

Dissecting Masculinity in the *Harry Potter* Series and *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

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Abstract

This paper will show how J. K. Rowling and Suzanne Collins construct the concept of masculinity in the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) and *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010) trilogy. Masculinity and femininity are two sides of the same coin and inherently related to each other. The concept of masculinity is fluid and multiple masculinities are found in the texts. Masculinity is not limited to any particular gender. The *Harry Potter* series offers mainly hegemonic and new masculinity and Harry Potter's victory over Voldemort suggests that new masculinity is better than hegemonic one. In *The Hunger Games*, we find hegemonic, alternative and female masculinity, which help the readers understand the idea of masculinity. This paper calls for politics of inclusion or helps to broaden the definition of manhood to end gender struggle. The authors try to engrain the ideas of women empowerment and ultimately of gender equity in the young minds.

Keywords: masculinity, femininity, hegemonic masculinity, new masculinity, women empowerment, gender equity.

Morgan argues in *Discovering Men* (1992) asserts that masculinity and femininity are constructed by society and culture and they are not the property of particular individuals. Whitehead and Barrett believe that the concept of masculinity is not static but always being constructed in a continuous process (*The Masculinities Reader* 2001). R. W. Connell in *Masculinities* (1995) suggests a complex definition of masculinity stating that it is “a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experiences, personality and culture” (71).

Connell’s concept of masculinity as expressed in *Masculinities* (1995) does not accord with the sex role theory but it says about power and change. It contributes to the social construction of masculinity. According to R.W. Connell, masculinity can be understood as “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to problem of legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or taken guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77) and is called ‘hegemonic’ masculinity which was adopted in Victorian era. Through societal consent, masculinity becomes dominant and superior to femininity. In other words, hegemonic masculinity, which is a culturally dominant form of masculinity, legitimizes certain positions and roles of men women in society and it proposes men to dominate over women and subordinated women.

There was an eclipse for young adult in the world of fiction before the entry of J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. *Harry Potter* series got huge popularity and inspired writers to produce fantasy novels and other forms of YA novels. In *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), Voldemort is depicted as hegemonic masculinity whereas Harry Potter displays the values of a new and unconventional masculinity. In Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010), different kinds of masculinities are offered. Gale Hawthorne with his physical strength and habits like making traps and shooting animals without emotional attachment represent traditional masculinity. Another male character Peeta Mellark has

beautiful blond curls, can decorate cake marvellously, is intuitive, artistic, a good listener, funny, cares about his peers and shows the signs of emotional vulnerability. Still Peeta is an example of masculinity- especially alternative masculinity, not femininity. Katniss Everdeen, female protagonist of the novel, is initially tomboy, but later on succumbing to the social norms marries and becomes mother. In early part of the novel Katniss who embraces masculine traits like hunting, competitiveness, cross-dressing, leadership represents female masculinity. In this novel, both man and woman can possess any traits – masculine or feminine. Different subgenres of young adult literature- fantasy, horror, realistic, science-fiction, etc. - can connect nicely with this age group. In the late nineties David Levithan, who is associated with Scholastic's teen imprint, PUSH, observes in *A Brief History of Young Adult Literature*: “Teen wanted things that were real, that they connected with... It doesn't have to reflect reality directly. They love *The Hunger Games* (2008) not because it's real in that it happens, but the emotions there are real, and it's very relatable” (Strickland).

Traditionally hegemonic masculinity has been the ideal of masculinity. Bradley Harriet, in *Gender* (2012), expresses Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity in his own way, stating that “the form of masculinity we refer to as ‘macho’: tough, competitive, self-reliant, controlling, aggressive and fiercely heterosexual” (47). Elizabeth Heilman, in “Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Gender Identity and Power”, also thinks that “Hegemonic masculinity is straight, strong, and domineering” and adds that “it oppresses not only women but also the many men excluded from it” (231). In *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort seems to fit into these ideals of hegemonic masculinity. His dreadful appearance exhibits domination and power. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), Voldemort, a prototype of evil, is introduced in such a way that emanates his hegemony: “The thin man stepped out of the cauldron, staring at Harry . . . and Harry stared back into the face that had haunted his

nightmares for three years. Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils . . . Lord Voldemort had risen again" (643).

