

# **The Subjectivities of the Female Lawbreaker in Visual Culture: Cinematic Trajectories of Representation in the Exploitation, Hollywood, and Independent Film in Depictions of the Carceral World**

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## Abstract

In a consumerist driven culture, crime interweaves within the everyday fabric of leisurely consumption of the filmic artefact, as a culturally constructed entertainment commodity that contours our understandings of the female penal subject and the closed world of the prison – performatively enacted on the visual screen. It is important to investigate popular cultural mediums such as film, because the epistemology created from mediated representations reaches a far greater audience than that generated from academic criminological research endeavours. The dissertation is a critical, analytical, deconstructive inquiry into the cinematic constructions of the lawbreaker/prisoner, across three diverse and interlocking film-making forms: exploitation, Hollywood, and contemporary independent. A feminist-grounded theory methodology was employed to examine a historized database of 22 titles within a complexly integrative framework that unveiled a profusion of prisoners' subjectivities (categorical constructions); emergent within varied manifestations of the prison and themes (criminological and otherwise), and affirmed in enveloping discourses and theoretical constructs. A multi-analytical, interrogative focus of single filmic texts emphasized particular areas, including the micro-aspects of textual aesthetic expressions (visual, dialogical, narratological, performative and thematic), the meso-milieu of ethnographic 'voices' of film industry personnel and the broader macro-level domains (historical, socio-political, cultural and criminological) that envelope and contour the film-making process. Cyberspace supplementary textual sources included 1,161 film reviews. The dissertation findings reveal that prisoners are multiply-constituted subjects; intersectionally located, contextually specific and situated in unequal relations of power. Across the mediascape of women-in-prison titles, the delineated film-making forms create varied and recycled subjectivities; from the fantastical, clichéd 'othered' archetypes in exploitation cinema, to the fictitiously personified, 'normative' womanhood in Hollywoodized tales. Conversely, the independent film symbolizes a critical image practice of resistance that creates alternatively distinctive, empowering embodiments of prisoners which not only reflect contextualized moments of authenticity in prisoners' marginalized, experiential lives, but which serve also to demystify the corrosive, oppressive and seemingly denaturalized subjectivities found in the former filmic forms. The praxological research outcomes aim to encourage the filmic viewer to consume representations with a more critical cinephilic eye that challenges problematic representations which appear to reflect an existing unquestioned, taken-for-granted reality regarding the penal subject.

**Keywords:** female lawbreakers; cinematic representation; subjectivities; feminist grounded theory, women-in-prison film, social constructionism

## Dedication

To all those women confined within the carceral complex of the State  
And the cultural constructions of our times

May your lives be filled with hope and peace  
And someday, may you be free from the constraints of oppression

To the many prisoners who have privileged me and touched my heart with their stories  
of courage, strength, resilience, and wisdom

### For my Family

My mother Grace 'Torchy' Stewart Adamson  
July 21, 1927 – Sept 27, 1992

A life filled with compassion and empathy towards those marginalized by injustice,  
discrimination, and exclusion  
Forever cherished and loved,  
Someday we will be together once again

My grandmother (Nana) Gladys Lillian Urquhart Stewart  
1894-1975  
A teacher,  
Treasured childhood memories

My Father  
James Adamson  
Wisdom, strength, tenacity, generosity and sacrifice  
A peaceful calming presence

My brother James Adamson  
A kind, generous and loving heart

My nephew Austin Adamson  
Saskatoon Blades, Western Hockey League  
You've made me so proud in the pursuit of your dream  
Talent, perseverance, passion, and dedication

And for the young people in my life, Austin Adamson, Dayley and Celina Lim and young  
Lily Adamson

May you be sensitive and empathetic to the social injustice of the world

And for Lexicon (Lexie)  
September 25, 2010 – October 9, 2011  
An Angel in my heart forever,  
Sweet dreams,

“Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened”

Anatole France

In remembrance

Tom Allen  
A cherished and beloved friend

1944-2014

An impassioned, caring and critical scholar  
A voice of resistance to injustice and marginalization  
A remarkable person

Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Dr. Kevin Bonnycastle  
SFU classmate

1956-2011  
A brilliant mind

St. Mary's University  
Halifax

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To this reality, my current research demonstrates that the cinematic prisoner permeates the public consciousness - in all her incarnations - through the mediated apparatus of socially constructed meaning and understanding in the women-in-prison film. Even though punishment is a State sanctioned enterprise; in popular culture it is a cultural enterprise.

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## **Chapter 1.**

# **The Cinematic Screen: Cultural Constructions of the Criminalized Subject in the Penal Context and Beyond**

## **Introduction**

Filmic portrayals of crime, criminality, and the prison symbolize a “fundamental genre of storytelling” (Sparks 1992: 36, 37) – a mediated conduit of cultural meaning and understanding through which the populace cinematically experiences the hidden carceral world and the female lawbreaker in all her incarnations. Representations of criminal women reproduce and recreate particular mythologies, beliefs, convictions, and assumptions that ideologically shape societal understandings and perceptions regarding crime; women’s role as accused persons, convicted lawbreakers and incarcerated inmate wards. Criminological tales flow through a growing technology of representation that fuels the creation of “an endless interplay of images” through the visual lens (Ferrell and Sanders 1995b: 302). Thus, filmic texts represent a widely distributed form of popular culture, the “activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of ... ordinary people... .” (Hall 1997a: 2). The criminal woman becomes an object of exchange commodified and incorporated within the filmic text to be repeatedly consumed by another viewer (Kuhn 1994: 111). Consequently, it is imperative to re-examine representational depictions of the cinematic prisoner. The following dissertation incorporates a uniquely constructed interpretive ‘lens’ and analytical framework that explores the resiliency and power of filmic representations to either propagate the fantastical and fictitiously misrepresentative or resistantly create counter-filmic portrayals of authenticated ‘moments’ of understanding. The entertainment industry creates an epistemology, drawn from popular film, which reaches a far greater audience than the enterprise of academic criminological discourse,

research, and claims (Rafter 2007: 415). As feminist bell hooks contends, “Cinema assumes a pedagogical role in the lives of many people” (1996: 2)

## Central Dissertation Focus and Lines of Inquiry

The dissertation identifies and examines the subjectivities (characterizations, embodiments, or personifications) of the criminalized woman/prisoner culturally constructed and positioned across and within one form of visual media, namely, a historized sample of *filmic* productions of the prison world, crime and beyond. Filmic texts are not homogenously conceptualized; rather, various prison films are associated with diverse and interrelated film-making forms, or *styles*<sup>1</sup> – identified as the exploitation, Hollywood, and contemporary independent film styles. Consequently, these cinematic forms signify separate sites through which to situate my ‘lines of inquiry’ and corresponding conclusionary findings, that highlight both differences and interconnectedness in characterological embodiments and representational portrayals for public leisurely consumption. The present study represents a multi-analytical, deconstructive and comparative inquiry that is wide-ranging in emphasis, as it pertains to how I understand and explore the film-making process. The subsequent inquiry and analysis does not homogenize film, rather within a feminist grounded theory, particular *emergent* theories unique to each film-making form emerged from the data that contributed to an original piece of dissertation work.

The analytical terrain of the dissertation is as follows. First, as a *micro*-analysis of single filmic texts,<sup>2</sup> the primary database highlights the *textual (artistic) aesthetic expressions* (visual, dialogical, performative, narratological, and thematic) that contour those performative and interrelational displays of filmic characterizations that symbolize deeply engrained understandings. It is through this interrogation that raw data are rearticulated in a grounded theory process that interpretively frames the corresponding dissertation results. Second, the cinematic apparatus of creation and reception denotes

<sup>1</sup> The definitional status of diverse film-making forms is outlined in *Chapter Three: Cinematic Productions: Film-Making as a Conceptually Distinctive Process*.

<sup>2</sup> Maltby conceptualizes films as a performance over a text; therefore I further articulate films as ‘textual performances’ (Maltby 2003: 371).

the *meso-analysis*, explored across film-making forms that incorporate the distinctive ethnographic voices of film industry agents (cultural creators and consumers). Third, film-making is also embedded within broader *macro-level* domains, including historical, socio-political, cultural and criminological contexts. Each of these three aforementioned areas either represents a separate line of inquiry or is interdispersed as a thematic thread across various inquiries that make up the dissertation's central objectives. As well, these three levels interpenetrate each other.

Eight distinct interrelated lines of inquiry are outlined herein:

1) I interpretively explore and demonstrate how representational practices create multifarious, diverse and interlocking subjectivities of the female prisoner, that emerge in the on-screen, cinematic world, across the mediascape of designated filmic forms. The analysis demonstrates how women's subjectivities take form through a multiplicity of discourses and corresponding theoretical constructs that re-entrench and challenge existing cultural frameworks of meaning that are typically oppressive, discriminatory and negatively implicative in the lives of real prisoners. In conjunction with the dissertation's definitional parameters of subjectivity,<sup>3</sup> I demonstrate that prisoner embodiments are interlinked with intersectional social and criminological locations, ranging from gender, race and class to women's political perspectives, crimes, rehabilitative/risk potential, and carceral experiences and oppressions. As well, in some filmic forms intersectional differences such as sexual orientation and race become pathologized in inherently problematic characters. An exploration of subjectivity involves bringing into view the personifications of the central protagonist and all other prisoner wards, both in the foreground and background of the filmic storyline. An additional integrative thread involves juxtaposing prisoner embodiments with male characters, who symbolize formations of an oppressive, paternalistic, or heroized masculinity, resulting in women's perilous predicaments, carceral degradations and eventual rescue or recriminalization. As well, correctional authorities (wardens, guards, psychiatrists and other prisoner workers) are revealed to embody various incarnations, distinctly emergent across the filmic forms. To broaden my understanding of this aforementioned process I articulate a

<sup>3</sup> At the end of this section I define the terms of representation, discourse, and subjectivity as it pertains to this dissertation specifically.

series of *other* inquires that contour the ways in which subjectivity formation and performative display is interlinked to other important factors as identified below.

2) I demonstrate how formations of subjectivity are interrelated to particular manifestations of the prison – its discursive landscape, gendered typologies, conditions of confinement, cinematic symbols (iconic and otherwise), central storyline themes/conflicts and legitimacy – as a strictly containment-oriented, punitive, rehabilitative and/or reformatory context (Mason 2006: 607). Imprisonment is either central to the filmic storylines or is a secondary context that is significant to the development of subjectivity or broader narratological directions and filmic messages.

3) Feminist perspectives have a particularly important contribution to the research theoretically, epistemologically, and methodologically. The “point of a cultural analysis is to demystify, and make available alternate and oppositional readings of cultural objects that often appear transparent ....in their simplicity and innocuousness... .” (Walters 1995: 151). I have incorporated feminist threads into this inquiry that do not denote any singular feminist scholar per se. The academic literature from prison activists, such as Karlene Faith, Kim Pate, and ex-prisoner and writer Gayle Horii, reflect critical feminist writings in the area of Canadian prison injustices and oppressions.

Feminist readings of the text conceptualize the female lawbreaker/prisoner as a multiply constituted subject constructed and reconstructed through cultural processes. A feminist focus considers understanding the prison and prisoner within the wider context of intersectionality (Carlen 1994: 137). Consequently the research recognizes the importance of “interweaving gender, class, race, and ethnicity” and other interrelated dimensions of difference into its inquiry and interpretive analyses (Ardizzoni 1998: 303; Dill, McLaughlin and Nieves 2007: 630). This study unveils how the intersection of these locations influences the meaning and nature of the depiction of women in film (Meyers 2004: 99). Overall, the dissertation interprets mediated images in visual culture as communicative representations that carry particular meanings tied to ontological claims, political ramifications, epistemological beliefs, and social issues.

A feminist critique and textual analysis also aims to unveil the systematic structures (e.g., racist, patriarchal) of meaning that potentially reproduce oppressive and

discriminatory knowledges that have implications for actual prisoners, as identified by activist scholars. As such, the study aims to challenge problematic representational practices and unveil potential counter-representations that are situated within prisoner's experiences and more marginalized and competing discursive frameworks.

A critical interrogation of the text disrupts its seemingly smooth appearance by unveiling hesitations and inconsistencies, associations and variations, and silences and gaps in the visual and narratological structure of films (Tonkiss 2004: 379). For example, an understanding of the conceptualization of the prisoner involves unveiling the erasures, absences, or ways in which she does not appear or is constructed within movie imagery and storylines. The apparent naturalized and taken-for-granted quality of these absences (and presences) within a sexist, patriarchal society makes them difficult for the film viewer to see (Tonkiss 2004: 380). Consequently, it is imperative that my analyses "make the invisible visible"—namely, by uncovering, deconstructing and de-naturalizing the ideological, mythical, and discursively-based cultural constructions of the criminal woman which perpetuate injustice, androcentricism, and discrimination in both overt and subtle forms (Sunderland & Litosseliti 2002: 19; Kuhn 1994: 71).

Furthermore, the textual engagement explores the contradictions that emerge from filmic representations. For instance, a film can *appear* to the audience to convey a sexist ideology, but critical analysis may reveal counter images and meanings. Many authors contend that the exploitation film, albeit a vehicle of sexist and misogynist views, can also express more empowering, subversive incarnations of the carceral subject. The question then becomes, do such meanings comparatively emerge from my database of filmic titles? At a deeper level of examination, I am sensitized to potential disjunctures, ruptures or inconsistencies at the levels of visual imagery, symbolic meanings, and narrative structure (Kuhn 1994: 79). For example, I look for possible discrepancies between a prisoner's primary characterological traits and behavioral repertoires of actions/interactions that conveys a deeper reading to what appears on the 'surface' of the text.

Lastly, a feminist inquiry requires that the researcher attend to both 'transparency' and 'reflexivity' in the research process. Accordingly, I need to reflect on 'who I am' and 'where I come' from and how my positional perspectives and social

locations shape my focus of inquiry, analytical insights, interpretations, and the knowledge produced in the dissertation (Ristock and Pennell 1996: 13). Thus, in the doing of research I bring myself into the process and become part of it in every way.

4) A multiplicity of 'voices', including both cultural producers and consumers, are selectively interwoven throughout the analysis to produce an ethnographic account of the collective and complex process of creating the women-in-prison film, in its various formations. Specifically, the representational process involves various degrees of coordinated interrelated contact with a diversity of film industry agents – studio executives, creators/directors/producers, cast members (performers), consultants, and professionalized cinephilic critics – who partake in the process of constructing the cinematic prisoner from her inception to reception. This condition implies that movie-making symbolizes a contested and negotiated process of claims-making in regard to the creative process, amongst the cinematic players who hold varied and competing interests and artistic visions both within and across film-making forms. For example, I demonstrate how the women-in-prison films plays upon specific objectives tied to film-making forms such as the subversive commentary and exploitive promotional elements, in the exploitation film, to the politicized aims and pedagogical messages of some independent titles. Within this meso-level of understanding, interconnections also with macro-level domains become evident. For example, within different historical periods, film-makers are embedded in particular socio-political contexts. These aforementioned cinematically grounded conditions reveal that *all* film-making symbolizes the art of social construction, to varying degrees. These ethnographic insights derived from DVD special feature's commentary, print entertainment media (newspaper and magazine), and academic literature significantly highlight, enrich and validate my own analysis and meaning-making processes. As such, this line of inquiry produces a multiply constituted interpretive account that envelopes the research.

5) The relevance of multi-level filmic areas of focus (macro, meso and micro) is explored. The industrial contextual conditions; individualist auteur creators; socio-political and ideological dimensions; commercially driven objectives; entertainment markets, and formalistic stylistic conventions, are interpretively examined and selectively highlighted to determine their impact on the cinematic creative process and the representations of prison and prisoners in the films sampled for analysis. For example, a

detailed, though selective, exploration of formalistic aesthetic conventions and ideological or political understandings, incorporated from scholarly film literature (Maltby 2003, King 2005; Tzioumakis 2006 ) aims to demonstrate how particular techniques of style (e.g., narratological structure and visual expressions) or filtering of perspectives (anti-correctional) impact the legitimacy, authenticity, and representational formations of prisoner embodiments, characterological attributes/portrayals, storyline content and criminological messages. An understanding of these factors is also drawn from the ethnographic voices of the various agents described above.

6) Contemporary ex-prisoner, critical academic and/or activist writings (primarily non-media related) regarding A) the social construction of female lawbreakers and B) the experiential actualities of prisoners' carceral lives serve as a critical criminological literature context in which to further position and embed my work. For example, the latter contribution (B) legitimizes my claims that some independent films bring forth important, authenticized counter-representational prisoner embodiments, carceral 'moments,' and criminological issues that implicitly resist the formulaically corrosive or normatively naturalized depictions correspondingly found in the exploitation and Hollywood titles. Also, in this regard, these writings also challenge misrepresentations in filmic portrayals and prisoner embodiments. As such, what I see in some filmic texts is congruent with the 'voices' of prisoners as conveyed through these scholarly works.

7) Film review discourse cited as individual-posted commentaries on two online forums (*The internet movie database* and *Amazon.com* marketplace) preliminarily unveil how the audience absorbs and gains understandings of crime, criminality and imprisonment from popular cultural filmic representational texts. More specifically how does the audience react to the cinematic prisoner in all her formations – with acceptance, indifference, or resistance? A perusal of review commentary reveals the continual appeal, affective responses, evaluative critique, promotional remarks and perspectival insights from film enthusiasts whose criminological conversations endorse cultural portrayals that are clearly misrepresentative or alternatively transformative. These comments symbolize an ongoing, publically-generated dialogue available to potential film consumers who may similarly partake in the movie viewing and/or reviewing process. Public appraisals activate the filmic text outside its visual context of reception. Research on the cinephilic review is an unrepresented area of inquiry in



criminology-based media studies of the female prisoner. Consequently, the preliminary insights demonstrated in this discussion serve to initiate the importance and directions of potential future inquiries.

As well, within the main textual write-up I briefly identify other non-celluloid forms of promotional culture such as the filmic tagline, box cover imagery and online marketplace products that discursively sell the cinematic prisoner. Overall, the filmic tagline textual discourse, available in cyberspace – in addition to the film review reportage (professional critic) - make up a comparative supplementary database, along with the commentaries, interviews and featurettes derived from DVD special features, that bring forth a tapestry of film industry perspectives and viewpoints, as outlined above. Otherwise, particular products related to the women-in-prison film, marketed online are not part of the secondary database nor is the filmic box cover imagery.<sup>4</sup>

8) Finally, an analytical theme that is reiterated throughout the dissertation is the commodification of the cinematic prisoner. The entertainment media turns the pleasure of crime into a leisurely cultural artefact that is produced, consumed and bought, through a capitalist system of socially constructed products and commodities that generate profits for an industry in its multifarious forms; from the mainstream (Hollywood) conglomerate to the localized, smaller scale exploitation film company (Maltby 2003: 12, 56). As a result, the movie viewer and those on-screen character constructions become instrumental in the marketing of filmic forms – the former as a consumer of such products, and the latter as the image commodified for production and consumption. Respectively, the dramaturgy of crime and punishment connects with popular perceptions in a commodified, consumer culture. To reiterate, online websites serve as a media backdrop through which filmic sources are advertised, communicated and dispersed across global consumer markets. Technological advancements have precipitated the globalization of mediated conduits of representation that 1970s scholars could not have anticipated (Faubert, personal communication, 2011). To conclude, the aforementioned lines of inquiry, feminist grounded theory methodology and enveloping theoretical narrative (to come) create an inventive piece of research that, in its

<sup>4</sup> Refer to chapter four for a brief discussion of such products. The box cover imagery is selectively incorporated into the Results chapters.

complexity and deeply integrative analytical focus, creates a uniquely important contribution to current criminologically-based media studies.

## **Definitional Terrain of some Central Terms**

### ***Representation***

In the dissertation, the definition of representation is primarily tied to the cultural studies literature. Representation is defined as “the production of meaning through language” (Hall 1997a: 1; 1997b: 16). More specifically, to represent something is “to describe or to depict it, to call it up [into] the mind by description or portrayal or imagination...” (16) However, language holds “broad based meanings” and moves outside the terrain of the written or spoken word (dialogical), and can incorporate other cultural systems of *meaning* through visual imagery and sound that emerges in mediated formations such as filmic texts (Hall 1997b: 18; Barker 2008: 11). It is through this conceptualization as articulated above that cultural representations and meanings take on a “certain materiality” being embedded in popular cultural forms (Barker 2008: 9). Representation reflects the socially constructed production, creation, and circulation of meanings, understandings, as well as knowledge that is bound up in cultural practices (Hall 1997a: 5; Barker 2008: 7).

For the present study, representation is the link between this language and the categorical constructions and themes that emerge within the imaginary, fictitious and socially constructed world of criminality, crime, and the prison (Hall 1997b: 16). In the dissertation I refer to the process of representation, or representing, and also use the term representation(s) as a symbolization of the discursive products of that process, such as the subjectivities or characterizations of the prisoner, or the underlying themes that frame ‘manifestations’ of incarceration, for example.

Although the dissertation is not associated with a single constructionist approach to representation as outlined by, for example, cultural studies (Stuart Hall), I nonetheless emphasize two units of analysis that correspondingly bring forth principles from both the semiotic and discursive approaches, through which representations of the penal subject and carceral world are more deeply understood. First, I examine the micro-aspects of

subjectivity formation, such as the characterological attributes (visual, dialogical), and the dramaturgical displays of character-related performances, actions/interactions, and/or behavioural repertoires which convey meaning and life form through the language of representation, (the tool kits of the film-maker) as outlined above.<sup>5</sup> In particular, a deconstructive analytical focus is interlinked to semiotics through (as outlined in Hall 1997 b: 30 -35) the identification and dismantling of hierarchal conceptual binary oppositions that symbolize primary configurations of prisoner embodiments, which signify dichotomies of intersectionally-based difference(s) that espouse notions or claims to truth. Problematized and stereotypical meanings, tied to the representations of prisoners, are sustained by the intertextual juxtaposition of binaries emergent across specific films and film-making forms.

The second unit of analysis interlinks representations of the prison and prisoner to specific discourses (not semiotic signification), that symbolize relations of power and systems of knowledge which are historicized and contextualized (Hall 1997b: 44, 51). This discursive approach is informed by the work of post-structuralist Michel Foucault that secondarily emerges from the cultural studies, social constructionism, and feminist (post-structuralist) literature. However, only select theoretical threads inform my work, which in no way reflects a Foucauldian discourse analysis as a methodological approach or central analytical lens through which I primarily frame my inquiry or insights. These theoretical threads are descriptively outlined in the definition of discourse provided below. The discursive approach not only explores “how language and representation produce meaning,” but primarily attends to how discursively produced knowledge “(inter)connects with power, regulates conduct...constructs subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced, and studied” (Hall 1997a: 6). Social constructionist Vivian Burr and others contend that “once we begin to talk about, or otherwise signify or represent the material world then we have entered the realm of discourse; and at that moment ... have engaged in social construction[ism]” (Edwards et als. as cited in Burr 2003: 91). It is through this process that the material world exists, but as a socially constructed, textual reality (92, 101).

<sup>5</sup> Actions/interactions can be routine, strategic and consequential depending on the conditional context.

## ***Definition of Discourse***

Various discourses “manifest themselves in texts” which can be read for meaning in popular cultural sources – the women-in-prison film being an example (Burr 1995: 146; 2003: 66).<sup>6</sup> In the dissertation, Vivian Burr’s work in macro social constructionism (1995, 2003) is the central perspective through which my conceptualization and understandings of discourse emerge and take on meaning; while other cited scholarly work (cultural studies, post-structuralism) provides integrative threads that selectively contour the primary definitional insights. Within the discussion below the definitional parameters of the term discourse are associated with strands of a Foucauldian theoretical perspective and understanding.

To begin, Sara Mills contends that the term ‘discourse’ is problematic, in that “even within a particular discipline, there is a great deal of fluidity in the range of reference of the term...” (1997: 3). For the purposes of the dissertation, discourse refers to several tenets that, I believe, best fits with how it is integrated into an analytical framework that creates understandings and meanings through cultural representations. Discourses are “the practices which form the objects of which they speak;” (Foucault as cited in Burr 2003: 63) and “objects ...come into existence ... as meaningful entities through their representation in discourse (Burr 2003: 66). A discourse, then, refers to “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations,<sup>7</sup> images, stories, and statements” – a cinematic language that collectively produces varied filmistic versions or depictions of the female penal subject and prison (63). In addition, discourses also emerge in the patterns, categories, and themes that arise from an inductive micro-analysis of filmic texts through a grounded theory methodology (Faubert 2003: 87). Consequently, various discourses “inhabit all systems of signification” that represent or construct something or someone (Burr 1995: 141, 142). As such, filmic texts both within and across film-making forms communicate certain discourses regarding my topical area and identified lines of inquiry. The cinematic prisoner takes on meaning, and becomes an object of culturally perpetuated knowledges within particular discourses – both compatible and competing

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Rafter (2007) terms the discipline of *popular criminology* as a variety of discourses about crime; including filmic, televisual, newsprint, Internet, literary and music.

<sup>7</sup> Here a set of representations of the female prisoner can be referred to as discourse. The prison film is a popular cultural discourse on the mediated constructions of the prisoner.

(Hall 1997b: 44, 45; Baxter 2003: 8). These knowledges are bound up in relations of power. Truth claims are destabilized; truth is not discoverable through scientized applications, but is a “fluid and unstable, changing description of the world, created through discourse” (Burr 2003: 80).

In cultural studies, Hall notes that “discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But since ...all social practices entail meaning and meanings shape and influence what we do ... all practices have a discursive aspect” (Hall as cited in Hall 1997b: 44). Therefore, knowledge that is linked to power is legitimized as truth-generating – particularly in the case of more institutionalized criminological discourses (Hall 1997b: 48/49), many of which emerge in representational practices and hold commonsensical understandings. Discursively produced knowledge about the cinematic prisoner has real effects in the criminal justice treatment, regulation and social control of actual prisoners. In respect to this, within the dissertation some areas of focus include (Tonkiss 2004: 374) the investigation of how knowledge about the female prisoner and carceral world is understood through a multitude of discourses within the filmic text(s), both criminological and otherwise, and also, how such discursive constructions have implicative effects on social and criminal justice practices, institutions and power relations.

In summary, discourse is conceptualized as a representational system through which the subjectivities of the criminalized woman emerge in their various incarnations that become objects or subjects of our historicized cultural imaginations and public consciousness (Hall 1997b: 44, 46). Through the emergence of these subjectivities, discourses and their relative power relations are brought to life (Burr 1995: 40). Discourse provides the conceptual backdrops and categorical repertoires through which cultural labels and descriptors are linked to particular subjectivities and associated criminogenic proclivities and criminological knowledges (Burr 1995: 138). As such, the classification (categorization) of prisoner embodiments into various subjectivities is discursively-based, rather than indicative of reality-based, externalized distinctions (Burr 2003: 89). Historical and cultural specificity frames understandings of crime, criminality, and imprisonment, that are both thematically and categorically grounded within the available dominant, prevailing, or alternate discourses tied to differential relations of power, knowledges, social practices and social structures – perspectively,

organizationally, and societally (Burr 1995: 140; Gavey 1997: 60). In this way, ideologies and power relations are entrenched and reproduced through discourse (Burr 2003: 170).

Across the filmic titles, characterological selfhood is embedded within narratological components and aesthetic expressions, accentuated by attending to the visual in textual readings and engagements. For example, at the micro-textual level, prisoner embodiments represent various interconnected discourses which frame meanings through an interplay of the symbolic language, signification devices, and textual aesthetic expressions used in the social construction process. Such elements include individualized attributes, visual imagery, dialogical commentary, characterological performance, actions/interactions and/or behavioural repertoires, and criminological themes that discursively frame *who prisoners are for us* – the filmic viewer (Burr 2003: 66). As well, the prison context, in all its formations, is discursively constituted through symbolic signifiers (iconography; pre-emptive imagery), inmate populations, and the corresponding criminological discourses of punishment, containment and/or rehabilitation or reform that envelop the carceral stay. At the creative, industrial meso level, film-makers choose to situate their cultural representations within various prevailing and historicized discourses that correspond to forms of socially constructed knowledges. The meanings that emerge from prison film representations gain acceptance through their interconnections to particular discourses; some of which are privileged over others in the construction of knowledge regarding the penal subject.

Discourses linked to configurations of knowledge and ontological ‘claims’ integratively create prisoner embodiments, carceral worlds and crime that reflect ‘pseudo-realism’, ‘truth claims’ and ‘authenticated moments’ symbolic of dominant, and alternatively competing (marginalized) discourses. These discourses are subsequently tied to differential levels and manifestations of politics, power, oppression, and control in the on-screen and actualized world of the female lawbreaker. For example, the regulatory and organizational power of the cultural creator enacted upon particular subjects, is symbolically reflective in recycled characterizations, discursively formulated, and legitimating of the ongoing punitive and discriminating practices inflicted upon those persons deemed as the *other*, to the more normatively, masculinist conceptions of proper

womanhood in society – as illustrated in the exploitation and Hollywood film, respectively. The way cinematic subjects are discursively produced creates conditions through which prisoner subjectivities become locked into an oppressive representational system; or break free into alternate embodiments that give voice to actual prisoners and their experiential circumstances, though within a constructed, mediated, popular cultural form.

## ***Subjectivity***

In the dissertation, *subjectivity* is defined through a multi-theoretical terrain that incorporates the perspectives and epistemologies of critical feminism (post-structuralism), social constructionism, sociology and cultural studies. The cultural process of representation as a signifying and discursive practice (Barker 2008: 8; Hall 1997c: 226), creatively constructs and reconstructs, within the filmic text, representational versions of multiple ‘selves’ (subjectivities) of the cinematic prisoner through those attributes, character performances, actions/interactions and behavioural repertoires, characterologically displayed within tales of crime and incarceration. To reclarify the definition of subjectivity at a deeper level, subjectivity formation is interlinked to multifarious intersectional social locations, which characterize for the cinephilic viewer *who prisoners are* for us – their gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, educational level, life experiences, perspectival insights and other contextualized socio-structural experiences (e.g., marginalities), which are discursively-based (Burr 1995: 51).

A deeper micro-textual analysis of intersectional locations in the dissertation explicitly demonstrates how prisoners’ subjectivities are interlinked to criminologically-based differences such as 1) a woman’s status as a prisoner (legitimate or non-legitimate), 2) her particular offense typologies (sexual offending) , 3) her carceral experiences, including her position within the inmate sub-culture, and broader prison oppressions, and 4) her criminogenic proclivities/risk; especially a prisoner’s rehabilitative or reformatory potential within the carceral world. To reiterate, some filmmaking forms primarily ground subjectivity in pathologized, individualistic states, interconnected to psychologized, psychiatric and medicalized discourses; compared to other filmic forms that contextualize subjectivity in more structural factors, within the

discourse of marginalization, for instance. Subjectivity is also contextualized in prisoner actions and behavioral repertoires that reflect resistance or revolt to their carceral oppressions, which can be multifariously and intersectionally-based (e.g., the carceral oppression of black women to systemic prison injustices). The feminist-derived term of intersectionality theorizes that people's multi-layered identities (subjectivities), shaped by dimensions and locations of difference, are embedded within "multiple systems of power" (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves 2007: 629, 630). These intersectional locations "have profound influences on the constitution of self" (Qin 2004: 297). In the research, prisoner subjectivities are also interchangeably associated with various terms; including embodiments, personifications, characterizations, and incarnations.

In the Results chapters of my study, I focus on unveiling how prisoner subjectivities across the filmic terrain are intersectionally tied to particular social and criminological locations (some of which take precedence over others) as primary elements in contouring subjectivity, depending on the characterological personification. In many cases, subjectivities seem all encompassing, with only certain locations being highlighted. This doesn't nullify the fact that the penal subject embodies various other subjectivities tied to less influential or dominant intersectional locations. Overall, however, women are more than the subjectivities that they primarily exemplify in relation to their criminalized and carceral status; the primary focus of the dissertation.

A post-structuralist, social constructionist perspective rejects the humanist notion of a rationalized, unified 'self' with psychologized inner states and mechanisms responsible for human action(s). Rather, the subject is fragmentary, partial, strategic, and contradictory (Burr 1995: 126, 127; Gavey 1997: 55; Ogle & Glass 2006: 174). Alternatively, across the filmic sources, the cinematic prisoner is conceptualized as a multiply constituted subject, reflective of varied situated selves, or subjectivities (Qin 2004: 302), that deny a singular conception of an inherent personhood or womanhood (Qin 2004: 302). Subjectivity is not an ontological category; it is, instead, conceptually based (Knight 1995: 50). Social constructionists similarly conceptualize subjectivity as anti-essentialist, ever-changing and socially produced (Burr 2003: 104). Even so, in the dissertation I utilize the single concepts of 'prisoner' or 'penal subject' only to symbolize that, as a group, incarcerated women share particularized on-screen experiences given this master status. In addition, many filmic characters are constructed as embodying a



singular pathologized or normatively naturalized personhood that is static and unchanging, which overrides the emergence of other subjectivities. A critical focus portrays how the interconnection of various intersectional locations influences the nature of women's cinematic subjectivities and their corresponding meanings, which are not transparent, but are rather "changing and shifting with context, usage and historical circumstances" (Hall 1997a: 10; Meyers 2004: 99). The gendered categories of femininity-masculinity and their performative dimensional range of formations are not essentialist or universal, but rather discursively constituted and imbued with differential relations of power (Barker 2008: 223). My definition of subjectivity is by no means singularly tied to any one scholar or perspective, but brings in theoretical threads that create a definitional parameter, for the purposes of the dissertation only. Even so, feminist post-structuralist tenets serve an important contribution to the definitional meanings of subjectivity, as articulated above.

The cinematic construction of formations of subjectivity (prisoner and otherwise) is interrelated to social constructionism (as articulated in Burr [1995; 2003]) in two ways uniquely incorporated and synthesized into the dissertation. First, it is associatively tied to the micro-oriented principle that the dynamics of social interaction and interrelations between people socially construct knowledge and understandings, in a fluid, ever-changing process. With this, the creation of prisoner embodiments that develop on the screen are the result of the negotiable, contested and interconnected relations and communications between parties, such as film industry personnel, positioned within the creative process of film-making. The representational techniques and symbolic language film-makers utilize contributes to subjectivity formation that interlinks characterizations to a set of visual images, dialogical content, performative display, and narratological backdrops, often creating an inter-textuality of meaning across filmic titles (Burr 2033: 119). The way prisoners are embedded within the filmic text, is the result of the interactions of film-makers and other persons who construct them a certain way within a subjectivity that is discursively constituted. Film-makers' exercise power through the discourses they use to structure the types of subjectivities that take form in their culturally-produced, 'cinematic' prisoners (Burr 2003: 79).

Second, a macro-oriented focus emphasizes the "constructive force of culturally available discourses," and the ideologies and power relations embedded and

reproduced within them (Burr 2003: 171, 203). Therefore, in the dissertation, prisoners' subjectivities are discursively produced and situated within the discourse of film, which is grounded within other social, cultural, and criminological discourses that are historically and contemporarily available, and utilized in popular cultural texts (Burr 1995: 140). As well, the discourses tied to particular characterological embodiments contour women's prison experiences, status within the inmate hierarchy and are interrelated to carceral oppressions. Furthermore within the filmic world, interactions between characters framed within a backdrop of storyline structures and themes symbolize a micro-performative display of emergent subjectivities that are produced through a variety of behaviorally related interactions – actions, conflicts, accommodations, and partnerships.

An understanding of how I conceptualize and bring forth subjectivity into the analytical process, as described and articulated in the *Results* chapters, is attached to a grounded theory framework. Subjectivities of the cinematic prisoner and others, emerge as distinct categorical embodiments; some of which are further demarcated into sub-categories that bring clarification, specification and a deeper layer of meaning to the primary categorical designations (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 101). In some instances, sub-categories are situated along a dimensional range that reveals the breadth and variation within the primary prisoner subjectivity (categorical embodiment). To demonstrate these interconnections, I provide exemplars from the exploitation film. The primary subjectivity of the madwoman, or, 'sick druggie', is interlinked to two sub-categorical embodiments – the 'diabolical stalker' and 'impulsive killer' that personify specific cinematic characters with corresponding individualized behavioural attributes. The subjectivity of the 'lesbian predator' is classified along a range of sub-formations, from the 'masculinized butch' to the 'feminized femme' with the 'dark figure' alternatively embodying qualities from the former two characterizations.

Through the use of the grounded theory method, the way in which I organize, cluster, arrange and classify concepts into categories symbolizes a process of representation – of identifying and portraying those emergent prisoner embodiments, and establishing relations between categories and their subcategories (Hall 1997b: 17). In turn, categories and sub-categories are associated with the 'language of film' (textual aesthetic expressions) and symbolic elements and devices, that represent signifying creative tools – the visual, narratological, dialogical, performative, and thematic – all of

which discursively contour the various personifications of the penal subject and the manifestations of the prison. Subjectivities are intersectionally located in various primary ways. In this conceptualization there is a direct interlinkage between filmic language and the conceptual and categorical landscape of grounded theory (Hall 1997b: 17).

To a more limited, supplementary extent, the analysis also unveils the interrelationship between formations of masculinities in male characters (carceral and otherwise), which are associatively tied to behavioral repertoires that construct prisoner embodiments in particular ways; for example, within the binary structure of male victimizer-female victim, or the reverse. The cultural meanings tied to historically and intersectionally-based masculinities are actively constructed through systems of representation (Nixon 1997: 297; 310). More specifically, the social and criminological locations of race, class, sexual orientation, authoritative responsibilities, and others contour subjectivity formation of males primarily within the contexts of patriarchal power and control –oppressive and heroic.

### ***Emergent Terminology***

For the purposes of the dissertation, the following definitional delineations are made in regards to differential conceptions of ontology, as it pertains only to the research. These terms emerged *directly* from my engagement with the data (primary filmic and secondary layperson reviews) and are incorporated into the film *Results* chapters. In some cases specific terms are associated with one film-making form more than another.

*Pseudo-realism* refers to representations based upon suppositional, culturally grounded systems of knowledge that uphold a seemingly taken-for-granted naturalized, objectivist, or normalized reality, and that Hollywood filmic depictions play upon the naturalization of women’s normative roles, for instance. In this respect, ideology comes into play, in that there are “assumptions about the nature of reality” that are embedded within filmic representations that appear real, but which “uphold myths that a society lives by, as if these myths referred to some natural, unproblematic reality” (Kaplan as cited in Rafter 2000: 5). Alternatively, in the exploitation movie, violent representations may resonate with misrepresented, public cultural knowledge about the carceral world;

yet may appear or be perceived by some filmic viewers to be 'real' or truthful. Often, this knowledge is culturally legitimized through dominant, discursively-based criminological representations that develop within news-based mediated forms (print and televisual).

*Truth claims* refers to prisoner personifications and carceral images emergent from various discourses (e.g., psychiatric, criminological, patriarchal, normative) that are objectively grounded in social scientific, factual, experiential, or gendered externalized knowledge bases derived from seemingly reliable sources – criminal case or psychiatric records or prison research, academic or otherwise, the words of criminal justice agents (psychiatrist or prison guard), or accounts based on a true story – that disregards the social constructedness of knowledge regarding the penal subject. Truth claims may be enveloped within exploitative and stereotypical depictions in prisoner subjectivities that symbolize imagination and/or fiction over authenticity. Historically, film has been an important arena of cultural representation that serves to reproduce mediated realities that are created, rather than experientially-based (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 12, 13).

An *authenticated moment* refers to slivers and instances of experiential authenticity in the lives of some prisoners, which are cinematically depicted and grounded in more critically-based understandings that do not lend themselves to the commercial and entertainment-based objectives of some film-making forms (e.g., exploitation or Hollywood titles). This definition of authenticity does not emphasize homogenization or grand theorizing. Prison activist perspectives, research, and experiential work with actual prisoners document such knowledges that are grounded in activism and the consequent voices of actual prisoners.<sup>8</sup> My own historicized contact with prisoners also frames understandings through their own words, in how they have communicated their carceral lives to me. As well, a filmic message component that emerges from a representation that may be otherwise exploitative, fictitious or fantastical, may aim to create a more authenticized portrayal, related to a film-maker's experiences or politicized viewpoints. Nonetheless, the cinematic process of constructedness penetrates all three aforementioned filmic definitional domains (the exploitation, Hollywood, and independent film) to varying degrees. These

<sup>8</sup> These activist perspectives may be academic-based (critical research) or related to actual film-makers' interests.

representational spheres forge a multiplicity of perceptions, ideologies, and meanings around lawbreaking, female offenders, crime control, imprisonment, punishment, and criminogenic factors and causality.

*Verisimilitude* is generally defined by Maltby (2003: 591) as “truthfulness, and although its meaning overlaps with that of ‘realism’ ...[within this dissertation] it implies something that is probable [or] plausible..., rather than [completely] realistic [or authentic].” Even so, given my social constructionist stance, within the present study, verisimilitude refers to those formalistic conventions that attempt to create filmic representations that appear probable, believable or potentially accurate to the filmic viewer. This does not negate the fact that verisimilitudinous techniques can create representations that mirror more authentic understandings of the penal subject and prison world.

## **Conceptually Distinct Film-Making Forms: The Exploitation, Hollywood and Independent Film**

I chose to categorize the filmic database into three separate film-making forms, as identified above, for the following reasons: First, as outlined in the scholarly film studies literature these filmic forms are politically, ideologically, thematically and aesthetically shaped by their diverse and inter-locking histories, industrial influences and contact (production, distribution and exhibition), underlying objectives, auteur creators, actor-performers, professionalized critics, projected audience types and distinct formalistic stylistic conventions. In addition, each film-making approach brought a markedly unique perspective and significance to the research in its comparative juxtaposition to other formations. A deeply rich and meaningful knowledge base emerged in the productive and creative construction of the cinematic prisoner, uniquely contoured and understood through each interrelated line of inquiry that highlighted both the differences and similarities between and within filmic styles. Even so, the dissertation will demonstratively unveil the substantive distinctions in representational depictions that further justify this strategy of filmic designations. Furthermore, these cultural products differentially reach the filmic consumer, or cater to a particular cinephile, which influences how certain imagery remains alive within the public consciousness.

Hollywood cinema is arguably a larger part of popular cultural landscape due to its wider distribution to the populace, through its ties to media-conglomerates. As well, the non-contentious topical areas, affirmatively resolute narratives and star power/performances appeal to a more generic, mass audience. Alternatively, some contemporary independent films cater to more cine-literate viewers, who seek alternate political and ideological perspectives and aesthetic styles counter-representational to mainstream portrayals. And the exploitation film provides the space for a cult fandom of potential male viewers to continue the endorsement and sale of the women-in-prison film, which fuels their potentially misogynous tastes and expectations.

## **The Analytical Process: Reiterated Points and Additional Conceptions**

To reiterate the exploration of meanings that emerge from the talk and imagery of cultural texts is discursively and textually analyzed through a feminist, grounded theory methodology. A critical interrogation of filmic titles, within the micro-context of reviewing, identifies, deconstructs, and reconstructs cinematic representations in order to demystify their seemingly naturalized existence. More specifically, I explore the process of subjectivity formation, namely how the cinematic prisoner (and others) are put together or constituted by attending to the several interrelated factors or lines of inquiry (as outlined above). The analysis also unveils within the methodological scheme, the categorical designations of women's subjectivities which are configured as single formations or binary juxtapositions, the latter of which are identified, as hierarchal conceptual oppositions that are correspondingly tied to misrepresentation and stereotypification of particularly intersectionally located groups. A deconstructive engagement with the text involves the dismantling of hierarchal conceptual oppositions that are seemingly tied to cultural or criminological 'truths' which devalue the inferior part of the binary (Barker 2008: 35).

Visually mediated portrayals frame broader meanings within discourses that symbolize structures of power, hegemonic thought, normative regulation, and the

expansion of legal control and correctionalist sanction.<sup>9</sup> Such textually mediated forces serve to marginalize and oppress female lawbreakers depicted through the lens of media reflection, creation, opinion, and imagination. Critical feminist Dongxiao Qin contends that “culture and self are co-structuring and co-structured” ... with culture defined as a “complex combination” of intersectionally situated differences “that are forged, reproduced, and contested within asymmetrical relations of *power* that primarily constrain one’s self” (2004: 297). Fundamentally, the female offender in all her variations becomes imprisoned within cultural categories (to varying degrees) that emerge and are reiterated across media forms and which contour our most “commonplace [criminological] understandings” (Sloop 1996: 4). Representation is understood as an aestheticized expression of the real, created through “a stylized repetition of [performative] acts” that reify and stabilize embodied subjectivities consumed in an ongoing text-consumer relation (Butler as cited in Benwell, 2002: 169, 156; Barker 2008: 12). In this regard, ‘doing gender’ is a performative act, through which gender (femininity or masculinity), are emergent as culturally and historically inscribed significations, rather than “regulatory fictions” that in some filmic forms uphold the seeming facticity of naturalized gender distinctions (Butler 1999: 165). As such, gendered attributes and acts within the prison film illustrate how film-makers can create multifarious ways through which prisoners perform gender within various cinematic roles or subjectivities.

The cinematic prisoner becomes discursively constructed within subjectivities located along a continuum from *transgression* to *otherness*. For instance, the insufficient understandings about the sexual orientation “of criminalized ... women, coupled with the notion that their behaviour is the product of ‘masculinization’ and deviance sets the stage for the demonization of another group – lesbian women” – who, within the cultural filmistic imagination, *often* become characterological embodiments of predatory abusers and killers (Chesney-Lind & Eliason 2006: 37). Consequently, many problematic personifications legitimize incarceration and the unnecessary punitive control of prisoners deemed dangerously menacing through their culturally typified subjectivities

<sup>9</sup> In these instances, prisoners are oppressed through a particular characterological embodiment attributed to them (‘mad’ woman’), while other women positioned by less condemnatory subjectivities (such as ‘survivor’) are oppressed through particular correctionalist practices, that reflect a form of discursively grounded social control, enacted by certain agents (the ‘uncompromising’ prison guard).

that reinforce societal fears of the criminalized object. Alternatively, discursive strategies can be employed to construct non-formulaic, more authentic characterizations. The research discussed herein aims to unveil and sensitize the reader to these issues and others that are grounded in interrelated representations, discourses, corresponding theoretical constructs and ideologies that typify the voices of both mainstream and alternate popular cultural creators (Kellner 1995: 8).

As a researcher, I am an audience of one to those textually generated representations of the criminal woman, within a research process that continually engages me with specific data sources. In inhabiting the textual mode with a critical, cinephilic eye, it is imperative to provide prospective film viewers with an analysis that unveils the problematics of cultural representations, concealed within dominant stereotypical versions of crime, criminality, and punishment that have socio-cultural roots and correctionalist implications. Respective of this, my research has the capability to direct, engage, and educate people towards more authenticized cultural constructions in films that diverge from standardized, fantastical, mythical and decontextualized stories of crime, and pathologized stock characters that have historically littered the cinematic landscape of movies depicting the female penal subject.

## **Ideological Roots of the Current Research**

A critical analysis and exploration of media representations of the penal subject emerged as an area of research inquiry from a multiplicity of interests and experiences, both academic and personal, that I bring to my work. I was curious to revisit an area of study that I had explored in a graduate-level methodology paper some years ago.<sup>10</sup> I also wanted to reconstruct and expand this work within the context of doctoral research in order to provide a deeper, more thorough theory, grounded in an extensive film database integrated with additional media related sources. My historical and most recent contact with lawbreakers of both genders has also influenced me to challenge, resist,

<sup>10</sup> This would be my *conceptual baggage* (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid 2006).



and denounce the distorted constructions that result from popular cultural constructions, particularly in the entertainment media.<sup>11</sup>

I see myself as someone interested in issues of social justice regarding female lawbreakers. For this reason, I am sensitized to media narratives and imagery that socially construct criminalized women in stereotypical, demonizing, masculinist, and discriminatory ways which I find both offensive and dissonant with my knowledge of them. Even though I have never been imprisoned or in conflict with the law, my varied contact with prisoners (women and otherwise) in the capacity of friend, volunteer, student researcher, university teaching assistant, and instructor, has provided me with some measure of inter-subjective understandings about their lives and crimes through their own words and personal stories. As well, my experience with the penal context in its diverse formations has provided me a window into the world of confinement: the

<sup>11</sup> I have had extensive volunteer experience and educational contact in various penal contexts over the last thirty years, with male, female, and youth prisoners at the Canadian provincial and federal correctional systemic levels. As a teaching assistant at Simon Fraser University, I took students to correctional facilities in both Washington State and British Columbia, to provide them with an understanding of imprisonment, the institutional environment and its corresponding structures and regimes. As well, I organized students' meetings with prisoners (such as a 'Lifer's' group) to facilitate an understanding of their lives and carceral experiences, that helped to deconstruct prevailing stereotypical and demonizing cultural views. These meetings humanized an otherwise pathologized group of lawbreakers. In more recent times, I volunteered with the *Alternatives to Violence* (AVP) Restorative Justice Project at Fraser Valley Federal Women's Institution in Matsqui, BC. I visited the prison monthly with other volunteers to participate in a three hour mini session with the women. The session emphasizes creating a safe and mutually supportive space (or 'circle'), where group members can dialogue about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. For example, a context of learning to use restorative approaches – such as conflict resolution – for addressing particular life circumstances and challenges, is learned by all group members. I also attended AVP at Ferndale Federal Institution for Men in Mission, BC. Additionally, I have taken part in AVP in the community with male and female ex-prisoners. In my SFU Master's thesis in criminology, entitled *Youth Violence: An Examination of Adolescent, Caregiver, and Correctional Personnel Perceptions Regarding Offending and Behavioural Actions* (1997), I conducted a qualitative research study with 29 violent youth male offenders in a secure BC provincial prison, Burnaby Youth Secure Custody Centre. This experience sensitized me to the socio-familial and carceral issues that the male penal subject faced. As well, in 1987, I conducted a yearlong educational practicum in social work, in the same high security setting, formally named the Willingdon Youth Detention Centre. Around this time (1985-1987) I also volunteered in the community halfway house resource of Balaclava House for women who had prior contact with corrections and mental health services. Prior to this I volunteered in two prisons: Matsqui Federal Institution for Men (1984) and Lakeside Correctional Centre for Women (1980-1983), through the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies respectively. Lakeside was part of the Oakalla provincial prison complex which closed in 1991.

physicality of containment, the structured institutional regime, the hierarchal prison culture, and the underlying oppressions, both systemic and authoritative that prisoners undergo as everyday hardships.

## **Relevance of the Research to the Criminological Endeavour**

Historically the socio-emotional power of mediated formulations of crime, where “representation and reflection are central to the self-consciousness of modern society” has been ignored by a rational and traditional criminology (Manning 1999: 263). Yet, crime and culture hopelessly confound with the meanings of criminality, endlessly flowing within a fluidity of representational forms that saturate public and professional consciousness with images that define, distort, amplify, and escalate fear, condemnation, and moral indignation.<sup>12</sup> In its criminological imagining, filmic narratives intertwine with academic discourse regarding the etiology of female law-breaking and its associated sanctions. Alternatively, other narratives critique the criminological project itself ( Tzanelli, Yar & O'Brien 2005: 114). Nevertheless, the media industry is a conduit of cultural reproduction that holds political implications in its selective portrayals, which are marketed for public consumption (Manning 1999: 259). As Menzies (2001: 418) contends, studies of mediated, artistic and literary sources, ‘popular culture’ and ‘counter’ culture “have documented how authoritative and ‘expert’ understandings of crime inevitably bear the imprint of wider social values, conflicts, and preoccupations.”

A dissertation that situates criminality as a *social construction*, grounded in cultural practices, challenges orthodox criminology as a scientized discipline of numeric abstractions that claim naturalized and universalistic truths regarding human experience (Ferrell, Hayward & Young 2008: 169). According to Manning, a visually-oriented, reflexive inquiry that emphasizes image, symbolism, and meanings suggests that crime, transgression, and carceral control is understood through the many screens – theatrical, televisual, and computer – by which the embodiments of the female transgressor or

<sup>12</sup> Professional here refers to the implications of such images on the criminal justice agent’s perspectives.

demonized *Other* are circulated and displayed within the entertainment apparatus of movie promotion, distribution, and viewing (Manning as cited in Ferrell et al. 184).

A critical deconstructive research focus provides an *analytical resistance* (Lazar 2005: 5) to those totalizing prevailing discourses – social scientific, medical, and cultural – that are theoretically embedded in a criminological discipline oppressive and gendered in its penal practices. Additionally, locating my dissertation “outside the orbit of bureaucratic control” (Ferrell et al. 2008: 88) prevents the research from being overtaken by “dominant paradigms’ ... [reliance] upon hegemonic tools of order specified by State [government] funding agencies [and] criminal justice organizations” that support prevailing conservatist and crime control perspectives (Ferrell and Hamm as cited in Muzzatti 2006: 75). In such cases, the dissemination of particular legitimated forms of privileged knowledge creates a cultural reproduction of prevailing criminological frameworks that validate dominant theoretical traditions as truth generating. Instead, the lens of critical inquiry and analysis that I employ is not policed by the gate-keeping functions and organizational objectives of a correctional system that aims to control the knowledge generated by research conducted within, for example, the penal context (Martel 2004: 168).<sup>13</sup>

The dissertation’s emphasis on the aesthetic, thematic, and symbolic tales of crime, criminality, and punishment, is an endeavour that moves beyond its outwardly imaginative focus. Unveiling the continued reproduction, representation, and recirculation of images of criminal women through a critical engagement, with filmic sources at the textual, creative, performative, professional critic and consumer levels, can reflect an important challenge to the insidious inequality and underlying social control film texts generate (75). As well, revealing counter-representational depictions serves to draw out “lines of resistance” that provide a potentially more authenticized and

<sup>13</sup> A gate-keeping function is directly related to securing access for research in the prison which can be contingent on a study that does not challenge existing bureaucratized knowledge bases and perspectives of that organization such as the Correctional Service of Canada (Martel 2004: 168). Canadian activist Joan Martel (2004) contends that critical knowledge bases are subject to scrutinization, delegitimization, marginalization and “policing” in several criminological spheres of research dissemination including academic literature and the news media (157, 162). Martel relates her claims to her research on women’s experiences of solitary confinement (segregation) in 1999.

empowering cultural space for the cinematic prisoner (Sloop 1996:8). The cultural studies project is a political one, which “focuses on the way in which [the] cultural industries, institutions, forms, and practices are bound up with, and within, relations of power” (Nelson et al. as cited in Hollows 2000: 25). Structural change to the social circumstances and mediated processes that marginalize law-breaking females, both discursively and materially, is beyond the scope of the research. But it nonetheless continues the process of deconstructing and reconfiguring culturally generated knowledge in a textually resistant analysis, to those cinematically grounded discourses in which imaginations of crime are taken as ontological realities, and criminological concerns.

## **Organizational Structure of the Dissertation**

### ***Chapter Discussions***

The dissertation is organized into the following chapter sections. Chapter two briefly outlines the additional primary theoretical lens through which the research is analyzed; namely, social constructionism, cultural criminology, media studies, cultural studies, and film studies. A comprehensive discussion of the cinematic filmic forms, their definitional status and the overlapping and distinct historical contexts of production, distribution and exhibition is delineated in chapter three. In chapter four, a review of the scholarly media literature reveals the cultural contributions that film (and other mediated sources) provide to our understandings of the criminological condition (crime, criminality, and imprisonment). The focus of chapter five is primarily threefold. First, it discusses the major tenets and selected procedural practices of a feminist grounded theory methodology. Some potential methodological problems are also identified. Second, it provides a detailed outline and conceptualization of the dissertation database, that is the primary ‘visual’ and supplementary sources such as the cinephilic layperson reviews and film industry ‘voices’ material. As well, the definitional parameters of the designated film-making forms are outlined along with the filmic selection themes. Third, this chapter explicates the selection (sampling) process of filmic titles for preliminary review and then inclusion into the research.

The subsequent results chapters are organized in relation to the three film-making forms: the *exploitation* film (chapter six), the *Hollywood* film (chapter seven), and the *contemporary Independent* film (chapter eight). Each chapter has standardized subsections that organizationally outline and analytically unveil the primary dissertation findings that include the categorical embodiments (prisoner subjectivities) and manifestations of the prison. In chapter nine, layperson textual readings (cinophilic reviews) that symbolize discursively grounded micro-circuits of filmic meanings and understandings generated by the populace are examined. Chapter ten closes the dissertation and discusses the conclusionary findings, within a feminist grounded theory framework, that investigates the subjectivities of the female prisoner that are correspondingly classified into an overarching core or primary category, distinct subcategories per film-making style (form) and the enveloping theoretical narrative – all of which interpretively interweave and envelope the filmic database. This chapter also ascertains the implications of the research, the mediated effects of cultural constructions on actual prisoners, and the praxological outcomes of encouraging the filmic audience to critically challenge corrosive representations and partake in consuming alternate filmic portrayals.

### ***Appendixes and Footnotes***

The dissertation has a number of appendices at the end of the document. *Appendix A: Filmic Parameters in the Selection Process: Purposive Sampling*, identifies the context for the filmic selection procedures (the internet movie database [IMDb]) and descriptively outlines the primary selection parameters – search criteria (keywords, and other criterion for inquiry) and filters (numeric) used in the purposive sampling method. *Appendix B: Total Number of Films Drawn per Keyword*, tabulates the primary and secondary keyword numbers (prior to the filmic filtering process) drawn during the two designated sampling dates, namely August 2008 and February 2009. In *Appendix C: Films in Database by Film-Making Form*, the complete number of titles catalogued under the exploitation, Hollywood, and contemporary independent film are recorded. This appendix lists the production and distribution companies, industrial context details and the numeric parameters (overall rating, rating vote and film review numbers) that enabled a movie's final inclusion into the study. *Appendix D: Film Review Commentary*

*Numbers*, records the entire groupings of reviews per film within each cyberspace context, to reiterate – the IMDB and Amazon.com. *Appendix E: Film Industry Personnel*, identifies and lists movie industry agents (writers, producers, and directors) associated with single filmic titles. This appendix also highlights particular women who are involved in the cinematic process.<sup>14</sup> A surprising side note is the presence of notable female industry personnel tied to exploitation film-making. *Appendix F: Ethics*, specifically defines the research within the domain of the university ethical applications process and the particular ethical considerations that were met to secure ethics approval. *Appendix G: Primary Categorical Embodiments (Subjectivities) of the Prisoner and Male Characters per Film-Making Form* outlines the categories and sub-categories which are associated with particular time periods and individual filmic exemplars. And lastly, in *Appendix H* one descriptive statistical bar graph, entitled, *Total Numbers of Films per Year: Specific Film-Making forms*, correspondingly illustrates the number of movies per film-making form ‘in total’ (database) and ‘per year’ (decade range).

The dissertation contains a large number of footnotes interlinked with particular aspects of the primary textual write-up. Footnotes are utilized sparingly for definitional purposes. For example, *some* filmic colloquial terms (or slang), such as ‘new fish,’ attributed to prisoner subjectivities, or ‘stir bugs,’ denoting disordered internalized states (mental breakdown), are identified for the reader. Other examples include the definition of specific terms directly related to the methodological process, which are also further refined. As well, footnotes hold an identification function by associating particular filmic titles or characterological embodiments to themes articulated in the results chapters, for example. Footnotes are also utilized for clarification purposes. Throughout the research discussion, supplementary information provided in a footnote further outlines, illuminates and explains specific concepts (film studies terminology – e.g., film noir), historicized, contextual mediated backdrops (e.g., the Hollywood conglomerates – film studio associations), grounded theory methodological procedures (coding), and definitional parameters, both framing and purposive sampling-based. In these latter two cases,

<sup>14</sup> Green (1998: 37, 47) and Smith (1999: 19) contend that men dominate visual culture with “women’s [reel] labour,” consisting of being looked at. In this respect, then there maybe a preponderance of male film-makers in some film-making forms over others. The question of whether women directors create, or aim to create counter-images, and whether there can be, or is, a female inscription on a film, is also briefly referred to.

examples include the selection context, thematic classifications and sampling criteria for inquiry. As well, footnotes identified specific details regarding filmic production techniques which aimed to create more real or authentic representations. Further in the results chapters, specific footnotes serve an informational purpose, by identifying and incorporating additional knowledge to exemplars incorporated into the text, building upon emergent knowledge that more deeply contours and brings meaning to a filmic theme or characterological (categorical) embodiment (prisoner or otherwise). Some historical material regarding the prison film *I Want to Live* (1958), for instance, or film-maker, such as Walter Wanger, is an example. And lastly, the experiential voices of critical activists and academic scholars are contained in footnotes that bring legitimacy to the ontological claims of counter-representational moments, or experientially challenge misrepresentation in exploitative depictions of prisoners.

## Chapter 2.

### Theoretical Sites of Analysis

The following chapter outlines how particular theories inform the research inquiry and subsequent analysis. The dissertation interweaves and incorporates multifarious theoretical approaches into the framework of an enveloping feminist grounded theory that integratively builds theory from an analytical and interpretive engagement with raw data embedded within the cultural text of film. The following theories contour the present study and include: 1) social constructionism and 2) cultural criminology, media studies, and cultural studies - two central areas which are indicated under two primary headings. The contribution of feminist theory is incorporated into the research through its significance as a major line of inquiry as outlined in chapter one. As well, I also integrate film studies literature into the dissertation. However, this latter work centers on chronologically historicizing film-making, and associating it with particularized conceptual elements such as aesthetic conventions and political perspectives. Specific film theories do not inform the research in any singular way. Therefore, rather than embed the present study solely or primarily within a single theory or select theories that are tied to a primary theorist(s), in a homogenizing way, I alternatively have chosen to bring forth various 'theoretical threads' and 'tenets' from the aforementioned perspectives tied to notable authors and various works.

As well, I bring forth insights from both post-modernist and post-structuralist theory; however, this material is directly interlinked and drawn from the theoretical terrain as described above. To further clarify then, the perspectives of some prolific theorists such as Michael Foucault and to a far lesser extent, Jean Baudrillard is secondarily present or cited in the dissertation as it emerges from a particular study or author who writes within the areas of cultural criminology, media/cultural studies, social constructionism, or feminism, for example. To reiterate, the definitional framing of the concepts, of 'subjectivity' and 'discourse' as articulated above are drawn from an



integration of theoretical principles from social constructionism, cultural studies and (feminist) post-structuralism. Consequently, the present study *does not* represent either a deeply articulated work in the areas of post-structuralism/postmodernism or cultural studies, or for that matter any other single theoretical orientation as outlined above. Several lenses contour the dissertation – the ethnographic ‘voices,’ of cultural creators and consumers, the central lines of inquiry, the theoretical landscape, and my own researcher-based and socially located stance.

Although, in traditional grounded theory (GT) preconceived theoretical insights are not brought in by the researcher in this present study particular theories contour my analytical lens of inquiry and understanding to “elaborate and build upon existing theory,” in media studies that specifically explores representations of the female prisoner and carceral world (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 12). These aforementioned theories are imperative in the framing of my inquiry, situating it within an ontological framework, and contouring the perspectival terrain through which I will interpretively understand what emerges from the raw filmic data (e.g., categorical configurations, thematic patterns) which bring forth meaning and understandings to my dissertation findings. As well, I cannot commence the research from an atheoretical stance. My education in criminology and experiential contact with prisoners has exposed me to theoretical perspectives that I bring to the research. As more explicitly articulated in the methodological chapter, the key then becomes in how I use these insights as analytical tools that refine, enhance and more deeply rearticulate those inductively emergent patterns, themes and categories found in my ongoing textual analysis of films.

## **Social Constructionism**

The multi-disciplinary theoretical orientation of social constructionism has key foundational assumptions that provide a conceptual framework through which to situate my research inquiry and analysis (Burr 2003: 2). In the dissertation, this approach is linked to the writings of Vivian Burr, whose scholarly interests include social psychology,

cultural studies and gender.<sup>15</sup> Social constructionism can be both micro and macro oriented. This theoretical perspective is based on several interrelated principles. It rejects objectivist, essentialist notions of empirical, positivistic, 'taken-for-granted' knowledges that naturalize difference, through socially constructed categories or divisions, often grounded within the psy-sciences (1995: 3). Conceptions of an externalized, static, factual, and absolute reality or truth are problematized because knowledge is perspectively and discursively-based and serves some interests over others (1995: 5). In this way, an anti-realist stance is taken. Feminist post-structuralist thought similarly denies truth claims and reality, and posits that "there are multiple, socially constructed realities" that delegitimizes "media messages as the authoritative interpretation of events," for example (Gavey as cited in Rendon & Nicolas 2012: 228). Vivian Burr also asserts that knowledge and understanding are both culturally and historically specific, contingent upon the prevailing social and economic structures (1995: 4). Meanings and understandings are structured through culturally-based conceptual and categorical frameworks derived from language that holds consequential outcomes and practical implications (2003: 7). The traditional psychologized 'essentialist sphere' of creating pathologized individuals as an explanatory domain for problem solving is rejected (2003: 9). Instead, there is an emphasis on the socially interactive and dynamic process of knowledge construction. In this regard, the actions between various parties can lead to particular situated understandings of a certain phenomenon. Social constructionist research is interactive in nature, emphasizing a co-production of knowledge between the researcher and the research subjects (Burr 2003: 152). In the dissertation, I reshape this tenet to fit with my own work that (in part) builds upon theory production grounded in the filmic texts and those ethnographic 'voices' of the film industry personnel and the cinephilic consumer reviews.

More specifically, then this emphasis on social interaction in the production of knowledge is incorporated into the research in this way. Understandings of the female penal subject and carceral (prison) world are social constructions that emerge from the

<sup>15</sup> Although Burr contends that social constructionism is primarily associated with psychology and sociology, discourse analysis, deconstruction, and post-structuralism reflect social constructionist frameworks that challenge and offer radical and critical alternatives to the disciplines in the social sciences and humanities (Burr 2003: 1).

interactions between various parties (Burr 2003: 8, 9) – within the culturally creative sphere of film-making – and include prisoners, film-makers, consultants, actors, and critics who collaboratively create particular meanings that differentially take on varied polysemic readings by the public consumer. This process provides the analytical framework through which formations of subjectivity emerge, and create multifarious prisoner embodiments and characterizations that become the “products of claims-making, labeling, and other constitutive definitional processes” (Franklin as cited in Forte 2002: 136), symbolic of the creative, productive, and performative processes of human interaction within the language, symbols, and resultant discourses that contour mediated representations (Burr 1995: 3). Rival claims-maker agents compete within a contested and negotiated terrain of reality definitions, using “the rhetorical toolkits of (images, words, phrases, metaphors, and themes)” in socially constructing particular objects of inquiry, such as the incarcerated woman (Forte 2002: 153). Such a definitional process and its corresponding meanings are grounded in varied discourses that hold differential levels of power within the cultural landscape. A focus on the interactional dynamics of filmic production, through an ethnographic account of the various players involved, unveils these processes in constructing popular cultural filmic texts. For example, film-makers and performers create characterological embodiments that take on various meanings, partly facilitated through actor performance. And within this process, certain film-making forms (Hollywood) have more power to both create and exhibit their products to a cinephilic consumer. In turn, particular perspectives either support or challenge dominant cultural values and beliefs about crime, criminality, and carceral sanctions.

Social constructionism (and other perspectives, such as post-structuralism, and cultural criminology) questions the legitimacy of truth claims and an externalized, tangible reality through which to *discover* the ‘real.’ Taking the position of a more critical social constructionism, and interweaving other theoretical insights (post-structuralist) on this issue, I contend that versions of reality are socially constructed, and cultural products (films) take on a multiplicity of meanings contingent upon who is engaged with the text – the filmic creator, public consumer or myself, the researcher (Rendon & Nicolas: 212: 228). Consequently, rather than ascertaining that the films represent a universal truth or reality, I use the term *authenticity* to unveil how some films (and film-

making forms) depict representational ‘moments’ “in ways that are congruent” with the voices and experiences of actual prisoners brought out in the critical ‘words’ of ex-prisoner, critical academic and/or activist writings (230). Even so, these accounts are perspectively-based, situated within particular discourses, and reflect difference, in that they do not purport to reflect the experiences of *all* incarcerated women in any homogenizing or realistic manner. Nevertheless, they give voice to prisoners largely absent within a mediated filmic apparatus that often misrepresents their lives. Despite this admission, I also maintain that the art of social construction permeates filmic representations in a multiplicity of ways. For example, I have created the terms *truth claims* and *pseudo-realism* from my engagement with the data to exemplify how many representations claim to reflect, imitate, or replicate a universal reality ‘out there’; grounded in true meanings regarding the criminalized lawbreaker versus the traditional, law-abiding woman. Additionally, some films that wholly make claims to fantasy or fiction in their representations may nonetheless mirror what resonates in official theoretical understandings of the criminal woman, supported by dominant, scientized, seemingly truth-bearing discourses. In these instances, “those who claim to present the unmediated truth about crime, [the criminal and prison], are mostly marketing delusion, diversion, or ideology” (Ferrell 1999: 250). Consequently, I do not take a relativist stance as it pertains to ontology, nor do I come from a realist ontological position. My position is constructionist, as specifically articulated above.

A social constructionist perspective is problematized on several fronts. For one thing, it delegitimizes the foundational bases of positivistic criminology by a rejection of knowledges based on scientized, objectified, truth seeking assertions. In addition, social constructionists invalidate differential levels of individual expertise, academic or otherwise, drawn from naturalized, taken-for-granted assumptions that emphasize grand theorizing, factual understandings, and pragmatic solutions to the individualized *causalities* and *consequences* of crime. As such, for social constructionists criminological knowledge represents claims-maker perspectives and subjective meanings, organizationally or academically categorized, that are elevated into *facticities* and *objectifications*, reflective of “a particular version, and vision” of the world rather than absolute, pre-existing truths (Forte 2002: 135, 137; Burr 2003: 151). Critics may question the justification and importance of the dissertation focus inquiries, interpretations, and

analyses, embedded within broader historical and cultural contexts and shaped by the socially situated intersectional locations of the researcher (Burr 2003: 158). However, methodologically speaking, film data, reflective of categorical properties and attributes through a visuality of characterological representation, a specific dialogical commentary, or behavioural action, provide a valid, stabilized material presence in a filmic text. Ultimately, these same elements could reliably be drawn out of the movie by another researcher. Nevertheless, it is through my own interpretive constructive lens that analyses become contoured in unique ways that reflect my theoretical, experiential and locational understandings and directive insights. In this regard, constructivist analytical inquiries and understandings are typically criticized for grounding criminological knowledge in subjectivist, relative, perspectival 'insights' or 'valuations' over empirical 'truths,' 'realities' and apparent actualities – a position that sees true social constructionists as relativists.

## **Cultural Criminology, Media and Cultural Studies**

A tapestry of theoretical insights interlinked to cultural criminology, media studies, and cultural studies contours the research as articulated above. Cultural criminology brings forth the perspectives of its internationally-based founders, including Jeff Ferrell, Keith Hayward, Jock Young, the late Mike Presdee and other significant persons, such as Martin O'Brien, Clinton Sanders, Rodanthi Tzanelli, and Majid Yar. Similarly, media studies works – criminological or otherwise – are associated with significant scholars such as Karlene Faith, bell hooks, Yvonne Jewkes, Sean O'Sullivan, Nicole Rafter, Richard Sparks, Ray Surette, David Wilson, Alison Young and others. I have also selectively incorporated cultural studies perspectives from significant writers such as Stuart Hall, Douglas Kellner and Sean Nixon. The following discussion integrates perspectives primarily from cultural criminology, which are then highlighted through incorporated insights from media studies (feminist and otherwise).

Cultural criminology views crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system (including its agents, practices, and ideologies) as the creative products and constructs of culture. Exploring the mediated constructions of female lawbreakers in visual culture, helps bring to light the cultural background of crime and its perpetrators through "media

discourses and cultural spectacles of crime's public representations" (O'Brien, Tzanelli, & Yar 2005: 244). In analyzing the popular cultural text of film, I focus on the fictitious narrative as well as storylines that claim to cinematically (re)create actual criminal events and offenders and/or portray degrees of authenticity or truth claims in mediated representations. It is argued that some prison films aim to provide audiences with realistic accounts and understandings of prisoners' experiences within a variety of penal contexts and criminal justice circumstances, such as lawbreaking, criminal conviction, custodial escape, community release, and anticipated reintegration (O'Sullivan & Wilson 2004). Otherwise, to commence with the following theoretical discussion, several tenets of cultural criminology and media studies shape the focus of inquiry. These themes are not mutually exclusive; rather, each has an interrelated influence on the meanings of the others.

1) Cultural criminology symbolizes a critical conversation and collective integration of various eclectic theoretical perspectives that have shaped my research in cultural criminological directions. Critical perspectives – postmodernism, for example – are reworked from existing criminological and sociological perspectives in a cultural criminology which “suggests that contemporary legal authority rests on media operations and symbolic crusades ... [in which] crime and criminality incorporate subtleties of [art, form], style, and representational meaning... .” (Ferrell & Sanders 1995b: 302).

2) Prison films provide the cinematic space for specific criminological discourses (positivism), to envelope tales of crime in intrinsic meanings that prevail within a cultural apparatus, which fuels actualized implications. More specifically, films can take on a pedagogical role in the lives of viewers whose shared movie experiences spark commentary, insights, questions, and affective reactions regarding criminal women, imprisonment, and punishment within the everyday sphere of leisure and entertainment (hooks 1996: 2). Subsequently, these representations may shape public and professional attitudes regarding the penal subject. Cinematic narratives and imagery elicit a diversity of meaning and significance for the viewing audience, who communicate their perspectives in cyberspace contexts both cinephile-based (IMDb) and commercially operated (Amazon.com). Filmic texts are then recontextualized, remade, and re-activated through Internet film reviews, written by consumers who publically partake in a meaning-making process that continues the recycling of crimes representations, through

dialogical commentary that loops back into the actual filmic text to be watched by another popular cultural consumer. In this respect, layperson textual readings serve a promotional, as well as evaluative, function. As well, in the everyday engagement with these mini-cultural filmic texts, movie consumers share 'versions of knowledge' and understanding regarding the prisoner and prison, through which meaning is re/produced "in the interplay between the text and reader" in which "the moment of consumption is also a moment of production" (Barker: 2008: 216).

3) The dissertation emphasizes the interconnected circulation of cultural constructions through inter-textual media loops (Manning 1998) which recycle, reproduce, reshape, and recreate images and narratives of criminal women that are re-experienced by the populace across different textual forms. A deeper examination "journey[s] into the spectacle and carnival of crime... where images created and consumed by ... [film-makers], control agents, media institutions, and audiences bounce endlessly off [each other] ...like walk[ing] down an infinite hall of mirrors" (Ferrell 1999: 397). The proliferation and saturation of the media in everyday life, through a multitude of historically contemporary mediums, has brought filmic viewing outside the theatrical context into the home through the televisual and computer screens. And outside the on-screen cinematic world, the criminal woman continues to flourish in cyberspace on video/DVD box covers and in filmic taglines which are dialogically and visually inscribed, and readily displayed on websites to promote the viewing and consumption of the women-in-prison film (Manning 1998: 26, 27). Filmic and cyberspace contexts celebrate the privatized pleasures of the entertainment of crime in which discursive interconnections emerge between the media, consumer market, criminological endeavour, and the criminalized subject/object.

Viewing and consuming such gendered tales symbolize text-reader conversations that activate 'interchanges of thought' and 'sequences of action' for persons engaged in their reading (Smith 2005: 104, 120, 169). These textual engagements become embedded within the real time and local setting(s) of a particular person which impose a time-space organization on social life (Sparks 1992: 44). The production, availability, and distribution of replicated texts (e.g., the prison film) are facilitated through multiple technologies that organize social relations into a continuous

realm of interconnections with others partaking in the same viewing activities elsewhere and extralocally in various contexts of reception (Smith 2005; Sparks 1992: 46).

4) I continue to interweave various theoretical threads into the dissertation discussion, and in exploring the interface between culture and crime, the aesthetics of media representations are interlocked with the political economies of criminality. Cinematic and cyberspace narratives become *criminalized pleasures* within an entertainment industry that packages the criminal woman as a commodity, to be sold and consumed by multiple and fluid audiences. The reality of crime becomes multifariously constructed through microcircuits of meaning that are reshaped and remade within the symbolic interactions of people's lives (Ferrell & Sanders 1995b: 313; Ferrell 1999: 411). In this regard, our living in, and through, the technology of the image invokes understandings and effects as part of an ongoing, everyday dialogue, conversation, and experience about crime (Young 1996: 19). Crime becomes part of the aesthetization of everyday life. Consequently, in this ever-expanding realm of postmodernist media creation and fragmentation, "the criminal justice system has become a hostage to the global media systems which devour deviance as a prime element in the ... [entertainment industry]" through the creation, commodification, and commercialization of crime narratives and imagery (Osborne 1995: 30). Nevertheless, in fighting the war on crime criminology not only requires the continual cultural production and existence of crime but also demands its dramatizations embodying depictions of goodness, evil, violence, and dangerousness (Sparks 1992: 53).

