

Alpenglow: Binghamton University Undergraduate Journal of Research and Creative Activity

Volume 8
Number 1 *Alpenglow: Binghamton University Undergraduate Journal*

Article 1

October 2022

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Recommended Citation

Corso, E. (2022). The Strong Female Character and The Fighting Fuck Toy: A Comparative Analysis of Katniss and Glimmer in The Hunger Games. *Alpenglow: Binghamton University Undergraduate Journal of Research and Creative Activity*, 8(1). Retrieved from <https://orb.binghamton.edu/alpenglowjournal/vol8/iss1/1>

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The Strong Female Character and The Fighting Fuck Toy: A Comparative Analysis of Katniss and Glimmer in *The Hunger Games*

Abstract: Katniss Everdeen has been praised by scholars for empowering of young girls, for instance, in *Girl Warriors: Feminist Revisions of the Hero's Quest in Contemporary Popular Culture* (2019), Svenja Hohenstein applauds Katniss for “challeng[ing] the conventions found in traditional quest stories” (78). However, Katniss is not only characterized by and praised for her traditionally masculine traits, but she is also surrounded by numerous female characters who exhibit traditional femininity in order to emphasize the contrast between Katniss and the women in the book. One of the most salient contrasts is Glimmer, a career tribute from District 1 who, according to the rules of the novel, should be one of the most dangerous competitors in the arena. However, Glimmer is repeatedly portrayed as incredibly incompetent, as well as hyperfeminine and hypersexualized. The novel elevates Katniss for her masculine qualities, while at the same time diminishing other characters such as Glimmer by portraying her as weaker or inferior to Katniss because they embody more traditionally feminine qualities. Thus, although the novel succeeds at presenting an independent and capable young woman in the form of Katniss, it does so by maintaining the idea that traditionally masculine characteristics like stoicism, violence, toughness, and rugged individualism are superior to traditionally feminine characteristics, such as empathy, compassion, emotional intelligence, and community-mindedness.

Keywords: *Hunger Games*, strong female character

A trope that was popularized in the 1990s as a result of the Girl Power movement was that of the “fighting fuck toy,” named such because her advanced combat abilities and provocative appearance (Heldman and Cahill 9). At first glance, the fighting fuck toy seems to stand in direct opposition to the damsel in distress. The women who occupy this role are often presented as autonomous, tough, and just as physically capable as the men they fight alongside and sometimes against. However, the crucial element of the fighting fuck toy trope is that these hyper-competent, hyper-violent women are also, simultaneously, hypersexualized. Although this trope gives the illusion of empowerment, they ultimately appeal to the male gaze, hence their revealing clothing and close adherence to Western beauty standards. Take, for example, Catwoman from the *Batman* comics, TV shows, and movies. Although she’s a skilled athlete and violent vigilante seeking her own form of highly-gender-driven justice, Catwoman’s skin tight attire and provocative behavior are direct appeals to a heterosexual male demographic. Her role

in the *Batman* narratives is less about her own character development and more about furthering the plot of her male love interest. Women as portrayed through this trope are still treated as objects of sexual desire, and often lack any real substance as characters or relevance to plot. Rather than being active agents in the story, they fulfill the role of the idealized woman as seen through the male gaze. In the world of *The Hunger Games*, the character Glimmer, the female tribute from District 1, is a nearly perfect example of this trope, although she is, strikingly, even less competent and athletic than Catwoman. Glimmer is described as stunningly beautiful, and as a “career tribute,” she should be one of the most physically skilled tributes –except– she isn’t. Despite supposedly being trained since childhood to compete in the Hunger Games, Glimmer is portrayed as wholly incompetent as a competitor, and what’s more, is that she lacks in every area in which Katniss succeeds.

In response to the fighting fuck toy, the strong female character was born. The strong female character, as opposed to being hypersexualized and feminine, is instead hypermasculine. Like fighting fuck toys, strong female characters often have physical abilities that rival that of their male counterparts (Sunil 2264), but instead of being hypersexualized, strong female characters often take on the qualities traditionally reserved for male characters. Sunil suggests that, in order to be considered “strong” women must become “masculine encased characters that have to embody the characteristics of a man in order to be recognized and/or taken seriously as a character” (2264). In other words, this trope hinges on the idea that, in order to have the same value and nuance as male characters, women must give up aspects of their femininity and instead adopt more masculine traits, like toughness, physical fortitude, and emotional stoicism, in order to be considered equal to men. While past tropes, like the damsel in distress, have portrayed women as overly emotional, sentimental, and weaker than men, the strong female character trope

