but the districts are in varying states of poverty. The narrator and protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, lives in District 12, the poorest region of Panem, located in Appalachia.

## 2. Marxist Feminism

The word “feminism” has become misinterpreted in the 21st century. According to Gay (2012), essential feminism suggests anger, seriousness, and a prescribed set of rules for how to be an appropriate feminist woman, or at least a proper white, heterosexual, feminist woman—hate pornography, individually criticize the objectification of women, do not provide to the male gaze, hate men, hate sex,

and focus on career. The term “feminism” can be divided into three waves.

First-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity between the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries throughout the world. It focuses on women seeking equal rights with men. They prefer to have equal ownership of children, wages, and the right to receive property.

Meanwhile, second-wave feminism contains many aspects of first-wave feminism. However, this wave includes the aspiration for female-only rights. They support abortion, marital rape laws, etc.

Third-wave feminism refers to post-feminism that includes a broader variety of women, such as women of many colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds. It also focuses on the interpretation of gender and sexuality.

Moreover, there are many types of Marxist feminism, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, postcolonial feminism, eco-feminism, existential feminism, and postmodern feminism. Marxist feminism emphasizes classism as the basis

of women's cruelty. According to Anwar (2012, p. 131), Marxist feminism believes that social class or social structure is the fundamental cause of women's discrimination. Women can fulfill their life necessities on their own. Marxist feminism explains that women must be strong, confident, and happy in their lives because they are the primary people responsible for their families. The purpose of this theory is to make the world a place where women can enjoy their lives.

### 3. Class Inequality

There is a famous scale of class inequality. It was pioneered by Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels (1848). They identified the "two great classes" that occurred with capitalism. Marx and Engels viewed inequality as directly related to one's relationship to the means of production. They observed social class inequality as follows: first, the owners and controllers of the means of production. It is also known as the "ruling class." Second, those with no ownership of capital but only have labor to sell as a means of survival. It is called the "working class." In other words, Scott (1990, p. 21) explained that the ruling class will use every strategy, including violence, insults, and abuse to make their working-class members work effectively.

These forms of domination are established methods of extracting labor, goods, and services from the lower population.

### 4. Related Studies

A great number of studies of *The Hunger Games* focus on the main character Katniss Everdeen. Fortuna (2019) studied the Representation of Social Inequality in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. It is said that social inequality is a phenomenon that appears in society because of inequality in various parts of social life. The research analyzed the pattern of power causing social inequality and investigated the kinds of social inequality that were found in the novel as well as studied the struggle of the character to fight against social inequality. It was found that many patterns cause social inequality, such as the acquiring system, barriers, and the rules made by the Capitol which makes people throughout the nation suffer more. Secondly, three types of social inequality appeared in *The Hunger Games*: income, poverty, and human rights violations. Finally, the main characters who experience social inequality in the novel were Katniss Everdeen and Gale Hawthorne. In the class struggle, society will fight for its class freedom and remove the class from society.

Meanwhile, Permatasari (2015) studied social class and poverty in American society in the 2000s era, as seen in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* novel. The main method used in this research was library research. The *Hunger Games* novel was employed as the main data source for the study. The secondary data sources were books, encyclopedias, articles, and the internet. The theory applied in this study is a mimetic approach. It analyzes the character, setting, plot, and theme. The findings revealed a huge gap between the upper and lower classes. The lower class has to fight for survival while the upper class becomes richer. The upper class has more power than the lower one. Poverty strikes the lower class.

Feminism in the novel reflects obvious third-wave feminism (Loobeek, 2014). Third-wave feminism focuses on the flexibility of a woman's sexuality and her right to display or minimize it. Marxist feminism plays a vital role in the discussion in this paper. Based on the previous explanation, the present study aims to investigate the feminist representation of Katniss, the development of Katniss' feminist characteristics from the beginning to the end of the movie,

and class or social inequality in the novel. For this reason, research questions were fulfilled by the related sources and theoretical framework used in this research.

### Conceptual Framework

This paper is theoretically based on aspects of Marxist feminism to explore the characteristics of Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist in the novel. Throughout the trilogy of *The Hunger Games* novel, the feminist aspect of Katniss Everdeen will be examined. Marxist feminism will be employed as the conceptual framework to yield the results of the study.

### Methodology

Data were analyzed to correspond with the research questions. The researcher will review and analyze academic papers, theses, movie synopses, and primary sources such as novels. A close reading technique was employed in this study. Some of the important lines and dialogue in the novels were given as examples for in-depth analysis.