5) Furthermore, there is the exploration of how the aesthetic and simulative aspects of media representations of crime and the female prisoner serve to both recreate and reinforce existing cultural constructions that permeate the public consciousness. The photographic image of the visual and its denial of authorship give cinematic representations a seemingly real presence (Kuhn 1994: 82; Green 1998: 38). As well, linearity sequenced, uninterrupted storylines appear to create a similar effect; while in other instances the defracted and non-resolutive narrative is arguably deemed as more authentic. The assumption therefore emerges that film, in part, symbolizes a neutralized means of communication that reflects pre-existing truths and realities. But, in the making and marketing of transgression, the entertainment media creates a hyper-real simulacrum in which image and reality are not separate, but are instead conflated as



one, with “the distinction between what the media shows, and the reality it represents, ... [being] collapsed, or imploded into a one-dimensional universe which is image saturated and simultaneously free-floating and authentically unreal” (Baudrillard as cited in Osborne 1995: 28). Media-generated imagery and perspectives that appear to portray the natural and “real”, in fact conceal the very art of social construction in film and the world it represents (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson 1992: 374; King 2005: 237). Tomasulo (1996) argues that “given ... [the] two-dimensional reproduction of a three-dimensional world, as well as the distorting capabilities of lenses, shot scale, camera angle[s], editing, and other techniques, how close to the ‘reality axis’ does the parabola of cinema get?” (72). O’Sullivan and Wilson (2004) argue that the prison film can never be truly realistic but can to some degree only approximate reality. Consequently, the prison film, for the most part,<sup>16</sup> does not give audiences the real; rather, it constructs the imagined, reinvented, textual versions of the real, a reality supportively linked to certain knowledges, discourses and relations of power; one that emphasizes the entertainment pleasures of interest and curiosity over, at times, mundane authenticity and actuality (Burr 1995: 132, Greer & Jewkes 2005: 26; Fenton 1995: 426). In this way, media realities symbolize an “appearance-oriented consumerism,” and a hyper-reality that emerges from “an omnipresent media ... fully determined by the modes of its sponsorship, production [aesthetic, visual, and narratological], and distribution,” as well as commercial interests and consumption (Boozer 2006: 142, 153). Mediated imagery plays out in “a hyper-real politics of representation, identity [and authority]” (Ferrell & Sanders 1995b: 302). This focus is markedly antithetical to traditional criminology as a science of crime that explicates a naturalist, objective stance through positivistic theories and methodologies seeking ontological claims.

And to reiterate, even though claims to truth or realism permeate various filmic portrayals, the circularity of constructions and [re]constructions of the lawbreaking woman that emerge produce subjectivities and carceral worlds, grounded in simulation and imagery rather than the actualities of women’s embodied experience. Faith (1993: 255) contends that the actual voices of confined women are rarely heard in films

<sup>16</sup> This is especially the case for films that are solely a portrayal of the prison context and its inhabitants, such as the exploitation titles.

depicting their on-screen lives. Consequently, in a media saturated society the non-normative transgressor or demonized *other* “may not be seen, ...touched, or even heard [in an interactive or experiential way]” but is rather a subject created and objectified through media realities (Manning 1999: 257; hooks 1996: 2). Even so, some representational strategies may alternatively begin the process of incorporating the voices and perspectives of activists and ex/prisoners, directly into the productive and creative process of film-making in such a way that counter representations at some level are congruent with the experiences of some prisoners.

Historically, the distinction between the factual and fictional in the terrain of filmic portrayals is a contested epistemological issue in media and cultural studies. There is no substantial evidence to assume that fictional depictions hold any less relevance to “articulating and shaping social sensibilities ...[in regards] to crime and criminality” than those depictions that make claims to realism (Yar 2010: 69). Moreover, the construct of *factuality* in representation is questioned as a simulated truthfulness that is facilitated through particular formalistic techniques and generic elements (69). Motion pictures “[have] long been *parasitic* upon historical personalities and factual events in organizing [their] narratives... [and in] reconstructing the activities” of notable criminal culprits, “as well as the myriad of crime ... [stories] prefaced by well-known phrases such as ‘Based on a True Story...’”<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the continual recycling of stereotypical images or newly emergent critical constructions of the female prisoner in filmic narratives, themes, and characterizations, although appearing to be fantastical or realistic, can still problematize the meanings of representation – with the fictional at times appearing factual and the factual appearing fictional (69).<sup>18</sup> Our willingness to critique or challenge the filmic text is overtaken and seduced, for a time, by the power of those images depicted on the screen and “the imaginations that have created ... [such] images” (hooks 1996: 3).

<sup>17</sup> Several films in the research claim to contain elements of truth in *real* stories. Some of these titles are classified as docudramas.

<sup>18</sup> In some films, there appears to be an interweaving of the factual and fictional through both the visual and narratological.

6) Cultural constructions have social, political, and legal implications despite their representational formulation (Ferrell & Sanders 1995b: 312). Visual media culture portrays the criminalized subject as an ever-present threat to both the normative and legalized boundaries of society, someone requiring legal control, sanction, and containment, while simultaneously marketing transgression as a commodity to be sold in the pleasure and “leisure industries” (Maltby 2003: 57; Hayward 2004). Portrayals of crime, whether exploitative or seemingly authentic, elicit a variety of feelings that range from fear, loathing, condemnation, concern and judgement, to voyeuristic pleasure within a carnivalesque, circus-like atmosphere of fascination and morbid curiosity.<sup>19</sup> Within the on-screen cinematic world, “irrational acts of destruction and violence,” from individual predators – both male and female – “intermingle with pleasure, fun, desire, and performance” (Presdee 2000: 29). However, the popularity and enjoyment of consuming crime becomes intertwined within the moral panic of amplified fears, concerns, and uncertainties; which reflects the power of the image to elicit affective feelings, stylized meanings, and implicative outcomes. And through the power that is unleashed, we gain access into those criminalized places and spaces that evoke fantasy, rather than a seeing or knowing that moves beyond imagination (Valier 2004: 251). Even alternate cinematic portrayals create fictitious tales or depictions within narratives that claim to realistically portray prisoner stories and experiences. Nevertheless, as Manning contends (1999: 259) “screens, like everyday social activity are filled by i.e., arbitrary culturally motivated signs, that float without clear referents, yet are rationally constructed to stimulate and simulate feelings, to motivate, entertain, inform, and persuade.”

Even though filmic tales seem to be “[dis]located ... from the temporal and local world[s]” of our existence, the subjectivities of criminal women that emerge ultimately structure formations of thought and discourse that “can be used as warrants for action” (social practices) (Prior as cited in Smith 2005: 102) affecting the material lives of women subjected to their effects (102). Crime films can influence criminological trends by devising ways of thinking about crime and criminality that resurrect old stereotypes, or create new conceptualizations (Rafter 2000: 48, 49). The “duplicity of the media and ... [academic myth-makers] has entrenched ... [those] stock [filmic] characterizations of

<sup>19</sup> I am implying a non-academic use of the term of carnivalesque.

women in prison in the public mind” with fictional portrayals, deemed as mirror reflections of actual criminal women who deserve whatever injustice or ill treatment they receive in prison (Faith 1987: 197). Ultimately, the popular cultural commodification of the prison and prisoner infuses into the public consciousness the acceptability of mass imprisonment, tied to marketable products (film) for public consumption (Wright: 2000: 19).

7) An underlying interconnection between the media and criminal justice system prevails in the ongoing creation of images that emerge from relations of power and social definitions that are unequally distributed in society (Greer & Jewkes 2005: 28). Cinematic expression supports specific and variable constructions of crime within a web of imagery and narratives that support specific interests and agendas. Political, ideological, and social agendas function to distort, dramatize, or tailor the meanings of crime, to fit with particular cultural beliefs (Ferrell 1999: 407, 408). For example, films mold ideology through representational techniques (narratives, visual images) that structure people’s assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and myths about a gendered, taken-for-granted reality that correspondingly attaches meaning to female transgressions and lawbreaking (Rafter 2000: 7, 8). As such, films may reinforce or challenge stereotypical views regarding the female penal subject.

8) Criminal justice policy, criminological theory, and legal practices identify particular subjects who present a threat to an imagined community (e.g. the family; broader society; law-abiding persons) threatened by the outlaw rule-breaker, often deemed as the *other* (Young 1996: 9). Textually creating the deviant through tales of lawbreaking women within popular cultural forms (i.e., the prison film) serves to reveal the entertainment media’s active role in the constitution of subjectivities that “do not exist outside of or prior to language and representation but [which] are actually brought into play by discursive strategies [through the symbolic power of] representational practices” (Martin as cited in Alexander 1999: 232; Hall as cited in Mason 2005: 194). The narratological and visual characterization of criminal women’s subjectivities serves a regulatory function in governing both their conduct and the lives of public viewers who consume such representations. As such, the pleasure industries which commodify popular imaginaries of crimes and criminals symbolize non-State forms of governing through seemingly expressive rather than oppressive relations of power where “forms of

thought and conduct ... are targeted for transformation ... via the extension through the social body of the forms [and] techniques ... of [an] aesthetic ... culture" (Bennett as cited in Bratich, Packer & McCarthy 2003: 6; 8, 10). Ultimately, crime stories can become cinematic and cyber journeys into the "forbidden underworlds" and "dark [ominous] spaces inhabited by [the] criminal being, accompanied by repeated cathartic resolutions that repudiate the transgressive and restore a sense of stability and safety" (Hermes 1995: 60; Menzies 2001: 419).

9) Popular historicized and more contemporary cultural constructions of the criminal woman create assorted subjectivities which take on lives and forms "within a media saturated environment... [existing] from ... their [inception] as a moment in a mediated spiral of presentation and representation... ." (Ferrell & Sanders 1995a: 14). The depiction [in part] of similarly problematic images across both fictitious and docudramatic filmic portrayals, exemplifies the entertainment industry's complicity with sexist, racist, homophobic, and classist constructions intersectionally linked with representations of female lawbreaking and criminality. Often, crime is tied to specific, individually-based factors (greed, mental illness, psychopathy, drug use/addiction) with "its genesis not found or associated with other historical, social or structural conditions" (Surette 1998: 48). In the exploitation film particularly, "it is the presumed 'well-socialized' analyzing the 'under-socialized,' the social viewing the asocial, the culturally evolved examining the atavistic, the meaningful world explaining 'meaningless' forms of violence and misbehaviour" (Ferrell et al. 2008: 31). Cultural terminologies grounded in a historical heritage of individualism create, circulate, and reshape deviant constructions which are the cultural apparatus through which the media juxtaposes newly identified deviants versus ordinary citizens unveiling and reinforcing cultural fears of otherness (Gerber 1978 as cited in Sanders & Lyon 1995: 30, 31; Greer & Jewkes: 2005: 20). As such, the controversial and sensationalized terrain of a cultural criminology, that "picks amidst the cultural detritus of oddities and titillations" ...which offer "a gilded invitation to revel pruriently and voyeuristically in the exotica of ...deviant doings" (O'Brien as cited in Ferrell et al. 2008: 191) emerges in some perversely and idiosyncratically cinematic embodiments of prisoners.

10) Everyday media practices emphasize atypical events of the world (violent crimes/ [serial murder] behaviours), that are unusual and inexperienced escapes from

the ordinary, normalized existence of our lives. Within these depictions lies the potential victimness of textual readers, further fuelling public anxieties regarding criminality as a ubiquitous danger and threat to the individual and broader normative societal systems. As well, violence associated with actual criminalized figures, chronicled in some films, merges with the gruesome crimes of fictional prisoner embodiments that perpetuate and continue the distorted view of female offenders as dangerous and aggressive (Barak 1994: 5). In the *women-in-prison (WIP)* film,<sup>20</sup> it is often the wrongly or unfairly accused/convicted/ incarcerated female who experiences an unjust or villainous carceral system, or falls prey to the *other* – the violent and exploitative criminal woman within a corrupt and harsh carceral world. In exacerbating public fears and concerns, these portrayals confine understandings of crime within dominant discourses that carry the weight of cultural assumptions, expectations, and public support (Meyers 2004: 96). Performative acts of violence in popular cultural texts “reproduce [relations of] power and inequality, encoding ... [them] in the circularity of [people’s] everyday life” (Ferrell et al 2008: 11; 229). Harm is symbolic in representation – the terrible consequences, in all their cultural complexity (11).

11) A media saturated society that interpenetrates multiple discourses moves beyond the generation of representations to produce systems of knowledge and social practices of human management that are embedded within technological schemes and pedagogical forms (Foucault as cited in Bennett 2003: 54). In many instances filmic portrayals of the penal subject construct the criminal justice agent (warden, guard, psychiatrist, or attorney) as the expert in the discursive construction and classification of the subjectivities of lawbreaking women which revalidate and reauthorize their authority through the technological apparatuses of the entertainment industries and their markets<sup>21</sup> (Bennett 2003: 55). Criminal justice personnel become authorized speakers and members of discursive fields tied to a language, knowledge, and power that link causalities of crime to seemingly naturalized categories of the criminalized *other* (Tonkiss 2004). The constructions that emerge invariably become tied to forms of governing that transverse a criminological landscape that aims to address crime and the

<sup>20</sup> This designation will be used to denote all adult prison films included in the research.

<sup>21</sup> There are varying degrees of representation and power associated with the criminal justice agent across different prison films.

criminal woman through the regulation, containment, control, and/or reformation of her criminalized conduct (Surette 1998: 48).

12) Cultural criminology shapes the focus of inquiry through connecting both individual and group identities to subcultural styles which symbolize layers of meaning, framed within symbolic codes that reflect lived experience (Ferrell 2004: 61). In this dissertation, I argue that the aesthetic and narratological styles within which the female prisoner is constructed are often grounded in criminological imaginaries, as opposed to actual prisoner's embodied experiences and life worlds. For example, filmic sources may associate particular visual styles or behavioural repertoires to the subjectivities of the penal subject within the prison culture in ways that perpetuate their negative and discriminatory constructions, which is usually the case for some film-making forms. For example, in the exploitation movie, the lesbian predator is constructed through the behavioural repertoires that are associated with predation, violence (impulsive and calculated), and death of oneself and others (prisoner victims). Cultural representations and textual realities fragment the lives of criminalized offenders into conceptual categories that serve both a commodifying and abstracting function. Therefore, some categorical creations representing institutional discourses remain without any referent to the localized actualities and *doings* of women's lives – with “the actual [becoming] selectively represented [only] as it conforms to the conceptual” (Smith 2005: 54, 76).

13) And “in investigating the intersections of culture and crime for power relations and emerging forms of social control,” cultural criminologists emphasize attending to forms of resistance towards mediated constructions and their meanings (Ferrell 1999: 409). The present study conceptualizes resistance in two ways. First, gradations of resistance – albeit socially constructed to varying degrees – can expose representations that are either fantastically subversive or authentically implied. The question is, then do alternative, more critical productions attempt to situate the cinematic prisoner within contextual circumstances, and corresponding subjectivities, that are counter-representational in moving outside the dominant discourses that continue to stereotype, oppress, and discriminate against the cinematic prisoner? And if so how do such representations of resistance experientially and genuinely and congruently represent the lives of prisoners in ‘moments’ of authenticity? And second, cinephilic reviewers may express resistance in the ways they read and interpret particular thematic

or characterological embodiments in individual films. Consequently, the research inquiry aims to make clear the discursive production of crime myths, whereby “criminals ... [become] social actors who personify human dilemma ... [and] provide [the] focus for delusion, celebration and critique while crime is an outpost, a flag on an icy peak, a site line from the familiar neighborhoods to distant horizons, an event/idea to which we tie our tangled myths... .” (Kane 2004: 305, 306). In exposing mythologies of crime and making them conscious, alternate cinematic representations and understandings emerge which provide a critical resistance to the demonized constructions of the marginalized *other*. To conclude, this listing reflects some of the informative theoretical threads that contour and densify my analysis of the filmic texts and layperson reviews.

Cultural Criminology’s seeming embracement of the criminalized outlaw, and marginalized groups, through the process of humanization and dignity towards those persons condemned, vilified, and judged for their crime(s), is problematized as an acceptance of such acts, or a minimization of their harm to others. Yet, the cultural criminological investigative focus can be critical, and at times, condemnatory towards the acts it examines. Centering the analytical lens of my research upon mediated representations of crime, over the experiential actualities of its presence, criminalized determinants, and effects on victims, may be viewed by the proponents of some paradigms (positivism) as problematic in proposing viable explanations, and/or important solutions/implications to *real world* criminological concerns. Consequently, utilizing a grounded theory methodology in deconstructively explicating the representational process of ‘cultural’ criminological meaning-making can be deemed as insignificant to the broader, pragmatic and empirical landscape of criminology, and it’s more traditionalized penetrative inquiries.

## **Film Studies Literature**

The dissertation incorporates insights from major authors in film literature that include Richard Maltby (2003) and Philip Green (1998) (Hollywood cinema), Geoff King (2005) and Yannis Tzioumakis (2006) (contemporary independent film), Randall Clark (1995) (exploitation film), and other less notable scholars. Film studies work informs the research in two primary ways. First, it identifies and chronologically details the historical



industrial context of the designated film-making forms, identified above that are associatively interlinked to particular definitional terrains. Second, filmic works bring forth some centralized elements and techniques of representation such as formalistic styles: narratological (storyline structures) and visual expressions (camerawork, image quality), sound, generic conventions, socio-political and ideological dimensional perspectives/messages, and thematic content (standardized and otherwise), that creatively contour the meanings of filmic depictions. During a micro-textual filmic analysis, many of the ways I interpretively read and see the filmic source is directly linked to these elements as identified above. To reiterate, the dissertation does not, however, represent research in film studies per se, and my inquiry and analysis are not associated with any primary theoretical perspective within the discipline of film studies.

## **Chapter 3.**

# **Cinematic Productions: Film-Making as a Conceptually Distinctive Process**

### **Introduction**

In the following chapter, a comprehensive two-fold discussion outlines the historical industrial backdrop of the film-making process that unveils the distinct, interlocking and symbiotic interrelationships between the Hollywood, independent and exploitation filmic designations. Section one outlines the definitional terrain that correspondingly distinguishes between filmic formations, as outlined by some notable film studies' authors. In particular, some forms, such as the exploitation film, have a relatively clear designation; while others, like the independent film, have contested and diverse meanings. Definitional status is very much shaped by several elements including the broader industrial context of film-making, the underlying socio-political and ideological dimensions/perspectives, particular subject matter/messages, generic frameworks/subtypes, and auteurist creators along with both differential and overlapping (formalistic) aesthetic and narratological conventions. These formulated meanings directly inform how I understand and utilize such filmic distinctions in the research.

Section two historically explores the co-dependent, conflictive, and autonomous interconnections of Hollywoodized and independent film-making embedded within the contexts of production, distribution and exhibition. To a lesser extent these interrelations emerge for the exploitation film. The periodized chronological emergence and rearticulation of the women-in-prison film, across the cinematic landscape of identified filmic forms, is incorporated into the discussion and brings forth noteworthy filmic titles that highlight important historical 'moments,' in representational practices and achievements in the rearticulated depiction of the confined female (and male). Excluded

filmic titles from the research also serve as exemplars in this regard. For example, certain discursive themes denote a historicized specificity that may nonetheless re-emerge in more contemporary films, such as the taken-for-granted normative and maternalistic 'nature' of womanhood. Furthermore, this discussion provides a chronological socio-political backdrop that additionally contextualizes the three filmic forms that were distinctively framed through particularized industrial context details of production and distribution.

## **Section I: Definitional Status of Film-Making Forms**

### ***Hollywood Film***

The term *Hollywood* represents a style rather than a location. If Hollywood is not a particular context – as in the place of Los Angeles, for example – then “perhaps it is best thought of as a place in our communal imaginations, or as a gateway to a place of common imagining” (Maltby 2003: 8; Green 1988: 17).<sup>22</sup> As a style, it is manifestly aesthetic, industrial, and determinedly ideological – one that can be produced outside of its American contexts (Green 1998: 16, 17). Even so, mainstream Hollywood works are associated with an industrial, institutionalized context of studios that in contemporary times are associatively tied to large-scale conglomerates and subsidiary companies involved in the production and distribution of films. Hollywood’s domination of the global marketplace of visual culture creates a standardization of style that becomes the norm and general expectation. It is a form of film-making that is shaped by particular industrial structures of, for instance, production and distribution, economies, and formalistic styles, that have historically emerged and created a mainstream product for mass consumption. Typically, this style is not overtly or blatantly recognizable; it may be hidden within an apparent objectivity, realism, and naturalistic mode by not bringing to attention “its origins in idiosyncratically [individualized] acts of creation” (Green 1998: 16, 17). Maltby

<sup>22</sup> Hollywood film-making can be understood from a range of historical perspectives (Maltby 2003). For the purposes of this dissertation and its restrictions on content, I do not provide any substantial discussion of the history of Hollywood film. This would be a complex and laborious process. As well, the history of independent film chronicles its interrelated history with mainstream Hollywood.

contends that “audiences go to the movies to consume their own emotions,” which are aesthetically facilitated through commercially based, formalistic narratological devices (plotlines, relational connections, and happy, resolute endings) that are pleasurably appealing to the Hollywood spectator and affirm mainstream cultural values (2003: 14). An imagery world of social harmony is created, setting the boundaries of normalcy and decency against the ravages of deviance caused by the *other*.

However, inconsistencies, gaps, and competing logics also inform cinematic conventions that may stray from “some of Hollywood’s most persistent traits,” such as sequential causal continuity and resolutions (Maltby 2003: 464). And while filmic narratives and stories are replete with sexist and racist stereotypes and themes that symbolize dominant ideologies and perspectives, Hollywood can also offer alternative views in representational practices (Ryan & Kellner: 1988: 13). For example, at the characterological level, the prisoner protagonist may overtly and explicitly reject patriarchal control, familialhood, maternalism and traditional femininity, which discursively frame the underlying filmic thematic content and messages. Such a character, albeit problematized within the broader storyline, may also be constructed through attributes which radiate strength, independence, and a resistance to traditionally conservatist values that can symbolize an empowering portrayal, appreciatively acknowledged by some audience members. Typically however, by the filmic ending, such women are cinematically punished for such transgressions of patriarchal womanhood.

### ***Contemporary Independent Film***

The category *American Independent Film*, or *Cinema*, has a definitional status fraught with indecision and controversy. It conveys a range of meanings and associations that are linked to several interrelated historicized developments.<sup>23</sup> Media scholars give different levels of relevance to the conceptual elements (formalistic convention and style,<sup>24</sup> commercial objectives, ideological/political dimensions),

<sup>23</sup> The work of Emanuel Levy (1999) and Yannis Tzioumakis (2006) are two scholarly examples.

<sup>24</sup> The work of Geoff King (2005) is unique on this focus.

industrial conditions (financial, productive, and distributive control), and auteurist works,<sup>25</sup> focusing on some more than others in their definition of independence (Berra: 2008: 9, Tzioumakis 2006: 6). Greg Merritt (2000: xii) classifies the independent film as a motion picture that is autonomously and solely financed and produced outside the *major* Hollywood media conglomerates and studios.<sup>26</sup> These films have no established distribution agreement prior to their production. A *semi-indie* film is not directly produced by the *majors*, but has a pre-production distribution arrangement or agreement guaranteeing its circulation by the mainstream.<sup>27</sup> Merritt's definition specifically excludes any notion of aesthetic style or filmic content as an element of importance.

Conversely, film critic Emanuel Levy (1999: 2) idealistically defines independent film as a fresh, innovative, creative, low-cost film, with gritty stylistic form and original, sometimes quirky, subject matter that characterizes a film-maker's unique personal vision. For Annette Insdorf, independent films comprise only relatively non-commercial productions that would exclude low-budget exploitation films (Insdorf as cited in Holmlund 2005b: 23).<sup>28</sup> Geoff King (2005) conceptualizes independence as a dynamic, multifarious, fluid process that emphasizes conceptual elements beyond the industrial context that include formalistic aesthetic techniques, non-traditional narrative structures,

<sup>25</sup> The work of Emanuel Levy (1999) and Greg Merritt (2000) are two scholarly examples.

<sup>26</sup> Merritt classifies films as independent if the title is eventually purchased and distributed by the mainstream after it was completed. Within contemporary times, (2014) these 'major' studio subsidiaries/units ('the Big Six') would include; (Sony) – Columbia Pictures, (Viacom) – Paramount Pictures, (Time Warner) - Warner Bros. Pictures, (21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox) – 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, (The Walt Disney Co) – Walt Disney Pictures, and (Comcast) – Universal Pictures (Maltby 2003: 190, "Major Film Studio," 2014). The conglomerate owner is indicated in parentheses. Some scholars (Berra 2008 and Tzioumakis 2006) find this definition very problematic because much independent film-making is linked to the corporate sponsorship, financing, and control of the Hollywood Sector. In addition, many of the so-called independent production/distribution companies, such as New Line Cinema, Touchstone Pictures, and Sony Pictures Classic are subsidiaries of major conglomerates – namely Time Warner, Walt Disney and Sony Columbia respectively. As such, although they have a degree of autonomy, the parent company has the power to interfere with their decision-making abilities, decrease their budget for production and so on (Tzioumakis 2006: 3).

<sup>27</sup> I do not classify any films in the dissertation as semi-indie. Instead I make more clear-cut distinctions.

<sup>28</sup> Independent films can be big budget productions with star-laden casts and accomplished film-makers including, *Gangs of New York* (Director Martin Scorsese 2002). Films can alternatively represent genres, such as the teen horror flick, *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1985) and its sequels, which were associated with the then independent company, *New Line*, known for its more artsy/alternative, or generic, mainstream filmic fare (King 2005: 33).

generic identity and locations, and non-conformist, ideological and socio-political positions. Other definitions similarly emphasize aesthetic conventions related to social engagement, unusual narrative patterns/departures, creative experimentation, and diverse visual forms/styles “markedly different from the formal contours of the dominant aesthetic regime” (Tzioumakis 2006: 12; Holmlund 2005a: 2), and uniquely present and incorporated into independent fare.

Alternately, Yannis Tzioumakis (2006) critically challenges and problematizes the above definitions when delving more deeply into an understanding of its industrial conditions and other elements. To avoid the ambiguity in definitions, he therefore conceptualizes independent film as a discourse. Tzioumakis states that in creating cultural artefacts such as American independent film through discourse, various socially authorized institutions<sup>29</sup> that provide filmic commentary and criticism emphasize particular practices and procedures linked to film-making upon which individual definitions are established; either in expanding or contracting ways (11). This emphasizing of some defining features over others is related to issues of power “as discourses are produced and [are] legitimated by socially authorized groups” seeking to achieve particular objectives within the film industry (11, 12). Subsequently, in the discourse of defining independent cinema (for instance, post 1980 productions), film historians consider many definitional factors, including the industrially located positioning of films or film-makers, the types of formal/aesthetic strategies they utilize and their connections to the broader social, cultural, political, or ideological backdrop of film-making (King 2005: 2). Currently, for instance, some film-industry companies such as Lionsgate Pictures produce and distribute independent films outside the control of the Hollywood conglomerates/studios.

But despite the definitional problems of *independence*, this sector thrives on maintaining an identity distinct and separate from Hollywood (King 2005: 1). In this dissertation, independent film does not denote a singular definition. Rather, it is conceptualized in relative terms – a film-making form that can be defined at various levels of focus, whether industrial, aesthetic, generic, commercial, or ideological, that

<sup>29</sup> These institutions would include academics, film-makers, critics, and industry professionals.

affects different films at shifting degrees of interface. In this regard, some films are more politically and ideologically distant from Hollywood, while others are more artistic in “form and content,” with both aims being interdependent.<sup>30</sup> As King (2005) contends, “formal ... departure from dominant conventions is, potentially, a major resource for the deconstruction of dominant ideologies” (2). A “degree of distance, industrially, from the Hollywood studio system often appears to be a necessary condition for substantial formal or socio-political departure from the ...[prevailing] norms” (2). Alternatively, aesthetic expressions can more closely approximate the mainstream in visual clarity and texturing (11). In this way, independent film-making moves from the extremes to the margins of Hollywood.

### ***Exploitation Film***

The exploitation film serves to shock and titillate the audience through a bombardment of offensively explicit images that aim to satisfy disreputable pleasures, prurient interests, and morbid curiosities, while espousing social commentary messages. Brutality, sadism, bloodshed, rebellion and carnage litter formulaic storylines both visually and narratologically in many forms such as the women-in-prison film (WIP).<sup>31</sup> The hallmarks of production are antithetical to the Hollywood system of continuity; which includes star actors, psychological realism or narrative complexity – a condition which fuels the exploitation’s films subversive potential (Cook 1976: 125). A visuality of aesthetic representation emphasizes extreme images that assault the audience and lack any sensitivity or subtlety in their over-the-top or graphic expression (Clark 1995: 166). During the 1970s, content was exceedingly distasteful, bizarre, and perverse. The term *exploitation* is derived from the promotional devices that were used to advertise and exaggerate the particular exploitable elements of such films. It is a form of low-budget independent film-making. Several sub-genres and categories exist, each exploiting some sensational topic or theme – sex (sexploitation films), shock (shock exploitation),

<sup>30</sup> The political and artistic usually merge with particular aesthetic styles serving to break down dominant ideologies. For example, *some* films focus on the banal, ordinary realism of a prisoner’s life in their storyline, cinematography, and characterological embodiment. This way of delineating meaning is drawn from Geoff King’s work (2005).

<sup>31</sup> Many films aim to attract cult fandom audiences.

horror and gore (zombie and splatter films), juvenile delinquency (teenpics<sup>32</sup>), and Nazi (nazisploitation). Mondo films (or shockumentaries<sup>33</sup>) are produced in pseudo-documentary style and depict gruesome death and violence. The women-in-prison titles<sup>34</sup> are auteur-related, and associated with particular companies (New World Pictures), and film-makers such as Roger Corman, Jack Hill, Billy Fine, and Paul Nicolas. Exploitation film-makers exploit the latest fad, creating sub-genres which shift in focus, contingent on the changing cultural trends, obsessions, or concerns of the times. This might include those 1970s countercultural themes in the WIP film which depict the “criminal woman” as an independent, resistant, rebel who violently breaks free in an act of primal liberation.

The sexploitation film uses sex, women’s bodies, and violence to sell their films which have lurid, soft-core pornographic content that features rampant nudity and graphic sex; typically more explicit than mainstream fare (Holmlund 2005b: 25). The women-in-prison film incorporates elements of sex and nudity with the disturbing brutality, torture and degradations that are associated with shock exploitation. Women are sexually abused, tormented, tortured, and humiliated by sadistic wardens, guards, prisoners, and other persons. These films draw the audience into the “perverted pleasure[s] of looking... without the guilt of knowing that the victims are real...[with] most exploitation film-makers ... [being] without shame” or responsibility for what their films represent (Meyers as cited in Clark 1995: 174).

Such filmic distinctions are necessary in defining how the criminalized, incarcerated woman is multifariously constructed beyond a homogenized embodiment that reflects a singular cultural representation. These definitional parameters as outlined above serve to contour representations in particular ways distinctly tied to filmic form’s ‘defining’ features.

<sup>32</sup> The teenpics did not have the distasteful and offensive imagery characteristic of the other sub-generic forms as outlined above.

<sup>33</sup> Since the late 1970s most of the Mondo films depict actual death through footage of accidents, suicide, and execution. *Faces of Death* (1978) is one such film.

<sup>34</sup> The women-in-prison film has also been categorized under the sexploitation sub-genre (Clark 1995). For the purposes of this research I have done the same.



## Section II: Historical Conditions and Contexts of Production, Distribution and Exhibition

### ***Hollywood and Independent Film-making: Conflict, Interdependence and Autonomy***

The Hollywood film has a rich and varied history that holds interconnected relationships to the broader contexts of other forms of film-making, and to a lesser extent, the television medium (Maltby 2003: 17). Following World War I, the film industry was controlled by several vertically integrated companies which became known as the “Big Five,” and included Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Paramount, Warner Brothers, RKO Radio Pictures, and Twentieth Century Fox.<sup>35</sup> Each gained revenue through theatre ownership and controlling the first-run exhibition of films. The divorcement of the major studios oligopolistic power over production-distribution from the exhibition of films significantly affected subsequent filmic output.<sup>36</sup> This 1948 Supreme Court action was termed the *Paramount Decision* (Maltby 2003: 128). This loss of control resulted in breaking down the studios monopolistic power over film exhibition venues. The studios lost their theatres and were no longer ensured an exhibition site for their products (Tzioumakis 2006: 106). Vertical integration ceased to exist and the Paramount Decision significantly weakened and dismantled the studio system in years to come.

Early cinematic depictions of the imprisoned woman (from the 1930s to the 1950s) appeared in the classic Hollywood melodrama. Prior to these productions, the prison film relegated women to peripherally insignificant roles in the male genre; they appeared as devoted wives, mothers, or girlfriends on visiting day, or fleetingly surfaced as characters in the flashback sequence (Crowther 1989: 62). Women-in-prison (WIP) films were typically produced and distributed by the same Hollywood studio systems,

<sup>35</sup> A vertically integrated movie company controlled the production, distribution, and exhibition of films. Even though each studio has experienced corporate takeovers, or merging, these companies continue to hold power within the industry in contemporary times. The exception is RKO which folded in 1959. The *Big Five* dominated the industry from the late 1920s to the mid 1950s. There were also the *Little Three* – Columbia, United Artists, and Universal – companies that did not own theatres but which produced and distributed movies (Maltby 2003: 121) .

<sup>36</sup> Hollywood released fewer A-pictures and declined to produce any B-films, shorts, cartoons, or newsreels, which forced competition amongst exhibitors for the filmic product.

commencing with: *Ladies of the Big House* (1931, Paramount); *Ladies They Talk About* (1933, Warner Brothers); *Girls on Probation* (1938, Warner Brothers); *Women in Prison* (1938, Columbia); *Convicted Woman* (1940, Columbia); *Women without Names* (1940, Paramount); and *Women's Prison* (1955, Columbia).<sup>37</sup> In these films, women did not challenge the patriarchal authority or power reflective in state-sanctioned punishment because, by the standards of the time, it was improper to do so – a position that was antithetical to the overt defiance and resistance from representations of the male prisoner (Nellis & Hale 1982: 24). Instead, narratives emphasized “(re)domestication/ redemption stories and, by extension, the recuperation of the threat posed by independent women” in classical Hollywood narratives that were causally directed, with filmic resolutions sparked by characterological transformations (of correction [e.g., domestication]) being facilitated by a “romantic heterosexual union” (Bouclin 2009: 23, 24).

But, two films directed by Jon Cromwell – *Ann Vickers* (1933, RKO) and the esteemed *Caged* (1950, Warner Brothers) were unique in their portrayal of female resistance to a penal system deemed to be problematic. In the former, it is Ann Vickers, a liberated, reformed minded social worker who struggles to change the plight of imprisoned women. Cromwell's later production, *Caged*, which sparked the emergence of the female protagonist in prison narratives (Mason 2005: 287), was intended to be a memoir of filmic writer Virginia Kellogg's experiences inside four different women's penitentiaries.<sup>38</sup> This film was released during the commencement of a medicalized, psychologized treatment model of “female corrections” that emphasized rehabilitation over punishment (Faith 1987: 188). Warner Brother's developed the screenplay which advocated for the rehabilitative rights of prisoners subjected to a harsh and punitive penal regime. But this message was narratively depicted through formulaic characterizations of the monstrous prison matron, who wreaks havoc and fear amongst archetypical prisoners who are confined within an institution plagued by corruption, violence, desperation, and hopelessness. Although the prison film continued to be a

<sup>37</sup> These films are not included in the research; the selection criteria ranged from the years 1950-2008.

<sup>38</sup> Kellogg arranged some stays of confinement to chronicle and research her experiences of prison which informed the filmic depictions and storyline (Parrish 1991: 94).

Hollywood staple, by the 1960s, productions had reduced considerably to an almost non-existent level.<sup>39</sup> An inferior remake of *Caged*, entitled *House of Women* (1962, Bryan Foy Productions, Warner Brothers)<sup>40</sup>, failed to depict the stellar acting required to convey any meaningful and powerful message.<sup>41</sup>

The postwar years recorded a precipitous decline in movie-going, with the populace enjoying other forms of non-cinematic entertainment (Tzioumakis 2006: 88). The exhibitory venues of the movie screen changed with the suburbanization of a population who abandoned the city theatre for the 1950s drive-in, and the eventual post-1970 shopping centre multiplex. Hollywood increasingly relied on the *blockbuster* phenomenon, concentrating its profitability on a few exploitation-like mega budget features that targeted the youth audience such as *Star Wars* (1977, Lucasfilm, Twentieth Century Fox). Accordingly, the women-in-prison film faded in the Hollywood imagination. It re-emerged in the lurid cycle of the *sexploitation* films which dominated cinematic productions from the 1970s to 1980s (Walters 2001: 107).

Although the Hollywood product was reduced and more specifically concentrated, film distribution continued as a lucrative and monopolistic business that had historically involved the control of the independent sector of exhibition as well. Eventually, major movie companies became subsidiaries of a limited group of diversified multi-media conglomerates with economies that facilitated blockbuster production and promoted products across a number of interlocking markets (Maltby 2003).<sup>42</sup> In addition, the majors moved into low-end exploitation film-making in a “process of

<sup>39</sup> This decline was apparent for both male and female prison films. One notable male film was *Cool Hand Luke* (1967, Jalem Productions, Warner Brothers/Seven Arts) although other titles do exist such as Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1967, Pax Enterprises, Columbia Pictures) (Nellis and Hale, 1982: 30).

<sup>40</sup> Bryan Foy Productions and Warner Brothers denote the production and distribution companies respectively. Subsequent filmic designations are listed in this manner in the dissertation text.

<sup>41</sup> Typically in Hollywood films the actors/actresses had established filmic careers (e.g., Agnes Moorehead [Warden Ruth Benton] in *Caged* (1950).

<sup>42</sup> For example, Paramount was taken over in 1966 by Gulf and Western – companies that had business interests outside the entertainment industry (Tzioumakis 2006: 192). The period from 1989 to 1994 was marked by the major studios, including Paramount, Warner Bros., Columbia and Universal, in transition via corporate ownership changes and several conglomerate mergers that provided new monetary and marketing avenues.

[controlling], adopting, and appropriating practices ‘from the industry’s margins’” (Tzioumakis 2006: 201). Some Hollywood companies became interdependent upon both the exploitation and mainstream markets, simultaneously producing and distributing diverse filmic forms. However, the vast majority of exploitation fare, however, was produced by the independent sector, with American International Pictures (AIP) leading the way. One example of a girl-in-prison film included the title *Reform School Girl* (1957).

In more contemporary times, the growth of the auxiliary marketplace of video (early 1980s), cable, satellite television (late 1980s), foreign markets (mid-1990s), and DVD, Blu-ray and the Internet (2000s) secured the needed financing (non-theatrically-based), expanded distribution opportunities, and re-exhibited titles outside their original filmic form and exhibition venue (King 2005: 18; Tzioumakis 2006: 257). As such, Hollywood classic WIP films such as *Caged* (1950s) and others have been released in DVD format increasing their availability. In addition, the commodification of films has intensified, with the Hollywood product becoming part of a chain of goods, and “multipliers” that initiate the selling of other merchandise (Maltby 2003: 190). This is particularly related to the blockbuster film; for example, *Jurassic Park* (1993, Universal), which has ancillary-related product markets such as clothing and video games. This condition is also evident for the exploitation film. Nonetheless, this historicized industrial shift to market synergy has reshaped “the way films function as cultural experiences” (Pramaggiore & Wallis 2008: 418). In current times, large scale online retailer companies such as Amazon.com, Inc take part in this process. Therefore, rather than symbolizing unique and aesthetically discrete experiences, motion pictures have become commodities that fuel the large scale industrial consumption of their rearticulated forms.

The *Shawshank Redemption* (1994, Castle Rock Entertainment, Columbia Pictures) was the catalyst that renewed the popularity of the prison film in the 1990s, which was set to decline by the millennium (Mason 2005: 198).<sup>43</sup> However, films outside of Hollywood, and/or typified to be on the fringe of the traditional carceral narrative, have subsequently emerged in alternate and meaningful productions (Mason 2005: 201). The

<sup>43</sup> This title is a male prison film. *The Shawshank Redemption* is consistently listed on the IMDb as the highest rated film ever, accruing a rating of 9.3/10 as of August 25, 2014.

female penal subject reappeared in contemporary Hollywood films created by esteemed film-makers and cast with star performers, some of which include *Brokedown Palace* (1999, Fox 2000 Pictures/Adam Fields Productions, Twentieth Century Fox), and *White Oleander* (2002, Warner Brothers). Unlike the classical mainstream works of yesteryear, these filmic storylines may not centralize incarceration as the primary theme. The Hollywood studio continues to emphasize financing, marketing, distribution, and merchandising over the production of many films. For some titles it is the independent company that oversees the cinematic productive role.<sup>44</sup> Since 2000, some notable prison-related films have been produced outside the Hollywood sphere in the independent film-making sector that includes both male and female titles.

### ***Contemporary Independent Film***

The history of independent film is marked by both its interdependence and autonomy from Hollywood's corporate structure, star performers, film-makers (producers and directors), economic backdrop, commercial objectives, and formalistic aesthetic conventions (Berra 2008: 11). In the early years, independence symbolized a movement that served to challenge and resist the oligopolistic control of the major studios, and create a product that was uniquely challenging and differentiated from the mainstream. Upon the first phase of independent film-making, from the 1920s to late 1940s, United Artists (UA) became the key distributor of top-ranked (prestige)<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> In 2000, the Nashville based company *Gaylord Entertainment* announced that its film division Gaylord Films would produce and co-finance several films to be distributed and also co-financed through an agreement with Warner Brothers. One such film was *White Oleander* (2001). This Company was uncredited in the filmic listing details.

<sup>45</sup> This form of independent production was different from the Poverty Row studios (for example, *Republic* and *Monogram*), which developed low-budget B-films in the 1930s and 1940s. Poverty Row production was completely independent from the Hollywood studio system in every way. These truly independent companies created adventure, action, spectacle, and excitement in movies that thrilled and entertained audiences. Alternatively, the *prestige-level*, top ranked independent fare produced "artistically and commercially successful films" with limited Hollywood intervention. Even so, these productions would influence the mainstream industry through new developments in production, distribution, and exhibition (Tzioumakis 2006: 29).

independent films during the studio era and beyond.<sup>46</sup> Even though UA was part of the Little Three, it historically remained a studio on the fringes which supported, financed, and distributed independent film productions throughout its industrial presence. Some notable independent film-makers – among them Walt Disney, Howard Hughes and David Selznick – tested the limits of the Production Code during the 1930s and 1940s, exploring controversial subjects, pushing film-making conventions and techniques, and utilizing strategies of distribution and marketing different from the industry norm (Tzioumakis 2006: 29).

The *Production Code* emerged in 1930 as a regulatory device for the Hollywood filmic industry. It was based on the belief that entertainment had a moral obligation to provide moviegoers with pure, inoffensive, and appropriate subject matter and content which controlled the movie's construction of narrative and characterizations. Historically, there had been “a fear of entertainment, in which cinema's production of pleasure through the projection and fulfillment of desire... [was] thought to be innately threatening to the moral health of both the individual and the community” (Maltby 2003: 472) This was the dominant aesthetic theory of film discourse from the mid 1930s to the mid 1960s (60, 61, 497). But the Code forced producers to develop techniques (through imagery, sound, and language) that enabled an ambiguity and vagueness in representations especially in content such as sex and crime. Alternatively, Hollywood films became dramas of appearances and “offensive ideas could survive at the price of an instability of meaning... .” (Jacobs 1991 as cited in Maltby 2003: 62, 63).

Economic opportunities emerged for independent, prestige level productions becoming the “A” filler for the double bill feature presentation. During the depths of the Depression (1932 – 1933), it was essential to support the declining theatrical audience with films drawn from the independent ranks (Tzioumakis 2006: 41). Although still proclaiming their autonomous status, independent film-makers became increasingly dependent on Hollywood for production resources, performers, and exhibition venues.

<sup>46</sup> In 1919 United Artists became the first independent film studio in the United States. It was formed by – Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, and D. W. Griffith – who challenged the power of recognized Hollywood personnel (producers, distributors) who created films to tighten their grip on star performers' salaries and creative autonomy (Tzioumakis 2006: 27/28; “Independent Film,” 2013).

While some independent film aesthetic styles (narrative structure, visually expressive forms, and ideological/political dimensions) transgressed mainstream conventions, most films closely resembled the Hollywood product; thus, a cinema distinctly separate and parallel to the majors was still not clearly demarcated (Tzioumakis 2006: 43). During this time the effects of top ranked independent fare prevented Hollywood from totally controlling the cinematic marketplace.

From 1940 to 1948, independent production became an integral part of the Hollywood milieu, with United Artists losing its monopoly over distribution due to financial difficulties and partnership changes.<sup>47</sup> The *independent influence* and shaping of American cinema's creative and industrial practices were set for years to come. The proliferation of independent production was sparked, in part, by wartime conditions and influences. During a period of increased theatre attendance, the emphasis of the majors on reducing their output to a few high level films created a need for extra product that was filled by the independent sector (Tzioumakis 2006: 48). Following the war, however, deteriorating market conditions resulted in independent film-makers penetrating the studios, due to the tightening up of viable financing opportunities for their films.<sup>48</sup> The continued industry-wide adoption of independent production once again questioned its autonomy and distinction as an alternate filmic form – given its increased incorporation into the Hollywood studio system.

During the second phase of independent film-making production (1948 to late 1960s), top ranked independent and Hollywood fare were synonymous with the ex-studios now distributing much independently produced material. Early on, the Paramount Decree had given the independent sector the freedom of competing for exhibition venues with the mainstream system. But the political climate of anti-communist sentiment and fear that rocked the film industry from 1947 to 1953, along with the hearings of the *House of Un-American Activities Committee*, resulted in the blacklisting of several industry employees suspected of being political traitors (Benshoff & Griffin

<sup>47</sup> From 1945 until the end of the studio era all independent films were distributed through the studio networks.

<sup>48</sup> Historically, the financing of independent films is significantly influenced by the broader economic conditions and industrial developments of the motion picture (especially mainstream Hollywood) and television industries (King 2005: 37).

2004: 180, 181). In addition, a film's aesthetic styles and socio-political commentaries were conservatively restricted, for fear of any film-maker (independent or otherwise) being constructed as a communist.

The 1950s and 1960s were characterized by both the Hollywood product and independent (exploitation) film-making.<sup>49</sup> In the mid 1950s, United Artists re-emerged as a major player in attracting independent film-makers to its fore. A revived economic base and alternate system of production afforded individual producers creative autonomy for their works, complete and unhindered financing, copyright holder status, and a share of the profits (Tzioumakis 2006: 114-117). Consequently, film-makers could lay claim to independence regardless of their ties with a Hollywood major. Two extraordinary prison films deserve notable mention. At this time, the female execution film *I Want to Live* (1958, Figaro, United Artists) was independently produced and distributed, however, there was a Hollywood influence through producer Walter Wanger – who had a distinguished and long film-making career and historical ties with several major studios (Paramount, Columbia, and MGM) –<sup>50</sup> and actress Rita Hayward, who delivered a star performance. *I Want to Live* was a unique film that pushed the envelope of filmic depictions, expressing anti-death penalty sentiment and criticizing a legal system and overzealous media campaign that vilified Barbara Graham<sup>51</sup>, the central,

<sup>49</sup> The exploitation films will be discussed as a separate form of independent film-making.

<sup>50</sup> After leaving the studio system in the mid 1930s, Wanger became an independent film-maker, creating socially conscious films that cast star performers such as Henry Fonda. He produced the prison drama *You Only Live Once* (1937, Walter Wanger Productions) that was distributed through United Artists. In 1951, Wanger was convicted of the attempted murder of then talent agent Lang Jennings, who was having an affair with Wanger's wife, actress Joan Bennett. Upon Wanger's release from a California State prison farm he produced the seminal prison film, *Riot in Cellblock 11* (1954, Allied Artists Pictures), reflective of the dreadful prison conditions that he experienced ("Walter Wanger," 2013; IMDb, 2013). This production was shot at Folsom State prison (in California) and included actual guards and prisoners as background performers.

<sup>51</sup> Barbara Graham had a history of prostitution, gambling and drug offences, and had served a prison sentence for perjury. In 1953, she was convicted of the killing of Mabel Monohan during a home invasion robbery, in which Graham was accompanied by a gang of male criminal associates. Graham was executed in 1955 at San Quentin State prison, one of only three women to have faced State sanctioned death in California during this century. The pre-trial publicity from journalist Ed Montgomery all but sealed Barbara's fate in his words, "It's her tough luck to be young, attractive, belligerent, immoral, and as guilty as hell" (Crowther 1989: 69). Although *I Want to Live* (1958) is listed as a prison film, it is excluded from the research because it focuses primarily around issues of the death penalty.



and true-to-life character, as a heartless killer; even though questions remain regarding her innocence. It chillingly and systematically depicted the process of death work, from preparing the gas chamber to carrying out the execution. An unnamed *Variety* critic noted the overwhelming compulsion and power in the film, characterized in the final 30 to 40 minutes as being “as harrowing as anything ever done in pictures. It is a purposely understated account of the mechanics involved in the State’s legal destruction of life, and its effects is to raise serious thoughts about what constitutes ‘cruel and unusual punishment’” (Parrish 1991: 202).

*The Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962, Norma Productions, United Artists) chronicled the life of prisoner Robert Stroud, an American man incarcerated for fifty-four years. Stroud became a notable ornithologist and author, with only a grade three education. The film was produced by Norma productions, an independent film company formed in 1948 by then producer Harold Hecht and Hollywood star Burt Lancaster, who was cast as Stroud (“Burt Lancaster,” 2012). *Birdman of Alcatraz* was “a tribute to the iconoclastic courage needed to break the mold of the normal prison film drama” (A. H. Weiler, *New York Times* as cited in Parrish 1991: 35). *Variety* praised this extraordinary production, which “brings a new breadth and depth to the form... [It] achieves a human dimension way beyond its predecessors” (Parrish 1991: 40).

Yet, even though ex-studio productions had become genuinely autonomous and devoid of their former standardized identities, “there was ...a parallel centripetal tendency throughout the industry” to emphasize the former; “the tried and tested, which eventually eroded” oppositional attitudes to the mainstream and made an alternate cinema alongside its competitor an impossible condition (Tzioumakis 2006: 125).

The last stage of independent filmmaking, from the late 1960s to present-day (2012-2013), was shaped by economic forces and socio-cultural changes. A fiscal crisis between 1967 and 1971 resulted in a brief change in film-making style that enveloped the entire industry. Low-budget independent film-making became the norm in a period known as the *New Hollywood* or *Hollywood Renaissance* (1967-1975). An intermixing of aesthetic qualities, film styles, generic frameworks, and thematic content further clouded the boundaries between the meanings of an alternate cinema and the mainstream (Tzioumakis 2006: 170). These innovative films were uniquely different from the top-

rated independent fare that was now occupying a more marginal position within the cinematic terrain. Expensive, big-budget films associated with the majors were surpassed in revenue and popularity by the films of the Hollywood Renaissance, which set trends in audience appeal, the presentation of non-traditional and controversial content (violence, sexuality, and drug use), the espousing of radicalized perspectives (anti-establishment, anti-parental), a sensitivity to cultural change, and an extreme departure from established conventions of film-making (Tzioumakis 2006: 178, 179).<sup>52</sup> This countercultural cinema satisfied an increasingly rebellious youth generation. One exemplary title was Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1967, Panda Company and Raybert Productions, Columbia), a "biker/social protest/road film" that was "radically different aesthetically" than its top-ranked counterparts – a condition that classified the film as exceedingly non-mainstream in style and content (171). However, the mainstream sector would ultimately capitalize from this new film-making style, both commercially and creatively.

Ultimately, the goal of the new independents was to democratize film-making and overthrow the power of the major industrial competitors and their dominant form of movie-production. But the idiosyncratic film-makers' reliance on the old studios for marketing and distribution networks hindered this ambition. In the late 1960s, during the reign of the Hollywood Renaissance, the ex-studios became immersed in corporate mergers, as subsidiary companies of conglomerates. The outcomes of these ownership changes affected the industrial landscape of independent film-making. While top-ranked fare retained its hegemonic industrial position, the countercultural, New Renaissance product, by the early seventies, began to falter at the box office, paving the way for exploitation films to fill the gap in the film market (Tzioumakis 2006: 192, 193). As well, Hollywood was making fewer movies and relied extensively on blockbuster films for its industry revenues. Consequently, the big-budget film (independent or studio-produced)

<sup>52</sup> The new independents had a visual style and expression very different from the Hollywood mainstream (which was now top-ranked independent fare). As well, an array of film-making conventions from foreign art-house cinema were brought into the American industry from Europe and Japan, including breaks in the linear narrative, classical structure; the subverting of genre; verité camera work and zooms; an overemphasis on particular types of shots (e.g., close-ups, long shots); editing techniques (e.g., jump cuts, split screen), and other elements such as image-sound mismatches and freeze frames (Tzioumakis 2006: 179).

thunderously returned in full force in 1975, propelling a slew of mega entertainment hits, such as Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (Zanuck/Brown, Universal) (Tzioumakis 2006: 183). The Hollywood Renaissance founding film-makers were no longer embraced or endorsed by the mainstream and the subsequent Reaganized 1980s, marked by a conservatist, politicized US culture and spawned by the New Right, that advocated "'a politics of return' to pre-New Deal, pre-social welfare economies, to the traditional male-supremacist family, to fundamental religious values," at a time of globalized, militaristic American power (207).<sup>53</sup> Even though, these countercultural films inevitably faded, they nonetheless were credited with having given a representational voice to groups previously marginalized by mainstream cinema, and bringing forth specific film-makers such as Spike Lee and Jim Jarmusch whose vision would continue to shape independent film in the years to come. Most importantly, "this type of cinema offered often uncompromising views of contemporary America which were far removed from the safe representations and harmless entertainment associated with mainstream cinema, but which were welcomed by a young generation that was disillusioned with the state of things" (184).

Independent film-making *now* became situated outside the majors, and represented uniquely low-budget, stylistic, aesthetic, and thematic films associated with film-makers whose visions diverged from the mainstream in significant ways. It was at this point that independence was becoming clearly separate from all other styles of film-making, demarcating an alternative cinematic form that represented marginalized voices (e.g., minority), varied perspectives, and the examination of real social issues and "hidden histories" that mainstream television and film primarily ignored (Tzioumakis 2006: 209).

During the more contemporary 1980s and 1990s, the financing, production, and/or release of many independent films were ultimately facilitated through the rise of those major independent companies (most notably, Orion, Miramax and New Line) not owned by a conglomerate (224), and which existed alongside other smaller scale companies that have continued into the millennium (King 2005: 26). Many of the films

<sup>53</sup> The election of Ronald Reagan as US president in the 1980s all but solidified this conservative movement within the American political landscape.

created were socially conscious and controversial, while others were mid-budget fare productions which significantly contributed to the institutionalization of American independent cinema and a corresponding infrastructure for film-making that was diversely unique from the mainstream. Due to the ultra-conservatist state of the Hollywood product following the late 1970s, both film-makers and audiences sought unconventional and challenging films, a number of which secured exhibition through a growing video market that increasingly required an excess of available films to promote (King 2005: 22).

The contemporary independent women-in-prison film takes many forms, with narratives either centrally situated within the prison or interjected by a primary, criminalized or non-criminalized narrative. *Civil Brand* (2002, Mandalay Sports Entertainment, Lionsgate Films) was an African American production that cast an ensemble of artists (film and music) who were politically conscious of the film's portrayal of the carceral and corporate enslavement of racialized prisoners. Viewers were sensitized to the realities of the prison industrial complex and mass incarceration in 1990s America and onward— a condition that primarily affected the African American lawbreaker (Prison Film Project 2006a: 7, 8; 2006b: 6,7).

Alternatively, the definitional status of independent cinema has been questioned given that some critics view it as an institutionalized arm of the mainstream. The symbiosis between them has resulted in two significant contemporary changes (Tzioumakis 2006: 246). First, independent companies, such as Miramax and New Line were taken over and integrated into the media conglomerates as separate units, left to operate semi-autonomously.<sup>54</sup> And second, select independent production companies established contractual agreements to become satellite distributors for parent affiliates or major distributors.

<sup>54</sup> *Miramax* and *New Line* were brought into mainstream conglomeration in 1993. It was here that they alternated between producing and distributing high end independent fare (e.g., *Gangs of New York*, Miramax, 2002) and low, budget unique films (e.g., *Storytelling*, New Line Cinema, Fine Line Features, 2001). *Fine Line* is a specialty division of New Line Cinema.

Nevertheless, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, several small, mostly short-lived production and/or distribution companies contributed to an independent movement that was harmoniously growing alongside the conglomerate majors. Two unique juvenile detainee movies deserve an honorable mention, *Fun* (1994, Neo Modern Entertainment/Greycat Films), and *Freeway* (1996, Illusion Entertainment/Kushner-Locke, Roxie Releasing), were connected with such companies.<sup>55</sup> It is here that some prison films moved from exploitation to artsploitation and parody; for example, those created by unique and quirky independent film-makers such as writer/director Mathew Bright – namely, *Freeway* (1996). Although this title is considered a standardized prison film, it offers, in a satirical and at times perverse way, commentary about criminogenic factors, crime, punishment, and the agents of criminal justice systems, such as prison personnel and the police. Still, the Hollywood influence continued to shape independent productions, with some film-makers crossing over into this filmic sector. For example, Oliver Stone, who produced the mega hit *Natural Born Killers* (1994, Warner Brothers), became one of the executive producers of *Freeway*. As well, some independent production companies linked to the mainstream sector returned to independence in due course.

An infrastructure of support for independent film-making emerged in terms of the production, promotion, and exhibition of films, through various organizations and networks such as film festivals (Sundance, Cannes, and Tribeca) and cable television channels (Sundance, and Independent Film Channel [IFC]) (King 2005: 21, 40). Historically, there had been limited institutional or organizational networks supporting independent cinema (outside the intrusion of the majors), save the festival circuit, which first appeared in the 1950s and 1960s (18). However, the festival circuit enables such films to secure distribution agreements through both the Hollywood sector and independent companies such as *Lionsgate* (King 2005: 20). The Tribeca International Film Festival annually screens diverse productions, from documentaries to narrative features, with the mission of enabling the motion picture community and general public to experience the power of cinema within the backdrop of New York City as a major

<sup>55</sup> The lifespan of these production and/or distribution companies included; *GreyCat Films* (1990-1996) and *Roxie Releasing* (1985-2001).

filmmaking centre (“Tribeca Film Festival,” 2013).<sup>56</sup> In 2004, director/actor David Duchovny’s *House of D* was selected for distribution by Lionsgate Films. As well, the organization Film Independent (FIND) sponsors and sets up the Independent Spirit Awards.<sup>57</sup> Many other women-in-prison films are associated with alternate awards and nominations, including *Map Of The World* (1999<sup>58</sup>, Golden Satellite Awards, [2000]) and *Civil Brand* (2002, American Black Film Festival, [2002]).<sup>59</sup>

As well, the majors set up *new classics divisions* by the mid-1990s,<sup>60</sup> independent arms (subsidiaries) of the conglomerates, many of which branched out into multiple areas such as film financing, production, and distribution. These divisions such as the former Warner Independent Pictures sought to create and attract films that were distinct, taboo-breaking, risky, experimental, and personal, from visionary auteurs, artists, and newcomers to alternate film-making (Tzioumakis 2006: 262). Notably, the success of the film *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989), distributed by then independent Miramax, sparked other independent distributors to enter the market. Consequently, film distribution and exhibition were provided through these companies and the major independent affiliates.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, these conditions have enabled the majors (and their

<sup>56</sup> Tribeca also showcases numerous films made outside of New York City.

<sup>57</sup> Many prison films (independent and otherwise) have been nominated and/or won multiple awards across film festival and film-making events, in recognition of acting performances, direction, casting, and filmic storyline (e.g., dramatic). Some notable Hollywood winners include; *Caged* (1950, Academy Awards) and *White Oleander* (2001, Screen Actors Guild Awards). The exploitation film has received the least positive attention in this regard.

<sup>58</sup> The first year denotes the date of the filmic production and the second year refers to either the award nomination (e.g. *Map of the World, Best Actress Performance, Sigourney Weaver*) or award winner (e.g. *Civil Brand, [Neema Barnette] Best Film*).

<sup>59</sup> The Satellite Awards honours innovative independent productions, alongside studio blockbuster films. The creative works of independent film-makers receive the critical exhibition venues that otherwise are limited or non-existent. The American Black Film Festival aims to have the mainstream embrace and acknowledge the contribution that black culture and film-makers have on the motion picture industry.

<sup>60</sup> An example of a classic division is *Fox Searchlight Pictures* (the independent arm of Twentieth Century Fox studio). These divisions enjoy a relative degree of autonomy from their parent company.

<sup>61</sup> The conglomerates created a return to ‘vertical integration,’ whereby, studios were provided with distribution and exhibition contexts that included theatres, television outlets, rental franchises (DVD, video) and Internet service providers (Pramaggiore & Wallis 2008: 418). Tzioumakis (2006: 263) maintains that films financed and/or distributed by classic divisions were indistinguishable from films distributed by the smaller independent companies.

conglomerate owners) to reap the profits from independent products – both alternative and mainstream – through newly developed speciality or classic divisions, distribution contracts, and the acquisition of former independent companies (King 2005: 45).<sup>62</sup>

The conglomerates have increasingly shaped their works towards more conventional films and mainstream promotional strategies. As a result, what remains is a brand of *indiewood*; a hybrid form of cinema that intermixes mainstream and alternative elements, emerging in classic division films with those of the smaller, more autonomous independent sector works – both of which support the American independent cinematic industry (Tzioumakis 2006: 265). In 2006, art-house/indie subsidiaries, including Fox Searchlight, Focus Films, and New Line Cinema, accounted for 30 films, and the six major movie conglomerates accounted for 89.8 percent of the North American market (“Major Film Studio,” 2013) After 2000, the next decade saw several changes that continued to reconfigure the independent terrain, both within and outside the control of the mega corporate arena. And despite the competition, several small scale independents thrived against their large scale counterparts and the Hollywood subsidiary speciality (indie) divisions (King 2005: 49). In current times (2013) there remain some leading independent production and distribution companies, including Lionsgate Films, Summit Entertainment, Yari Film Group, Magnolia Pictures, and the Weinstein Company/Dimension Films and others.<sup>63</sup> As well, interrelationships with the Hollywood sector continue, with some independent films being marketed and distributed in their home-based DVD (*secondary*) exhibitive formats by mainstream companies, such as Sony Pictures – distribution strategies which secure a wider audience for these productions.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> These co-dependent relationships were necessary in an industrial context fraught with staggering production and advertising costs. In the 1990s the majors sought to secure more profitable independent fare, such as *Pulp Fiction* (A Band Apart, Miramax, 1994), which appealed to mainstream audiences (King 2005: 26). In the case of this film, it was distributed by Miramax, which had just been purchased by the Walt Disney Company.

<sup>63</sup> In 2003, two independent companies completely outside of Hollywood control – *Lionsgate* and *Artisan Entertainment* – merged, with the former company in a corporate take-over of Artisan.

<sup>64</sup> One such example from the dissertation database is the film *Nine Lives* (2005) released by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

In conclusion, it was not until the post-1980s that contemporary independent film-making was conceptualized as an alternate form distinct from Hollywood. Its emphasis on claiming a cinematic 'realism,' away from the crass commercialism of escapist blockbuster entertainment, has been constructed through aesthetic, generic, thematic, political, and ideological departures from mainstream conventions. Even so, by the 2000s, the definitional status of "independent" was clouded once again by an inconsistency in meaning and distinctiveness, given that so many films could be so categorized. Therefore, for *some* media scholars, critics, and practitioners, the term *specialty [re: independent] film* maybe most fitting in regard to those films which appeal to a particular niche market. Regardless of this condition, independent film-making thrives within the film industry; constructing cinematic fare that to varying degrees is alternative, challenging, and original both in storyline content and formalistic style/techniques. This detailed, historical discussion serves several purposes in regard to both the Hollywood and independent film, including chronicling 1) their distinct and interconnected history, productive and distributive contexts, 2) the socio-political terrains that shape these film-making forms' stylistic techniques and underlying messages, and 3) the emergence and continuance of the women-in-prison film in its varied manifestations; from the Hollywood melodrama to the independent, socially conscious film.

### ***The Exploitation Film***

The exploitation movie has a historical presence as old as cinema itself. It is classified as an important, albeit "low-brow" form of independent filmmaking that has been affected by the broader industrial context of Hollywood. In its earliest formulations it appeared as tabloid cinema; seemingly educationally addressing – but luridly depicting and propagandizing – the disreputable vices that plagued society (drug use, venereal disease, miscegenation, sexual relations outside marriage, abortion, and homosexuality) in a way that appealed to the unsophisticated viewer.<sup>65</sup> Exploitation films not bound by the Production Code initially filled a niche market [outside] the respectability of the

<sup>65</sup> An example of one such film would be *Reefer Madness*. This production propagandizes the ills of marijuana use that leads to addiction, madness and crime (from manslaughter to attempted rape) (1936, George A. Hirliman Productions, Motion Pictures Ventures).



majors.<sup>66</sup> This was achieved by presenting controversial and taboo subjects that played to audiences' "gratification of [the] forbidden curiosity" (Tzioumakis 2006: 139) while these films "simultaneously deliver a vicarious pleasure in salacious excess" (Williams 2007: 299; Maltby 2003: 169).

In time, Poverty Row studios such as *Monogram* capitalized on the exploitation market – its publicity techniques, distribution strategies, and contentious content.<sup>67</sup> In the 1950s, independent film production exploited adolescent misbehaviours (juvenile delinquency, rebelliousness, and chaos) through *teenpic* exploitation films. These films focused on youths and outcast groups, who were disinterested in assimilating into a society whose normative boundaries, traditional values, and social aspirations they challenged and rejected. Three conditions led to the rise of the exploitation teenpic film. First, the teenage consumer increasingly engaged in the pleasures of entertainment and movie-going. Second, their visibility in public discourse, through newsprint stories, made the perils of adolescence an alluring representation in many exploitation productions (Tzioumakis 2006: 137, 141). Third, the drive-in movie theatre, especially frequented by teens, was a lucrative exhibition site for these films. As well, the teenage subculture's defining commodity was music (for example, rock and roll) that explicitly symbolized the transgression of both racial and class boundaries (Maltby 2003: 168). It seemed that the "B" film had metamorphosed into the low-end independent exploitation film of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>68</sup> The girl-in-prison (WIP) storyline became an exploitable subject within the teenpic film, with a few notable titles being produced in the mid to late 1950s. For example, *Reform School Girl* (1957, American International Pictures) was tied to the independent sector, while *The Green Eyed Blond* (1957, Arwin Productions, Warner Brothers) relied on Hollywood distribution networks.

<sup>66</sup> In reality these films were made (from the late 1920s to 1940s) outside the American film industry, which included Hollywood and independent film-making (e.g., top-ranked and Poverty Row fare). These films, however, were distributed through the 'states' rights market and were screened at various American exhibition venues (Tzioumakis 2006: 139).

<sup>67</sup> In 1943, *Monogram* released *Women in Bondage* – an exploitation film about "the enslavement of women in fascist Germany accommodated by the tagline – 'BLUEPRINT FOR SHAME'...womanhood's most sacred ideals and rights...stripped away in a reign of uncurbed fearfulness" (Tzioumakis 2006: 87).

<sup>68</sup> However, these films unlike B-features had to individually market their appeal to audiences and were not exhibited as additions to A-feature films (Maltby 2003: 169).

The mainstreaming of exploitation-type material and distribution strategies emerged in the late 1960s. The moral regulation of filmic content enforced by the Production Code was lifted upon the introduction of the ratings system in 1968, which permitted and legitimized explicit representations of sex, nudity and violence in Hollywood films that now belonged to the R-rated sub-genre. The ratings system is a regulatory code that classifies films into different levels of suitability in terms of themes and content for particular audience groupings. More contemporarily, specific generic frameworks – crime and horror films for instance, many of which utilized the exploitation films’ shock-type energies, presentations, and promotional strategies – simultaneously incorporated their ideas and images into a recycled, more sanitized, and acceptable form (Williams 2007: 300, 301).<sup>69</sup>

The adult WIP (women-in-prison) film re-emerged within the American market during a socio-political climate of countercultural rebellion to the traditional prerogatives and power of a white, patriarchal society (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 27). The uprisings of the 1960s encompassed a wide range of discursive issues, including black liberationism and power, feminism, Third World revolutionism, gay rights, and political dissent, with the fallout from the 1972 Watergate scandal subsequently occurring. A climate of alternative sexualities and sexual freedom would challenge the morality of 1950s familial structures and heterosexual monogamy. An anticapitalist and radicalized student movement critiqued the Vietnam War and its symbolization of the American military industrial complex (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 33). Cinematically, representations of black people moved outside the formulaic Hollywood stereotypes that promoted subservience and/or assimilation to the white dominant status quo (Tzioumakis 2006: 212). In the *blaxploitation* film that surfaced, alongside the sexploitive *WIP* productions “cinematic deceit transmuted [black] liberation into vengeance, [with] the pursuit of a social justice” emanating from black vigilantism against a ghettoized society, devoid of the ills of capitalist and socio-structural forces (Robinson, 1998: 6).<sup>70</sup> Characterizations of the

<sup>69</sup> The film *Silence of the Lambs* (2001, Strong Heart/Demme Productions, Orion Pictures) represents a mainstream production that is symbolic of low-budget exploitation fare that was “often harsh and awkward but sometimes deeply energetic...films that said it all, and in flatter terms, and on a shoestring” (Clover 1992b as cited in Williams 2007: 301).

<sup>70</sup> Some writers include the women-in-prison film as part of the blaxploitation sub-genre.

blaxploitative woman ‘vigilante’ mirrored her prison ‘action heroine, rebel’ counterpart; the former fought for community protection from a ghetto epidemiology individualized in drug dealers, black gangsters, corrupt politicians, and cops in American cities, while the latter revolted or schemed an escape against her prison abusers, guards, administrators, and other inmates, to free herself and others from their carceral oppression in an “unidentified exotic locale” (Robinson 1998; Holmlund 2005c: 100).<sup>71</sup> Consequently, the exploitation film became an important cultural form that enabled African American actresses, such as Pam Grier, to take the lead in subversive, action heroine roles that positioned her as beautiful spectacle and exotic other (98).<sup>72</sup>

The economic downturn in the early 1970s hit both the majors and New Hollywood independents substantially, while exploitation films continued their appeal to a niche market of consumers. This more purified strain of independent film-making encountered little intrusion from the majors, and was represented by several companies that controlled the production and distribution of films – a condition that polarized the two film-making forms (Lowry 2005: 41). In 1971, Roger Corman formed New World Studios; a small production and distribution company that afforded him full control of film circulation, away from the influence of the majors.<sup>73</sup> Corman was a pioneer in the reformulated version of the women-in-prison film (Clark 1995: 84).<sup>74</sup> Several of his productions include, *The Big Doll House* (1971, New World Pictures), *Women in Cages* (1971, New World Pictures), *The Big Bird Cage* (1972, New World Pictures), and *Caged Heat* (1974, Artist’s Entertainment, New World Pictures). At this time and earlier, the

<sup>71</sup> These themes appear in many 1970s women-in-prison films such as *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *The Big Bird Cage* (1972).

<sup>72</sup> Actress Pam Grier became a star in both the prison and blaxploitation films directed by Jack Hill such as *Coffy* (1973, AIP) and *Foxy Brown* (1974, AIP). She brought the black audience into the Corman prison films that were not specifically intended for this targeted viewer

<sup>73</sup> Some of these films were initially distributed by *New World* but, their video and DVD formats were subsequently released by *New Horizons - Concorde-Pictures* companies that Corman formed upon selling *New World* to an investment group in 1983 for \$16.5 million (Schafer n.d.).

<sup>74</sup> The creation of a film is an interrelated and negotiated process, shaped by multiple (often conflicting) intentions, logics, and directions of various cinematic institutions, television networks, and people in the productive, distributive and creative aspects of the work (Maltby 2003). Some independent film work has been attributed to the artistic direction, perspectives, and formulaic styles of individual film-makers such as Roger Corman’s and Jack Hill in the *The Big Birdcage* (1972), for example.

vast majority of all exploitation films, prison-related or otherwise, were produced outside the control of the mainstream studios during a prolific and memorable period, with Roger Corman being an abundant contributor (Tzioumakis 2006: 171, 193). These R-rated titles continued to capitalize on the wanton sexuality, violence and nudity that specific audiences desired – content that the mainstream historically could not cinematically depict until the abandonment of the Production Code in 1968.

Corman held a multiplicity of roles across these titles, including that of director, financier, lead or executive producer, and/or distributor. His film-making approach was unique; use cheap production, sensationalize a primary theme, promotionally exaggerate titles, and quickly release for multiple exhibitions before any negative evaluations (Tzioumakis 2006: 157). He would become legendary in exploitation film-making and in the mentoring of several influential and esteemed Hollywood directors, including Francis Ford Coppola, James Cameron, Jonathan Demme, Ron Howard, and Martin Scorsese. Also, he commenced the careers of notable actors such as Bruce Dern, Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda and Jack Nicolson. Roger Corman has gained an established reputation for some of his work, which dates back to the 1950s. In addition to the women-in-prison film, he made teenpic exploitation and rebellion films, horror films, and crime films.<sup>75</sup> The WIP cinematic female casts were drawn from the ranks of camp stars (Pam Grier, Roberta Collins – *The Big Doll House*, *Women in Cages*), “B” grade, inexperienced, has-been actors, or unknown foreign performers. Typically, cast members were sent out on promotional tours to advertise the films within the theatrical, radio, and televisual contexts.

By the mid 1970s, though, the majors’ monopoly over the distribution end of filmmaking resulted in the exploitation sector being dependent on them for the release, circulation, and exhibition of their titles. The majors adopted exploitative practices in their mainstream blockbuster fare that emphasized glossier and productively superior films that focused on subjects that were exploitative in nature, such as science fiction,

<sup>75</sup> One notable crime film was *The St. Valentine’s Day Massacre* (1967, Los Altos Productions, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), which chronicles the history of the infamous execution style killings of the Bugs Moran gang members, by rival gang leader Al Capone on February 14, 1929, in Chicago. Corman was the filmic director for this title.

monster, and car chase storyline themes; content formally tied to the low-brow exploitation product (Tzioumakis 2006: 193).

As well, the financing of exploitation films became commonplace, with the majors significantly controlling the youth market while continuing to focus their efforts on films for the adult audience. For example, the exploitation film *Black Mama, White Mama* (1973, American International Pictures) was financed and distributed by MGM in its later VHS and DVD reproductions (Tzioumakis 2006: 201). These moves allowed the majors to regain control of the film industry, in their attempt to resist the competition independent film-making had historically provided.

The advent of the video format enabled the exploitation film to survive in a declining and eventually obsolete theatrical market through the emergence of direct-to-video home releases (Tzioumakis 2006: 193).<sup>76</sup> Roger Corman's film-making presence prompted other companies and film-makers to create a host of movies that contained formulaic storylines, plots, and characterizations of the imprisoned woman. After the release of *Caged Heat* (1974), WIP films were primarily abandoned in the US, but continued to be produced within the European exploitation market (Clark 1995: 87). The return to an ascendant, neo-conservative climate by the 1980s was marked by feminist backlash, the re-emergence of patriarchally controlled relationships and unions, and black liberation being replaced with acceptance of capitalist values for the betterment of black society and culture. Nonetheless, the adult WIP film was revitalized once again in Americanized, white, misogynous sexploitative works, produced and/or distributed by an array of companies such as Troma Entertainment, New World Pictures, Concorde Pictures and the non-theatrical video suppliers (Vestron and Cannon Home Video). These films differed significantly from the Corman works, although the film-maker was an uncredited executive producer in the film *Vendetta* (1986). It was in the American penal context, where women were constructed as passive objects subjected to violent assaults by super-male macho, sick rapists and/or masculinized lesbian predators. A number of other film-makers were involved in these works, including: *Concrete Jungle's*

<sup>76</sup> Many exploitation films were exhibited in the *grindhouse theatre* – a setting that mainly showed this fare. This venue existed from the late 1960s until the proliferation of the home video markets in the mid-1980s which contributed to the demise of the grindhouse context.

