

Who's Afraid of Katniss Everdeen?: How Fictional Characters Can Impact New Visions of Substantive Gender Equality

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This presentation will examine the role that fictional characters play in fashioning women's lives and their views of gender norms, gender equality, and ultimately stimulating law reform. The audience will be asked to ponder law and legal reform by considering the impact, positive or negative, that pop culture fictional characters have played in our lives. From Janie Crawford, Nancy Drew, Claire Huxtable and Julia Sugarbaker, to Dr. Mindy Lahiri, Santana Lopez, Hermione Granger, and Katniss Everdeen, we will explore the impact that fictional women (or men) have played in challenging gender norms and/or stereotypes. What have we learned and what can we continue to learn from fictional characters to help find innovative approaches to achieving substantive equality in the workplace, in the family, in the political process, and in legal education? What benefit, if any, might there be in using fictional (as opposed to real life) persons to keep the conversation ongoing about gender norms and gender equality? To what extent are we living in a "post-sex/gender" world, and do women still rely on exemplars to imagine social and legal change? Is society today, as it has been historically, affected by fictional characters as a vehicle to arouse reaction about gender norms and to provoke debate? We will present responses across generations from women lawyers and law students, reporting on the impact fictional characters have had on informing their views of gender equality and gender norms. We will summarize common themes found among their views and will suggest that teaching young women to be aware of the significance of fictional role models can be a valuable instrument for fostering mentoring, networking relationships, and affecting law and social change.