### Analysis and Discussion

It is implied by Marxist feminism that women must take responsibility

for their lives because they are the first to take responsibility for their families and themselves. The objective of this theory is to make every woman live her life happily. According to the theory of Marxist feminism, Katniss Everdeen, faces many incidents in her life, especially the revolution in Mockingjay. This is the final episode of the trilogy. There is a key role to play in representing Marxist feminism. Some parts of the novel demonstrate Katniss's reflection of Marxist feminism by Katniss. She was the guardian of her mother and her little sister after her father's death. She tried very hard to fulfill daily necessities. Anwar (2012, p. 131) suggested that Marxist feminism believes that social class or social structure is the fundamental cause of women's discrimination. Women are able to fulfill their life necessities on their own. Marxist feminism explains that women must be strong, confident, and happy in their lives because they are the primary people who are responsible for their families. It is obvious that Katniss has to survive on her own. As the leader of her family, she finds the best way to protect the peace in her family.

Katniss Everdeen is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. She is a strong,

practical sixteen-year-old girl. She is far more mature than her real age. She is the main leader of her family. There are Katniss, her mother, and Prim her younger sister. She genuinely cares about her sister. She volunteers to take Prim's place in the Hunger Games to protect her. Moreover, she is more responsible than anyone else in her family. She tries to hunt animals even though it is illegal because she lives in a poor district. Additionally, the novel takes place in the future time in the nation of Panem. It is said that Capitol City is a rich city which was surrounded by twelve districts. Katniss lives in District 12, the poorest region of Panem (The Hunger Games, 2013). Furthermore, Capitol is the most technologically advanced and modern. Meanwhile, other districts suffer from poverty, income, and health. It could be seen from the previous conditions, there are many reasons for fighting against class inequality. Katniss does everything to make her life better. It is indicated that she has a rebellious mind against the law. Starvation causes people to suffer and die. Her mother became depressed after her father died. All responsibility goes to Katniss. The tough moments in her life, cause her to be a brave, resourceful,

and unemotional girl. She can use a bow to hunt the animals. The skills that she possesses have helped her cope with everyday challenges.

During the weeks in which the games occur, Katniss's character does not basically change. The changes are the situation that she faces in the games. She does not begin to seek people's attention once she becomes a celebrity on Capitol TV and begins doing television interviews. Normally, she tries to end the interview quickly and wants to go back to her normal life. Before the games begin, she has no interest in boys and only focuses on her duty. After that, she develops her feelings for Peeta. This lack of change, however, can be seen as Katniss's victory. Despite the horrific sufferings she endures in the games, she maintains her sense of identity and honesty, as does Peeta, who at one point says he would like to. It is obvious that after the long, bitter battle in the games, she develops a feeling of love, especially for Peeta. She wants to protect her beloved people and fight against inequality in society.

Class inequality is represented in the novel. There is a huge gap between the rich and the poor in Panem. Wealth is heavily concentrated in the hands of the

rich, particularly those living in the Capitol, the world's most advanced technological town. There are several areas where there is a significant disparity between their lives and those of the poor. This difference reveals itself in numerous ways throughout the novel, but among that stands out is food. Many residents of impoverished areas do not even have enough to eat. Katniss states that hunger is common in District 12 where she lives, and she has to hunt illegally in the woods beyond the district's borders to feed her family. A number of studies have been conducted to investigate social class inequality in *The Hunger Games*. Fortuna (2019) studied the Representation of Social Inequality in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. This study analyzed how social inequality is caused by patterns of power, varieties of social inequality in the novel, and the obstacles of a protagonist to fight against social inequality. It became clear that there were numerous patterns, such as the acquiring system, and barriers made by the Capitol which make the people suffer. Income, poverty, and human rights violations are the three main manifestations of social inequality. The protagonist will fight for freedom and work to end class inequality in society. Moreover, Permatasari



(2015) also studied social class and poverty in American society in the 2000's era in *The Hunger Games*. The results showed that the upper class and lower class were hugely different. The lower class fights for survival, while the upper class becomes richer and lives in luxurious houses. There are many ways to survive starvation in District 12 where Katniss lives. She learns how to hunt the animal for sale. However, doing such is against the law. She hides it from the Capitol. The novel suggests that most of the district's people are not able to hunt or do not know how to hunt. It means that even given how little Katniss's family has, it still has more than many of the other families in her district. Later, Katniss discovers that Peeta's family owns a bakery and is thus one of the better-off in the district. On the other hand, when Katniss arrives in the Capitol, she is impressed by the lavish banquets and decoratively prepared dishes. The food is rich and plentiful, and Katniss, for the first time, tries hot chocolate. When considering the gap between the poor and the rich, it can be seen that many privileges are reserved for the rich while the poor must fend for themselves. Even though they occasionally have to hunt for food illegally, they have no other option.

