Gender and Violence in *The Hunger Games* and *Battle Royale*

Magda L. Kitano [1]

The 2012 American movie *The Hunger Games* (Ross) and the 2000 Japanese movie *Battle Royale* (Fukasaku) both concern state-run games in which children are placed in a controlled environment where they must kill one another until a single victor is determined.[2] Both take place in dystopian societies with a controlling central government. And in both of the "games," children are provided with weapons of varying degrees of lethality, and life-threatening dangers include obstacles created by game designers.

Regardless of this uncanny resemblance, author Suzanne Collins explains that she had not seen *Battle Royale* or even heard of the book before writing *The Hunger Games* (Dominus, 2011). If true, these two works illustrate the independent evolution of a similar future world scenario by writers from the vastly contrasting cultures of east and west. The following movie adaptations provide a ripe opportunity to observe differences in a wide variety of cultural aspects by comparing such things as components of the game, the actions and reactions of the participants, and cinematography. This paper will compare just one of those aspects – the depiction of violence committed by females.

As the games in both movies recruit an equal number of male and female children, the scenario produces a significant number of minor females faced with the sudden necessity to defend themselves from violence, to commit violence in order to survive, and perhaps more importantly, with the sudden permission and even encouragement from adults to commit violence. How are the female children from these two cultures depicted as handling this situation? What does this indicate about gender in the respective cultures?

Female Violence in the Media

Gender studies have found that violence and especially murder are gendered in both entertainment as well as mass media. Karen Boyle (2005)

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[2] While both of these movies are based on novels of the same names, this article will focus solely on the secondary motion picture works.

explains that women who kill or act violently are given much media attention not only because it is so rare that women do commit violent crimes, but because they have violated gender norms.

> Violence and aggression are intrinsic to our conceptualization of masculinity. Femininity, however, is associated with nurturing and caring for others, with emotion, passivity and vulnerability. All of this is thrown into crisis when a woman chooses to attack, hurt or kill another human being (or allows someone else to do so). Violent women are thus guilty both of breaking the criminal law and violating gender norms. (p. 95)

When looking at real cases of violence taken up by the media, we find that there are certain circumstances in which female acts of violence are more acceptable to the public: mothers acting to protect their children, and women who are suffering from some sort of insanity, which can include hormonal imbalance (p. 116-121). In other cases, the media reacts to the violation of gender by either vilifying the female aggressor as a witch or source of pure evil, or by emphasizing in her a lack of femininity or focusing on lesbian qualities (p. 108-115). We can see such trends when examining the media frenzy around Karla Homolka's conviction and following release from prison, while no such spotlight was put on her husband Paul Bernardo, with whom she carried out the crimes. Belinda Morrissey (2006) explains:

> The intense vilification that followed the conviction of Karla Homolka make evident the severity of her sins against heteropatriarchal society. The crimes she had committed were shown to far outweigh Bernardo's rapes, abductions, and murders for they included offences against 'good' woman- and wifehood. Karla Homolka was presented as nothing but a façade, beautiful but vacuous, appearing to be the epitome of femininity with her neat suits and long hair, yet revealing 'traditionally masculine' traits in her clear enjoyment of the rapes she performed on endless sex videotapes . . . . Indeed, she seemed to deliberately pervert classically feminine values, like nurturance and care, as she described how she anaesthetized some of her victims with a cloth doused in Halothane and then watched over them like a nurse while her male partner raped them. (p. 88)

When turning to film, we see an aversion to depicting violent females. When they do appear, Burfoot and Lord (2006) explain that they tend to be given "reactive roles, such as the vengeful wronged woman and the maternal protector" (p. xiii). In an examination of the gendering of violence in *Natural Born Killers*, Karen Boyle (2001) illustrates how male violence is normalized, while representations of female violence focus on triggers which have transformed the woman into something capable of violence. As the name of the movie suggests, the male protagonist is shown to have a potential for violence from birth. However, his female partner in crime is shown to be reacting to long-term sexual abuse she suffered as a child.