He is 'Master' or 'Lord' to his inferior men, Death Eaters. Voldemort has strength, power and authoritarian control over both men and women. Demetriou in "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique" (2001) identifies "hegemony over subordinated masculinities" as "internal hegemony" and "hegemony over women" as "external hegemony" (341). He was self-reliant and emotionally distant. Elizabeth Heilman says when Quirrel and Wormtail, Voldemort's pawns, physically contribute to Voldemort to revive, they lose their masculinity: "Their physical possession by Lord Voldemort emphasizes their lack of masculinity" (233).

Voldemort dictates not only his subordinated men but also his inferior women. When Bellatrix Lestrange, his faithful Death Eater, gets delighted in having him in the family, Voldemort first flatters her and then mocks and at last humiliates her. Bellatrix loves him but Voldemort keeps distance from her. He can manipulate her and other subordinates to perpetuate their subordination to him. He is self-reliant. Annette Wannamaker in "Men in Cloaks and High-heeled Boots, Men Wielding Pink Umbrellas: Witchy Masculinities in Harry Potter Novels" argues that "Voldemort is portrayed as evil precisely because he is loner" (142). Voldemort's self-reliance is visible in *Harry Potter and Half-Blood Prince* (2005) when Dumbledore hypothecates: "...Voldemort would be entirely dependent on the Elixir, and if it ran out, or was contaminated, or if the Stone was stolen, he would die just like any other man. Voldemort likes to operate alone, remember. I believe that he would have found the thought of being dependent, even on the Elixir, intolerable" (502).

As a wizard Voldemort thinks himself the most powerful. He was obsessed with the idea of destroying Harry because of competitive and aggressive nature. He sometimes

expresses his anger through violence and sometimes enjoys. He kills casually Charity Burbage, Bertha Jorkins and Severus Snape without any repentance. This clearly indicates Voldemort's traditional hegemonic masculinity which is emotionally distant, aggressive, competitive and domineering. But unlike Voldemort he can accept the support and help from his friends.

Rowling tries to vituperate traditional hegemonic masculinity and allows Harry to display unconventional masculinity. Harry is not a perfect hero rather he fails and is vulnerable. He has an unconventional appearance of a hero. He is lean and thin with dishevelled hair. He starts from zero and as the story progresses he attains significant position in the novels. He has good quality broom and an Invisible Cloak which help Harry rescue his friends, when needed, and become a school sports star. All these contribute in the construction of his masculinity. Although Harry Potter has a few traits of hegemonic masculinity like- we find in *The Philosopher's Stone* (1997) he becomes the Seeker of his Quidditch team at Hogwarts (112-113), he wants to seek the stone by his own (197); in *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998), he goes alone in search of Ginny (225). But unlike Voldemort, he can accept the support and help from his friends which contradict his desire to be self-reliant.

Harry Potter represents a new and unconventional masculinity and challenges the ideals of traditional hegemonic masculinity in many ways. He never humiliates his supposed subordinates as inferior to him. He is concerned about and takes care of Dobby, Neville and Luna. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) he befriends Dobby who sacrifices his life for Harry out of love towards him: "Dobby has no master!" squealed the elf. "Dobby is a free elf, and Dobby has come to save Harry Potter and his friends" (474). Harry does not wish popularity, a good broomstick, a good dress robe, but a loving family. He never imposes or forces himself on his acolytes as well as of his foes. According to Stephens, traditional masculinity is associated with violence but Harry dismantles the stereotypes. He solves the

problem with wisdom and logic and does not hesitate to take help of his friends in difficult situations.

When Voldemort prefers to use the spells like Avada Kedavra, a killing curse or Cruciatus Curse, considered as similar to corporeal torture, Harry Potter uses the disarming spell like Expelliarmus and other less harmless spells. Harry has sympathy and compassion even for his enemy Voldemort when he comes to know Voldemort's mother does want to stay alive despite her magical power to survive. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005), Harry asks Dumbledore in a conversation: "She wouldn't even stay alive for her son?" (262). Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. "Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?" (262). Unlike Voldemort Harry Potter likes to be accompanied by his friends, admirers and his followers and his leadership, which displays unconventional masculinity, promotes love, respect and belongingness. He is such a leader who is ready to sacrifice his own life for the greater good as he realises that to defend Voldemort he must die.

J. K. Rowling affirms the merit of an unconventional masculinity through the character of Harry Potter. In the novels, the victory of contemporary but unconventional masculinity over traditional hegemonic masculinity clearly encourages a new vision of masculinity which is associated with teamwork, sensitivity, affection, empathy and belongingness combined with competitiveness, courage and leadership. Rowling allows some imperfections to the character of Harry and so makes the character genuine and relatable to the readers.

In Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy Gale Hawthorne and Peeta Mellark embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and alternative masculinity subsequently. Gale is aggressive and rebellious. He is physically strong and tough individual who makes traps and shoots animals. He and Katniss hunt in the woods to provide food for their families. This hunting in herd suggests one of the primitive traits of masculinity. Gale can show defiance

against Capitol. He is emotionally distant. On the other hand, Peeta Mellark shares both male and female traits. Peeta is skilled in camouflage, which is considered as passive defensive, tactic, and passivity, is seen as feminine. In *Masculinities* (1995), Connell argues that Freud “equated masculinity with activity in contrast to feminine passivity” (68). He is good at baking and painting. In *Mockingjay* (2010) when Peeta loses his memory, Katniss tries to remind him who he was, saying “[y]ou're a painter. You're a baker. You like to sleep with the windows open. You never take sugar in your tea. And you always double-knot your shoelaces” (153).

Peeta is depicted as honest, intuitive and emotionally vulnerable. He cries at the train station in public. He has blue eyes and blonde curls and is good listener and concerned about compeers. Despite losing his leg and having feminine traits he does not lose masculinity. He survives after fierce attack of mutant wolves and thus proves himself as a born fighter. He becomes crippled; still he is determined to unconditionally help Katniss. He represents alternative masculinity. Sara Martin in her article “Los Estudios de la Masculinidad: Una Nueva Mirada al Hombre a Partir del Feminismo” thinks alternative masculinity cannot be valid until we differentiate patriarchy from masculinity.

Connell in *Masculinities* (1995) believes that “[t]rue masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body” (45). But in “Female Masculinity” (2010) Judith Halberstam challenges Connell saying that masculinity can be properly understood if we start thinking it beyond maleness (2). She asserts that body and masculinity become two different things and so there is scope for alternative masculinity. She also says female masculinity helps us understand “how masculinity is constructed as masculinity” (1). Katniss represents masculinity despite her female body and this actually helps us to understand how masculinity works and the power structure involved in it.

According to Judith Butler, not genitalia but rather day-to-day behaviour of a person conditioned by society determines one's gender. In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) she asserts that "gender ought not to be constructed as a stale identity or locus of agency (...); rather, gender is an identity (...) instated in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (179, original italics). Katniss goes for hunting in the woods and arrange food for her family. She is the only breadwinner of the family and plays a male role in her family. She supports her mother and sister after her father's death. She dares to visit the black market, which the common people of District 12 try to avoid. She defies the authority when she goes to the woods for sustenance. She dislikes her mother's weakness and vulnerability, which are signs of femininity. On the other hand, her sister, Primrose can cook, can arrange flower and is good at healing, sympathetic humans and animals alike. In *Masculinities* (1995) Connell asserts that masculinity "does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity'" (68). Collins here portrays Primrose and Katniss' mother as a foil to Katniss' character to emphasize masculinity in her. Again, feminization of Peeta allows Katniss to be masculine in contrast. In *The Hunger Games* (2008) we find she is a stereotypical tomboy who does not like girlish dresses and says, "A silly girl spinning in a sparkling, dress" (135). In *Catching Fire* (2009), she feels vulnerable after being waxed before the games and states, "I hadn't thought about it much, but in the arena at least some of the boys got to keep their body hair whereas none of the girls did" (24).

As boys grow up they acquire competitiveness. According to Connell in *Masculinities* (1995), sports help construct masculinity in boys: "When boys start playing competitive sport, they are not just learning a game; they are entering an organized institution" (35). These institutions have competitive and hierarchical structure that they find in the workplaces. Thus they are trained to possess advantage over girls/women through aggression. In the *Harry Potter* series, Quidditch is the most popular game in the wizarding world. The teams are men and

women need to have courage and successes and it is a gender-mixed. In the novels, women are portrayed as not different from male. Katniss is a good player of the hunger games and she represents female masculinity. In Rowling's and Connell's novels sports and being athletic are equated with traditional masculinity. Harry chooses Gryffindor's Quidditch team and the girls start noticing him. Bulgarian Quidditch player Viktor Krum is everybody's favourite. Rowling permits the involvement of boys and girls in the games, which breaks the conventional gender roles of boys as well as girls. Katniss also displays her physical strength and skills in *The Hunger Games* series to survive. Being successful in sports is equivalent to successful masculinity. Ron also wants to be the winner in male sports in order to attain masculinity. That is why when he stands before the Mirror of Erised he can see his deepest desire of becoming a successful player holding the Quidditch cup.