portrays them as nearly emotionless, stoic, and physically capable. The problem with this portrayal is that it posits that there is only one way for a person to be considered “strong” and that is by adhering to traditional masculinity. This trope still depicts femininity as inferior to masculinity, but it uses women to do so. Katniss is a prime example of the strong female character. Katniss is defined by her talent at archery, proven by her earning the highest training score of all the tributes by shooting an arrow at the Gamemakers due to her frustration at being ignored by them. She is also not portrayed as emotional or sentimental, in fact, she is often seen as stoic and cold to those around her. Katniss is not only characterized by and praised for her traditionally masculine traits, but she is also surrounded by female characters who exhibit traditional femininity in order to emphasize the contrast between Katniss and the women in the book. The novel elevates Katniss for her masculine qualities, while at the same time diminishing other characters such as Glimmer by portraying her as weaker or inferior to Katniss because she embodies more traditionally feminine qualities. Thus, although the novel succeeds at presenting an independent and capable young woman in the form of Katniss, it does so by maintaining the idea that traditionally masculine characteristics like stoicism, violence, toughness, and rugged individualism are superior to traditionally feminine characteristics, such as empathy, compassion, emotional intelligence, and community-mindedness.

Glimmer’s introduction comes during the tribute interviews with a television personality from the Capitol, Caesar Flickerman. Glimmer is the first tribute to be interviewed, and the first—and it seems only—thing Katniss notices about Glimmer is her looks. Katniss paints the picture of Glimmer “looking provocative in a see-through gold gown...You can tell that her mentor didn’t have any trouble coming up with an angle for her. With all that flowing blonde hair, emerald green eyes, body tall and lush...she’s sexy all the way” (Collins 125). This description is

striking in a number of ways, the first of which is that Glimmer is the only tribute whose physical description is described at such a length, and whose description is limited solely to her physical experience. Furthermore at this point in the novel, Katniss has never spoken to Glimmer, and knows nothing of her personality, her abilities, or her motivations. Instead, she assumes that the clear “angle” chosen for Glimmer by her mentor is sexy because Glimmer is described as neatly fulfilling traditional Eurocentric beauty standards. This assumption reduces Glimmer to only her looks. It suggests that she was not capable of taking any other angle for her interview, for example emphasizing her physical capabilities to establish herself as a fierce competitor, or perhaps present herself as kind hearted and genuine in hopes of evoking sympathy from the audience. Instead, Katniss posits that Glimmer must play the role of the sexy bombshell, simply because she looks the part.

Furthermore, this assumption reveals not only Katniss’s patriarchal views, but also the patriarchal views of the Capitol and Panem as a whole. The idea that Glimmer’s mentor decided that she use her looks to present herself as sexy first and foremost is evidence that they think along the same lines as Katniss: both immediately assume Glimmer’s primary attribute is her beauty. However, Glimmer’s mentor has, assumedly, advised other tributes in past Games, as the victors are required to serve as mentors each year, and has the experience to know how tributes can most effectively present themselves in order to win over the people of the Capitol. The fact that the strategy this mentor chooses is based on physical beauty suggests that Glimmer’s looks would actually be a valuable asset to her because the people of the Capitol greatly covet physical beauty and might be more likely to support her if she plays up her sex appeal.

In this instance, Glimmer’s portrayal is consistent with that of the objectified woman curated for the male gaze. According to Laura Mulvey, “pleasure in looking is split between