Other films can also be seen to use the reactive model to explain female violence. Tarantino's *Kill Bill* (2003), one of the more famous movies featuring explicit violence at the hands of women, is actually doubly safeguarded against violating gender norms in that the heroine not only sets out on her quest for blood after having her entire bridal party murdered, but she is also showing

maternal instincts in avenging the believed loss of her unborn child. Screenwriter Hilary Henkin comments on the need felt in Hollywood to provide a reason for violence in females, whereas none is required for males. Henkin wrote heroine Rita of *Fatal Beauty* to be "driven, obsessive, violent, and sexual," and "driven on a mission in the same way that Dirty Harry was driven on a mission." However, the script was rewritten heavily, in the end becoming a comedy. Rita was given a background story of abuse to explain her violent nature. Henkin explains:

> But what happened to Rita seems to be the object lesson of what happens to all those characters. It comes down to back story. It seems that similar sorts of male characters within the genre are allowed to indulge their obsession, with almost no reason, and when they indulge their obsession they are applauded by the film-making establishment and the audience. But the notion of the female character who does things for the sake of doing them seems to be frighteningly out of control for the system and its perception of how the audience would react to that idea. (Francke 1994, p. 120-121)

Both *Battle Royale* and *The Hunger Games* set about to see how children react when they suddenly must kill or be killed. Does the very new *The Hunger Games* continue the Hollywood tradition of showing violence to be a masculine trait? Does *Battle Royale* show a different attitude towards female violence coming from the Asian tradition?

Violence Profiles of the Game Players

Although the movie *Battle Royale* is known to be a bloodbath of violence between school children, a surprisingly high number of students in the game are not active participants in violence. The game in *Battle Royale* utilizes as its subjects a ninth grade class that is chosen at random from among all of the homeroom classes in the country. At the start of the game, the children therefore will have known each other for at least three years, and will be entwined in the usual romances, cliques, and rivalries of children at that age. The movie *Battle Royale* is therefore a study in what would happen to such a group if uprooted and thrown into a kill-or-be-killed situation.

Of the forty-two students of the class, five students show that they are opposed to participating in violence. ("Anti-violence" in Table 1.) For example, one girl refuses her allotted survival kit and weapon saying, "I will not take part in this game."[3] She then proceeds to a cliff where she goads her boyfriend to join her in suicide. Two of these Anti-violence students are the two protagonists, Shuya Nanahara and Noriko Nakagawa. Shuya is especially repulsed by both violence itself, and the idea that his classmates are actually acting upon the instructions to kill one another. When rolling down a hill together with Tatsumichi Oki, a classmate who was attacking him with an axe, the axe somehow ends up buried in Tatsumichi's skull. Shuya is devastated by the idea that he might have killed the boy, and implores to Noriko, "Did I just kill him? Tell me the truth! You were watching, weren't you? Tell me, did I kill him?" shaking her by the

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[3] All translations in this article are the author's translations from the original Japanese, and are not taken from the English of the international subtitled release.

shoulders. She says no, it was just an accident, although with the speed at which it happened it is very hard to say for sure. This illustrates the degree to which it is important to these children that they do not and have not committed murder, no matter the reason. Shuya is also seen on several occasions throughout the movie lamenting the fact that killing is going on. When two girls are gunned down trying to gather together classmates with a megaphone, he shouts, "They were our friends. This is all crazy! How can everyone so easily kill each other?"

Fifteen students cannot be classified as being either violent or nonviolent ("Unknown"). Either they are not featured in the movie until their deaths, or they are killed before they have had a chance to enter into the action of the game. Four students take no part in violence unless their lives or those of their friends are in danger, but then they are able to stand up and fight at that point ("Action when Necessary"). This category includes girls who band together in the lighthouse until one girl strikes out with a machine gun. Responding to the threat ends with all five dead. This category also includes Shinji Mimura, who enacts an elabo-

rate plan to attack the headquarters of the game administrators with two friends. He blows up the efforts of his hard work, a bomb, in an effort to stop indiscriminate killer Kazuo Kiriyama, whose attack has brought their plan to a halt.