It reflects the harsh reality of survival in today's world. According to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1848), there are the 'two great classes' that occurred with capitalism. The ruling class is in charge and has power, while the working class has to sell labor in order to survive. It is obvious that the ruling class in the novel is President Snow and President Coin, who have the power to control people. Residents in poor districts, on the other hand, represent the working class in the novel. They cannot afford the best necessities in their lives. The luxury assets are provided for the ruling class. In the study of Permatasari (2015), social class and poverty in American society in the 2000s era were studied, as seen in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* novel. The findings showed that the upper class and the lower class were different in terms of living conditions. The lower class must struggle to survive while the upper class becomes wealthier. The upper class has more power than the lower one. Poverty strikes the lower class.

Class inequality is controlled by the dominant class. James C. Scott wrote in his book title *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, explained that "... these forms of domination

are institutionalized means of extracting labor, goods, and services from a subject population. Typically, domination contains a strong element of personal rule ... ” (1990, p. 21). In other words, Scott explained that the ruling class will do every tactic including violence, insults, and abuse to make their working-class work effectively. These forms of domination are used for controlling labor, goods, and services from the lower-class population. In the trilogy of *The Hunger Games*, there are two main villains such as President Snow and President Alma Coin. Snow led the Capitol to control other districts as the slave areas. While Coin used Katniss as her puppet to become the Mockingjay, that would collect and lead the rebellion in every district. Moreover, she always watched Katniss and threatened her by punishing her friends.

“...punishing my prep team’s a warning,” I tell her. “Not just to me. But to you, too. About who is really in control and what happens if she’s not obeyed. If you had any delusions about having power, I’d let them go now.” (Collins, 2010, p. 50).

In addition, Katniss decided to defeat class inequality by fighting against the Capitol. Every word and

action she took would decide the future of Panem. It is told on page 11:

Of course, I hate the Capitol, but I have no confidence that my being the Mockingjay will benefit those who are trying to bring it down. How can I help the districts when every time I make a move, it results in suffering and loss of life? (Collins, 2010: 11).

However, when Katniss makes a move, some people die from her movement. Her memory of the inhumanities that the Capitol made to her life, triggers anger inside her. Class inequality is started by class consciousness at the beginning of the story. She has to survive by hunting animals, while people who live in the Capitol become richer and have a pleasant life. It is obvious that a class revolution for parity is needed to overcome in this novel.

Marxist feminism explained that three types of feminism such as first-wave, second-wave, and third-wave play a vital role in the analysis. It is clear that third-wave feminism was found in the novel. As Loobeek (2014) suggested, this wave focuses on the flexibility of a woman’s sexuality and her right to show or minimize it. There are several aspects to consider, such as the many colors,

ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds. In a novel or a movie, there are many people whose backgrounds are various. The Capitol is excluded by other districts. They want to change the ruling system from a dictatorship into a democracy because the ruling class dominates the working class violently. Especially, President Snow, the main antagonist in the novel, as well as President Alma Coin, who needs to manipulate Panem under her power. Katniss realizes that, after Snow passed away, a new dictator has arisen. Thus, she does not need the old, violent circle to come back. She killed President Coin to save the entire nation. Finally, a real ruling system has arrived. Class inequality was destroyed.

## Conclusion

Katniss Everdeen, the main character of the novel, has the most important role in the entire trilogy of the Hunger Games series. She has to fight against class inequality in Panem. She gathers and recruits a large number of people to fight alongside her for a better life.

Meanwhile, Marxist feminism plays a huge role in analyzing this present study. Marxist feminism tells us that women must

survive for their lives because women are the first to be responsible for their families and themselves. She became the guardian of her mother and younger sister after her father's death.

As the protagonist and narrator of the novel, Katniss is a strong and practical girl who is more mature than her real age. She volunteers for the Games in place of Prim, her little sister. At the beginning of the Games, she has no interest in boys, after that she wants to protect Peeta.

There are differences between the rich and the poor in terms of class inequality. It can be explained that people who live in the Capitol are wealthy and enjoy luxurious lifestyles. In contrast, people who live far away from the Capitol face starvation and uncomfortable life. Katniss realizes that everyone deserves to live in equality. She develops her skills and troops who have the same intention to fight for a better life by eradicating class disparity. Finally, the advent of democracy has arrived. Class inequality was destroyed. In the nation, people live happily.

## Suggestions and Recommendations

The suggestions of the present study focus on the role of Katniss Everdeen,

the main protagonist of the series. Especially, the role of people in fighting against class inequality. It is suggested that educators who concern with the pedagogical method, might consider using either the novel or the movie adaptation for learners who want to improve their English reading skills. Moreover, they could enjoy and read it for pleasure. Social studies teachers could use this novel to discuss issues of class inequality and lead the class

discussion after reading or watching the movie.

However, the present study only focuses on Katniss, the main protagonist in the movie. For further studies, the researchers should investigate antagonists and other minor characters in different aspects for producing persuasive findings or studying the comparative study between this novel and related feminist protagonists in other novels.

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