active/male and passive/female. The male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure... women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual erotic impact” (Mulvey 808). Glimmer’s appearance is not simply richly described, rather the emphasis is placed on the sexiness of her features and physical presentation repeatedly. In her interview, she is turned into an object whose purpose is to appeal to the erotic “fantasy” of the audience, both in and out of the book. The presence of such a character “work[s] against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action” (Mulvey 809). Glimmer is a prime example of this, as her physical description not only reveals very little about her as a character, it actually delays the revelation of one of the biggest plot points in the novel, that is Peeta’s love for Katniss. Thus, the lengthy description of Glimmer actually pauses the main action of the story to allow for a focus shift onto the physical beauty of a young girl. Furthermore, Katniss serves as the “bearer of the look of the spectator” (Mulvey 810), which is usually reserved for the main *male* protagonist. For a woman in media to be viewed through the male gaze, she is viewed first through the eyes of the main narrator within the story, and then through the eyes of the audience (Mulvey 810). As the book is told completely from Katniss’s perspective, she is the audience’s window into the world of Panem, and the main vessel through which the story is told. The audience is encouraged to project themselves onto Katniss and experience the action through her eyes, thus she fulfills the role of the primary viewer. Katniss’s comparative lack of physical description further characterizes her as a masculine figure, as “the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (Mulvey 810). Katniss is positioned as an active viewer in her story, however, because she embodies a more masculine role and the object of the spectatorship, thus the male gaze is upheld even when the viewer is another teenage girl. Using Katniss as the “male” viewer in this instance is significant as it teaches young readers, especially young girls, to

view women that adhere to beauty standards or present as traditionally feminine as in inherently sexual, and of less value than than women who don't dress this way. As Katniss herself is a teenage girl and positioned as a role model for young girls, her scorn of Glimmer suggests that there are right and wrong ways to be a teenage girl.

The "Girl Power" movement come about during early third wave feminism, in the early 1990s. "Girl Power" rejected the idea that women and girls had to sacrifice their femininity in order to gain equality. Instead, as Genz and Brabon explain, "Girl Power's defining characteristic is a reappraisal of femininity...as a means of female empowerment and agency" (119). The "Girl Power" movement functioned as a sort of reclaiming of femininity, in which traditional expressions of femininity were made to represent agency and independence, rather than passivity. However, the Girl Power movement was also heavily criticized, mainly because of the provocative ways that self proclaimed "Girlies" acted and dressed. Though they claimed that they were free to choose how to dress and present themselves, critics noted that "the Girlie look is similar to, if not synonymous with, patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty" (Genz and Brabon 122). The main argument against the Girl Power movement was that it was "not unanimously liberating, but rather conceal[ed] a trap of conformity and disempowerment," (Genz and Brabon 122). In other words, critics said the Girl Power movement promoted self-objectification under the guise of choice and self-expression, thus marketing the sexualization of women for male pleasure as empowering.

Glimmer embodies this role as she dresses and acts in a way that is in accordance with the Western standard of beauty, presenting herself as physically desirable to win the favor of the audience. Additionally, the concept of self-objectification is amplified by Glimmer's status as a career tribute. The careers are tributes from the wealthiest districts, namely 1, 2, and 4, who are

trained from childhood to compete in the Hunger Games. While tributes from poorer districts, such as District 12, view the Games as a death sentence and avoid entry at all costs, career tributes are often eager to volunteer as they have been raised to view participation in the Hunger Games as an honor. Therefore, although many careers enter the Hunger Games voluntarily, because the Games are marketed to them as a chance at glory, they are as much a commodity of the Capitol as the rest of the tributes: to be used for entertainment and discarded once they've fulfilled their purpose.

Unlike Glimmer, other tributes are afforded the privilege of having their personalities mentioned. For example, Katniss comments on the other tributes' interviews, "the monstrous boy from District 2 is a ruthless killing machine, the fox-faced girl from District 5 is sly and elusive...the crippled boy from 10 is very quiet" (Collins 125-126). Each of these descriptions gives the audience more information not only about what these characters look like,—"monstrous" or "sly"—but also what they might be like as people—ruthless, sneaky, shy, afraid. The fact that Katniss can supply information about their personalities suggests that she paid attention to their interviews, looking past the surface to see their real characters. Conversely, the fact that there's no mention of a personality trait for Glimmer seems to suggest that Katniss didn't consider *what was said* during Glimmer's interview to be the most important aspect. Furthermore, the actual contents of Glimmer's interview are never disclosed—not quoted, nor even summarized. We as the audience never get to learn anything that Glimmer said. Despite the fact that the scene in question is an interview scene, Glimmer is only seen and not heard. This seems to suggest that her most important attribute is her looks, and that if she ever opens her mouth and speaks, what she has to say warrants no attention—not from Katniss, not from the

people of Panem, not from readers of *The Hunger Games*. Therefore, she is turned into a beautiful object devoid of any personality or inner thoughts, rather than a human being.