Eighteen students show aggressive behavior, and these can be divided further into four categories. Ten students show outward aggression, taking part actively in the game by attacking most students they meet ("Aggression"). Those they do not kill are temporary allies. An example is Shogo Kawada, the winner of a previous game returning for a second time to the battlefield, who befriends the protagonists. Four students exhibit excessively violent behavior due to a panicked fear of their classmates ("Panicked Aggression"). This includes Yoshio Akamatsu, who waits outside the schoolhouse as students enter the playing field, shooting them down with arrows. His intense fear causes him to blunder along, drop his weapon and then charge madly at the boy who picks it up. Another is Kayoko Kotohiki, who fires her gun the moment she is seen by a boy. However, it turns out that he had been looking for her simply to tell her that he had a crush on her. Two students show reactive

Table 1: *Battle Royale* Students Categorized by Attitude Toward Violence

Attitude toward Violence	Number of Males	Number of Females
Anti-violence	1	4
Unknown	8	7
Action when Necessary	1	3
Aggression	9	1
Panicked Aggression	1	3
Reactive Aggression	0	2
Super Aggression	1	1

violence ("Reactive Aggression"). They do not kill other students they meet, but react violently when provoked or insulted. One is Takako Chigusa, who vigorously stabs a boy all over his body, including twice in the genitals, when he uses a variety of approaches, including threats of violence, to try to get her to have sex with him. The second is Yuko Sasaki, who plans to poison Shuya in return for his part in the death of Tatsumichi Oki. Finally, there are two Super Aggressive students, one male and one female. They are responsible for most of the deaths in the movie, and seem to take enjoyment in killing.

As would be expected from gender studies literature, overall the number of aggressive males is higher than that of females, and aggressive females tend to be either panicked or reactive. On the other hand, we do have male representatives of each category except for Reactive Aggression, and the fact that the male protagonist is highly anti-violent makes a strong impression on the movie as a whole. A total of ten males and fourteen females do not take part in violence whenever possible. This high number is significant because the story is set in a future scenario that is in supposedly more dangerous and degraded than the Japan we know today. It is a Japan where there is high unemployment and where students threaten teachers and live by their own rules. Even then, the majority is seen not to take active part in a killing game authorized by the government.

Table 2 shows the number of students killed by those in each category. We can see that the two Super Aggressive students are responsible for a large percentage of the killing in this movie. Purely Aggressive students did not make much of a mark, but those with Panicked Aggression and Reactive Aggression are successful in killing. There are a few kills in the less aggressive categories, but note that these numbers do include suicides, of which there are five total.

Turning to *The Hunger Games*, several differences in the games and in the movies need to be explained before comparing numbers, as they prevent a direct comparison. First of all, while *Battle Royale* is an R15 movie, director Gary Ross intended *The Hunger Games* to be safe for viewers as young as 12 (Dominus, 2011). We will therefore

Table 2: Number of Kills by *Battle Royale* Students Categorized by Killer's Attitude Toward Violence

Attitude toward Violence	Males		Females	
	Number	Kills	Number	Kills
Anti-violence	1	1	4	2
Unknown	8	1	7	1
Action when Necessary	1	0	3	1
Aggression	9	3	1	0
Panicked Aggression	1	1	3	4
Reactive Aggression	0	0	2	3
Super Aggression	1	12	1	6

expect to see a much lower amount of violence and level of gore in *The Hunger Games* simply due to the difference in targeted audience. Secondly, as the official game of the nation, the children chosen for the game in *The Hunger Games* have seen the previous games every year of their lives in a reality TV format. They therefore have a good idea of how the game progresses, and probably even have ideas of their own as to how they want to approach the playing field. The children in *Battle Royale*, however, are shown to have no idea why they have been abducted and taken to the island. This is due to their lack of attention paid to civics classes and to televised media events. Some in the class seem not to believe the teacher is serious when he says he wants them to kill each other, and a demonstration of their murdered homeroom teacher as well as a couple of killings over classroom disruptions are necessary to bring the point home to them. This difference in approach to the game should bring about different responses from the children in these two different plotlines.