Billy Fine and Tom DeSimone (1982), *Chained Heat's* Paul Nicolas and Billy Fine (1983), and the *Naked Cage's* Paul Nicolas (1986). There was no place for the sexy and aggressive vigilante, action heroine protagonists and her comrades, of the 1970s. However, some titles – such as those from film-makers John Adams and Bruce Logan *Vendetta* (1986) and Eric Louzil *Lust for Freedom* (1987) – created sexy, protagonist avengers, who sought vengeance on prison abusers. Nonetheless, this does not reduce the sickening misogyny these titles propagate. For example, *Lust for Freedom* (1987) is a *Troma* production which has become synonymous with particular filmic characteristics that include explicit sexuality, nudity, vulgarity, and typically a graphic gorefest of offensive and sick violence incorporated into disturbing filmic storylines. In an interesting and telling side note, the sexploitation *WIP* films, across the two decades, employed women in both lead and executive producer roles.<sup>77</sup> As well, a few 1980s titles had female writers.

However, putting *WIP* films aside, by the mid to late 1980s, sexploitation films began to shift away from the sexually explicit and lurid depictions of young women, to films that capitalized on the sexually rampant behaviors of young males – a morally, more acceptable venture (Clark 1995: 98). The reign of the exploitation women-in-prison film had ended; but these *WIP* films continued to be produced into the 1990s and into the 2000s. An example of one such film was *Prison Heat* (1993, Global Pictures, Canon Home Video). In recent years, the availability of such films has risen through DVD reintegration. This discussion on exploitation cinema served to contextualize this uniquely, albeit 'low-brow,' form of independent film-making, within its broader productive and distributive contexts, which had some ties to the mainstream Hollywood sector, but which also operated autonomously, especially in the production of the women-in-prison film tied to auteur creators. In conclusion, it is imperative to unveil the autonomous, yet inter-dependent, socio-political history of film-making that delineate it as both a uniquely non-generic enterprise of conceptually diverse filmic forms, that otherwise interface with each other at different points along the chronological continuum of production,

<sup>77</sup> Refer to *Appendix E: Film Industry Personnel*. Some of these producers included Jane Schafer in *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), Monica Teuber in *Chained Heat* (1983) and *Red Heat* (1985). Laura Cavestani in *Vendetta* (1986) is listed as a filmic writer.

distribution, and exhibition. This undertaking is essential in understanding how constructions of the criminal woman arise from the broader, historically grounded, perspectival milieus of the Hollywood, independent, and exploitation film.

## Chapter 4.

### Women, Crime, and Prison: A Mediated Literature Review

The following discussion outlines the diverse scholarly work in the areas of cultural criminology and media studies, that encompasses several areas of focus, including: 1) the formations of prisoner and other characterological subjectivities that are discursively and/or intersectionally-based; 2) the manifestations of the prison (discursive, metaphorical, and/or symbolic) and 3) the explanatory frameworks of female law-breaking and transgression – all of which are conceptualized by specific authors.<sup>78</sup> Many studies hold ontological claims to the prison film's capacity to represent notions of reality or authenticity in its varied representations. Select works also explore the prison film's legitimacy as a cultural form to critically challenge and/or initiate public dialogue around the traditionalized taxonomies of criminality, and the oppressiveness, inhumanity, or effectiveness (reformatory, rehabilitative or otherwise punitive value) of the prison, as a justifiable legal sanction. Other literature contends that mediated portrayals have implicative consequences towards actual prison policies, regimes and the treatment of confined women. Some representations are dissonant with the experiential understandings of prisoners' lives, and are rather built upon sensationalism, inaccuracy and archetype stereotypes. Further to this, the commodification of the female penal subject emerges through marketable online products that oppressively construct her and which are tied to the exploitation film. Lastly, I briefly articulate the contribution that critical non-mediated literature on women's imprisonment has on the dissertation.

This literature review is significant to the dissertation for three reasons: First, a detailed summary identifies prior research sites of inquiry and conclusionary insights

<sup>78</sup> These authors are from Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.



that contribute to a growing criminological literature; one that conceptualizes interrelated, popular, mediated forms (film and other sources) as cultural conduits of meaning-making, that mold public understandings and perceptions about criminality, crime and incarceration. Second, in outlining the breadth of academic work in this area, potential gaps in directive focus and understandings are revealed, which shape how my research can be reformulated to contribute new knowledge to the mediated criminological arena. My comparative focus on three distinct and interrelated film-making forms facilitates this process. Third, these studies influence the interpretive thematic lens of my analyses; especially during the writing stage of the present study. Furthermore, the methodology section explicitly outlines how the literature is utilized within a feminist-oriented, grounded theory research approach. The following brief discussion brings forth studies on both the male and female prison film.

The social construction of the criminal woman has a historical, cultural, and hetero-patriarchal presence that has persisted across various media forms. Formulaic, criminogenic themes, prisoner personifications (subjectivities), and images (defeminized behavioural repertoires or actions/interactions, and visual significations) have interpenetrated both fictitious and supposed realistic accounts of female lawbreakers to varying degrees, in re-emergent, limited categorical formations (Herman 1992: 55). The literature has reflected these foci through concentrating their exploration exclusively within a specified textual milieu (filmic, for example), or through comparatively juxtaposing it and/or other sources with such diverse media forms as reality or fictitious television series/shows, print media (newspaper, magazine articles), and non-mediated forms including academic writings and literary sources. There has been limited analysis of titles that lie outside the prison film genre; movies that are not completely situated within the penal context or strictly categorized as WIPs (Mason 2003: 282). In several instances, scholars specifically classify movie titles into a particular film-making form(s), such as the Hollywood melodrama or exploitation cinema with specific titles highlighted for discussion.<sup>79</sup> Even so, these studies significantly differed from my research in terms

<sup>79</sup> The Hollywood and exploitation film were overrepresented compared to the independent film and telefeature (made-for-TV movie).

of the definitional parameters of the film-making forms, the incorporated ethnographic voices, and the grounded theory framework of selective focus and analysis.

As articulated in the former chapter, the filmic medium has continued to variously create representations of the prison and incarcerated woman since the 1930s. Visual imagery, thematic content and narrative structures have emerged in movie productions associated with different forms of film-making styles, with content that reflects both interrelated and diverging systems of expression, representation and meaning, discursively constituted and bound up in culturally embedded criminological knowledge (Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney & Wise 2006: 50). In reviewing the literature on crime and the media, several works emerged as important contributors to the dissertation work. As well, in my former engagement with the women-in-prison film such sources reconfirmed my understandings of existing mediated portrayals.

To begin, Parrish (1991) compiles a comprehensive historical filmography of 293 prison pictures that provides industrial context details, cast/characterological credits/listings, storyline summaries, and contemporary professionalized film critic reviews.<sup>80</sup> A select group of scholarly articles has emphasized the varied social constructions of the penal subject (male and female) and the prison, within historically specified time periods and/or across various filmic titles, *some* of which are compared with televisual, literary, news-making sources, and academic writings.<sup>81</sup> Most recently, Mason (2005) chronologizes the discursive constructions of the prison in Hollywood filmic output from the 1930s to the 2000s.

Discourse is a milieu through which the subjectivities of prisoners and other characterological embodiments emerge and take form. Androcentric and sexist ideologies propagate culturally reinforced prejudices against women deemed to transgress proscribed gender norms and moral boundaries in society. A “cultural reservoir of symbolic representations” exists, that constructs lawbreaking women

<sup>80</sup> Parrish’s compilation includes male and female adult and youth prison productions.

<sup>81</sup> Some of these works include the following, Bouclin 2009; Berlatsky 2008; Callanan 2008; Chesney-Lind & Eliason 2006; The Prison Film Project 2006a/b; Jarvis 2004; Jewkes 2004; Minkoff 2004; O’Sullivan & Wilson 2004; Mason 2003, 2005, 2006; Clowers 2001; Jackson 2001; Rafter 2000/2006; Mayne 2000; Faith 1987/1993; Crowther 1989; and Morton 1986.

through their purportedly deviant aggression, alternate sexuality, physical appearance, mental and physical health, and matrimonial ties, in which “representation becomes cultural artefact and social norm” (Jewkes 2004: 112 – 131; Frigon 2006: 17).

Historically, prison film discourse has orchestrated intersectional difference in terms of gender, race, class, age, and sexuality, through characterological portrayals that reflect oppositional and binary categorical distinctions – the feminine, heterosexual ‘normal’ woman versus the masculine, morally degenerate, ‘abnormal’ lesbian wo[man]; the bad (white) woman versus the bad (black) woman - which contribute to sexist, racist, classist, and homophobic images, narratives, and messages (Mayne 1994: 61). Cinematically constructed stock formulations and archetypal roles are culturally and historically recycled in clichéd narratives of violence and victimization, derived from the male-based prison film (Morton 1986; Faith 1987: 197). Different film-making forms play upon these formulations to varying degrees, with the exploitation film going to the extremes in its representations. However, feminist analyses reveal how particular meanings and interpretations of film discourse are constituted through phallogentric language and imagery. Faith (1993, 1987) contends that fictional stereotypes are reflective of positivistic, criminological assumptions, both historically and contemporarily.

Consequently, such corrosive representations serve to pathologize, demonize, masculinize, stereotype, and sexualize the criminal woman, who becomes “the marginal subject, marginalized by gender, stigmatized by sexual preference, victimized by callous bureaucracies, physically isolated, and preyed upon – ... most assuredly [becoming] the marked ‘other’ [being]” (Walters 2001: 106).<sup>82</sup> In the more evil incarnations, she is mythologized as a predator; lurking in the shadows, a dangerous and threatening creature laying in wait for her next victim. Cinematically, the prisoner is transformed through the language of visual expression, dialogue, and behavioural actions that construct her as a transgressor of proper femininity – an outsider to society (107). Morey (1995: 1), however, describes the prison in *Caged* (1950) as a “site of contradictions” in its function of instilling domesticity as a valorized and rehabilitative goal for outcast

<sup>82</sup> Walters chronologically examined a group of prison films that spanned from the 1930s to the early 1980s, some of which included the Hollywood melodramas – *House of Women* (1962), the exploitation films – *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *Caged Heat* (1974), and the telefeature – *Born Innocent* (1974).

women. Institutional authorities castigate impending mothers as immoral and promiscuous persons whose unwanted children pose an economic burden to the State. As a result, the carceral “discipline into femininity’s innermost recesses” [the womb] is antithetically non-maternalistic, in a prison world that creates women more suitable for crime than domestic responsibilities.(5) <sup>83</sup>

Similarly, cinematic depictions of the female prison authority (trustee, guard, or warden) often vilify her as the *other*; a predatory, violent, corrupt, and treacherous woman, pathologically similar to her inmate wards. However, in the historically mainstream film *Caged* (1950), despite the wickedly sadistic matron, the warden embodied a reformist maternalism and compassion towards fallen women. Comparatively, in the Hollywood melodrama, male characters (such as the warden or the prison doctor) formulaically function to provide patriarchal power, authority and security despite their insignificance to the overall plot in many films (Mayne 2000: 117). As well, men rescue and redeem potential wives and mothers who are shirking their familial duties. In other portrayals, mainly the exploitation film, male power becomes abusive, brutalizing and misogynously degradative. Overall, representations of the prison typically emphasize its harsh and oppressive regime and treatment of prisoners. <sup>84</sup>

Filmic studies have specifically explored and problematized whether cinematic depictions (fictitious or seemingly realistic) have sparked public debate and discussion about prison reform, oppressions and imprisonment as a justifiable legal sanction (Jewkes 2004: 137; Mason 1998; 2003; Nellis & Hale 1982; Wilson & O’Sullivan 2005; and The Prison Film Project 2006a/b). The question invariably becomes “Are such films really critical of real life experiences of incarceration?” (Prison Film Project 2006a: 7). In particular, Mason (2006) addresses cinematic representations of the prison, and

<sup>83</sup> Morey studied the Hollywood films *Caged* (1950), *Women’s Prison* (1955), *Girls in Prison* (1956), and *House of Women* (1962).

<sup>84</sup> Third world or foreign institutions and criminal justice systems are especially constructed as oppressive and corrupt. This is depicted in both the exploitation film, (for example, in *Red Heat* [1985] and *Prison Heat* [1993]) and in more contemporary Hollywood fare, such as *Brokedown Palace* (1999).

prisoner, in titles released over the past decade (1995-2005).<sup>85</sup> He concludes that, instead of questioning the inhumanity, futility and legitimacy of incarceration, these films rampantly portray the animalistic and dangerous prisoner, who deserves the harsh punishment and control that exists within the violent carceral world, where a discourse of fear and dangerousness reigns. Mobilized opinions and efforts towards reformatory change or penal abolition, sparked by images of prison brutalities, are subjugated to the spectatorial entertainment pleasures of watching exploitative portrayals of violence (Mason 2006: 611, 612). This is especially the case for the male prison film. Even so, the women-in-prison film is constructed within the discourses of violence, fear and criminological practices (execution). Mason (2006; 620) contends that the depiction of the execution process as a sanitized, “sterile [and] clinical” ritual devoid of pain and horror “locates the discourse of the death penalty within a framework of legitimacy and necessity.” Consequently, these films strengthen societal support for imprisonment – a paradigmatic solution to the rising crime rate.<sup>86</sup> Conversely, Wilson & O’Sullivan (2005: 479) outline the reformatory functions of the prison film narrative, some of which include humanizing/empathy (for the prisoner) and revelatory functions, such as revealing unjust carceral practices.<sup>87</sup> Some male prison films that carry-out these functions include *The Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962) and *Cool Hand Luke* (1967).

Other academic writings specifically tackle the representational capacity of films to critically challenge the imprisonment and punishment of women lawbreakers often stereotypically constructed. Both Chibnall (2006) and Williams (2002) examine particular auteur-related, British WIP works. These portrayals critique prison practices and regimes that attempt to punish and re-educate women for their legal transgressions

<sup>85</sup> Mason looked at 28 English-language films released between January 1, 1995 and December 31, 2005. He primarily explored the male prison film genre, although five WIP productions were discussed. These included the Hollywood films *Caged* (1950), *Last Dance* (1996), and *Brokedown Palace* (1999); the exploitation film *Under Lock and Key* (1995), and the independent title, *Map of the World* (1999).

<sup>86</sup> Mason’s work is developed within the British context of crime rates.

<sup>87</sup> The WIP films O’Sullivan and Wilson explored include the Hollywood productions *Last Dance* (1996) and *Brokedown Palace* (1999); the independent film *Map of the World* (1999), and the telefeature, *Stranger Inside* (2001).

and violations of normative gender behaviours (Chibnall 2006: 176).<sup>88</sup> Women are sympathetically presented within texts that challenge and reject dominant notions of femininity and womanhood. Far from their deviant public image, women are sensitively portrayed (Williams 2002: 7). O’Sullivan and Wilson (2004) emphasize how the television series *Bad Girls* eclectically pairs informative, critical, and truthful accounts of women’s imprisonment with fictitious, almost cartoonist images that are recreated from the characterological labels (villainous prison guards, or the “mad” prisoner, for example) found in standardized women-in-prison (WIP) storylines.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, supportive and humanizing portrayals of such labelled women serve to garner empathy and compassion from the populace through mediated representations. Overall, ‘entertainment pleasures’ are interwoven with serious ‘message components’ that bring forth issues regarding prison injustice and reform in the United Kingdom (2004: 126).

Lastly, Bouclin (2009: 20) argues that *Caged* (1950), by virtue of its “discursive determinations, normative dimensions, and inter-textual references,” symbolizes a feminist jurisprudence in its dualistic yet contradictory leanings. The film is exemplary in “reproduc[ing] the gendered operations and assumptions of the criminal law,” while simultaneously “challenging its institutions and apparatuses of power” (20). More specifically, Bouclin’s textual analysis unveils how the film critically replicates and challenges feminist reform discourse and practices that raise jurisprudential questions regarding the intersectional criminalization of women, and the reformative potential of the prison; issues that resonate with contemporary feminist concerns (28, 29).

Some authors debate the ontological capacity of the prison film. For example, O’Sullivan and Wilson (2004) contend that filmic portrayals relay “accounts of reality” that educate the public about prisoner experiences of capital punishment, confinement<sup>90</sup>, and/or release (parole), while others, such as Rafter (2000; 2006), question the prison

<sup>88</sup> One film, *The Weak and the Wicked* (1953), was based on the semi-autobiographical book *Who Lie in Gaol* (1952) by Joan Henry and is a memoir of her life in two British prisons. It was not included in the database because it was a foreign film.

<sup>89</sup> The British TV series *Bad Girls* aired for several seasons in the United Kingdom. It is available in North America for DVD purchase on Amazon.com/ca.

<sup>90</sup> Confinement specificity refers to differential penal settings and their corresponding effects on prisoners.

film's claims to authenticity, emphasizing its artificiality and fantastical nature.<sup>91</sup> Faith (1987, 1993) contends that some films present more realistic and positive portrayals of female lawbreakers, in both traditional and contemporary roles, moving away from the destructive images that emerge through distorted filmic characterizations (195). These depictions have emerged in documentary and entertainment-based film. One such title is the telefeature, *Prison Stories: Women On The Inside* (1991, HBO), that is a trilogy of multi-cultural, authenticized representations of single-parent prisoners who struggle to maintain a caregiving role over children; some of whom are susceptible to criminalization and confinement (Faith 1993: 269).<sup>92</sup>

Jamie Bennett (2006) claims that the prison film genre situates representations of the media/reporters within narratives and characterological embodiments (of news reporters, journalists) that serve specified roles. Most importantly, particular filmic depictions reinforce "their own claims to authenticity and insight," by revealing the distorted or exploitative on-screen media lens in the reportage of cinematic prison events, in ways that support the status quo or spark moral panics and the stereotypification of prisoner subjectivities (111). In this way the media's complicity in legitimating problematic carceral policies and practices is revealed (107).<sup>93</sup> Alternatively Jarvis (2004: 171) argues that "despite its patina of progressive credentials, the American prison film generally fails to challenge conventional taxonomies of criminality or the legitimacy of the penal system." Instead, "beneath its veneer of dissent, then, the prison film provides a space in which the shibboleths of American mythology can be regenerated" (172). For Clowers (2001) the portrayals of prisoners in four exploitation films are interrelated with her own experiences as an educator in a maximum security women's prison.<sup>94</sup> She argues that misrepresentations propagated in the depictions of

<sup>91</sup> Rafter examined several male based prison films within her larger study of crime films (over 300 titles in total). She remarked that the women-in-prison films are the soft core porn babes-behind-bars genre that appeals to male sexual fantasies. Meaningful depictions of prisoners are a rarity, with the death penalty film *I Want to Live* (1958) as one exemplary exception.

<sup>92</sup> Some more recent exemplars include the independent films *On the Outs* (2004) and *Sherrybaby* (2006). These aforementioned titles are not included in the research.

<sup>93</sup> Bennett's work focuses on the male prison film.

<sup>94</sup> Clowers explored the films *Angels in Chains* (1976), *Chained Heat* (1983), *Red Heat* (1985), and *Fugitive Rage* (1995).

the prison regime and policies, along with the stereotypical characterizations of prisoners, are potentially damaging, “since visual images have a persuasiveness beyond any vocabulary in or outside a given film ... (Manatu-Rupert as cited in Clowers 2001: 28); [and] given time and exposure, consumers ‘see’ the celluloid world as reality”(28).

Brittan (2003) contends that these popular cultural and mythical images along with portrayals of sadistic, inept, and bungling guards (although fictitious), still lead to serious implications in the public and professional eye. Prison work becomes contaminated with discriminatory preconceptions that elicit fear, loathing, and formidable barriers to prospective new recruits; while for more seasoned guards, humanized contact with prisoners is deemed a morally profane undertaking (90). These beliefs are reflected in gendered stereotypes and labels of female prisoners as “emotional, manipulative, and petty,” over males who are validated as having “real, legitimate complaints” and a potentiality for violence (219). The cultural currency and power of such prevailing beliefs is difficult to challenge and deconstruct within the public consciousness. In reality, the attribution of such labels and also constructing “women as ... violent or dangerous set up staff expectations about their likely behaviour, encouraged hostile interpretation of their actions, and induced resistance from ...prisoners” (Shaw 2000: 66). Equally important, correctional staff persons report that experientially there is a perceived disparity between the cinematic and real prison world, even though instances of danger and stress in the carceral workplace remain no more than a “passing resemblance to their fictional counterparts” (Britton 2003: 91, 92).

The symbolic meanings tied to the prison experience have been explored by select authors. Mason, for instance, (2003; 2005: 203) observes the prison’s metaphorical meanings (the prison as “machine”), “where [those captive men] are the cogs that turn, driving the huge... [apparatus] of punishment relentlessly onward.” This mechanistic discourse pervades the film in narratives that depict the prison riot or uprising “against the machine ...or the role of the machine in processing and rehabilitating inmates...(204).” As well, the prison machine symbolizes injustice through dehumanizing practices, that in some films are unveiled as political statements (Mason 2003: 290, 291). Jackson (2001: 4, 5) comparatively examines how gothic culture, the women-in-prison film and the criminological perspective of Otto Pollak, in his book *The Criminality of Women* (1951), construct the metamorphosis of the angelic, fundamentally



good woman into the evil, masculinized “Other,” who crosses the boundaries of gender once she enters into the closed and isolated world of the Big House (in Gothic literature) or prison (in film).<sup>95</sup> And Fiddler (2007) explores how the cinematic constructions of the prison, its gothic cathedral structure, and claustal dungeon-like space, create a hyper-real, ‘place myth’ of the carceral setting that exists in the minds of movie goers, even though the contemporary prison designs become more physically indistinct and varied in style (Shields as cited in Fiddler 2007: 192)<sup>96</sup> This façade of the gothic prison holds a spectral power in our cognitive map of what we expect imprisonment to look like, both visually and punitively. Lastly, Alber (2005) explores how imprisonment in film creates, for the viewing audience, a heightened awareness of the prisoner’s bodily experiences – feelings, emotions, perceptions, and reactions – through oppressive carceral practices that symbolize the power over the body, such as the induction process, solitary confinement, isolationism and deprivation, within “the disciplinary space of the prison” (242). Such bodily awareness occurs in both the actual and cinematic prison.

Filmic representations have been juxtaposed with other mediated cultural texts, both entertainment and news-based. Cecil (2007a) comparatively examines images of women prisoners in the Hollywood film and reality-based television (documentaries, talk shows, and televised news magazines), and discusses the stereotypical, mythical, and inaccurate representations of ‘bad’ women within the contexts of sex and violence that titillate the viewing audience and hold implications for prisoners.<sup>97</sup> These programs do little to present the contributory factors that lead to women’s confinement, such as histories of abuse, impoverishment and addiction. In another study, Cecil (2007b) looks at the portrayals of female offenders in fictionalized television crime dramas to determine if the characterological imagery is different than depictions in Hollywood cinema and

<sup>95</sup> Jackson explored the film *Caged* (1950).

<sup>96</sup> Some contemporary prisons, such as the Los Angeles County Jail, become part of the cityscape skyline, where they are indistinct from other buildings.

<sup>97</sup> The programs explored in this study included news-based television shows (e.g., *Primetime Live*, *CBS News*, *Investigative Reports*), talk shows (*Oprah Winfrey* and *Tyra Banks*), and television documentaries (e.g., *Troop 1500* [2005]; *Release: Five Short Films about Women in Prison* [2001]; and *From One Prison* [1994]).

reality television.<sup>98</sup> She concluded that exaggerated televisual portrayals are dissonant with the actuality of female offending; its offence types, contextualized determinants, motivations, and intersectional realities. For example, crime programs consistently construct women as white, individualistic perpetrators of violence, who are motivated by greed, tainted love, revenge, self-preservation, maternal instincts/rejection and male influence; representations similar to those found in film, where women were deemed responsible and guilty for atypical crimes and actions that require punitive control and sanctioning.

John Sloop (1996) investigated popular cultural representations of prisoners (both men and women) and punishment, through juxtaposing selected filmic sources with newspaper/magazine articles and academic literature representing dominant discourse.<sup>99</sup> His work focuses primarily on discursive representations based on race and gender. Sloop concluded that historically, the woman prisoner has been constructed (especially in print media) through the discourse of femininity, with representations emphasizing women's rehabilitative efforts aimed at preparing them for familial duties required for the continuance of the species, and the protection and reproduction of cultural morality (53, 129). He consistently found that the discourse of dysfunctional familialism framed childhood histories fraught with criminogenic factors (abuse, marginalization) leading to women's crimes and incarceration. And despite the sordid depictions of prisoners in exploitation films such as the wickedly riotous, teen romp *Reform School Girls* (1986), Sloop reiterates that print sources construct prison release as a necessary "moral option" - that enables the female to be "reunited with her progeny, to re-enact the role of sustainer of moral and physical life" (135).

The cinematic version of novelist Janet Fitch's *White Oleander*, is meaningfully interpreted through Laura Callanan's (2008) essay on the book. It brings forth analytical

<sup>98</sup> Cecil looked at four TV series: *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, and *Without a Trace*. All episodes from a single (one) season of each show were selected for exploration.

<sup>99</sup> Sloop's work covered the period from 1950 to 1993, and he relied primarily on written materials (popular journals) over filmic sources. The small sample of films cited in his work are primarily male prison films (e.g., *Cool Hand Luke* [1967] and the *The Defiant Ones* [1958]).

insights in a story that characterologically intermixes a radical feminist subjectivity with anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist sentiment, embodied in prisoner Ingrid Magnussen, the monstrous, poor mother; someone who values aesthetic expression and primal survivalism over conservatist ideals of maternalism. However, Ingrid's imprisonment is not the ultimate crime; rather it is her rejection of middle-class mothering that positions her as pathologized subject (516).

Bond-Maupin (1998: 44) explored televised imagery on the crime program *America's Most Wanted* and found that female fugitives are consistently depicted as inherently ruthless criminals, dangerous to all victims (men and women) who were in their way. Women are portrayed as rejecting conventional femininity and as self-interested psychopaths who lived outside the control of men and were deserving of prison.<sup>100</sup> Offenders' greed for monetary gains and material possessions, combined with their sexualized control of naive males, culminated in women's power and subsequent crimes (32).

Many authors connect their inquiries to both past and present criminological theories perpetuating similar imaginations of crime. And while some studies are theoretically dense, drawing on particular analytical frameworks such as feminism,<sup>101</sup> or post-structuralism (Foucauldian thought), other works have received criticism for having inadequate theoretical foundations and interpretive insights that offer little more than mere description (Mason 2005: 193, 194).<sup>102</sup> Film analysis within cultural criminology has been limited and has focused on male cinematic representations (Rafter 2007: 406). But in an examination of the film *Chicago* (2002), the female killer is contextualized through representations and characterizations linked to the work of Jack Katz's *Seductions in Crime* (1988), and broader cultural constructions (O'Brien et al.

<sup>100</sup> This show features America's most wanted fugitives. Typically, the individualistic-based motivations and criminogenic influences to women's offense(s) are specifically detailed. Sensationalized, violent crimes are highlighted

<sup>101</sup> Feminist perspectives are provided in some of the following works: Karlene Faith (1987, 1993), Margaret Jackson (2001), Suzanne Walters (2001), Laura Callanan (2008), and Suzanne Bouclin (2009).

<sup>102</sup> The works done by Anne Morey (1995), John Sloop (1996), Jan Alber (2005), and Paul Mason (2005 & 2006) integrate Foucauldian thought into their analytical frameworks and interpretations.

2005: 254). Here, images of criminalized women emerge and are deconstructed from past cinematic depictions in other film eras and in particular, in Hollywood productions. For example, “the feminization of crime in *Chicago* ... signifies a conservative discourse of female attractiveness” and deadly sexuality, which are constructed as potentially dangerous, criminogenic, and threatening to the social order (254). As well, murder situates women within the spectacle of celebrity and notoriety (249).

Other scholars have moved beyond gender to explore other intersectional locations that emerge in the representations of the cinematic prisoner and correctional authority (e.g., matron figure). Mayne (2000) specifically emphasizes the intermixing of lesbianism, sexuality, race and crime.<sup>103</sup> She unveils the interrelationship between the “ever-present gaze” and “discursive networks of power” (Doane, Mellencamp, & Williams as cited in Mayne 2000: 117), in WIP films that objectify the female body in “dramas of surveillance and visibility,” (Mayne 2000: 117) in which women (authoritative and/or prisoner alike) observe other women. She links particular prisoner identities, such as the stereotypical, lesbian/butch, with the gazing eye of control and objectified pleasure. For example, in *Caged* (1950), prison matron Harper’s surveillance of the inmate wards carries sexual undertones through attending to the visual, narratological and dialogical aspects of her interactions with the women. Mayne also contends that, across WIP titles, female-based relationships are paramount, with difference intersectionally grounded in opposing binary juxtapositions of subjectivity, or associated with offense characteristics (127). Ciasullo (2008) examines the historical construction of the prison lesbian from the 1920s to the 1960s in early research studies, pulp fiction novels and B-prison movies.<sup>104</sup> She argues that the prison lesbian, “in her various incarnations, both embodies and enacts a series of ‘promises’ for straight readers/viewers” – providing a titillatingly safe cultural milieu of contained *true* or *pseudo* homosexuality, to the reassertion of heterosexuality as the dominant sexual standard (196). The dissertation contributes to future research in its lines of inquiry as outlined in Chapter One, and in its attention to

<sup>103</sup> Mayne looks at both the Hollywood melodramas of the 1950s and 1960s. Some examples include *Caged* (1950), *Women’s Prison* (1955), *House of Women* (1962) and the exploitation films *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *Black Mama/White Mama* (1972).

<sup>104</sup> These studies were primarily psychological and include Estelle B. Freedman’s analysis of lesbianism in prison which is entitled *The Prison Lesbian: Race, Class, and the Construction of the Aggressive Female Homosexual, 1915-1965*. This source is cited in the research.

comparatively exploring separately designated film-making forms – the exploitation, Hollywood, and contemporary independent film – in their representations of the carceral world and female prisoner.

Lastly, the Internet has provided the virtual space for the anonymous layperson to recreate their version(s) of crime and prison stories through websites that provide site users access to revisit the WIP film in all its formations. The *Encyclopaedia of Women in Prison Films* is one such site that reframes films through selected visual imagery and written commentaries (summaries and reviews).<sup>105</sup> This website posts a trailer of the month, featuring weekly pictures along with short reviews of all indexed filmic titles, some of which contain video clips.<sup>106</sup> Typically, video highlights emphasize pornographic, misogynous and violent imagery found in exploitation films, pre-1980's and post1980s. These images include shower scenes, nudity, and women being looked at by other women (the villainous masculinized prison guard), etcetera . This cyber site also contains merchandizing links via the *Warden's Brothel* online shop that sells *WIP* products, including books, DVD films<sup>107</sup>, posters, and "fun stuff" such as promiscuous clothing (sexy female inmate costume), handcuff jewelry (pendants and bracelets), filmic mouse pads, and cigarette, credit card and pill boxes.<sup>108</sup> In almost all instances the women are depicted in a degradative and/or sexualized manner. Other more recent websites have emerged in cyberspace. Accordingly, the misogynous and exploitative commodification of the penal subject moves outside the filmic milieu, into other leisure markets.

<sup>105</sup> This site, which was initially accessed at [www.premiumwanadoo.com/wipfilms/](http://www.premiumwanadoo.com/wipfilms/), claims to have catalogued every woman-in-prison film ever made. The author provides a historical backdrop to various subgeneric categories in the films indexed. The website has recently been rearticulated to [www.bigbustout.com](http://www.bigbustout.com) although the original website can also be accessed. It appears that both sites are separate but can be linked to each other. Currently, this site is temporarily shut down.

<sup>106</sup> The picture of the day for March 31, 2012, depicted a young, presumably new fish prisoner being approached by two sexually aggressive women in the shower stall.

<sup>107</sup> The sale of films, books, and some of the fun stuff connects directly to the Amazon.com marketplace.

<sup>108</sup> Filmic promotional imagery from *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *Black Mama, White Mama* (1972) are depicted on the posters and mouse pads. In current times the availability of such items may have changed.

## Non-Meditated Literature: Critical Literature on women's Imprisonment

Women lawbreakers have been socially constructed as the *other* (psychologized, psychiatricized, and biologized) in official discourses which create subjectivities and labels that mirror popular cultural filmic representations. The monopolization of research on prisons and prisoners by researchers operating within a positivistic paradigm controls and produces a form of knowledge that sustains these images, and others, which fit with the perspectives, mandates and goals of correctional systems. In turn, pathological constructions serve to legitimize and justify the discriminatory and repressive treatment of prisoners. Critical feminist writings empower ex-prisoner, academic and activist voices which critically challenge the institutionalized and organizational knowledge of so-called professional, scientific, and university experts who are authorized as providing factual over experiential representations of women prisoners' lives (Smith 1990: 19, 30, 35). This literature is layered and incorporated into my interpretive analyses and evolving theory, in the text or as footnote informational sources that serve an important purpose. The dilemma of privileging my commentary over the perspectives of prisoners themselves is, in part, addressed in this way. The experiential insights from notable ex-prisoners, activists, and/or scholars (feminist and otherwise) bring forth understandings of the actualities of prisoner's lives that are very often misrepresented in filmic representations. As such, these writers' works and insights provide some legitimacy to the authenticated moments that emerge from some films, which appear to be congruent with the lives of actual prisoners. Several of the writings are from the Canadian context, although some American and British studies are also explored. Various notable persons include Karlene Faith, Kim Pate, Elizabeth Comack, Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Joanne Martel, Margaret Shaw, Gayle Horii, Angela Davis, Barbara Owen, Mary Eaton, and Mary Bosworth. As well, the male prison activist Michael Jackson is cited.<sup>109</sup> These sources are primarily situated outside of media studies with the exception of a few select authors. Instead these works emphasize how criminal justice policies, practices and programs, socially construct the female offender within various discourses and contexts.

<sup>109</sup> Many of these writers are feminist criminologists.

## **Chapter 5.**

# **Research Methodology: A Feminist Grounded Theory**

## **Introduction**

The dissertation examines the cinematic constructions of the criminal woman within film; a popular cultural form that is conceptualized as both a heterogeneous, yet intersectional medium. A feminist grounded theory (FGT) emerges from a deconstructive, comparative analysis that emphasizes a textured layering of exploratory levels of inquiry, which inductively and collaboratively unveils multifarious, categorical embodiments of the penal subject within individually-selected movie titles. This methodological choice enables the researcher to interpretively and analytically interweave a multiplicity of perspectival ‘voices’ – those of both the cultural creators and consumers (filmic writers, directors, consultants, performers, and professional critic) and cinephilic layperson commentaries – into the enveloping non-grand theoretical narrative.

The research herein exposes underlying images, representations, narratives, and themes that converge and diverge across filmic data sources. To reiterate, three forms of film-making are defined for study: the exploitation, the Hollywood, and the contemporary independent film; each of which discursively and theoretically ground fantastical, fictitious, or outwardly authentic moments in portrayals of the carceral world and its inhabitants, within interlocking and diverse narratological/storyline structures (content and directions), characterizations, and subversive, traditionalized, or alternate messages. The analysis delves deeply into those layers of meaning and symbolism that envelope those emergent categorical constructions within discursively constituted perspectives such as counter-cultural dissidence, patriarchy and resistance.

## Chapter Organizational Structure

The following chapter is organized into several different areas of focus. Section I: *The Relationship between Theory and Methodology* outlines the methodological process and procedures utilized in the dissertation, as identified above and relative to FGT. Some preliminary queries for review are initially and separately sketched out, for both the filmic and secondary cinephilic review sources. Next, the tenets and procedures of a Feminist Grounded Theory (FGT) are identified, as reshaping traditionalist notions towards a more critical inquiry and analysis. The interrelated techniques of the coding typologies (open, axial, selective, and theoretical) utilized in the organizing and interpretation of the data is explicitly articulated in purpose and meaning as it applies to the research. In addition, I discuss the relationship of literature to FGT, and the meaning behind theoretical selection and sensitivity; processes specifically associated with the grounded theory approach. Lastly, some anticipated methodological problems are identified, such as cyberspace as an ever-changing domain, viewing contexts of visual sources and the problematics of grounded theory.

In *Section II: Dissertation Database Sources*, I delineate the primary (filmic) and supplementary secondary data materials; the latter of which includes the written cinephilic 'layperson reviews', the promotional tagline, and the ethnographic-based, film industry insights drawn from the academic literature, and DVD special features. The primary selection contexts for the filmic sources and cinephilic reviews are identified as the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb) and *Amazon.com* respectively. The definitional parameters of the three film-making forms are specifically outlined, along with the filmic selection themes and a brief discussion of genre and the prison film. In *Section III: The Actual Process of Filmic Selection*, there is an explication of the two sampling processes (initial and secondary) of women-in-prison titles for review and final inclusion into the research. I also examine some preliminary themes, insights and categorical constructions to further contour the research analysis, and specifically, the theoretical selection process. Last, the evaluative criteria utilized in a critically constructionist feminist grounded theory research is discussed.



## **Section I: The relationship between theory and methodology**

### ***Some Preliminary Queries for Review***

#### **Filmic Sources**

In doing feminist grounded theory my positional perspectives, theoretical proclivities, research interests, epistemological assumptions, academic and experiential understandings of the subject area and perusal of the scholarly literature sensitized me to look for certain themes, processes, and constructions in the data sources (Charmaz 2004: 501). As such, I have outlined some preliminary areas of inquiry prior to officially delving into the research. These questions are initial directions of focus that were framed from some introductory hunches regarding the interrelated nature of media sources which materialized from my early viewing of some films and reading of written consumer reviews. As well, once I begin my ongoing engagement and analysis of the emerging themes, concepts, and categories in the data, these hunches may hold differential levels of significance to the developing grounded theory. As well, a series of ongoing areas of analytical focus continued to unfold throughout the research at each level of abstraction and theoretical development.

Overall, the dissertation addresses several mission questions and queries that open up the research investigation (Chenail 1997: 3). First and foremost, this study endeavours to explore the intersectionally located subjectivities (characterizations, personifications and so on) of the penal subject within the cinematic terrain of the women-in-prison film. The analytical process is discursively grounded within an interpretive inquiry that links multiply-constituted and reconstructed subjectivities to historicized, criminological, and cultural discourses, which are correspondingly linked to the storylines, thematic content, visual imagery, behavioural actions, dialogical commentary, and the socio-political and ideological messages in individual films. A central aim in the dissertation is to unveil how varied, categorical embodiments and formations are also enveloped within broader theoretical constructs.

Across diverse film-making forms, representational styles transmit popular cultural messages, understandings and perceptions of the penal subject, in ways that

recycle, reformulate or create newly emergent subjectivities. Therefore, it is of central importance to comparatively draw out the multifarious categorical embodiments that emerge, and their associated symbolic meanings. For example, how do some representations invoke a discourse of patriarchal oppression against women depicted as transgressing the law (or wrongly accused of it)?<sup>110</sup> As well, subjectivities and associated behavioral repertoires (violence) may be linked to certain social locations, such as sexual orientation or ethnicity. My research delves into the discursive interconnections that transpire between the producers, supporters, and audiences of these mediated portrayals – ranging from specific film-maker (auteurs), performer(s), and consultant(s), to those professional film critics and layperson reviewers who recreate their own versions of crime and prison stories on Internet filmic websites and marketplaces. Further, I endeavour to establish how the content of particular films is enveloped in thematically divergent storylines that emphasize shock, spectacle, and lurid delights, for instance, in the exploitation film, versus mundane authenticity in many independent films. The way in which these accounts are reflective of ideological and institutional objectives that create particular characterological embodiments, to purposely satisfy cinematic aims such as generic expectations, commercial profits, socio-political perspectives, or genuine aesthetic expressions, is investigated also.

More specifically, the question as to whether fiction and imagination envelope *all* representations, or, whether alternate expressions create a more authenticized or experientially congruent penal subject, is discussed. How, for example, is the adult prisoner constructed outside of the formulaic stock characterizations of the mad woman; the masculinized, violent, lesbian predator and others, found in many standardized WIP films? What rearticulated subjectivities or counter-representational embodiments emerge? It is important to reveal the way in which corrosive images can be contested and resisted by conflicting themes that emerge within and between film-making forms. Thus, the dissertation queries how particular categorical embodiments – whether contradictory, or interrelated – symbolize differential levels of power, and how these constructions reflect a circularity of meaning and/or disjuncture in representation and

<sup>110</sup> Patriarchal oppression may be constituted in either physical aggression (misogynous violence) or repressive expectations (proper or normative femininity) towards women.

understandings. Moreover, the analysis examines how gendered constructions of the female offender are visually, behaviourally, and dialogically related to particular subjectivities, located along a continuum of character performatively – from normative femininity to hegemonic masculinity. In what way, for instance, are these gendered incarnations associated with demonized, legitimized, or depathologized prisoner actions? And most importantly, how are these categorizations tied to our understandings of crime, in a culture dependent on the social construction and classification of persons deemed a threat, and who require legal, social, normative, and criminological control? These questions are addressed in addition to what the research says about how these images remain alive within cultural texts and discourses that continue to be part of our popular imagination and consciousness. The continued availability of historicized films for viewing and the ongoing, cinephilic layperson review dialogue, keeps the women-in-prison film and its corresponding representational meanings alive within the contemporary public leisurely domain.

The dissertation seeks also to identify the diverse and homogenous ways that particular film-making forms portray the imprisonment and punishment of women. For example, how is the prison gendered in its multifarious manifestations? Also, I discuss the discursive practices that emerge in the cinematic portrayals of the carceral world and culture of confinement. More definitively, the research endeavors to explore the symbolic functions of incarceration and its corresponding oppressions. These functions include the normative redomestication and ‘disciplining’ of transgressive women; prisoner punishment (segregation) and secure containment; correctional assessment of offender risk, and the misogynously illicit and torturous captivity of women. In particular, I ascertain how thematic messages and characterological embodiments correspondingly support, problematize or reject imprisonment as a legitimate and rehabilitative sanction for female lawbreakers.

Lastly, the social significance of those diverse and overlapping representations of the criminal woman, the prison, and punishment practices that prevail across and between film-making forms is briefly discussed in a conclusionary post-script. The dissertation specifically focuses on two interconnected themes. First, I discuss the cultural implications of the research, in terms of the influence filmistic representations hold in either re-entrenching or challenging prevailing belief systems, which shape a

public consciousness that affects criminological trends and issues. Second, I ascertain how my research may hold a promotional function, in encouraging prospective cinephiles to watch and appreciate more critical and authenticized filmic representational 'moments.'

### **Cinephilic Textual 'Layperson' Conversations in Cyberspace**

Mediated representations spark public dialogue in cyberspace through reviews that elicit attitudes, affective feelings, and critical commentaries towards various aspects of a film: the micro-dynamics of the creative and productive process, the underlying storyline themes, characterological representations, and cinematic messages. In regard to these aspects, the dissertation examines what cultural texts emerge from consumer layperson reviews in regard to criminological issues and concerns, how people dialogue about crime and the female prisoner, and what labels re-emerge in review commentaries. More specifically, do people reconstruct the penal subject in alternate ways? Do sexist, racist, misogynist, classist, heterosexist, and pathologized perspectives arise from people's viewpoints and perspectives? These questions are considered in relation to how the audience might reframe, support or resist various filmic messages and imagery through selected areas of focus for their textual review. I seek also to determine what draws viewers towards particular filmic forms - generic tastes, aesthetic expressions, entertainment pleasures, or messages and meanings.

### ***Methodology: Grounded Theory***

#### **Traditionalist Roots, Definition and Breadth of Utilization**

Grounded theory (GT) was originally developed through the collaborative efforts of two sociologists, Barney Glaser (University of Chicago) and Anselm Strauss (Columbia University), who emphasized qualitative interpretive analyses over statistical procedures or other methods of quantification (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 9, 10). Grounded theory is a methodological (data-driven) approach that creates inductively generated theory through an active and repeated interplay with raw data "systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process" (1998: 6, 12). The flexibility and creativity of the researcher deeply facilitates in theory building. The techniques of grounded theory – utilized within their original formations, or blended with other methods – emerge across

the academic spectrum outside of sociology, to include other disciplines such as education, nursing and psychology, within both traditional and critical paradigmatic perspectives. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 8, 9) contend that various methodologies utilize grounded theory for purposes from “generating theory ... [to] very useful description or conceptual ordering (classifying and elaborating).”

## ***A Feminist Grounded Theory***

### **Feminist Critiques of Traditional Grounded Theory**

The works of traditional grounded theorists such as Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin have been critiqued by feminists as being infused with underlying positivistic and objectivist principles, practices, and terminology (*sampling, hypotheses, and variables*) (Charmaz 2005: 509; Keddy, Sims, & Noerager-Stern 1996: 450). Grounded theory’s modernist traditions position the researcher as someone who *discovers* phenomena from a natural, external reality of truths which exist *out there* for the impartial observer to explore (Charmaz 2003: 250). This approach has received scholarly criticism for misinterpreting variation in the data as negative cases, rather than as *difference* worthy of exploration and significance. As well, in its purest form, GT discourages the researcher from engaging in a substantive literature review, for fear that preconceived understandings drawn from the literature will somehow hinder and cloud the purely inductively-driven insights that develop from the raw data.

Feminist critiques maintain that GT typically ignores the concept of power within micro-contexts of focus, and that “it represses the broader macro forces that both limit change and create domination in the micro sphere” (Burawoy as cited in Charmaz 2005: 511). GT research, they suggest, lingers within a microcosmic world that fails to challenge existing structural conditions, or to inform social reform or politicized change. Feminists argue that it is imperative to address associations of power that exist in systems of stratification in gender and ethnic relations, and in other socio-structural phenomena that exist outside people’s conscious awareness and understandings at a micro-level of interaction (MacDonald 2001: 121). For example, in regards to the present work, there are broader contextualized influences (social, political) that contour the experiences of prisoners (in the on-screen cinematic world) (Kushner & Morrow (2003:

39). Traditional GT is criticized for not emphasizing the importance and meanings of gender – in its infinite and multifarious conceptions of being “learned, performative... enculturated, and [a] situated social action... .” (Clarke 2007: 350). Ultimately, grounded theory must attend to this micro-macro issue, synthesizing these levels of analysis in ways that attend to macro structures without compromising an interactionist exploration of micro contexts (Macdonald 2001: 120).

### **A Feminist Reshaping of Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory practices are reshaped to create a more feminist-informed methodology for this dissertation. The framework derived from the traditionalized procedure is reconfigured through a feminist theoretical lens that engages in certain areas of focus, as outlined herein. To reiterate, as a central organizing analytical theme, intersectionality is examined within the situated and contextualized specificities of its presence in the research sources. The intersectional criminological and social locations of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, carceral experiences, prisoner reformability potential, and other socio-structural conditions etc discursively symbolize and shape categorical prisoner embodiments (subjectivities) interlinked to broader theoretical constructs conceptualized as ‘intersectional difference’ (intersectionality) which permeates all prisoner embodiments (MacDonald & Schreiber 2001: 43). For example, subjectivity is enveloped within notions of gender-based attributes, visual features, characterological performances, actions/interactions and/or *behavioural repertoires*, discursively framed as hegemonic femininity or masculinity that are patriarchally governed through traditionalized, normative systems. As such, prisoners become cinematically constructed within sexist, otherized, subversive, empowering or humanized representations, contingent upon the film-making form and prisoners’ interrelationships (e.g., adherence to, or transgression) of such inscribed structures.

Feminist GT is also (in part) framed within postmodernist principles. Formations of subjectivity and situated ‘selves’ are constructed through cultural sources (MacDonald & Schreiber 2001: 46). As well, ontological conceptions of multiple, shifting, and socially constructed and re-constructed *notions* of reality reflect post-modernist notions (40) This perspective challenges the modernist conception that meaning is fixed, unchanging and a homogenous consensus of thought that represents an externalized reality of truth

claims – a realist ontology (MacDonald & Schreiber 2001: 37). Although this view is central to traditional grounded theory, in this work, meaning is viewed as unstable, perspectival, and non-universal (45). Additionally, the language used to describe the research process is reshaped into less positivistic forms. For example, terms like hypothesis and theoretical sampling<sup>111</sup> are replaced with the language of ‘hunches’ and ‘theoretical selection.’

A postmodern aesthetic shows how media texts contain traces of prior textual content in their reappropriated forms of cultural narratives and imagery (40). It is also imperative to challenge the ways that power relations and dominant ideologies disregard difference to sustain grand narratives and theorizing that reproduce and marginalize particular groups, such as lawbreaking women (MacDonald & Schreiber 2001: 40). Consequently, feminist thought sensitizes the researcher to look for and integrate contradictions and difference into the developing theory to prevent it from creating homogenized and universalistic understandings and meanings. Lastly, discourse is rarely examined in GT, in that emergent themes are not associated with broader discursive contexts or formations (Keddy et al., 1996: 452). A feminist influence would therefore move GT into the study of discourses such as visual and narrative forms, the filmic media being an example. Respectively, the research interlinks characterological embodiments (prisoner and otherwise) and manifestations of the carceral setting to certain criminological and cultural discourses that prevail in shaping academic and commonsensical understandings of the criminological condition.

### **Feminist- Based Principles in Grounded Theory?**

Alternatively, some authors (Wuest & Merritt-Grey 2001: 159) claim that a certain number of grounded theory tenets (as originally conceptualized) are already explicitly feminist and make for an easily integrated methodological approach. For example, both approaches share some common epistemological principles. First, GT and feminism view the reading of data sources as perspectival, provisional, and partial, with readings situated within historical, social and cultural contexts (Clarke 2007: 349; MacDonald & Schreiber 2001: 56). Second, throughout the research, exploratory directions and

<sup>111</sup> The term *sampling* is *only* used to denote the process of purposive sampling.

inquiries transpire from an open analytic process, free from any major confounding *a priori* assumptions that would block newly evolving insights for reflection and interpretation. And third, GT foregrounds deconstructive inquiry in the open coding procedure in which data are analytically broken down and critically examined.

Some areas of grounded theory practice are contested by feminist scholars. Wuest (1995: 135) contends that, similar to feminism, grounded theory stresses the importance of reflexivity. The researcher brings a knowledgeable and experiential background to the study, which shapes the creation and interpretation of data by the researcher individually immersed in the process. Alternatively, Clarke (2007) criticizes GT for a lack of reflexivity in its tenets. As previously articulated, acknowledging my own self-reflexivity throughout the research process is necessary. An intermixing of personal perspectives, knowledge, beliefs, and experiences with media source data will enable my creative insights to interpretively explore and contour the evolving GT narrative (Cutcliffe 2000: 1479).

### ***The Relationship of the Literature to Grounded Theory***

The dissertation conceptualizes grounded theory in several ways. To reiterate, I do not work within the rigid, objectivist parameters of the traditionalist approach to grounded theory. For the purposes of the dissertation, I utilize a more rearticulated and flexible methodological version that is more feminist-oriented, as described above. In an ongoing micro-analysis of raw data, I engaged with interrelated and varied coding procedures through which associated categories (prisoner subjectivities) and thematic content patterns (carceral manifestations, filmic storylines) transpired and were then interconnected to build explanatory theoretical frameworks regarding the cultural constructions of the cinematic prisoner (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 15). I acknowledge that the research is not completely inductively-driven in the purest form of the approach (GT); no qualitative approach is completely inductive (Charmaz 2005: 509). It is unfeasible to commence the dissertation with no prior understandings of the research area (Schreiber 2001: 59, 60). I come from a prior interpretive frame of reference (509). For example, my biography, socially located perspectives (academic, experiential, and personal interest) gained partly through an engagement with the relevant literature, and actual prisoners,



reflect theoretical orientations that contour how I understand the penal subject and how I interact with what emerges from the data (509).

To begin, the dissertation required a definitive area of study and inquiry, from which to direct my doctoral research. I chose to explore the cultural representations (social constructions) of the penal subject and prison within the filmic text. A feminist perspective and approach further shaped my work towards emphasizing gender as the primary construct through which to understand my topical focus. Consequentially, I could not proceed from an atheoretical stance. I needed to ascertain what theoretical perspective(s) I was coming from and how they inform the research inquiry and analysis. This is a requirement of the doctoral dissertation process.

The importance then becomes in defining how I used the literature in ways that are extracted directly from the grounded theory writings from various authors. To restate, although traditional grounded theory frowns upon bringing existing theory or literature into the research, the present study identifies particular theories that analytically contour what inductively emerged from the data, to elaborate, refine, and build upon the existent knowledge-base derived from academic studies (criminological and otherwise) similar to my topical focus (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 12). Even so, despite the fact that this condition may be perceived as adding a deductive layer onto the research, these sources were used to enhance, rather than constrain, the data-driven, evolving theory development in the dissertation. Subsequently, the literature was used as an analytical tool to foster conceptualization and creativity in what emerges from the raw data. The initial literature review also helped identify current gaps in knowledge and understandings that legitimated the directions and rationale for the present study (Cutcliffe 2000: 1480).

The literature is conceptualized in two ways – as technical-academic and non-technical sources (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 35). Bringing the literature into my work not only demonstrates scholarliness but allows for extending, validating and refining knowledge. The technical sources include the various theoretical materials (feminist, criminological, cultural/media studies), film studies works and critical activist writings.

My work comparatively provides clarification, alteration, and a more articulated description richness and explanatory power to some of the categories that emerge from the literature. For example, I have presented an in-depth and detailed analysis of the properties, dimensional ranges, characterological performances, actions/interactions, and/or behavioural repertoires explicitly brought forth in filmic exemplars and tied to specific representations of the prisoner or other primary persons. The categories that emerged were contingent on the films that I used, and so were unique to the patterns, variations, concepts and themes that developed in the data. In addition, the reappearance of categorical designations, or, prisoner embodiments, within my database and other scholarly media-studies work sensitized me to comparatively explore the similarities, differences and relevance between such prevailing categories (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 51, 52). In addition, within the dissertation these works take on a supplementary role.

In many instances, I incorporate various selected studies into my discussion by unveiling how other authors understand a particular representation or characterization of the prisoner, and the manifestation of the prison context and/or storyline themes that I have found resonate with what emanated from my data. This process creates a newly developed collaborative insight, interweaving my understandings with another author to build upon existing categorical meanings. As well, incorporating the insights from other media scholars continually adds an integrative layer of descriptive meaning to the analysis and textual write-up narrative.

A more constructionist GT encourages a mutual creation of knowledge about the culturally-produced female penal subject (Charmaz 2003: 250). Despite this process, however, the primary categories that materialize from my work represent my creatively-constructed, designated terms and interpretive understandings and were made more meaningful through the literature. The film-studies works provide an additional role in situating my work within the broader context of film-making; its industrial contexts, genre-based frameworks, formalistic conventions, and ideological and political perspectives. By implementing this literature I demonstrate the interrelationship between representational configurations of subjectivity, and/or filmic themes, to formalistic styles, political viewpoints or other film-making elements as outlined above, which provide added meaning to the categorical embodiments that emerge from my textual analyses.

The ex-prisoner, critical academic and/or activist writings and 'voices' (secondary sources) served as a landscape, through which to juxtapose the representational prisoner embodiments and prison-related themes that contextualize such portrayals alongside the experiences of actual incarcerated women. In this respect, incorporating such voices does provide some legitimacy to the ontological claims of my data driven insights; namely, how I characterized some themes as depicting moments of authenticity in some women's lives. As well, these 'voices' challenge depictions that propagate misrepresentation, discrimination, and oppression. These understandings also emerge from my own knowledge and historicized contact with prisoners and the carceral world. Nonetheless, all representation is embedded within particular socially constructed discourses, which contour its meanings in different ways. Ontological claims aside, however, the dissertation does not assume or support universalistic, grand notions of externalized truths discovered within filmic representations that somehow mirror or reflect an unmediated reality.

In the dissertation, non-technical sources include the promotional tagline, the box-cover imagery, the DVD special feature materials (film-maker, performer, and filmic consultant commentary), cultural movie critics (newspaper, magazine-based), and the cinephilic layperson reviews. The research becomes more original through grounding my work in sources other than the primary filmic text. For example, I comparatively juxtapose how film-makers conceptualize the embodiments they create, with my own interpretations. This comparative process was not used to validate my categories, but was just another descriptive layer of meaning and understanding.

These materials all served as secondary data sources that functioned to further enrich my data-driven analytical insights through the ethnographic voices of those producers and consumers of the women-in-prison film. Therefore, even though prior research may have derived similar categorical embodiments of the penal subject in some instances, interweaving this non-technical work into the present study stimulated critical thinking and added layers of meaning to the emergent categories and themes, to enhance the uniqueness of this research endeavour. This integrative process reshapes traditionalist notions of grounded theory, a methodological approach that other media studies work has not utilized.

The cinephilic reviews are an especially significant addition to the research. The coding process explores areas of thematic focus that reviewers emphasize in trying to gain meaning from the filmic texts. For example, I endeavour to demonstrate how the audience processes what they see within prison film discourse, by exposing definitive exemplar descriptors (cultural labels, quoted phrases/statements) drawn directly from single-posted review commentaries that reflect people's indifference, support or rejection of pathologized, or alternately, humanizing representational embodiments of the female prisoner.

Much of the direct engagement with the literature transpired in the writing stage of my work following my exploration with the raw data, that was coded for emergent themes and categories analysed for their interrelationships. It was then that I comparatively juxtaposed my findings with the literature that was integrated to enhance, clarify and build upon existent meanings, or to create newly rearticulated and alternate understandings of the cultural process of constructing the cinematic prisoner.

### ***Grounded Theory Procedures: Coding***

Coding is "the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, ...integrated" and interrelated to form theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 3). Coding primarily involves the constant movement within and between the primary filmic texts as well as their interrelationships with the technical scholarly literature and the secondary non-technical sources as previously described. It is imperative to include several data sources to ensure that all theoretical readings are inductively grounded insights, and not stringent a priori assumptions and conceptualizations (Schreiber 2001: 64; Eastlick-Kushner & Morrow 2003: 31). I analytically explore evolving concepts and categories which shape interpretations within data sources through the *constant comparative method*, and the formulation of critical feminist questioning that identifies and explains their inter/intra-textual relationships (Eastlick-Kushner & Harrison 2002: 51; Adamson 1994: 8). At each analytical stage, questions will be asked in order to reconstruct data broken down in the GT process, for example, during open coding. Theoretical questions may help me to understand the connections between categories which might be asked this way: *How do these two categories relate to each other at the level of their properties and dimensional range* (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 77)? Data can

simultaneously be coded at two or more levels. For instance, a unit of meaning may be given one or more open codes. Coding is a fluid process of integrated procedures that is artificially and sequentially outlined herein to explicate the methodology of the dissertation (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 101).

I commenced the conceptual process, *open coding*, by examining single media texts (filmic) that constructed the female prisoner within stories of crime, incarceration (punishment), and release/escape that were central themes or peripheral narratological backdrops. A single media text refers to an entire prison film, film review or series of reviews. Given the extensive research database, I did not code every aspect<sup>112</sup> of a text, but rather unveiled and chose more extensive sections of raw data; specifically, a filmic theme (storyline segment or primary emphasis), a sequential narrative structure (linear configuration) or fragment, a visual characterological or scenic shot, segment, or sequence of character performance, action(s) or interactions, a textual conversation/narration<sup>113</sup> or a single 'label', phrase or dialogical commentary,<sup>114</sup> image or filmic backdrop (scene setting) that provided unique discoveries, and interpretive insights. As well, these various forms of data served to richly envelope categorical constructions (prisoner embodiments) in meanings that were brought out, for instance, in examples of dialogical commentary, descriptive visual expressions, character performance, actions/interactions and/or behavioural repertoires.

Coding involves breaking down the data into discrete parts which were analyzed for similarities and differences (Seale 2004: 244). Conceptual labels were analytically attributed to selected portions of texts that sparked ongoing comparative engagement

<sup>112</sup> More specifically, I did not code every representational signifier or symbol in a filmic text; for example, every line of dialogical commentary or every scenic detail in an entire film.

<sup>113</sup> A textual conversation would denote a dialogical interaction between on-screen characters or a filmic character narrator's commentary.

<sup>114</sup> In the layperson film reviews, I coded for particular review textual content – words, phrases, or quoted commentary messages that reflected affective expressions, criminological understandings, and evaluative meanings that represented cinephiles' engagements with filmic texts and their broader creative milieu, that included formalistic conventions, (narratological or visual expression), performative work (acting) and other technical productive aspects that may reflect mainstream or alternate formations. As well, I attended to viewers' perspectives regarding a film's primary representational content or themes, and the varied subjectivities of the criminal woman.

and critical enquiry to create associative and interpretive meanings grounded in cinematic contexts (e.g., carceral) – portrayed through visual, thematic, narratological, and dialogical conduits of representation (Wuest & Merritt-Grey 2001: 163; Strauss & Corbin 1998: 106, 110). For instance, a conceptually derived storyline theme, standardized and intertextuality linked across the exploitation film thematically, creates particular personifications of the criminal woman within the prison world. In this way, the contextualization of meaning(s) is discursively shaped through those cultural and criminological discourses, constitutive in the underlying threads of filmic text and tales. Once conceptual labels were created, any emerging data that contained similar characteristics were placed into the same conceptual code (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 105).

To reiterate, as an interactant analyst (Annells 1996: 387), I drew upon my feminist stance, critical perspectives, carceral experiences, the reviewed literature and the unfolding research process that sensitized me towards particular issues, themes, processes and questions in the data. This epistemological baggage continually shaped the theoretical selection process and the ongoing comparative analysis, interpretation and investigative engagement. Nonetheless, I used these prior interpretive frames in ways that enabled me to remain open to what was grounded in the media sources (Charmaz 2005: 510). An ongoing examination of the films inductively unveiled alternate, negative, and newly emergent ideas, themes, concepts, categories and their interrelationships – in a process of comparative juxtaposition with my initial theories, hunches, and insights (*sensitizing concepts*) that determined their degree of integrative fit and importance to the evolving theoretical narratives found across different film-making forms (Strauss & Corbin 1990: 12, 13; Seale 2004: 244; Schreiber 2001: 59).<sup>115</sup>

An intermixing of interrelated and similarly classified concepts created *categories* that, upon deeper examination, represented multifaceted meanings, theoretical articulations, discursive power, and cultural importance, currency, and a continued presence (*focussed coding*). Categories represent the significance and strength of those initial codes that continue to hold theoretical relevance (Charmaz 2005: 507). Also,

<sup>115</sup> A negative case may contradict and challenge my initial hunches.

categories were deconstructively analyzed at different levels of interpretive examination and comparative intersection to those constructions that have emerged in popular culture and criminological literature and folklore – populist and academic creations of the criminological imagination. Unveiling diversity in the data helped me draw out a variety of explanatory themes for analysis and investigation. Categorical formations represented character-centred embodiments (subjectivities) of prisoners, for example, that emerged within a filmic world contextually situated, behaviourally enacted, and discursively constituted. Corresponding explanatory descriptors/names were attributed to some categories through my own abstracted creations, (e.g., prisoner as ‘survivor’ or ‘mentor’) or from established terms associated with particular discourses (e.g., ‘madness’ from psychiatry/psychology). In other cases, an *in vivo code* was used, drawn directly from filmic labels that named particular prisoners in a certain way, for instance, as ‘animals’ or ‘politicals.’ Even so, in some cases, the names associated with particular subjectivities were in part derived from a collaborative integration of my creative insights with those of select media studies authors.

Emergent categories were deconstructively analyzed at different levels of contact and interface in order to identify their general and specific attributes. This process enables me to reduce data into more manageable, abstracted groupings of conceptually related material. A deconstructive focus of characterologically generated prisoner subjectivities revealed attributes and qualities tied to visual imagery, dialogical content, character performance, actions/interactions and/or behavioural repertoires, intersectional locations, and other socio-structural conditions. In some cases properties were located dimensionally along a continuum, or range, that delineated degrees of variation (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 101, 117). Also, visual aesthetics such as clarity and form of imagery (sharp, or vibrantly smooth; coloured, versus desaturated or bleakly darkish or greyish tones; or noirist contrasts and shadowing), provided the structural form, visual backdrop, and filmic mood through which categories were enveloped in and given further meanings (for example: fantastical exoticism versus a depressingly bleak effect). Categories were also discursively related to the broader narrative structure and representational content (e.g., stereotypically formulaic, or traditionalized, versus alternatively non-standardized) in which they are embedded.

The process of *axial coding* was then commenced. I engaged in deeper analytical work in determining *how* categories were interrelated both characteristically and dimensionally to their sub-categories, which provide added clarification and specification, increasing a category's explanatory power (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 123). In addition, some categorical constructions are configured into sharply opposed binaries and oppositions, typically along a continuum of normalization-deviation-pathologization; gradations of difference from gendered and patriarchal notions of womanhood (Hall 1997a: 10). In some instances, categories can invert the traditional binary structural dynamic to empower the disempowered subject of the binary pair (McQuillan 2000: 9). Consequently, in unveiling these categorical juxtapositions or distinctions then, some questions emerge for deeper exploration. For example, how do such oppositions symbolize meanings engulfed in unequal relations of power, oppression, and misrepresentation of the penal subject in the filmic text? As well, how do such binaries privilege some intersectional 'locations' over others which continue to perpetuate discriminatory thinking and attitudes? And how do some some-making forms construct women outside of such binary structures?

It was imperative to examine categories through an organizational *coding* scheme/procedure that emphasized the linkages between several components – including *conditional contexts (structure)*, *action/interaction strategies (process)*, and *consequences* – that contextually situate and shape categorical formations (e.g., prisoner subjectivities) (Charmaz 2005: 511; Strauss & Corbin: 1998: 125, 126). A process of critical questioning and inquiry thereby uncovered interrelationships and variation within and between categories that were then comparatively verified in the data (161). Furthermore, this process determined both *structure* and *process*, as identified above. In coding for *structure*, the contexts under which a category arises are both cinematic and discursive. For example, stories of women's crime were built around categorical designations embodied in particular characterological formations, created through interweaving analytically layered *contexts/conditions*; macro (socio-political), meso (cinematic apparatus of creation), and micro (performative dramaturgy, filmic narratives) (Charmaz 2003: 280).

More specifically, all categories were situated within broader, macro/meso, theoretical constructs (conditions), interrelated or tied to particular cultural and



criminological discourses such as maternalism, oppression, otherization, psychiatrization, correctionalism, humanization, and resistance, as well as differential levels of discursive power, including 'gender relations,' (hegemonic femininity and masculinity) and intersectionally-based structural 'marginalities' such as racism, classism, homophobia, ageism, sexism, heterosexism, and marginalization<sup>116</sup> (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 130, 131; MacDonald & Schreiber 2001: 43; Eastlick-Kushner & Morrow 2003: 35). I utilize specific terms in the naming of discourses and constructs – many of which are my own creations that emerge from my grounded theory engagement with the filmic sources.

To reiterate, as indicated above, constructs represent structural (macro) conditions (e.g., contextualization), normative or ideological perspectives and/or particular (meso) cinematic processes, objectives, intentions and styles – including parody, formulaic standardization, commodification, objectification/exploitation, and/or authenticity. In addition, constructs can be micro-oriented and symbolize those performatively delineated conditions that are individualized, disordered, characterological attributes/states, such as, mental disorder, or more broadly termed pathologization. As well, a prisoner's intersectional 'locations' (sexual orientation, race) termed intersectionality can be pathologized as inherent deficits or pathologies at the individual level. These constructs in turn are interlinked with abnormalizing discourses; otherization, racism, demonization, psychiatrization, violence and criminological positivism, for instance. Alternatively, constructs may represent an individualized, transformative change (characterological), played out within particular behavioural repertoires or series of actions/interactions. To conclude, the formations and meanings associated with the subjectivities of the penal subject (and other characters) are consequently delineated in thematic categories that are enveloped within particular discourses and corresponding 'abstracted' theoretical constructs as outlined in the *Results* chapter discussions. These constructs symbolize the analytically conditional, representational frames that may be individually, structurally or ideologically embedded, industrially productive, filmistically thematic, micro-performative and formalistic (e.g., narratologically organized, or visually expressive), through which such discourses are

<sup>116</sup> These 'gender relations' and 'marginalities' can also be conceptualized as discourses in the dissertation discussion. As well, social locations such as sexuality, class and race are discursively constituted and contoured.

cinematically grounded and emerge. In addition, discourses that vary in their authority and stability structure particular forms of knowledge regarding criminal women (Meyers 2004: 100).

In coding for *process* it is imperative to analytically explore the ongoing interplay between *action/interaction* and *structure*. More specifically, the sequential, coordinated, and varied states of *process* are analytically recorded, as it evolves and becomes contoured by shifting changes in *structural* contexts and conditions (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 163, 167). For example, at the micro filmic level – the routinization/standardization of *action/interaction* strategies is apparent in the exploitation film, where formulaic storyline plots and scenes (conditions) create discursively constituted prisoner subjectivities – such as the ‘reactive victim’ and others – and their corresponding formulaic behavioural repertoires towards problems that emerge from the primary constructs of victimization-predation, from villainous abusers such as the ‘lesbian predator.’<sup>117</sup> One consequential outcome emerges within the constructs of traumatization-submission-vengeance and characterological transformation that propels corresponding temporary behavioural changes, such as violent actions from the victimized prisoner, who correspondingly takes on an alternate counter subjectivity – that of the ‘good-woman-gone-bad.’ This following scheme of understanding is explored and more applicable in the framing of some prisoner subjectivities such as those that emerge in the exploitation film. In other instances actions/interactions and consequential outcomes are less influential or overtly apparent and are thus, more implicitly part of a characterological performance that is conditionally framed and analytically explored outside of this aforementioned scheme. It is in these cases that actions/interactions and/or behavioural repertoires are not explicitly articulated in the discussion in this schematic way. At the macro analytical level, however, these seemingly fantastical representations hold a cultural currency and correctional power that frames both public and institutionalized repertoires of action (attitudinal or practical) towards the actual penal subject, re-emergent in other mediated forms.

<sup>117</sup> These ‘action-interaction’ behavioural repertoires serve to commercially commodify the penal subject in misogynous and exploitative ways – a cinematic and promotional aim for the exploitation film-maker.

The *consequential outcomes* (intended or unintended) that emanate from action/interactions can feed back into contexts to influence subsequent conditions and responses (128). Process can formulate categories (peripheral or core), and it is the organizing thread that brings the developing theory together. Overall, this aforementioned analytical scheme of *structure*, *process* and *consequences* is grounded in our broader cultural anxieties regarding the female transgressor and the criminalized woman *other*, in both popular culture and academic disciplines and knowledge bases.

*Selective* coding is the process through which all categories (across the films) are unified around a *core category* (central idea) which is created and integrated into a developing theoretical narrative. The core category will not homogenize or generalize the analytic findings to a grand narrative; rather, the central category will create a theoretical milieu, through which its relationships with other categories accentuate both interconnection and difference. As well, I aim to create a distinct *sub-core category* associated with each film-making form. Selective coding involves six interrelated procedures: (1) explicating the central storyline, (2) peripherally linking all categories to the core category, (3) interconnecting categories at the dimensional level, (4) confirming relationships against the data, (5) providing added detail to those categories that require further explanation, refinement, and density for saturation purposes, and (6) trimming down excessive categories (MacDonald 2001: 150). The core category also accounts for variation in the data (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 146, 147).

In delineating a primary category some of the following questions are addressed: What are some of the major analytic themes in the research? How does the core category link together all other categories? How are contradictory or alternate conceptual themes and processes understood through the central category? The core category was determined to be a reemerging phenomenon, grounded in the data with considerable explanatory power and significance. And once revealed, it directed the coding of data that are related to its themes. For example, the core category (the *cinematic prisoner – mediated constructions of subjectivity*) is interlinked to the variously emergent personifications/embodiments of the penal subject framed across the multi-analytical landscape of interpretation and investigation. Subjectivity formation and its corresponding meanings are discursively constituted, propel and contour filmic storylines, and create particular criminological messages.

Lastly, a process of *theoretical coding* seamlessly integrates all the data, codes, categories, and the core category into a theoretical narrative that can ultimately be verified in the database (Schreiber 2001: 75).

### ***Theoretical Selection and Sensitivity***

Following the initial compilation and delineation of films, theoretical selection became a continuous, interactive process with existing data, as I analyzed all primary visual sources (and Internet material) to a level of abstraction that surpassed mere descriptive interpretations. Theoretical selection became the simultaneous practice of collecting, coding, analyzing, and interpreting data through identifying and comparatively examining content themes, categorical constructions, and underlying representational messages that initiate and shape the developing grounded theory (Cutcliffe 2000: 1477; Schreiber 2001: 64). More specifically, the selection directions and units of analysis were not additional films, but encompassed relevant thematic content, (including filmic plots, storylines, or other narrative formations), visual imagery, dialogical content, conditional contexts, and emergent concepts, and categories that construct character subjectivities and their corresponding properties, symbolic meanings, dimensions, and variation (Strauss & Corbin 1990: 8; 1998: 73). For example, particular narratological and aesthetic *styles* that created the storyline and visual backdrops, through which categorizations of the woman prisoner emerge, were re-explored for their underlying symbolic power and meanings.

Selection was a process that re-examined, reworked, and integratively included other data sources, such as the relevant perspectival and cinematic insights from the filmic DVD featurettes, promotional taglines, professionalized 'critic' reviews, my memos, and the academic literature – all of which further enriched the analysis. In particular, an engagement with the literature promoted theoretical selection. In developing a theoretical narrative with a significant explanatory capacity, continuous sampling of key areas served to explicate, develop, densify, and saturate categories, and to strengthen their interconnected relationships. The introduction and refining of additional data was influenced by underdeveloped ideas (gaps in meanings, understandings or interrelationships) and unanswered questions (Fassinger 2005: 162).

As well, this process served to maximize opportunities for comparatively unveiling categorical properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 202, 203). A single film may contain multiple concepts and categorical constructions which have particular properties arising from diverse conditions, contexts, actions/interactions, and behavioural repertoires – all of which hold specific effects and consequences for the criminalized woman (Strauss & Corbin 1990: 8; 1998: 214; Charmaz 2003: 266). Alternative and contradictory cases that arose, for example, storyline directions and content that challenge the more standardized and formulaic categories, or themes, were analytically validated as rich and alternative insights (Schreiber 2001: 79).

During the ongoing coding and selection phases, I engaged in the process of building theory from specific details and concepts to more abstract categorical levels, theorizing relationships and connections that are in part shaped by my initial ‘hunches’ (*theoretical sensitivity*) contoured through the lens of my intersectional locations, situated experiences, and feminist theoretical perspectives. Asking the generic question, “*What is actually happening here?*” enabled me to delve into the data in a more abstract manner (Schreiber 2001: 60). Nonetheless, I endeavoured to achieve a balance between cultivating sufficient theoretical sensitivity and avoiding an overload of pre-determined assumptions on the research (MacDonald & Schreiber 2001: 43). Theoretical selection and analysis was continued until the categories and emergent theory were fully explicated, with no new or significant creative developments appearing in the data sources (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 136). At the same time, during the writing stages of my work I remained open to revisiting the data collection phase through reformulating or developing any added ideas, insights, or key areas that arose for deeper analytical attention.

A feminist focus emphasized difference in theoretical selection, by identifying the complex and multifarious nature of the concepts, categories, and themes, creating a narrative relevant to how women prisoners are constructed within the broader picture of popular cultural representations of crime and criminality (Wuest 1995: 131; Wuest & Merritt-Grey 2001: 160). Theoretical sensitivity to issues of power-dis/empowerment, injustice-justice, and control-oppression facilitated a selection process that reveals how these dimensions are tied to an array of categories (Wuest 1997: 108). I examined how the intersectional differences of gender, class, culture, age, sexual orientation, race and

other locations (i.e., criminological) appear in the data, and how they contour and shape emerging theoretical concepts and categories, revealing variation and difference (Wuest & Merritt-Grey 2001: 159, 160).

### ***Methodological Issues***

The research presents some anticipated methodological issues that require further elaboration, clarification, and discussion.