Additionally, even when other characters get detailed physical descriptions, Glimmer's is the only one that focuses exclusively on beauty. For example, Thresh, the male tribute from District 11 is described as, "one of the giants, probably six and half feet tall, built like an ox" (Collins 126). The description emphasizes Thresh's physicality highlighting how he will be a substantial threat to Katniss once they are locked in competition in the arena. Thresh is the only character (of the tributes from other districts) whose physical description is of comparable detail to Glimmer's, and yet, while the description of her body hovers over her curves and hair color, his is focused exclusively on his strength and physical prowess. Glimmer's physical description serves no other purpose than to let the audience know how pretty she is. Thresh's serves no other purpose than letting the audience know how dangerous he is. Glimmer and Thresh are both described in terms of their height and build, but Glimmer's tall stature isn't meant to suggest physical strength. Rather, the phrase "tall and lush" invokes the image of a modern-day supermodel.

In addition to emphasizing her striking beauty, the only other character trait the book mentions about Glimmer is that she is terrible with a bow and arrow. In the arena, when Katniss comes face to face with the careers for the first time, she climbs a tree to escape, and Glimmer, who is in possession of the only bow and arrows in the Games, tries to shoot her down, "The girl with the arrows, Glimmer I hear someone call her — ugh, the names the people in District 1 give their children are so ridiculous — anyway, Glimmer scales the tree until the branches begin to crack under her feet and then she has the good sense to stop... She tries to shoot me and it's immediately obvious that she's incompetent with a bow... I could kill them, every one of them, if

those silver weapons were in my hands” (Collins 182). Glimmer’s comparative lack of skill with Katniss’s signature weapon emphasizes further Katniss’s own talents. Additionally, Katniss’s skill in the woods, specifically her ability to climb trees, gives her a great advantage over her competitors as they lack that same skillset. What makes this comparison even more important is that Glimmer is a career tribute. Earlier in the novel, the careers are described as “...the kids from the wealthier districts, the volunteers...the ones who have been fed and trained throughout their lives for this moment” (Collins 94). Glimmer comes from one of these districts: according to the world-building of *The Hunger Games*, she should be wildly skilled, one the kids who have been trained since childhood to compete in the Games. By that same logic, it would appear that Glimmer, likely volunteered herself for the Games, and is there –fighting not just for her life, but for fame, money, and glory– of her own accord. The fact that Katniss is shown to be more skilled with a bow than a girl that has been trained to compete in the Games demonstrates just how much natural ability she has. However, the author's use of Glimmer, specifically, to make this comparison is significant because it upholds a historical association between sexualization and low skill. The sexualization of women has been shown to be linked to perceptions by others of incompetence and inferiority, particularly in male-dominated settings, (Graff et al. 764). For instance, in work settings, women who are dressed more sexily are seen as less capable of higher profile jobs than more conservatively dressed women (Glick et al. 389). Even Olympic athletes were viewed as less intelligent when they were dressed sexily on the cover of a magazine as compared to in their athletic attire (Gurung and Chrouser 91). These perceptions maintain that, in order to succeed, women must embody more stereotypically masculine characteristics (like Katniss) and avoid presenting themselves in a more sexualized or stereotypically feminine way (like Glimmer). Therefore, despite Glimmer’s supposed lifelong training specifically for the

Hunger Games, she becomes the butt of the dumb blonde joke because she fulfills the role of the sexualized, attractive young girl who cannot do anything successfully but be pretty.

When considering the culture surrounding the Games in the career Districts, it's difficult to understand how Glimmer could be in the Games if she were truly were as incompetent as Katniss describes. When Katniss initially volunteers at the Reaping, she laments that, despite her skill as an archer, she will not be able to win because, as she explains, "The competition will be far beyond my abilities. Kids from wealthier districts, where winning is a huge honor, who've been trained their whole lives for this" (Collins 36). The children that Katniss describes are the "careers," dubbed as such because they are trained from childhood in combat to compete in the Hunger Games, thus giving their Districts the best possible chance at winning the games. The culture of District 1, where Glimmer was raised, is such that winning the Hunger Games is a massive honor not just for the tribute, but for the whole district. The number of victors that come from District 1 is a source of pride, and those victors are treated like celebrities both in their District and in the Capitol. Because of this, children from the career Districts tend to be eager to volunteer to compete in the Games because they want the opportunity to earn such an honor. Although the books never directly state Glimmer is a volunteer tribute, the information the book provides about the careers and culture surrounding the Games in their Districts suggests she likely was. The aspect of training is heavily emphasized several times throughout the book to illustrate to the reader that, despite Katniss's extreme talent as an archer, she will have to face the danger of other opponents that are not only physically capable of killing her, but also mentally desensitized to gravity of the Games. Therefore the careers, which should include Glimmer, pose a huge threat to Katniss and all the other tributes. For instance, in order to intimidate the other tributes, the careers monopolize the weapons section of the training prior to the Games and are

described as easily handling “the deadliest looking weapons in the gym” (Collins 95).