The Hunger Games children also have the resources of private trainers and staff, and a training program before the game begins. *Battle Royale* children are thrown into the game after a brief explanation, still wearing the clothing from when they were abducted. The reality television format in *The Hunger Games* will also affect the children's decisions, as they know their every move is being broadcast. Appealing to this constant audience also brings rewards in the form of items necessary for survival, gifts from wealthy patrons who have taken a liking to them. The children in *Battle Royale*, on the other hand, are told that their parents "have been notified," and only the remaining

winner of the game will be shown on TV. They are left basically on their own until a winner is determined. Not only do their actions have no effect on an audience, but they are also protected by secrecy. They can act out any fantasy or desire they have had with anonymity and without repercussions. Finally, the children's roles are quite different between the games in the two movies. In *The Hunger Games*, the children represent their districts, and winning is a source of pride. In *Battle Royale*, survival is the only reward, and fame seems to be limited. Even though Shogo was the winner of a previous year's game, he was not recognized by the other students.

With these differences in mind, let us turn to the violence profiles of *The Hunger Games* participants. As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of the players' stances on violence are unknown. A large number of them are killed in the opening of the game, during a frenzy where children compete for weapons. There are no outright declarations against violence, as there were in *Battle Royale*, but there are two girls who do not take part in any violence throughout the film. The two protagonists, Katniss and Peeta, are categorized as "Action when Necessary," as both seem to avoid killing whenever possible, but take action when their lives are in danger. There are five males who can be classified as aggressive, and take part in the game as it is designed. There are no cases of players acting in the Panicked Aggression or Reactive Aggression categories. There are two females and one male in the Super Aggression category, but as mentioned above, the level of violence is lower than that of *Battle Royale*. But as with *Battle Royale*, they can be seen to enjoy killing, and take part in overkill.

Table 3: *The Hunger Games* Participants Categorized by Attitudes Toward Violence

Attitude toward Violence	Number of Males	Number of Females
Anti-violence	0	2
Unknown	6	7
Action when Necessary	1	1
Aggression	5	0
Panicked Aggression	0	0
Reactive Aggression	0	0
Super Aggression	1	2

As to gender, the only females taking part in killing are the two Super Aggressive girls and the heroine (Table 4). All other females are either victims or merely endeavoring to survive alone in the wilderness. Katniss's relatively high number of kills may be explained by the amount of threatening situations she encounters. As to the males, the aggressive males make more of a mark than those in *Battle Royale*. Their achievement of seven kills in total especially stands out because of a lack of kills in so many other categories. The Super Aggressive players make far fewer kills than in *Battle Royale*, but this may be due to the PG13 rating of the movie.

To sum up, we find the majority of killing done by males in *Battle Royale* to be the work of the Super Aggressive male, with a spattering of single kills by males in other categories. In *The Hunger Games*, most male killings are done by aggressive males, with three kills by the Super Aggressive male. This indicates in *Battle Royale* a more non-violent attitude towards males in general, as if to say that most males are non-violent although once in a while a violent male is born. *The Hunger Games's* figures, on the other hand, imply a view that males in general are aggressive, and some-

Table 4: Number of Kills by The Hunger Games Players Categorized by Killer's Attitude Towards Violence

Attitude towards Violence	Males		Females	
	Number	Kills	Number	Kills
Anti-violence	0	0	2	0
Unknown	6	0	7	0
Action when Necessary	1	0	1	4
Aggressive	5	7	0	0
Panicked Aggression	0	0	0	0
Reactive Aggression	0	0	0	0
Super Aggression	1	3	2	4

times a few of them are a bit more aggressive than others.

As for the females, *Battle Royale* shows females of several different categories killing, including at least three suicides. The Super Aggressive female has the highest number of kills of the females, but this is half the number of her male counterpart. In *The Hunger Games*, only the Super Aggressive females and the Action when Necessary protagonist log kills, and the number is not high. Here we can see that *Battle Royale* treats females as even more likely to be violent than males, as there are a variety of triggers that they respond to, such as panicked aggression and reactive aggression. In *The Hunger Games*, females are basically either victims or wilderness survivalists, with a few trained to kill and one with superior skills who is able to respond to attacks made against her.