### **Cyberspace as an Ever-Changing Domain**

The use of Internet-based film reviews can be problematized for limiting the viewer commentary to computer users with Internet access<sup>118</sup> and anonymous individuals with unknown social locations, subjectivities, and life experiences which are instrumental in interpretively shaping their filmic perspectives (Walters 1995: 88).<sup>119</sup> As well, the Internet may be subject to time compression whereby the rapid and continuous updating of websites may result in altered procedural techniques or reconfigured or lost archival data previously accessed by the user (Esterberg 2002: 126).<sup>120</sup>

### **The Viewing Context of Visual Sources**

The viewing context and conditions of my work shaped my analytical insights in significant ways. The retrospective engagement with non-celluloid movie formats – video and DVD – outside the socio-political and historical context of their theatrical release or

<sup>118</sup> Esterberg (2002: 126) argues that Internet users are likely to be a more privileged group of viewers than non-users. However, Internet access may not be thoroughly stratified across differing economic, ethnic, class, gender or user ages (Van Zoonen 2001: 67). For example, specific prison film productions, such as the exploitation film, may have a more male-based audience and viewer commentary. As well, people can access the Internet in public places such as the library setting. Therefore, one does not need a home computer to do so.

<sup>119</sup> The IMDb lists the demographic (gender and age) breakdown of registered viewers who posted filmic ratings for a particular title. This particular information was not integrated as a data source in the dissertation analysis. However, in citations of quoted material, in chapter nine: *Supplementary Film Review and Textual Analysis* I have indicated the gender of the reviewer where possible.

<sup>120</sup> The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) *Power Search Feature* (used in the filmic selection process) was eventually retired and replaced with the *Advanced Title Search* and *Advanced Name Search*. These reconfigured searches enabled the addition of new parameters, ironed out several bugs in the original system, and provided for a richer viewing experience for the filmic results (IMDb, 2011).

home distribution, created differential meanings and effects, than if films had been viewed during their initial exhibition (Rapping 1992: 45, 47). As well, the movie theatre, heightens our “sense of vision” and inclusion into the cinematic world, where the spectator becomes a participant-observer within “the pictorial space projected on the screen but not part of it, involved with the action, but not impeding it, missing nothing” (Maltby 2003: 312). The viewing of titles originally produced for theatrical exhibition on the small televisual screen may have markedly altered my perceptions of particular aesthetic conventions, such as the use of colour (the degree of saturation), the level of cinematographic focus and depth, and, frame format (the location of characters within the picture) and the representation of space, and the expressive meanings it represents (Corrigan 2004: 130).<sup>121</sup> In consideration of this, I did not explore these visual acuties in any depth.<sup>122</sup> I therefore acknowledge that *what I see* and unveil aesthetically in films is influenced by these conditions in ways that shape my interpretations, even though these formats have become the most common media through which films are repeatedly viewed in contemporary society, while the cyber world of the computer screen is a most recent home viewing site.<sup>123</sup> The proliferation of new technologies of exhibition has continued consumer accessibility to the violent images in some WIP filmic forms; particularly, the exploitation film (Lynch & Krzycki 1998: 325).

### **The Effect of A Priori Assumptions**

It is important that my existing knowledge of the subject area, and strong viewpoints that are anti-correctional, abolitionist, and critical of traditionalist criminological perspectives, do not impose on the research a prior assumptions that block what emerges from the films and my creative insights within a grounded theory methodology. Instead, I am reflexive in realizing that my experiences, perspectives, and academic insights have, to varying degrees, directed the focus of the study. As well,

<sup>121</sup> These effects are significantly more intensified and problematic with video formats.

<sup>122</sup> Many films become reformatted for television because of these limitations.

<sup>123</sup> The Amazon marketplaces currently provide the capabilities for films to be watched via *Amazon instant video*. Consumers buy the movie and/or rent it for a specified time period and can access selected titles from all film-making forms. Several prison films are available such as *The Big Doll House* (1971), *Lust for Freedom* (1987), *Brokedown Palace* (1999), and *Map of the World* (1999). Currently, this online option is only accessible from US locales. Amazon instant video was not available at the time of the research sampling in 2008 and 2009.

these facets that contour my own subjectivity interpretively shape my understandings and analyses of newly emergent themes that may challenge and destabilize my views. Thus, I continually remain open to new ways of processing what it is that I 'see' in the films.

### **A Critique of Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is a uniquely creative qualitative research approach. A richly enveloping analytical narrative emerges from culturally mediated texts that are integratively and abstractly connected to categorical designations, discursive formations, and theoretical constructs. However, this methodology poses some specific challenges during its implementation within the research process. Fassinger (2005) notes a number of issues that include, the laborious nature of collecting, coding, integrating, and analyzing voluminous amounts of data; the challenges in using the approach with larger databases and variegated source materials; the overemphasis on analytic procedures over the data selection process; and the difficulty in publishing a lengthy dissertation in another scholarly format, such as a journal article, given that meticulous details, or exemplars, may be restrictively reduced (158, 164). As well, the quality of the GT interpretive work is contingent on the conceptual abilities of the researcher. And to reiterate, other more critical perspectives – feminism and post-structuralism, for example – critique traditionalist forms (Strauss and Corbin) as rigidly deterministic, sequential and structured, positivist, objectively truth-seeking, and definitively problematizing of difference as a negative case (Faubert personal communication, October 17, 2012). Also, grounded theory is criticized as ineffective in initiating social reform as an implicative aim of academic research (Keddy, Sims, Noerager-Stern 1996: 452); as mentioned, there is an emphasis on the microcosmic sphere of focus which depoliticizes and decontextualizes issues.

## **Section II: Dissertation Database Sources**

The next section specifically delineates the data collected and analyzed. The visual and narratological sources of cinematically created filmic texts constitute the primary database utilized in unveiling the culturally propagated subjectivities of the female prisoner. Several supplementary (secondary) sources – promotional taglines,



commentary from film-maker auteurs, cast performers, consultants, and professional critics and so on – are selectively integrated into the results chapters. Given the lengthy analytic discussions of primary filmic sources, it was decided that the layperson consumer appraisals (reviews) required a separate chapter context, through which to comparatively describe some underlying connections in thematic content and explanatory meanings that arose between the filmic and print-based textual sources. In this dissertation I did not conceptualize deleted scenes as part of the main feature film; instead, these DVD extras were available to view as a special feature.<sup>124</sup> As such, I only watched and analyzed the film in its feature length entirety. I felt for the purposes of the dissertation that deleted scenes could alter my cinematic perceptions by interjecting and disrupting the sequential progression of the main filmic narrative. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that many film viewers consider the deleted scenes to be part of the movie text.

### ***Primary Visual Sources: The Women-in-Prison Film***

The research explores an extensive number of filmic texts that cross different film-making forms, historical periods, industrial contexts, political perspectives, and creative styles. The entertainment media culturally contribute to our criminological understandings through representations that forge a multiplicity of perceptions, ideologies, meanings, and knowledges around lawbreaking, female offenders, crime control, imprisonment, punishment, and criminogenic factors.

### ***Definition of Film-making Forms***

The scholarly entertainment media and filmic literature has primarily classified the cinematic domain into various film-making forms, or styles, including the exploitation, Hollywood and contemporary independent film, based on several primary elements: the broader industrial context, the underlying socio-political and ideological perspectives/positions, particular subject matter/messages, creative choices, genre-

<sup>124</sup> A deleted scene denotes the filmic footage that has been eliminated, censored, or replaced in the final version of the film (“Deleted Scene,” 2013). This option is only included on more contemporary DVD-formatted titles.

based distinctions/subtypes, auteurist creators, and formalistic aesthetic styles (visual expressions and narratological structures).

In addition, films can be defined (in part) through other elements such as cultural importance and artistic merit, commercial interests, projected audience types and film festival recognition (especially in the case of the independent film). This complexly integrative terrain was explicitly outlined in *Chapter Three: Cinematic Productions: Film-Making as a Conceptually Distinctive Process*. Further to this, I descriptively articulated how notable film scholars differentially emphasize these aforementioned elements (especially the primary ones, as identified above) in how they define distinct film-making forms with the independent film symbolizing the most contested definitional terrain of all the filmic designations. It is from my engagement and understanding of this literature, the women-in-prison media studies works and other sources, that I created the definitional parameters that classified the three filmic forms (primary media sources) as identified above.<sup>125</sup> That being said, my filmic definitions are not exclusively associated with any one filmic or media scholar; instead I incorporate a variety of definitional elements to create my own distinctions. Even so, these distinctions do not nullify, in any way, the fact that film-making forms have diverse and overlapping histories, industrialized interconnections, creators, actors, and formalistic styles and structures. There are no absolute distinctions in this sense. Nonetheless, for the purposes of the dissertation only, it is through these filmic designations that the social construction of the female lawbreaker/prisoner is explored. As well, it is also apparent that the filmic literature clearly differentiates between film-making forms based on scholarly work. For example, see Clark (1995), Maltby (2003) and Green (1998), and King (2005) and

<sup>125</sup> In making these delineations I also relied on information from the Internet Movie Database, (filmic selection context), online film industrial websites (conglomerate, studio, or filmic company based), and the Wikipedia online source. The Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia was used as a citation to material that was difficult to access from other sources, for example, the ongoing current industrial changes to the film-making contexts of the Hollywood and contemporary independent film. As well, Wikipedia provided information regarding generalized definitional filmic or cultural terms, or specific details regarding entertainment personalities, or film-making forms. In other cases Wikipedia provided further descriptors to film-related content that I knew was accurately documented in the online source. In any case, all material derived from Wikipedia was cross-checked with other online or print-based informational sources. Overall, the Wikipedia content was not related to the filmic analysis in any way. As well, similar to the IMDb Wikipedia is within a public discursive domain as an informational source.

Tzioumakis (2006), who have produced scholarly works on the exploitation, Hollywood, and independent film, respectively.

Taking these understandings into account, I will clarify how I used several elements in the formulation of definitions for the three filmic forms. First I chose to use the broader industrial context of filmic production, distribution, and exhibition as the criteria through which a title would be categorized into a distinct film-making form, such as Hollywood cinema. In delving into this complicated cinematic terrain, the challenge became in determining how certain film companies were associated with specific film-making forms. This was a complex process that involved identifying the film-making status of those industrially-based conglomerates, corporations and/or companies tied to the production and/or distribution of individual filmic titles. For example, Hollywood cinema is historically or contemporarily associated with mainstream studios (e.g., Warner Bros. Pictures) and their parent conglomerates (Time Warner) in present times, while the exploitation film is historically tied to exploitation film companies (New World Pictures [1970s]) and (Troma Entertainment [1980s]), for example (refer to *Appendix C* for a list of the industrial context details per filmic title). These delineations were made in regard to the original filmic exhibition context, in either the theatrical release, or, the initial home-based market (direct-to-video format) within the USA domestic domain.<sup>126</sup> Second, another equally significant definitional parameter for the exploitation film was its association with a specific genre-related typology (sexploitation or WIP exploitation cinema), often linked to notable auteurist (producers/directors) of such productions that include Roger Corman/Jack Hill (1970s) and Paul Nicolas (1980s).

Third, and of additional importance, I demonstrate in the *Results* chapters that films classified into a particular filmic designation typically exemplified specific elements such as formalistic aesthetic conventions, socio-political underpinnings, ideological perspectives, and specific subject matter/messages associated with that film-making style to varying degrees of significance and distinction, as drawn from the scholarly literature. These connections are directly related to how I understand the films included

<sup>126</sup> Direct-to-video is a term to denote a film that has historically been released to the public in video format only (typically VHS), or is within this format prior to its airing on television or theatrical exhibition .

in the dissertation only. Independent productions, for example, can politicize representational depictions that pedagogically aim to initiate public awareness about carceral oppressions, both systemic and individualized, that are congruent with prisoners' actual experiences. Other filmic forms may emphasize unconventional visual aesthetics and/or narrative patterns (independent film), normatively patriarchal-based ideologies (Hollywood cinema), or parodied thematic content and countercultural caricatures of criminalized women (exploitation film); elements that move beyond just the singular definitional status of a film's industrial context. Therefore, in grounding the filmic text in this corresponding data (e.g., a politicized viewpoint or aesthetic expression), I further definitionally interlink these films with the appropriate film-making form.

To reiterate, the filmic categorizations outlined herein include the exploitation, Hollywood and contemporary independent film. These titles' definitional parameters are directly related to the elements as outlined above. So then, the Hollywood film is industrially tied to a major studio in historical or contemporary times, such as RKO, Paramount, Universal, Columbia, Warner Brothers Pictures, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Walt Disney Pictures, or Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM),<sup>127</sup> in its production and/or distribution. As mentioned, present-day studios have conglomerate-based ties. In some cases, smaller companies secure co-production agreements with studios in the making of films. The selection process draws on both classic and current titles. Typically, the exploitation film is associated with industrial context (productive or distributive) companies and auteur creators, as exemplified above, and is exclusively defined as part of the sub-genre category of the women-in-prison, sexploitative film.

Contemporary independent films are industrially situated within contexts outside the mainstream Hollywood sector. For the purposes of the dissertation, these films are not produced or distributed by a subsidiary of a Hollywood conglomerate, such as the current 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox, its associated parent division (Fox Entertainment Group), major studio subsidiary unit (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox), specialty distribution divisions (Fox

<sup>127</sup> In contemporary times, after decades as a major studio, MGM is considered to be a mini-major; that specializes in the distribution of "motion pictures and television content" ("Major Film Studio," 2014).

Searchlight),<sup>128</sup> or any other major subsidiary companies (e.g., New Regency Productions).<sup>129</sup> Rather, these titles are associated with companies that are characterized as producing and/or distributing independent films. Lionsgate Entertainment Corporation, for instance, is a large-scale independent production-distribution company, that is extremely profitable and competitive with the larger Hollywood studios.<sup>130</sup> For the purposes of this research, in the case of co-productions, filmic companies located outside the United States, with no notable or primary ties to the Hollywood sector, are considered to be independent. As described, a number of film-related elements also contour particular film-making forms in unique ways, such as the socio-political perspectives related to the independent film-making style.

Again, all filmic titles included here are either theatrically released or direct-to-video productions. The current availability of films in both VHS and DVD format creates more flexible patterns of filmic engagement and consumption, and this has enabled me to continually micro-analyze and review particular segments, scenes, and sequences in all the titles – a condition that is not possible within the fixed schedule of theatrical exhibition (Maltby 2003: 415). Maltby contends that “as the technologies of audiovisual home entertainment evolve ...the difference between the cinematic experience [and in watching the same film in the televisual viewing form] is not to be found in the purist notion of the superiority of celluloid...but in the transience and non-repeatability of the experience of consumption in the movie theatre” (415).

<sup>128</sup> The conglomerates typically have *art house/indie* distribution divisions that market independently produced films. These independent divisions are able to achieve a cross-over into larger markets outside of the art-house and particular social groupings categorically linked to gender, ethnicity, and class (King 2005: 32; “Art Film,” 2013).

<sup>129</sup> For the purposes of the dissertation these designations take into account the delineation of some companies as independent-based, as defined by filmic scholars such as Geoff King. Further, the changing landscape of the industrial context of film does not nullify the fact that independent companies can have ties to the Hollywood sector outside of their original distribution and production.

<sup>130</sup> Lionsgate is considered by many to be a US based ‘mini major’ studio. It has developed ties with the Hollywood sector. For the purposes of the research it is classified as an independent company. Lionsgate is the most successfully profitable North American distributor of independent films.

## ***Filmic Selection Themes***

The dissertation explores prison film productions within two primary content related themes/contexts. First, and most specifically, films that portray the lawbreaking woman's experiences within conditions of confinement; in the prison or jail, either as the primary narrative or secondary theme or locale, are examined. In these instances the protagonist(s) or central characters are prisoners. A supplementary focus includes titles where the main character is imprisoned but the storyline primarily emphasizes her crimes or criminal lifestyle in outside society, which serves to socially construct the female offender in particular ways. In these films a woman's imprisonment must hold some significance, and move beyond a fleeting instance of confinement that represents a periphery filmic shot or scene that has little relevance to the central filmic narrative or characterization of the penal subject. And second, the female prisoner is not the main character (protagonist), but her ongoing presence holds a significant influence and purpose towards the filmic themes, storyline, plot or life of the main character. In these films the prison context interjects a primary narrative sequence. As well, most films depict prisoner escape or legitimate release at the end of the narrative, as a resolute thematic thread, or as part of a final climatic sequence.<sup>131</sup> In these two instances, the ex/prisoner may be an escapee on the run, or have completely regained her freedom after being remanded into custody or having completed her sentence.

To reiterate the content of all selected films will range from narratives and imagery that depict women within the broader context of their crimes, legal issues, incarceration, and release, to films that primarily construct the criminal woman through her status and experience as a prisoner. The criminalized subject in film may have committed a crime outright or for the purposes of facilitating her entry into the prison, be unlawfully confined, or otherwise be wrongly accused, convicted, or framed for an offense, have run-ins with the law, or be facing criminal charges.

<sup>131</sup> Prisoner escape typically occurs in the exploitation film as a climatic melee that commences the closure of the storyline. A person *remanded* into custody is incarcerated prior to her criminal conviction and subsequent sentencing.

## ***The Prison Film and Genre***

The filmic database is not conceptualized as a single, specified *genre*, for example, *crime*; because as definitional categories both crime and genre are problematic and complex. Rafter (2006: 6) contends that crime is a category of films that encompasses various interrelated genres such as the gangster or prison film. More specifically, *generic* conventions can be differentially related to a number of factors including filmic features (themes, settings, and characterizations), content types (dramatic), particular effects (affective), and/or visual styles (e.g., film noir).<sup>132</sup> In conjunction, individual films typically hold multiple generic allegiances and associations. However, genres are fluid categories subject to a constant process of alteration that breaks down rigid classificatory boundaries (Maltby 2003: 75). The “mutability of generic conventions” clarifies that genres are best understood as “contexts that evolve in both personal and social history, the contingent results of ongoing transactions between viewers and [the] movies, rather than eternally fixed and mutually exclusive categories” (Leitch 2002: 5, 8, 11). Correspondingly, the filmic database includes both traditional and alternate prison films that primarily cross over into various classified genres (action, drama, crime, thriller, mystery, and romance) as listed on the IMDb filmic home page (Mason 2005: 193).<sup>133</sup> Typically individual titles were tied to more than one genre. As well, despite the fact that some media scholars classify the prison film as a separate, homogenized genre based on its often standardized features<sup>134</sup>, I elected not to do so because the definitional parameters are not clearly demarcated. For example, some of the films I explore are considered to be either on the definitional margins or outside the *generic* category of the prison film. In addition, given the multifarious representations in a variegated group of titles, it is precarious to homogenize all films under this generic umbrella. For instance, various prison productions may create and satisfy diverse audience expectations, or promotional draws, or elicit varied emotional reactions to filmic features (storyline themes/directions) and prisoner characterizations that are overlapping

<sup>132</sup> Maltby (2003: 75) contends that generic categories can be identified by affective elements, such as the emotional reactions audiences experience from a film.

<sup>133</sup> In other contexts, such as the IMDb crime is classified as a genre.

<sup>134</sup> These features including stock characters, plots (eventual riot or escape), and themes (prisoner rebellion against oppression) as identified by Rafter (2006) are most often associated with the female exploitation film and traditional male prison film (163, 166, 168).

or otherwise distinctly different from more standardized prison cinematic fare. In problematizing genre, it is also difficult in the classification of prison films, because critics ponder what proportion of a film must be situated inside the penal context. Definitional problems in parameters are challenged when films situated along the margins of the prison film genre may offer unique insights and understandings about prison, yet, may be excluded from scholarly studies (Mason 2003: 283; O'Sullivan 2001: 319, 320). Nonetheless, in regards to the research, I acknowledge that the women-in-prison movie is generically classified for some filmic forms – typically the classic Hollywood melodramas such as *Caged* (1950) or the sexploitation cinematic WIP titles. In these instances, I integrate into my analyses the generic understandings of these films in terms of their subject matter, particular themes, and prisoner archetypes that appeared in my research and across the filmic literature.

### ***Supplementary/Secondary Sources***

#### **Ethnographic 'Voices': Filmic Commentaries: Filmic Creator, Actor, Consultant, and Professionalized Cinephilic Critic**

The unique multivocal ethnographic voices of cultural producers and consumers (film industry agents) are interwoven within the developing theoretical analysis. These commentaries reveal the broader aesthetic, political and thematic milieus through which the criminal woman is constructed from; for example, a film-maker's creative imagination, which is then embodied in characters, and performatively crafted and portrayed by entertainment personalities who are esteemed, experienced or otherwise unknown. DVD special features and academic publications provide the context for these sources. Movies reproduced in DVD format typically include special feature extras that provide the filmic viewer with behind-the-scenes knowledge of film-making. Short featurettes may chronicle the filmic vision,<sup>135</sup> meanings, and creative insights from commentary and interviews with directors, producers, cast members, and consultants such as writers whose novels have inspired a filmic adaptation.<sup>136</sup> The aesthetic

<sup>135</sup> This vision may be in relation to how characters are performatively constructed through an actresses on-screen personifications and performance.

<sup>136</sup> Literary writers may be interviewed to provide their commentaries regarding the cinematic version of their work.



techniques of film-making (camerawork) may be also shown in relation to a particular scene. As well, perspectives and viewpoints from professional cinephilic critics in online publications (newspapers or entertainment magazines) was selectively incorporated into the results chapter write-ups to provide professional cinephiles' critical, evaluative and promotional insights regarding filmic titles.<sup>137</sup> In addition, many external reviews were drawn from the book *Prison Pictures from Hollywood* (1991), by James Robert Parrish.

### **Promotional Elements: The Filmic Tagline**

The tagline is a memorable phrase used to play upon and exaggerate filmic elements that will appeal to the interests, curiosities, or sentiments of a targeted audience (this is especially the case for the sexploitation film). Taglines often exemplify discourses and promotional talk that frame a film's thematic content and/or categorical character constructions, used to market tales of crime, punishment, and confinement. The IMDb filmic home page provides the taglines for each title listed.<sup>138</sup> Within the dissertation, tagline exemplars are used sparingly to illustrate a broader filmic theme. Visual and dialogical box cover imagery, depicted on either the video or DVD case, is not a definitive supplementary database but is still explicitly exemplified for a few films.

### **Internet-Based Cinephilic Layperson Reviews**

In chapter nine, the commentaries and insights from the layperson viewer served as a rich database through which interpretive and analytical meanings emerged from the public's engagement with filmic texts. In cyberspace, media imagery and narratives selectively reappear in both leisure-based and commercially driven websites where the public viewer can partake in reactivating and interpreting criminological tales. As such, filmic depictions and images of the criminal woman are appropriated and utilized by entertainment industries (e.g., Amazon.com) to fulfill their consumerist objectives.

<sup>137</sup> These sources were accessed from the IMDb filmic home page, which provides external reviews from various online publications such as newspapers (*Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC)*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Austin Chronicle*, *The Chicago Sun Times*, and *New York Times*) and magazines (*Variety*). As well, I accessed reviews from *Salon.com*, an online, liberal magazine that reviews films, books, and music. This publication also provides commentary on political issues and current affairs. The Robert Parrish (1991) work brought forth professional reviews from sources such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *Village Voice*, *British Monthly Bulletin*, and *Variety*.

<sup>138</sup> Some films can have multiple taglines, while other titles have none.

Consumer criticism and the reviewing of films represent a secondary, supplementary activity, keeping the cinema alive through the circulation of commentary and debates which continue to create a flourishing, cultural context of reception.<sup>139</sup> People's corresponding commentary contains multiple perspectives that emphasize some discourses over others.

The Internet provides a plethora of web forums through which the dialogical perspectives of its users exist within a hypertextual flow that reproduces an agora of ideas about particular topics (Nunes: 2006: 73). An understanding of viewers' perspectives and readings of filmic portrayals, was drawn from film reviews exhibited on one Internet-based movie seller; specifically, the *Amazon.com* marketplace and one film reviewer 'movie buff' website: *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*.<sup>140</sup> For example, Amazon.com which sells crime and punishment enables the layperson to selectively highlight those images and filmic narratives that elicit particular meanings, feelings, and entertainment values for them.<sup>141</sup> In this way, a film's availability and associated reviews immortalize (to some extent) a sample of historical filmic images and narratives, which remain active in modern day textual readings and interpretations (Jackson 2007, personal communication).

Consumer cinephilic layperson reviews reveal how film content impacts contemporary understandings and affective feelings regarding the female penal subject,

<sup>139</sup> Today, reviewing can be a consciously impressionistic practice, where readers begin to trust and rely on the commentary of both layperson and professional critics, by choosing to watch a particular film (Maltby 2003: 496). In this way, film reviews serve a promotional role. This is very much the case for independent films where the cinephilic audience tends to be more knowledgeable and "discriminating" of the filmic productive process and more influenced by "critical opinion" (King 2005: 27). The IMDb is also commercial in nature. See footnote #165.

<sup>140</sup> Although IMDb does not emphasize the sale of films, it does provide a forum (e.g., the *user [reviews] comment* feature) through which movie viewers (site members) can write about their thoughts and feelings regarding a particular film. Consumers emphasize filmic meanings and messages about crime and justice and otherwise, actor performance, filmic direction and storyline truthfulness, authenticity and entertainment value. In addition IMDb links users to online marketplaces (Amazon) for film purchasing or online viewing.

<sup>141</sup> The Amazon website is located at *www.Amazon.com*. I chose this site *only* because it contained a globalized range of reviews from North America, Europe, and other locales. The Canadian subsidiary (*www.Amazon.ca*) typically has its reviews included in the Amazon.com website, but in some instances discrepancies do occur. On the Amazon website *user comments* are termed *Customer Reviews*.

within a carceral system of confinement, correction and punishment. Overall, it is important to reveal the underlying meanings that may symbolize misunderstandings about crime and female criminality, that are grounded in misrepresentation, discrimination, and a cinematic re-criminalization of women lawbreakers through the camera lens. As well, different film-making forms (such as the exploitation versus contemporary independent film) may expose commentary that emphasizes meanings particular to that style. Further, audience generated texts may help to communicate how messages (problematic or otherwise) about the criminal woman may be lost – or enhanced – due to the consumer’s attention to cinematic style and presentation, storyline content and plausibility, and acting performances. All individual reviews are available for public access and are ranked in terms of relevance and helpfulness for potential viewers and consumers or buyers of the film. Accordingly, these readings both activate the text and spark conversations between viewers’ textual engagements (Smith 2005: 106). The cinephilic reviews were not selected through a parameter-directed sampling process; rather, all layperson commentary (Amazon.com and IMDb) associated with the specified films is included in the research.<sup>142</sup>

To conclude, a diversity of primary and secondary data sources were chosen for the following reasons. First, the expansion and availability of visual technological forms and images (at home, and in cyberspace), creates a proliferation of the contexts through which the criminal woman can be constructed, consumed, and commodified (Lynch & Krzycki 1998: 325). Second, a methodological framework that utilizes an array of textual sources containing categorical and conceptual constructions – both multifarious and similar – contribute to a grounded theory rich in interpretive insights. Third, the diverse representations, meanings, and perspectives that emerge challenged me to interpretively explain and account for variations in visual imagery, expression, and thematic content. These differences are interrelated at a more abstract level of analysis (Schreiber 2001: 64).

<sup>142</sup> In total, across both IMDb and Amazon.com there were 1,161 single reviews that spanned a time frame from September 3, 1998 to February 28, 2009.

## **Selection Context for Primary Visual and Secondary Source Materials: The Internet Movie Database and Amazon.com**

The *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb) is a suitable and reliable website for the purposes of selecting films and gathering secondary source material, specifically, user comments/customer reviews, professionalized film critic commentary, and filmic taglines, for the following reasons. First, the IMDb includes a multiplicity of titles that cross different historical periods and styles of production, ranging from the classic melodramatic and mainstream Hollywood, to grindhouse exploitation cinema, and contemporary independent film. Second, the availability of films for both consumption and purchase is noted. Third, the IMDb has a number of redeeming features (Esterberg 2002: 39). It has a clear statement of purpose, and receives both commercial and corporate sponsorship. A variable audience of thousands of users utilizes the website per month. Regular updates stabilize and make additions to the filmic database and all other informational details related to listed titles.<sup>143</sup> The IMDb monitors user content for inappropriate material and commentary. Fourth, the site also catalogues a diversity of prisoner films within storylines that commence either prior to, during, or following a woman's crime(s) and incarceration. And fifth, IMDb site users can access the Amazon marketplace through a purchasing link on each film's IMDb home page.

## **A Visual and Narratological Inquiry of Primary Source Material: The Micro-Dynamics of Exploring Filmic Texts**

The following discussion describes, in general terms, those visual and narratological aspects of the filmic text that I see or look for during my repeated viewing experiences. The *Results* chapters correspondingly incorporate these elements into the discussions, to bring meaning and understanding to the formation of emergent prisoner embodiments embedded within formalistic conventions. The aesthetics of 'form' and

<sup>143</sup> There are additions to the filmic database and all other informational details related to individual films. The reliability and accuracy of the information contained on IMDb is maintained through a large number of consistency checks carried out by the IMDb staff. The filmic database details are submitted by public (site users) and movie industry personnel. Given the sheer volume of information on IMDb, occasional mistakes are revealed and are quickly verified and fixed. The site is continuously monitored and updated for such corrections.

meaning through visual expression are related to the techniques of cinematography<sup>144</sup> such as camerawork (e.g., camera and spatial positioning [angular cinematic shots]), image quality and texturing, lighting, and colour (Pramaggiore & Wallis 2008: 134-171; King 2005: 107). Cinematography shapes the viewer's understandings of time, space, and image perception. For example, the placement and movement of the camera [in space] creates different scales of shots, which determine viewer's perceptions of "characters, events, and objects in the world on screen" (Pramaggiore & Wallis 2008: 139).<sup>145</sup> The choice of film stock can determine the clarity and texturing of filmic imagery – from the smooth fine-grained images typically associated with Hollywood productions, to the grainy imagery associated with some independent films. This rough and unpolished look may be an unavoidable by-product of industrial budgetary constraints, or a deliberate act that produces a more documentary feel, and less-standardized visual aesthetic (Pramaggiore & Wallis: 2008: 165).

Mise-en-scene is conceptualized as the on-screen world indicative of thematic setting, character development, filmic intensity, and mood (Pramaggiore & Wallis 2008: 88). As well, it refers to how movie sets, performers, lighting (e.g., noirist),<sup>146</sup> and props are locationally situated within a film's frame.<sup>147</sup> Through the theatrics of space, space becomes expressive "as a meaningful organization of elements... ." (Maltby 2003: 328).

<sup>144</sup> This list does not include *all* the techniques available to cinematographers; rather, it focuses only on those limited elements that I examine in this dissertation. Cinematography is too complex a process to explore in its entirety. As well, I have tried to emphasize the most visible and recognizable '*forms*,' that are subsequently described above.

<sup>145</sup> The cinematic shot has three important components: "camera height, angle *on* the action, and distance *from* the action" (Pramaggiore & Wallis: 2008: 139). The latter component specifically refers to a particular shot; that is, the distance or space between the camera and the filmic character which affects the viewer's level of engagement with them (long or medium shot, etc.). Diverse camerawork such as angles and movements do not have universal meanings, but rather change across different film titles or filmic forms (Corrigan 2004: 62).

<sup>146</sup> In *film noir*, the low-key lighting conditions produce meaning; for example, "a sombre or forbidding [filmic] mood," mainly through shadowed lines and shapes and "many grades of lightness and darkness" that fall upon the image rather than its depth relations (Pramaggiore & Wallis 2008: 111, 112).

<sup>147</sup> I have chosen only particular elements of mise-en scene to focus on; namely, setting, costumes, props, and character performance. For example, how does acting construct meaning in terms of authenticity versus fantasy? Costumes and props (movable objects) used or owned by characters can functionally establish and contour characterological meanings (Pramaggiore & Wallis 2008: 1030).

Within the prison film, for example, characters can be situated in either *open* or *more* constricted space, depending on the gendered incarnation of the penal setting and/or the punishment regime such as segregative confinement. Spatial arrangement may depict feelings of alienation, emotional distance, or freedom in the former instance and either physical or psychological entrapment, isolation and/or deprivation in the latter case (Pramaggiore & Wallis: 2008: 115). Filmic settings may give significant meaning to a story's characterizations, action, and central themes, and lighting, either natural or artificial, can create a particular mood and atmosphere through illuminating scenes, characters, or objects in various ways (Corrigan 2004: 50, 52).

Narrative structuring sequentially orders filmic events in space and time. Some authors, such as Cohen and Shires, contend that narrative is both a verbal and visual medium of storytelling, with the camera symbolizing a verbal activity or performance, in showing how the visual is going to be seen on the screen (as cited in Maltby 2003: 458, 459; Maltby 2003: 459).<sup>148</sup> The standardized, narrative pattern dominant in mainstream filmmaking is the *classical style*, marked by a linear sequence of cause and effect that is organized around storylines, plot(s), individual scenes, and character actions, goals, and motivations (King 2005: 60). The 'narrative sequence' is facilitated by the arrangement of edited visual images which influence how the audience 'sees the storyline' (Pramaggiore 2008: 203). Diverse film making styles such as the independent film may depart from this mainstream convention in varying degrees or levels of difference. Narratives structuring may be downplayed, absent, or alternately patterned with non-closure to filmic storylines.

The editing process incorporates individual shots into larger components of a film to convey more complex meanings through enjoining separate shots into a scene or a unified group of shots or scenes into a sequence (Corrigan 2004: 63).<sup>149</sup> Very often scenes are actions confined to one place and time, while a sequence would involve

<sup>148</sup> Conceptualizing narrative beyond a form of linguistic activity has not been universally articulated across the filmic literature. Although my dissertation does not explicitly conceptualize narrative structure as visual, I nevertheless try to 'see' narrative patterns especially through a grounded theory methodology.

<sup>149</sup> The editing process is extremely complex and involves a number of techniques. This dissertation only explores it at a very introductory level.

extended time and action and a move across locales (Corrigan 2004: 63). In presenting filmic exemplars into the textual write-up, typically the scenes that are brought forth are illustrative of snippets, or parts of a scene. Certain factors such as editing pace or rhythm (shot length), the establishing shot, shot transitions, and flashbacks sequences – are used in classical continuity editing, to create an unobtrusive, continuous flow of imagery and narratives.

As well, sound serves several roles; it is narratologically directive, symbolically meaningful and expressively affective. In some instances, I interpret the symbolism of certain diegetic or non-diegetic sounds in relation to filmic imagery or thematic content. Diegetic sound is that which is included within the on-screen world. Non-diegetic sound is the background music that sets the tone of a scene, and is heard by the audience only (Maltby 2003: 581). Musical elements can trigger particular events that are going to impact a character or may convey a character's emotional state (Maltby 2003: 461).

In comparatively highlighting some of the differences between filmic forms, it is necessary to conceptualize these in *relative* rather than *absolute* terms, embracing gradations of difference between the two, as with Hollywood and independent filmmaking, for example (King 2005: 76, 104). I do not assume, for instance, that all independent films contain the same elements as others, or that their stylistic techniques, which depart from classical conventions, are unique only to this form of filmmaking. I propose instead to acknowledge that some Hollywood films use various devices that similarly stray from traditional styles and narratives (Tzioumakis 2006: 9).

## **Section III: The Actual Process of Film Selection**

### ***Initial (Formal) Selection Process of Films***

Prior to formally commencing with the research, I conducted *purposive sampling* for all primary visual sources. A feminist grounded theory methodology allows for an initial selection process that has some pre-determined criterion structure (Schreiber 2001: 64). This non-probability sampling procedure was chosen as it best fit with the aims and purpose of a research endeavour that required a select number of films to examine from hundreds of titles listed on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) (Babbie

1992: 230). Although I had prior knowledge of various prison films, I did not know the *entire* historical range of titles, nor did I have the time to view all the prison movies listed on the IMDb.

The following discussion explicates the process through which an initial group of films was drawn and refined in focus upon the formal commencement of the research.<sup>150</sup> The selection process was carried out during a one week period, in August, 2008<sup>151</sup> and involved three stages that included: 1) the final *preparation* for the filmic parameter/criteria determinations and selection procedural method, 2) the *formal* drawing of films through the IMDb power search engine and 3) the *filtering* of selected titles through additional parameters (thematic, exclusionary, numeric [e.g., user rating vote numbers]). During the *preparatory* phase, I reviewed, rearticulated and solidified the primary and secondary keywords and the filmic parameters to be used as selection criteria in the drawing of films. Once these determinations were made I conducted a few practice selection procedural trials and made any necessary adjustments to the parameters.<sup>152</sup> I then proceeded onto the next stage. During the filmic *selection/sampling* phase, on August 27, 2008, I conducted a twofold phase of searches – a generalized, and then more advanced selection of films. In previously perusing the IMDb website and conducting practice searches, I knew that the prison film database was exceedingly large. Therefore, I first redetermined the total number of films that were associated with imprisonment (women’s and otherwise) in *generalized* searches by using two separate, *primary* keywords on the *IMDb Power Search Engine*, namely, the descriptors *women’s-prison* and *prison* – which drew 373 and 1,907 titles, respectively. I included films that crossed *all genres* and were *any colour*, black and white included. As

<sup>150</sup> A similar process was preliminarily explicated in the prospectus document presented at colloquium on May 15, 2008. But subsequent to this time various adjustments were made that were incorporated into the research upon its formal commencement.

<sup>151</sup> The exact dates were from Sunday August 24 to Saturday August 30, 2008.

<sup>152</sup> Since the initial colloquium some of the changes to the filmic parameters were as follows: primary keyword (*prison*), criteria for inquiry (*country of production* [USA or Canada]) and also, exclusion of the *sales option* (*merchandizing link*) on the IMDb, because in some cases there were discrepancies. Some films were available for sale on the Amazon.com/ca marketplaces, yet had no merchandizing availability through their IMDb home page link.



well, *television movies* and *direct-to-video* titles were included.<sup>153</sup> In addition, I entered two exclusionary parameters, *ignoring TV series* and *TV episodes* into the mix. Only *exact matches* were included. Given the expected voluminous number of associated works drawn, I did not go through these titles, but rather decided to incorporate the additional classificatory criteria, in order to further specify and reduce the database numbers to more manageable groupings of films per keyword.

Filmic sources required a systematic definition of selection criteria to ensure a methodologically secure procedure. Nicole Rafter (2007: 406) warns that if selection principles for extensive databases such as filmic sources (or other media forms) are completely unsystematic, then methodological problems can emerge.<sup>154</sup> The absence of any specific criteria or parameters which, in part, draw a more tailored collection of films, can result in adapting one's data and research to support almost any argument.

A more refined and *advanced* set of searches using the same primary keywords was carried out, delineating certain criteria for inquiry; specifically, *country of origin* (Canada or USA)<sup>155</sup>, *language* (English),<sup>156</sup> and *year range* (1950-2008). Once again,

<sup>153</sup> I included TV movies in the selection process because other scholars (e.g., Faith) had comparatively juxtaposed TV and filmic representations of the prison and female prisoner. As well, it became apparent in my reading of the media studies literature that the TV movie offered alternate and differentiated portrayals. For example, these films present familial-based, melodramatic storylines that target the female viewer.

<sup>154</sup> The IMDb has been a site used to sample films for other scholarly work. Nicole Rafter (2000, 2006) searched IMDb to determine the voluminous number of crime movies in existence (over 10,000 titles) (including the telefeature) prior to setting the selection criteria for her research on crime films and society. In a subsequent article, Rafter (2007: 406) used the power search feature to selectively draw a specific sample of sex crime movies using the search keywords *sex crimes*, and delineating two other selection criteria – years (2000 to 2004), country of origin (United States), and several exclusionary criteria (direct-to-video productions, for example). Dawn Cecil (2006) also used IMDb to gain a description of films that were used to generate a list of female delinquency titles for her research.

<sup>155</sup> All the films were US productions or co-productions.

<sup>156</sup> All foreign films (i.e., exclusively foreign language productions) were excluded from the research. As well, foreign films were not conceptualized as co-productions with either the USA or Canada. Rather foreign films would be completely out of the North American context. It would be very problematic and labour intensive to explore the broader cultural meanings and creative contexts of films that were *exclusively* within the industrial milieu of overseas production, distribution, exhibition and film-maker auteurs from several countries – Europe, Asia, and the United Kingdom.

*picture colour* (any), and *all genres*<sup>157</sup> were entered into the appropriate parameter fields. As well, both *television movies* and *direct-to-video titles* were included. Other optional *search* features could be utilized to modify the filmic features, so as to integrate additional criteria. I chose *user comments* as the *only* parameter to use. The search emphasized *exact* word matches only, and again excluded *TV series* and *TV episodes* from being selected in the results.<sup>158</sup> All films were listed with their alternate, or (*aka*) *also known as*, titles shown. Choosing women-in-prison (WIP) movies around a set of pre-determined parameters (inclusionary/exclusionary criteria) drew a diversity of films, associated with various time periods and film-making forms. Even though I have an extensive knowledge of the content, range, and availability of WIP films, I did not know the *full* extent of titles within the time frame specified above or within the specific filmic delineations (the exploitation, Hollywood and independent film). Thus, it was necessary to search for movies on an existing media database such as IMDb, in order to ensure that a preliminary group of movies would be selected from a representative and variegated number of listed titles on the website.

**Table 5-1 Specific Criteria for Inquiry: IMDb Power Search Engine**

Criteria used while searching for Films
Language – English
Year of Production (Range) – 1950 to 2008
Country of Origin – Canada or USA
Colour – Any
All Genres
Exact Matches Only
Included – TV Movies and Movies (Direct-to-Video)
Excluded – TV Series and TV Episodes
Must Have – User Comments

A formal selection of 129 films was drawn using the keywords *women's- prison*, and the specified criteria as outlined above during the same date, August 27, 2008. One additional primary search, using the keyword of *prison*, yielded 723 films respectively. In order to ensure that I had not missed any relevant films, I randomly searched IMDb with

<sup>157</sup> I utilized the *all genres* parameter on the IMDb search engine to include films associated with any genre. I did not want to systematically limit the titles selected to specific generic categories that may be differentially defined and attributed to films by the IMDb site staff and filmic viewers.

<sup>158</sup> Refer to *Appendix A: Filmic Parameters in the Selection Process: Purposive Sampling* - for a list and description of the specific criteria incorporated into the IMDb power search engine.

a number of secondary keywords and phrases, to include any additional titles not previously identified.<sup>159</sup> The aforementioned selection criteria developed for the major searches were also used. This secondary process was not deemed to be part of the primary selection procedures, because the two main keyword search categories drew the majority of films. Nevertheless, each secondary keyword search drew a number of titles.<sup>160</sup> In all keyword searches (major and secondary) that did not specifically refer to the female prisoner, using the terms *prison*, *prisoner*, *jail* and others, I reviewed all titles by accessing the IMDb filmic home page for each, to determine the number of female prison films and to determine if such titles fit with my content-related parameters, as outlined in the *filmic selection themes* section above specifically, the imprisonment of women within particularized thematic contexts.<sup>161</sup> I also carried out this process for all films selected that specifically referred to the female offender, drawn from keywords such as *female-criminal*. Usually, the relevant information on IMDb enabled me to make such a determination, as in the case of the films drawn under *women's-prison*; but when I was unsure, I then located the title for viewing.<sup>162</sup> In turn, all the films drawn were subject to various *filters* before their final inclusion into the research database.

**Table 5-2      *Number of Filmic Titles Drawn Per Keyword Search – Primary Keywords Only and with Selection Parameters/Criteria***

<b>Initial Two Primary Keywords</b>	<b>Number of Titles Found</b>
Women's-Prison	373 Titles
Prison	1,907 Titles
<b>Two Primary Keywords – Selection Parameters</b>	<b>Number of Titles Found</b>
Women's-Prison	129 Titles
Prison	723 Titles

<sup>159</sup> These filmic descriptors emerged by reading through various films' plot keywords list. As well I created some myself. It was from here that I incorporated them into secondary power searches. These keywords are listed in *Appendix A*.

<sup>160</sup> *Appendix B: Total Number of Films Drawn Per Keyword* shows the total number of films drawn from each primary and secondary keyword search for August 2008 and the subsequent selection date of February 2009.

<sup>161</sup> Most of the films drawn were male prison titles.

<sup>162</sup> This reviewing occurred immediately after the selection period, once I had accessed the films. I reviewed under 10 filmic titles in these circumstances.

During the *filtering phase*, this preliminary group of selected films was further sifted through several parameters.<sup>163</sup> This parameter-based information was accessed off the IMDb filmic home page.<sup>164</sup> For one, *all* films included in the dissertation sample *must* meet one of two *numeric parameters*. The film must have earned 100 or more user rating votes on IMDb, with at least five *user comments/customer reviews* across the *IMDb* and *Amazon.com*, or within a single site. The minimum user comments/customer reviews only have to satisfy the numeric parameter. Therefore, a film is included even if all reviews are posted on only one of the online websites, for example, the *IMDb*. Otherwise, films that have not met the minimum numeric parameter of 100 rating votes must have earned 10 or more user comments/customer reviews across these two online websites, or within a single site. In both cases, the film must have earned a minimum user rating of 2.0/10 (at the time of the selection/sampling). This latter ‘rating’ filtering parameter precluded an over-emphasis of movies from a particular time period, mainly the 1990s and 2000s, which would contain redundant themes, plots, narratives, and imagery which offers little new information beyond what other more highly ranked films provided. This condition pertains specifically to the exploitation titles.

At the time of the sampling of filmic titles, typically the IMDb had a purchasing link on each filmic home page that connected the site user to the Amazon marketplace. The interlinkage of both online sites solidified my decision to include Amazon.com as an additional viable context to locate filmic reviews.<sup>165</sup> During the filtering process, I determined the number of *Amazon.com customer reviews* per movie title and then added this number to the IMDb *user comments* to determine if a selected filmic title had met the numeric parameter for film review numbers. The parameter-based customer reviews were exclusively linked to *Amazon.com* only. As well, I rechecked all films manually by accessing the Amazon.com site directly, without exclusively relying on the purchasing link or in other cases when such a link was not available for a listed film.

<sup>163</sup> Refer to *Appendix A* for a specific discussion of these parameters.

<sup>164</sup> Upon sampling the films the IMDb listed the titles and provided particular information, specifically rating /10 and rating vote numbers.

<sup>165</sup> In 1998, after IMDb was purchased by Jeff Bezos, founder, owner and CEO for Amazon.com, IMDb became a commercially driven advertising resource for the sale of movies in both video and DVD formats.

Audience interest was imperative, especially for the older filmic titles. Other filtering criteria considered a film's marketing for North American purchase and/or viewing through online distributors, exclusively the Amazon marketplace.<sup>166</sup> In order for a film to be included for preliminary review, it must have been available for purchase during the selection time period. Out-of-stock titles with an uncertain future availability were excluded from the research. Amazon has a popularity and presence that enables users to navigate a virtual space of endless filmic titles, and customer reviews that promote a film to potential consumer buyers.<sup>167</sup> As previously mentioned, people can easily engage in rating films and making recommendations from their own perspectives on both the IMDb and Amazon sites (Nunes 2006: 71, 73). I created this parameter because it ensured that anyone with Internet access would have the opportunity to buy, access, and/or review a particular film. This criterion did not disregard the fact that numerous titles had been aired on television. Also, in learning of the variegated number of women-in-prison titles (as listed on the IMDb), potential viewers could then access films potentially available for rental in their geographical locale. I needed to access films available for repeated viewing. Many films were also available for rental at video outlets, either mainstream or specialized, in and around the Lower Mainland, of Vancouver B. C.<sup>168</sup> Even though some of the older women-in-prison films (prior to the 1970s) were not accessible on Amazon, the research included a significant number of those *available* films from the 1950s to 1980s.

<sup>166</sup> These sites were specifically *Amazon.com/ Amazon.ca*. Here, two marketplaces were accessed to determine the availability of the films for purchase and viewing by me and the consumer cinephile.

<sup>167</sup> Amazon is the world's largest online retailer which has separate websites (versions) for various countries such as *Amazon.ca* (Canada) and *Amazon.com.au* (Australia).

<sup>168</sup> A mainstream outlet is Blockbuster video while specialized, smaller businesses include Videomatica, Limelight, and Black Dog Video. Some of the less popular sexploitation films, however, did not have the availability for rental. Currently, with the prevalence of low cost or free online movie rentals through Netflix, and the entertainment on Youtube, the ability to download or view films has resulted in the phasing out of some video stores, including Blockbuster and Videomatica.



**Figure 5-1 Filmic Filtering Parameters: Numeric**

The research specified additional *exclusionary parameters* that all preliminary selected films were filtered through. Despite the fact that films crossed over into various genres the research nonetheless dropped titles that had the primary elements of the musical, horror, science fiction, western, war, history, and comedy genres (unless otherwise stated).<sup>169</sup> Those titles that are solely within the adult film genre were also excluded.<sup>170</sup> As well, particular filmic types such as documentaries, filmic shorts<sup>171</sup>, and mini-series<sup>172</sup> were omitted. In addition, some thematic-based exclusions included the following. Nazisploitation films were dropped, as the representational context of confinement is the Nazi death camp or brothel during World War II, and many of these

<sup>169</sup> In some instances a film classified (on IMDb) as having elements of an excluded genre, as with comedy films, was added to the database because it otherwise fit with the filmic parameters and themes of other films initially selected.

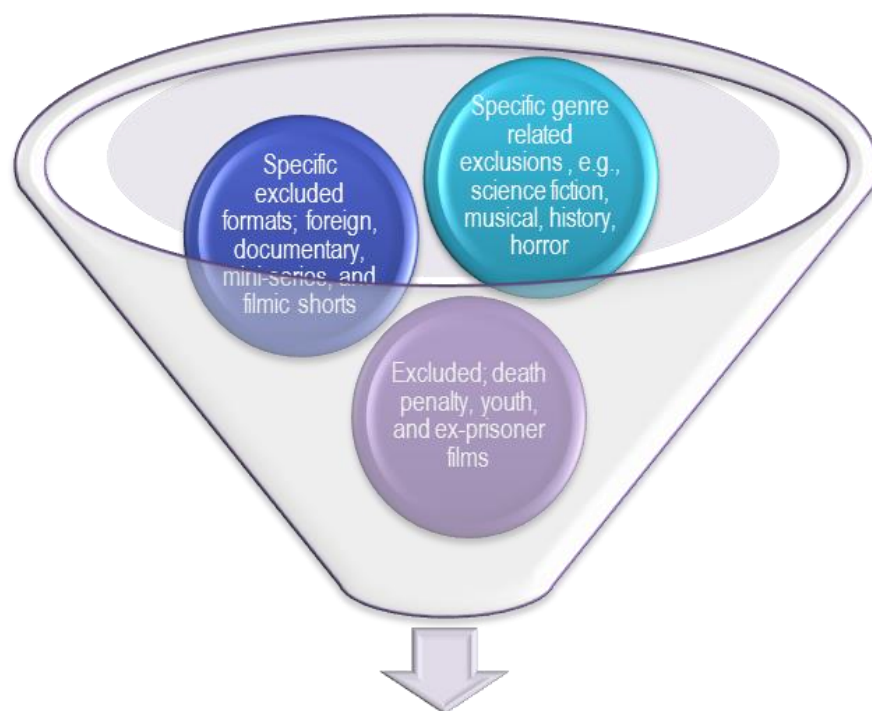
<sup>170</sup> Some prison films are adult pornographic titles.

<sup>171</sup> A filmic short is a film with a running time of forty minutes or under (together with all the credits), substantially less than a full-length feature movie ("Short Film," 2013; IMDb, 2013).

<sup>172</sup> A mini-series is a television series that has specific episodes which together make up an entire story (IMDb, 2012).

movies are foreign Italian exploitation cinema. Also, films that depict confinement within a secure, prison-like mental institution were excluded from the analysis. Prison or death penalty films that primarily emphasize the protagonist's impending execution and the legal issues related to her fate (fairness or appropriateness of this penalty, her culpability in the crime), were omitted in order to more strictly limit the database size. As well, the discourse of capital punishment in these films pervades the storyline content and thematic messages that are related to a more socio-legal literature than the women-in-prison film. As well, films that primarily or completely portray the ex-prisoner upon (her) release<sup>173</sup>, or prison escape, and facilitate in propelling the primary narratological theme/plotline that is criminalized or non-criminalized, were dropped from the study. Lastly, films depicting the youth penal subject were not examined. Consequently, these particular criminological themes related to the condemned woman, ex-prisoner, or youth lawbreaker correspondingly represented in several excluded titles could encompass separate research endeavours. Overall, this further funnelling-down procedure reduced the primary data base to a suitable number of films for preliminary review.

<sup>173</sup> In many of these films the prison context is not included in any filmic scene, or the prisoner is depicted as being released from custody only.



**Figure 5-2** *Filmic Filtering Parameters: Exclusions (Examples)*

Once all the films were drawn and filtered through the criterion parameters described above, the filmic titles were more specifically delineated. The three keyword searches of *women’s-prison*, *prison* and the secondary descriptor, *female-criminal* comprised twenty-eight, two, and one title respectively, comprising a total of thirty-one films. Overall, the films portray diverse and interlocking representations of the penal subject, within primary or secondary narratives, interlinked with varied manifestations of the prison (Wuest & Merritt-Grey 2001: 160). These films would now undergo a preliminary review, before taking a permanent place in the dissertation database.

**Table 5-3** *Preliminary Numbers of Films per Primary or Secondary Keyword(s) First Selection Period (August 27th, 2008)*

Primary Keyword	Primary Keyword	Secondary Keyword
Women’s-Prison	Prison	Female-Criminal
28 Titles	2 Titles	1 Title



## ***Interpretive Readings and Analyses of Media Texts***

### **Perspectival and Experiential Influences of the Feminist Researcher**

The readings of all textual sources are polysemic, with the researcher speaking and writing from embodied locations of self, without laying claim to any universal, fixed reality-based, or factual ideological meaning, or interpretive analysis (Chiseri-Strater 1999: 123; Fenton 1995: 426). As researchers, we cannot assume ourselves to be blank slates; rather, we are *positioned subjects*; contributing a variety of perspectives situated within specified historical, cultural, material, political, and social contextual milieus (Zavella 1991: 318; Kuhn 1994: 90). A feminist inquiry requires that the researcher attend to both transparency and reflexivity in the research process. To reiterate, it is necessary to reflect on *who I am* and *where I come from*, in addition to how my social locations, academic interests and experiences with lawbreaking women and prison influence research decisions and shape my focus of inquiry, existing assumptions, interpretations, analytical insights, and the dissertation results and implications (Ristock and Pennell 1996: 13). Respective of this, I remain open to both contradictory and new trajectories of insight, examination, and meaning throughout the 'doing' of the research. Being self-reflexive is imperative, because using a feminist grounded theory (FGT) method creates a socially produced text that provides critical commentary on representations of the penal subject across various media texts (Reay 1996: 60). As well, I have the power to selectively determine the specific narratological, thematic, and visual imagery for exploration, and analysis. This process produces particular permeations of meaning shaped by what I am positioned to see, understand, and know from data that are "sifted through [the] terministic screens" (Chiseri-Strater 1999: 120) of my ideological, epistemological, and experientially situated *se/ves*. Thus, in the doing of research, I bring myself into the process and become part of it in every way.

Given that the voices of women prisoners and ex-prisoners were not directly incorporated into my work, in terms of my actual research contact with them<sup>174</sup> its focus, interpretations, and analyses reflect my representation and re-interpretation of female lawbreakers, from the point of view of a researcher who has not experienced their life circumstances, criminal justice contact, imprisonment, or marginalized status. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned activist and/or academic writers (ex-prisoner and otherwise) contributed their 'voices' to the research narrative through select scholarly studies that bring forth the experiential understandings of *some* prisoners lives. As well, I have gained intersubjective understandings of prisoner's lives through my various historical affiliations with them. Even so, women socially located differentially from me may be sensitized to imagery or filmic themes that hold particular meanings influenced by their own experiences; for example, of racial oppression and subjugation. Therefore, I acknowledge the partiality of the perspectives and knowledge generated from my work. In addition, textual readings and corresponding meanings were contoured through those analytical frameworks within which the research is embedded; including theoretical, methodological, and literature-based as previously articulated.

### ***Pilot Phase: Review for Selected Titles: Underlying Themes and Directions***

Prior to formally introducing the primary database, I immersed myself in a preliminary, albeit attentive, viewing of all thirty-one filmic titles initially delineated from the August 2008 selection criteria, parameters and funnelling-down process. This phase of the research took a few months and met two methodological objectives of grounded theory. First, it was imperative to uncover some key thematic, conceptual, and categorical constructions, to further shape and contour the analytical direction of the research. And second, in turn, it was important to focus on the ongoing process of theoretical selection. Also, I was able to drop any films that were either structurally, thematically, or aesthetically different, in the broadest sense, from other WIP grouped

<sup>174</sup> Women's perspectives were not directly incorporated into the study, because I decided not to create a qualitative interview component to the research. The issue of correctional access and the difficulties in conducting prison related studies was part of a prior, unrelated area of doctoral research that I had initially proposed. As such, it would have been problematic and timely in attempting to secure correctional access for the present study.

titles. The film *Natural Born Killers* (1994) represented such a title. In this film, Oliver Stone's annihilation of Hollywood norms is depicted through a hallucinogenic frenzy of nightmarish images, rapid montage sequences, and shots of visceral violence, both symbolic and characterologically enacted in a visual spectacle that envelops the viewer in a "radically disjunctive universe where image, action, and sensation are divorced from the narrative armature of cause and effect" that becomes "cannibalizing [of] itself... ." (Gross 1995: 8, 9, James 1995: 45). Although the film's main female character, Mallory, is constructed as a psychopathic criminal (the environmental product of familial abuse and depravity), the film largely revolves around Mickey, a 'natural born' killer whose inherent aggression is unleashed on society – someone cinematically positioned within a lineage of real life maniacs, including Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy and Charles Manson (Boyle 2001: 315).<sup>175</sup> Additionally, the film's storyline is a carnivalesque excess of the tabloid sensationalism and cult fandom following of two bloodlust lovers, Mickey and Mallory Knox, on their murderous spree of carnal violence and mayhem. *Natural Born Killers* is "a satirical exposé of the mass media's glorification" of random violence, and the globalized fascination with culturally iconic killer figures, commodified and consumed in mass mediated forms (Boyle 2001: 311; Sweeney 2001: 152). Ultimately, the film is more directed at the culture Mickey and Mallory personify, than the killers themselves (Jarvis 2004: 227). Consequently, *Natural Born Killers'* complexity in aesthetics, style, content, meanings, and themes requires a separate analysis outside the dissertation focus. No other films were dropped from the research, and subsequently, the recalculated database consisted of thirty titles, prior to a reselection of films on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>175</sup> Ted Bundy (Washington) and John Gacy (Illinois) were prolific American serial killers, while Charles Manson orchestrated the Sharon Tate/Leo LaBianca homicides in Los Angeles in 1968. As Vincent Bugliosi (co-author of the book *Helter Skelter* [1974]) remarked, "Manson has come to represent the malignant side of humanity. And for whatever reason, there's a side to human nature that is fascinated by pure, unalloyed, evil" (Bugliosi as cited in Stashower, 2013: 1). As the Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney at the time, Bugliosi successfully prosecuted Charles Manson and several other criminal associates.

## ***Some Introductory Observations***

During the pilot viewing phase, no formal coding was carried out. Rather, I just watched the films with a critical eye to note any formulation – whether categorically, discursively, or thematically – that became either differentially and/or similarly articulated across diverse film-making forms (as outlined above). I was provisional and open to my initial hunches regarding how the varied industrial, formalistic (narrative, visually expressive), political, and historical contexts of film would distinctively play out in the thematic and representational process.

These preliminary interpretations revealed some unique insights that preview to the reader some of the analytical directions and focus that the research took. I chose to include these insights here, to show how the analytical process commenced upon my first engagement with the cinematic titles and their corresponding non-celluloid features. For instance, filmic box cover imagery and taglines on the Internet Movie Database were inter-textually looped in visual imagery and dialogical content that promotionally generated constructions of the criminal woman. Although the IMDb's mandate is mainly deemed as non-commercial, the website's ownership by Amazon.com, an online, multi-national retailer, ensures IMDb's consumerist-oriented agenda for advertising cinematic products available for sale through site purchasing links to its parent company. As a result, other people's crimes, transgressions, and carceral constraint becomes an entertainment commodity for popular cultural dealers to sell in a cyber capitalist market (Barker 2008: 356).

Another insightful observation was that a multiplicity of diverse and overlapping discourses offered both recycled and alternate possibilities for constituting prisoner subjectivities. An intermixture of characterological traits (visual and behavioural), contextual backdrops, and perspectival differences created particularized meanings, intersectionally framed and symbolic of differential relations of power (Gavey 1997: 54). An example of this was the discourse of mothering, which primarily permeated two filmic forms and remained comparatively absent in the third, namely, the exploitation film. However, the presence of maternalism constructed prisoners in various ways that could embed motherhood within traditionalized, middle-class notions (the Hollywood film) or

structural marginalities (independent titles). In addition, several discourses were at play within cinematic contexts such as the prison, and beyond.

Also revealing was the ascertainment that the prison culture took on varying degrees of significance as a site through which women's subjectivities materialized. In the exploitation film, for example, the 'captive woman' is the central/master category for the protagonist and background characters in storylines primarily situated within a carceral world of clichéd archetypes. Cinematic embodiments of pathologized individuals with binarily opposed subjectivities, personifying good versus evil, are instrumental in directing linear storylines that emphasized violence, adversarial conflict, or rebellion against sadistic abusers and oppressors. Here, the criminological imagination is firmly embedded in fantastical tales. Essentially, prisoners are produced through their interrelationships with others in either disempowering or empowering ways.<sup>176</sup> Exploitation cinema reigned as the filmic form that overwhelmingly depicts women abusing and killing other women (prisoners or staff persons) in misogynous acts symbolic of hegemonic male victimization, violence and death.

Conversely, in *some* contemporary independent films, the prison hierarchy and its associated character constructions, relationships and antagonisms, are either absent, downplayed or depicted in less stereotypical or distorting ways. Prison archetypes do appear but, are either peripheral or background storyline characters, even though some representational exceptions do emerge. Otherwise, women are depicted primarily in non-exploitative ways. In many films, women's subjectivities emerge [in part] through carceral regimes, practices, and policies that *attempt* to authenticate actual experiences, through which understandings of women's crime are criminologically framed. The prison becomes the site through which correctional agents ( the psychiatrist or security officer/guard) "work within the regulated framework of [penal] power and control" (Comack 1996: 136) to make claims regarding prisoner's subjectivities, through the application of labels and diagnoses. Institutional practices, such as the prison interview, spatially juxtapose interrogative questioning against a woman's pre-prison life and lawbreaking, which are visually depicted in flashback sequences. Many titles construct

<sup>176</sup> These themes were found in most exploitation titles in the database.

the prisoner within the banality and monotony of prison life, or in terms of the everyday rules and policies that some women actively challenge in individualized acts of resistance.

Lastly, I observed that the layperson filmic viewers and their associated commentaries *appeared* to draw out some diverse permutations of crimes cultural meanings from texts across filmic forms. But the question is, do such film reviews provide meaningful observations, insights, and critical interrogations of criminal justice processes (imprisonment, punishment), and constructions of the penal subject – or are these Internet-based commentaries simply snippets of promotional discourse, that serve the commercial interests of corporate retailers (Amazon marketplaces)?

### ***The Second Sampling (Selection) Process***

A second preliminary selection phase took place in February 2009, to include any new titles not drawn from the August 2008 selection process.<sup>177</sup> At the same time, any films initially identified that now met the minimum user rating vote numbers, or filmic review numbers and/or the overall IMDb rating out of 10, could now be potential additions to the primary database. Four films emerged from the February selection process and underwent a similar introductory phase of viewing prior to their potential inclusion into the research. In the dissertation two separate selection processes were engaged to ensure the IMDb database had been sufficiently searched for any available films that would further enrich the study. As well, a six month period allowed for the possibility of formally out-of-stock or unavailable titles being present for purchase on the Amazon marketplaces.

However, upon continuing the deep analytical engagement with the filmic texts, I found that the telefeature (TV movie) titles posed a problem in terms of their ability to engender a multi-voiced interpretive ethnographic account. As well, the examination of multiple films became a voluminous, time-intensive and laborious process. As such, I

<sup>177</sup> The selection time frame was from February 22 to 28, 2009. The drawing of films was on February 27, 2009, a date that was six months after the August 27, 2008 time. I choose this date for this reason. During this secondary selection I added one secondary keyword: *women's-correctional-center*.

elected to drop the telefeature sometime after the February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009 sampling process, for the following reasons. First, a reduction in filmic numbers would create a more manageable group of titles to work with. Second, the telefeature titles typically did not contain information regarding the productive, creative, political, and thematic contextual milieus of a particular film, that were in part gained from DVD special featurettes, commentaries and interviews of film-makers, writers, consultants, and performers. As such, this condition questioned the telefeatures integrative fit with a deconstructive, grounded theory framework that interweaved such cinematic spheres into the enveloping theoretical narrative, unveiling variegated subjectivities of the criminal woman. Third, many important telefeature titles continued to be unavailable for viewing because they had not been formatted onto either VHS or DVD, or these formats, especially video, were not in stock for purchase on the Amazon marketplaces. One excluded title included *Dangerous Offender: The Marlene Moore Story* (1996, CBC<sup>178</sup>). Fourth, and most importantly, the television medium is exceedingly different than film. Rafter (2000, 2006) excluded telefeature sources from her crime film research on the contention that TV movies were shaped by different considerations of audience, artistic aspiration, duration, and movie making styles and so required a separate inquiry. Even so, other media scholars have included TV movies in their studies – such as Faith (1993) with *Turning to Stone* (1985, CBC); Walters (2001), with *Born Innocent* (1974, NBC); and O’Sullivan and Wilson (2004) with *Stranger Inside* (2001, HBO). Nonetheless, in critically rethinking Rafter’s option and in taking into consideration the other aforementioned issues I choose to delete the telefeatures from the final filmic database.

### ***The Filmic Database: Final Numbers***

In total, after the two selection procedures and the pilot viewing phases for each, a total of thirty-four films became part of the research database. However, upon the deletion of the twelve telefeatures initially included, the database was reduced to twenty-two titles. More specifically, across the two selection dates - August 2008 and February

<sup>178</sup> This denotes that the film was aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

2009 - twenty and two filmic titles emerged respectively.<sup>179</sup> The films were then further broken down by film-making form: four Hollywood, six independent, and twelve exploitation films.<sup>180</sup> These films are listed in *Appendix C: Films in Database by Film-Making Form*. The IMDb user rating vote numbers, and the filmic rating out of 10, as recorded in the tables, represent the listed numeric data for the film on either the August 27, 2008, or February 27, 2009 selection dates, contingent on when the film was included into the research database. As well, the tables list the total number of film reviews (*IMDb and Amazon.com*) for the film, *at that same time*.<sup>181</sup>

This selection/drawing of films was a fully reliable process. Hypothetically speaking, if another person had utilized the same keywords (e.g., women's-prison) and criteria for inquiry (e.g., year range and so on) on the IMDb power engine on August 27, 2008, at the same time that I conducted my search, they would have drawn the equivalent filmic titles (129) and corresponding data (e.g., user rating vote numbers) that I obtained during the drawing of films. The IMDb makes daily updates on the filmic home page in terms of recalculating rating (user) vote numbers. In terms of user ratings (filmic overall rating/10) it is only updated when a minimum amount of votes are collected (IMDb, 2008).

### ***Evaluative Criteria in Critically Constructionist Grounded Theory Research***

Multiple standards of quality termed trustworthiness, “or the conceptual and analytical soundness of the [qualitative] inquiry,” can be ascertained through explicit evaluative measures (Fassinger 2005: 163; Morrow 2005).<sup>182</sup> First, the empiricist terms of reliability and validity are problematic and unsuitable as evaluative measures in social

<sup>179</sup> The additional February 2009 filmic inclusions were *Red Heat* (1985), and *The Naked Cage* (1986).

<sup>180</sup> Refer to *Appendix I: Figure: Total Number of Films Per Year: Specific Film-Making Forms*.

<sup>181</sup> Given that cyberspace is an ever changing domain, film reviews are subject to deletion, and as such, their original numbers as listed may reflect slight changes, upon access to the site (IMDb and/or Amazon.com) in more recent times (after the 2008 and 2009 selection periods).

<sup>182</sup> Trustworthiness is the qualitative research equivalent to the standards of reliability, validity, generalizability, and objectivity/neutrality that are evaluatively used for quantitative studies (Fassinger 2005: 163).



constructionist research. Second, particular criteria are congruent with specific epistemological and paradigmatic underpinnings of a research endeavour. Third, other criteria transcend paradigmatic boundaries. The present dissertation is a critical, feminist, deconstructive analysis that emphasizes the socially constructed subjectivities of the female penal subject within the popular cultural process of film-making. Therefore, elements of 'trustworthiness' emerge from both constructionist/interpretive, critical theoretical emphases, such as feminist post-structuralism, and grounded theory.

In terms of social constructionism, research credibility and quality build upon the capturing and validating of a multiplicity of perspectival voices, drawn from the scholarly literature, filmic creator/performer/consultant commentary, critical professionalized reviews, and evaluative perspectives of the audience that enhance and build upon my own interpretations. Consequently, the subjectivities of the researcher and those other supplementary voices multifariously co-construct the meanings and understandings of the research inquiry. In addition, it is imperative to ground these social constructions within broader frameworks that move from the micro-textual filmic source and the meso-milieu of the cinematic productive process, to the broader, macro cultural, socio-political, structural, and criminological contexts. Being self-reflexive in the research process is another important criterion to consider.

In looking through the critical lens of my work, trustworthiness is also related to a number of other conditions, such as the historical specificity of the study and the deconstructive focus of unveiling relations of power and oppression that emerge from the cinematic embodiments of the criminalized woman. In essence, *making the invisible visible* is of primary importance. And in line with a post-structural feminist thought, Lather has termed 'transgressive validity' as the ability of the research to discursively contribute to a more critical stance, such as feminist social justice (Lather as cited in Morrow 2005: 253).

Some more generalized evaluative factors that cross the paradigmatic spectrum include the following areas; First, an explication of the implemented grounded theory procedural practices reveals the ways in which, for example, categories emerged from the data, and how their formulated interrelationships, and attention to difference, correspondingly strengthened the explanatory power of an enveloping theoretical

narrative, that holds significance to the production of new knowledge (Fassinger 2005: 163, 164). As well, the study reflects a rearticulated rendering of the prison film discourse, creating new categories, and insights “that challenge[s], extend[s], or refine[s]” existing understandings (Charmaz 2005: 528). Consequently, the dissertation contributed to the broader literature in media-based feminist criminology. Second, the adequacy of the research database emphasizes the variability and richness of the textual sources, filmic and otherwise, in providing unique analytical insights, thematic patterns, and information. Third, a purposive selection of films, embedded within specific time periods and film-making forms, provided a vastly variegated group of titles through which to interpretively ground my research. And fourth, the adequacy of explanation during the interactive process of data analysis, examination, understanding, and presentation is another measure of trustworthiness that reflects the researcher’s immersion in the database (Morrow 2005: 256). Furthermore, a feminist grounded theory provides the analytical framework through which to interpretively unveil the categorically derived meanings from the data sources. The presentation of my dissertation work balances my understandings with those other voices I incorporate into the research narrative, which exemplifies how I have grounded some of the interpretations in the perspectives of those cultural creators and consumers (writers, consultants, directors, actors, and professional critic) that produce the filmic text (256). As well, the layperson public reviewer brings added meanings to how the audience implicatively engages with the cinematic prisoner. Lastly, the experiential voices of ex-prisoner, critical academic and/or activist writings emerge in authenticated filmic moments that bring forth an important and needed layer of meaning to representations.

### ***Notes about Result’s Chapter Organizational Structure***

To commence the analytical *Results* discussion of the central dissertation lines of inquiry, I review how mediated constructions of the imprisoned woman embody multifariously diverse or interrelated subjectivities that emerge across the delineated mediascape of the women-in-prison film. The following introduction outlines the standardized organizational structure of the three *Results* chapters – the exploitation, the Hollywood and the contemporary independent film. It is within these discussions that the subjectivities of the female prisoner take form, in characterological personifications tied

to particular discourses and theoretical constructs. Each prisoner embodiment *tells a story* through specific discourses, signifying devices and textual aesthetic expressions (e.g., visual, dialogical, thematic, performative, and narratological) - which frame *who the cinematic prisoner is* for us – creating corresponding understandings and knowledges tied to prevailing cultural and criminological notions and ontological *claims*.

I choose to situate each film-making form in a separate, self-contained chapter to bring forth and heighten the methodologically distinctive (feminist grounded theory), multi-analytical interpretive terrain – the broader macro-structural context, meso-creative (film industry) milieu, and micro-textual aesthetic expressions – that together shape how I see and understand cinematically constructed tales of crime, formations of subjectivity (prisoner and otherwise) and criminological meanings. This process facilitates in the uniqueness and strength of my dissertation findings and conclusions. As well, separate chapters more clearly demarcate and demonstratively highlight the subjectivities that are uniquely tied to each film-making form. Those densely articulated analyses that interweave the experiential insights of both cultural creator and consumer into the enveloping narrative, fit with the procedural tenets of a feminist grounded theory and the evaluative measures (trustworthiness) required for a social constructivist interpretive theoretical lens.

Each chapter is organized into short, sub-headed sections that emphasize specific topical areas and include the following: 1) a brief opening introduction; 2) the specified 'focus of inquiry' as it distinctively frames the film-making form 3) the broader industrial context, underlying ideological perspectives, politicized commentary and formalistic aesthetic conventions (visual and narratological) that contour subjectivity formation, and filmic storylines; 4) the central storyline themes and narrative directions both within and outside the carceral world; 5) and the manifestations of the prison – its discursive foundations, gendered formations, primary iconography, underlying oppressions, varied inmate populations and correctional agents and representational depictions. More specifically, each chapter explores the legitimacy of the prison as a rehabilitative or reformatory context within the on-screen world. The dissertation investigates whether representations challenge the oppressions that women suffer, or whether they infer that women are deserving of such treatment, based on the subjectivities through which prisoners take form. Lastly, I identify and interpretively

analyze the varied prisoner subjectivities emergent in categorical and sub-categorical embodiments that are configured as singular formations or binary juxtapositions.<sup>183</sup> This discussion comprises the majority and remainder of each chapter. I also interlink prisoner subjectivities to particular social and criminological locations that range from gender, race, age, and sexual orientation to women's political perspectives, crime(s), carceral experiences/oppressions and potential for reformability. Subjectivities that materialize and are attributed to male characters and correctional agents, of both genders, are also explored herein. Select filmic exemplars serve to envelope subjectivities in meanings embedded within – underlying discourses, thematic backdrops dialogical commentary, descriptive visual expressions, and characterological performances, actions/interactions and/or behavioural repertoires. This usage of various exemplars builds upon the deeply rich interpretive nature of the filmic database.

Finally, in my textual readings across the filmic terrain, several dimensions of focus are highlighted, including power/disempowerment; injustice/oppression/justice; punishment/abuse, and subjectification/objectification/exploitation. Relations of power are conceptualized as individual, interrelational, systemic, and governmental.

<sup>183</sup> Refer to Appendix G: *Primary Categorical Embodiments (Subjectivities) of the Prisoner and Male Characters per Film-Making Form* for a list of the subjectivities in the dissertation.

## Chapter 6.

# The Exploitation Film: Misogynous Violence, Voyeuristic Pleasures, and Objectified Bodies

*“Savour if you will the mixture of fascination and repulsion, attraction and condemnation...”* as the sexploitative text reels towards exploitative doses of sensationalized spectacle (Ferrell et al. 2008: 50).

## Introduction

Amidst the contemporary mediascape, films of yesteryear are sold in cyberspace as seductions of frenzied entertainment (Ferrell et al. 2008: 143). The sexploitative women-in-prison movie offers a voyeuristic window into the world of confinement; a masochistic and sadistic escapism marked by depravity and horror, brutalization and resistance, and vengeance and liberation. It can be argued that the morbid imagination and inquisitiveness of audiences is satisfied through fantastical storylines awash in soft-core pornography, misogyny, patriarchal oppression, sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia. Typically in these films, the elements of sexuality, nudity, and violence feed into the production-consumption cycle of a popular cultural form marketed to a cult fandom of male followers (Lynch & Krzycki 1998: 324, 325). These depictions fuel a common-sense mythology, that reinforces criminological folklore and fiction, in character-related constructions that shape societal notions of imprisonment and bring the subjectivities of both the keepers and kept into view (Tzanelli et al. 2005: 97).

