

# Anxious, distrustful, angry: meeting Generation K

By the beginning of *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2*, Panem – North America’s dystopian future state – has been plunged into war. The poor and oppressed members of the ‘districts’ outside the luxurious Capitol are coming together to rebel against the corrupt and sinister President Snow. Meanwhile, Katniss Everdeen, played by Jennifer Lawrence, is severely traumatised by three films’ worth of brutal violence and emotional torment. She never wanted to be part of this war – and she is trying, above all else, to stay alive.

The first book in Suzanne Collins’ *Hunger Games* trilogy was published in 2008, just as the financial crash stripped the world of its economic security and prosperous, optimistic outlook. By 2012, 65 million copies of the three books in the series had been sold in the USA alone. The first three films have made £1.5bn. But as the franchise gathered success, the generation of Katniss readers grew up in an increasingly troubled world – one of tough austerity measures, government surveillance and rising terrorism.

Earlier this year, the economist Noreena Hertz surveyed and interviewed teenage girls born between 1995-2002, and found that they were more anxious about ‘existential threats’, more distrustful of authority, and less interested in traditional ‘social mores’ like marriage and parenthood.

The phenomenon led Hertz to name current 13-20 year olds ‘Generation K’ – a reference to *The Hunger Games*’ long-suffering but strong-willed heroine. ‘I think *The Hunger Games* resonates with them so much because they are Katniss navigating a dark and difficult world’, she said. ‘But like Katniss, Generation K also has a strong sense of what is right and fair.’

## Let the games begin

Today’s teenagers have no shortage of things to be worried about, says *New Statesman*’s Laurie Penny. It is no wonder they identify so strongly with Katniss. The obsession with dystopia futures stems from fears over questions like ‘How will I survive when the world I know collapses?’ and ‘How will I protect my family?’ The young people of 2015 are more serious, more afraid, but ultimately more principled than any other generation.

But teenagers have always been given many different labels by adults who don’t understand them, say others, and they are nearly always wrong. ‘Generation Selfie’ or ‘Generation Z’ has a diverse set of desires and attributes – and their lives are not so awful. This is not Panem; Western governments are not actively trying to murder their citizens. In fact, this new generation has unprecedented access to free information, cheap travel and equal opportunities for different genders and sexualities. Today’s teenagers are the luckiest ever born.