Comparing this with the research, *The Hunger Games* therefore stays in line with the Hollywood normalization of male aggression, with the majority of females taking the role of the victim or the hunted. *Battle Royale*, however, shows a completely different stance on male and female aggression. Females actually seem more likely to commit violence than males when put in situations without controls for violence. The reasons seem to be both a lack of self-control as well as a lust for violence. While there were in fact aggressive males in the game, the number of males trying to find alternate solutions to their situation as well as the conviction with which Anti-violence males voice their opinions make the partaking in violence seem more of an abnormality than it is shown to be in the Hollywood schema.

Next, I will take a closer look at the Super Aggressive females in both movies in order to determine if they follow depictions of violent females in gender studies literature.

Battle Royale's Super Aggressive Female: Mitsuko Souma

The Super Aggressive female in *Battle Royale* is Mitsuko Souma. In addition to being responsible for a large number of the deaths inflicted by females in this movie, she is the only female in the movie to move on the offensive when unprovoked. Starting with her first kill at the beginning of the game, Mitsuko uses stealth as well as duplicity in order to attain more lethal weapons from classmates while lessening the number of rivals on the playing field. As to her motives, Mitsuko tells Megumi Eto, her first kill, that she saw one of the two class couples hung in a double suicide, and swore that she would never end up like that. This experience of seeing her dead classmates spurred her offensive strategy in the game.

But we see that Mitsuko is not simply trying to win the game, thereby avoiding death. This could also be accomplished by shooting rivals directly upon meeting up with them, or by first waiting the game out until there are fewer opponents. However, on several occasions we see Mitsuko toying with her targets, as well as making cruel speeches to them once they are completely under her power. With Megumi, she goes back and forth between threatening and befriending attitudes, creating in her prey a continued and increasing sense of confusion and panic. She first uses a flashlight at the doorway to the shed where Megumi is hiding, shining it directly into Megumi's eyes to hide her identity. Mitsuko then reveals herself by lighting her face from below, as children do when trying to

scare each other with ghost stories at a summer camp. After this dominating attitude, she suddenly changes tack and asks permission to enter the shack, which is in no real sense the property of Megumi. Mitsuko then comes in and sits down with Megumi as if for a girls' chat, commenting on Megumi's collection of photos of her favorite boy. Taking Megumi's weapon, a stun gun, she chats amicably about it, but then shows familiarity with it enough for Megumi to ask if she has ever used one before. This turns Mitsuko on Megumi, who then feels bad for implying that Mitsuko was delinquent to that degree. When Megumi goes to take her stun gun back, this leads to a chase around the room ending with Mitsuko lodging her sickle into Megumi's neck. Instead of simply killing her, Mitsuko continues her girls' talk about their weapons, saying that she finds her sickle to be quite effective, before slicing Megumi's throat open. In addition to psychological torture, some of her kills are unnecessarily bloody or excessive. Yuichiro Takiguchi and Tadakatsu Hatagami are two examples. We know little about what happened, but we are shown a bloody scene where the two naked boys as well as the surrounding bathing area is covered in blood, and Mitsuko is seen dressing and picking up her sickle to leave. It is assumed that she seduced them, only to turn on them later. They have several sources of bleeding, not all necessary, such as their thighs. Their genital areas are especially bloody. Mitsuko is enjoying both the psychological as well as physical aspects of killing her classmates.

Not much is given as her personal history, except that it is hinted that she ran with a group of girls on the rough side.[4] We learn of this through her encounter with Megumi, one of the few "good girls" of the class. In defense of why she first started to use her stun gun when she sensed someone come into her hut, Megumi says that she didn't get along with Mitsuko's group, but hastily adds that she has no problem with Mitsuko herself. Megumi's assumption that Mitsuko has used a stun gun before shows her belief that Mitsuko was street smart, and even familiar with violence. We are not given any further information on this group of girls or what kind of lives they led outside of school, and we are not even shown which other girls were in that group. Mitsuko moves on her own throughout the movie.