Katniss is a perfect example of a tomboy. Tomboyism allows her to exercise masculinity and femininity both with social acceptance but that happens in the stages before pubescence. That is why she is directly or indirectly pressurized to conform to her own gender norms because tomboyism is a threat to heteronormativity prevailed in the society. She rejects femininity that, she believes, makes one vulnerable. She embraces masculinity and to understand femininity. In *The Hunger Games* (2008) she says: "I hear Effie Trinket's voice, calling me to rise. "Up, up, up! It's going to be a big, big, big day!" I try and imagine, for a moment, what it must be like inside that woman's head. What thoughts fill her waking hours? What dreams come to her at night? I have no idea" (54). Her female masculinity may seem as an imitation of hegemonic masculinity which subdues both femininity and other masculinities. In the novels she fights for women and the non-white. Katniss, along with Peeta, rebel against the Capitol for the right of equality all people and decides to commit suicide. This sacrifice indicates nothing else but her defiance against the authority. Her female masculinity is different from hegemonic masculinity.

Commercialism makes Katniss accept femininity and so she has to learn feminine props from Cinna and Haymitch to draw attention of the sponsors. She is forced to become a model of wedding costumes. She is presented as an innocent beloved of Peeta rather as a rebel by the Capitol, so that rebels in the Capitol will not find a prospective leader in her. Love and fashion are supposedly feminine and so associated with weakness. She is falsely presented as pregnant which is related to vulnerability. The process of feminization takes away her power. In the last novel of the trilogy, that is, *Mockingjay* (2010), she is no leader but a housewife and a mother. At last she conforms to feminine role and loses the power she has earlier. It helps to understand how masculinity is constructed.

In the western conception of femininity, a girl learns how to attract male gaze. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, performing feminine role helps Katniss manipulate the sympathies of Panem. There is a similarity between the gaze in the trilogy and the gaze in cinema as described by Laura Mulvey. According to Mulvey in "Visual and Other Pleasures", actresses are styled to attract patriarchal gaze and women on the screen are objectified. She says: "The man controls the film fantasy [...] as the bearer of the look [...] and] woman as spectacle" (20). The gaze offers a power structure where a man acts as possessor of the gaze and a woman as the object of the gaze.

In *Harry Potter and Chamber of Secrets* (1998), three friends Harry, Ron and Hermione take a potion for their transformation in appearance. Harry and Ron are transformed into two awkward looking boys at Hogwarts but in case of Hermione things go wrong. Hermione changes into a cat and out of embarrassment she hides herself in bathroom. Though Harry and Ron are now looking ridiculous and still are bothering with it. The situation says that a girl feels embarrassed because she knows that she always plays the role of the object or the 'gazed' and a boy as the subject or the 'gazer'. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (1998) it is seen that Hermione works on her appearance to get the most desirable man at Hogwarts, Viktor

Krum as a date for the Yule Ball. On the one hand she actually attracts the gaze of Krum and on the other hand Krum is the object of the gaze and for girls, who are the 'gazers', decide who among the boys are the handsome, masculine and suitable for them. Similarly in *The Hunger Games* trilogy male characters are groomed physically in such a way that attracts people's gaze. We find in the *Harry Potter* series and *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the roles of the 'gazer' and the 'gazed' change. Man attains his masculinity and power for his gaze. Same thing will happen to women if she becomes the 'gazer'.

At the end, we can say the two women writers of young adult literature present masculinity in different ways. Rowling depicts 'hegemonic' masculinity through the character of Voldemort. Although Harry Potter has a few traits of 'hegemonic' masculinity but he is a perfect example of unconventional masculinity. In the novels a contemporary unconventional masculinity of Harry Potter becomes victorious over traditional 'hegemonic' masculinity of Voldemort. She proffers a new vision of masculinity to be inculcated in the minds of young adult readers. In Collins' *The Hunger Games* we find different types of masculinity- hegemonic masculinity, alternative masculinity and female masculinity. Both the writers try to establish that a contemporary and unconventional masculinity is always better than hegemonic masculinity and good for mankind.

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