Presumably, this statement includes Glimmer because she, along with the other careers, received this specialized training as children, and should therefore be comfortable and experienced with weapons. Furthermore, bows aren't always present in the arena (Collins 91), and the fact that Glimmer chooses this as her weapon of choice, instead of a weapon more commonplace in the Games, suggests that she must have some experience handling it. Glimmer's specialized and extensive training as a child, as well as her willingness to volunteer when she surely wouldn't have to, leads the reader to believe that Glimmer should be a strong competitor in the Games, just as the other careers are. However, the only time Glimmer is seen as an active participant in the Games, she is decidedly incapable.

Glimmer is positioned as the near exact opposite to Katniss. First, Glimmer being one of the only two characters to use the bow in the book invites a direct comparison of her and Katniss. Glimmer's subpar performance with the bow illustrates that, despite all her wealth and training which afforded her an advantage in the Games, she is not as good a shot as Katniss, who lives in poverty and had to learn to hunt in order for her and her family to survive. Furthermore, Katniss is a volunteer, which is rare in District 12 but commonplace in Glimmer's home, District 1. However, their motives for volunteering differ greatly, and act as a reflection of their characters. Katniss's motivation for volunteering was to save her sister, which illustrates her devotion to her family, and her bravery to willingly participate in what is considered a death sentence in her district. Glimmer's motivation, however, (as well as the other careers') would likely have been pride and the desire for glory, hinting that she's conceited and boastful. Their motives to volunteer also act as strong motives to win the Games, as Katniss worries about who will take care of Prim if she dies, and Glimmer will only receive the honor she desires if she wins. The

comparison between Katniss and Glimmer portrays Glimmer as a self-centered, privileged, and untalented teenage girl while Katniss is elevated as a brave, moral, and self-sacrificing. While Glimmer is used partly to represent all the careers, it is significant that the most traditionally feminine presenting character is used as the scapegoat to make Katniss appear superior.

The fact that Glimmer is shown to be bad with a bow could potentially be explained away by the notion that it was not her usual weapon of choice. Regardless, the important factor is not why she's a bad shot, but rather, how her character acts as a foil for Katniss. Each of the other careers are portrayed as deadly, and get the opportunity to showcase what they've learned during their training. For instance, Marvel, the boy from 1, is proficient enough with a spear to kill Rue, (Collins 232); Clove, the girl from 2, is said to "never miss" (Collins 150) with knives and nearly kills Katniss more than once (Collins 150; 284); and Cato, the boy from 2 who is ultimately the biggest threat to Katniss is the last tribute to die before Katniss and Peeta win (Collins 327). Glimmer, however, is only shown using a weapon once during the whole book, and she's terrible with it. The significance of this is that the traditionally feminine, pretty girl is put down in order to make her counterpart, Katniss, look better in comparison. Glimmer, in many ways, is the exact opposite of Katniss, and embodies the exact opposite values. Glimmer in her interview is shown to be charismatic and sexy, and she wins over the audience with her beauty. Contrastingly, Katniss struggles in her interview; she's not personable by nature and she's more reluctant to be a source of entertainment for the people of the Capitol.

Furthermore, Glimmer's standout characteristic is her physical appearance, while Katniss is known for her skill with a bow. Although "the Hungers Games aren't a beauty contest...the best-looking tributes always tend to pull more sponsors" therefore it makes sense that Glimmer uses her looks to her advantage in hopes of gaining an upperhand (Collins 58). However, this

strategy is overlooked in comparison to Katniss's proficiency as an archer, and while this seems reasonable at first, Glimmer's strategy will give her access to what she needs most: food.

According to Katniss, the careers often end up dying of starvation because they are not as accustomed to going hungry as the tributes from the poorer districts. Therefore, Glimmer's looks may be as valuable as Katniss's bow when it comes to sustenance because the careers main source of food is typically gifts from sponsors. Glimmer's privilege as a career, that being her wealth, access to sponsors, and her lifetime of training, all suggest that she should be a major threat in the Games, but instead, she's made out to be an incompetent young girl. The author's choice to use the traditionally feminine character to play the role of the inferior foil to Katniss further shows the preference for traditionally masculine characteristics over feminine ones.