Mitsuko is an example of exactly what Boyle and Henkin say that American movie producers will not agree to, and what American audiences will not stomach on screen: the violent female who is simply violent by nature. As the movie deals with the question of what each different type of child would do when faced with the sudden necessity to kill all of his or her classmates, her presence in this movie implies that there are girls who are simply violent in nature, and would act this way under similar circumstances.

The male equivalent to Mitsuko in this movie is Kazuo Kiriyama, the dangerous element in the game. He is seen to ruthlessly kill in order to attain weapons, becoming almost invincible at one point with a bulletproof vest. Not originally a member of the class, he has no emotional ties to his opponents. While Mitsuko seems to take special pleas-

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[4] Both the novel and the manga give Mitsuko a back story of violent and repeated abuse from an early age, as well as previous incidents of having sexually enticed and then harmed classmates and local men (Takami, 1999). The extended version of the film adds a flashback of Mitsuko being sold for sex by her mother.

ure in the social aspects of killing – most of her kills are fellow females – Kazuo seems most fulfilled by the strategy and the play of the game, as if it were a video game in which he has come to excel. But like Mitsuko, we also see in him a taste for excessive violence. He tends to spray adversaries with fire from automatic weapons, firing again at close range to confirm that they are dead. Once he uses the severed head of one of his kills in order to deliver a grenade through the window of a dwelling where three students are hiding.

We are given no information on this boy's past, except that he volunteered to join the game "because he likes this stuff".[5] It is implied that there are other boys who likewise volunteer regularly as a type of hobby. This fits in with Boyle's natural born killer profile, in which some males are simply born with a taste for violence. But alongside Mitsuko, director Fukasaku implies that this is true not just for males, but for both males and females. This equality in violent tendencies pairs these two, and they move separately throughout the bulk of the game. They then each utilize all of their skills in a showdown near the end of the movie.

The Hunger Games' Super Aggressive Females: Glimmer and Clove

Glimmer and Clove are the Super Aggressive females of The Hunger Games. They both run with the same group during the game, that of the "careers," or children who have been trained especially for the game all their lives. In contrast, poor-

er districts such as that of the protagonists have no such facilities, and being chosen for the Hunger Games is basically considered a death sentence. But District 1 and District 2 train promising children, who then volunteer for the game.

In the Hunger Games taking place in the movie, the four representatives of District 1 and 2, along with protagonist Peeta, form an alliance and move together through the woods. As representatives of the stronger districts, Glimmer and Clove fulfill their roles by killing and cooperating with their group in the effort to hunt down opponents. They act willfully and skillfully in killing. For example, in the opening bloodbath of the game where strong players fight for the best weapons, we first see Glimmer slashing away at a fallen child, and then Clove throwing a knife long-distance at the back of a boy busy attacking Katniss. Once the boy falls, Clove then immediately throws another knife directly at Katniss. They are unblinkingly carrying out the skill set with the purpose of killing as they have been trained to do.

Yet in addition to skill and training, both girls also show an active taste for violence itself. The first scene of Glimmer during the game shows her hacking continually at a child, which is most probably overkill. When the group moves together through the woods, Glimmer is heard on several occasions to ask for the kill – she wants to be the one to kill the child that the group has come across. In the first group kill, they come across a girl who was uninformed enough to light a fire for warmth at night. We see Cato, one of the males of

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[5] In the book (Takami 1999, p. 81-83), Kazuo has had all emotional response in his brain gouged out by a splinter from an accident that killed his mother before his birth. At the beginning of the game, he flips a coin to decide whether to try to win the game, or to try and take on the authorities. Flipping "play the game," he goes and methodically wipes out all of his classmates without remorse. As with Mitsuko, this is quite a different character from the Kazuo in the movie.

the group, hand over a weapon so that she can make the kill. When the group comes across Katniss wounded in a pond, Glimmer shouts, "She's mine!" Later, when Cato proves unable to climb a tree Katniss is in, Glimmer says, "I'll do it myself!" and immediately starts to shoot arrows up at Katniss. As to having Peeta in their group, Glimmer is the one who suggests simply killing him off right away. Cato must remind her of Peeta's value in tracking down Katniss for them.

