

Masculinity in The Hunger Games:

Throughout the novel we see a clash of personalities in Peeta and Gale, as they arguably represent opposite ends of the Masculine spectrum. Gale is the personification of what is called Hegemonic Masculinity. This is what we typically view as the Alpha Male mentality. It is a concept popularized by the sociologist R.W. Connell, who defines hegemonic masculinity as a “culturally idealized form of masculine character” (Connell 2005) and that it “may only correspond to the actual characters of a small number of men. Yet very large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining the hegemonic model” (Connell 2005). Essentially, whilst few men perform masculinity to an extreme extent, masculine stereotypes influence the majority of men in how they interact with others and the world around them. Hegemonic masculinity presents men as strong protector types and leaders. Gale is seen, by both Katniss and the other residents of District 12, as a desirable spouse due to his alpha male traits: “if he wants kids, Gale won't have any trouble finding a wife. He's good-looking, he's strong enough to handle the work in the mines, and he can hunt. You can tell by the way the girls whisper about him when he walks by in school that they want him” (Collins 10). Later on in the trilogy, Gale fully embraces extreme hegemonic masculinity and becomes a formidable war general: “‘not if we blow it up’, Gale says brusquely. His intent, his full intent, becomes clear. Gale has no interest in preserving the lives of those in the Nut. No interest in caging the prey for later use. This is one of his death-traps” (Collins 10). We see that this trait makes him less attractive to Katniss.

If Gale represents Hegemonic Masculinity then Peeta arguably represents Marginalized Masculinity – he enjoys typically 'feminine' activities such as baking and painting, and is much more in touch with and open about his emotions than both Gale and Katniss. At the beginning of the series, Katniss views Peeta's sensitivity as a negative trait and something to be pitied when she compares him to Gale, stating "It's not that Peeta's soft exactly, and he's proved he's not a coward. But there are things you don't question too much, I guess, when your home always smells like baking bread, whereas Gale questions everything". We see Katniss compare Peeta to Gale once more when she is reunited with him in the Arena and tries to go hunting with him, stating that "even on a smooth bed of needles, Peeta is loud. And I mean loud loud, as if he's stomping his feet or something" whilst she later describes Gale as having a “velvet tread” on the same page (314).

Whilst not the main focus of the series, the love triangle between Katniss, Peeta and Gale is a key subplot that runs throughout the books. Katniss's confusion over her feelings or lack thereof for Peeta and her unresolved potential romantic feelings towards Gale help to drive Katniss's character