## Focus of Inquiry - The Exploited Penal Subject

This chapter interpretively explores the master category of ‘captive woman’ in the sexploitative film, which consists of twelve titles. The historicity of the movies discussed

spans three eras – the early 1970s, the entire 1980s, and a single 1990s film<sup>184</sup> These titles include the cleverly subversive, pseudo-feminist escapades of enslaved, tortured women in the *The Big Doll House* (1971), *Women in Cages* (1971), *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), and *Caged Heat* (1974). While later films reflect depressingly repulsive tales of women victimized, exploited and murdered by vile abusers in *The Concrete Jungle* (1982), *Chained Heat* (1983), *Red Heat* (1985), *The Naked Cage* (1986), *Vendetta* (1986), *Lust for Freedom* (1987), *Caged Fury* (1989), and *Prison Heat* (1993). To begin the consideration of the sexploitation women-in-prison films, I demonstrate that filmic representations are enveloped in interlocking discourses and corresponding theoretical constructs that constitute the cultural formations of subjectivity, emergent in intersectionally-located categorizations of the prisoner, typically configured in binary juxtapositions or singular formations that are analytically detailed throughout the chapter (Barker 2008: 230; Walters 1995 68). The manifestation of the prison– its gendered incarnations, geographical locales, villainous inmate wards and subcultural world of misogynous depravity and violence is also thematically explored.

Comparatively speaking, the clichéd archetypes that emerge in the selected filmic titles represent recycled characterizations that are identified as a staple of exploitative film-making documented by other media scholars in the literature. However, in this dissertation, the interpretive inquiry and analysis brings forth added layers of meaning, through gaining a deeper understanding of the cinematic prisoner. For example, I attend to bringing forth particular exemplars (filmic scenes, dialogical commentary, visual attributes, and behavioural repertoires) that provided added clarity, description, and specification to those categorical embodiments of the prisoner, and other characters; both primary and secondary. More specifically, in the exploitation film, the actions/interactions associated with particular subjectivities such as the lesbian predator, action-heroine and others, are further conceptualized as behavioural repertoires that symbolize formulaic, standardized behaviours that inter-textuality appear across the characterological terrain of the sexploitation WIP films. These

<sup>184</sup> The sexploitation film is still being produced in more contemporary times but is not associated with particular auteur film-makers such as Roger Corman and Jack Hill. Some films ‘parody or pay homage’ to the seventies periodized titles, and include *Sugar Boxx* (2009). Other films remain a staple in the soft-core pornography exploitation market even though titles are promoted on mainstream websites such as Amazon.com.

repertoires are tied to archetypical clichéd prisoner embodiments that are intersectionally located, discursively constituted and embedded within particular conditions within the carceral world. As well, characterological juxtapositions and binary oppositions take form and meaning through behavioural repertoires and standardized characterological actions that have consequential outcomes.

The cinephilic reviews discussed in chapter nine, reveal how the sexploitation filmic consumer often revels in pleasurable delight at the misogyny and degradation enveloped in the selected dissertation titles. What is alarmingly apparent is how depictions of sexual assault and abuse feed into twisted, masculinist exploitative fantasies. There is little concern or critique towards villainous characters (of both genders) who commit such atrocious acts of maltreatment and humiliation. Conversely, such depravity becomes an expectation that reviewers seek out in films. And despite the fantastical nature of these filmic storylines and characterological prisoner embodiments some reviewers believe in the reality of representations that are sparingly resisted in select cinephilic commentary. The penal subject overall is constructed through archetypical adjective descriptors that lie along a discursive dimensional range from pseudo-feminism/empowerment, to sexualization and otherization (demonization).

In the exploitation film, subjectivity formation is embedded within promotional exploitable elements that capitalize on prison oppressions and violence, degradative victimization, and the sexual objectification of captive women that satisfy misogynous male fantasies. Imagination is emphasized over authenticity in formulaic storylines replete with intextually recycled embodiments of both carceral agents and inmate prisoner wards that are disturbingly misrepresentative. An analytical, comparative and deconstructive examination of individual titles unveils the articulation of interdependent meanings, configurations of knowledge, and criminological messages that create tales of crime tied to particular industrial and productive milieus, auteur-creators, entertainment markets, socio-political contexts, and aesthetic conventions (narratological and visual). More specifically, an understanding of the complex interplay of these factors to the representational process is demonstrated by interweaving my interpretive examination with those 'ethnographic voices' and perspectives from film industry agents (cultural producers and consumers) drawn from the DVD special features, entertainment sources (newspaper and magazine), and academic literature. As well, at the macro-level, the

prevailing socio-political landscape of the times – the counter-cultural, turbulent, and radicalized 1970s and the patriarchally conservative 1980s – creatively contoured underlying filmic themes, social commentary and prisoner embodiments. Some representations, such as those found in Roger Corman titles, also espoused a particularly radicalized socio-political critique of normative notions of traditional womanhood.

It is argued that the subjectivities (personifications) women occupy shape the trajectory of their lives within the penal social structure; its punitive, segregative and torturous practices, and the prison hierarchy or community that shapes prisoners' interactions (illegitimate or otherwise) with their cell mates and the administrative authorities. Ultimately, the outcome of women's on-screen lives is directly related to how they are constructed. Characterological embodiments of self are cinematically generated interpersonally or inter-relationally within formulaic, linear storylines, that typically represent a series of actions – crime-based allegations (wrongful convictions) or perpetrations<sup>185</sup>, prison indignities, and prisoner riot, escape and/or rescue – as the prime constituent and defining feature (Abler 2005: 246).<sup>186</sup> More specifically, categorical prisoner embodiments emerge from the prisoner as subjected to oppressive penal practices and/or primary characterologically-driven villainous actions. Women in these films are depicted as suffering from various individual pathologies, such as social, psychological and/or biological. Alternatively, in films that portray feminist sensibilities, women's behaviours in part symbolize perspectives/actions (revolutionary) that attempt to reflect structural concerns, causes, and countercultural views.

Overall, the aesthetic expression of the real becomes a cinematic simulacrum, whereby any notion of women's confinement in actuality is constructed at the extremes, with exaggerated, fantastical, and/or decontextualized images of the predatory, corrupt, and savage world of crime, the prison, and the prisoner. Subsequently, a materiality of effect ensues from cultural images, symbols, and ideologies that give legitimacy to the

<sup>185</sup> In some titles the criminal event is not shown. An example is the film, *Chained Heat* (1983).

<sup>186</sup> It is argued by Shaw that in actuality, disorder in female prisons (riots) results from "a genuinely shared sense of injustice" not from the actions of uncontrollable, individualized, prisoner troublemakers (Shaw 2000: 68).



unjust containment and punishment of pathologized or unruly women deemed deserving of ill-treatment and even death (Britton 2003: 219; Faith 1987: 197).

The disciplinary practice of creating a carceral subject, constituted in formulaic clichéd categorizations, reflects the gendered discourses of feminized sexuality and masculinized violence. Women's intersectional differences become configured as binaries of inequality, through which the discursive marketing of inclusion-exclusion emerges in the demarcation of the normal versus the deviant; those essentialist categories multifariously deconstructed and reflected in orthodox criminological classificatory systems, knowledge bases, and theories (Ferrell et al. 2008: 82). In some of the films analyzed binaries such as the 'good woman innocent' – 'bad woman lesbian' primarily structure and propel both central and peripheral filmic narratives and plots (Turner 1999: 87). Intersectional locations are differentially and culturally fixed to particular subjectivities for both prisoner and other characters (Hall 1997b: 48). For example, a character's visually and behaviourally depicted femaleness creates more positive character constructions than those associated with less feminized qualities. Alternatively, those labelled as deviant in the exploitation film create a moral condemnation, demonization, or parody of particular group identities (intersectionalities), such as queer culture/sexualities and race (Ferrell et al. 26; Walters 1995: 68). The hierarchical organizing of discursively produced representational difference creates subjectivities infused by unequal relations of power. The notion of sexual superiority and others based on race, class, and gender serve to reinforce the hegemony of white, patriarchal, capitalist society (Bensoff & Griffin 2004: 13). As well, stereotypical conceptions support the myth of a stabilized reality where naturalized difference exists (Ferrell et al. 77). But the ensuing discussion exposes the contradictory ways that cinematic constructions challenge traditional femininity, otherized archetypical characterizations, and fixed binary structures.

Prisoner subjectivities symbolize a commodification of *looking* and desire. The underlying themes of male fantasy, voyeurism, fetishism, and misogynous violence emphasize the visual spectacle of numerous 'sexploitable' elements that include gratuitous nudity, lesbianism, rape, female captivity, the sexualization and objectification of the female body, and cruel and derogatory punishments. Filmic titles, taglines and eroticized box cover imagery similarly promote these themes through dialogical and

illustrative promises of illicit and misogynous pleasures of hot female desire, sexuality, and rage from enslaved, tortured, and brutalized women. These advertisements provide a window into a representational world where hurt, humiliation, and degradation become performative acts of power and domination, characterologically enacted in specific scenes, sequences, and narrative themes for cinematic entertainment (Presdee 2000: 70; Ferrell et al. 2008: 229). In these depictions violence is disposable without responsibility or consequence to the cinephilic viewer (Presdee 2000: 65).

## **The Women-in-Prison (WIP) Sexploitation Film: Formulaic and Genre-Based Representations of Misogyny, Degradation and Violence.**

In this section, the discussion descriptively explores the lens through which exploitation films are definitively understood as a representational form that contains standardized, cinematic elements built upon criminological imaginations, where the audience consumes cultural taboos without conscience. Generally speaking, exploitation cinema is associatively generic in the expression of thematic content that facilitates an inter-textual interface of meanings and event-related motivations.<sup>187</sup> The WIP as a distinct subgenre stresses misogynistic taboos and the objectification of the female body through the visual, a primal unadulterated display of shock and sensationalism – a macabre marketing device . Seedy storylines and characterological portrayals guarantee evilness and immorality. As well, a traditional understanding of narrativity (plotlines) is redefined to emphasize an experiential understanding of confinement and its degradations on the prisoner's body (Alber 2005: 243). Misogynous violence, either fantastical or pseudo-realistic, symbolizes a bodily spectacle that ultimately depicts a prisoner's internal suffering and emotions through the visual (e.g., close-up camera shots) and auditory codes (screams and pre-emptive music).

The mise-en-scene is primarily the carceral setting and its associated physical - props of containment and control: bars/structural barriers, prisoner cells, secure living

<sup>187</sup> Maltby (2003) contends that an *intertextual motivation* "appeals directly to the audience's familiarity with [generic] convention: an event happens ... because events like that usually happen in movies of this kind" (467).

units and dormitories, segregation (the *hole*), high walls and enclosed recreation yards and/or guarded institutional compounds. In several 1980s titles, a distinct signifier, the American flag, emerged as a background symbol in the warden's office, or in some other institutional area, or as a patchwork identification on the guard's uniform – in all cases a visible reminder that the prison is located within the United States. Costumes, which add to the mise-en-scene, contributed to the sexualization of women through varied but similarly revealing attire, which made them a desirable commodity for the male (and female) eye to see.

Overall, the dominant cinematic discourse in the women prisoner sexploitation film remains rooted in violence rather than in a denunciation of it (Mason 2006: 614). The prison regime is not rehabilitative in any manner. For the most part, reformist discourse that questions the inhumanities of incarceration becomes enshrouded in scenes of abuse, torture, and death, purely intended for the spectatorial gaze not unlike that found in the contemporary male prison film (Mason 2006: 607). This is especially apparent in 1980s titles. The voyeuristic treatment of prisoners' bodies facilitates leisurely spectacle over critique of penalty or penal practice. The watching of such cruelty is transgressing in itself – producing a spectre of reactionary emotions both condemnatory and pleasurable (Presdee 2000: 28; Hill 2002, 2005).

## **Films of the 1970s**

### ***Campy Fun, Sadistic Pleasure and Masochistic Revenge: The Films of Jack Hill and Roger Corman***

#### **Formalistic Conventions, Creative Choices, and Subversive Commentary**

Roger Corman and Jack Hill, both exploitation auteurs, brought their perspectival and ideological views into the films of the 1970s which emerged from the industrial context of New World Pictures (Crowther 1989: 64).<sup>188</sup> This company

<sup>188</sup> Roger Corman typically produced or co-produced films rather than directed them. Some of his titles do not list his name in the credits – for example, *Women in Cages* (1971). The use of formalistic devices can also be a way of connecting and identifying with particular film-makers such as Roger Corman and director Jack Hill (King 2005: 141).

espoused countercultural and anti-capitalist rhetoric, feminist politics, and anti-authoritarian views within a film-making practice that resisted the naturalized mythmaking that emerged from the Hollywood sector (Morris 2000b: 1).<sup>189</sup> Rather, these films' overt manipulation of stereotypes and generic conventions acknowledged that representational practices were embedded in tales of fantasy and imagination. As well, the creative freedom to defy mainstream aesthetics enabled film-makers to use gimmickry such as the intermixing of corny and absurd parody, humour, violence, misogyny, and humiliation in particular scenes, in order to elicit audience reaction and delight. Patriarchal authority and power are at times destabilized and demoralized. Instead, Corman in a "peculiar egalitarianism" creates a "fetishized" 'tits and ass' feminism" – an intermixture of coded female objectifications that feed masculinist desires and parodied depictions of female empowerment, through the expropriation and reversal of male hegemonic behaviours and roles that either re-affirm or humiliate patriarchal power (Cook 1976: 126 ; Morris 2000b: 5; Mayne 2000: 143). Overall, there is "a delight in being deviant... [an] experience that, like all [other] seductions, needs to be played with ... again and again. In this way, carnival, popular dissent, and riot become part of [a cinematic] fabric of fun" (Presdee as cited in Hayward 2004: 151). Addison Verrill, of *Variety* (as cited in Parrish 1991: 26), remarks of the "soft-core pornography outing" of the *Big Bird Cage* (1972): "The women's prison epic is about as hardy a cinema chestnut as one can find these days, but it's a perfect showcase for the nudity, sex, violence, raw language and comic relief necessary in this type of exploitation programmer."

The exploitation film's narrative formats and bodily aesthetics are shaped by a creative context that stressed commercialism over production values. Shooting off-set in rural, jungle like settings, such as in the Philippines, with unknown, foreign cast members and sexploitation performers gives these films a less polished studio, or *Hollywood* effect. As well, expeditious movie-making, low budgets and labour costs resulted in unsophisticated and mindless narratives, low-tech aesthetics, and outrageous images that for *some* critics precluded the WIP film from artistic merit, critical

<sup>189</sup> Jack Hill (2002) commented that the film *The Big Bird Cage* (1972) was deemed by a feminist magazine to be a "manifesto of the position of women in society – women in prison."

examination and cultural importance (Schaefer 2007: 95).<sup>190</sup> But in peeling back the layers of lurid and offensive content, commentaries that questioned broader structural or institutional oppressions emerged, such as the confinement of women in foreign locales over the American penal setting (with the exception being *Caged Heat* [1974]). A collaborative film-making style validated the perspectives of female writers, producers and actors. Improvised performances and open scripts were favoured over pre-written scenes and characterizations. In *The Big Doll House* (1971) and its sequel *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), acting and dialogue were revised around the personalities of individuals, in a fluid and democratized process (Hill 2002; Dixon 1976: 12). The versatility, ingenuity, and quality of the actor's work were deemed unique to these films. Many actors were cast across filmic titles. Stock WIP elements (scenes of torture, prison antagonisms), gags and narratives— a necessary promotional draw – were inventively re-produced (Hill 2002).

Furthermore, an interesting side note emerged from the DVD special features filmic commentaries. Despite the misogyny, sadism, and objectification that enveloped these storylines, some cast members or productive staff did not characterize these films as disturbingly exploitative; rather, their experiences were defined as creatively expressive in the empowerment of strong female prisoner characters that fulfilled a growing market demand. One actress who expressed this view was Judy Brown (2011) (Sandy, *Women in Cages*, [1971]) who remarked in an interview, “[it was] cool...putting women into men's situations [where] we were the ones to break out of the prisons.” Cast members fondly remembered these unique filmic ventures. Judy Brown, (Collier, *The Big Doll House*, [1971]) who grew up economically privileged remarked, “Going to the jungles of the Philippines and working in a Manila prison with...the real prisoners in jails for six weeks...was a fantastic...adventure like no other.”<sup>191</sup> Producer Jane Schaffer (2011) sought representational arenas outside the Hollywood studio mainstream and felt her work was a “celebration of the young independents.” As well, Roger Corman put his

<sup>190</sup> Even though, *The Big Doll House* (1971) was made for a measly \$125,000, the movie was a financial success yielding \$5,000,000 in profits from “domestic film rentals paid to distributors” (Parrish 1991: 27). This title was New World Pictures second sexploitative film and it did especially well at the drive-in exhibition venue.

<sup>191</sup> Director Jack Hill (2005) commented that the exterior of the prison compound depicted an actual Manila prison, while the women's cells were filmed on a sound stage.

directorial slant on films, even if he was listed as the producer (Morris 2000b: 2). Dixon (1976: 13) notes that in Corman's cinematic personifications "there is respect and even admiration for the outlaw, the outcast" which, within the WIP film, represents transgressive and offending captive females.

Quality camerawork in virgin movie locales created a visual artistry of clear textured imagery, vibrant and stunning cinematography that accentuated even the darkest most fetishized scenes (Morris 2000b: 4). This use of bright, naturalized light was different from the typical grindhouse cinema, which was depressingly bleak by comparison. Beautiful, exotic landscapes, in all their splendour, made-up the scenic backdrop of many titles. As a result, the 'look' of these films surpasses the weakness in parodied storylines and exaggerated performances that suspend realism and authenticity (Turner 1999: 74; Hill 2002). There is no subtlety of the camera; rather, constant stimulation of action-packed adventure and surprise bombard the viewer with entertainment pleasures. In some scenes, bloody visual effects are left to the viewer's imagination rather than graphically displayed (Hill 2002). Over-the-top violence served not to shock, but rather to add to an outlandish, campy effect, especially in the *Big Bird Cage* (1972). In *Women in Cages* (1971), an intensely dark, sinister film, there is no parody; instead, the film focuses on stark sadism in repugnant depictions of degradation and torture. The cinematography is expressively gloomy, with many scenes shrouded in dim, or dusk-like light, adding to the ominous atmosphere. As well, the close-up shot is repeatedly used to depict a variety of emotional and physical states in the prisoners, such as terror, degradation, pain, and drug withdrawal.

Jonathan Demme had his directorial debut in the 1974 exploitation gem *Caged Heat*, a film that won critical acclaim for its visual style (sultry sexualized, erotic dream, and ambiguous sequences, unique camera angles, and novel wipes and dissolves) and subversive feminist commentary; a uniquely artistic endeavour that was aesthetically superior to many of the other exploitative female prison fare. Tony Rayns (*British Monthly Bulletin*) contends (as cited in Parrish 1991: 81), that not since the Roger Corman production of *Bloody Mama* (1970) has a film managed "to indulge [in] all the statutory exploitation elements (from shower scenes to depraved medical malpractice) without ever becoming either gratuitous or condescending." Despite the exploitation film's seemingly mindless plots, stock storylines, non-Hollywoodized casts, amateurish

performances, low-budgets and corresponding aesthetics, a closer examination proves that ingenuity marked the creative process. As such, understanding the productive aspects of this filmic form requires sifting through the inventive layers that range from the micro-aspects of film-making, to the ideological messages and politicized subversive commentary that emerge in films that otherwise serve to misogynously objectify the captive female subjected to a range of carceral degradations.

### **Storylines of Women's Sexualization, Victimization, Solidarity and Rebellion**

During the 1970s, a trilogy of interrelated themes linked to prisoner relationships, politicized struggles, and carceral indignities (hardships and custodial escape/revenge) dominated multi-strand narratives. The spectacle of female bonding, antagonisms, and revolt are juxtaposed against scenes depicting the sadistic and sexualized victimization of women “obsessively visualized in ... lurid tales of abuse and incarceration” (Mayne 2000: 123; Walters 2001: 120). A subversive third world backdrop politicized subplots which symbolized insurgent intervention in foreign liberation struggles while obscuring the injustice of US confinement.<sup>192</sup> Oppression is emphasized beyond the carceral context, to repressive, political regimes/governments that structurally marginalized outside society. For some women depicted as American, their intimate involvement with foreign male rebels and criminals such as drug dealers and pimps sealed their fate of imprisonment, symbolic of a misogynous backlash that depicted the enslavement of women in nameless banana republic countries by sadistic abusers – a cultural vengeance for prisoners' rejection of proper US gender roles.

Comparatively speaking, incarcerated females are less demonized in the 1970s than in 1980s productions. Although victimization is depicted, women do not exploit, abuse, and/or kill other inmates to the extent found in later titles; instead, prisoners are sadistically victimized by predominantly female authorities such as the warden, matron,

<sup>192</sup> Interestingly, film-maker Jack Hill couldn't see the political statements in his films (especially *The Big Bird Cage* [1972]). Revolution instead became a backdrop through which to incorporate a unique form of humour (by featuring comic revolutionaries Django and Blossom, for example). Yet, at the time of the film, revolutionary insurgent activity characterized the Philippines, which had experienced rebel bomb attacks (Haig & Ford 2011). However, the Philippines is not revealed to be the exotic locale in these films.

or guards.<sup>193</sup> However, characters continue to be constructed and pathologized within clichéd formulations, even though social deviance, non-traditional difference, and alternate sexualities are more accepted, with race and lesbianism being interconnected (Holmlund 2005c: 99). Overall, prisoner interactions emphasize instrumental unity, subjective ties, solidarity, and interracial friendships and love interests over adversarial conflict and victimization. In the *Big Doll House* (1971) and *The Big Bird Cage* (1972) the central storyline plot is partly built around varied prisoner relationships in “a series of shifting affections, grudges, bonds, and betrayals” amongst women (Berlatsky 2008: 15) who collectively share in each other’s maltreatment, and ultimately rally in solidarity to deal with the ongoing oppressions they experience. In this regard, women are relational with each other in positive ways, a naturalized aspect of female bonding and camaraderie which comes out in actresses’ performances (Hill 2002). In *Caged Heat* (1974), interracial difference is celebrated in an image of “multicultural sisterhood that manages to address central issues of female consciousness with humour and insight” (Walters 2001: 115).

The revolutionary ranks high in the inmate hierarchy, and exerts authority over others through her physical presence, political ties, and views. There is not the battle to the death of the opposing binary juxtapositions of the ‘good woman - bad woman’ that is found in later exploitation works. Rather, a climatic riot or calculated escape that rallied both prisoners and their rebel comrades<sup>194</sup> would end in a collective melee of violence, destruction, and death – a justifiable outcome of patriarchal, imperialist, and ideological oppressions. Women’s liberation is not contingent on questions of characterological innocence like the ‘good women’ protagonists of the eighties, but with the brutality prisoners endured through their confinement. Contrary to the Hollywood narrative and some subsequent exploitation titles there is no traditional, happy, patriarchally-driven ending. The protagonist or other central characters are either killed off or freed to live a life of uncertainty. Overall, these films... [force] “the viewer to concede the [illusionary]

<sup>193</sup> There are two prisoner abuser exceptions - the sick druggie, Stoke, and the sadistic inmate trustee matron, Alabama, in *Women in Cages* (1971). Alternatively, in the *Big Bird Cage* (1972), male guards’ abusive treatment of prisoners is not as graphically displayed.

<sup>194</sup> This is explicitly the case in the *Big Bird Cage* (1972).



nature of image making. Realist narrative is not simply dethroned, but is rather effectively deconstructed” (Walters 2001: 119).

The storyline of *The Big Bird Cage* is an example. Although American socialite/actress Terry Rich and rebel Blossom are linked to peripheral plot sequences, both women eventually occupy the central prison storyline. With little success, Terry seeks the assistance of her political affiliates to gain her release and reveal the injustices at the prison. On the contrary, Blossom, an African American militant, wants allies for her revolutionary movement and aims to break women out to support the cause. Eventually, her rebel comrade and lover Django infiltrates the compound and they rally the prisoners to “*kill and burn*” as they riot, torch the buildings, and battle corrupt authorities to their death. In the end, Terry and friend Rina gain their freedom and Django and Blossom die; becoming part of the movement’s folklore. Nonetheless, it is the revolutionary subject, Blossom, who frees and liberates the prisoners; not Terry Rich, the middle-class, political crusader.

### **The Prison: A Seething Cauldron of Torture, Servitude, and Sadomasochism**

The architectural structure of the exploitative 1970s prison reflects gendered categorical incarnations (Britton 2003: 223). Imaginary in its creation, the penal setting holds no intended affinity or realism to U.S. confinement; rather, it is a stifling, exotic hellhole or campy plantation isolated from civilization, in a jungle-like enclave away from the regulation of outside authorities. However, despite the knowledge that U.S. prisons were problematic, Roger Corman capitalized on portraying foreign confinement as exceedingly shocking, with the exploitative prison being embedded within the discourses of punishment, violence, sado-masochistic cruelty, misogyny, and depravity (Bougie 2006: 25). As well, it is the indignities and brutalities inflicted on mainly attractive Caucasian American detainees that are at the forefront of the filmic narrative; while women of colour mainly play background roles (prisoners or guards) who hold little cinematic value, with the exception of *some* central characters such as black actress Pam Grier

In stockade detention compounds with high walls, gun towers and armed guards, that almost resemble Vietnamese POW camps, women are celled in vermin and snake-

infested, filthy, medieval dungeons. In specific titles (*The Big Doll House* [1971] and *Women in Cages* [1971]) prisoners are susceptible to barbaric and sadomasochistic punishments in torture chambers that fetishize suffering for the male and female gaze. Alternatively, in other films (*The Big Bird Cage* [1972]) the prison is feminized in a cottage, dormitory style setting. Nonetheless, regardless of its visual form, prisoners are subject to degradation, regimentation, rural slave labour, fantastical mechanisms of prisoner transport, punishment, and segregative conditions. In *The Big Doll House* (1971), new fish detainee Collier is contained in a bamboo cage attached to a jalopy pick-up truck, before she is discharged to the prison – an absurd, if not invented, depiction of prisoner transport (Bougie 2006: 25). And in the *Big Bird Cage*, women manually drive the “ominously imposing” birdcage-like sugar mill, a torturous bamboo contraption of interlocking and grinding wheels that malfunction, dangerously leading to gruesome accidents or a ghastly demise for prison snitches, who are hurled or fall from the heights of the structure (Parrish 1991: 26; Hill 2002). This mechanism of pain and death lies at the center of the compound.

In the film *Caged Heat* (1974), the Americanized Connorville prison is overseen by a group of quirky and oddball characters. Nevertheless, women are similarly susceptible to the ravages of confinement found in Roger Corman’s foreign locales, such as unsanitary living conditions, illegal operations, primitively bizarre and callous punishments, and sexual assault (Clark 1995: 96). A seedy, villainous character, Dr. Randolph is a non-descript, passive, deceitful man who fondles unconscious women under his care. He conducts electroconvulsive behavioural modification with a crude, horror-like apparatus that shocks prisoners who scream and grimace in terror. This represents the misogynous torture of captive women by medicalized techniques. He does not experience legal ramifications for his malicious acts.

## **Sexploitation Films of the 1980s and 1990s**

### ***Misogyny and Betrayal: The Making of Chained Heat***

Sexploitation films produced subsequent to the 1970s were made in the United States or foreign locales by different auteurs. The campy jungle setting was replaced by

prison set designs, some of which appear across titles that also had recurrent performers in both background and centralized roles. The ensuing discussion chronicles the creation of one such movie, *Chained Heat* (1983). A misogynous, hierarchal, and repressive context of patriarchal film-making marked the productive process. The script was initially presented to lead actress Linda Blair as a morality driven drama, similar to the telefeature *Born Innocent* (1974), but during shooting, its exploitative elements were clearly apparent (Blair 2011).<sup>195</sup> Cinematic depictions of graphic rape were experienced as real violence; actresses were traumatized by the continual physical and mental abuse on the set.<sup>196</sup> Scripted performances were forced on actresses. For example, there was pressure to expose the female body in objectifying ways. Writer/Director Paul Nicolas and producer Billy Fine made misogynous demands and comments during their direction of women in various disturbing scenes. Interestingly, Blair contends that she was saved by a Vietnam vet stunt-coordinator who acknowledged her plight. This male heroizing is symbolic of the militaristic rescuer who saves women from the latches of the masculinist WIP abuser – in Blair’s case, the film-makers themselves. After its release, controversy towards the film condemned its overt sexism and demonizing portrayal of lesbian women – a concern voiced by Lesbian rights activists (“Chained Heat,” 2013). As well, the production was criticized for being more voyeuristic than action-oriented like most other women-in-prison fare.<sup>197</sup> Within the cinematic world, *Chained Heat* delivers “huge dollops of nudity, perverted sex, and disturbed, violent female [in]humanity at every turn” (Parrish 1991: 91).

Billy Fine was the producer of the earlier film, *Concrete Jungle* (1982), that received an especially condemnatory review from Linda Gross (*Los Angeles Times*),

<sup>195</sup> The controversial *Born Innocent* is an NBC TV movie that chronicles the psychological, physical, and sexual trauma that a runaway girl experiences in a juvenile detainment home. This title is infamous for a graphic all girl rape scene, initiated by the violent, emotionally unstable Denny and her gang, who use a broom handle in the disturbing assault –an act that had never been aired on prime time television.

<sup>196</sup> Another production by Paul Nicolas, *The Naked Cage* (1986), also depicted graphic sexual assaults.

<sup>197</sup> Nonetheless, this film incorporated high quality camerawork, genre cast members, and performances based on actual practices such as street fighting by Los Angeles gangs. But unlike the Hill and Corman productions, there was less emphasis on acting quality, character complexity, and creativity.

who wrote (as cited in Parrish 1991: 95), “This is an exploitation movie of the worst kind because it wallows in sadism, suffering, dominance, drug abuse, degradation, and survival by dehumanization... .[It] offers in one terrible package every cliché situation and character and every atrocity that every other prison movie has had.” Another critic, Paul Taylor (*British Monthly Film Bulletin*), comments (as cited in Parrish 1991: 96) that this film [does not] display the “zappy energy of the New World [Pictures] cycle of women’s prison [films] nor the reformist impulse of the docu-drama expose. Only the most easily pleased voyeur is likely to derive any satisfaction from the sex or sadism reticently represented here... .” Nonetheless director Tom DeSimone felt the film was authentic in its representations of incarceration (2001).

As well, for most films of this era (1980s), locating the story within the context of US imprisonment critiqued a conservatist system of State-sanctioned repression for the criminalized other; an archetypical embodiment of media propagated fears and fantasies. Select social commentary (possibly unintended) emerges from the reformist discourse espoused by do-gooder agents/authorities who have little power in a criminal justice bureaucracy that is corrupt, ineffective or indifferent to the maltreatment of women in *Concrete Jungle* (1982) and *Chained Heat* (1983) (Surette 1998: 32). In some films (*Lust for Freedom* [1987]), the conservative politics of heroizing the law enforcement agent is primary to the narrative (Ryan & Kellner 1988).

### ***Storylines of Antagonistic Conflict, Abuse, and Death***

The women-in-prison narrative thematically centers on a recently incarcerated ‘innocent’ or ‘minor offender’ who is confined in a nightmarish world controlled by corrupt wardens, abusing and vile guards, and predatory, psycho victimizers. Several ‘questionable’ paths to prison are constituted for the protagonist character, including

wrongful conviction, kidnapping, unlawful confinement, or accidental crimes.<sup>198</sup> In most cases, family members are either absent or do not know the whereabouts or carceral fate of their loved one. A prisoner's lawbreaking, criminal associations, violent behaviours and/or transgressions from proper femininity legitimate her physical and psychological separation from outside society. It is within the carceral world that women's crimes are particularly heinous.

Usually, the new detainee is sympathetically portrayed as vulnerable to the evils of the prison and the wrath of a lesbian *queen bee* and her dangerous followers (the mad and bad) – both authoritative and prisoner alike (Mason 2006: 616). The 'bad woman' heads the institutional hierarchy and co-conspires with exploitative authorities in the trafficking of drugs and women's bodies, in a twisted capitalist venture of individualistic greed that is linked to crime, prison atrocities, and institutional power (Clowers 2001: 25). An environment controlled by prowling inmates who have free reign to intimidate, abuse, and kill other women without legal or correctional consequences plays upon the formulaic mythology typifying the cinematic male prisoner (Faith 1987: 197). A dangerous assortment of names – *Icy*, *Spider*, *Breaker*, *Grinder*, *Eyes* and *Trouble* – that symbolize coldness and aggression, are attributed to background prisoner characters.<sup>199</sup>

Typically, the warden, head guard and other subordinate officers' disregard, encourage or partake in such carnage through their interrelationships with the psycho abuser/killers. The *othering* of the prisoner population is rampant. Locating prison violence in individual archetypes decontextualizes the institutional and conditional determinants in the production of 'risky' behaviour (Hannah-Moffat 1999b: 81). In *Vendetta* (1986), as 'new fish' (first timer) Bonnie walks down the cell house tier, an

<sup>198</sup> A minor offender is an otherwise law-abiding person whose out-of-character, accidental crime sends her to prison. In *Chained Heat* (1983), Carole is convicted of vehicular homicide. Women are falsely imprisoned in several narratives. In *Lust for Freedom* (1987), *Caged Fury* (1989), and *Prison Heat* (1993) a network of corrupt people kidnaps or dupes vulnerable women into a scheme that leads to their confinement. Imprisonment in foreign countries in *Red Heat* (1985) and *Prison Heat* (1993) is linked to the wrongful enslavement of American subjects who suffer various indignities.

<sup>199</sup> These names are associated with the films *Concrete Jungle* (1982), *Chained Heat* (1983) and *The Naked Cage* (1986).

establishing shot depicts the animalistic group of women she will be housed with, who push, mock, proposition, and throw garbage at her – a portrayal that pre-emptly the volatile and seedy world she is about to enter. The loud echoes of women’s voices are heard creating a distorted, surrealist effect. Even background prisoner characters are unremorseful killers. Later in the film an older convict, nonchalantly tells prisoner Laurie “*I’ve been down thirty years. Oh [!] killed my husband and his mother, they deserved it. I enjoyed it.*”

In other titles racially segregated inmate gangs vie for power within a subculture of conflict and antagonism inhabited by opposing character juxtapositions marginalized by race, class, age, and alternate sexualities. Recurring images of unimaginable violence are normalized in an animalistic world where prisoners are susceptible to rape by both genders. No one is safe; only the strong survive, and the weak succumb to a gruesome end. Prison snitches, indebted drug addicts, and vulnerable women are particularly susceptible. The filmic storyline typically ends in varied formulaic outcomes, which may reflect overlapping themes. Typically, the protagonist good girl metamorphizes into a hardened con, who exacts either an individualized revenge (*Concrete Jungle*), and/or a collective mutiny (*Chained Heat* and *Naked Cage*) against the adversarial abusers, in a climatic bloodbath of violence and assault. Despite the protagonist’s hellish ordeal in some storylines, a presumed happy ending ensues in patriarchal and familial based imagery that depicts or implies a romantic reunion (*Red Heat* [1985], *Vendetta* [1986], *Caged Fury* [1989]), a wedding shower (*Lust for Freedom* [1987]), and a return home to loving parents and a beloved pet (*The Naked Cage* [1986]).

### ***Depiction of the Prison: A Nightmarish World of Animalistic, Psycho Predators***

The prison is either a primitive or austere foreign setting, or a vile, brutalizing, cold American context. In its domestic manifestation, it is visually indistinct, a non-descript set of buildings in an urban or rural landscape that contradict our place images of the prison as a gothic cathedral-like structure or massive archaic institutional complex (Fiddler 2007). In some films, exterior spotlights, razor wire, fences, armed guard catwalks, and gun towers denote its carceral presence in a single or sequence of

cinematic shots. But, it is within its walls that the cultural representation of the mythical and generic male prison plays out. It is a claustal space – one that discursively projects a repository of containment, danger, terror, and uncertainty – a cesspool of depravity, extreme predatory violence, misogyny, and corruption (Fiddler 2007: 193). Filmic taglines that read “*raw violence and hot rage explode*,” “*behind prison bars everyone belongs to someone*,” “*2000 women stripped of all they had, except the will to survive*,” and “*explore the naked passions in this hot-house of Hell!*” (IMDb, 2010) dialogically communicate and market these images.<sup>200</sup> Prisoners live in rundown cell house structures or cage-like dormitories and laboriously work in factories, machine shops, or industrial areas (laundry) with a cast of unreformable archetype characters. In these settings there is no contact with the outside world; visitors are not permitted.<sup>201</sup> The prison is the only solution to a population of misfits, abusers, and killers with some deserving of death over containment. Conversely, in some films, do-gooder correctional authorities espouse a reformist philosophy and aim to address the prison oppressions within the discourse of humanizing the prisoner population.<sup>202</sup>

Stark and brutalizing conditions in the ‘hole’ (segregation) are used to isolate and punish the misbehaved or targeted victims; it is here they are susceptible to mental breakdowns and/or sexual assault by sadistic male guards. In *Concrete Jungle* (1982), as the guard opens the segregation cell, a monstrous visual display is seen. Prisoner Sweets is sitting on the floor, filthy and in tattered clothes, her eyes rolled back in her head as she contorts with disjointed bodily and facial movements. Clearly, the deprivational experience has warped her sanity. As guard Stone carries her back to the dorm her body continues to bizarrely convulse. A screeching musical score, similar to the sinister violins heard during the notorious stabbing scene in Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Psycho* (1960), plays in the background. Sweets is never seen again. In addition, the micro-oppressions of segregation, its claustrophobic design and deprivational effects, both physical and psychological are seen in various sets of shots (high angle overhead,

<sup>200</sup> These taglines promote the films: *Naked Cage* (1986), *The Concrete Jungle* (1982), *Chained Heat* (1983), and *Red Heat* (1986).

<sup>201</sup> The protagonist receives a single visit with relatives or a male intimate in only two films, *The Concrete Jungle* (1982) and *The Naked Cage* (1986).

<sup>202</sup> This is apparent in the two films, *The Concrete Jungle* (1982) and *Chained Heat* (1983).

and close-ups) of prisoners trapped by their carceral predicament and fate. In these depictions, prisoners' bodily needs and awareness are heightened in powerful portrayals that lack plot-oriented sequences (Alber 2005: 262). In the same film, protagonist Elizabeth's segregation provides a glaring example of this experience. A still, high angle shot first depicts the prisoner, as a motionless figure on the floor of a grey box-like cell. Shadows of bars on the wall symbolize its claustrophobic isolationism. Elizabeth awakens after being knocked unconscious by a female guard; she is startled by what she sees – nothing. Her physical containment is seen high from above, as the filmic viewer watches her move about the cell and demarcates the barriers that enclose her in – the walls, high ceiling, and the grey colourless space. A close-up depicts her almost suffocating fear at this purgatorial plight. Elizabeth lies on the concrete floor, dirty, starving and barely able to move, unaware that insects are touching her body, crawling around and under her. Upon her return to the dormitory, Elizabeth is non-communicative and almost zombie-like as she lies down on her bed, her dignity and humanity ravaged by her experience. During Elizabeth's second segregative stay, two guards – an unnamed female and the sadistic Stone – viciously beat her; their maniacal laughs echoing in the background. Stone then rapes her.

Visual imagery is expressively dark, with bluish and greyish tones that create a mood of evilness. It is a barren, sadistic, and cruel environment, devoid of feeling and emotion.<sup>203</sup> In some films, certain sounds foretell dangerous events (*Naked Cage*) or create an atmosphere of sinister intensity (*Concrete Jungle*). A foreshadowing of the carceral setting is established in a preliminary scene which graphically displays misogynous violence against women.<sup>204</sup> Threat and fear continue to be communicated throughout the films in both iconography and pre-emptive character dialogue (Mason 2006: 612). These discursive warnings frame how the prison will be experienced. In *Chained Heat* (1983), for example, the ominous sounds and visuals of rattling keys and male footsteps are seen and heard in an abandoned living unit; a close-up of a prisoner's face depicts a fear and anxiety towards what is to come. As guard Stone opens the dilapidated cell, a handcuffed Susie sits on a dirty mattress, huddled against

<sup>203</sup> The video quality of many titles adds to a de-saturated visual effect.

<sup>204</sup> This occurs in many titles such as *Chained Heat* (1983), *Lust for Freedom* (1987) and *Caged Fury* (1989).



the wall.<sup>205</sup> Guard Stone states: “*I never understand why scum like you make such a big deal out of a little fuck. Besides, I paid double last time.*” Susie pulls out a gun and threatens to blow Stone’s head off if he does not open a barrier door. She cries, “*I’d rather die than be caged in this hole.*” They both exit the cell. Then, as she turns, in a blaze of deafening gunfire several guards shoot her dead – and her lifeless body falls to the ground. Susie’s gun is revealed to be a toy. In a subsequent filmic sequence, young, first-timer Carole is depicted with a motley group of degenerate women – murderers, drunks, punk rockers, petty thieves, and prostitutes – all repeat offenders waiting to be processed into the prison. Carole unknowingly awaits a terrible fate.

The foreign prison setting confines women in differentially archaic, cramped, and austere conditions, either dungeon-like or dormitory style.<sup>206</sup> Captivity, similar to its American counterpart, results in prisoners’ exposure to poor living conditions, slave labour, and victimization such as sadistic predation, rape, abuse, and death by other prisoners and staff persons. Overall, though the prison, whether foreign or Americanized, is tied to broader anxieties about crime through its demonization of prisoners, subjects of focus for a crimino-legal complex of classification, confinement, and control; reformation and rehabilitation is not an option.

### ***Categorical Formulations of Woman Prisoner Subjectivities***

In the exploitation film, subjectivity and individualistic difference emerges in archetypical clichés of ‘captive women’ that are intersectionally located, and given meaning through a multiplicity of discourses and corresponding constructs such as formulaic standardization, genre, fantasy, exploitation and commodification that contour the on-screen cinematic prisoner in all her formations. Subjectivity formation is contoured by both social and criminological locations that include gender, class, race, age, sexual orientation, political perspectives and a woman’s crimes, prisoner status, carceral experiences and malleability to rehabilitation or reform. The 1970s titles

<sup>205</sup> The sadistic guard in both the *Concrete Jungle* (1982) and *Chained Heat* (1983) is named Stone and is played by the same actor.

<sup>206</sup> Two films depict foreign penal settings: *Red Heat* (1985), East Germany, and *Prison Heat* (1993), Turkey.

espouse the counter-cultural discourses of pseudo-feminism, women's emancipation and empowerment, oppression (politicization), and dissidence/resistance within the constructs of revolutionary causes/rebellion, normative and ideological transgression, and contextualization, which created prisoner embodiments of the 'liberated criminal woman' and the sub-categorization of the 'revolutionary' subject, for example. These characterizations symbolize anti-establishment perspectives and lifestyles that are *othered* to the traditionalized status quo. Otherwise, the discourse of otherization grounds subjectivities in positivistic criminological notions of essentialist individualistic difference (abnormalization and demonization); constitutionally or environmentally-based deficits, interrelated to the constructs of pathologization, stereotypification, and intersectionality found in characterizations across all the exploitation films – regardless of the productive historical period. Power is associated with individualized character attributes (masculinized, feminist), ideologies and revolutionary causes, and actions (embodied in behavioral repertoires) against others, including violence, victimization, and exploitation from various prisoner villains.

However, the 1980s titles primarily vilify the prisoner *other*, in clearly more evil incarnations, such as the 'lesbian predator,' who is binarily juxtaposed against the normalized protagonist 'good' woman. Upon entry into the prison, women's identities and autonomy are shattered through status degradation ceremonies and the ownership of their bodies by the State and individual predators, with white women, in particular, becoming highly marketable commodities in domestic and foreign prisons. The ills of the carceral world transform some women into taking on alternative, opposing binary positions that typically result in transformative changes to their subjectivities, either in temporary or permanent ways. Contradictions emerge in portrayals that appear to symbolize feminist sensibilities but which covertly reflect right wing ideologies. Specific visual, behavioural, and dialogical styles are linked to various subjectivities within an institutional subculture that contributes to character vilification, righteousness, or difference. Moreover, the attribution of some labels on criminal women excludes the embodiment of other more positive statuses or subjectivities (Ferrell et al. 2008: 38). Disorder and violence are categorically embodied in characterological abnormalities. Certain subjectivities are more associated with women's propensity to commit prison

atrocities; to being susceptible to victimization and to the likelihood of their retaliatory actions against prison abusers.

Overall, in the exploitation film cinematic conceptions of captive woman prisoners split the ahistorical criminal woman into a multitude of characterological embodiments, (categories and sub-categories) that include; 1) the liberated female offender (the non-criminal innocent, liberated criminal, and the revolutionary subject), 2) the racialized pacifistic peacemaker 3) the sexualized, objectified, and victimized penal subject (the sexually liberated, sex-starved, lesbian, repressed, abused and fetishized woman), 4) the madwoman -sick druggie (diabolical stalker and impulsive killer), and 5) the female action heroine (rebel, avenger or rescuer-protector). At the same time, the penal subject is enveloped in juxtapositional categorizations, such as the good woman (unseasoned first timer) versus the bad woman (lesbian predator [masculinized butch, feminized femme, or dark figure]), the otherized gang member – the bad/bad black women versus the bad white women, the human-inhuman (animalistic criminal), and the instrumental partner-emotive friend. The primary interchanging binary structure was the victim (passive, reactive, resistant) versus the victimizer (inherently constituted, environmentally produced or structurally created). Some of these labels first appeared in Hollywood B prison melodramas such as the film *Caged* (1950). Penal authorities are constructed as either do-gooder change agents or corrupt and victimizing abusers.<sup>207</sup> Males personify various villainous, parodied or heroized roles, including: male intimates, inept and humiliated victims, clichéd parodied archetypes, sadistic abusers/abductors/exploiters, hero rescuers, and faceless, patriarchal presences. In the organization of the following discussion, the prisoner and other characterological subjectivities are brought forth in appearance and discursive meaning through exemplars drawn from both historical periods – the 1970s and 1980s -1990s. For example, the ‘female action heroine’ is embodied in the 1970s ‘rebel’ and 1980s female ‘rescuer-protector.’ As well, in other instances, some primary characters such as the 1980s ‘lesbian predator’ are primarily associated with one period.

<sup>207</sup> As well, the female prison authority can take on individualized subjectivities, especially related to victimization, sexualization, and predation.

## ***The Liberated Female Offender***

Countercultural thought spilled over into 1970s exploitation works as “feminism was becoming ... a very revolutionary part, of the American cultural scene... .” (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 31). New World’s pseudo-feminist, discursive twist created characterizations tied to female liberation and freedom, enveloped within the constructs of rebellion-vengeance and transgressions (both normative and ideological), and intersectionality that did not homogenize women into traditionalized or minor filmic roles. Rather, carceral narratives produced leading characters that symbolized unconventional women in several sub-categorizations, such as the ‘non-criminal innocent,’ the ‘liberated criminal’ and ‘revolutionary subject.’ These women represent multifarious intersectional social and criminological locations tied to race, age, class, sexual orientation, political perspectives, offense types (gendered), prisoner status, and particular experiences within the carceral world. As well, a background cast of prisoner personalities existed alongside their primary counterparts.

Criminal offending is feminized (domestic), masculinized (political) or absent altogether. Prisoners are depicted as assertive, sexy, swinging singles, independent women, many of whom reject male dominated familial relationships, traditional gender norms, paternalism, and heterosexuality. Motherhood is absent; women do not aspire to parental responsibilities in any way (Berlatsky 2008: 13). Beautiful, ‘kick-ass’ protagonists personifying a feminized erotic presence dispatch embodied symbols of patriarchy (boyfriends, drug lords, guards, and police officers) through hegemonic repertoires of violent behaviour or comedic parodies of masculinist victimization and authority (Cook 1976: 126; Morris 2000b: 5). In *Caged Heat* (1974), for example, males are embodied in comedically ineffective caricatures. In one scene, prisoner Maggie and friend Alice cleverly intercept a bank robbery in process, shoot one of the culprits, force the men from the bank, collect the cash and flee with Jackie behind the wheel of a getaway car, while the inept male suspects are pursued by the bungling police. Maggie and Jackie are prison escapees.

## ***Prisoner Sub-Categorizations***

### **The Non-criminal Innocent**

The 'non-criminal prisoner innocent' is primarily contoured by her law-abiding and pacifistic ways and wrongful conviction and embodies the discourses of non-violence and normalization. She is typically white, young, heterosexual, and American. As well, she is assumed to be of a higher class standing. Two women embody this status – the hip Terry Rich in *The Big Bird Cage* (1972) and the naive, weepy, and vulnerable Carole Jeffs in *Women in Cages* (1971). Prison oppressions do not transform the protagonist into a hardened con who internalizes a male-based convict code. In fact, individual violence is overtly rejected as an instrumental or emotive reaction against cruel victimizers or troublemaking cell mates (snitches). In a filmic scene from *Women in Cages*, protagonist Carole Jeffs rejects comrades Stoke's and Theresa's lethal plans for their held-captive matron, Alabama. Carole calmly retorts, "*Look she tried to kill me too, but I don't have to be like her.*" Throughout the film, Carole is the peacemaker, who tries to intercede in the other prisoner's disputes and confrontations. Prisoner self-preservation and autonomy means fleeing not just physical confinement, but also the psychological oppressions that are framed within a discourse of retribution and violence.

### **Liberated Criminal**

The 'liberated criminal' woman typically commits gendered crimes, including infanticide, domestic homicide, and prostitution. Again she is a white, young, heterosexual, unseasoned prisoner. Her class affiliations are unknown. Although these prisoners' actions breach the norms of proper femininity, women are not constructed as loathsome villains. Roger Corman created characters whose actions are justified by external circumstances or pathologized states tied to the discourses of oppression, marginalization and abnormalization. In the *Big Doll House* (1971), new fish Marne Collier shoots her abusive boyfriend, with inmate Helen Gear responding supportively "*good for you, that son of a bitch.*"

### **Revolutionary Subject**

The 'revolutionary subject' racially located woman of colour specifically plays upon the discourses of violence, black liberation, politicization, and women's socially

induced (hegemonic) masculinization (Adler 1975: 142).<sup>208</sup> Perspectivally and behaviorally speaking, she is a politicized, strong, smart freedom fighter with ties to a male insurgent partner/lover who is deemed a threat to the prison authorities. Her quest for fighting oppressions from foreign governments – both structural and systemic (carceral) – deflects critique away from US militaristic and imperialist force. Crime becomes an expression of masculinity, reinforcing the belief that rejection of conventional femininity and patriarchal control leads to women’s criminality (Naffine 1987: 90, 91; Boritch 1997: 67). The revolutionary’s efforts to right injustice through particular actions/interactions lead to lawlessness and rebellion. A violent offender who moves into the realm of male-based crimes (insurgency, prison rioting, and escape), the rebel woman is tied to Freda Adler’s views of a “revolutionary [pseudo] feminism” that manifests itself in images of the 1970s Symbionese Liberation Army’s “maniacal escapades” and violence (1975: 20, 21). However, such a prisoner embodiment is problematic in decontextualizing feminism and locating it within individualized notions of empowerment in the renegade transgressor, who uses hegemonic violence and vengeance to right perceived injustices. The linking of female crime to woman’s liberation “reveals a confused and simplistic understanding of the process of emancipation, its influence on consciousness and social institutions, and its location within and alongside other social and historical developments” (Smart 1979: 58).

In her cinematic incarnations, actress Pam Grier, revolutionary Blossom in *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), becomes a re-appropriated and iconographic symbol of Angela Davis (Robinson 1998: 6).<sup>209</sup> Grier’s visual similarity to Davis is unique. But Blossom’s voluptuous figure, eroticized persona, and the corresponding exploitative storylines

<sup>208</sup> Adler (1975: 142) states that black woman’s “aggressiveness, toughness, and a certain street-wise self-sufficiency were just a few of the characteristics necessary for the black woman to shepherd her beleaguered flock of children, siblings, and consorts through the wastelands of educational, social, financial, and cultural deprivations.”

<sup>209</sup> Angela Davis is a prominent African American political activist/organizer, scholar, author, prisoners’ rights advocate and distinguished professor emerita at the History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies Department, at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Historically, she has been a prolific academic writer. Her commitment to carceral issues has focused on racial injustice and oppression, and the move towards penal abolition in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and an alternate vision of justice (University of California, Santa Cruz, Feminist Studies, 2013). In the 1960s she was active in countercultural movements (Civil Rights), had ties with the Black Panthers and was an active member of the Communist Party.

symbolized an evisceration of Davis' radicalized perspectives, political and organizational context, doctrinal commitments, and most importantly, her overall critique of capitalist society. As a result, her revolutionist conscious becomes cinematically betrayed in an individualistic categorical dissenter, bent on taking personal vengeance over furthering structural liberatory causes. However, in a less fantastical depiction, the revolutionary may symbolize the politicized prisoner of the time-women who were imprisoned in the domestic (US) context for anti-war and anti-establishment transgressions (Sloop 1996: 128).

Nonetheless, the prison symbolizes a microcosm of repression reflective of broader socio-structural marginalities. Character dialogue acknowledged this reality, even if for an instant. In the *Big Doll House* (1971), for example, the escapees storm Warden Dietrich's office, brandishing machine guns and taking hostages. Amidst the commotion, the kindly, but ineffectual Dr. Phillips asks "[if] you give me a chance I'll get this prison reformed...don't you wanna see things change for the better?" Revolutionary Bodine rejects his optimism, answering "before you can do anything in here a lot has to be changed out there." Within the historicized backdrop of politicized protest, activism and the women's movement, these images provide a snippet of countercultural commentary.

### ***Essentialist Difference: Good Woman-Bad Woman Dichotomy***

A conservative shift in political and social thought became culturally represented in exploitation films of the 1980s and 1990s. There was a return to traditional values, the supremacy of patriarchal control – familial and otherwise – militarism, law and order, individualistic power, heroism, and feminist backlash. The 'good woman/bad woman' dichotomy emerged within the discourses of naturalization/normalization versus otherization respectively associated with the constructs of glorification – righteousness and pathologization – vilification which manifested in intersectionalities and masculinist thought. Categorizations of the imprisoned woman became significantly more polarized creating monstrous and demonizing characterizations of killer wo[men], with the lesbian predator taking front stage. The discursive marketing of inclusion-exclusion within the opposing classificatory systems of good versus evil, us versus them; the normalized criminalized woman versus the abnormalized criminal wo[man] is portrayed in subject-

centered, individualized character juxtapositions that direct storyline themes and plots emphasizing adversarial conflict, victimization, brutalization, and death (Jewkes 2004: 109; Ryan & Kellner 1988: 91, 93). These characterological fictions uphold hegemonic acceptance of imprisoned women as inhumane and cruel. Essentialist difference is tied to sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class, propensity towards victimization and violence, and the gendered dimensions of masculine-feminine attributes, roles, and behaviours.

### **The Unseasoned First Timer Good Woman**

Cinematically, the inherent image of normal womanhood is culturally embodied in the 'good woman innocent' or 'minor offender' first-timer who embraced two sub-categorizations, particularly in the 1980s-1990s titles. The discourses of normalization, traditional femininity, race, class, heterosexuality, and resistance tied to the constructs of virtuousness and intersectionality frame prisoner subjectivities. As well, the apparent injustice regarding these women's imprisonment also contours their almost non-criminalized status. Some good women are initially portrayed as naive, vulnerable, and easily victimized, while others are independent, resistant, and stand up to their prison abusers. Nonetheless, it is through their eyes that the foreboding carceral world is seen. It is implied or shown that the good woman lives a middle-class life. Here, classist notions of gender reflect that only these women are innocent enough to be unjustly imprisoned, with "film-makers ... projecting assumptions drawn from a middle-class world view and capitalizing on structural class antagonisms" (Faith 1987: 198). Young, attractive and Caucasian, she looks non-criminal and epitomizes white, patriarchal conceptions of beauty; someone who embraces romantic love, marriage, and family life within patriarchally controlled relationships. Elizabeth Deming, in *Concrete Jungle* (1982), embodies these qualities. She is arrested at the airport for narcotics possession, after her shady, drug-trafficking boyfriend, Danny, hides cocaine in her skis. He remarks to his brother, upon doing the corrupt deed, "*With an angel-face like that no cop in the world would ever dream that that little ski bunny was carrying her own snow.*"<sup>210</sup> In other cases, the good woman appears almost child-like; she may live in a protective, rural

<sup>210</sup> Her current predicament (presumed lawbreaking and confinement) is related to her dependency on Danny for the middle-class, patriarchal union (marriage) and love that he promises her.



setting home with her parents, have an older, caring sibling, be inexperienced in the world, and be associated with signifiers such as stuffed toys and beloved pets. In *Caged Fury* (1989), Kathie Collins is “daddy’s little girl,” a young woman whose desire to be independent from her father’s paternal care and country roots, lands her in peril in the big city, where she becomes a victim to false imprisonment and the white slave trade. Once incarcerated, the othering of the penal subject – both central and background characters – is emphasized through their crimes, physical appearance, deviant behavioural actions, and illicit desires; inherent differences that result in the criminalized woman’s naturalized conflict and opposition with the normalized protagonist (Mason 2006: 618).

### **The Lesbian Predator Bad Woman: Masculinized Butch, Feminized Femme, and Dark Figure**

The characterological embodiment of inherent evilness and vilification is primarily intersectionally tied to sexual orientation and race, commonly exploited in mediated forms such as the crime film (Faith 1987: 193). Historically, imprisonment has been synonymous with female perversions. The salacious seductions of eroticized captive women in fictionalized pulp novels, true confession magazines, and film littered the popular cultural landscape (Freedman 1996: 4). As well, academic studies targeted alternate sexualities as a threat to the decency of true womanhood. Over time, changing conceptions of prison lesbianism culminated in its emergence as a dangerous sexual identity associated with the white, working woman, a class realignment in the demonology of homosexuality, formally associated with the masculinized and mythical black sexual aggressor (Freedman 1996: 1). Marginalized by her sexual orientation, the lesbian symbolized the cardinal folk devil, a contemporary and condemnatory incarnation of criminological positivism. Predatory personality traits provided an individualized explanation for her crimes (Surette 1998: 47). The pathologization of sexual preference as an inherent or situational deviance had vilifying, and/or abnormalizing consequences for women who threatened heterosexual dominance. The cultural connection between lesbianism and crime has deep historical roots. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, the two were clearly associated “by virtue [of them] occupying the same space of ‘degeneracy’...” (Ciasullo 2008: 198).

The sexploitation WIP film capitalizes upon the stereotype of the female sexual psychopath – the predatory lesbian character central to the filmic narrative and plot.<sup>211</sup> This characterization enveloped within the discourses of homosexuality/homophobia, hegemonic masculinity, deadly femininity and violence, took on particular visual, behavioural, and dialogical styles tied to the constructs of intersectionality, pathologization, dangerousness, and predation-victimization. Typically, the lesbian is white while her class position is unknown. Three sub-categorical embodiments of the lesbian prevailed along a dimensional range from the boorish, unattractive, deep voiced and ‘masculinized butch’ (Kay in *Vendetta* [1986]), the feminized, eroticized ‘femme’ (Sophia in *Red Heat* [1985] and Cat in *Concrete Jungle* [1982]) to the so-called ‘dark figure’ (Helena in *Prison Heat* [1993]). The butch was the antithesis of normal femininity, seemingly more evil than the femme. S[he] is the cinematic characterization of the Lombrosian born criminal; monstrous, possessing a “diabolical cruelty,” more ferocious in [he]r crimes than males, someone devoid of maternal affection, feelings, or procreative desires, mannish in dress and action, exhibiting excessively perverse behaviour and dominating of the weak by suggestion or force<sup>212</sup> (Lombroso & Ferrero 1899: 187). Her masculinized appearance is threatened by the feminized good woman. The butch elicits feelings of fear and loathing. Conversely, the ‘femme’ is attractive, well-manicured and attends to her womanly appearance.<sup>213</sup> Although her femininity implies a pseudo (situational) lesbian status, she shows little interest in men. Her primal desires are with women. She is calculating and deceptively lures young, susceptible prisoners into her web of manipulation and lies, initially appearing to be a prison comrade. Unconscious fears of deadly feminine evil are personified in the femme, a pathological archetype much like the butch, symbolic of a hetero-patriarchal prejudice that constructs

<sup>211</sup> In some titles the lesbian predator takes on a more peripheral role. These films include *Lust for Freedom* (1987), and *Caged Fury* (1989). Nevertheless, the prison lesbian is a convention of the WIP film (Ciasullo 2008: 198).

<sup>212</sup> Early criminologists Havelock Ellis and Cesare Lombroso sprung the transitive logic that facilitated in the cultural construction of the prison lesbian. With the invert as masculine, and masculinity naturally inclined towards criminality, the invert becomes criminalized. And “the ‘wedding’ of the invert and the female offender has continued well into the Twentieth century” (Hart as cited in Ciasullo 2008: 199).

<sup>213</sup> Sophia is very feminine, wearing make-up, lipstick, and a negligee. She has bright red hair. Similarly, Cat continually grooms herself, combing her hair and filing her nails. She wears black high-heeled boots

sexual difference as an intrinsically shocking deviation (Jewkes 2004: 132).<sup>214</sup> The 'dark figure' lesbian incorporates both femme and butch qualities into her persona. She can look tough, masculinized, and hardened with a physicality of strength, or alternatively, become feminized and sexy, depending on her behavioural actions.<sup>215</sup> In actuality, criminological research has reported that the visual demeanour of defendants, or their noted lesbian sexual orientation, predisposes women to harsher treatments by the courts. Chesney-Lind and Eliason note that in American death penalty cases, "The more 'manly' her sexuality, her dress, and her demeanour, the more easily the jury may forget that she is a woman" (2006: 38).

The bad woman could be alternatively portrayed. In *Vendetta*, Kay is dually constructed beyond her primary butch persona. She is bisexual, a sub-categorical status, that moves outside the typical gay-straight binary structure. In a single scene, she brags to other prisoners about her rendezvous with drug dealer lover Gino: "*I got me ten inches of Italian stallion waiting for me.*" Overtly, she appears womanly, wearing a black leather skirt, tank top, and facial make-up, even though her mannish demeanour continues to linger under a pseudo-feminized appearance. But Kay is ultimately more interested in drug monies than sexual relations.

All the same, these loathsome villains' behavioral repertoires are similarly driven; they dialogically threaten, relentlessly stalk, and harass vulnerable, and kill targeted prisoners, typically, the good woman and her allies. They are monomaniacal in their goals to exploit and 'own' the bodies of young attractive new arrivals turned-out for their sexual desires. However, despite the lesbian's consequential wrath upon her victims, her lethal demise is an inevitable storyline outcome. In *Vendetta* (1986), Bonnie Cusack, an attractive, young college co-ed, is sentenced to Duran Correctional Institute for manslaughter after she shoots a man who violently rapes her. Shortly after her confinement, Bonnie is murdered by the vile prison trustee, Kay Butler, and her gang.

<sup>214</sup> A contemporary criminological study reported that the lesbian turnout femme is a more aggressive victimizer than the primarily butch, stud, black woman. These views are documented from the letters of one prisoner over a five year period who witnessed victimization and was herself victimized (Fital Alarid 2000: 397).

<sup>215</sup> Helena's feminized appearance can be masculinized through her demeanour and accentuated, black attire of a dark tank top, toque, and sunglasses.

Earlier in the film, she punches Kay in a shower room full of cheering prisoners, an overt rejection of her sexual advances. Intent on revenge, Kay has a lethal plan. Ominous, non-diegetic sound pre-empted and accentuates the disturbing act that follows. Bonnie is kidnapped, and Kay asserts, “*You’re history Goldilocks*” as the woman is repeatedly punched and beaten unconscious. Kay then orders the crew to “*shoot her up*” as an extreme close-up depicts a needle full of heroin piercing into the young woman’s arm. Kay maniacally laughs “*Nighty-night Goldie, you just had your last date with the three bears.*” Bonnie’s body is dumped over an abandoned cell house tier. As she falls to her death, the shot transitions to another scene; Hollywood stuntwoman Laurie Collins-Cusack-Collins jumps off a building in a daring feat. Soon afterwards, she infiltrates the prison to seek vengeance on her sister’s killers.<sup>216</sup>

Regardless of the lesbian’s physical appearance, masculinized violence, intimidation, and fear are a means for imposing power, control, and dominance over others. Often the lesbian predator is the head trustee of the prison unit or dormitory ‘hierarchy’ – a position that is bestowed to her from corrupt authorities. However, in the *Naked Cage* (1986), she takes on alternate and recycled qualities in the personification of Sheila, who both visually and behaviourally fits into the formulaic category of the villainous queen bee.<sup>217</sup> She is a masculinized killer, large in stature, with a deep voice. Nevertheless, protagonist Michelle is protected by Sheila, after Rita viciously stabs a screwdriver through Michelle’s hand, and threatens the woman’s life. Rita, the resident bad girl, is alternatively a violent, evil, heterosexual female.

The lesbian predator is also embodied in prison staff workers (guards, the superintendent or warden). Whether in the prisoner, or the authority incarnation, this villain’s sidekicks, or gang of thugs, are background characters ordered to muscle, threaten, and assist in acts of assault. They are variously characterized as drug addicted, and/or mentally unstable, and are equally as ruthless as their leader. For the most part, the lesbian designation in all its forms precludes most characters from

<sup>216</sup> At the morgue, Laurie pulls away the sheet and sees Bonnie’s battered and bruised body. She realizes that her sister has been murdered, even though the prison authorities classify her death as a suicide from an overdose complicated by a fall. In many films the authorities use prisoner suicide or accident as an excuse for deaths caused by murder.

<sup>217</sup> Sheila’s lesbian status is implied.

occupying other more positive statuses and subjectivities. The bad woman is the ultimate enemy, an exploiter, abuser, and killer of women. She is no less aberrant than victimizing male characters. Homosexual predation also promotes homophobia and intolerance. Character dialogue can directly espouse this view. In *Caged Fury* (1989), the femme, a naked Warden Sybil, provocatively invites Rhonda into a hot tub for a sexual rendezvous. But Rhonda replies in disgust “*Lesbian freak, I’d rather die.*” Sybil calmly reacts, “*Die, I think I can arrange that.*” Rhonda is then shown in the hot tub, having succumbed to Sybil’s threats.

Regardless of the portrayal, the bad woman is inherently evil, sadistic, and unsalvageable – a seething cauldron of anger, ready to erupt in impulsive rage. The insidious message is that female crime is associated with masculinity, horrific violence and lesbianism (Faith 1987: 193). She enacts masculinist behaviours that symbolized a flawed caricature of patriarchal power and dominance. In the end, she dies a violent death, taken down by legitimate authorities or the good woman, in an act of vengeance and survival; confinement not enough to stop her psychotic reign of terror. Prison activist and scholar Karlene Faith asserts that such representations have serious implications, explaining, “It is assumed [that] these fearsome fictional women reflect actual criminal women, and it is further assumed that whatever ill treatment they receive in prison is justified and deserved.” (Faith 1987: 197). As well, the ghastly depictions of women’s violence, sexual predation, torture and torment of others is “a betrayal of their actual experience [of prison]” (204). Lesbian prisoners do not undergo a villainous metamorphosis into “the demented, sex-crazed” monsters depicted within such detestable mediated representations (1987: 194). Alternatively, Ciasullo argues that the lesbian has currency within the cultural imagination of WIP narratives because her butch, femme and other formations speak to our unconscious curiosities and fears, and enable the gaze of the anonymous viewer to occur without penalty or condemnation (2008: 196). In this view, the prison lesbianism offers straight women characters and viewers a ‘looking’ position without taking on the role of homosexuality (206, 214).

### **The Otherized Gang Member: The Bad/Bad Black Women Versus The Bad White Women**

The essentialist construction of blackness and whiteness as signifying categories (Creed 2007: 488) emerged in the sub-categorical embodiments of the ‘bad/bad black

women,' versus the 'bad white women' 'otherized gang members' enveloped within the discourses of race/racism, violence and masculinization, interrelated to the constructs of opposition-confrontation, intersectionality, and biologization (primordial aggression). Conflict between racially designated gangs involved their struggle to control the illicit drug trade in the 1980s titles. They were naturalized enemies. Also, the corrupt prison authorities often fueled deadly conflict between prisoner adversarial groups. The bad white women were usually headed by the butch or femme, and had attributes similar to their leader. To the contrary, in *Chained Heat* (1983), Dutchess and her black sisters look feminized but are portrayed as violent, vindictive, tough, and radiating a masculinized power with muscular bodies and threatening ways. The racialized body and its underlying meanings carry great resonance in mediated representations of otherness and difference (Hall 1997b: 46). Dutchess, an imposing physical presence, with broad shoulders and a powerful physique, towers over the other women. Her voice is commanding, non-emotional, and intimidating in expressing her demands and concerns to Erika, the white gang leader. Here, women's super-strength and physicality are pathologized unlike that displayed by the legitimate crime fighting action heroine. But the bad/bad black women are seldom at the center of filmic narratives; rather, it is the bad white women who hold the most power within the prison.

Black women are portrayed as more deadly than their white counterparts exhibiting a frightening primitivism, played out in behavioral repertoires of savagery and barbarianism (Hall 1995: 21). Cold, distant, and capable of incredible violence, the black prisoner's ferocity is exemplified in pre-emptive talk. Their inherent wrath is something to be feared. Margo, a kindly, older, experienced former queen bee, in the *Concrete Jungle* (1982), warns good woman Elizabeth to stay away from the black Muslim sisters, explaining "They don't cuss, they don't fool around, they don't even do drugs; but you cross them wrong and you're dead." Spider, a white gang member in *Chained Heat* (1983), suffers a gruesome demise. As she sits on the toilet smoking marijuana, one of Dutchess's prison sisters spears Spider in the throat with a long hook that pulls the woman's body up against the stall. The killer laughs and smiles with satisfaction in a close-up shot. Sometime later, Carole discovers Spider's drenched and bloodied body that is graphically displayed – the hook embedded deep inside her head – with Spider's contorted face having turned blue. Earlier, Spider had stabbed a black comrade of

Dutchess's gang.<sup>218</sup> Here the black woman kills for retribution – enacting an eye for an eye mentality against those who victimize her prison sisters. Black aggressors do not engage in predatory lesbian victimization even though there is an implicit assumption that these women may be gay, given their manly appearance and strength. Nevertheless, constructing minorities as more violent implies that individualized violence is interpreted as a characteristic of race (Shaw 2000: 64). Racism is also depicted in terms of discriminatory opposition, and/or the physical and social segregation of women within the prison culture and hierarchy. In *Vendetta* (1986), Laurie has a Hispanic roommate who is overtly racist and resistant in her attitudes towards having her as a cell mate. She objects and complains to guard Nelson “*I can't have this gringo shit in here. What are you trying to set me up for murder, or what? People are going to start to get hurt around here, I'm telling you.*” The ahistorical notion of a feminine nature that is culture and class specific further pathologizes women of different races and ethnicities.<sup>219</sup>

### **The Racialized Pacifistic Peacemaker**

Alternatively, a contradictory subjectivity formation is Brenda in the *Naked Cage* (1986) who is depathologized as a ‘pacifistic peacemaker’ within the discourse of non-violence and corresponding construct of pacifism. She is a caring and peaceful individual who expresses concern for her prison comrades (gang members or otherwise). In this depiction, constructions of the black woman can diametrically symbolize non-aggressive embodiments. Brenda tries to shelter her sisters, away from the dangers of confinement; namely drug taking. After white friend Amy gives Ruby marijuana and cocaine, Brenda voices her frustration over vengeance seeking actions, “*I am trying to do some good in here for my people.*”<sup>220</sup> *So that they could have some hope, when they get back out there. That's why I don't allow any dope. You brought that shit to Ruby didn't you? I trusted you Amy.*” In this depiction, pseudo-friendships and interactions emerge across

<sup>218</sup> This scene was excluded from the DVD edition of the film.

<sup>219</sup> In some exploitation films European women are constructed as abusers, such as the warden, and lesbian victimizer Sophia in *Red Heat*.

<sup>220</sup> This term is racist, homogenizing black prisoners as people with no sensitivity to women's differences, ethnicities and varied subjectivities.

racial lines. Women also formed communal bonds and solidarity in face of racist practices that in some instances were challenged through resistance and/or revolt.

Later in the film when a group of Brenda's prison sisters vie to murder guard Smiley, intently chanting "*kill him, kill him,*" upon learning that he raped Ruby, Brenda preaches non-violence and legitimate ways of dealing with this tragedy and the broader prison injustices, even though her efforts ultimately fail. The angry leader of the mob laments: "*Brenda man, that's shit, you talkin' is dead. Ain't no justice in here! It might be some out there ... some of us ain't making it back out there, so we got to stand for what we believe in, in here.*" In a subsequent filmic scene, the villainous guard Smiley is viciously mauled by the mob and others, who open up the cell partition in a vengeance-seeking rage, after he shoots Brenda dead. A bloody riot sequence ensues. Smiley is eventually pinned up against the cell house barrier of the white prisoner unit, and viciously stabbed while the prisoners repeatedly chant, "*Brenda... Ruby.*" In this depiction, despite Brenda's pacifistic preaching, the film discriminately reverts back to the exploitative fervour of climatic mayhem caused by a mob of inherently animalistic, savage black women. The Caucasian prisoner Carole Jeffs in *Women in Cages* (1971) is also a pacifistic peacemaker, as described above.

### ***The Sexualized, Objectified, and Victimized Penal Subject***

The women-in-prison film in both the 1970s and 1980s emphasizes gratuitous nudity, sexuality and soft-core pornographic imagery, framed within the discourses of sexism, sexuality, race, otherization and violence tied to the constructs of commodification, objectification, exploitation, discrimination, victimization, and intersectionality. The sexualization of prisoners emerges within three primary representational expressions linked to corresponding categorical prisoner embodiments. First, the prisoner characterizations of the 'sexually liberated', 'sex-starved,' and 'lesbian,' archetypes emerge from the discourses of hyper/untamed sexuality and homosexuality that create non-normative, liberated, and othered embodiments. Second, within these films prisoners are susceptible to maltreatment and degradation as 'sexually abused' women whose bodies are owned, trafficked and brutalized by victimizers of both genders. The discourse of violence pervades this misogynous fate for many 'captive females.' Third, in the 'fetishized woman' there is a focus on the visual in the fetishization



of women's bodies depicted through exploitable elements that objectify prisoners for the 'gaze' and misogynist pleasures and profits. In this way film commodifies women's bodies for the movie consumer, in titles ultimately, marketed for rental or sale to enable repeated public viewing. Lastly, the 'sexually repressed' woman is the stern correctional superintendent who is alternatively dour and unattractive, but who emerges as sexualized spectacle in an erotic dream sequence. Intersectionality emphasizes women who are constructed within the social locations of disability, race, ethnicity, age, heterosexuality and to a lesser extent homosexuality. Both primary and secondary characterizations take centre stage in these representational contexts.

### ***The Sexually Liberated, Sex-Starved, and Lesbian Prisoner***

Violence, animalistic aggression, and untamed sexuality are used to visually and socially situate prisoners into particular character constructions such as the 'sexually liberated woman,' 'the sex-starved inmate' and the 'lesbian.' These women cross racial lines and are young, attractive, and American. Some notable embodiments are high class. Non-normative sexuality is exploitively represented as liberated and/or overtly voracious. In 1970s productions, the 'sexually liberated' woman is juxtaposed against those who are sexually frustrated. The former asserts an unrestrained heterosexuality that is free from patriarchal control and monogamy. In the *Big Bird Cage* (1972), rebel Django kidnaps the curvaceous, sophisticated Terry Rich in a robbery at the Flame restaurant gambling club. Fleeing in a stolen cab, with an older couple screaming in the back seat, the two flirt as Django informs Terry of his intention – rape. She responds with inviting conviction, "*ole baloney, I don't believe it, besides you can't rape me, I like sex.*" Django quips "*Okay you're a hostage, how do you like that?*" Terry replies "*I love it!*" They both laugh and smile. This scene implies that liberated women enjoy sex, even rape. The dialogical threat of male violence is sexualized and legitimated by intermixing misogynist and comedic elements intended to entertain the male cinephilic viewer.