Clove is also an enthusiastic member of the group, but her tendencies towards violence are shown more through her skill and speed. Further interest in killing is seen when during a boring moment, she practices her knife throwing by spearing a lizard. Clove also taunts through words, and when she attacks Katniss instead of simply asking where Peeta is hiding, she belittles their relationship by calling him "Loverboy." She also boasts about having killed Katniss' friend, the young Rue.

The audience is given no view of the lives of these girls before the games, so it appears that their lust for killing as well as ability to kill without a second thought may indicate that the resistance Henkin finds to writing purely violent female characters is easing up in Hollywood. But on closer inspection, we can see that here a different tactic is being used to make these characters palatable to an American audience. In addition to back stories of abuse to explain female violent tendencies, Boyle (2005) also explores the media's emphasis of masculine qualities in women who have committed murder. She cites the media's tendency to link women's sexuality with criminality. Lesbian rela-tionships between convicted killers make headline news, and unwomanly-like aspects of women on trial are emphasized. Figures show that women who even appear to be lesbian or bisexual are more likely to be seen to be guilty, by both juries and by people working in the penal system. Just as acting out of revenge or after being "damaged" by a violent act in one's childhood makes violent women palatable to American audiences, labeling a killer as being lesbian acts as an explanation for the behavior, and keeps safe the idea that killing is not something that a "real" woman does. The masculinity of the woman has affected her capability for and interest in violence in this scenario (p. 108-115).

Lem and Hassel (2012) write about how genders are blurred in the book, *The Hunger Games*. They focus on the protagonists, Katniss and Peeta, and how they have blended gendered characteristics, making the book popular with both boys and girls. They describe Katniss as balancing "traditional masculine qualities such as athleticism, independence, self-sufficiency, and a penchant for violence with traditionally feminine qualities such as idealized physical female beauty and vulnerability" (p. 118).[6] As a "male-identified" female character, she is introduced to be hunting to provide food for her family, committing acts of subversiveness, and being emotionally detached. When she has emotional lapses, many are anger rather than sadness (p. 122).

Lem and Hassel do not mention Glimmer and Clove, but we can see the same blurring in effect with their characters in the movie. While they possess all of the masculine qualities listed above, they

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[6] The feminine quality of caring for others could also be added to this list.

lack the feminine qualities of vulnerability and caring for others. They are seen to have beauty in their appearances in pretty dresses for the pre-game interviews, but are not seen to be desired by any of the males in the movie. There are no scenes showing their vulnerability, and they are never seen taking care of others. This makes them even more masculine than Katniss, who in the movie only kills when her life is threatened. While Super Aggressive Mitsuko was given no explanation for her active participation in violence, Glimmer and Clove are shown as male-identified female characters, with few remaining female qualities after long years of being trained to kill.

Comparing these two Super Aggressive females with the Super Aggressive male of the movie, Cato shows aspects of both the bully and the athlete. He is quick to anger and hold a grudge, as when he thinks another boy has stolen the knife he was using during practice. He then swears to go for him first once the game starts, even though there is no evidence that the boy has actually stolen the knife. And when Katniss blows up the careers' stockpile of food, Cato becomes angry with the young boy who had been left to guard it. He then kills the boy with a quick neck twist. Cato also portrays the athlete ready for a game. When the tributes are all sitting back in the helicopter on their way to the playing field, only Cato is sitting forward, body twitching and ready to go. He is revved up, waiting only for the game to start.

Different from *Battle Royale*, rather than being rivals, all Super Aggressive players in *The Hunger Games* are part of a temporary alliance. Being from a similar background of elite athletics-like training, they share values and experiences. And rather than finishing with a showdown amongst them, the two females meet their ends through the hands of others over the course of the game. Similar to *Battle Royale* is the timing of the death of the Super Aggressive males. Both find their ends after fighting against the protagonists, leaving only the protagonists as the remaining players of the game.