Although many of Glimmer's more traditionally feminine aspects, such as her physical beauty, would have been an asset to her in securing sponsors and winning over the crowd, they are not valued as highly as Katniss's combat skills. In fact, the only other female tribute that is shown to be a real threat to Katniss is Clove, who is very similar to Katniss in that she embodies many traditionally masculine traits. For example, she, like Katniss, is a prodigy with a weapon, in her case knives, and also emotionally distant and cold. Additionally, the choice to strip Glimmer of all combat skills, despite the fact that she was supposedly trained from childhood to compete in the Hunger Games, feels like an attempt to dismiss Glimmer as frivolous and incapable because of her femininity, while simultaneously elevating Katniss due to her masculinity. Katniss, then, is not simply characterized as possessing more masculine traits. Rather she is differentiated from Glimmer, a more traditionally feminine presenting girl in a way that is meant to show Katniss as superior. Therefore, Katniss's masculine traits are elevated at the expense of Glimmer's feminine characteristics.

Additionally, Katniss and Glimmer are also set up as foils in that they are the only two tributes with known district tokens. A district token is an article of clothing or a piece of jewelry of some kind that the tributes are allowed to wear in the arena during the Hunger Games, to remind them of home, (Collins 38). Katniss's, famously, is the mockingjay pin. Katniss describes the mockingjays as "something of a slap in the face to the Capitol" (Collins 42). These birds are the result of breeding between mockingbirds and a genetically mutated bird, the jabberjay, which were engineered to spy on the people of the Districts during the rebellion. The birds had "the ability to memorize and repeat whole human conversations...it took people awhile to realize what was going on...how private conversations were being transmitted...then...the rebels fed the Capitol endless lies and the joke was on it" (Collins 43). The jabberjays represent a failure of the Capitol, and even though the rebellion was put down, the birds still served as an embarrassment. They were abandoned once the rebels began using the jabberjays against the Capitol, and were expected to die off in the wild. However, they instead mated with mockingbirds, and formed a new species called the mockingjay. The mockingjay is very representative of Katniss herself, because it represents the betrayal of the Capitol manufactured weapon against its creators, which Katniss becomes later when she tries to commit suicide with Peeta as an act of rebellion against the Games, and as well as later in the series when she refuses to play the role of the victor. The mockingjay also represents the will to survive and adapt, despite the odds. Because of this, the mockingjay later becomes a symbol of the rebellion later in the series.

The only other tribute who's district token is ever described is Glimmer's. When dressing Katniss to enter the arena, Cinna reveals that Glimmer's district token, a ring, was confiscated, because "If you twisted the gemstone, a spike popped out. Poisoned one. She claimed she had no

knowledge the ring transformed and there was no way to prove she did. But she lost her token” (Collins 145-146). In both cases, the district token was used to reveal something about each character’s personality. For Katniss, her pin emphasizes her will to survive and her unwillingness to be a pawn for the Capitol. For Glimmer, though, her ring paints her as a liar and cheater. It also plays into the tradition of poison as a woman’s weapon, an idea rooted in the perception of poison as “dishonorable and unmanly” (Sadowski 140). Because poison doesn’t involve direct confrontation and relies on the ignorance of the victim, it has largely been considered a cowardly means of murder, as Sadowski explains, “precisely because of its violation of fair play in denying the victim/opponent the opportunity of self-defense” (140). It became most commonly associated with women because of the implication that they were not physically capable of beating a man in a fair fight. It’s also significant that, again, Glimmer’s district token was in line with something that is traditionally considered feminine, a piece of jewelry. Pairing the ring with the poisoned spike also creates a link between femininity and dishonesty, and suggests that more traditionally feminine characters are sneaky and underhanded by nature.