Some characterizations play upon the myth that imprisonment causes women to become either situationally lesbian, and/or sexually aggressive, needing real men to satisfy and consume their insatiable sexual appetites. The idea that prisoners are 'sex-starved' is a fantastical and promotional filmic attraction that satisfies lewd male desires (Hill 2002). In the *Big Doll House* (1971), for example, delivery man Fred continually

hounds his side kick, Harry, about sexual liaisons with the prisoners”<sup>221</sup> Despite Harry’s lack of success he wittily quips, “zap R-A-P-E zap.” Fred, at first dumbfounded, finally gets the punch line, “*Wait a minute... you mean to tell me you’re going to rape one of these girls with all these guards hanging around?*” Harry smiles, and then laughs, “*I ain’t going to rape one of them; one of them is going rape me.*” His eyes widen with a look of impending delight. This film “craftily misses no opportunity to exploit its cast for the sake of titillating its voyeuristic audience” (Parrish 1991: 28). And in another exemplar, from the *Big Bird Cage*, prisoner Karla continually complains, “*I can’t stand to think about it. If only I could get laid by a real man once and a while I think I could stand it.*” In the prison, however, real heterosexual men don’t exist; instead guards Rocco and Moreno are stereotypically and effeminately gay.

The sexually aggressive and wanton woman moves outside the discourse of heterosexuality in some exploitation films. The villainous predatory sex-starved lesbian central to the 1980s titles, previously appears in two primary Roger Corman incarnations of black prisoners: Helen Gear, in *the Big Doll House* (1971), and matron/trustee Alabama, in *Women in Cages* (1971). With the exception of the latter character, the lesbian is not as pathological, and personifies more positive attributes. In these films she is otherwise feminized, sexy and eroticized in either the femme or butch forms. Gear is a tough, racialized image of the predatory butch who owns her lover, Harrad (a sick druggie, who needs a constant supply of heroin), but otherwise takes care of her. In this embodiment, lesbianism is a form of liberatory sexuality, away from the patriarchal heterosexual relationship. In addition, Gear’s lesbianism is juxtaposed against her role as a common prostitute in outside society. Conversely, in the personification of Alabama homosexuality is pathologized in a vile femme abuser who preys upon prisoners to be her lover, in a relationship that borders on forced sexual servitude. As well, homophobic dialogue can pervade a filmic scene. In the *Big Bird Cage* (1972), lesbian Karen is taunted by the labels of “*sex maniac*” and “*dyke*” by the other women. In one instance, Mickie openly mocks Karen: “*You can tell how she’d love to put those big horny hands on my skin; press that big ugly body down on top of me.*” Karen then aggressively confronts Mickie.

<sup>221</sup> Fred and Harry deliver fruit and also contraband items to the prison compound.

In another scene, Helen Gear exploits her sexuality to unknowingly involve the sleazy worker Harry in the women's escape scheme. As he walks towards her cell she catches his eye. Harry needs her cigarette monies but Gear has something else in mind, after she snatches the tobacco away from him. She says "*give me your hand*" as she places it on her breasts under her dress. Then, Gear provocatively looks at him and exclaims, "*Isn't that better than money, Harry.*" Although his interest is titillated, Harry wants "*the real matzo [cash],*" so Gear obligingly gives him something better; what he really lusts after – her crotch. Although he cringes with excitement, Harry's desires are quenched by Gear's lesbian ways, as he knows she "*digs girls.*" But Gear, in a soft, seductive voice, settles his hesitation by blaming her captivity on causing "*a girl [to] get strange desires [that] creep up on you like a disease.*" This is curable, however. When Harry asks, "*What does it take?*" Gear plays upon his masculinity, answering, "*A real man like you [Harry]*" (Berlatsky 2008: 9). Here, Gear clearly takes on the situational lesbian femme role to provisionally seduce Harry into taking the bait, but her butch toughness comes out when she forcefully grabs his genitals in an act of phallic humiliation – one that is implied and off camera. Although Harry, leaning over towards the cell bars, is physically and psychologically incapacitated, he is painfully and deceptively aroused into coming back that night for sex. Gear "is trapped in [a] double bind of a colonialist discourse," which either objectifies the black body for the white male gaze (Harry) or views the untamed hyper-sexuality of the black jezebel as manipulative and threatening to western patriarchal power (Lalvani 1995: 269). As well, Gears' body is both titillating and dangerous. Nonetheless, Gear's character exhibits an instrumentally-based agency in constructing herself as a sex-starved, heterosexual prisoner to Harry.

### ***The Sexually Repressed Woman***

In *Caged Heat* (1974), the 'sexually repressed' woman emerges within the intersectionality of disability in the cruel, unfeeling superintendent McQueen, a wheelchair bound tyrant who is the juxtapositional embodiment of risqué sexuality and proper, almost prudish, femininity. Upon first sight, she is far from sexually-desirable; McQueen radiates a sour demeanour. Her tightly pulled back dark hair, and coke-bottle glasses add to her unattractiveness. McQueen's hardness and emotional barrenness is linked to her

sexual frustration. As the Warden falls into a deep sleep one night, a dream sequence depicts her as an able-bodied, sexy woman, clad in a Vegas-style, slinky, studded dress, black and red high heels and wearing a top hat. As she parades on stage in front of a group of cheering prisoners, McQueen preaches the sins of fornication to the women, shouting, *“Don’t you realize with sex it puts you behind bars in the first place?”* The prisoners scream *“Yeah!”* in unison. McQueen continues speechifying, *“Stealing to better dress for a man...killing to eliminate a sexual rival.”* She forcefully demands; *“Give me contrition. Let’s have redemption...repent our debt to society.”* The prisoners repeat her words and stand-up and shout in approval. The film then transitions to McQueen chastising prisoners’ Bell and Pandora for their disgusting display of behaviour the night before, in a parodied outlandish skit on masculinities. The warden angrily laments to them: *“Given a chance to express yourself you went straight to the gutter. Even for criminals you are a particularly poor reflection on womanhood.”* McQueen later tells her subordinate that she had a disturbing, yet gratifying, dream the night before. She smiles with almost lurid satisfaction. In this discriminatory depiction, disability is equated with eccentricity, repressed sexuality, and evilness in a character who espouses normative femininity, during a time period where traditional gender norms were being challenged. It appears that it is McQueen’s disability and its limitations that somehow propel her towards a fantasy of sexual freedom, albeit one that she deems as associatively criminogenic to the prisoners she oppresses.

### ***The Sexually Abused Prisoner***

The ‘sexually abused’ prisoner characterization emerges within two contexts 1) degradative carceral processes and 2) the actions of vile abusers and exploiters. Women are criminologically located within carceral oppressions and are young, Caucasian, and usually American. The strip search is an act continually associated with exploitative violence, degradation, assault, and the humiliation of women, symbolizing a form of rape for cinematic characters and real prisoner victims (Horii 1994: 15). As well, individually propagated victimization can be exceedingly heinous. A visuality of expression serves to exploit and shock the viewer through extreme images of women being stripped, violated, and brutalized by pathological, sick persons. Nudity is associated with violence. Camera close-ups and sound depict such acts, their methods

of terror (weapons), their effects on victims, and their outcomes – deadly or otherwise. In this “pornographic eroticization of violence [cruelty], ...the ploy of casting females as both [its] perpetrators and victims” compounds its offensiveness (Faith 1987: 196). This is especially the case in 1970s titles. Women’s bodies become the visual site for misogynous prison injustices and crimes in a display of pain, terror, and humiliation within the imaginative world of the film. It is in these depictions (and others) that the sexual abuse of prisoners is rampant.

In 1970s titles cruelty is particularly barbaric with fantastical contraptions of punishment being depicted. In the *Big Doll House* (1971), prisoners are barbarically tortured by Lucian, the despicable head matron. In one scene, she sadistically interrogates prisoner Collier, whose naked body is physically restrained on a rack, an overhead, close-up shot signifies Lucian’s perverse use of a cobra snake that dangles close to the prisoner’s exposed breasts. In a cold, and ominously monotone voice, the matron warns, “*The cobra is deadly poisonous... [its] venom attacks the nervous system. The victim dies in convulsions, foaming at the mouth.*”<sup>222</sup> An unknown hooded voyeur looks onward with hidden pleasure – a figure assumed to symbolize misogynous patriarchal power. But it is the Warden, Miss Dietrich, not a man, who is eventually found to be the guilty party. In the *Big Bird Cage* (1972) a crude, painful, and sadistic punishment is inflicted on prison escapee Terry Rich, who is hung by her hair and suspended high off the ground, with her legs and feet bound together. The other prisoners look on as Warden Zappa lectures them in a high strung, authoritative voice. Film-maker Jack Hill (2002) thought this was a nifty scene and overtly disregarded its misogynous nature. He remarks “[the] fact is hanging by your hair is not that big a deal... .” Although this act depicts the torture of women as pure fantasy, it is nonetheless very disturbing – as is Hill’s commentary.

In the 1980s films, although, sexually frustrated women seek to have their desires met by the resident male guard, heterosexual sex is depicted primarily in the context of graphic assault. The most disturbing exemplar emerges from the *Concrete Jungle* (1982), where prisoner Neumann is beaten and raped by guard Stone in a

<sup>222</sup> In *Naked Cage* (1986) the sound of a rattlesnake foreshadows the evilness and danger, to come.

frenzied act of violence and victimization. Stone orders her to strip; they don't have much time. He then remarks, "*Cat said you were in some porno movies; I never made it with a movie star.*" He throws her up against the wall and sadistically and perversely ravages Neumann's body under torn off clothes. The guard appears visually abhorrent, sweating profusely and looking and laughing maniacally. As he begins raping Neumann, her screams are transitioned against another prisoner giving birth, with the intensity of each act – childbirth and sexual intercourse – reaching a climatic end; one that is joyously painful and the other bleakly hopeless and sadistically humiliating- with the other woman delivering her son at the same time that Stone orgasms. This is a staggering juxtaposition and very much disaffecting to the viewer. These cinematic shots depict a heightened state of being in the body, one's corporality related to the penetrable violation of rape versus the naturalized delivery of birth. In these examples, it is the off-screen viewer that is the voyeuristic witness to brutal cinematic sexual assaults. Alternatively, in *Chained Heat* (1983), an equally sadistic rape pleasurably titillates a characterological viewer within the on-screen world – the evil female guard Boots, who sinisterly smiles, as if sexually aroused by what she sees.

The homoerotic look is central to both predatory and consensual lesbianism. It can be either overtly or covertly depicted. In *Prison Heat* (1993), four college co-eds are kidnapped and held captive in a brutal Turkish prison. In one scene, lesbian Helena provocatively stands against the wall and seductively stares at Bonnie in the shower. She is constructed as "*Miss Hungry Eyes,*" a sexual predator on the hunt for an easy victim. Later in the film she attempts to rape Michelle, in the prison yard. Alternatively, women are engaged in loving, mutual relationships and sexual liaisons.<sup>223</sup> Even so, homosexuality is juxtaposed against scenes that privilege heterosexuality as the norm. In *Lust for Freedom* (1987), a graphic depiction of consensual lesbian sex is juxtaposed against two other very disturbing scenes of punishing inmates, housed in adjacent cells – the bloodied whipping torture of a enchained prison escapee and the rape of another woman, a prison drug dealer. The camera moves back and forth to each portrayal while protagonist Gillian Kaites recovers from a physical assault from the evil matron, Miss

<sup>223</sup> The films included *Concrete Jungle* (1982), *Chained Heat* (1983), *Vendetta* (1986), and *Lust for Freedom* (1987).

Pusker. Here, lesbianism is sequentially linked to violence against women as if it (in part) necessitates a misogynous reasserting of heterosexual supremacy through sadomasochistic cruelty and sexual assault. Women's criminalized status makes them deserving of this fate. In hearing their screams, former police officer Gillian feels no sympathy. She narrates, "*Now I was ... caged alongside the same petty trash and scum that I had helped put away. I knew a lot of brutality and perversion was going on in those cells, but I didn't care. I had my own problems.*" Overall, *Lust for Freedom* is an offensive sleaze-fest of misogyny and degradative violence, replete with amateurish performances, cheesy aesthetics and scenes, goofball characters, and ultimately, weird, campy humour.

A recurrent exploitative theme is the permanent or temporary ownership of prisoners' bodies as commodities for personal consumption or sale within the deprived prison subculture or illicit sex trade. Both men and women figure in this process. Predatory 'queen bee' inmates or corrupt authorities may deceptively help a vulnerable first-timer in an attempt to gain her trust, with the intention of making her the bad woman's property; usually for sexual purposes. In *Concrete Jungle* (1982), Cat appears to be kindly and caring towards Elizabeth, who accepts the woman's favours – candy bars and a job in the laundry – before she realizes that she is dangerously indebted to Cat.<sup>224</sup> Unbeknownst to the woman's revelations, Cat tries to further lure Elizabeth into her clutches by saying, "*Listen Cherry, I like you a lot. I could take care of you, make life real easy for you. I want you to belong to me.*" But Elizabeth directly declines her offer, answering, "*I don't want to belong to anybody.*" Cat grabs then her by the hair, and says vehemently, "*You don't understand how it works on the inside; everyone belongs to someone.*" Regardless of Elizabeth's continued rejections, though, she becomes Cat's property and is off limits to other prisoners. Initially, Cat's intentions to own Elizabeth are explicitly communicated to Sweets, another one of her degenerate followers. Shortly after the newbie prisoner enters the dormitory, Cat instructs Sweets, "*Pass the word. No rough stuff with her unless I say so. I want her clean. Got it!*" This commentary implies that Elizabeth's commodity as a sexual object for other prisoners is restricted only to

<sup>224</sup> Elizabeth realizes this after she witnesses Cat and her thugs coldly kill prisoner Margo for an unpaid drug debt. Initially to ensure her safety and survival, Elizabeth is silent to the corruption and death imposed on prisoners.

Cat, who wants her virginal for her own intentions. Women's bodies are also owned by Cat, who pays off guard Stone with prisoners who he regularly sexually assaults.<sup>225</sup> It is implied that the unnamed female dormitory guard has full knowledge of this.

As well, sexually enslaved women are susceptible to degradation, continual abuse, disease and even death. In *Prison Heat* (1993), Colleen learns her horrific fate during her containment in a vermin infested dungeon Susan, a sick and distraught looking woman, speaks of an eerily similar path to prison. The two women talk as they sit; their arms and legs shackled to a wall. Susan had been kidnapped at the border, and no one knew her whereabouts. A month later she was sold by Warden Saladin to white, Middle Eastern slave traders, who ran several brothels. She shows Colleen a branded 'S' (slave) tattoo on her thigh and continues "*you'll get one too, Cause that's where you and your friends are headed.*" A tear runs down her face, a look of hopelessness in watered eyes; "*They'll fuck every orifice of your body and in months you'll have every disease you could possibly imagine, and in six months if you're not dead, they'll kill you and find someone else.*" She tells Colleen to try to escape; the risk of death is the better choice. The above example symbolizes the essential sexuality of male power: of degradation, hate, ownership, of gender hierarchy, and dominance evoked in cultural forms, and produced in a media industry controlled by male-based narratives and images (Dworkin 1989: 23).

The induction process into confinement relinquishes a woman's former selfhood, personal rights, and material possessions, which rationalizes discriminatory treatment of someone transformed from an outsider to an insider status (Alber 2005: 250; Horii 1994: 13). A prisoner's crimes, associations, and normative transgressions legitimate her exclusion and loss of freedom. Captive women are now susceptible to becoming the property of the State. In *Concrete Jungle* (1982), Warden Fletcher informs Elizabeth "*there's one thing you better learn fast, you've got nothing anymore - no clothes, no rights, you're here for discipline, that's my job. You're no longer a citizen of the United States. They didn't want you. They gave you to me.*" In this depiction, State sanctioned punishment becomes perversely rearticulated into the individualized ownership of

<sup>225</sup> This is also the case in *Chained Heat* (1983).



women whose status of prisoner subjects them to injustice, disempowerment, and abuse.

### ***Sexually Fetishized Prisoners***

In the exploitation film, the pornographic eye fetishizes the woman's body for leering male audiences and on-screen characters' predatory, victimizing, and sexualizing behaviours within the mimetic world of the film.<sup>226</sup> It is here that the 'fetishized woman' takes form. Prisoners are constructed as object; they become depersonalized, subordinated, and fragmented in a myriad of ways that enhance the consumerist role of the gaze (Rabinovitz 2006: 40). Such fragmentation is interrelated with consumerism, interlocking the powers of looking with the powers of ownership and consumption in a "multiplication of areas of the body accessible to marketing" (Coward as cited in Walters 1995: 56). An illicit den of captive inmate bodies voyeuristically creates an orchestration of looking for a multiplicity of gazes (Hall 1997b: 59). Visual and narrative techniques typically make voyeuristic objectification a female prerogative (Smelik 2007: 492), with the lesbian predator (whether characterologically masculinized or feminized) often taking up the active looking position that is almost exclusively a male right in other cinematic forms, such as Hollywood film (Nixon 1997: 308). Nonetheless, the camera symbolizes a concretized instrument of the male viewing position – that of the film-makers who direct the cinematic shots that objectify women in various stages of undress, eroticised actions, sexually explicit dialogue, and scenes of torture and violence (Walters 1995: 72). The 'look' is continued within the representational world itself, through the gaze, whether male or female, ever present in filmic scenes that depict exploitable imagery for the characterological eye to see – a license not afforded to racialized characters (Gaines 1990: 208). The anonymous viewer represents the panoptic-like gaze of the onlooker towards a filmic, televisual or computer screen that "creates dramas of surveillance and visibility" (Mayne 2000; 117; Bensoff & Griffin 2004: 235).

In the 1970s titles, it is the young, Caucasian or racialized woman who becomes the sexualized prisoner object. Both heterosexual and lesbian prisoners are depicted.

<sup>226</sup> Alternatively, in *Caged Heat* (1974), the sexualization of women is depicted in a non-fetishized fashion in sultry and erotic dream sequences.

Conversely, in the subsequent 1980s films, it is the beautiful white body that is exclusively objectified and fetishized - the young, attractive, feminized blonde model – while women of colour and the homosexual bad woman are rarely seen.<sup>227</sup> However consensual lesbian relations are depicted between women in a few background scenes. The depiction of prisoners as “sexualized spectacle” is established through subjective camera shots<sup>228</sup> and costuming that depicts prisoners as scantily dressed, in thong underwear, g-strings, frilly bras, cut-off shorts, dresses, smocks and halter tops (Mulvey as cited in Walters 1995: 62). As well, many background, unnamed prisoners are seen frolicking in the shower in suggestive ways, or seductively posing for the camera or an on-screen voyeur – a masculinist control of the image (Walters 1995: 59).<sup>229</sup> Women are eroticized through the exposing of selective body parts, namely, breasts, nipples, crotches, buttocks, legs, and bare backsides in standardized scenes linked to the prison intake process, including the showering, delousing, hosing down, and strip/body cavity searching of criminal women deemed as unclean and immoral (Faith 1996: 174). These scenes are found in most exploitation fare to varying degrees of graphicness. Such overt visual displays of women’s bodies denies women’s agency as active subjects in their construction of self, in many instances. As well, the gaze symbolizes a patriarchal power held by the viewer who cinematically possesses women through spectatorship and ‘looking’ – “the female body ... offered ... purely as a spectacle, an object of sight, a visual commodity to be consumed” (Bordo 1996: 54).

In *Vendetta* (1986), Bonnie Cusack, the blonde newcomer, has hardly “matriculated into her strange environment, [when] she is taunted as ‘fresh meat’ in the showers by some [predatory] inmates... .” (Parrish 1991: 442). As lesbian butch Kay Butler picks up a bar of soap, she says “*Hey, honey pie, looking for this?*” She lets the bar purposely slide out of her hand, onto the floor, and then retrieves it, as she slowly gazes up the contours of Bonnie’s tanned physique, with sexualized intentions. “*We got*

<sup>227</sup> In the *Naked Cage* (1986), it is the nude body of black prisoner Ruby that is voyeuristically seen, prior to guard Smiley’s rape.

<sup>228</sup> This is a camera shot that is shared by both the filmic character doing the looking and the viewer (Bensoff & Griffin 2003:234).

<sup>229</sup> The film *Caged Fury* (1989) is particularly voyeuristic in this manner, in that most of the actresses are adult film performers whose fetishized nude bodies are on display through the cinematic close-up.

plenty of time to get acquainted,” she tells Bonnie; “I’m Kay. I’m the boss! I’m the big bad wolf! You and me we’re going to be real good friends.”<sup>230</sup> Although the two prisoners stand in the shower, it is Kay who is fully clothed; the unattractive, masculinized woman is not voyeuristically displayed.

### ***The Madwoman: The Sick Druggie as a Diabolical Stalker or Impulsive Killer***

The ‘mad’ woman ‘sick druggie’ is either a central or background characterization standard to the WIP narrative. Constitutionally and environmentally-based deficits take precedence over intersectional difference in contouring this subjectivity although these women are typically Caucasian. This characterization is a pathologized and pathetic soul who enacts violence on others. Madness emerges within the discourses of psychiatrization, medicalization and violence, interlinked with the constructs of addiction, mental illness and victimization (instrumental or volatile) and embodies two primary prisoner sub-categorizations: the ‘diabolical stalker’ and ‘impulsive killer.’ Dependency on drugs makes prisoners treacherous, psychologically disturbed, and unpredictably dangerous. Their behavioural repertoires of violence (calculated or impulsive) are varyingly contoured by the construct of addiction depending on the characterological embodiment. In the 1970s films, women in desperate need of a ‘fix’ are willing to get it by any means possible: even murder. Stoke, in *Women in Cages* (1971), is an unstable and devious addict. She uncontrollably shakes and appears paranoid and agitated after Carole caringly approaches her. Stoke, in a fearful rage, yells, “*Don’t touch me. Don’t anybody touch me!*” as she cowers up against the wall. Characterologically, Stoke appears to be a friendly comrade to her cell mates, but in truth she is an underlying untrustworthy and diabolical stalker, who schemes to kill Carole (the good woman) at every opportunity. In one scene, after giving Carole a poisonous sandwich, extreme close-ups show Stoke’s bulging blue eyes, that appear wildly and erratically focused on her prey. Stoke’s face is profusely sweating, her body trembling, and unintelligible sounds are heard as she remains in an almost animalistic wait, until Carole becomes deathly ill. An ominous sound of an organ sinisterly plays in the background. Eventually,

<sup>230</sup> In male prison slang, ‘wolf’ denotes a sexual predator.

Stoke gets up and uncontrollably fumbles to get a needle full of heroin, injecting it and then falling back into a dreamy, calm, unconscious state. Stoke is not unlike the 1950s' Criminologist Otto Pollak's inherently deceitful woman, who uses trickery and lying to mastermind invisible methods of murder (Pollak 1950; Smart 1977: 94); her intentions are initially hidden from other prisoners, but not the filmic viewer. Pollak theorized that women's gendered role as homemaker enabled them to partake in various undetectable means of committing homicide not readily available to men, such as poisoning (1). As the storyline progresses, Stoke's attempts appear more overt.<sup>231</sup> It seems Carole's testimony against syndicate boyfriend Rudy needs to be stopped. And Stoke will get a stash of drugs if she does the job of permanently silencing her. In this depiction, Stokes actions/interactions with Carole (murder attempts) are strategically carried out to secure drugs and construct Carole as a potential victim. Stoke is ultimately unsuccessful in her wicked attempts.

Crime is also intermixed with addiction and the inherent constitutional deficits triggered by a woman's reproductive cycle. The latter view occupies a prominent position in medical, legal, and psychologized doctrines (Armstrong 1999: 68, 69). In the *Big Doll House* (1971), Harrad is depicted as a strange, unstable woman; her madness linked to infanticide and heroin use. She dances around in the cell in a psychotic-like trance. In this characterization, the mad woman defies femininity by being unable to carry out proper womanhood (motherhood) due to a serious psychological disorder. Portraying women who commit infanticide as biologically disturbed perpetuates the myth of normal women's naturalized maternal feelings and desires, and further entrenches crime within a disordered subjectivity of apparent monstrous maternalism (Jewkes 2004: 127).

During the prison escape, Harrad becomes an impulsive killer who is increasingly drug-sick, irrational, and agitated; while her lover, Gear, tends to the plan. Harrad looks strung out, worn, frail and wild eyed, as she pathetically whines, "*I got to have it Helen*

<sup>231</sup> Stoke's other techniques of attempted murder include putting a venomous snake on Carole's bed while she sleeps, and pouring acid through the grate of the segregation hole during Carole's containment. But after the escape, Stoke's attempts are more open, as she tries to shoot Carole. After Carole is sold into sexual slavery on the shipboard brothel, the Zulu Queen, she eventually realizes Stokes's evil intentions.

(Gear), please, get some for me. I'm sick. I got to have it now." She frantically grabs Gear's shoulder. In frustration, Gear pushes Harrad up against the barred cell door; she has no time for the woman's pathetic pleas and accusations to come. In a pitiful act to elicit Gear's attention, Harrad yells, "You don't want me anymore, you want that Collier bitch!" Fearing that her lover will abandon her, despite Gear's promises to the contrary, Harrad becomes even more distraught and angry, whimpering, "How am I going to get a fix if you leave me behind! I'm not pretty enough, am I? I'm just an ugly, ugly, snail. You want to see me dead, don't you? But I got a hunch I'm going to see you dead first." In a frenzied state of jealousy, she impulsively stabs Gear in the jugular vein, in an act of homicidal madness.<sup>232</sup> Later in the film, as she hears the truck leave with the escapees, she then desperately calls out for Gear, whose bloodied corpse is seen in the background. In Harrad's psychosis she does not realize what she has done. Clutching a cloth doll, she staggers outside into the destruction, and guard Leyte shoots her dead.

### ***The Animalistic Criminal***

The dialogical labelling and caging of imprisoned women as 'animalistic criminals' who deserve secure containment, harsh punishments, and in some cases death, emerges within the binary juxtapositions of humanization-dehumanization. As well, other discursive constituents of psychiatrization, masculinization, violence and correctionalism, or, reform, interconnected to the constructs of biologization (racialization), aggression (untamed and intentional), intersectionality and characterological transformation, shape this subjectivity. Often, these animalistic embodiments intersectionally linked to race and sexual orientation enacts behavioural repertoires similar to the bad/bad black women. Women's status as prisoner also leads them to being constructed as animalistic. These subjectivities emerge in characters across both the 1970s and 1980s time periods. Images of subhuman, racialized female offenders originate in the biological primitivism of Lombrosian criminological theory. Confinement in barred cellar units and chambers, isolative but also open to constant

<sup>232</sup> This incident represented the most graphic prisoner initiated violence for a Roger Corman film, with the exception of some scenes in *Women in Cages* (1971).

visual surveillance, symbolically reinforces the need to contain wild women (Alber 2005: 251). Within the representational world, prisoners are categorized by themselves, other inmates, and correctional officials, within the contexts of aggression, prisoner management/control, and self-injury. Women are both visually and behaviourally portrayed as having a physicality of masculinized strength that enables them to commit violence (Mason 2006: 617). For some, facial tattoos make them appear all the more fearsome, threatening, and savage-like. Bad woman victimizers are also often associated with signifiers like the snake (phallic power), symbolic of their wicked, deadly, and lecherous ways.

Inhumanity is associated with aggression in two specific categorizations: the 'mad woman psychotic' and the 'lesbian predator.' In the *Big Bird Cage* (1972), Rina and other mentally ill prisoners are confined in the nut pen, a primitive bamboo cage segregated from the other dorm huts. These dangerous women are depicted as screeching, unkempt, and savage prisoners who are continually hosed down, their partly clad and exposed bodies rolling in the mud. Conversely, in the 1980s titles also, the white lesbian predator exemplified an animalistic rage sparked by intense jealousies over lovers or potential sexual partners (Freedman 1996: 4). Alternatively, two crimes enable prisoners to keep their humanity; spousal homicide and infanticide. In the latter case, a pathologized reproductive state precludes a woman from utter dehumanization, although she is still constructed as non-woman. In this case, the murderess is victim to her biology

The centrality of the staff-inmate divide creates perspectival differences regarding prisoners in both cinematic depictions and actual carceral practices. Dana Britton (2003: 108) documents the capacity of officers to either humanize or dehumanize prisoners – although one's inmate status should not imply a forfeiture of humanity as depicted in some films. Black characters are susceptible to the stereotype of having an inherent aggressiveness that symbolizes racial patriarchy and colonialist perspectives. In the *Naked Cage* (1986), the death of Ruby is embedded in masculinist evolutionary discourse. Warden Diane warns the good newbie prisoner, "You know they call this place the cage, Michelle. The longer I work here I think they're goddamn right." She pauses, and then continues, "The guards, the zookeepers and you're the animals." Diane shows Michelle what she means. A naked Ruby is found hanging in the infirmary

from an apparent suicide (after being raped by guard Smiley). Scrawled on the wall is a desperate message to her friend that reads “*sorry Brenda I have no more hope*” The warden emotionlessly responds; *According to Darwin, only the strong ones survive.*” When Michelle questions Ruby’s intentions, the warden replies “*She got tired of being an animal,*” implying that she was too weak to survive her subhuman existence – death being the only option.

It is the caring prison official, who humanizes and advocates for prisoners within a reformist philosophy, that deems women as salvageable subjects. This reflects a critical commentary in 1980s titles. In the *Concrete Jungle* (1982), prison administrator and crusader Shelley Meyers suspects nefarious corruption, after receiving several complaints of prisoner maltreatment and drug overdoses that require further exploration and scrutiny, in a facility that she sees as chaotic and unsafe. She angrily makes allegations to Warden Fletcher: “*It’s your job to take care of the inmates. You don’t do [it] worth shit!*” The warden sarcastically pathologizes the prisoners as untrustworthy and manipulative cons, who lie about the injustices inflicted upon them. She coldly asserts, “*We punish criminals. Everybody sends their bad little girls to me and when I try to discipline them you tie my hands.*” Meyers retorts, “*Even when a person commits a crime they’re still a human being!*” *It’s your job to treat them that way; it’s my job to see that you do!*” Meyers then storms out of the office. This correctional crusader’s resistant commentary albeit within the realm of a thematically exploitative storyline nonetheless depathologizes through the discourse of humanity, those women who are otherwise problematized in the films various incarnations of the penal subject.

Contrary to this, men can commit violence and retain their humanity. Crime is an aspect of cultural ideology intrinsic to the hegemonic masculine ideal, whereby aggression is articulated and even glorified. This is symbolic in the actions of the macho male rescuer found in some 1980s titles (Jewkes 2004: 127; 132, 134). Still, it is the male prisoner who is often deemed as animalistic, especially in contemporary prison films. Constructing incarcerated women as subhuman –a cinematic iconography associated with their male counterparts – “is both a reflection of and a catalyst for the public’s seemingly unquenchable desire ... [to build] more and more prisons in which to cage criminals” (Britton 2003: 109). Actress Linda Blair, in trying to bring some authenticity into the film *Chained Heat* (1983), reiterated a similar imagination. She

remarked “anybody that goes to jail or any animal that is imprisoned, you will change, you will go crazy, you will learn how to protect, you will learn to do whatever it is you have to do...” (Blair 2011). Accordingly, some prisoners are personified as human while others are excluded from humanity altogether – characterizations that mirror the good woman/bad woman distinction.

## **Victim/Victimizer**

### ***The Passive, Reactive, and Resistant Victim***

The discourse of oppression-violence emerges within the constructs of victimization-predation to create the opposing and interchanging categorizations of ‘victim/victimizer.’<sup>233</sup> Victimization from villainous abusers is found in all the filmic titles with misogyny taking on various heinous and sadistic depictions. The actions/interactions of abusers spark characterological transformations in former victims who temporarily take on the role of victimizer or challenger. The criminal woman as ‘victim’ personifies any one of three sub-formations – the ‘passive,’ the ‘reactive,’ and/or the ‘resistant’ victim – that are further tied to the discourses of psychiatrization, pseudo-feminism and politicization, shaped within the constructs of traumatization, submission-vengeance, characterological transformation, transgression (political and carceral) and intersectionality. In the latter two subjectivities, the good woman, susceptible and defenceless to the characterological villains, may initially take on the passive victim designation before morphing into a reactive stance – a psychologized almost pathologized revenge against her abuser(s). Alternatively, she may outwardly resist prison victimization and oppressions. Nevertheless, some prisoners are portrayed as too defenceless to ward off the continual abuse from [usually] a single perpetrator and her followers. Overall, victimhood is intersectionally tied to a woman’s ‘first timer’ prisoner status, her crimes, political perspectives, and carceral experiences. Inherent personality attributes (weakness) often associated with traditional femininity make women at risk for abuse. Victimization is usually depicted as sexual, psychological, and/or physical.

<sup>233</sup> The term *interchanging* refers to how some women experience both subjectivities.



### **The Passive Victim: The Vulnerable, Weak Prisoner**

The 'passive victim' is denied the agency or power to overcome her plight and very often succumbs to cruel abusers. She becomes the sexualized property of other women. In *Red Heat* (1985), the People's Correctional facility is a particularly foreboding and sinister place, with its strict regime, uncompromising rules, rampant victimization, and sadistic, prisoner antagonist Sophia, who reins ongoing fear on targeted women. Barbara, a timid, vulnerable, and non-descript prisoner, is regularly tormented, and assaulted by the lesbian queen bee [Sophia] and her gang. In graphically disturbing scenes of gang rape, other prisoners ravage Barbara's body like animals over their prey. After a physical altercation with Sophia, Barbara is sadistically raped with a broom handle. She cries and screams as she is kidnapped and held down, a close-up shot graphically depicts her legs spread apart. Before the brutal act proceeds her victimizer coldly asserts "*nobody fucks with Sophia.*" The terror in Barbara's eyes is seen as a hand over her mouth quickly muffles her screams. Sometime later in a horrifying display of misogyny, Christine finds Barbara dead in the bathroom, hanged by the neck from a utility pipe. In a perverse signifier of ownership, Sophia's name is crudely scrawled in black ink on Barbara's forehead – the mark of the deadly femme – and the suicide of the passive victim is actualized.

### **The Reactive Victim: The Good-Woman-Gone-Bad**

Conversely, the 'reactive victim' fights back; taking on the interchanging, and opposing subjectivity of the victimizer, the 'good-woman-gone-bad' first-timer who metamorphoses into a vengeance-seeking killer, a characterological change that supports a form of victim-feminism, whereby self-initiated violence is associated with feminist conquest (Iorns MaGallanes 2005: 32, 37). Women's actions become justified on the basis of self-defence. As well, prisoner retaliation is psychiatrized as a damaged psychological state or underlying pathology, temporarily triggered by trauma, (Battered Women's Syndrome) that results in an impulsive and deadly violence (often graphically depicted) against a victim's abusers (Motz 2001: 238).

In some cases these actions are embedded within a rape-revenge narrative strand. In *Prison Heat* (1993), passive victim Bonnie is initially depicted as child-like, naive, and a vulnerable target for prison predators. Psychologically traumatized and

distraught from Warden Saladin's repeated sexual assaults, Bonnie attempts to cut her wrists, before being intercepted by her friends in the bathroom. During a daring escape, however, she morphs into a reactive victim, who castrates the incapacitated warden. This transformation is often only temporary with most prisoners re-emerging as the good woman after their release. For example, after killing bad woman Rita by throwing her against an electric panel, taking policewoman Rhonda hostage, and inciting a prison riot good woman Michelle (in *The Naked Cage* [1986]) finally returns home, riding off into the countryside on her horse, Misty. She appears happy and carefree as if to have shed her prison scars and aggressive nature. The embodied message is that 'normal' women are too weak to endure the adversities of prison life, and so they transform into 'bad' women retaliating against their abusers, inflicting pain and sometimes death, or otherwise surrendering emotionally, mentally, or physically under the constant pressure of warding off prison predators.

### **The Resistant Victim: The Politicized Prisoner**

Prisoners' victimization from the authorities and/or other inmates is linked to the categories of 'revolutionary dissenter,' 'spy,' or 'political.' In these personifications, the prisoner is the 'resistant victim.' These women are susceptible to punishments based on their perceived or actual political views, crimes, and affiliations with a foreign or repressive government, official, or male insurgent deemed the enemy. They are consequently excluded from membership in the prison world and hierarchy. In the *Big Bird Cage* (1972), Terry Rich, a woman with intimate ties to a foreign Prime Minister, is initially ostracized and threatened by other prisoners who call her the "new pig",<sup>234</sup> in a country deemed politically repressive and corrupt. Prisoner Karla rants, "*I don't know if you know this but around here amongst us honest thieves and murders a political prisoner is about the lowest, dirtiest scum you can be.*" Mickie remarks, "*Look, whether you're ballin' some clapped up dude in a back room of a bar or king shit in the imperial palace baby, it's still hoeing, she's okay.*" But Karla angrily insists, "*Unless she did it for fun then she's not a whore, she's political!*" Nonetheless, Terry nonchalantly resists Karla's accusations and denigration of her subjectivity. This subversive commentary reflects how countercultural ideologies and politics of the seventies were deemed more

<sup>234</sup> This word denotes a hatred of the established mainstream.

threatening to the American social order than street crimes. Terry's sexual relationship with a political oppressor is more condemnatory and despicable, than the act of prostitution, thievery or murder.

In 1980s titles, spies are also targeted and subject to abusive treatment from communist regimes, and/or individual sympathizers. The US authorities (Embassy officials) are constructed as uncaring, neglectful, or unable to provide assistance in finding and securing the release of citizens confined in foreign penal contexts. In *Red Heat*, (1985) protagonist Christine Carlson is upset with her fiancé Mike who chooses military re-inscription over a marriage and family life. Angered and feeling hurt, she takes a midnight walk only to be kidnapped and imprisoned for alleged espionage with spy Hedda. Upon being wrongfully imprisoned, Chris is labelled a spy, and targeted for abuse by correctional authorities and individual prisoner predators. Later in the film, passive victim Christine is held captive and raped by Sophia and a male guard, while Barbara helplessly looks on. During the assault, close-ups of the unemotional faces of Barbara, Sophia, and the male abuser are interjected by filmic cuts, to prisoners watching a propagandized message proclaiming the evils of Western capitalist countries (United States), while glorifying the communist People's Republic. At the end, Sophia's face emerges from the darkness, as she warns Christine "You'll do [what I ask you] to do or this will happen again, again, and again." Prior to this brutal act, a desperate and resistant victim Christine challenges her abusers, "what kind of people are you? Why me, why Barbara, I mean what did we do?" The guard sternly replies "you're enemies of the State and it was your choice!" But when Christine declares her innocence he continues "no political ever thinks they did anything wrong, even after they confesses." Overall, *Red Heat* is a particularly misogynous and offensive film that nonetheless elicits some unique review commentary. For example, Kim Newman (*British Monthly Film Bulletin*) validates a myriad of exploitable elements as authentic aspects of the European carceral experience in her statement, as she explains, "The details of life in an East German prison (assembly-line drudgery, organized bullying of politicals, elaborate tattoos to signify memberships of Sophia's clique) are fairly convincing" (Parrish 1991: 350). As such, this representation may perpetuate a pseudo-realistic effect on viewers who deem this film, like the professional critic to be authentic in portraying the carceral world and prisoner wards.

## ***The Passive or Reactive Victim***

### **The Prisoner Transgressor: The Indebted Drug Addict and the Addicted Goody-Goody Snitch**

Women prisoner ‘transgressors’ are victimized and killed for deeds (drug debts and snitching) that violate the convict code and jeopardize the bad woman’s control within the prison hierarchy. In this case, it is the ‘indebted drug addict’ and ‘addicted goody-goody snitch’ sub-categorizations of the resistant or passive victim who suffer the wrath of killer women.<sup>235</sup> The murder of prisoners through drug overdosing is a recurrent theme in 1980s exploitation films.<sup>236</sup> In *Concrete Jungle* (1982), a sick and deeply indebted Margo demands drugs from her supplier Cat. In a frenzied state of desperation she threatens, “*Cat you give me a fix, you give me a fix Cat, or so help me God, I’ll spill my guts about you,*” (inform authorities about Cat’s illegal activities). Margo is wild eyed and shakes with agitation. Cat obliges, giving her a lethal injection as Margo realizes her sinister intentions. And in the *Naked Cage* (1986), Amy is heartlessly killed by Rita and her gang. A close-up shot shows Amy’s worn and tired face, gaunt from a daily fix of drugs. The next shot transitions to a shattered mirror, with Rita standing behind Amy. Taking a large piece of broken glass, Rita warns “*Do you know what this is? This is our favourite dish for snitches.*” Amy screams but is quickly subdued by being punched in the stomach. Rita pushes the glass down Amy’s throat, and as her trembling body crumbles to the floor, blood spills from her mouth, and she gasps in death.

### ***The Victimizer – Inherently Constituted, Environmentally Produced, and/or Structurally Created***

As previously discussed, villainous ‘victimizers’ within the exploitation film, are particularly emergent within the discourses of otherization, criminological positivism and violence, associatively interlinked to the construct of pathologization (constitutionally or environmentally-based abnormalities). Inherent-based pathologies are often intersectionally-located to sexual orientation (lesbianism) and structural oppressions.

<sup>235</sup> The drug addict does not impulsively or diabolically kill, or attempt to harm, others like the sick druggie in the 1970s titles. Instead, the addict’s dependency makes her susceptible to drug debts, which ultimately result in her demise

<sup>236</sup> These titles include *Concrete Jungle* (1982), *Vendetta* (1986), and *Naked Cage* (1986).

Nonetheless, within the construct of contextualization some films link the victimizer's behavioral repertoire of violence to the discourse of marginalization (e.g., racism classism), personal hardships and injustice. In *Women in Cages* (1971), a spectre of racial violence is graphically unleashed in the characterization of Alabama, the black prisoner trustee (Walters 2001: 119), who sadistically tortures prisoners in the play pen: a dungeon-like chamber with fantastical sadomasochistic contraptions and archaic death apparatuses, such as the noose and guillotine. In this hellish den of depravity women are stripped, whipped, hung, and undergo degradative treatment. American prisoners are targeted for Alabama's wrath, because they symbolize the broader white, racist, classist society that repressed and ghettoized black inner city communities of the time. Earlier in the film, Alabama smokes marijuana, and celebrates her expatriate status, softly speaking, "*It's five years since I left the States.*" Her lover, Teresa, then asks, "*What do you know about the new American in my cell [Carole]?*" Alabama replies, her voice intensifying with anger, "*Nothing, except she's typical of the racist bitches I knew back in the States.*" This commentary expresses an anti-American sentiment through the actions of a victimizing lesbian.

Later in the film, Carole Jeff's is tortured mercilessly by Alabama, after she divulges to visiting dignitaries the cruelty and maltreatment the women experience. The prisoner is stripped, and crudely bound with electrical cord that repeatedly delivers painful shocks to Carole's body. She yells to Alabama, her punisher, "*What kind of hell did you crawl out of?*" Alabama coldly replies, "*It was called Harlem baby, and I learned how to survive, never have pity.*" Alabama approaches her and harshly asserts, "*I was strung out behind smack at ten and worked the streets when I was twelve.*" When she then disrespects the tyrant trustee, Carole is shocked again. The victimizer is also a victim to male abuse, sexual assault, and/or control. But she becomes a predatory and permanent victimizer, unlike the good woman. After the prison escape, as Stoke vies to shoot her dead, with Sandy's encouragement, Alabama yells to her female captors, "*Why not! A white man raped me; a white bitch can kill me.*" However, Alabama is eventually drowned by a barbaric mob of foreign tracker men, who first attempt to rape her in a particularly disturbing scene.

## ***Female Action Heroines: The Rebel, Avenger, and Rescuer-Protector***

The category of the 'female action heroine' is related to the discourses of heroism, hegemonic masculinity and pseudo-feminism interconnected to the constructs of victimization, rebellion, retaliation, vigilantism (injustice/justice), protection, decontextualization and transformation. The heroine personifies three sub-categorizations: the 'rebel,' the 'avenger' and the 'rescuer-protector.' In these cases, the criminal-hero juxtaposition is deconstructed through a character's dualistic personification of both subject positions. For example, the primary actions/interactions of prison abusers framed within antagonistic conflict and victimization initiate a characterological transformation in some protagonist characters that enact particularized behavioral repertoires of action including protection, retaliation and/or vengeance for the atrocities inflicted upon themselves and others. In other instances, the prisoner embodies a naturalized authority in leading a collective prisoner rebellion interlinked to carceral injustices and broader politicized issues. Women oppressed by their prison circumstances and maltreatment are empowered through heroic actions that become secondary, often action-packed, resolute plotlines. Prisoner's use of emancipatory violence is symbolic of a pseudo-feminist aggressor, who battles against misogyny and repression to enact revenge or incite rebellion. Women are the doers and agents of violence; the identity of passive victim does not prevail (Iorns MaGallanes 2005: 28). These women are socially located through race, age, and political perspectives. The criminological locations of prisoner oppression, inmate status, and experiences (law-enforcement) also shape these sub-categorizations.

### **The Rebel**

The 'rebel' in 1970 WIP films promoted radical ideologies, actions, and counter-cultural discourses. She was racialized and perspectively tied to politicized causes against oppressive foreign regimes. Consequently, the rebel's rebellious actions incite prisoner revolt over crusading efforts in dealing with carceral injustice. Women relied on their own ingenuity and physicality over the strength and bravado of male rescuers. Their communal banding together was emphasized over the individualistic actions of the female avenger. In *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), Blossom stops the other women from a violent retaliation against the authorities, after Mickie's death on the 'Bird Cage' sugar mill; however, she leads the women to rebellion later on in the film. She is visually

eroticized but behaviourally masculinized, having the qualities of independence, leadership, and courage. This revolutionized action-heroine, a consciousness-raising renegade who, in a ‘frenzy of the visible’ flees the patriarchal oppression inherent in her confinement, provided actress Pam Grier a chance to exercise her naturalized authority, even though such “[figurative displays] wove fantasy solutions to the injustices of crime, [carceral, and structural oppressions]” (Bailey 2009: 87; Walters 2001: 107; Hill 2005).

### **The Vengeance Seeking Avenger**

In 1980s productions, the ‘action heroine avenger’ was situated within a conservatist discourse that glorified individualistic aggression, in righting injustice through the vengeance-seeking actions of the pseudo-masculinist, young, sexy white ‘female avenger.’ She is a crime fighting prisoner who uses vigilantism, force, retaliation, and extreme violence against bad women abusers and male rapists to seek retribution and uncover the unjust victimization of others, such as an abused or murdered family member, friend, or other prisoner. Characteristically, her actions emerged within a victimization-revenge (rape or otherwise) narrative, a strand of the broader filmic storyline which culminated in a climatic filmic ending.<sup>237</sup> Prison injustice to self and others contours this subjectivity in the unseasoned offender. In fighting off her adversaries, the action heroine enacts an individualized justice, since the law, prison policy, administration, and outside authorities are absent, or ineffective in stopping carceral atrocities. In some cases, the avenger seeks out the solidarity or aid of other women in her quest; assistance from male intimates or others is not necessary (Clover 1993: 76). She is a feminized, attractive woman who possesses masculinized strength, power, and specialized skills, such as intelligence and physical prowess (martial arts), honed in male-based professions or interests, including movie stunt work. She is another reformulation of the ‘good woman gone bad’; a woman who crosses over into the opposing binary category, using hegemonic masculinity to exact an emotionally driven vengeance against villainous archetypes. Yet, as she carries out her deadly retribution, the avenger is depicted as an angry predator, intent on killing her adversarial targets in any way possible. She may appear almost animalistic in her over-the-top

<sup>237</sup> Rape-revenge here is not genre-related but rather forms a part of the narrative structure, for instance, a particular scene(s) or sequence (Read 2000: 25).

violence. As such, psycho-predator lesbians and sick males turn ordinary women into deadly vigilantes (Rafter 2006: 106).

In *Vendetta* (1986), Hollywood stuntwoman Laurie Cusack-Collins is the “the hard bodied hardware heroine” (Holmlund 2005c: 97) who avenges her sister’s death by killing the inmate culprits in an exaggerated display of karate and kick-boxing moves. Parrish (1991: 443) notes that in a novel storyline change, the law enforcement officer is not the protagonist character, like in other sexploitation WIP films. After the legal authorities refuse to investigate her sister Bonnie’s death, which is deemed a drug induced suicide, Laurie commits a string of crimes to ensure a prison sentence in Duran Correctional Centre, where she identifies and seeks an angry confrontation with the “death gang” members (Parrish 1991: 443). Nevertheless, in a final, climatic, action-packed sequence, Laurie – out for justice – and killer villain Kay – in a maniacal, animalistic rage – duel head on. After Kay is taken down, in an act that parallels the immortalized monster in horror films, Kay rises once last time to kill; but guard Dice shoots her dead, and the villain’s body is blasted to the ground. In death, Kay appears all the more monstrous. She is a bloodied and horrific sight; one that emerges from our criminological imaginations of the depraved, psychotic killer. The “featuring of ...unredeemable characters, echo and reinforce the lock-em up rhetoric of contemporary crime control agencies” (Rafter 2006: 92). It is the survival of the fittest, and the avenger inevitably defeats her aggressor(s).

Ordinary women with no specialized training also sought vengeance on prison abusers. In *Concrete Jungle* (1982), Elizabeth holds the lifeless body of Kathy, a friend overdosed by prisoner Cat, who is jealous of the women’s close relationship. Emotionally distraught and enraged, it is Elizabeth who reactively takes lethal vengeance on Cat, committing an act of violence to do so. Eventually, Elizabeth provides the authorities with pertinent information to build a case against the warden, which is the non-violent first step in the implementation of just treatment for the women. In this depiction, it is the female avenger who enacts transformative changes to the penal context, through a legitimate act of retaliatory violence. The punishment fits the crime; legal, moral or ethical issues do not question the legitimacy of the avenger’s actions (Clover 1993: 78). Such elevations of deviance are mediated by the



depathologization of the avenger's subjectivity and the circumstances that drive her to kill.

### **The Deadly, Rescuer-Protector**

Alternatively, in *Lust for Freedom* (1987), the young, white law enforcement officer is heroized as the 'rescuer-protector,' a smart, strong, defender who wards off both the criminal element and corrupt prison officials. In a thematic twist, she is aided by one of her abusers, Sheriff Coale, who wants to right his injustices inflicted on the women. Protagonist Gillian meets Sharon, a sweet, bride-to-be in the Georgia county jail. Caring for this young, innocent, victim of rapist, Jud, and others, stirs something inside of her. Gillian had all but given up after the death of her fiancée partner, Ron. She had lost herself in sorrow, a heart crushed by a shattered dream of marriage, family, and happiness. Gillian quits her job as a police officer and narrates "*cops were dying all over the place and all I could do was act like a woman.*" It is not until her lust for freedom is unleashed that her former self re-emerges, taking control, firing a gun, and killing her oppressors in a fight for women's emancipation, justice and sweet Sharon's return to her fiancée and womanly virtues.<sup>238</sup>

To conclude, the female action heroine's vigilante driven violence is legitimized because it symbolizes an honourable solution in the taking down of corrupt officials, and villainous abusers whereas the psychopathic prison predator is demonized, in part, for her collusion in and facilitation of authoritative injustice and power. Therefore, neither the avenger nor the protector suffers legal consequences; rather, they are immune to criminal culpability, prosecution, and sanction, even when their actions are known to the rightful authorities (Iorns MaGallanes 2005: 37). Yet in one film, *Vendetta* (1986), a final filmic message questions the legitimacy and purpose of Laurie Cusack-Collins' vengeful actions, when guard Dice says, in a serious, emotionless voice, "*Did it bring Bonnie back? You have the rest of your life to think about that.*"

<sup>238</sup> Gillian narrates at the end of the film, "*I would never lay down [again] in submission – I had learned that at times we had to fight – no one else I knew would suffer again.*" The last image shows her holding a machine gun, shooting down a prison tier, with the deafening sound of gun fire.

When the crime avenged is a brutal rape or death and the retaliation involves both psychological and physical strength on the part of the heroine, with the perpetrator's death imminent, this appears to symbolize a feminist victory (Iorns MaGallanes 2005: 31). There is an objectifying cinematic point of view towards the bad woman as opposed to the good woman as a heroically [embodied] paragon of righteousness [and justice]...<sup>239</sup> (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 94). Nevertheless, it is problematic to equate the imagined violence of individualized feminine vigilantes with a broader feminist consciousness and movement, whether in cinematic fantasy or real life, because feminism becomes depoliticized and decontextualized within a discourse of the conservative New Right, which produced a morality of individualism and self-reliance (Iorns MaGallanes 2005: 36). And if it was not for a woman's vengeance she would just be another victim, retreating into an embodied sanctuary of femininity (34). The sexualized heroine's athletic and firmly toned body sparks a "pleasure of the flesh [that] convenes with the excitement of [a visceral display of] revenge so that they might double for a notion of social justice" (Robinson 1998: 11).

### ***Instrumental Partner versus Emotive Friend***

The discourse of comradeship (heroism or care) is tied to the inter-relational constructs of emotionality/instrumentalism, within two categorical embodiments – the 'instrumental ally/partner' and the 'emotive friend/supporter' that structure or restructure the dimensional properties of prisoner subjectivities and associations/affiliations. Exemplars emerge from both historical periods – the 1970s and 1980s-1990s. The subjectivity of 'instrumental ally', which is further embedded within the discourse of violence and corresponding construct of characterological transformation, characterizes the formation of temporary prisoner alliances for the purposes of custodial escape, or righting/avenging a carceral injustice. As such, women's shared victimhood from carceral oppressions frames this subjectivity and its corresponding behavioural repertoire of vengeance. Prisoners initially demonized by a primary status of lesbian predator, or abuser, take on a more positive albeit temporary subjectivity. Typically, inmate antagonists or former victimizers rally with the good woman to systematically

<sup>239</sup> Other avengers include Carole in *Chained Heat* (1983) and Michelle in *Naked Cage* (1986).

carry out their intended goal, using male-based characterological traits of rationality, ingenuity, and intelligence. Hegemonic and graphic acts of violence result in an ensuing filmic ending of melee and destruction. In *Chained Heat* (1983), Carole crusades with the help of Erika and Dutchess, leaders of rival racial gangs, to unveil the abuse and corruption to outside correctional authorities. In the process, a riot erupts, and lethal vengeance is enacted upon the villainous abusers. Both the good woman and bad woman are depicted as instigating justified, crude and violent acts of heroism. In *Prison Heat* (1993), bad woman Helena helps the wrongly imprisoned co-eds escape, losing her life in the process. In both examples, it is the protagonist who devises the plan.

The 'emotive friend/supporter' subjectivity linked to the discourse of traditional femininity and naturalization and the construct of protection involved prisoner bonds that embraced a mutuality of respect, the giving of advice, encouragement, and prison wisdom. Women developed close emotional bounds with other prisoners, particularly in primary (or secondary) friendship groups or pairs that the protagonist or good woman developed while incarcerated. This subjectivity is interlinked to the social location of gender, which is related to women's ideologically perceived, naturalized roles as protectors and caregivers who are relationally connected and dialogically communicative with other women. In some cases, friendships take on familial-like qualities. The characterization of the older prisoner provides an experiential knowledge, educating the first timer about the prison culture, its dangers, and how to do time in a safe manner.<sup>240</sup> In many films, a prisoner may physically protect or comfort a friend affected or threatened with the predatory violence of the bad woman or other victimizers.<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, in most instances the protagonist's friend is murdered by the villainous queen bee abuser in all her incarnations (lesbian or heterosexual).<sup>242</sup> Prisoners help and console friends in distress. In *Red Heat* (1985) a sexually victimized Barbara lies depressed in bed, unable to function. Knowing she will suffer grave consequences if she does not go to work, Barbara's friends Christine and Meg try desperately to help her.

<sup>240</sup> These women included; Margo (Moms) in *Concrete Jungle* (1982), Mary in *Red Heat* (1985), and an unnamed woman in *Vendetta* (1986).

<sup>241</sup> These titles would include; *Caged Heat* (1974) *Concrete Jungle*, (1982), *Chained Heat* (1983), *Red Heat* (1985), and *Naked Cage* (1986).

<sup>242</sup> This occurs in the *Concrete Jungle* (1982), *Chained Heat* (1983), and the *Naked Cage* (1986).

Christine pleads “*we care about you, don’t give up, at least try. C’mon, we’ll help you, c’mon.*” But, Barbara remains incapacitated. She is eventually thrown screaming into a segregation cell and violently re-victimized. Typically, the bad woman does not develop mutually trusting and close friendships with others, although she may be visibly upset when women close to her are hurt or killed, such as with Kay, in *Vendetta* (1986). Relationships with the bad woman are hierarchical and oppressive, with her controlling other women for her own needs – sexual or otherwise.

In *Caged Heat* (1974), instrumental partnership and emotive friendship drives the actions of protagonist characters. In a clever inversion to the formulaic, climatic, prison riot, two former enemies, Jackie and Maggie, flee from their confinement and return to break into the Connorville facility to rescue their comrade, Belle, from a perilous fate – a crude and horrific lobotomy surgery from the abusive and unorthodox Dr. Randolph. In contrast to the formulaic plot sequences found in other exploitation films, the women’s efforts are depicted with both a flare and style that does not rely on hegemonic violence that is either an over-the-top revolutionary melee, or a graphically displayed, individualized act of aggression.

### ***Prison Authorities: Corrupt and Victimiting Abusers versus the Do-Gooder Change Agents***

The criminal justice agent emerges within the discourses of otherization and heroization, tied to the constructs of victimization-vilification and righteousness-injustice in two categorical juxtapositions – the ‘corrupt and victimizing abuser’ versus the ‘do-gooder change agent.’ The good woman/bad woman categories initially attributed to the ‘kept’ are extended to the ‘keepers’- namely, guards, matrons, the warden, and outside correctional personnel. Characterizations and scenes of victimization play upon historicized beliefs of disorder and brutality in prison from ruthless and incompetent guards employed in a crooked or ineffectual system (Britton 2003: 51, 69). In this respect, contrary to Alison Young’s binary juxtaposition of the ‘criminal justice’ agent and ‘criminal,’ the distinctions between cinematic outlaws are not clearly delineated; both “criminal offenders [and prison workers] are constructed as the bearers of ...evil...as

threats to the State..., the community, and the individual in an unending battle”(Young 1996: 8, 9).<sup>243</sup> The good woman protagonist and others<sup>244</sup> are under continual threat from the ‘corrupt and victimizing abuser’; the exploitative and vile correctional authority who is intersectionally located in their gendered embodiments as the white, feminized lesbian, or hyper-masculinized white rapist, for example. Some particularly notable embodiments are the warden femme, or sleazy male warden who sexually harasses or preys upon women or the masculinized female guard who is an abuser or complicit in supporting the actions of male rapists. In films across both eras, women play central roles as institutional staff persons and higher administrative personnel. As well, the “sequestration [and celling] of the human body” facilitates the keeper’s surveillance, control, and punishment of female captives (Frese Wit as cited in Alber 2005: 244). Alternatively, the ‘do-gooder change agent’ is the caring outside official who fought to expose unjust institutional practices at the individual level. She is located within the social and criminological locations of gender, education, prison experiences/work, and sensitivity to injustice - someone who holds an almost maternalistic attitude towards prisoners in need of proper care and concern. She is heroized for her persistence in meeting the immense challenges encountered, despite her lack of success at times.<sup>245</sup>

Nevertheless, these primarily negative correctional staff person portrayals support the notion that the prison is populated by animalistic inmates who are controlled by brutal authorities – an unfair and stereotypical assumption that fails to account for the punitive functions and status differentials that contextualize prisoner-staff relations (Faith 1987: 184). Historically, Faith (1987:183,184) experientially contends that some prison staff otherwise interact with prisoners in a respectful and supportive manner; ways that clearly contradict the mediated construction of the guard as enemy. In actuality, it is not individualistic abusers who make the prison a vile place but a disempowering and dehumanizing structure of forced containment and interpersonal dynamics, marked by unequal power relations.

<sup>243</sup> In *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), the prison guards are the least vilified of all; they are parodied.

<sup>244</sup> This would include other prisoners, typically the protagonist’s friendship group and/or other vulnerable women.

<sup>245</sup> The crusading ‘change agent’ is found in the films *Concrete Jungle* (1982) and *Chained Heat* (1983).

## ***The Social Construction of Male Filmic Characters: Parodied Archetypical Clichés, Victimizers/Opressors and Hero-Rescuers***

Women prisoners are caged within a discursively constituted system of patriarchal power/oppression that is ever-present within the constructs of criminalization, parody, (inverted) victimization, romantic relations, exploitation/abuse and protection (Mayne 2000: 117). Across the filmic titles, males emerged in various characterological roles that were uniquely different across the historical eras – 1970s and 1980s. Earlier filmic works are characterized by ‘parodied archetypical clichés’ in the subjectivities of the ‘zany revolutionary,’ ‘effeminate gays’ and ‘inept/humiliated victims’ while the subsequent time period constructed men as ‘sadistic abusers,’ ‘abductors/exploiters,’ and ‘hero rescuers.’ These subjectivities are primarily tied to the locations of race, sexuality, and political causes that are either parodied or pathologized.

The categories of male ‘intimate partners/lovers’ are instrumental to women’s incarceration. Male revolutionaries, in part, politicize and frame female lawbreaking in the countercultural 1970s titles, while in subsequent periods the actions of male drug dealers and human traffickers directly lead to wrongful conviction and imprisonment. As such it is politicized perspectives versus criminalized lifestyles that locate men within particular subjectivities. In the latter two instances crime is located outside of broader structural inequalities (Pollack 2000: 73). Overall, in both time frames however, male figures are not central to the carceral narratives with a few exceptions, namely the zany revolutionary and the hero-rescuer.

To summarize, characterizations of the 1970s primarily represent men as ‘clichéd parodied archetypes’ that contain three sub-categorical embodiments, the ‘zany revolutionary,’ ‘effeminate gays’ and ‘inept and humiliated victims’ Otherwise men are largely absent or occupy peripheral roles. Sexual abusers and victimizers are primarily female, although a few male background personifications exist. In *Women in Cages* (1971), the tracker men hunt down prison escapees who are returned for \$50 per head (dead or alive). Typically these foreign, racialized men swarm, strip, savagely gang rape, and then kill their captives, in an animalistic frenzy. It is only the insurgent rebel who is depicted as strong, smart, and brandishing weapons.

The exploitation works of Roger Corman and Jack Hill cleverly interrelate the social locations of homosexuality, race and/or political perspectives, to create clichéd, parodied archetypes that denigrate traditional patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and politicized causes. Nonetheless, some critics would argue that these representations are discriminatory even though they are intended to provide a comedic value to otherwise contentious content such as political rebellion or sexual assault. Django in the *Big Bird Cage* (1972) is the ‘zany revolutionary,’ restrained by the untamed aggression of his female counterpart, Blossom. As well, within the same title, the racist cliché of the feminized Asian man is intermixed to create the subjectivity of the ‘effeminate gay,’ flamboyantly embodied in guard Rocco whose demeanour (mannerisms) and dialogue reinforces cultural stereotypes of homosexuality.<sup>246</sup> In an early cinematic shot, Rocco supervises a prisoner who seductively poses for the voyeuristic male gaze, washing herself up in the make-shift shower, with Rocco at his supervisory post. As she directs a look his way, Rocco throws his shoulders back and leans up against the wall, with a smile, and comments, “*Don’t play coy with me ... you don’t have anything I’d be interested in anyway.*” Django also takes on the subjectivity of the gay guard, in some entertaining dialogue and scenes, with guards Rocco and Moreno, both of whom vie for Djangos’ attentions all the while the revolutionary has infiltrated the prison to free girlfriend Blossom.

Subsequent to this light-hearted scene, a markedly disturbing image emerges as film-maker Jack Hill juxtaposes Rocco’s lustful desires with an overtly misogynous disregard for escaped prisoner Terry’s gang rape by a group of village men. Terry is thrown on a bed, and swarmed by the culprits, who await their turn as a man cuts Terry’s clothes off with a switch blade knife.<sup>247</sup> Eventually, Terry is found dazed and traumatized by the assault. Standing just inside the hut, guard Rocco looks at the men and then turns towards the camera, a sparkle in his eye, a grin on his face, and again with a subtle shoulder shake, as he quips “*Darn, nothing like that’s ever happens to me.*” Audience reaction to Hill’s gimmick was less than positive, with viewers feeling offended more than entertained. In this case, the importance of homosexual thirst overshadows violence

<sup>246</sup> Jack Hill comments that this film was a hit with gay audiences and had its longest run in Hollywood, California, an area known to be popular with gays (Hill 2002).

<sup>247</sup> The rape is not graphically depicted but is more so implied.

against women. It is the gay male who has his parodied commentary taking center stage in a pseudo patriarchal way.

In Roger Corman's films, a plurality of power relations creates neither masculinized domination nor feminized subordination. Instead, a prisoner's susceptibility to patriarchal oppression in voyeuristic scenes of salacious nudity and torture is juxtaposed against instances where women degrade men through behavioral repertoires of masculinist violence (rape) with parodied outcomes. As a result, male humiliation and female victimization are interlinked in comedic scenes of masochism. The male rape fantasy is subverted in an ironic twist, as it is sex-starved women who rape men, not the reverse. An intermixing of comedy and violence somehow discursively empowers women within the construct of inverted victimization to assault men in a seemingly satirical, less offensive manner. In these instances men are constructed as 'inept and humiliated victims.' One memorable scene illustrates this point: In *The Big Doll House* (1971), prisoner Alcott aggressively assaults a sexually vulnerable Fred, a lame and awkward prison worker, who initially peeps at her through a shower window. Fred is pictured with his face and nose pressed up against the barred glass in a pathetic display of male lustful pleasure. When Alcott spies his presence, she plays upon his voyeurism, soaping up her voluptuous, naked body. In desperate need of a man, she decides to satisfy Fred's desires in a predatory way. She seductively confronts him in the storeroom at knife point and orders: "*Come on lover boy, get to work,*" as he spasmodically tries to kiss her while taking off his shirt, his humility clearly portrayed. Alcott, irritated by Fred's ineptness, then demands, "*Get it up or I'll cut it off!*"<sup>248</sup> As she (off-screen) cuts open his pants, Fred pathetically whimpers. Before the act is complete, matron Lucian intervenes and Fred passively stops, not man enough for a climactic finish (Berlatsky 2008: 11). Here, the stereotype of the violent male rapist is put on its head, with the woman doing the victimizing in a parodied role reversal that subsequently demoralizes patriarchal aggression and power in the process. In a later scene, during the prison break, Alcott forces Harry at gunpoint to bust through the gate with his truck. He asks for something in exchange and she promises that he can have

<sup>248</sup> Jack Hill (2008:1) takes credit for developing this line, which he said brought the audience to laughter.



his way with Warden Dietrich. Eventually, Harry only donned in underpants has his chance, although at first he hesitates in embarrassment at the idea that others are there to watch. Alcott at gunpoint demands: “*action, big mouth*” as she tears off the warden’s top. Harry, takes off his hat and utters the word “*Ma’am*” before he mounts the tormented woman. His perversity ends with the army interception of the escapee’s whereabouts. Thus, Harry’s masculinity emerges from Alcott humiliatingly forcing him to commit this act (Berlatsky 2008: 15)

In the *Big Bird Cage* (1972), guard Rocco’s femininity, vulnerability, and disempowerment are explicitly displayed during his assault by a group of animalistic women from the nut pen. He pathetically screams for them to stop as they maul, rape, and kill him in a humiliating depiction of violence.<sup>249</sup> In a previous scene that builds upon male fantasy, several sex-starved central and background characters, with their dresses open and breasts exposed, stand in line to take turns with Rocco, who is mortified at his fate. As Karla mounts him, tough-bird prisoner Jones, in a perverse yet comedic act, sits on Rocco’s face, to “*shut that bastard up,*” as his screams and pleas to stop are heard. A close-up shot then depicts Jones’s hilarious facial expression and accompanying, sexual arousal, blurted out in one intelligible word: “*Mmm.*” The riotous destruction ensues with climatic explosions and gunfire, that simultaneously coincide with Karla’s orgasmic ecstasy, and she comically blurts out, “*I’ve never had one like that before.*”<sup>250</sup>

In contrast, in the 1980s and 1990s titles, males are ‘sadistic abusers’ and ‘abductors/ exploiters’ or ‘hero-rescuers’, who wield differential power over imprisoned women. Masculinity is visually and variously constructed in categorical forms. The first two categorical embodiments emerge within the discourses of oppression, violence, and death tied to the constructs of predation, victimization, and exploitation. Male abusers are portrayed as sick, hyper-masculinized psycho rapists and/or sleazy exploiters. Their behavioural repertoires are stereotypically similar. These men torment, terrorize, and sell women at will, without any interference from prison authorities who are either complicit in

<sup>249</sup> This outcome is implied but not visually depicted.

<sup>250</sup> In order to prevent an X-rating, both the *Big Doll House* (1971) and the *Big Bird Cage* (1972) cut scenes. The former title deleted a graphic lesbian sex scene, while the latter film cut several frames in the rape sequence, with Rocco being swarmed by female inmates (IMDb, 2013).

their actions, uncaring, indifferent, or unable to stop them. These culprits are usually white heterosexual men either primary or background characters, including the warden, guard, and outside worker. Some men appear visually abhorrent and evil. Jud, in *Lust for Freedom* (1987), is a particularly loathsome racialized predator; a rapist and sadistic murderer, paid to cruise the highway, hunt down, and abduct women that are trafficked into sexual slavery and snuff pornography films. He kills in scenes of predatory, graphic, sadistic violence. In another film, *Chained Heat* (1983), Warden Bacman, is a sleazebag, “sex-driven [man who] revels in orgiastic unions with his [prison] ‘girls’ and takes delight in videotaping his athletic hot tub action in his office” (Parrish 1991: 92).

The male action ‘hero-rescuer’ emerges within the discourse of hyper-masculinity linked to the constructs of militarism and heterosexual relationships. He is an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and power that reflects a return to conservative values. Overall, this categorization takes on a more central filmic role. A mini subplot or peripheral narrative thread involves this super hero planning specific actions/interactions to achieve the goal of rescuing an inmate partner or love interest from prison. Violence is glorified as a legitimate strategy in doing so. Men gain physical prowess from armed combat linked to army intelligence and operations. For example, Dirk a mystic bodyguard and mercenary, in *Caged Fury* (1989), frees prisoners enslaved at the Honeywell facility. With skills honed in Vietnam and Beirut, he crashes through walls with a physicality of strength that almost seems inhuman. Dirk’s fully exposed, muscle bound chest glistens against the steamy bluish background, as he becomes an unstoppable killing machine. At one point, guard Spyder incapacitates him with a stun gun. But, like a caged animal, Dirk smashes through the walls of the cell he is detained in. A visual code of hyper masculinity is displayed through the physique of the rescuer, where it is “active, powerful, and dangerous as well as [a] sexy weapon wielded against other men” during the prison break action sequence (Nixon 1997: 303, 304; Bensoff & Griffin 2004: 246). Dirk’s physicality and muscular body market certain visual pleasures for the straight female gaze, which are tied to particular forms of looking, and traditional notions of the real man (Nixon 1997: 314). At the end of the film, after Dirk leads the escapees out onto a street in downtown Los Angeles, he chooses his mercenary role over a romantic relationship with prisoner Tracy, while her sister, Katie, reunites with lover, Victor. In these depictions, the male intimate saves his maiden from the moral

decay of the prison, lesbianism, white slavery, and certain death. His actions symbolize a form of paternalistic protection and reliance on men for women's safety, and a return to patriarchally-controlled relationships.

The *otherness* of male power is symbolized through a 'faceless patriarchal presence' of anonymous, unseen men who wield authoritative control over women. In *Red Heat* (1985), Christine, mentally fatigued and physically worn down from hours of repeated interrogation, admits, under duress, to being a spy for the CIA. As her captors pass a three year prison sentence, a close-up shot of Chris's face transitions to the outline of three male figures in the darkness, with an intense, white light in the background that further delineates their visual presence. In the passing of her sentence, an accented voice is the only link to their foreign identities. In this depiction masculinity is not associated with any visual codes (Nixon 1997: 304).

## **Conclusion**

Cinematic discourse on imprisoned women symbolizes an "imaginary form of subjectivity," grounded in constructions that create cultural notions of pathological women, either inherently constituted or environmentally induced, through prison maltreatment and injustice (Burton & Carlen 1979: 47). The facade of the sexploitation prison creates a simulacrum of terror and danger; it is "a brutal, uncivilized place that punishes, degrades, and humiliates" through the creation of the very folk-devils who are imagined in our cultural reservoir of prisoner archetypes – both culturally and criminologically-based (Ferrell et al. 2008: 52; Mason 2006: 611, 612). A "theatricality of abuse, torture, and violence" individualizes the culprits in a misogynous system of sadistic treatment and corruption, while fantastical scenes of sexuality and objectification serve to address the gaze of the male and female viewer (Berlatsky 2008: 14). The re-victimization of prisoners becomes a mediated enterprise of punishment, through a multitude of slanderous, cinematic subjectivities that play upon historicized, criminological categorizations that have both political and material effects. The pathologization of prisoner violence into a fabrication of mayhem and predation serves to nullify the reality of actual systemic, carceral injustices (Faith 1987: 204). The truth about crime, transgression, and imprisonment becomes merely a cultural fiction that legitimates confinement as a viable solution for women deemed as *other* to normal

feminine virtue and aspirations. As such, this cinematic “vacuum encourages public acceptance of the correctional stereotypes found in the [sexploitation film], which commonly shows either harsh, brutal places of legalized [and legitimized] torture or uncontrolled human zoos that barely contain their animalistic criminals” (Surette 1998: 45).

In the next chapter, the Hollywood film frames prisoner subjectivities within seemingly naturalized states of inherent womanhood that if transgressed, leads to the problematization, recriminalization and vilification of the penal subject.

## Chapter 7.

# The Hollywood Film: Entertainment Pleasures and Criminological Commentaries

*“Movies do not need to be accurate: they need to be useful as dreams and commercial ventures” (Herman 1992: 69)*

### Introduction

Hollywoodized tales envelope the penal subject within a fictionalized terrain of entertainment pleasures intermixed with pseudo-realistic criminological messages that claim a truthfulness of representation drawn from taken-for-granted, naturalized culturally generated knowledge systems regarding women, the penal subject and prison. Storylines are structured around relatable elements that draw upon women-centered issues with significant others, namely; intimate partners, children and friends in ways that link the emotions of crime and punishment with exploitative, heart-breaking, and sentimental narratological moments. Prisoners' subjectivities become essentially tied to normative roles that resonate with women's everyday lives; that of mother, friend, lover, wife, and daughter. It is within these roles that narrative structures and threads interweave commentary regarding the prison as a context of policies, practices, interrelationships, and power relations that create individualized injustice, disempowerment, conflict and transformation. As well, the Hollywood film continues to propagate misinformation about prisoners; for example, by attributing prisoner resistance to disordered states, rather than carceral oppressions. The seductions of crime in the films discussed herein draw upon both our popular imaginations of the criminal woman alongside alternate prisoner personifications that may challenge patriarchal-based value systems, but which continue to subject women to criminalization, incarceration and vilification. As well, the celebratization and beautification of the prisoner protagonist is

often critically juxtaposed or embodied in women constructed as non-woman: masculinized, transgressive, and non-traditional subjects who initially resist or fail at proper femininity, a role that by filmic end will either be achieved, rejected, or partially realized.

## Focus of Inquiry: The Hollywoodized, Normatively Transgressive Prisoner

This chapter explores the cinematic landscape of the Hollywood film as a cultural system of representation diversely varied from the exploitation film in its creation of characterological manifestations of the criminal woman within the carceral world. A textual, deconstructive inquiry explores one master category – the ‘imprisoned woman’ – across four titles,<sup>251</sup> each of which is variously associated with either classical or contemporary historical periods, inclusive in a time frame from the 1950s to the 2000s.<sup>252</sup> The films include the depressingly shocking *Caged* (1950), the emotive docudramatic *Love Child* (1982), the xenophobic tale *Brokedown Palace* (1999), and the fractured familialism in *White Oleander* (2002).<sup>253</sup> In the same format as the exploitation filmic discussion, chapter headings and subheadings specifically delineate and analyse emergent subjectivities of the penal subject. The carceral context is thematically described as unique to the mainstream aesthetic that communicates, yet downplays, the violence seen in the exploitative cinematic forms. Women’s subjectivities are less configured into binary configurations, of opposing prisoner archetypes, than those found in the former exploitation filmic titles. Nonetheless, intersectionally-located stock characters continue to shape prisoners’ subjectivities, juxtaposed against the ‘good

<sup>251</sup> Very few Hollywood films were drawn because only these specific titles met the parameters for inclusion into the research such as filmic selection themes, specific criteria for inquiry (sampling) and the filtering parameters (numeric, exclusionary) as outlined in the methodology chapter.