Considering the background of the career fighters, both male and female, it might also be said that they are products of the system, rather than acting out genuine desires for violence. *New York Times* staff writer Susan Dominus (2011) writes, "even the most loathsome, bloodthirsty young fighters are clearly victims of the programming and training they received during the years they spent preparing for the games. In 'The Lord of the Flies,' the children are in an amoral free fall; in 'The Hunger Games,' young people, even murderous ones, are for the most part innocents, creations of adults' cruelty or victims of adult weakness in the face of power." While also applicable to the violent males, aggressive violence can be explained as a result of training at the hands of adults.

Discussion

In depicting what children might do if told by adults that they must kill one another, American production *The Hunger Games* creates a scenario in line with current Hollywood norms, where most aggressive killing is done by males. Aggressive violence in females is carried out by masculinized females, the more masculine the more aggressive. *Battle Royale*, on the other hand, shows the majority of aggressive killing being done by two overly aggressive individuals, one male and one female. In other players, we see both males and females avoiding violence, some openly against violence

while others spending their energies seeking alternative ways out of their situation. More females are responsible for deaths than males. As to the two overly aggressive students, there is no explanation given for either's part from normality, and the female's actions are not mitigated by factors such as masculinization or insanity.

Do these differences signify that Japan has different gender norms than the west? A further look into the two movies may indicate a broader difference in gender expectations. Boyle (2005) tells us that violent crimes committed by women, both in the real world and in fiction, are shocking to us because such women have crossed over from the nurturing and vulnerable role of the female to the male role which is associated with violence and aggression (p. 95). If violence in women was more acceptable in *Battle Royale* than in Hollywood movies, might these root associations with each gender be different in Japan?

Let us take nurturing as an example. In *Battle Royale*, we can see nurturing in both males as well as females. Noriko is wounded at the beginning of the game, and she is not only protected but also nursed and fed by her two male friends. Later, Shuya is also nursed and fed by a group of females when he is wounded. In this way, nurturing and caring for others seems to be more gender-neutral than in western films. In *The Hunger Games*, only females are seen caring for the wounded or needy.

A common theme in *Battle Royale* is the human condition, and all of the students are affected by emotions and desires regardless of their gender. There are children of both genders who fall in love, over-react when consumed by fear, reject violence, help friends in need, decide on suicide as the best path, try to find alternative ways off the island, decide to gather together friends, use the game as an opportunity to strike back at old enemies, decide to win the game through offensive play, and, those who give in to a lust for killing. In this respect, the gender neutrality of this movie is quite remarkable.

We are now at a point in history where many nations are trying to close the gender gap. *The Global Gender Gap Report* in October reported that Japan had slipped a further four points in gender gap rankings to 105th (World Economic Forum, 2013). But the situation and prospects are far from clear. While Prime Minister Abe is lauded for his speech at the United Nations General Assembly outlining his plans for improving empowerment (Torres, 2013, Sept. 30), on the other hand a recent survey indicates that one third of Japanese women wish to become full-time housewives (Torres, 2013, Sept. 26). Gender norms different from the west may mean that the gender gap problem may not be easily solved utilizing methods that work in other cultures. But working along with, rather than against, these differences may give light to new solutions.

And more gender neutrality hints at a variety of advantages. If in the west femininity is equated with vulnerability and nurturing, women must discard their femininity if they wish to be accepted in leadership roles. But if characteristics are less gendered in Japan, there should be more opportunities for women to succeed in the workplace while still expressing their femininity. What is necessary is support in the home, especially in caring for children and the elderly, as well as overcoming the outward trappings of a male-dominated society.

Another hopeful trend comes from the gender neutrality of nurturing. This can be seen in the

popularity of the *iku-men* (child-rearing men) campaign started by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. It has spawned events, clubs, magazines, spots on a variety of television programs, and a movie. The ease with which this campaign has been accepted may come from a more open attitude towards male nurturing, and with more participation by men also promises to aid women in becoming more independent of the home.

It may not be fair to judge the degree of gender equality in Japan by the standards of other countries. Japan's drop in ranking was due mainly to the number of female lawmakers ("Japan slips further to 105th in gender equality ranking", 2013). If one third of women in Japan wish to become full-time housewives, they may find such a life to be fulfilling because they are seen under less gendered lenses by their families, by society, and by themselves.

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