Finally, Glimmer’s death is a gruesome one that ultimately solidifies Katniss as her superior double, and also reinforces the emphasis on Glimmer’s physical beauty by forcibly stripping her of it. After the careers trap Katniss in a tree, they decide to wait her out until the morning. They fall asleep underneath her perch, and to escape in the morning, Katniss drops a tracker jacker nest on them. Tracker jackers are “killer wasps...spawned in a lab...they have a distinctive solid gold body and a sting that raises a lump the size of a plum on contact” (Collins 185). When the nest drops, Glimmer is overcome by the tracker jackers and ultimately unable to escape. The fact that Glimmer is Katniss’s first kill of the Games is significant, even though it is indirect and perhaps not entirely intentional on Katniss’s part. Glimmer’s miss with the bow the

day before followed shortly by Katniss's successful attack on the careers further emphasizes Katniss's own capabilities as being better than the careers, and once again Glimmer is used as the prime vessel of this example. Glimmer's poor performance with the bow illustrates Katniss's superiority as an archer, but Katniss's ability to outsmart the careers and use the tracker jacker nest against them shows her superior intellect. Katniss is shown to be better in combat than Glimmer, and now she is shown to be smarter than her as well. The fact that Glimmer is ultimately the career who dies in this attack shows the Glimmer is the weakest of the Careers, and is the most easily overtaken by Katniss. Katniss's proficiency with a bow compared to Glimmer's failure exemplified how Katniss's traditionally masculine characteristics, especially when it comes to physical ability, are greater than Glimmer's, a more traditionally feminine character. The tracker jacker attack now shows Katniss to be more intelligent than Glimmer too, which reinforces the stereotype that boys, or more traditionally masculine figures, are smarter than girls, or more traditionally feminine figures.

Furthermore, Glimmer does not simply lose her life in this scene; her death ultimately serves as an attack on her beauty, and shows that even in death Glimmer is still defined by her physical appearance. Even in Katniss's hazy state, the result of her own stings, she is struck by the sight of Glimmer's body, saying "this girl, so breathtakingly beautiful in her golden dress the night of the interviews, is unrecognizable. Her features eradicated, her limbs three times their normal size. The stinger lumps have begun to explode, spewing putrid green liquid around her" (Collins 192). Other tributes meet similarly gruesome fates, but their loss of beauty is not the central point of the scene. For example, Cato is attacked by mutations, "genetically altered animals" that the Capitol originally bred during the rebellion to use as weapons against the Districts (Collins 42). In the Games, Cato falls victim to wolf mutations, each of which have

been designed to look like a fallen tribute. The attack lasts for hours, the whole night in fact, with Cato's death serving as a sort of grand finale of the Games. When Katniss finally kills him out of mercy, she describes him as "the raw hunk of meat that used to be my enemy" (Collins 340-341), which gives the impression that Cato has been maliciously disfigured to the point of unrecognizability, much like Glimmer. However, there is no mention of Cato's previous looks, no lamenting his loss of beauty. Rather, Cato's death serves as a sort of redemption moment for a character who, up until this point, has been described as monstrous and vicious. In his final moments, Cato elicits pity from Katniss and the audience, as he not only meets a terrible fate, but also the realization that the purpose of this boy's horrific death is ultimately to be a source of entertainment. Glimmer is not afforded such a redemption. Rather, her death further reinforces the reduction of her identity to her looks, and then strips her of such identity through her physical mutilation. Katniss expresses little sympathy for Glimmer, and instead her death is portrayed as a means to an end: Glimmer's death means that Katniss can finally take possession of the only bow in the Games.

Katniss Everdeen is one of the most recognizable figures in modern young adult literature, and she has been praised as an empowering feminist character due to her break with traditional gender norms, for instance, in *Girl Warriors: Feminist Revisions of the Hero's Quest in Contemporary Popular Culture* (2019), Svenja Hohenstein applauds Katniss for "challeng[ing] the conventions found in traditional quest stories" (78). . Katniss's characterization marks an attempt by the author to create a teenage girl that was unburdened by stereotypes and free to be the hero of her own story. However, ultimately, Katniss functions as a very traditional "masculine" coded character, embodying emotional stoicism, violence, and toughness, thus upholding the idea that, in order to succeed, one must possess traits traditionally

associated with masculinity. Furthermore, while Katniss is a capable and compelling character, other, more traditionally feminine characters are not given the same care. Glimmer is a prime example of this. She is overtly sexualized from the moment she's introduced, and is repeatedly portrayed as incredibly incompetent even though as a career she should, according to the rules of the novel, be one of the most dangerous competitors in the arena. Thus, while Katniss represents an attempt to break down traditional gender roles, she actually strengthens them by suggesting that masculine characteristics are preferable to feminine characteristics.

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