<sup>252</sup> The classical period denotes films from 1950 to the 1960s, while contemporary film commences from the 1980s onward. The classical period is my conceptualization and does not denote the *classical period* of Hollywood film-making which reigned from the 1920s to 1950s and referred to a style (e.g., narrative), mode of production, and the broader industrial context of movie making (Maltby 2003: 17, 18). The Hollywood representational style has carried over into more contemporary times.

<sup>253</sup> This title is considered to be on the definitional margins of the prison film genre.

woman' protagonist in some films. In other instances the prisoner can be vilified in various incarnations. The formulaic archetypal subjectivities of prisoners and other characters, similar to the exploitation film, become enmeshed with standardized behavioural repertoires (e.g., violence, oppression) from embodiments such as the nasty lesbian guard, or racialized, prisoner villain, in the titles discussed herein. However, characterological actions/interactions also symbolize other meanings in select filmic exemplars. As well, rearticulated, collaborative understandings around subjectivity formation were gleaned from selectively incorporating other authors' perspectives, drawn from media studies literature, regarding representational depictions of the prison and prisoner. However, I also contribute to the creation of new understandings through unveiling distinct categorical embodiments that emerge from an integrative analysis with the variegated group of Hollywood films selected for this research.

In chapter nine, audience reception to the selected database of Hollywood films revealed reviewer's explicit acceptance, propagation and indifference to stereotypical and corrosive depictions of the penal subject, with some embodiments being particularly vilified. Despite the fictitious and seemingly naturalized portrayals of the prison and prisoner(s), cinephilic resistance to Hollywoodized misrepresentations is typically absent. Rather the power of the image seduces viewers through storyline themes and representations that are affectively powerful, personally relatable, and often believable as potential or probable criminological realities. In turn, some filmic messages regarding the brutalities, corruption, and reformative potential of the prison seemingly serve a pedagogical role with people. Overall, the penal subject is constructed using adjective descriptors interlinked to the discourses of beautification, normalization, psychiatrization and demonization.

Hollywoodized tales are situated within broader socio-political and historicized contexts. The production of *Caged* (1950) emerged during a time of conservative backlash against working women expected to return to proper femininity and the patriarchally serving roles of maternalistic familialism and compulsory sexuality. During this post-war period, spatial changes emerged in the suburbanization of communities, and the segregation of populations based on class and race (Bouclin 2009: 27). The

more contemporary film titles (1980s to 2000s) continue to be reflective of traditional ideology, patriarchy, and anti-feminist sentiment.<sup>254</sup> In the 1980s, conventional family values and womanhood were filmic themes within melodramatic tales (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 160). Today, this sentiment continues with women being punished for their transgressions against classist and gendered assumptions of middle-class morality, parenthood and femininity.

In understanding the prison film, the productive context of film-making is conceived of as an institutionalized *style* of aestheticism, narrativity and ideology, rather than the *visions* of individual auteur creators who capitalize on prison-related themes.<sup>255</sup> Hollywood style is not exclusively associated with mainstream film-making and is utilized in other filmic forms, such as the independent film. To reiterate, this analysis does not assume a homogenization of Hollywood formalistic aesthetic conventions, or ideology per se; rather, I relate these elements to a select group of films, which I do not claim are representative of all women-in-prison Hollywood titles (Green 1998: 2). The distribution and exhibition of mainstream films is a monopolistic and capitalistic enterprise – of the studio system of the past and the media conglomerate of the present – the latter of which creates filmic commodities that are entangled within large scale commercialized and corporate capital. Overall, the Hollywood product has a stronger global presence despite other media forms, filmic and otherwise.

In the Hollywood film, the narrative structure simultaneously incorporates *entertainment pleasures* with *criminological messages* that make claims to truth or pseudo-realism, in portrayals that offer critique and challenge to injustices perpetuated by oppressive criminal justice systems, both domestic and foreign (O’Sullivan & Wilson 2004: 124).<sup>256</sup> As well, these issues are framed within storylines that incorporate a primary relationship into the mix. It is within the *message* component that explicit

<sup>254</sup> Mason (2005: 200) contends that in the 1970s few Hollywood prison pictures (male or female) were made. The exception lies in the prevalence of the exploitation women-in-prison film.

<sup>255</sup> However, mainstream film-making is associated with unconventional creators, who produce a uniquely auteurist aesthetic that denigrates mainstream conventions. One such example is the work of Oliver Stone in *Natural Born Killers* (1994).

<sup>256</sup> O’Sullivan and Wilson (2004) state that the entertainment component in WIP narratives is necessary to draw in audience interest, even if it plays upon formulaic elements (124).



commentaries regarding crime, criminalization, punishment, and reformative change emerge. Alternatively, the simultaneous merging of *entertainment* into the narrative is facilitated through a number of components that tweak audience interest and curiosity and include: particular characterological embodiments, sensationalized or melodramatic; centralized thematic content; storyline sequential closures that are emotionally affirming; a spectacle of intriguing entertainment (travelling abroad), or a brief cinematic sequence, scene or single shot in the foreground or background that depicts a specific element for audience appeal (Maltby 2003: 449). And even though we, the viewing audience, may never have committed a crime, Hollywood tales capitalize on *feel good* or *gut-wrenching* melodrama that plays out in resolute plotlines, recuperative goals, or unresolved issues in the face of personal, prison-related oppression and hardship. Conversely, but to a far lesser extent, exploitable elements associated with formulaic characterizations and plot lines also serve an entertainment function, but in a more essentialist, stereotypical and discriminatory way. People's sympathies are elicited through elements that pull upon their heart strings, and appeal to their moral sensibilities, personal ethics, and experiences. The emotion of crime does not become condemnatory or humiliating within a spectacle of misogynous and gratuitous violence in any significant way like the exploitation film; instead, crime, punishment, and its consequences – tragic, problematic, and transformative – serve to elicit audience emotion and reaction in ways that link criminological concerns to sensationalized stories of fiction, pseudo-realism and truth claims. In the films discussed herein, the thematic entertainment component emphasizes intriguing storylines that include the wrath of a villainous prison matron in *Caged*; a forbidden prison romance in *Love Child*; a cautionary tale of foreign travel in *Brokedown Palace*, and the multi-layered complexity of a mother-daughter relationship in *White Oleander*.

An intertextuality of meaning across the filmic sources is related to cinematic conventions that are traditionally associated with the Hollywood product (e.g., linearity, narrative closure and sequencing, smooth visual expression) and conservatist ideologies as opposed to formulaic plots, subversive messages, and characterological archetypes central to the sexploitation movie. Conversely, storyline structures, themes, and prisoner subjectivities can reflect contradictory alternatives to mainstream style and meanings.

## The Categorical Personifications of the Imprisoned Woman in the Hollywood Film

The subjectivities of the criminal woman are related to various processes both production-oriented and ideologically-based. In the filmic titles explored herein, the characterological embodiments of the penal subject emerge *primarily* within the discourses of patriarchally - based womanhood (proper femininity) and otherization. These discursive domains are respectively tied to the constructs of entertainment, commercialism, informative messages, normative expectations/transgression, and intersectionality-stereotypification. The othering of the prisoner population symbolizes intersectionally located or constitutionally pathologized archetypes embedded within the discourses of racism, ageism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and lastly psychiatrization that depict women as violent, habitually criminogenic, vulnerable, lesbian and/or mad, but to a far lesser extent than in the exploitation film. As well, women who transgress proper womanhood through crime and the rejection of gendered normative roles are also otherized. The emergent Hollywoodized prisoner embodiments (categories and sub-categories) are delineated as follows: 1) the othered penal subject - characterological clichés and essentialist difference, 2) the Hollywood star beauty (the beautified and celebratized prisoner), 3) the oppressed victim, the reformable-unreformable subject, and the resistant prisoner (pathologized or rationalized), 4) the interchangeable penal subject (the transitional subject, the non-subject, the transformed subject), and 5) the prison mother (absent, expectant/new, or failed real or pseudo mother[s]). These classificatory labels are more specifically related to the discourses and corresponding constructs (in parentheses) of, for example, otherization (intersectionality), naturalization-beautification (celebratization), oppression (injustice, victimization and exploitation), correctionalism, including reform and/or rehabilitation versus punishment (characterological transformation), and maternalism (pathologization-non-criminalization), tied to protagonists and background characters that are heroized, marginalized, or vilified.

The prisoner as non-subject becomes buried in a netherworld of purgatorial isolationism (segregation) that ignores her humanely existence – her personhood denied. Women are also constructed as unwed mothers - ‘subjects ‘with child’ through the carceral control of their reproductive processes in the policing of their bodies. The

subjectivity of male characterological roles included: paternalistic rescuers/saviours, villainous exploiters/abusers, deceivers-allies, and patriarchal power holders – oppressors. These aforementioned subjectivities are discussed in separate sections organized subsequently within the discussion.

All the films cast celebrity performers and esteemed Hollywood beauties as the central prisoner protagonists (O’Sullivan & Wilson 2004: 109). Overall the cinematic constructions of the prisoner are invariably constituted amongst discourses that uphold a traditionalized social order. The discursive governance of the criminalized woman is related to subjectivities which limit models of femininity to seemingly naturalized conditions and formations. For the imprisoned woman, subjectivity becomes tied to conceptions of self linked to masculinist notions of familialism, domesticity, romantic partnership, and motherhood. In the latter formation, a culturally acquired knowledge of human behavior is understood within ideological systems of thought that construct mothering as a biologized desire and primary responsibility of inherent womanhood. Women’s desire or ability to mother is a primary narratological theme in some films which socially constructs the prisoner in particular ways. For example, this intersectionally-based gendered role becomes a rehabilitative ideal within a middle-class reformist ideology that attempts to return imprisoned women towards their normative femininity – a condition that facilitates in law-abiding behavior. Subjectivity is not depicted as stable and fixed. In some personifications, the prisoner’s ‘transitional’ ‘selves’ reflect an ongoing ‘subjectivity in process’ in transformative, characterological changes that are visually, dialogically, and behaviorally depicted along a performative dimensional range from traditional femininity and hegemonic masculinity, to alternate formations that subscribe to neither designation in any homogenizing way.

## **Hollywood Film: Commercial Objectives, Ideological Perspectives, and Aesthetic Conventions**

As a cultural industry driven by marketplace economies and objectives, Hollywood’s creative merits are considered to be conflictive with its industrial/commercial ventures. The packaging of film as a commodity is fundamentally incompatible with understanding and conceiving it as an art form as posed by some film scholars (Maltby

2003: 42, 44). The contradiction between art and business is confronted by Hollywood's *commercial aesthetic*,<sup>257</sup> in which filmic products – their imagery and content – are both constructed through formalistic conventions and marketed as consumer pleasures culturally created in a industry of mass production and distribution – with the commercial and the aesthetic holding symbiotic interconnections (Maltby 2003: 12, 581-82). At the individual level, industrially affiliated agents (e.g., studio executives) can shape the cinematic content and direction of the filmic themes and characterological portrayals.<sup>258</sup> But the debate continues regarding the potentiality of film as a sociological and artistic medium versus its profitability as an entertainment commodity.<sup>259</sup>

To commence the analytical process of the Hollywood titles, I outline several stylistic and ideological elements associated with mainstream film-making. Although, many films characteristically adhere to these elements, other movies (Hollywood and otherwise) can also break with them to varying degrees. The films discussed herein illustrate this point. Hollywood visual culture creates an illusion of naturalness and objectivity that attempts to perpetuate realism in filmic imagery and thematic content that is often psychologically driven by a humanistic comprehensibility of character motivations (Corrigan 2004: 47; Green 1998: 17). Film critics contend that, both ideologically and politically, Hollywood film represents the status quo and prevailing cultural norms through an aesthetically conventional form (Maltby 2003: 44). As a result, cinematic naturalness often serves to support cultural ideologies of women's inherent

<sup>257</sup> The film *Titanic* (1997) exemplifies Hollywood's commercial aesthetic, in that its *admixture of attractions* emphasizes various viewing pleasures; namely, a Romeo and Juliet storyline within an action-based, disaster epic tale and special-effects extravaganza which launched the film's commercial success and widespread appeal (Maltby 2003: 14). This film had an affective impact on a range of audience groups. In the dissertation Hollywood prison films have a number appealing features including attractive women, exotic foreign travel, mystery, romance, and storylines that appeal to people's sense of loyalty (in e.g., friendships).

<sup>258</sup> In *White Oleander* (2002), a Warner Brothers studio executive directed the film-makers to cut out particular characters from the screenplay that were included in the literary version of the story that inspired the film (Wells 2003).

<sup>259</sup> This argument certainly could also be attributed to all other film-making forms with the exception of non-commercial, small scale independent films. Conversely, the film *Brokedown Palace* (1999) grossed \$10,114, 315 (USA) as of October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1999 in its theatrical run while *White Oleander* (2002) grossed \$21, 229, 200 (worldwide) as of 2002. In its opening USA weekend the former film was shown on 1,740 screens compared to 1,510 screens for the latter title (IMDb, 2014).

place in patriarchal society, such as the family (Walters 1995: 68; Green 1998). As Maltby argues, “in their several guises ... movies represent and legitimize the already dominant power. Dismissing them, whether as entertainment, ideology, or art does not make that cultural function disappear, and its persistence and power provide an important justification for analysis of the movies” (521).

In the depiction of darker, more serious material, filmic production does not unsettle or disrupt audience comfort or security with offensive or disturbing portrayals that destabilize traditional beliefs systems and institutions, with the exception of the shocking imagery in the film *Caged* (1950). There tends, instead, to be an emphasis on the affirmative, offered by filmic endings that range from pseudo or partial closures to fairy-tale conclusions, that may be notoriously unreal, but emotionally satisfying nonetheless, especially in the latter instance (King 2005: 129; Maltby 2003: 269). As such, the Hollywood product has been criticized as apolitical entertainment with storyline realism and authenticity sacrificed, in part, for the primary purpose of audience satisfaction (275). In attempting to achieve commercially-driven profits, there is an overreliance on standardization and repetition in creating a cultural form that appeals to the masses rather than ensures an accuracy of meaning in its representations, even though claims to truth are espoused in filmic taglines and trailers (Maltby 2003: 12, 39). But this view does not acknowledge the contradictions, challenges, and incoherence that underlie many Hollywood films (Rapping 1992: 8). For instance, in *White Oleander* (2002), authenticity may be performatively-based in low key acting that reduces the audience’s scepticism in ways that foster more genuine characterizations, in a script that is enveloped within a cinematic world of human emotion (Fugit 2003). And in *Caged* (1950), protagonist Marie Allen’s post-prison life, doesn’t fit the traditional patriarchal narrative resolution, of past WIP melodramas: instead, she becomes destined for a depressingly bleak future, marked by criminalization and subsequent incarceration(s). Politically, the mainstream product is far from monolithic; rather, fragments of a counter hegemonic world view emerge in characterological attributes and goals that symbolize a challenge to patriarchal power and authority (Green 1988: 17). Even so, films still perpetuate discriminatory elements in representations that are gendered and intersectionally-located in alternate sexualities, race, and performative (gendered) masculinities, which become embodied in corrupt and villainous characterizations that

individualize filmic issues and problematic storylines (Bensoff & Griffin 2004: 27). These antagonists are oversimplified cinematic constructions that play upon prevailing cultural stereotypes of the racialized, foreign, or lesbian ‘victimizer.’<sup>260</sup> In the films discussed herein, male characters are primarily vilified to various degrees, whether it is by their overtly exploitative actions or covertly insinuated power that oppresses the female protagonist and her prison sisters.

The commercial Hollywood narrative is a classic style of overarching structure that “appears as a coherent, unified, storytelling whole” with a marked beginning, middle, and end (Maltby 2003: 463).<sup>261</sup> Typically, narrative clarity, continuity and coherence are structured around linearly sequenced or circularly shaped plots and progressions linked to character-centered goals and motivations within a credible fictional world (Kuhn 2007: 46). The protagonist character is pivotal in the narrative, which establishes and sustains their agency throughout the storyline progression (Kuhn 2007: 46). Storyline plots are psychologically-oriented, triggering emotions, anxieties and suspense in the Hollywood viewer. At times, the clarity of storyline sequences may appear predictably simplistic. As well, the narrative structure relies on the binary oppositions of the heroine and/or filmic protagonist and villain/deceiver, through which established lines of conflict emerge that direct the narratological directions (Turner 1999: 85). An underlying façade may initially conceal a character’s villainous acts to come, whether deceptive or manipulative, and which lead to the protagonist’s carceral predicament. The narrative is both a visual and verbal medium. Typically, an initial state of disruption in the harmony or equilibrium of a character’s life or situation is causally dealt with in individualistic ways that lead to a form of closure, in which narrative conflicts become generically and predictably resolved in a manner that often supports personal rather than public issues (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 139). In other films a character’s life is initially conflict-ridden and marginalized but a disruptive event brings it to a resolute closure of equilibrium and stability. *Love Child* (1982) is one such example.

<sup>260</sup> These characters emerge in the films *Love Child* (1982), *Brokedown Palace* (1999), and *Caged* (1950), respectively. As well, the first title depicted lesbian predators, while in the last film, pseudo homosexual undertones emerged.

<sup>261</sup> As previously articulated the Hollywood film can diverge from the traditional classical style. But for the most part, departures are not the norm with most films still incorporating those mainstream characteristics described above in their production (King 2005: 64).

In some cases, films express a pseudo closure that is asserted rhetorically rather than literally in all its filmic details (King 2005: 61). In other instances, only facets of the interlocking narrative subplots or stories provide resolution. For example, in *White Oleander* (2002), the primary storyline contains a series of sub-narratives that hold different styles of closure from full, or partial, to pseudo forms, while the main narratological tale affirmatively ends in a standardized, happy, romantic ending for the non-prisoner central character, Astrid Magnussen. Hollywood film-making is “implicitly ideological by virtue of its structure alone,” most notably in its realist orientations (psychological, moral, and ethical), chronological, coherent, and causal narratives, sympathetic protagonist and psychologically satisfying endings. As such, in the “imaginary world of social harmony” (Green 1998: 23) and make-believe, Hollywood films “provide solutions to emotional problems in which wish fulfillments can occur without [penalty]... .” (Wolfenstein & Leites cited in Maltby 2003: 38). Such a structure aims to create realistic aspects through a “verisimilitude [created in] the fictional world ... or through the inscription of human agency” set-up within the filmic narrative (Kuhn 2007: 45). Cinematic conventions typically operate “to reconcile social antagonisms by shifting the emphasis from history and institutions to individual causes and effects” (Bordwell et al. as cited in Strinati 1995: 38). Yet, alterations remain. In *Brokedown Palace* (1999), the orderly sequence of good triumphing over evil does not materialize, with bureaucratic corruption remaining unscathed and Alice’s individualistic, sacrificial decision, in part, resolutely addressing the criminological predicament of the two protagonists. In this instance, the disruption in the women’s lives is only partially resolved, with one central character having her life restored following a wrongful conviction and incarceration.

In the Hollywood film, there are two primary narrative themes within the classical structure. The key plotline specifically establishes the narrative embedded within the broader, more generic qualities of the film, while a secondary storyline revolves around the formation of either a heterosexual relationship (romance, love) or family unit. These two strands are characteristically interconnected, with closure in the peripheral event(s) being instrumental in emotionally contouring resolution in the main narrative focus. Tight causality creates a smooth, continuous, unified flow of events and storyline structures that do not leave any unexplained, unconnected, or unresolved issues (Maltby 2003:

464). There are instances, however, in some films of inconsistencies and gaps that upset causality in terms of character goals, narrative sequences and event-relations (Maltby 2003: 464). As well, Hollywood film creates storyline components that are relevant to the lives of its viewers on several levels, whether personal, social, or cultural. Narrative functions provide the audience with the entertainment pleasures of Hollywood film. Leisure, within a capitalist system of film consumption, “opens[a] Pandora’s box of pleasure... [resealing] it by the end of the movie, confirming the expression and satisfaction of desire to the safe space of licensed public fantasy” (Maltby 2003: 487).

The titles discussed herein defy the mainstream Hollywood style that depicts heterosexual romance, attraction, and intimate relationships as primary influences to narrative resolution and happy filmic endings. Instead, such former resolute elements spark the initial disruption or conflict in a woman’s otherwise good life, by setting-up the central storyline plot or adversarial conflict that results in the protagonist’s emotional volatility, crimes and character-driven, woman-centered goals. These intimate male-female relations lead to injustice and imprisonment (drug trafficker Nick Parks in *Brokedown Palace*), and betrayal and murder (Barry Kohler in *White Oleander*). In *Brokedown Palace*, the two protagonists, Darlene and Alice, vie for the attention of Nick Parks, an attractive and engaging Aussie foreigner who sweeps them off their feet with promises of excitement and adventure while travelling abroad. The women’s initial trust, heterosexual attraction, and intimate contact with him make them easy targets, and they are set-up as drug mules who are apprehended at the Thailand airport and then given a thirty-three year carceral sentence. In other films, the prisoners’ marginalized circumstances and hardships are further exaggerated through these gendered inter-relationships that result in crime, punishment and tragedy (Tom Allen in *Caged*), and abandonment and deception (Jack Hanson in *Love Child*).

Mainstream conventions of visual expression in the Hollywood film emphasize a smooth continuous, uninterrupted, and unified free flow of images (and shots) that create a coherent, stable, predictable, and comprehensive storyline progressing toward a logical resolution (Manning 1998; Maltby 2003: 312, 581). Most often, there is a visuality of sharpness that appears natural and real, in the clear texturing of imagery, so that the Hollywood style does not bring attention to itself in an aesthetically disruptive way. In *Brokedown Palace* (1999) the cinematographic style of visually depicting the prison



envelopes the use of dark and sombre, shadowy tones and diffused, beautiful colours that emerge from sunlit backdrops of yellow and orange. In one fleeting cinematic moment, a clear, scenic, city shot can be seen outside the prison compound.

Continuity editing produces an unobtrusive film aesthetic that seldom directs the viewer's awareness to the mediating presence of the camera, instead; attention is drawn to "the story being told and not to the manner of its telling" (Allen & Gomery as cited in Tzioumakis 2006: 7; Maltby 2003: 581). Creative elements such as editing patterns or lighting choices (e.g., film noir) are equivalent to a novelist's choice of words, in that these components shape the way viewers interpret the storyline (Maltby 2003: 459). The visually expressive noirist style found in *Caged* (1950), for example, is expressively pessimistic in both narratological and visual style that creates a dark, ominous, and hopeless filmic mood – one intertwined with historicized societal fears of the independent woman being lured by the criminalized underworld over her familial responsibilities.

All the same, Hollywood film-making does break with the aforementioned conventions. For example, the presence of hand-held vérité camera work in *White Oleander* (2002) created a real, organic, genuine feel, which captured "those impulsive accidental moments" (Zellweger 2003).<sup>262</sup> Destabilized, jarring or blurring imagery emerged throughout the film to varying degrees, and certain moment's present fast panning, visually disruptive images that symbolize the out-of-control foster world that young Astrid must negotiate, after her mother Ingrid, is imprisoned. This imagery visually symbolizes the abrupt changes in her life and foreshadows the tumultuous instability of her subsequent journey. In addition, the Hollywood product can involve tight, quick shooting schedules and relatively small budgets compared to blockbuster movies. *White Oleander* was filmed in thirty-nine days on a modest budget (Kosminsky 2003).

<sup>262</sup> The film *White Oleander* (2002) is almost completely filmed with hand-held cameras, with no use of steadicam devices that stabilize the camera and allow it to occupy typically unreachable spaces (Pramaggiore & Wallis: 2008: 437).

## Storylines of Sacrifice, Redemption, and Transformation

The penal subject is categorically constructed within storylines that are (in part) external to the carceral world. Two films are the exception to this pattern – *Caged* (1950) and *Love Child* (1982). It is only within these titles that character subjectivities emerge within a prison subculture, its associated hardships, and injustices. Otherwise, crime stories are either interrelated, interspersed or peripherally tied to those various situational themes that emphasize *relatable* plots and issues: heterosexual romance, friendship, family (motherhood), and adolescent struggles that are relevant to the lives of the viewing public (Maltby 2003: 269).<sup>263</sup> The prison in these films becomes a contextual backdrop for issues that are unrelated to confinement in any primary, thematic way.<sup>264</sup> Yet it is the predicament of imprisonment that characterologically sets these issues in motion within the central narrative structure and constructs the imprisoned woman in relation to another significant person. Human emotion is paramount in these cinematic worlds. These filmic narratives, through a familiarity of experience, enable the audience to identify with particular characters and situations that elicit feelings and emotions that are somehow interrelated with the themes of crime and punishment. Criminological issues that affect characters' lives may somehow appear plausibly conceivable in viewers' minds – being falsely accused, or the target of drug traffickers in foreign countries, for example, or feeling anger and rage at a philandering lover.

As well, narratives make claims to realism through ideologies that naturalize particular normative expectations, such as motherhood, which silence or demonize alternate mothering forms or anti-domestic narratological themes (Barker 2008: 185). In this respect, the non-criminalized events in people's lives are intermixed within moralistic, fictitious tales tied to the prison in some underlying way.

<sup>263</sup> The film *Love Child* (1982) contains two central narratives; Terry's carceral experiences, and her intimate relationship and subsequent pregnancy from a male guard, Jack Hansen.

<sup>264</sup> An example of two such films is *Brokedown Palace* (1999) and *White Oleander* (2002).

Women's paths to prison are diverse; both real crimes and wrongful conviction elicit empathy and sympathy for the prisoner<sup>265</sup> (Mason 2006: 616). Typically, the central prisoner protagonist(s) category is intertwined in a primary relationship that is binarily conceptualized and related to differential levels of power. Promotional taglines similarly target this aspect of human relations. The promotional taglines include: *They were young, fearless, and friends forever. Until a stranger came between them, (Brokedown Palace)* and *Where does a mother end and a daughter begin? (White Oleander)*. The juxtapositions of prisoner-guard/warden, rebellious versus naïve imprisoned friends, and prison mother-teenage daughter – emerge and are reflective of antagonisms and conflict, variously depicted in central themes such as brutality and violence versus questions of prison indignities, reform and rehabilitation in *Caged* (1950), betrayal and deceit in *Love Child* (1982), conceptions of righteousness, goodness and questions of trust in *Brokedown Palace* (1999), and parental abandonment and control in *White Oleander* (2002). With the exception of *Love Child*, films depict women-centered relations. Contrary to the exploitation film, these juxtapositions do not represent standardized characterological archetypical clichés that intertextuality move across the Hollywood women-in-prison film landscape. The exception is the binary of the 'good woman,' unseasoned prisoner, Marie Allen, versus the villainous 'bad woman' guard abuser, Evelyn Harper, in *Caged* (1950). These transformative relationships result in characterological choices; whether limited by social circumstances, inherently determined, selflessly sacrificial or reluctantly redemptive. By filmic end in the four titles, Marie Allen chooses a criminal lifestyle over domesticity and family in *Caged*, Terry Moore, assumes the responsibility of motherhood without a man in *Love Child*, Alice Marano makes the ultimate sacrifice for a friend in *Brokedown Palace*; and Ingrid Magnussen fulfills her motherly duty to daughter Astrid in *White Oleander*. These themes are developed and articulated through particular categorical constructions discussed herein, such as 'motherhood' and the 'friend protector.'

In most films the beautiful prisoner protagonist is, to some extent, constructed through the intersectional locations of intelligence, sexual orientation (heterosexual

<sup>265</sup> The exception here would be prisoner Ingrid Magnussen who is vilified in *White Oleander* (2002).

attraction/relations), and/or class privilege, that are not associated with the imprisoned woman demonized in our cultural imaginations – such as the lesbian predator. In *White Oleander* (2002) the relationships foster child Astrid Magnussen has with various women – State caregivers and her prison mother – are the roots of the hardship and pain she ultimately experiences (Zacharek 2002: 2). As well, the prison protagonist's significant other relationship is instrumental in addressing a criminological concern (e.g., court testimony and release from prison [*White Oleander*], and questions of innocence and culpability [*Brokedown Palace*]) that become either a central or peripheral narratological goal that exists alongside those non-carceral themes. This primary relational association is imperative in directing the storyline towards complete or partial resolution. In all the filmic titles, release from prison is an overriding theme that is either achieved or declined.

Power is multifariously depicted across the films as the individualized power of villainous characters; the systemic power of unjust, or oppressive, prison systems, policies and practices; the associative power of hierarchal and inter-dependent relationships; and the power of intersectional difference based on class and race.

Ultimately, though, Hollywoodized tales play upon the fictitious in their depiction of criminological and otherwise problematic situations; through the dangerous stranger (*Brokedown Palace*), the unproblematic prison release (*Love Child*), and the portrayal of Los Angeles fosterdom as white and middle-class, with pseudo parental figures as deeply flawed caricatures (*White Oleander*) that continue to fuel misrepresentations.

## **The Prison: A Contradictory Context of Communicated Violence, Prisoner Transformation, Re-domestication, and Reformist Objectives**

In the Hollywood films discussed herein – *Caged*, *Love Child*, *Brokedown Palace*, and *White Oleander* – the prison, its iconic symbols, and corresponding subculture are either a primary thematic setting or a peripheral contextual backdrop that portrays the carceral world in a non-narratological-based way. As such, the mise-en-scene in some films moves outside the prison and its associated props of containment

and control. Selective cinematic snapshots portray the external prison structure, internal regime and life inside, with a focus on institutional practice(s), and individual prisoners and their behaviors. The prison is also signified in pre-emptive imagery and dialogical content that is grounded in the discourses of fear, *potential* violence, abuse and even death, which is juxtaposed against reformist rhetoric and practices that thematically aim to civilize the prison as a rehabilitative milieu. Culturally, incarceration is portrayed within the contexts of Americanized and foreign confinement. Women's exclusion from the outside world is symbolized in the geographical and/or physical isolationism of the penal setting. In *Brokedown Palace* (1999) imprisonment reflects the women's exclusion from their American homeland and culture. Visually, the prison is a spectacle of punishment, regardless of its multi-varied form and corresponding regime that is depicted along a range of representations – from the impressionistically sketched Thai prison<sup>266</sup> in *Brokedown Palace* (1999), to the brutalizing and shocking total institution in *Caged* (1950) (O'Sullivan & Wilson 2004: 109). These depictions and others have been criticized as sensationalized exploitation, clichéd portraits of prison life, or a “sanitized-for-the-home” portrayal as depicted in *Love Child* (1982) (Parrish 1991: 79, 267).

In its domestic manifestation, the carceral world is a gendered construction that supports characterological identities reflective of both hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity. In *Caged* (1950), an establishing shot depicts the external architecture of the prison: a massive foreboding stone building with large barred windows. The words 'Women's State Prison' are seen high above the main entrance. These two still shots are interspersed with a close-up depicting Marie Allen's frightened looking face. In the Hollywood prison, razor wire, high walls, flood lights, gun towers, perimeter guards, strict procedures, closed and secure areas (visiting), and solitary confinement ensure a physicality of control and oppression while penal policies instruct correctional staff to shackle inmates and to shoot-to-kill-prison escapees (Mason 2006: 609). High angle shots that overlook the prison complex symbolize the off-screen surveillance of the penal subject by the filmic viewer, who like the guards have unlimited access of observation. In *Love Child* (1982) these shot types symbolize “the dominance

<sup>266</sup> The initial police-lock-up is more oppressive than the prison. The holding cell is a dark dungeon, with stone walls, and unsanitary, vermin infested living conditions.

of the prison machine,” and the prison hierarchy that places the guards in constant view of the inmates (Alber 2005: 253). And unlike the sexploitation film, contact with the outside world is permitted. In *White Oleander* (2002), it is through the context of the prison visit that the subjectivities of the vilified criminal woman, Ingrid Magnussen, emerge, through her interactions with daughter, Astrid.

In its feminized form, the prison’s institutionalized regime, programmatic, and reformist philosophies, in part, promote idealized versions of womanhood through the (re)-domestication of prisoners into familial-based roles, responsibilities, and gendered tasks such as gardening, cooking, and laundry detail – programmatic objectives in actual contemporary women’s prisons (Faith 1993: 157, 158). As such, the prison is embedded within the discourses of sexism, proper femininity, domesticity, maternalism, and patriarchal familialism. Gendered identities are forged through categorizations that infantilize, biologize and socialize women into the roles of daughter, mother, spousal partner, and domestic homemaker. Overall, the penal regime, hardships of confinement, and inmate subculture emerge as gradations of oppression that differentially impact a prisoner’s life, in ways including the regulation and policing of women’s bodies, prisoner susceptibility to illness, abuse, and feelings of desperation and hopelessness. Although the prison is framed within the discourse of violence, this theme is implied rather than definitively ‘seen’ within the institutional prisoner subculture. Audiences are not unsettled by graphic or exaggerated displays of aggression. Character-perpetuated victimization is absent or downplayed in intensity in most filmic titles. In contrast to what happens in the exploitation film, prisoners for the most part do not abuse each other to any great extent in the Hollywood film, and typically, background characters take on the role of victimizer/harasser. For example, a filmic tagline for *Brokedown Palace* communicates such a discourse (Mason 2006: 615) in the statement “*their graduation present was a trip to paradise, but they never thought they would land in hell*” (Thailand prison). But, prison violence is not portrayed in any explicit way; rather it is associated with a few separate acts such as harsh corporal punishments or prisoner harassment. The institutionalized design of physical barriers associated with the North American penal context is replaced by a large compound with open communal spaces, albeit cramped and overcrowded at times.

Violence is not gratuitous in nature, nor is it a voyeuristic or misogynous pleasure directed at a male viewer. Rather, it is symbolic; depicted in visual images (static shots, or a brief cinematic scene), or dialogical commentary referred to in pre-emptive character dialogue or voice-over narration. For example, in the film *Love Child* (1982), a cinematic sequence of Terry Moore, walking through the prison, depicts the everyday world of Broward Correctional Centre; women in groups congregate and talk, sit, smoke, sing, dance, sun themselves, and do crafts while others move about the outdoor grounds. Nonetheless, prisoner J.J. warns Terry of the underlying dangers that remain in certain women: *“Cute, ain’t they. Those two are in for murder one. They’d cut you up as soon as look at you; in this place, what you see ain’t what you get!”* These killer women have no significance to the narrative except in the portrayal of the prison as a place housing volatile inmates.

In *Caged* (1950), the intake officer bluntly asks the vulnerable, new prisoner, Marie Allen, *“Who is to be notified in case of death?”* and tough con, Kitty Stark, warns her *“You see kid, in this cage you get tough or you get killed; better wise up before it’s too late.”* With the convict code firmly in place, women thought to break its rules are physically reprimanded by other prisoners. Yet, it is in this film that danger directly emerges from the monstrous matron Evelyn Harper who psychologically and physically abuses the women in a sadistic reign of terror.<sup>267</sup> Other than this extreme characterization, prison workers across these films are depicted as harsh punishers (*Brokedown Palace*), sympathetic and helpful supporters versus deceiver-allies (*Love Child*), and background characters engaged in penal practices such as staff escorts to the visits area of the facility (*White Oleander*).

Alternatively, there is an attempt to civilize the prison by downplaying its oppressive conditions through the discourses of reformist ideals and maternalistic/paternalistic care. Progressive reform aims to address injustice (systemic and individually based) or create program opportunities, while caring and concerned

<sup>267</sup> Interestingly, it is this characterization that is recycled in clichéd form in the exploitation films of the 1970s and 1980s. These abusive female prison wardens and guards either enact or order other characters to become violent towards prisoners. This violence typically has sexually-oriented roots.

prison workers provide support in ways that facilitate these objectives. This is especially the case in *Love Child* (1982), where correctional officers, like Captain Ellis, take on the role of human service providers who are compassionate, flexible, respectful, and tolerant in their treatment of the prisoners; especially protagonist Terry. Even though critics may consider such depictions as sugar-coated versions of prison life, they nonetheless bring some authenticity to the actualities of the inmate-guard accommodative relationship; whereby Terry's adherence to the rules is accommodated by the officers' fairness in providing some leeway in the enforcement of correctional policies (Griffiths & Cunningham 2000: 198). In contrast, the kindly, progressive Warden Benton in *Caged* (1950) attempts to civilize the prison through reformatory efforts, despite its organizational corruption and villainous actions of the punishing matron, Harper. To reiterate, the prison is also sanitized by its communicative and symbolic interpretation of violence over the graphic and gratuitous representations found in other filmic forms, namely the exploitation film.

## **Categorical Constructions of the Confined Woman in the Hollywood Film**

### ***The Othered Penal Subject: Characterological Clichés and Essentialist Differences***

The film *Caged* (1950) was pivotal in creating clichéd archetypes within the discourse of otherization - tied to a number of social and criminological locations such as gender, class, age, sexual orientation, intelligence, a prisoner's first timer status, carceral experiences and criminogenic proclivities/reformatory potential. As well, subjectivity is associated with inherently disordered states. Various characterological embodiments take form and include the 'mad' woman,<sup>268</sup> the 'lesbian villain/abuser,' the 'prostitute,' the 'seasoned, older offender,' the 'habitual repeater' and the 'queen bee' prisoner head, that re-emerged in other filmic forms, primarily the sexploitation women-

<sup>268</sup> When protagonist Marie Allen is processed by the intake officer, she implies that many women are psychologically disordered. She abruptly tells Marie, "*I'll skip the mental test. You look normal enough. Lots of them haven't got all their marbles.*" Here, good mental health is associated with the physical appearance of 'good woman,' Marie Allen.



in-prison genre (Faith 1987: 185). Alternatively, the diametrically juxtaposed new 'fish,' or 'good girl' protagonist symbolizes the discourses of naturalization, sexism and traditional femininity. *Caged* was the first female prison melodrama to cast the female prisoner as the protagonist (Mason 2005: 198). The above subjectivities are related to the constructs of intersectionality, pathologization, transgression (normative), defeminization, criminalization, and transformation (characterological). In many cases, as in *Caged*, 'Hollywoodized' prisoners are positioned as low class, economically marginalized, and morally degenerate. They commit crime with male lovers/intimates or have ties with the criminal syndicate. Lesbianism is shrouded in ambiguity and character dialogue that alludes to the prison's assault on the heterosexual relationship. For example, in *Caged* prisoner Kitty Stark remarks to Marie Allen, after she loses custody of her infant son, "*if you stay in here long enough you won't think of guys at all.*"<sup>269</sup> And despite the otherness of the prison population, inmates are not depicted as vile abusers or killers that stalk and prey upon women located lower in the institutional hierarchy.

In *Caged*, the prisoners housed in the bull pen, a dark claustrophobic celled dormitory, personify such characterizations. The film's sombre and grayish tones, and lack of color, visually homogenize *most* prisoners into hardened 'cons' and unfeminine looking women.<sup>270</sup> There is husband-killer, Kitty Stark, who "*knocked a guy off,*" a tough *booster* (shoplifter ring recruiter) who is head of the inmate hierarchy; her prison rival, Elvira Powell, a mannish, well-groomed, haughty vice queen and upper echelon criminal (both women have ties with the syndicate and the money to bribe prison authorities, to make their time easier and be *flopped out* earlier);<sup>271</sup> Smoochie, a common prostitute and victim of male violence who still longs for a man; June, a gentle nurse, convicted of

<sup>269</sup> At the time of the film, lesbianism was historically associated with the lower class white woman (Friedman 1996:1). But it is characters with a higher class standing, such as matron Evelyn Harper and prisoner Elvira Powell, that are covertly gay in their visual appearance, masculinized power, and relational associations with the other prisoners.

<sup>270</sup> The narrative of *Caged* (1950) was the prototype storyline for the women-in-prison film of subsequent years. The good, pretty, innocent woman goes to prison and is subject to clichéd characterizations of *othered* criminal women, the hardship and oppression of incarceration, and the victimization from individualistic prison predators such as cruel sadistic matrons or inmates (Faith 1993: 258).

<sup>271</sup> *Flopped out* is a colloquial term for prison release or parole.

illegal abortions, desperate to earn her release; and murderess Millie Lewis, a lifelong con, likely to die in prison but who is the voice of reason from her years of confinement.

The 'mad woman' takes on two sub-categorical forms; eccentric Emma Barber and the pampered Georgia Harrison. The former is a crazy 'spouse-killer-abused wife' and the latter a high-class 'money forger.' In an almost comical commentary, Emma quickly sits up in bed, and blurts out a theory about her confinement:

*"I was just thinkin.' It's all the judge's fault I'm here. When – when Joe first beats me up I grab his gun and just wing him in the shoulder. Do they arrest me? No. Then last year I defends myself again with a gun and the police still treats me like I was poison ivy. And then finally I finish Joe off for good. But it's that judge. If he'd a' nabbed me the first three times while I was just practicing, I wouldn't be here now for murder...it's all the judge's fault" (Parrish 1991: 76).*

Sporting a toothy grin, Emma falls back onto the bed. This commentary and brief characterological depiction of Emma reveals the hidden prevalence of women's susceptibility to domestic violence, yet pathologizes Emma within the discourse of psychiatrization, after she kills her violent husband. Consequently, it decontextualizes the external factors (self-preservation and protection) that contribute to the homicide of male intimates, from their abused female partners.

Alternatively, Georgia appears to be completely out of touch with reality. One night, she awakens in a nightmarish delusion, whimpering and agitated, in the silence of the bull pen. Georgia wails, *"I want to go home. I want to get out of here. Do you hear the train? People are going home on that train."* She screams, *"Conductor! Wait for me! Let me on that train!"* The woman smashes her arms through the barred glass window which severs an artery. *"Let me out of here. I don't belong in here,"* she wails, *"Father, father, father, father."* Matron Evelyn Harper and another guard come in to the bull pen, with the former callously lamenting, *"A cold hose will quiet her down."*

Finally, there is the timid and fragile Marie Allen, almost school-girl looking, the young protagonist, convicted as an accessory to armed robbery with husband, Tom. By filmic end, Marie takes on the attributes that enable her to make it in the underworld – toughness, immorality, and criminalized connections. *Caged* subverts the romantic

subplot found in other classical Hollywood prison melodramas where the prisoner is saved by a male love interest such the prison doctor or chaplain (Bouclin 2009: 29).

In *Caged* and other films, the gendered crimes of spousal homicide, prostitution, and assisting an abortion further construct prisoners as *other* – women who are triply deviant through the commission of crime(s), the rejection of normative femininity and responsibility, and the specific nature of their offences – ones that reflect an assault on patriarchy, both directly and symbolically, by the murder of a male intimate, the adulteration of monogamous sexuality and the defilement of family, most abhorrently through the abortive death of the unborn child (Bouclin 2009: 26).

The ultimate characterological *other* across all the films, however, is Evelyn Harper in *Caged*, the ‘bad woman’ in her most vilified incarnation. She is merciless in her treatment of the women. Visually, Harper is a foreboding presence, a grotesque symbol of patriarchal power, masculinized in her stature, mannish appearance, and strict domination of prisoners who are swallowed up by her wrath of violence and cruelty. The matrons continued heinous actions are performatively played out in a formulaic behavioural repertoire. Her butchified identity mediates a lesbian persona through both ambiguity and displacement (Mayne 2000: 127). A tyrant of the worst form, she demands complete allegiance and exploits the prisoners at any cost; “*time is money.*” Harper sells contraband (drugs, cigarettes) or the comforts of life (for someone in Marie’s most delicate condition [pregnancy]) and relays news to the women’s family members, or criminalized associates, for a price (Parrish 1991: 76). In one scene, she informs Kitty Stark that Elvira Powell is coming to prison; the queen bee will soon be buzzing off her throne. In an unbalanced compositional shot, Harper is seen in the filmic background; her masculinized power and control is symbolized by a low angle shot of her foreboding presence, a large, distorted form that envelopes half of the filmic frame, as she towers over Kitty, with Harper the clearer, lighter-toned characterological figure. This aesthetic juxtaposition of the two women, one shrouded in dimness and the other in more light, symbolizes an inversion of good versus evil, with the sadistic matron being depicted in a white uniform while Kitty is shrouded in a gray shadow that falls over her, symbolizing the ambiguity surrounding her power amongst the women. With the knowledge that Kitty will lose her status within the prison hierarchy, Harper gleefully walks away; a noirist silhouette of her looming figure is seen amongst the shadowing of

bars on the ceiling overhead – a symbol of the pervasiveness of her evilness. A dreary, hopeless, and depressingly dark filmic mood contributes to this effect.

There is no representation of race in *Caged*; rather, the unitary notion of woman emerges in a homogenized, penal subject devoid of racially-based intersectional differences (Sloop 1996: 53).<sup>272</sup> The issue of race first appears in the Hollywood melodrama *Women's Prison* (1956) (Mayne 2000: 129). In later women-in-prison films, racist and stereotypical constructions emerged in cinematic depictions of African American (and other non-Caucasian) prisoners as the sexual jezebel, masculinized savage killer/abuser, lesbian, and drug dealer.<sup>273</sup> Within these embodiments, the prisoner's violence is related to animalistic aggression and an inherent physicality of strength. These characterizations are not found in *any* substantial way in the Hollywood films discussed herein. Alternatively, race is either absent or relegated to the margins in secondary or background character constructions.

In subsequent filmic titles to discuss, the prisoner population is specifically *othered* through visual imagery, dialogical content and behavioural actions that pathologize some women through the discourses of heterosexism, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia, interconnected to the construct of intersectionality, including alternate sexualities (lesbianism) and race and ethnicity (Non-Westernized). Generally, the protagonist character labels women who bully and victimize particular facets of self, such as her heterosexuality. In *Love Child* (1982), the threat of lesbian contamination is pervasive in the carceral world (Ciasullo 2008: 206). Terry Moore is aggressively resistant towards prison predators, (female correctional staff and inmates) who voyeuristically proposition and gaze at her on a continual basis, especially when she is first incarcerated. These women appear both feminized and masculinized. As well, Terry develops a volatile relationship with an African American antagonist, who impulsively attempts to victimize her during ongoing confrontational exchanges. It is within these characterizations that exploitable elements intertwine with the constructs of victimization-

<sup>272</sup> Nonetheless, this production represented the actual segregative housing of the women's prison, with those racialized offenders being confined in more harsh penitentiaries and farm camps than white women.

<sup>273</sup> To reiterate, these embodiments cross film-making forms to varying degrees, but are primarily found in the exploitation film.

predation in various prisoner antagonisms and corresponding behavioural actions. In an attempt to construct herself outside the human contagion of the prison, however, Terry attributes different condemnatory labels that serve to *other* the prisoner population, even after she is placed in segregation after a fight. When Officer Jack Hanson, remarks, “*For a nice kid who doesn’t belong in a place like this you’re just fitting right in, aren’t ya?*” Terry replies “*Well, fit in with who – the crazies, the sneaks, or the dykes?*”<sup>274</sup> To which Jack replies, with a chuckle, “*I hope not; ‘couldn’t stand to think in that kind of ways.*” Terry answers, “*Yeah, well don’t worry now ‘cause I’m fighting to stay pure.*” Here Terry’s sexuality is not defiled by a homosexual prison encounter but is, on the contrary, kept pure for patriarchal pleasures, symbolic in her subsequent intimate love relationship with Jack later in the film. Consequently, “the prison lesbian, by representing the threat of contagion, perversion, and permanent inversion, makes possible the ...heterosexual intervention” represented by the male love interest Jack (Ciasullo 2008: 218). This process of othering privileges Terry’s normalized sexuality over lesbianism that is pathologized through the discourse of heterosexism. Here, the binarily propagated vilification of lesbianism is created through (patriarchal) systems of representation and power that privilege a patriarchal status quo (McQuillan: 2000: 23)

In *Brokedown Palace* (1999), the foreign prison harasser is constructed as *other* to two falsely imprisoned American tourists in Thailand. This inexplicitly harassing inmate gets protagonist Alice Marano severely punished, and for the remainder of the film is “caught by the camera with a bemused, treacherous smile, lingering on her otherwise vacant face” (Zacharek 1999: 2). This characterization symbolizes an individualized embodiment of the xenophobic and sinister Thai criminal justice system and culture. In some instances, the othered woman has no on-screen presence or characterological embodiment; rather, a dialogical commentary constructs the carceral world outside the conventions of cinematic storylines, narrative structures, and character performance. In *White Oleander* (2002), Ingrid acknowledges the possibility of death from the unknown prison killer. She tells Astrid with a strength, coldness, and determination in her words, “*prison agrees with me; there is no hypocrisy here – kill or be killed and everybody knows it.*” A bruise is visible on her cheek. Astrid asks, “*Do they*

<sup>274</sup> *Dyke* is a slang word for lesbian women.

*hurt you?"* and Ingrid replies, *"Not as much as I hurt them."* Ingrid's words binarily oppose her to the other prisoners, whereby her potential for hurting them outweighs her vulnerability to victimization – a condition which legitimizes Ingrid's own violence within the discourse and corresponding construct of primal survivalism (protection). Film-maker Peter Kosminsky (2003) creates a character whose strength is resilient to her prison oppressions. It was imperative that Ingrid maintain her potency and not become a "reduced adversary" to her daughter. Ingrid also constructs prisoners as the binary other in relation to how she constructs herself – as someone whose artistic brilliance far exceeds the intelligence of women she judges as stupid. In frustration, she complains to Astrid, *"I cell with a woman who has a vocabulary of twenty-five words."*

### ***The Beautified and Celebratized Prisoner: The Hollywood Star Beauty***

The 'beautified and celebratized' woman prisoner is constructed within the intersectional locations of gender, class, race, and sexual orientation (heterosexuality). This subjectivity is interlinked to the discourses of hyper femininity (naturalization versus otherization), heterosexism, and beautification, tied to the constructs of intersectionality, vilification, celebratization and commodification. The protagonist is visually encoded in young, attractive, successful, white actresses, regardless of their on-screen character culpability (criminalized status or innocence), categorical construction (vilification, normalization, or glorification), and/or intersectional location (class). Cinematically produced subjectivities reflect classist, racist, and heteropatriarchal notions of feminized beauty that creates stereotypically gendered, sexist images.<sup>275</sup> This productive casting choice promotes the visual spectacle of beauty and the star persona as devices that draw in prospective filmic consumers.<sup>276</sup> Physical attractiveness becomes an overriding

<sup>275</sup> In *Love Child* (1982), protagonist Terry Moore is blue collar and economically marginalized. All the female protagonists aspire to heterosexual relationships of romance and love with the exception of Marie Allen in *Caged* (1950).

<sup>276</sup> All the women cast in the films are attractive, fair-haired actresses, including Eleanor Parker (Marie Allen) in *Caged* (1950), Amy Madigan (Terry Moore) in *Love Child* (1982), Claire Danes (Alice Marano) in *Brokedown Palace* (1999), and Michelle Pfeiffer (Ingrid Magnussen) in *White Oleander* (2002). These actresses reached different levels of stardom or Hollywood fame as lead performers. For example, Eleanor Parker never became a major Hollywood star like Michelle Pfeiffer. Parker's versatility and choice of serious filmic roles accounted for this fact. Amy Madigan is the least established actress of them all.

quality that constructs the penal subject in ways contrary to the monstrous and masculinized prisoner in our cultural imaginations. Still, although, the prisoner takes on these stunning qualities through the performer, the image of the unattractive criminal woman nevertheless resonates in the public consciousness.

In *White Oleander* (2002), director Peter Kosminsky and others felt that actress Michelle Pfeiffer's luminous beauty was problematic in the personification of inmate mother, Ingrid Magnussen, a character deemed too beautiful to be in prison.<sup>277</sup> Thus, to visually downplay the actress's radiant features, Ingrid is portrayed as fatigued and hardened in her appearance and demeanour (Kosminsky 2003). Yet, in the narrated words of one prison letter to Astrid, Ingrid asserts, "*You write as if you're surprised to find me still beautiful, even here.*" This character is the cinematic re-adaptation of novelist Janet Fitch's literary construction of a woman who "was determined to retain her beauty... [someone who] would not let the system crush her .... [or] have the satisfaction of crushing her down into some kind of fallen, ugly woman in disarray" (Kosminsky 2003). Janet Fitch (2003) commented that the appearance of incarcerated men is never questioned, even when they appear physically fit and 'buff'; yet, incarcerated women who retain their attractiveness are problematized by society. As well, Ingrid's heterosexuality is juxtaposed via a quick cinematic shot against the unattractiveness of two masculinized, racialized prisoners who simulate a sexual act. She gives them a cold, scornful glare, before she looks back at daughter, Astrid. Elsewhere in the film, all the supporting cast members represent female characterological embodiments that are similarly blond beauties.<sup>278</sup>

In the film, conceptions of externalized beauty are associated with the internalized qualities of strength and evilness. Although Ingrid is beautiful, she is also

<sup>277</sup> Some filmic viewers expressed similar views, as did actress Michelle Pfeiffer (2003). Novelist Janet Fitch (2003) commented in an interview that for some people, physical attractiveness, intelligence, or a celebrity status made it hard for them to believe that characterological embodiment could be a murderer.

<sup>278</sup> In the book *White Oleander* (1999), by author Janet Fitch, Claire Richards is a brunette. Thus, it appears that for promotional purposes, blond performer Rene Zellweger was cast to make up the beautiful ensemble of primary female actresses that include: Robin Wright Penn (Starr Thomas), Michelle Pfeiffer (Ingrid Magnussen) and Lindsey Lohman (Astrid Magnussen). Interestingly Russian immigrant character Rena Grushenka (Sevetlana Efremova), a dark haired woman, was not shown the filmic box cover.

dangerous, a personification constructed through a non-visualized, dialogical expression that emphasizes the cruelty of her words and actions. In this instance, inherent beauty holds a superficial veneer; it does not reflect goodness, but rather individualized character vilification. Underneath Ingrid's seemingly radiant exterior is a narcissistic and unremorseful woman who manipulates other people's lives through an emotional vacuity of coldness and callousness. In some scenes, she has the "look and composure of a self-possessed lizard," her otherwise dazzling blue eyes "icy and cold," a character construction many viewers have little sympathy for (Zacharek 2002: 2). Ingrid associates her beauty with the strength and power to survive—but she ultimately disempowers others through her deceitful and hurtful actions.

The star cinematic character binarily constitutes the penal subject within two bodies that are opposing manifestations of reality versus fiction. The star/actor is a commodity; a knowable off-screen personality who becomes disembodied and fragmented from their *self* into the cinematic subjectivities of the characterological role (Maltby 2003: 382). Even so, "a paradoxical element in the idea of the actor's disappearance" is problematic when Hollywood performance distorts the realities of prisoners' lives in celebrity personas that entertain through fame, power and beauty, rather than present women's experiences in ways that emphasize their actualities in actresses who reflect more authentic personifications (382). Across the selected films, the underrepresentation of race in central characterizations denies giving voice to populations of women who are intersectionally marginalized by and susceptible to criminalization and incarceration, further fictionalizing the demographic and socio-structural linkages to confinement (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 102). Although it excludes the racialized carceral experience, the Hollywood prison film "borrows from black cultural history to construct white slave narratives" (Jarvis 2004: 169). As a result, sparking audience appeal and interest is emphasized over accuracy of representation. Women prisoner actualities become conflated into a world of Hollywood imaginations enveloped



in star performances, even though some films claim to depict legitimately genuine characterological embodiments.<sup>279</sup>

The beautification of the prisoner is objectifying, but not in an overtly sexualized, voyeuristic, or overly fetishized way such as in the sexploitation film. Nonetheless, this visual imagery symbolizes the passive confirmation of male power in the cinematic image (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 138, 139). The film *Caged* (1950) is the exception to this, as it depicts the fetishized bodies of prisoners in the shower room; their bare legs and feet moving around the wet floor, in a scopophilic single filmic shot where women can be reduced through “a visual machinery suitable for [pleasurable] male desire... .” ( Smelik 2007: 491; Green 1998: 42). Popular film accordingly constructs the women prisoners through the marketability of the performance and persona of the star/lead performer, and the commercial elements that commodify the penal subject through the power, privilege, and beauty of white actresses who are cast in primary filmic roles.

## **Systemic Injustice and Oppressions: The Prisoner as Oppressed Victim and Reformable-Unreformable Subject**

Institutionalized carceral oppressions in the film *Caged* (1950), inflicted upon the penal subject and their corresponding solutions, emerge within the discourses of correctionalism (punishment-reform), oppression, otherization and dehumanization-humanization, interrelated to the construct of injustice-justice. This construct is conceptualized through three conditions: prison repression, resistance, and reform/change. More specifically, the correctionalist discourse of progressive reform and rehabilitation, further enveloped within sexism, familialism, maternalism, classism, and psychiatrization, aims to create justice-based change/initiatives that will alleviate oppressions perpetuated both systemically and individually. As well programmatic opportunities are framed within the construct of potential characterological

<sup>279</sup> In an interesting side note, star performers create particular audience expectations in a character who may reflect realism in their performances and personifications. Maltby (2003: 482) contends that the trustworthiness of characters is, to some degree, related to their star quality. The star phenomenon is influential in drawing in potential fans who identify, imitate, and adore their favourite actress or actor cast in a film (Walters 1995: 96).

transformation. However, the discourses of otherization, psychiatrization and/or violence threaten the feasibility of reformatory efforts in both *Caged* (1950), and *Love Child* (1982). Filmic tales make claims to truthfulness or authenticity in the depiction of such conditions. It is here that carceral policies, philosophies and practices that violate prisoners' rights are cinematically portrayed within an explicit criminological message.

Injustice may reflect wrongful imprisonment, or question the legitimacy of confinement and punishment as an appropriate response in dealing with the marginalized woman – the protagonist and her prison mates. In contrast, many films critically question the feasibility of the prison as a site of reform-based strategies, in light of archaic correctionalist policies and the subjectivities of the prisoner population. Reformist goals endeavour to improve the conditions of confinement, institute new programs, address prisoner oppressions, and reprimand or discharge problematic staff persons. The latter condition reflects how injustice becomes embodied in villainous antagonists whose actions wreak adversity and unpredictability on the lives of confined women (Benshoff & Griffin 2004: 27). These depictions reinforce homophobic, sexist, classist, and racist notions. Commonly, injustice is addressed through the characterological goals of supportive authorities (lawyers, wardens, or prison guards) who take on different levels of influence within the filmic storyline. It is within all these circumstances that the criminal woman emerges in various primary embodiments such as the 'oppressed victim,' 'reformable – unreformable subject,' and 'resistant prisoner' - (rationalized or pathologized).

In the filmic titles *Love Child* (1982) and *Brokedown Palace* (1999), injustice is also related to the discourse of resistance to a perceived or actual oppression. For instance, prisoner 'victims' challenge their subjugation in ways that construct them as either 'rationalized' or 'pathologized' resisters. In the latter sub-categorical embodiment subjectivity, is individualized in problematic or disordered characterological states. Resistance may be instrumental in leading to the achievement of a characterologically oriented goal, or it may symbolize volatile actions that create some semblance of control in a situation of individualized disempowerment. The injustice-justice construct is most often cinematically explored in a primary relationship between binarily structured characterizations. Individualized prisoner resistance may also bring to the forefront the systemic injustices that predispose women to oppression.

## The Alleviation of Prison Injustice

### ***Reformist and Rehabilitative Rhetoric: Correctionalist Ideal or Realistic Change?***

The underlying narrative in *Caged* (1950) espouses the threat of the independent, rebellious woman who moves from the domestic to the criminal world. Its tagline reads “*Will she come out a woman or wildcat?*” a pre-emptive commentary on the prison’s power to either tame the criminalized outlaw, or contribute to her future criminality. Although the film asserts truth claims from scenarist Virginia Kellogg’s memoir of prison life, critiques from professional reviewers/authors emphasize the film’s fusion of exploitable elements with prison reform rhetoric in a shocking depiction.<sup>280</sup> Thomas M. Pryor (*New York Times*) termed *Caged* “a cliché-ridden account of institutional brutality and depravity,” while Doug McClelland, author of *Eleanor Parker: Woman of a Thousand Faces* (1989), claimed the film affected changes to programmatic objectives at several women’s institutions (as cited in Parish 1991: 79). Nonetheless, the film’s controversial scenes, lesbian undertones, anti-familial message and patriarchal challenges defied the conventionality and sentimentality of other Hollywood prison melodramas. Thus, some critics saw little leisure value in the film, which was condemned in its integrity and craftsmanship. *Caged* was, as *Variety* complained (as cited in Parrish 1991:79), “A grim, unrelieved study of cause and effect, it has exploitation possibilities but still adds up to very drab entertainment, unleavened with any measure of escapism that would brighten its chances in the more general market.”

The film’s opening credits begin with the high pitch screech of continuous sound. All that is visible is a small cage-like screen, enveloped in the darkness of a police van. *Freeside*, the colloquial term for an unnamed city, quickly slips away in a fast panning of

<sup>280</sup> The exploitable elements include; the standardized narrative of the innocent good woman (Marie) versus a villainous adversary (matron Harper), a harrowing prison experience, and the stock scenes of the prisoner riot, the exercise yard, segregation cell, a brutal murder, and the sexualization/fetishization of women’s bodies in the aforementioned single shower scene.

barely visible images of houses, streets, and cars.<sup>281</sup> The cinematography in *Caged* is visually noirist; a mixture of stark black and white contrasts and shadow patterning, that depicts the prison bars cast upon the bodies of the inmates and the set backdrops of the penitentiary, such as the bed covers, dormitory floors, walls, and ceilings, all of which create an ominous, claustrophobic effect. This aesthetic style, with the otherwise grayish visual tones, along with diegetic sounds (of a train and the rain<sup>282</sup>); contribute to a dreary, bleak and depressingly dark filmic mood. As the whistle of the train loudly blows, the women abruptly stop all activity and stand to a silent and stoic attention, until the steam engine, in full force, chugs by the grated prison window. The train is a symbolization of the freedom that the women have lost, in stagnant years of incarceration and troubled lives. The prison regime represents monotonous regimentation. Repeated, superimposed shots and sounds of a ringing bell cut to images of protagonist Marie Allen, looking weary and stressed; a temporal symbolization of the drudgery of her daily, carceral existence of laborious work, and a rigorous schedule of getting up, standing for *count*, eating, and sleeping – all dictated by the stern matron, Harper.<sup>283</sup> In the isolation ward, Marie experiences a barren environment, devoid of authoritative care or concern for the infirm or sick prisoner detainee. This context foreshadows and reflects the prison: a stark, lonely and exclusionary environment that doesn't hold an empathetic or human quality, except for the kindly warden, Ruth Benton. The carceral world is a place of despair, moral decay, mental deterioration, violence, and death. *Noirist* shadowing symbolizes prisoners' life-long confinement within a hopeless future marked by stigmatization, criminalization, and marginality. The setting in the social problem film is downplayed and replaced by the worst excess of human behaviour, here represented in the prison world.

The primary narratological construct of justice-injustice is symbolized in the opposing characterizations of (1) the prison authorities – the reform-minded

<sup>281</sup> The grated window re-emerges in different contexts within the prison such as the isolation dormitory and segregation cell. At times the Hollywood film has been known not to associate itself with an American community, so Freeside, in the film *Caged*, is used to denote an outside unnamed city (Maltby 2003: 294).

<sup>282</sup> Rain is often seen outside the window in the warden's office and isolation ward.

<sup>283</sup> At specific times during the day and night prisoners must be present for the *count*, where correctional staff persons determine the entire number of confined wards.

superintendent, Ruth Benton and the sadistic matron, Evelyn Harper; and (2) the keeper and the kept – the warden and the imprisoned protagonist, Marie Allen, a recent admittee to the State penitentiary. Ruth Benton's commentary and progressive carceral agenda symbolize the integration of a politically controversial criminological theme/message – prison reform – juxtaposed against the grotesque symbolization of punishment, Evelyn Harper; the stock characterization that is instrumental to the entertainment objective (Maltby 2003: 293). Benton, a compassionate and business-like warden, is a strange mixture of authority, sensitivity, and maternalism. She is a woman of social conscience who struggles to restructure the prison, in the face of patriarchal opposition by male prison board members disinterested in her perspectives, and the power of Harper, the incarnation of masculinized violence and harsh oppressive discipline (Parrish 1991: 74).<sup>284</sup> In addition political corruption and apathy impact the broader apparatus of correctional control. Benton in part symbolized a new generation of feminist reformer: typically women socially located as mainly Caucasian, educated, and unattached (single) subjects who pursued careers in social work, medicine, law, and the social sciences.<sup>285</sup> These heterosexual women were career minded and committed to the suffrage movement (Bouclin 2009: 29).

Ruth Benton though dualistically symbolizes the State as keeper versus the State as challenger to a carceral bureaucracy neglectful in overturning repressive philosophies and practices. She strives to implement rehabilitative change through education, psychiatric treatment, and work opportunities that mirror those afforded to women at other State facilities. Her goals are embedded within the discourse of middle-class reform that aimed to cure the ills of unruly women through domestic and familial-based initiatives, albeit for the white prisoner. Benton also vies to fire Harper, knowing of the indignities and cruelty she inflicts on the prisoners, (especially Marie), who are 'oppressed victims' to Harper's reign of terror. Benton humanizes the women, who she sees as decaying under the perils of confinement. She demands a public hearing into

<sup>284</sup> The character of Ruth Benton was based on Miriam Van Waters, the warden of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women. She worked towards an anti-punishment correctional reform that emphasized, spiritual guidance, social services and love (Bouclin 2009: 27; Freedman 1996: 6).

<sup>285</sup> Ruth Benton is married.

prison conditions and Harper's unjust actions, after the administrative authorities ask for Benton's resignation. Previously Harper goes to the press with tales of prison indiscretions after Benton's initial threats, and blames the warden for the institutional problems. But instead of prompting concern from the male-based penal authorities, Harper's allegations lead to correctional directives that further restrict prisoners' rights, abandon programmatic initiatives and subsequently solidify Harper's power and position as head matron. A corrupt and abusive punisher, the matron wreaks havoc on the prison with her neglectful and brutal practices, which have tragic results.

The status of prisoner, or confined inmate ward makes women susceptible to prison oppressions. In contrast to the exploitation film, in *Caged* some former powerful women within the inmate hierarchy fall victim to the sadistic wrath of the villainous guard. Kitty Stark, a criminally affiliated, former bull pen queen bee, goes *stir bugs* after a particularly brutal beating from Harper.<sup>286</sup> The prisoner's screams are heard from a segregation cell. Once released, Kitty sits alone in the cold prison yard, a shell of her previous self. As her adversary, Elvira Powell, apologizes for her role in Kitty's plight, and Harper's actions, Powell promises to make amends, get Kitty flopped out (released) sooner, and help the woman regain her head position within the prison hierarchy. But, Kitty barely able to rationally communicate or acknowledge who stands before her, looks up blankly and utters, "*What did you say?*" Shocked, Elvira moves away, almost threatened by Kitty's shattered mental state. Later in the film, in the dining hall, Kitty stabs Harper in the throat with a fork, in an impulsive act of violence, after the matron disrespects her. Marie Allen intently chants in a low hoarse voice "*Kill her! Kill her! Kill her, Kill her!*" before she takes Kitty away from Harper's body, which lies dead on the floor. Marie appears almost trance-like as she looks at the matron and stoically remarks, "*kindly omit flowers.*" Clearly, Marie has deteriorated from her imprisonment. Kitty is never seen again – she is sentenced to the death house – her sanction not mitigated by Harper's abuse or Kitty's mental deterioration. Instead, a disordered subjectivity is associated with culpability and a propensity towards an almost animalistic aggression. In this scenario, victimization is decontextualized with Kitty's actions becoming associated with madness. The message is explicit; these women deserve death as an appropriate

<sup>286</sup> *Stir bugs* is a colloquial term for someone going crazy.

penal response for their actions against a sadistic abuser.<sup>287</sup> In this case, it is Kitty who is demonized rather than Harper. By the filmic end, Ruth Benton sparks a legal hearing into the corruption and terror that Harper inflicted on the women. The warden's appeals to have Kitty's death sentence lifted, in light of these circumstances, is unsuccessful.

In another scene, the warden reprimands the matron after she purposely neglects to inform Benton of an inmate's acute depression communicated to Harper by other prisoners. June, a meek, emotionally fragile and self-persecutory woman hangs herself, after being denied parole. One night Marie, feeling ill from her pregnancy, rises from her bed and silently calls for June, who sleeps a few bunk beds away. As Marie struggles to look for her friend in the darkened bull pen, a close-up shot eventually settles on her face, now depicting the pain she is experiencing. As Marie falls against a bed frame, slow motion movements depict her attempts to focus her attention towards something. June's lifeless body hangs; a *noirist* silhouette of it is shown against the bullpen wall. Marie's wearied and bulging eyes shockingly express this ultimate nocturnal terror. Traumatized by this image, she collapses onto the floor and goes into premature labour, birthing her newborn baby in the prison infirmary. June's madness has led to suicidal death, and Benton blames Harper for the tragedy. She angrily tells the matron, *"You helped to kill June just as surely [as] if you had hanged her yourself."*

Harper callously responds to Benton's accusations, in full knowledge that there is nothing the warden can do, including firing the matron. Harper smugly looks at the warden and sneers, *"You sit there on your bustle, the big boss and think you know how to run this place."* A cinematic shot then depicts the back of her large body with the warden a significantly smaller figure in the background, clearly signifying the power the matron has over her. In a disturbing diatribe, the matron explains how the prison should be run and the inmates managed:

*"With a piece of rubber hose; break 'em in two if they talk out of turn. Anyone who doesn't toe the marks sits in solitary for one month ... bread and water. One funny move from a girl and I'd clip every hair off of her"*

<sup>287</sup> Harper's death predates the lethal fate of the lesbian characters as a stock element in subsequent women-in-prison narratives, namely the sexploitation movie. However, despite the ambiguity of her sexual orientation, she dies a violent death (Mayne 2000: 127).

*head. That's the way it used to be run and that's the way it ought to be run, just like they're a bunch of animals in a cage."*

Harper's correctionalist philosophy of unmerciful punishment chillingly solidifies her villainous characterological persona; one that disregards Benton's rehabilitative and maternalistic goals, that emphasize institutionalized care for marginalized prisoners.

Later in the film, Marie and her cellmates are juxtaposed against a group of high-class, respectable women being escorted around the prison, Harper in tow. Harper's dehumanization of the prisoners is similarly expressed by an older "lady" who looks into the bull pen and remarks with disparagement, "*This place smells like a zoo... and men call us the weaker sex. Look at those faces.*"<sup>288</sup> A young woman, in particular, directs her look at Marie through the celled dormitory door, an embodied symbolization of the prisoner's past and what she will never become – lady-like and law-abiding. Marie goes to the cell bars, a look of intimidation on her face, a cigarette in her hand. The camera pans up the woman's body, as Marie looks at her, homosexual overtones in play, with her potential lesbian ways inverting the 1950s suburban housewife image (Ciasullo 2008: 213; Berlatsky 2008: 4). The woman frightened by Marie runs off. These visitors deploy a binary opposition demarcated by the privilege, class, and normative femininity of the *virtuous* woman against the *dangerous* criminal, denigrated as *other* to anything human. In the aforementioned exemplars, labels from both the matron and an unnamed community member construct the prisoners as 'animals.'

Ruth Benton's rehabilitative ideals are not integrated or developed in any significant way in the prison narrative; rather it is Harper's domination, control and punishment practices that are shockingly depicted. Her affiliations with high ranking correctional and political officials protect her reign of abuse and mistreatment, and invert the power hierarchy between the warden and matron guard. It is Harper who ultimately maintains her power (to abuse), while Ruth Benton's efforts to commence one facet of her reform strategy and rid the prison of a villainous punisher is futile. It takes Kitty's act

<sup>288</sup> There is ambiguity regarding the identity of these women – whether they are community reformers or simply visitors to the prison. In historical times knowledge about the prison came from tours of facilities, but once these tours stopped, popular culture solely framed our understandings of the carceral world.



of prisoner violence to do so. Thus, patriarchal power and relational affiliations uphold Harper's sadistic ways.

### ***A Critique of Reformist Initiatives – Is the Reformable Penal Subject Possible?***

*Caged* also critically engages with a feminist reform discourse, particularly through the relationship between protagonist Marie Allen and Ruth Benton. The film not only symbolizes “some of the dominant socio-legal assumptions about women’s ‘criminality,’ it also exposes the women’s prison as a contradictory space... . [One that] raises jurisprudential questions ... [regarding] whether prisons can ever (re)form women” (Bouclin 2009: 21). Further, throughout the film, the moral justification for Marie’s criminalization and confinement is called into question (Bouclin 2009: 27). Contrary to being constructed as the habitual criminalized subject like the other prisoners, Marie is seen as a naïve and innocent victim who is not deserving of her plight, her criminal involvement (robbery) a wifely duty at the persuasion of her husband Tom.<sup>289</sup> As such, she is constructed as a ‘reformable subject;’ “a naturally moral being,” easily converted back into traditional womanhood, if the opportunities arise (Sloop 1996: 53). As well, Marie’s social locations of age, class, sexual orientation and first timer criminal and carceral status contribute to her potential changeability.

Warden Ruth Benton embodies a maternalistic protector to Marie, who first meets the warden in her Stately office. The young, scared inductee is comforted by Benton’s words that make promises of care, protection, and assistance in a correctional official who rather constructs herself as a friend, to Marie personally. The warden physically comforts the young woman, as she sobs: “*What’s troubling you, Marie? You weren’t sentenced here to be punished; just being here is the punishment.*” In this depiction Ruth Benton’s dialogical commentary and acts reflect her humanistic concern for the inmates and reformist views regarding the prison, both of which are undermined throughout the film by systemic and individual forces. This “sympathetic feminist

<sup>289</sup> The film attempts to contextualize the robbery within the “desperate times and economic hardship” that impacted the couple’s life (Bouclin 2009: 30). In actuality, women’s offending “is often [a] rational action, within a constrained range of choices” (Hudson 2002: 44).

character” is constructed as an ‘authorized knower’ who facilitates in the readjustment of criminalized women (Bouclin 2009: 29). The warden frames the term assistance or help clearly within a domestic discourse. She tells Marie, “*We want to help you, so when you go home you can start a new life. ...Now as to your work. I’ll bet you helped your mother with your father’s shirts, didn’t you?*” Marie is assigned to a job in the laundry as part of her correctional programming.

In another film, the labeling and othering of the prisoner population into violent killers and child abusers, also questions the feasibility of particular reform-based objectives. As such the perceived ‘unreformable’ prisoner hinders such correctionalist ideals. The docudramatic tale *Love Child* (1982) chronicles the life of Terry Jean Moore, an inmate who birthed a child fathered by a Florida prison guard – a case that gained national news attention. Both the penal authorities and Terry construct the inmate population as volatile and a risk to the safety of a young child. During the hearing to decide on Terry’s legal challenge to keep her infant, the warden expresses grave concerns regarding her ability to protect it from offenders involved in escapes, hostage takings, un/armed assaults/fights and convictions for either the abuse or death of children. She tells the correctional committee “*Am I going to order one of our armed guards to shoot at an inmate while she’s holding a baby?*” The warden’s voice is validated because she is both a mother and grandmother. The prison is a place of emotional hostility, unpredictability and violence and the inmates have free reign of the facility until dark. Here the prisoner population is *othered* within a discourse of potential correctionalist reform.

Terry herself also contributes to the perception of the prison as a dangerous world. After an African American adversary throws hot oil at her, which accidentally hits two other prisoners, an agitated and angry Terry yells to friend J.J. “*You didn’t see it J.J. You didn’t hear it, it was horrible! ... Do you know what this place does? It takes women and turns them into animals. Animals. ‘Cause that’s what they want!*” Terry is adamant; she will not let the authorities take away her baby. Her commentary is contradictory, in that while it constructs the prison as an environment that creates animalistic predators and abusers, it is a place where she appeals to keep her new born child. In this way, individual prisoner pathologies make the penal context unmalleable to seemingly progressive change.

## ***Prisoner Resistance to Perceived Injustice: The Pathologized and Rationalized Resister***

Prisoner opposition to institutionalized oppressions emerges within the discourse of resistance interlinked with the constructs of pathologization and/or rationalization, injustice-justice and parental rights in the films *Love Child* and *Brokedown Palace*. At times, characterological behaviours are tied to problematic or pathological personality traits in the prisoner constructed as the 'pathologized resister.' Even so, prisoner actions/interactions towards a perceived unfair situation can symbolize an outward resistance to the oppressions they are experiencing, which may consequentially further marginalize them within the prison system.

Protagonist Terry Moore, in *Love Child* (1982), is initially depicted as a confrontational and volatile young inmate. She is sentenced to fifteen years in prison for a violent crime and is pathologized by the judge as a repeat offender. He insists, "*It is just not relevant human nature to participate in armed robbery, one has usually led a life that has involved in some respects violations of the law.*" In a particularly sensationalized prison scene, she is hauled off to segregation after being blamed for starting a fire in the communal cell. She screams and kicks at staff persons who physically restrain her. Once confined, Terry becomes agitated and explosive in her struggle. She yells "*I told ya I didn't start that goddamn fire!*" She continues to scream. Then in a violent act of resistance she yells; "*You want a fire, hey you want a fire? 'You hear me out there? Do you want to see a fire! ...This is going to be my fire. ... This one's for you down the hall baby. ...I'll show you a real good fuckin' fire.*" Terry sets her mattress ablaze. She hangs onto the bars uncontrollably in an almost animalistic rage and yells "*I GOT A FIRE. ...THIS IS MY FUCKIN' FIRE!*" Smoke bellows from the cell. The other women on the unit also yell and scream; they are trying to sleep. The film internalizes Terry's violence within a disordered subjectivity that has attributes most likely to cause disruption: volatility, explosive anger/rage, aggressiveness, and a hot-headed temperament – a representational account for such actions that often mirror

actual correctionalist explanations of prison disorder (Shaw 2000: 65).<sup>290</sup> Terry's actions are not intertwined within a primary relationship or association. This confrontational behaviour and violent outburst directly contradicts the prison's feminine ideals and thus further results in individualized deprivations, injustices and an additional five year sentence for Terry (Martel 2000: 131). The next day, she lies on the floor in a strait-jacket that is chained to a barred cell door. Rather than conceptualizing Terry's actions as an act of resistance against her unjust treatment – being unfairly blamed for the cell house fire, she is pathologized as having mental health and emotional issues that are controlled through the psychiatric practice of physical restraint and further carceral containment (Eaton: 1993: 44). Intersectional location seems unimportant in Terry's case. This cinematic portrayal mirrors actual correctional responses to prisoner resistance.

Resistance can also be constructed as intentional, individualized actions and challenges to perceived injustice and human rights violations. Later in the film, following her pregnancy, Terry becomes dramatically depathologized. She becomes a 'rationalized resister,' who carries out a legitimized, legal challenge towards repressive State penal policies to achieve a particular goal. She asserts her parental rights, petitioning the State and correctional authorities to let her keep her baby in prison. Although she is still confrontational at times, it is now for the purpose of exercising her individual rights, and it reflects Terry's underlying vulnerability and fear of the unknown. Resistance can also be collective. A single exemplar from *Caged* (1950) emerges as a powerful depiction. As Marie enters the bullpen following a stint in segregation, and hospitalization all the dorms in unison clank their storage box lids – a collective resistance and "shared sense of injustice" to the cruelty inflicted on her by the sadistic Evelyn Harper (Shaw 2000: 67). It is only now that the women's solidarity threatens the matron, as she slowly walks backwards out of the bullpen, a fearful look on her face clearly visible.

<sup>290</sup> Critical scholars would argue that rather than reflecting a disordered mental state, Terry's actions symbolize actual prisoners' resistance to their oppression, through fire-setting, yelling, and throwing things, as a way to regain some control over their enforced exclusion. Often, these actions may result in a woman's release from segregative confinement due to their cell being uninhabitable (Martel 1999: 79). Even so, Terry's behavioural depiction in *Love Child* is probably over-exaggerated.

In *Brokedown Palace* (1999), the ‘rationalized’ and ‘pathologized resisters’ are tied to character constructions of the ‘good girl/bad girl’ dichotomy. The film is embedded within the amplified fears of the xenophobic *other*, who appears to victimize the innocent Westerner in cautionary tales of exotic and non-domestic travel.<sup>291</sup> What appears most disconcerting to the uncritical filmic viewer is how the imprisoned woman does not fit with the criminalized *other* in the public imagination, but in contrast, is the personification of the average, law-abiding white American citizen. As such, the intersectional locations of class, race, ethnicity, and age make the subjectivity of prisoner seem all the more problematic. Racist undertones portray an unjust and corrupt judicial system that falsely sentences best friends Alice Marano and Darlene Davis to an extremely harsh prison term for alleged drug smuggling.<sup>292</sup> The country, Thailand, in which the two women find themselves incarcerated, is depicted as nothing more than a drug haven of sleazy traffickers, corrupt officials and illegal heroin. Injustice is again characterologically embodied in villainous characters: a shady, on-the-take police chief, Jagkrit, and an unhelpful American Embassy member, Roy Knox, both of whom realize that drug trafficker Nick Parks (also known as Skip Karns) is the culprit who fooled the women.<sup>293</sup> The Thai culture and peoples are also demonized as being barbaric, sinister and deceptive. Alice’s increased frustration with her plight results in prejudicial attitudes directed at the freedom the girls associate with this exotic paradise. Alice narrates the desperate circumstances they are in and the injustice of the Thai system:

*“I wasn’t even that scared at first...And I actually believed that if we could just hold on until the trial it would all be over soon. Like a nightmare. See, I didn’t know then that it was all rigged here, like those birds in the marketplace that you think you’re setting free, when all the time they’re trained to fly right back to their cages. Because that’s all freedom is... an illusion.”*

<sup>291</sup> Screen writers Adam Fields and David Arata, adapted the film from numerous actual cases of naive young American tourists being set-up as drug mules and then confined in South East Asian prisons (McCarthy 1999: 1).

<sup>292</sup> The girl’s arrest at the airport allows other smugglers to get drugs through while the police focus on the duped young women.

<sup>293</sup> The foreign police chief does not uphold law and morality typically associated with domestic police officers in conservative Hollywood films (Green 1988: 58). These officials are more vilified than the white Australian, Skip Karns, although it is implied that he is corruptly tied with the police.

Although the story depicts the women's prison hardships – communal cells, primitive and unhealthy living conditions, harsh punishments (corporal and segregative) and staff surveillance – the film's main focus is twofold: to secure the girls' freedom and to chronicle the feelings of betrayal, mistrust and anger that test the ties of friendship strained from seemingly intractable circumstances. The horror of the women's situation is not the brutality of imprisonment but their lifelong sentence and presumed innocence. Overall, the filmic narrative is thematically cloaked in questions of guilt, responsibility, and loyalty. Although the film never divulges what really happens, questions are left as to whether either woman knew about the drugs.

In the face of their plight, Darlene is constructed as the 'rationalized resister,' the calm and composed 'good girl' trying to work with the authorities to secure her release. She is positive that their conviction will be overturned. Her actions are instrumental and strategic, however consequentially unsuccessful. Alice's anger intensifies, however, at Darlene's perceived naivety regarding the seriousness of their situation. As Darlene sits in the prison yard, hopeful that her letters reach U.S. authorities who will act on their behalf, Alice becomes irritated and pessimistic, further alienating the two women. She snaps "*Do you really think the president of the United States really gives a shit about us?*" Alice continues her cynical resistance. Their lawyer, Hank Greene is not coming back, even if they secure the funds to pay him. "*We can't do dick in this shithole country, Hank the wank,*" Alice complains, walking off. She sits alone, her face worn with the look of hopelessness and a marijuana joint easing her weary state. In a prior filmic scene, upon losing their court appeal, Alice embodies the 'pathologized resister' who outwardly rebels, saying, "*This trial is a joke; a shitty Third World joke!*"<sup>294</sup> Alice's act symbolizes defiance towards a corrupt foreign justice system that imposes an oppressive control over the women's lives. Hank reprimands Alice for her behaviour and threatens to stop his legal representation of the women. Her defiant opposition, in part, fits with her construction as the 'bad girl' – a hot-tempered and impulsive troublemaker –

<sup>294</sup> The film was shot in the Philippines because of its negative portrayal of Thailand. Actress Claire Danes (Alice) reportedly made racist comments about Manila in an interview for *Vogue* and *Premiere Magazines*. She described the city as "ghastly and weird" and that "it smelled of cockroaches, with rats all over, and that there is no sewage system and the people do not have anything – no arms, no legs, no eyes" (CBS News 1998: 1). She was not welcome in this country.

someone whose lies, irresponsibility; lack of parental supervision, manipulative ways and poor choices (perceived drug smuggling) lands the women in this predicament. She is the person deemed guilty of the crime, even though it was Darlene who convinced her to fly to Hong Kong (at Alice's reluctance) to meet with Nick Parks. As well, Darlene's jealousy towards Alice, upon her suspicion that she too may have had a fling with Nick, creates tension between the women, temporarily crumbling their friendship and leading to Darlene's accusations against Alice for the smuggling.

In the end, Alice makes a sacrificial, heart-wrenching decision; she admits to the crime to have Darlene freed from custody.<sup>295</sup> She tells the court that she did it because she was foolish, jealous and made a mistake that ultimately made her a poor friend to Darlene – the upper class, college-bound, good girl, who has suffered grave consequences. Darlene's believes otherwise. She tells Alice she is a good liar and that she cannot leave her. But Alice knows Darlene will die if she remains in prison. The women's last contact is a final melodramatic emotional embrace. Alice delivers a selfless goodbye: *"If I say it was the truth you'll hate me. And if I say I lied then when you go home ...you won't be able to be just happy. So let's just say it was the right thing to do, okay. Let's just leave it at that."* The girls tearfully hug and cry. Alice, the lower class, perceived bad girl makes a heroic sacrifice in the end; she becomes a 'friend protector,' whose courageous actions save Darlene from a terrible plight. In an almost redemptive reflection of her past personal transgressions, Alice's narrated words are heard in the final filmic shot, *"I know a lot of people won't understand why I said I did it. But for me it was the right thing to do. Maybe more right than anything I've ever done before."* *Brokedown Palace* emphasizes the plight of the young, white American victims who are vulnerable to the Third World *other*; those villainous individuals linked to a corrupt criminal justice system while the oppressive practices of U.S. injustice, criminalization and confinement are somehow negated. In this depiction, the fear of crime emerges from a mediated representation that creates a moral panic through the seemingly exotic *other* represented in the illusionary paradise of Thailand that symbolizes a sleazy haven for corrupt exploiters (criminal justice agents and drug traffickers) (Ferrell et al. 2008: 62).

<sup>295</sup> Alice must serve both their sentences to have Darlene set free.

## ***Transformations: Subjectivities in Process: The Prisoner as Interchangeable Subject – Prisoner Wards and Marie Allen in Caged***

Patterns in cinematic representation create gendered subjectivities that are precarious and contradictory, constantly being reconstituted in versions of femininity, masculinity, and alternate formations, that move in progressive and regressive characterological directions within the storyline narrative (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 149). A transformed personhood – whether ever-changing or seemingly permanent – is framed within the discourses of oppression, correctionalism (punishment-rehabilitation), maternalism, anti-familialism, survivalism, and resistance, tied to the construct of characterological transformation.<sup>296</sup> These changes, which assign differential levels of power to characters within the prison subculture and its systemic hierarchy, are to a degree relationally tied to *interactions* between the prison protagonist and other filmic performers, both central and secondary. The provisional status of prisoners' subjectivities, whether initially feminized or masculinized, is set off by their confinement, and corresponding experiential events that include the processing of new prisoners, the domestication of the penal regime/programs, the loss of parental rights, the preparation of women for parole and potential release, and the practice of oppressive punishment.

### **The Interchangeable Subjectivity**

Women's subjectivities interchange and fluctuate along the dimensional range, from femininity to masculinity, which, in part, is associated with the intersectional locations of gender and sexual orientation. Within the prison world, the corresponding deprivations and losses (e.g., parenthood status, non-parole), institutionalized practices (e.g., prisoner induction), and oppressions, such as segregative punishments, reconstruct protagonist Marie Allen as either a non-subject, or as masculinized, and/or defeminized, versus cinematic instances that reaffirm her womanliness through behavioural actions, such as caring for a beloved pet. Nonetheless, by filmic end Marie's newly created, resistant subjectivity contains fragments of both masculinity and femininity.

<sup>296</sup> In some films it would *appear* that characterological changes are permanent. The transformation of prisoner Marie Allen in *Caged* (1950) is an example.



Imprisonment is an assault on femininity. Women's subjectivities take on gradations of masculinizing difference that move from subtle variations in a prisoner's visual appearance to complete characterological embodiments that correspondingly change the prisoner both behaviourally and visually. Defeminization may emerge in the forefront or background of the filmic narrative. In *Caged* (1950), the admittance of new prisoners reflects 'status degradation' through an inquisition of questions and tests that strip women of their dignity, citizen identity, and female nature. Initially, the women transferred to the State penitentiary look attractively feminine for the patriarchal eye to see, with their feathered hats, assorted attire (fancy dresses and fur coats), and accessories (earrings and purses); but they quickly assimilate into a prison population de-feminized in appearance and demeanour. Any notions of class difference soon disappear. Femininity is not lost forever, however; women visually re-assert it in various filmic scenes. For example, even though they are masculine in their drab prison uniforms (grey jump suits), they hold onto and cherish symbols of femininity (e.g. lipstick) which they use to revisit their womanliness, if only for a cinematic instant. At Christmas time all the prisoners receive lipstick as a gift from high ranking prisoner Elvira Powell. Claire says with excitement, "*I sure feel like a new woman.*" In another scene, the prisoners gather around June in excited anticipation for her upcoming parole hearing. Various voices are heard saying, "*I got some slick new perfume you can have,*" and "*Let me iron your dress huh?*" "*Let me put your hair up in curlers for ya.*" While June is characterologically a femme, increasingly beautifying her physical appearance and attire implies that somehow her femaleness will enhance the likelihood of her release and return to her pre-prison self.

Similar processes of priming the potential parolee occur whenever it is an inmate's turn to be flopped out (released). As well, the prison aims to discipline "the guilty who may indeed be redeemed for domesticity" through the re-feminization of women in correctional programs such as laundry work (Morey 1995: 2). Therefore, although confinement places "an unjust punishment [on] the innocent, on whose bodies are inscribed [with] the stigma of masculinity," a correctable subjectivity ensures that prisoners survive their confinement only to return to normative roles and femininity upon women's release (Morey 1995: 2; Berlatsky 2008: 2). In *Caged*, most of the women in the bull pen take on either a butch or femme persona, or appear somewhere in between.

Those prisoners who remain traditionally feminized, such as Georgia Harrison and June Roberts, fall victim to mental instability and/or suicidal death. In these cases, the frailty of femininity results in victimhood and women's inability to survive prison either psychologically and/or physically.

Defeminization may be also intertwined with other intersectionalities, such as sexual orientation (e.g., homosexuality). Queen bee Elvira Powell exudes an underlying masculinity in her dress, demeanour and gaze towards other women, especially Marie. But Elvira dialogically reasserts her heterosexuality by describing a man she was once "sweet on," whose maleness is intact in the criminal world by the hegemonic violence he uses to "*work over guys for no reason at all, just because it made him feel important.*" Powell's commentary is directed towards Evelyn Harper, whose later indignities on prisoner Kitty Stark similarly constructs the matron as a masculinized thug, like the criminalized man, further eliminating any trace of femininity in Harper's persona. Other prisoners also reminisce about relationships with male partners and intimates.

### **Marie Allen: The Transitional Subject**

Throughout the film, protagonist Marie Allen is a 'transitional subject,' someone who alternates between femininity and masculinity during particular events in the cinematic narrative. By filmic end, she forges a new master status that lies exclusively outside of either binary term (Bouclin 2009: 21, 22). Marie enters the prison with her femininity intact; she is beautiful, innocent, scared, and radiates a soft vulnerability. But two events framed within corresponding actions/interactions and consequential outcomes begin to spiral her subjectivity towards masculinization and inevitably complete transformation by filmic end. First, Marie loses her son Tommy to adoption after her selfish mother, Queenie, refuses to care for him, more concerned with the disapproval of her new husband, Gus, than with family commitments to her daughter (Parrish 1991: 77). Later, Marie is arbitrarily denied parole by self-righteous male board members who infantilize her as "*no more than a child*" a construction that denies her adult status and the ability and independence to live a crime free life. She is deemed a poor risk, given the familial rejection of her son, unfavourable home conditions, no work skills, and little community support. Warden Benton tries to compassionately contextualize that Marie's life – being married, witness to her husband's death, birthing

her child in prison, and losing Tommy to adoption by law are all adult circumstances. She challenges the board members, "*How can anyone be called young who has lived through such experiences?*" Nonetheless, the legitimacy of whether a nine month sentence will deter Marie from future crimes (armed robbery) is brought into question. She frantically addresses the board's queries. At one point Marie gets up and makes a bold and impassioned plea for her release: "*I've done a lifetime in a year in this cage. If I have to fall back in I'll be like the others and I'm not like them. Oh, please, please give me a chance to prove it.*" Hearing their decision, 'parole denied,' sends Marie into a frenzied state of emotional despair. She covers her ears as the pounding sounds of bells are heard ringing heard inside her head. A close-up depicts the terror in her contorted face, as Marie screams and erratically runs out of the office, down the hall and out the door, before she jumps against a high wall in the exercise yard. An overhead shot looks down on Marie as she desperately reaches towards the barbed wire, and hangs onto it momentarily before she is pulled to the ground, by the guards. A dramatic orchestration of music heightens the intensity of the scene; Marie's inner torment and her harried struggle to escape the prison. As such, Marie's intersectional social locations and carceral circumstances (non-parole) and her (gendered) childless, non-parental status and marginalization are instrumental in her characterological change to come.

Countered with the hopelessness of her continued confinement and hardship, Marie's interior self begins to transform from feminized fragility to masculinized toughness in order to deal with her dire circumstances. She stands by a wall in the prison yard, dressed in a dark overcoat, her arms crossed against her chest. Her softness is now replaced by a tough, detached, attitude, a low, serious voice and a con-like demeanour. It's as if that in the loss of her son, Marie is biologically determined to somehow become masculinized, once her womanly duty of motherhood is tragically unachieved. When Elvira approaches her, Marie coolly stares back and says "*I'm a big girl and this isn't my first year away from home. If I said no to Kitty, I'm sure not going to say yes to you.*" Although she walks off, Marie's subjectivity is clearly set – she is primed for the criminal world; someone to be recruited for future transgressions, including boosting (shoplifting) and prostitution. Ultimately, Marie's masculinization enables her to survive the prison, but it does not put into question her heterosexuality. It is for the first time that she is converted into an object of male lust, as a potential "*cute trick,*" as

Elvira puts it so lasciviously, to Harper, after Marie's initial rejection of her, as the madam still eyes Marie in the prison yard (Berlatsky 2008: 3).<sup>297</sup> Initially, at the beginning of the film, Marie's traditional femininity makes her sexually unavailable outside the monogamous, patriarchal union of marriage; now, she can become a sexual commodity for many men.

At a later point in the film, a lost kitten appears in the prison yard, which momentarily humanizes an otherwise oppressive setting.<sup>298</sup> Caring for this pet, that Marie names "*Fluff*," brings hope, light and a moment of happiness into Marie's life and symbolizes her last bid for traditional femininity. She briefly returns to the persona she once was, with a gentleness and softness in her diction (Berlatsky 2008: 3). This change is short-lived, however, when matron Harper finds the feline and, after Marie refuses to give-up her pet, the kitten is killed in a riotous melee that erupts in the bull pen.

Subjectivity can become permanently altered through punishment practices that are disturbingly sadistic and oppressive. Throughout the film, Marie has a particularly precarious relationship with the demonic Evelyn Harper. After the uprising (riot) in the bull pen, the matron punishes Marie by shaving off her hair in a very disturbing scene. The prisoner is held down and gagged with a towel to silence her screams, as Harper carries out the cruel act. An extreme close-up shows Marie's bulging eyes, which depict an emotionality of terror and humiliation, as long strands of hair fall across her face. Harper then physically throws her into solitary confinement, the matron's appearance looking all the more sinister in the enveloping darkness. This butchification of Marie, a particularly cruel and humiliating punishment enacted upon her body, is a perverse symbolization of masculinity that further contributes to her crumbling femininity and impending criminality (Berlatsky 2008: 3). This act visually demarcates her as an outsider within the prison world and inmate subculture (Alber 2005: 251).

<sup>297</sup> A *trick* is a prostitute within the context of this film.

<sup>298</sup> In the prison film animals underlie the humanity of the prisoner living in an inhumane penal world (Jarvis 2004: 168).

## The Invisibility of 'Self': Marie as Non-Subject

Other punishments temporally deny a prisoner's subjectivity altogether. In segregation Marie becomes a 'non-subject,' a person neither objectified nor acknowledged in any cinematic way, a lost soul, suspended within a purgatorial non-world that is buried deep within the prison structure – an isolationism far crueller than confinement itself. Segregation epitomizes the brutality of the prison; in its most primordial manifestation, it is “a trace of ‘torture’ in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice” (Foucault as cited in Alber 2005: 257). There is an emphasis on the corporality of bodily functions and needs such as physical movement, sight and hearing, which are cinematically heightened in such a way as to create viewer awareness of the sensory experiences which are otherwise denied in the deprivational world of segregation (Alber 2005: 256, 257). This fragmentation of the senses as separate facets of torment creates an eerily disconcerting depiction. As prisoner Kitty Stark is removed from segregation, Marie stands outside the cell while a guard remarks that Kitty has gone “*stir bugs*” from the isolationism. A *noirist* contrast of light and dark tones falls over Marie's face, and only the left eye is completely visible as it stares straight ahead in an almost silent terror of what is to come. Once inside the solitary cell, Marie is enveloped in darkness with the exception of a brightly lit barred window. She repeatedly paces in the gloomy solitude, a barely visible body form that moves in a circular, restricted motion. Intermittent light vaguely illuminates her continual movement. Marie is a faceless being; the camera close-up depicts her fragmented body, a dark torsos figure with arms extending down its side, and the movement of Marie's hands is clearly in view. The silence is broken by the sound of a dripping tap, shown in the filmic background, which continues with her every step. The wet, stone, brick-like walls encase her in an empty, isolated space; an uninviting dampness fills the air. Marie's nerves are frazzled. Emotionally destabilized and anxiety ridden, she tries to claim her fears in an ominous narrated whisper,<sup>299</sup> that seems almost hallucinatory in nature, murmuring “*nothing to be scared about being alone isn't so tough. And bread and water never killed anyone. Maybe, maybe, I'll sleep for three days... Stop thinking about it, it will grow back.*” A black fade moves across the screen.

<sup>299</sup> This narrated whisper symbolizes the thoughts in Marie's head at the time. It is only the filmic viewer that hears her words of desperation and fear

Then, in a heart-wrenching attempt to free herself and salvage any semblance of communicative presence, Marie's face appears from under the door, as she screams "*let me out of here! I'll do anything you want! Oh God, let me out, let me out, please, please, please.*" She cries in agonizing despair; a look of misery in her face. The screen fades to black. The overwhelming solitude, sensory deprivation, and enforced silence of segregative exclusion symbolizes a form of dehumanization that invisibilizes and denies her humanly existence. She has no essential being or subjectivity as a woman or, more specifically, as a prisoner; Marie is not a person, but the property of the State (Alber 2005: 256; Martel 2000: 130). In actuality, the segregative experience for prisoners produces feelings of "a singular sense of the value of their own experience" (Martel 1999: 65). This deprivational world engenders feelings of prisoner isolation and seclusion that women describe as feeling lost or remotely isolated, "being put on a 'different planet'" or in "a cocoon" that are eerily and disturbingly seen in *Caged's* haunting representation despite its Hollywoodized and simulated creation. (Martel 2000: 130).

### **The Transformed Subject**

Marie's characterological change becomes complete by filmic end – she is the 'transformed subject.' The prison oppressions she experiences create a revolutionary subjectivity, one that is consciousness-raising and resistant. Marie is neither the vulnerable, naive victim nor the traditional, re-domesticated femme; rather she radiates a dualistic subjectivity; a hardened femininity and masculinized gun moll mentality (Bouclin 2009: 21, 22). She now chooses prostitution as a mode of living, albeit illegitimate; and one that threatens the patriarchal status quo of compulsory sexuality and family life (Mayne 1994: 51). Marie's criminalization and economic marginalization shapes a choice made under conditions of structural and individualized constraint (Bouclin 2009: 32). A decisive act of resistance symbolizes Marie's decision to work for vice queen, Elvira Powell. The prisoner takes out and applies a lipstick the madam had given her in a rhinestone studded compact, but "lipstick cannot give her back her naïveté or softness; to be Elvira's girl is to abandon girlishness forever" (Berlatsky 2008: 4). While this decision symbolizes a pseudo-feminist stance, an almost symbolic attempt to shed the chains of patriarchy given the historical period of the film, Marie nevertheless remains under male-based control – now, she is exploited through the capitalist venture of sex

work rather than domestic servitude (Berlatsky 2008: 5). She is positioned as the sexual property of the male syndicate, not a single spousal partner, with the ownership of women being crime-based, not familial-based. Marie is a commodity to be sold in the sex industry, her femininity now a physical façade to lure in prospective clients. Although she is released from the physical constraint of incarceration, Marie is not free; rather she becomes imprisoned within an illegal world of capitalist accumulation. A feminist, “intersectional analysis ...highlight[s] ... [how] ‘choice’ does not amount to agency when made in the face of unpalatable options but, rather, that women can ... nonetheless carve out spaces of resistance – however infinitesimal ...within oppressive social, cultural, legal and political contexts” (Bouclin 2009: 33).

In the end, though Marie is morally degenerate with regards to upholding her former law-abiding values. She is no longer juxtaposed as the virtuous, good woman against the criminalized *other*. Marie becomes like her prison counterparts. Her transformation shows how the total institution fails in its rehabilitative ideals and further exacerbates Marie’s marginalization and criminalization. *Caged’s* message is abundantly clear, despite its exploitative and fictitious representation, the penal context is unmalleable to reformative efforts; a view upheld by contemporary prison activists. Nevertheless, emphasizing prisoner and correctional authority archetypes, and failed gendered efforts or ideals at rehabilitating the fallen woman, continues to locate criminality in individualized deficits and fails to question the prison’s legitimacy as a sanction overall. As prison activist Karlene Faith contends “prisons are destructive to the individuals who are kept in them and to society at large” - therefore reform is pointless (Faith as cited in Bouclin 2009: 31).

### **Transgressive Subjectivities: The Correctional Agent**

The penal authorities also embody ‘transgressive’ subjectivities. Ruth Benton represents qualities that defy notions of traditional femininity – she is educated, independent, and employed outside the home in a masculinist profession as a State prison warden. Clearly, her work is valued over domesticity and children; however, her power is momentarily compromised by a picture of her husband, a symbolic reminder of an underlying femininity, hidden within a patriarchally controlled marriage. Conversely, Evelyn Harper’s subjectivity is dualistically constructed. The matron in *Caged* is both

feminized and heterosexualized in a way that creates ambiguity and displacement of her underlying lesbian/butch persona (Mayne 2000: 122, 121). The matron's living quarters are depicted as garishly female: a room adorned with frilly laced bed pillows, perfume bottles on the table, and ornamental trinkets.<sup>300</sup> A magazine of *Midnight Romance* is in Harper's hand as she lies on the bed, and prepares to feast on candies and treats. This warped personification of a heterosexual femme ensconced in domestic surroundings simultaneously parodies femininity and "emphasizes Harper's deviance and her threatening distance from, 'normal' womanhood" (Berlatsky 2008: 5). In another scene, Harper sashays past prisoners and into the bull pen, immaculately dressed and ready to meet her date, Pete. As she approaches the women, they comment on "*the new look.*" Prisoner Smoochie looks on, almost threatened by Harper's seemingly monstrous image, and comments, "*I got news for ya, if that is what dames are wearing now I'm glad I'm in here.*" Harper, in turn, boasts to the group of prisoners in an emotionless voice, "*The guy outside likes the way I look. Just bought himself a brand new car. He's taking me to a show...[afterwards] he is taking me to his place...real comfortable if you know what I mean. Every time he kisses me good night, I just want to keep on leaving him.*" But these attempts to womanize and heterosexualize Harper fail; she still appears masculinized, almost looking like a male cross-dresser underneath her feminized façade. Her external figure appears to look femme, as she is primped in a long, frilly dress, stylish accessories (earrings, a large bow pendant) and a wide brimmed, feathered hat, while her underlying personhood and outward physical stature embodies a butch persona.

In other films, the experience of confinement, and a primary event central to the storyline narrative, serves to feminize a masculinized woman. In *Love Child* (1982), protagonist Terry Moore is a troubled, volatile, and aggressive prisoner who continually fights and resists the authorities and other inmates. However, after she becomes pregnant, Terry's subjectivity transforms as her condition progresses. One night she looks into the mirror and touches the female contours of her body – her breasts and stomach that is holding her unborn child. She is increasingly feminized, maternal, and sheds her tomboyish appearance, her aggressiveness replaced by a softness and

<sup>300</sup> Harper lives in the prison.



vulnerability. A prisoner who becomes womanly in her lifelong goals, she is now both fearful and embracing of impending motherhood. The walls of Terry's room are adorned in baby pictures in anticipation of the birth of her child.

## **Motherhood: Absent, Expectant and Failed 'Real' and Pseudo Mothers**

Three filmic titles – *Caged* (1950), *Love Child* (1982), and *White Oleander* (2002) – aspired to ideal notions of motherhood within the patriarchal constructs of traditional marital and familial relations, and parental responsibilities in which proper femininity, heterosexism, naturalized (biologized) maternalism, domesticity and care-giving are central, discursive components, which are both idealized and problematized. *Brokedown Place* (1999) is the exception, with the mother figure being 'absent' in the narrative.<sup>301</sup> The state of a prisoner's subjectivity as 'mother' emerges as a storyline thread that directs the narrative towards some level of closure by filmic end. In two films, *Love Child* and *White Oleander*, prisoners achieve a maternally-oriented redemption for transgressions, whether criminal and/or personal. Typically, motherhood is framed within a mother-child relationship/bond that is realized, denied, or problematized. Nevertheless, contradictory representations to these conservatist notions of women's naturalized role are apparent, and although alternate family formations are depicted, it is within this context that non-traditional motherhood in *White Oleander* is inevitably demonized in the subjectivity of the pathologized prison mother, Ingrid. A woman's choice, ability, or interest in mothering creates various sub-categorizations that include the 'expectant,' or 'new' mother, the 'failed' 'real' mother, and the 'pseudo caregiver' all of whom are either characterologically praised, criticized, vilified, or pitied. In some instances, these are not mutually exclusive designations; some categories take on the properties of others. In the Hollywood film, motherly figures are intersectionally located within their gendered ideological status of prospective caregivers and nurturers – roles that are deemed an

<sup>301</sup> In this film it could be implied that the women's initial deception in travelling to Thailand over Hawaii and their misbehaviour may have been curtailed by motherly advice or direction. As well, no mother figure visited or provided support to the women during their incarceration. It appears that Alice may not have a mother.

inherent part of womanhood. As well, the social and criminological locations of age, race, class, marginalization and criminal status contour subjectivity formation and women's ability (or inability) to mother in many cases.

### ***Expectant and/or New Mothers: Marie Allen in Caged (1950) and Terry Moore in Love Child (1982)***

Potential motherhood is related to the penal context through its aims to restore outcast women to society as good wives and mothers, who are re-socialized into their domestic duties that are ultimately rehabilitative in nature. In the sub-categories (the 'expectant' and/or 'new' mother), motherhood is embedded within the discourse of correctionalism-reformation/rehabilitation versus anti-familialism/domesticity tied to the constructs of pathologization, recriminalization and characterological transformation-depathologization. The social and criminological control of women is "steeped in [sexist] patriarchal assumptions ... [regarding] 'familial' expectations that involve ideologically based constructions of gender-appropriate roles for women" (Martel 2004: 159). In *Caged* (1950), this aim is "valourized as an appropriate aim [ideal]" yet, the film is continually framed within an anti-familial discourse that is non-supportive of the mother-child relationship (Morey 1995: 1). Women are not constructed within the discourse of domesticity. For example, the prisoners do not aspire to motherly goals, and for those women who embody femininity, their childless status creates pathologized subjectivities (mental illness) that legitimately prevent their ability to mother (Armstrong 1999: 68). Otherwise, all the other prisoners are butch personas, or occupy subjectivities in-between the masculinity-femininity divide. In all their incarnations, these formations are antithetical with motherhood. Nonetheless, prospective mothers (Marie and Terry) are intersectionally located as white, lower to middle-class, young, and marginalized.

Protagonist Marie Allen is the exception. Her soft, vulnerable, feminized manner fits with her impending motherhood. But her parental status is abruptly terminated after the adoption of her son, Tommy, at her mother's insistence. It is determined that Tommy will be better off raised in a wealthy family and that Marie's single parenthood is an impossible option. In this way, Marie's criminalized status, confinement and economic hardship ultimately contributes to a "sanctioned form of [parental] abandonment" (Pavlovic, Mullender & Aris 2005: 253). Traumatized and devastated, Marie ultimately

rejects marriage and motherhood – a life that Warden Benton encourages her to pursue once she is free. Marie sarcastically laments, “*free for what? Go to my baby? Sit down to a turkey dinner with a family and kiss my husband?*” (Marie lights a cigarette). *From now on what’s in it for me is all that matters. You did your best and where did it land you. You can’t lick the system.*” Upon her release, Warden Benton advises the intake clerk to keep her file active, “*She’ll be back.*” “On this ... harsh note, *Caged* concludes” (Parrish 1991: 79). The message of the film implies that, when motherhood is not achieved, or is denied through tragedy, women reject proper femininity, marriage, and family, losing hope and becoming forever entrenched in crime.

As well, individual prisoner commentary espouses the importance of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity. In *Caged*, ‘old bird’ Millie, a habitual grandmotherly figure and once “*queen of the con women,*” cautions Marie in how to go straight once she’s paroled:

*“Before you get any bright ideas listen to me. I had a first time like you, but I can’t remember how long ago. Then the second rap, then the third. Now I’m a lifer; I’ll be seventy-one soon. Been a con forty years. And you know what I think? Nobody got cheated but me; forty years taken away. So I’m giving it to you straight. Wait a year on dead time, but get a legit job slinging hash, then get a good guy, have a kid.”* Millie loudly sighs. *“What I’d give for a sink full of dirty dishes.”*

Millie is the voice of wisdom within a traditional familial discourse to which few prisoners will ever ascribe. She sees her criminality and incarceration as lifelong barriers to the attainment of her desirable womanly role: marriage and motherhood.

In *Love Child* (1982), the prison system is legally ordered to instil domesticity through making special arrangements so Terry Moore can partake in her motherly role during her carceral sentence. Expectant motherhood reveals Terry’s underlying vulnerability as a young woman who searches for the love and family that she never had. At the same time, systemically, the presence of a child in the prison is a symbolic way to both civilize and heterosexualize an otherwise inhuman and women-populated environment (Mayne 2000: 130).

But, Terry’s criminalized status, age, low class, and pathologized subjectivity constructs her as someone who is potentially a failed/unsuccessful mother. During the

hearing to determine the placement of her child, Terry advocates on her own behalf, tears in her eyes:

*“The first time I felt my baby move was in solitary. And I stayed in solitary so I could keep my baby. But nobody has taken no time to talk about the good things. Like how this baby [has] changed me. I got a responsibility now. For the first time in my life.... You know, I used to think it was everyone else doing me wrong, but it ain’t so. It’s all up to me and I need to keep this baby, ‘cause I love this baby and we belong together.”*

During the hearing, several close-up shots of Terry’s blue eyes create a mood of emotional intensity. At one point the camera shows Terry’s hands on her stomach. Her heartfelt plea naturalizes motherhood through the development of a fetal bond/relationship during pregnancy, where Terry’s identity of mother is forged prior to giving birth, and strengthened by the biologized maternalism she feels toward her unborn child (Pavlovic et al. 2005: 256). The judge rules in favour of the plaintiff and the prison administration is required to make the needed special arrangements, to provide for the future welfare and safety for her child at Broward or another correctional facility. Eventually, Terry earns an early release, serving 741 days of a 20 year prison sentence, her motherhood status beneficially privileging her to leniency with the parole board – a condition which affords her preferential treatment over the other prisoners.<sup>302</sup> Despite the fact that Terry, the aggressive and anti-social ruffian, is not either “factually or morally innocent” a life-changing carceral experience has transformed her selfhood (Bouclin 2009: 24). Now a “mother devoted to the care of her young [child]; [she] is the good woman ... [who] becomes the ‘enviable’ one” (Bertrand 1999: 55). In the last cinematic shot, as the filmic credits roll, Terry smiles as she holds her infant daughter, Precious. In a prior voice-over postscript, she joyously pronounces “*I’ve got something now, something that matters; someone that I can take care of; and you know what? It really is a free world.*” Her statement infers a fairy tale future, seemingly devoid of the realities of hardship and struggle which marked Terry’s life prior to imprisonment. Critic

<sup>302</sup> This film pre-dated the development of mother-child programs in prisons. Although, deemed as innovative and ‘well meant’ penal reforms within a traditionalized context of women’s imprisonment these initiatives are the most gendered appropriations of women’s bodies by the State and correctional apparatus (Bertrand 1999: 57, 58). As well, a program that seemingly humanizes and civilizes the prison symbolizes gendering through a masculinist maternalistic arrangement (Bertrand 1999: 60).

Carrie Rickey (*Village Voice*) remarks “*Love Child* is soggy with right-to-life sentiment that’s mystifyingly combined with a feminist self-determination polemic” (Parrish 1991: 267).

Upon the fulfillment of her new mother status and parental responsibilities, Terry’s former subjectivity disappears, and becomes depathologized within a heterosexist and familial discourse which continues to support sexist, classist and patriarchal gendered assumptions regarding proper womanhood. Motherhood is implicated as a transformative and rehabilitative experience that positively impacts a woman towards a socially productive, non-criminalized lifestyle. It is also implied that, if criminal women became nurturing, loving and good parents, their criminality is changeable, reformable and not linked to inherent pathology and essentialist difference. As well, prisoners who resume, accept, or embrace their maternal role hold a naturalized affinity with the *normal* woman, who many had sought but failed to become. These cultural representations uphold the normative myth that “[proper] femininity is the antithesis of criminality” and that childbearing can tame and transform women’s wild and wicked ways (Smart as cited in Heidensohn 1985: 152). It is women who are considered to be more caring and capable caregivers; as such, parenting is exclusively the role of women.

Expectant motherhood has a transformative effect on the subjectivities of other women inside the prison, who are not with child. Earlier in the film, Terry’s impending parenthood transforms J.J., a lesbian, “*married man*,” into a pseudo motherly figure, who herself becomes maternal in her care towards Terry. J.J. is tomboyishly butch, sporting a short, slicked back haircut and bluntly direct demeanour. She tries to make Terry her lover by some brazen attempts to convert the new prisoner, through predatory harassment and verbal taunts that intensify after Terry belligerently rejects her initial advances. In their first meeting, J.J. gazes at Terry and says leeringly, “*Ooh sweet face where you been all my life, huh?*” She licks her lips as she comes towards Terry. A close-up shows her hand then squeezing the woman’s buttock. Terry angrily pushes her away, snapping, “*Hands off!*”

Eventually, J.J. relinquishes and becomes Terry's friend and mentor. It is at this point that J.J. herself becomes more feminized in appearance and demeanour.<sup>303</sup> J.J. can see Terry's vulnerability behind her hardened and volatile exterior. Thereafter, the predatory, sexual harassment from other inmates also stops. Devastated and hurt by guard Jack's seemingly unemotional, and nonchalant response to her queries about his marital status, Terry then realizes the seriousness of her situation and Jack's lies. He eventually abandons Terry and moves to another prison. J.J. comforts and consoles a traumatized and hurt friend, "*Baby it's alright mamma's here. I'm going to take care of you.*" Terry's head is in her lap as J.J. strokes her hair. Similarly in *Caged* (1950), as Marie Allen holds her newborn child, background characters previously depicted as masculinized and hardened become momentarily feminized and softened in their physical demeanour and dialogical commentary. The women smile and offer positive words of support to Marie.

***Failed Real Mother, Ingrid Magnussen versus the Unrealized Failed Pseudo Mothers, Starr Thomas, Claire Richards, and Rena Gruschenka, and State Caregivers in White Oleander (2002)***

*White Oleander* (2002) as representative of a current Hollywood production is the coming of age story of Astrid Magnussen thrust into a tumultuous Los Angeles foster care system after her mother, Ingrid, is incarcerated for first degree murder after receiving a lengthy sentence. The constructs of pathologization, abandonment, dysfunctionality and victimization-exploitation are interconnected to the maternalistic discourse of the 'failed realist,' or 'pseudo-parental (foster or State) caregivers,' sub-categories of motherhood depicted in the film. More specifically, Ingrid's subjectivity is embedded within the discourses of aestheticism, pseudo-feminism and anti-patriarchy tied to the construct of vilification-redemption.

The film presents a double-threaded, relationally oriented narrative that chronicles Astrid's experiences and the chameleon-like qualities she takes on from the pseudo mothers who mold her internal and external subjectivities, in ways that are reflected visually, behaviorally, and ideologically in Astrid's character. Linear narrative

<sup>303</sup> J.J. even admits she had an abortion before taking on a lesbian lifestyle.

strands depict her traumatizing progression through fosterdom in separate cinematic chapters, each representative of different families or institutional contexts that soon break down. Subsequent placements symbolize a narrative repetition of parental abandonment that culminates in the most dramatic event in Astrid's life: the loss of her mother – not through imprisonment, but by childhood rejection and desertion. Each new foster home is preceded by a travelling motif that depicts Astrid and social worker, Miss Martinez driving down the freeway, with quick pans of passing, at times swirling images of houses, cars, trees, and the sky reflected in the window, a visual symbolization of the uncertainty of Astrid's next placement. Interjecting flashbacks momentarily disrupt the narrative flow here and elsewhere and serve as temporal juxtapositions of Astrid's past and present life. They contextualize particular background details that are not significantly dealt with in the film.

A secondary filmic focus involves the dramatic unfolding of Astrid's relationship with her incarcerated mother, Ingrid, whereby the prison becomes a contextual backdrop for their regular visits, commentary and confrontational exchanges, scenes that intercut Astrid's foster placements. Astrid is continually controlled and drawn back by a parent who "reminds[s] her of the basic tenets of their existence together... ." (Kosminsky 2003). The storyline presents Astrid's perspective as a "[child who] becomes [an] isolated fragment floating in the ocean, dislocated and decontextualized by the brutal, neglectful behaviour of [several parental figures]" (Callanan 2008: 496) who represent dysfunctional universes that she moves between. Ingrid, the biologized mother, is vilified, because she is unnatural and truly wicked in defying her own instincts (Lloyd 1995: 47). In most cinematic depictions, when a mother loses her child, she is often represented as a truly horrible parental figure. The ideology of maternalism is such an engrained cultural expectation that a mother must be portrayed as deeply neglectful to merit the punishment of loss (Walter 1995: 73).

The movie's underlying framework emphasizes the incompatibility between a 'failed real mother' and those unrealized, portable, foster 'pseudo mothers' for hire; all of whom abandon Astrid in various disturbing and tragic ways (Callanan 2008: 496). Biologized mothering, and foster care, are dismal failures. Ingrid fails within the dominant discourse of inherent mothering which portrays women as sacrificial and all-loving, giving, selfless beings who are naturalized nurturers and the epitome of femininity and

protectiveness (Horwitz & Long 2005: 98). In a similar vein, Astrid's surrogate mothers/caregivers – Starr Thomas, Claire Richards, and Rena Gruschenka – also fail by bringing violence, tragedy and indifference into Astrid's life, as parental figures who symbolize society's inability to create adequate mothering substitutes. Interestingly, the social locations of race, age and class emerge across this maternalistic terrain with all the women (Ingrid and otherwise) – being Caucasian and middle-class with the exception of Starr and Rena who are lower class. Film critic Stephanie Zacharek (2002: 1) sees each character as a caricature that is believable within the universe of the filmic world. These women characterologically represent the failed embodiments of an *ideal* motherhood, one that espouses middle-class standards of parental responsibility embedded within social service discourses of expected child care (Callanan 2008: 503).

The 'bad mother-good child' binary characterologically juxtaposes Ingrid as the bad mother; someone whose beauty hides an inherent cruelty, with Astrid as the kind-hearted, traumatized daughter who searches for love, acceptance, and identity amidst a conflicted and damaged parental relationship. Ingrid is multifariously constructed as an unfit parent, a sociopathic, unremorseful killer and a radical pseudo-feminist outlaw who despises normative, bourgeoisie culture. First, and foremost, she is an artist who places an aestheticized understanding of the world over traditional value systems (Callanan 2008: 495, 499). For Ingrid, to have allegiance to particular ideologies is a sign of weakness, dependency and non-creative thought. Astrid must think for herself, but Ingrid's views are the truth; there is no ambiguity in her words or guidance, they are direct and to the point. Ingrid thus interprets Astrid's fosterdom journey through the lens of an extreme aestheticism, an epistemological framework that is ultimately tied to her alternate mothering, fatherless family and disdain for the presence of patriarchal power in the various discourses (for instance, Christianity) that shape Astrid's subjectivity in particular familial placements. These views become yoked to Ingrid's poor mothering.<sup>304</sup>

Ingrid's intelligence and artistic brilliance, along with her values of independence, radical individualism, and Darwinian survivalism, construct a powerful and liberating

<sup>304</sup> Aesthetics are sledgehammer symbols in the prison film that humanize prisoners living under inhumane conditions and regimes (Jarvis 2004: 168). But in *White Oleander*, artistic expression pathologizes Ingrid who is constructed as a woman who chooses aestheticism over maternalism.



feminist subjectivity. But this potentially transgressive subject, resistant to the patriarchally-based societal creations of proper womanhood, becomes denigrated as a poor mother, a “monstrous, unfeeling, and above all selfish woman,” who is the worst embodiment of anti-feminist backlash and fears (Callanan: 2008: 508, 509). She sees both Astrid and herself as ‘imprisoned’ and punished for their strength and independence. Novelist Janet Fitch crafts a fascinating literary character, who becomes a villainous filmic embodiment – yet while the character elicits fear and loathing, she also elicits admiration, and concern. She comments “I like Ingrid. I understand her. She’s a monster. She has tremendous flaws, but tremendous intelligence and wit, and she expresses a certain unspoken desire of many people” (*Salon.com* as cited in Callanan 2008: 505).<sup>305</sup> Nevertheless, Ingrid’s true nature initially hides under a luminous appearance.

In an introductory filmic scene, Ingrid appears to epitomize traditional motherhood; protection, care, and love, embodied in a woman who radiates confidence and feminized beauty.<sup>306</sup> She affectionately hugs Astrid, as they look out at the Los Angeles skyline from their roof top deck on a warm, breezy night.<sup>307</sup> That fall, the Santa Anna winds blow in hot from the desert, with only the white oleander flowers thriving. Ingrid’s upscale Hollywood home is a haven of aesthetic expression. A patchwork collection of photographic pictures, called mug-shots, depicts a series of different faces set around Astrid’s centralized image, symbolic of the many people she would become on her difficult journey towards womanhood. As the film progresses, Ingrid is increasingly constructed as a jealous, manipulative, obsessive and cold woman who tries to sabotage every foster placement Astrid experiences. In her confinement, facets of Ingrid’s fractured subjectivity emerge and break off as she struggles to maintain control of her daughter in a ‘real’ versus ‘pseudo’ mother binary, where the custodial, replacement caregivers are positioned over the disempowered, ‘absent’ prisoner parent.

<sup>305</sup> Actress Michelle Pfeiffer believed that, despite Ingrid’s brutality, she had the strength to ultimately speak the truth. This act is liberating, in light of Ingrid’s plight; yet Pfeiffer held an admiration for such a character (Callanan 2008: 507).

<sup>306</sup> The first filmic scene commences in the present, with Astrid in a New York loft doing her art, a scene which closes the film albeit within a complete post script narrated filmic sequence.

<sup>307</sup> It is within this scene that Ingrid’s selfish preoccupation with art emerges, as a friend’s art show takes precedence over parents’ night at Astrid’s school.

Ingrid's prisoner status prevents her from mothering. Ultimately though, Ingrid becomes the most demonized mother of all, her subjectivity the most vilified in the binary pair that pits her against each foster figure or institutionalized caregiver(s) at McKinney Hall. Contrary to Ingrid's negative representations, author Janet Fitch (2003) empathetically acknowledges how she would feel being in Ingrid's position, as a parent in fear of losing her child to another woman.

Astrid's surrogate mothers represent discursive embodiments that are in stark contrast to Ingrid's aesthetics, sensibilities and belief systems. It is in the interface of this conflict that Astrid attempts to create a dual subjectivity – one that fits with the diametrically opposed expectations of fosterdom over her own biological, albeit fractured, family. She must negotiate her past identity with those shifting, portable foster child identities that represent the internalization of discursive pseudo-parental values that appear to create a sense of security and direction in her life. With each chameleon-like transformation, Ingrid attempts to draw her daughter back, through a cruelty of words and actions that reflect her displeasure towards Astrid's changing situations and individual personas.<sup>308</sup> Nonetheless, Ingrid sees herself as a provider of an essential parental guidance which alternatively serves to construct her through particular characterological juxtapositions related to the discursive embodiments (subjectivities) of each foster parental figure. Ingrid's contextualized and relationally-based 'transitory subjectivities' variously construct her as a 'sacrilegious sinner' versus 'religious fanatic' (Starr Thomas), as a 'cruel victimizer/predatory monster' versus the 'loving victimized' (Claire Richards) and as a 'vulnerable deceiver – abandoning parent' versus the honestly blunt realist, 'callous non-parent' (Rena Gruschenka). As well, Ingrid is a 'rejecting parent' towards Astrid's 'caring, talented' boyfriend (Paul Trout). These subjectivities are imbued with meaning, through Ingrid's manipulative and villainous actions/interactions, that further problematize her relationship with Astrid during their prison visits. It is in one ongoing interrelationship, Ingrid's contact with Claire, that a tragic outcome takes place. Ingrid's personifications and their problematic qualities

<sup>308</sup> The film-makers tried to create foster parent characters that reflected realism and authenticity. Janet Fitch (2003) researched the experiences of former foster kids whom she contacted through agencies such as Planned Parenthood and a local college. The chameleon-like aspect was very apparent in their fosterdom histories.

attempt to destroy the influences these people have over her daughter. By filmic end, Astrid eventually emerges as a resistant subject to her mother's manipulative control.

California fosterdom is littered with chaos, uncertainty and traumatic experiences from troubled people, whose dysfunctional lives impact Astrid. Her journey and its corresponding effects are conveyed artistically in various ways throughout the film. Film-maker Peter Kosminsky (2003) creates meaning and symbolism through the visual aesthetics of a series of colour schemes that highlight the characterological personalities of individual foster mothers. Astrid correspondingly takes on these colours in her appearance and personality. As well, background landscapes tied to foster placements (California wildfires, Malibu seascapes) and contexts (Los Angeles Flea market) radiate various colours and atmospheres that hold particular symbolic meanings.

### ***Starr Thomas: The Flamboyantly Clichéd Mother***

Starr Thomas, Astrid's first foster mother, lives in a serene California setting surrounded by a picturesque backdrop of mountains and valleys. Starr is flamboyant and clichéd; a lively, brash and fast-talking, bleach-blond southerner, constructed within the discourse of Christianity and formulaic notions of religious fanaticism, tied to the construct of stereotypification. Lurid and gaudy colours, spandex and high heels heighten her lively persona of moralistic speechifying and preaching, which is juxtaposed against a crude and low class, trailer trash demeanour.<sup>309</sup> Even so, Starr sermonizes to Astrid, in the car on their way to the mall:

*“Sin is a virus... affecting the whole country like the clap...you can't get rid of it. I think we've got every excuse in the book, you know, what's wrong if I shove coke up my nose who's it hurtin', what's wrong with wanting to feel good all the time, who's it hurt? Well it hurts us. And it hurts Jesus; because it's wrong.”*

Surrogate motherhood symbolizes a philanthropic salvation for her former sins – drugs/alcohol, exotic dancing and inadequate parental care, and child custodial loss

<sup>309</sup> Also, several contexts in Starr's life are vibrant and colourful; with pinks, reds, blues, purples, oranges, and lime greens that adorn her home and the clothing racks of a retail store at which she shops.

(Wright-Penn 2003). In this portrayal, Christianity and faith saves people from the sins of the world, and Astrid embraces a newfound religious conviction as a way to understand and forgive her mother's crime, which is seen as an evil act in the face of a lover's rejection. Ingrid's redemption is partly facilitated by Astrid's affiliation with the "Assembly of God," a parsonage of followers who regularly pray for Ingrid, a 'sacrilegious sinner' who needs divine salvation. However, during their first prison visit, Ingrid's loving embrace of Astrid is soon disrupted, when she sees her daughter wearing a cross necklace; a present from Starr. Ingrid confronts Astrid's baptism and Christianity with a callous intensity of questioning and judgement: "*Are you out of your mind? How did this happen? I raised you, not a pack of bible-thumping trailer trash. I raised you to think for yourself!*" Astrid's spiritual beliefs assault Ingrid's aesthetic and artistic values. Ingrid despises religion, because she believes it stifles independent thought; so when Astrid tells her that Reverend Daniels believes that to think for yourself is evil, Ingrid coldly challenges Astrid's words: "*Evil ...if thinking for yourself is evil then every artist is evil, is that what you believe...man's ability to reason is evil?*" Ingrid's offense is viewed as an evil act, a sin that requires God's forgiveness. Ingrid explodes with anger, "*Fuck my redemption. I don't want to be redeemed. I regret nothing!*" Starr and her followers – "*those people*" are deemed the enemy, and Astrid is reminded that she is Ingrid's daughter and that she belongs to her. As the young girl leaves the visit and walks away, she takes off the necklace, in a symbolic gesture of again becoming who her mother expects her to be.

Astrid's placement abruptly ends when Starr commits the ultimate motherly sin. In a drunken and jealous rage she shoots Astrid, deemed to be a home-wrecker after having an intimate relationship with Ray, Starr's live-in boyfriend, a man who is kindly empathetic to Astrid's circumstances. Narrative closure is absent. There are no consequences for her crime, nor is she seen again in the film. In an earlier filmic scene, wildfires erratically burn a short distance away from Starr's home, while Ray and Astrid watch the smoke bellowing in the distance. This shot startles the serenity of the landscape, and symbolizes Astrid's growing closeness to Ray; a relationship that would inevitably stir up a climatic frenzy in Starr, in a troubling filmic depiction.

## ***Claire Richards: The loving, Privileged Mother***

Astrid's second mother is B-film actress Claire Richards, a kind, lonely and warm woman who resides in an orderly, beautiful home in Malibu, California, with film-producer husband, Mark. She is constructed within the discourses of maternalism, psychiatrization and classism, interrelated to the constructs of abandonment, insecurity and mental instability. Astrid appears happy and content as a privileged teen whose pseudo mother provides her opportunity, connection, and love. In one filmic moment, a long shot depicts Claire and Astrid as they run along the Malibu seashore, with the wide expanse of the ocean and sky, the background muted in pale blues. Then as the shot progresses to a more close-up view, the two women are shown laughing and enjoying the beauty of their surroundings, with the ocean waves washing up onto the sand. As they have a drink, in a beachfront cafe, Astrid sadly thinks back to a memory she has of Barry and Ingrid sitting at a table in that same restaurant. It is at this moment that Claire asks Astrid, "*What was the best day of your life?*" Astrid turns to her and emotively smiles; "*Today,*" she answers. Claire's world reflects a lifestyle of yuppie-like leisure and privilege; a threat to the artistic imagination, because Ingrid thinks that aesthetic creation emerges from open wounds, not middle-class comfort and security (Fitch 2003). Although soft and muted colours – light blues, yellows, pinks, beiges, and greys radiate peace, serenity and contentment in Claire, they hide her emotional vulnerability and unhappiness in the facade of a perfect life that soon tragically unravels. She soon becomes dependent on her foster daughter for the love and care she so desperately seeks, and consequently, Astrid becomes the confidante for Claire's troubles and insecurities.

When Astrid learns of Claire's correspondence with Ingrid, the girl fears the worst and questions her mother's intentions with the needy and naïve Claire, who looks up to Ingrid's power, strength, and talent; qualities that she draws out from letters Ingrid sends her. Jealous at Astrid's close and loving relationship with her, Ingrid plays upon Claire's weaknesses – a failed movie career, childlessness, an absent, potentially cheating husband – in ways that underlyingly contribute to an already frail self-esteem (Callanan 2008: 500). After the two women privately meet, Astrid, aware of Ingrid's vindictiveness, tells her mother to leave Claire alone. Ingrid replies with a maliciousness and sarcasm in her words, "*Oh but it's such fun; easy, but fun. In my present situation I have to get my*

*fun where I can. God, how can you stand to live with poor Claire? Did you know there's an entire order called the poor Claires?"* But Astrid counters *"she is a genuinely nice person. You don't know what it's been like. If you love me, you'll help me."* Ingrid coldly replies *"Help you; I would rather see you in the worst kind of foster hell than living with that woman. What can you possibly learn from her? How to pine artistically? Twenty seven names for tears? All I can say is – keep your bags packed!"* In this way, Ingrid is constructed as a 'cruel victimizer,' who despises Claire's vulnerability and victimhood that are antithetical to the strength, independence and survivalism she so desperately tries to instill in her daughter. Claire eventually commits suicide, distraught at her impending divorce and having to return Astrid to child services at husband Mark's insistence. And Astrid, who finds Claire dead, becomes a traumatized victim to her heart-wrenching decision. When Astrid returns to see her mother, Ingrid is vilified as a 'predatory monster,' whose intentional cruelty has caused the death of another woman. In an accusatory voice, Astrid blames Ingrid, telling her, *"You poisoned her too, only this time you used words."* Her mother coldly responds, *"I told her what she already knew...and don't think this is the first time she tried it either. It's just the first time she pulled it off."* Ingrid's unremorseful words further construct her as a heartless person, even in the death of another woman. Astrid then vies, *"I'm not coming back. I'm going to leave you in here alone."*

### ***Rena Gruschenka: The Callous, Immigrant Non-mother***

By her third placement, Astrid rejects the idealized familial form; instead she chooses Rena Gruschenka, a "Russian garbage sifter," who is indifferent, uncaring and cold towards her foster daughters (Callanan 2008: 512). Rena is constructed within the discourses of non-maternalism, ethnicity and free enterprise linked to the constructs of greed and exploitation. She is a blunt realist, outspoken and money hungry, lower class, unattached (single) immigrant who values capitalist accumulation over aesthetic expression and sentimentality. She is a non-mother who emerges out of a foster care system that tries to find children ideal parents. The colours in Rena's world are black and crimson. In a Fagan-like manner, Rena exploits Astrid and two other teenagers (one pregnant) as labourers in her flea market enterprise (Callanan 2008: 513). There is no room for emotionality or weakness in Rena's world; survivalism is the monetary game. In

one scene, Astrid confronts Rena, after she sees a rack of her clothes for sale in the market, one of which was a dress from Claire. Rena, bluntly responds, “So, you get good price for them. What do you need expensive clothes for, huh?” She then sarcastically quips, “Maybe Melrose Place call you to be a star. Hey that person who gave you thing [dress] don’t care, past is gone. Sentimental is stupid. It’s smart to make money.”<sup>310</sup> Rena’s philosophy is starkly realist with Astrid, as she admonishes her, “You a stupid girl. You walk away from money to punish mother. You want car, you want art, college. All cost money. Then go see mother, she needs something from you, you need something from her; go get it.” It is in this unloving, non-family setting that Astrid becomes rebellious, cynical, fiercely independent and calculating towards her mother, intent on getting what she wants from Ingrid – not money, but details about her childhood, even if it means committing perjury to secure her mother’s release; a transgression of Astrid’s former moral standards.

### ***Ingrid: The Vilified, Abandoning ‘Real’ Mother***

During their last prison visit, Ingrid is shocked by Astrid’s gothic appearance, dyed black hair, dark clothing, tattoos, make-up, and jewellery, which symbolizes the visual antithesis of white, the colour initially associated with everything that is Ingrid. It is Astrid’s refusal to acknowledge or accept how she is, in many ways, the personification of her mother’s ideologies and beliefs.

Astrid demandingly unearths Ingrid’s vulnerabilities in an attempt to learn the truth about her past. She confronts Ingrid about her crimes, questioning her motives and telling her of the effect they’ve had on her life: the murder of Barry, her unknown biological father, the cruelty towards Claire (a woman who made Astrid feel loved), and Astrid’s fosterdom and ultimately, her childhood desertion, which left Astrid searching for Ingrid’s love and acceptance. Astrid also confronts Ingrid about her failed love relationships, first with Astrid’s father, Klaus Anders and then with boyfriend Barry Kolher, each tied to middle-class ideals that, in failure, result in parental abandonment –

<sup>310</sup> *Melrose Place* (1992-1997) was a popular American television night time soap opera show that chronicled the lives of a group of young people living in an apartment complex in Hollywood, California.

through desertion and then imprisonment, reflective of a marginalized choice versus tragic actions. It is here that Ingrid is constructed as the ‘vulnerable deceiver’ – a selfish, ‘abandoning, monstrous non-parent’ who has committed the ultimate motherly sin. Ingrid’s words are remarkably cold and disconcerting; yet it is now that she expresses regret and emotion for the first time in the film, as she explains to Astrid how she was desperate and ill-prepared to care for a young child, who she left in the care of another woman – Annie, a neighbour.<sup>311</sup> One afternoon, she narrates, she simply dropped Astrid off and never returned for a year. Ingrid was now free of the responsibilities of parenthood, and of dealing with a child (Astrid), who she described as “*clinging*” to her “*like a spider*.” And who, in the end, she “*just wanted to throw...against a wall*.” Astrid pauses in shock, and then replies, “*My god. You should have been sterilized*.” Ingrid’s eventual return to reclaim her daughter does little to redeem her in the eyes of the off-screen viewer, or Astrid.<sup>312</sup> Ingrid ultimately becomes vilified as an uncaring, abusive mother who is also the destroyer of the family, preventing Astrid’s father from any paternalistic influence on her life, which further alienates and angers her daughter (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 157).

### ***State Sanctioned Institutionalized ‘Parenthood’: The World of ‘Mac’***

Interspersed between Astrid’s pseudo homes is the denim world of McKinney Hall, or “*Mac*,” that is “*the floor you can’t fall below*,” a chaotic State setting that houses those unwanted and unplaceable children within the system. It is constructed within the discourses of hostility and oppression versus love and connection, and tied to the constructs of victimization versus protection and relational ties. Mac is a window into the world of institutionalized State fosterdom, a context that mirrors the carceral experiences of Ingrid’s confinement – that of exclusion, violence, emotional distance and primal survivalism (Callanan 2008: 499). It is here that Astrid defends herself against the harassment and victimization from other youths – her mother’s strength, toughness, and

<sup>311</sup> Throughout the film Astrid stretches an unknown woman from her past who she now learns is Annie.

<sup>312</sup> Astrid remembers her mother abandoning her on two separate occasions; she was left outside a store, and then on a bus.



fierceness a guiding force.<sup>313</sup> But Astrid also experiences peace, love, and survival through her relationship with resident Paul Trout, a sensitive and lonely boy who, similar to Astrid, deals with the pain of his hardships and parental loss through artistic expression. He constructs an aesthetic niche for himself within the isolating world of Mac. But, 'rejecting parent' Ingrid chastises Astrid's growing relationship with Paul as a threat to her independence and Ingrid's control over her daughter. Paul's artwork is aesthetically inferior to Ingrid's standards; she sees his drawings as cartoon-like caricatures that have little artistic value. Ingrid laments under a veneer of parental wisdom, "*Don't do it again Astrid; [don't] attach yourself to anyone who shows you the least bit of attention, because you're lonely. Loneliness is the human condition. No one is ever going to fill that space.*" But it is Paul who ultimately saves Astrid from the pain of her past. The young couple's life together enables her to become free, to create the artist she is to become. Unlike Ingrid, Astrid's embracement of middle-class romance serves to create a filmic ending filled with affirmative Hollywood closure and promise. Yet it is Paul, the lower class, teenage boy, who saves her.

### ***Ingrid's Motherly Redemption***

Astrid has always been trying to understand those unanswered questions buried deep within her heart, and searching for a mother's love that she thought was never there. Sometime earlier, desperate to get out of prison, Ingrid wants Astrid to testify at her appeal. Astrid grudgingly agrees as she turns to walk away during the prison visit, but Ingrid forbids her to leave, imploring, "*I made you. I'm in your blood. You don't go anywhere until I let you go.*" Astrid, under the guise of her darkened appearance, softly responds with a child-like vulnerability, "*Then let me go. You look at me and you don't like what you see. But this is the price mother; the price of belonging to you.*" When Ingrid yearns to change her past transgressions, Astrid asks, "*Then tell me you don't want me to testify....Tell me you would sacrifice the rest of your life to have me back the way I was.*" In the end, Ingrid decidedly withdraws her request, in an act of motherly redemption. She and Astrid share a look for the last time, as Ingrid is handcuffed and led

<sup>313</sup> Astrid threatens a Hispanic girl with violence if she victimizes Astrid again. One night, as the girl lies in bed, Astrid puts a knife at the girl's throat.

away from the prisoner's docket in the court room. Astrid's eyes fill with tears. It is then that Ingrid's radiant beauty returns. She is dressed in white and her long, flowing, blond hair is shown as she disappears through the door and returns to prison.

In a final filmic narration, Astrid speaks of her mother in resolute terms, two years later, while she shares a New York loft with Paul. Enclosed in a letter is a copy of the *Los Angeles Times* magazine. Ingrid, the magazine article reads, "*stares out from the cover, the bars of her [prison cell] behind her – beautiful – dangerous – proud.*" An expose of her "*hauntingly distant prison collages*" has recently had a triumphant showing at the Santa Monica gallery. In this last scene, Astrid narrates her feelings and journey since that fateful day, when Ingrid is arrested for Barry's murder. Astrid's experiences of pseudo parents and foster placements are artistically expressed in a series of suitcases, each symbolizing a map of "*a terrible country [that she] will never revisit.*"<sup>314</sup> When reaching the last case, she looks into it at a picture she drew of her mother, Ingrid. It is surrounded by white oleander flowers, which are both beautiful and dangerous, just as her mother is. With that, the last and most important suitcase shuts, symbolizing a partial closure and resolution to Astrid's life. She is able to break free from her mother's control, find a separate voice, and create an identity for herself that is forged out of the realization that, even though Ingrid abandoned her, she still embodies her mother in very many ways. It is now that Astrid's visual beauty returns to the colour white, like Ingrid's.<sup>315</sup> The mother-child relationship becomes definitive in Astrid's transformation from a meek and naïve child to a woman able to define herself within the aestheticism that her mother so cherished. Even though Ingrid is constructed as a poor mother, it is Astrid's embodiment of Ingrid's survivalist mentality, independence and strength that enables Astrid to endure the hardship and tragedy of foster care. The suitcases illustrate who Astrid becomes from the experiential terrain of fosterdom to the inherent and perspectival influences from her mother. In this way, Ingrid has somehow impacted her daughter in a positive way. In the end, Ingrid's selfless decision reveals who she really is; as Astrid narrates, in the films' closing heartfelt exposé, "*No matter how much she's damaged me. No matter how flawed she is. I know my mother loves me.*"

<sup>314</sup> The colours associated with Astrid's foster mothers are represented in each suitcase.

<sup>315</sup> At the beginning of the film, Ingrid is associated with the colour white in her clothing, light coloured hair, and the white oleander flower, which is beautiful.

In a post-script conclusion, a symbolic closure is brought to Ingrid's life, through an aestheticized expression that continues to thrive behind the prison walls. Here the penal context facilitates in aestheticism rather than domesticity. Finally, for both mother and daughter, art is a way to heal from the trauma of shattered lives (Callanan 2008: 517). In this film, the act of imprisoning moves outside the carceral context, into the official world of State fosterdom that imprisons the motherless subject displaced by the confinement of her pathologized criminalized non-mother, Ingrid. Here, within a traditionalist discourse Ingrid's punishment not only reflects her incarceration but the loss of her child to the potential idealized mother, who is similarly constructed as a failed and dysfunctional parental figure (Walters 1995: 73).<sup>316</sup> *White Oleander* provided a unique contribution to the research, in demonstrating how a title, considered to be along the definitional margins of the prison film, could create such a complex and integrative array of transitory subjectivities of the cinematic prisoner, Ingrid Magnussen, that were juxtaposed against other problematic – although less vilified – characterological pseudo-mothers than the biologized, monstrous, 'real' mother.

### ***Policing the Womb: The Gynecological Threat of the Prisoner's Body***

#### **Prisoner as Unwed mother**

The policing of the womb represents the correctionalist power of the State to regulate women through the discourses of correctionalism-punishment, sexism, anti-maternalism, anti-familialism and gynophobia. The carceral surveillance, inspection and control of bodily processes related to a woman's reproductive capacities emerge as disciplinary techniques that are intersectionally and associatively gendered and related to the constructs of motherhood, parental rights and the economy. The womb "[as] a hiding place within the body must be policed as such, [even though] it makes women vulnerable ...and defiant. Like the family, the womb threatens the prison economy" (Morey 1995: 5). Moreover, "maternity and the womb identify what is at stake" in the disciplining of prisoners; punishment is not merely a control of the body, like it is for male

<sup>316</sup> The film could be critiqued for painting an unrealistic and particularly harsh picture of the foster care system.

inmates, but the “shaping or destruction of the family” (Morey 1995: 5). The prison system disciplines expectant prisoner mothers through punishment practices.

Upon entrance into the prison, women can be subject to such carceral practices as physical exams, medical tests and segregative confinement that determine, contain and manage a woman’s potential motherhood. Two films depict the social control of pregnant prisoners who emerge as the unwed mother: *Caged* (1950), and *Love Child* (1982). In the former title, during the intake exam, Marie is humiliated and frightened at the barrage of questions and abrupt and standardized procedures from a cold, masculinized and uncaring nurse, who treats Marie with indifference and judgment. No longer a person, Marie is inmate # 93850 shunted along an assembly line of new admittees. The nurse coldly remarks, her moralistic disdain for prisoners clear, “*I hope this batch is cleaner than the last lot. [I] had to scrub them with brooms.*” Marie is not feeling well, and the nurse abruptly asks, “*What’s the matter? Get that way often? Say, you expecting company?*” When Marie affirmatively suspects that she is with child, the matron judgmentally replies “*Another pregnant one; get-up! Do you know who the father is?*” *Will he help with the expenses?*” After Marie indicates her deceased husband the nurse snaps back “*Well ain’t we getting respectable. Another bill for the State; get dressed!*” Marie is criminalized as an immoral, loose, dirty woman, who is potentially having an illegitimate child.<sup>317</sup> Until the determination of her pregnancy, Marie is to be segregated with the sick, dying prisoners and hardened offender new admittees in the isolation ward; an act of disdain against motherhood, that associates the commencement of a new life with potential disease and death.<sup>318</sup> The prison system makes no special arrangements for the prospective mother-to-be, and thus has a blatant disregard for women’s maternalistic needs. After birthing her child in the prison infirmary, the acting physician is appalled by the conditions under which Marie’s child was born. He bluntly tells Benton, “*When my dog had distemper I took him to a cleaner infirmary than this one.*”

<sup>317</sup> Historically, up to the mid 20th century, a woman could serve an additional two year prison sentence for lewdness if she birthed an illegitimate child, at the Massachusetts State Penitentiary (Bouclin 2009: 24).

<sup>318</sup> All new inmates must submit to blood tests to determine if they have any health related problems or diseases. During this time, they have no contact with the outside world through either visits or letter writing, but remain isolated.

In *Love Child* (1982), protagonist Terry Moore carries out strategic actions/interactions to deal with two issues – to ensure the healthy progression of her pregnancy and to secure her parental status - through a resistant challenge to the systemic social control that prison policy places upon her maternal status, and her body which is ‘with child.’ The correctional administration suspects that protagonist Terry Moore is pregnant – a rumour that circulates throughout the prison. Terry is indefinitely segregated in solitary/medical confinement, the nature of her reproductive status policed by the authorities who demand that she submit to medical tests. But Terry refuses, for fear that disclosing her pregnancy will result in her being forced to have an abortion, or give her child up for adoption. In this scenario, the State has the ultimate power over her body. Following thirty-six days of confinement Terry finally admits she is five months pregnant after it is no longer medically safe for her to have an abortion. Also, now that she is released from segregation Terry is able to contact an attorney regarding her situation.<sup>319</sup> In a legal challenge to keep her infant, the lawyer for the correctional system complains that the State doesn’t have the funds or facilities to enable a prisoner to parent her child. Terry’s request, they assert, would be a costly endeavour to an unsupportive, bureaucratic system. In a disturbing commentary, the lawyer places the responsibility on the women themselves in the policing of their bodies, and in the termination of unwanted pregnancies, despite the inhumanity of such actions and the potential health risks. He remarks “*Hell, most inmates have abortions these days. The State pays for them or the girls just do it themselves.*” Here the State is willing to terminate parenthood by facilitating in the abortive death of a child, rather than supporting the mother-child familial unit.

Overall, in both these films, policing of the body discursively symbolizes a gynophobia towards prisoners likely to birth a child outside of the male-based patriarchal union (Green 1998: 75). Familial forms without fathers are consequently deemed a societal burden, and are associatively terminated.

<sup>319</sup> A prisoner librarian, named June discovers a Florida law that enables a woman to parent her baby in custody, until the child is eighteen months old. Upon learning of this statute, Terry contacts lawyer Jackie Steinberg, who prepares a civil case against the Florida Department of Corrections.

## **Male Characters: Paternalistic Rescuers/Saviours, Deceivers-Allies, Villainous Exploiters/Abusers, and Patriarchal Power Holders-Opressors.**

Across the filmic titles, women's intimate involvement with men can bring instability, deception and tragedy into their lives, which is directly related to their crimes, carceral experience, and corresponding hardships. It is through these relationships that the women prisoner is constructed in particular ways.

Male roles are primarily centered on the multifarious juxtapositions of 'paternalistic rescuers/saviours,' 'male deceivers-allies,' 'villainous exploiters/abusers,' and 'patriarchal power holders-oppressors' – versions of masculinity which are related to the discourses of patriarchal authority and domination, oppression and care within the constructs of intersectionality, victimization/exploitation/deception, and paternalistic protection-safety versus control. As well, men also impede women's attainment of character-related goals that may be criminological (prison release) or personal (parental rights). In the films discussed herein, men are typically associated with oppression and the exploitation of the protagonist character (and others). Particular social locations also come into play. Typically, villains and exploiters are racialized or are non-American, while male deceivers-allies are middle-class, heterosexual white males, and intimate partners of the protagonist. The exception is the film *Caged* (1950), where class privilege, political standing and crime syndicate ties enable males to oppress women through hierarchies of power that are embedded within different sites of patriarchal representation – criminological, institutional, familial, and illegal. Many of these categorical embodiments are socially located along the criminal justice dimensional range, from the police officer, prison guard, and parole board member, to high ranking correctional bureaucrats.

Hollywood roles for male characters fit into "familiar images of patriarchy," including the universal 'paternalistic rescue/saviour' (Green 1998: 63). In the xenophobic film *Brokedown Palace* (1999), it is the white, expatriate lawyer Hank Greene who attempts to rescue protagonists Alice and Darlene from villainous characters tied to a corrupt Thai justice system that preys upon young American victims. Hank symbolizes a paternalistic presence, a man who has the power to release the women whose actual

fathers fail in this regard.<sup>320</sup> He constructs the women as child-like school girls; mere victims whose inexperience with the evils of the world prevents them from having any agency to deal with their unjust predicament. In a bid to force police chief Jagkrit to investigate the women's case, Hank threatens to expose the Thai system, and Jagkrit's indiscretions, on American television. News correspondents like Larry King and Barbara Walters, he describes, will show Darlene's bedroom "*exactly the way she left it with a couple of teddy bears propped up against the pillows,*" while her aggrieved parents look on and plead for their daughter's safe return. In a filmic twist that resists patriarchal rescuing, only one of the women is permitted to go home, despite Hank's attempts. The film does not heroize his efforts; in fact, it is Alice's decision (to remain in prison) that constructs her as the protagonist heroine.

Initially, Greene is constructed as a greedy lawyer whose services come with a price. A Jamaican prisoner advises Alice that he is the women's only hope. But when Alice inquires why she has not used his services, the woman replies "*What Yankee Hank go [sic] with an impoverished soul like myself? He like American full-moneyed girl.*" He informs the women's parents that the fee will be \$15,000 dollars if they would "*care to contribute to their daughter's liberation fund.*" Ultimately, Hank's assistance holds both classist and racist undertones; it is only American women who can afford him. The film's emphasis is to free the westernized victim while the woman of colour is forever subjugated to her carceral fate.

The male 'deceiver-ally' emerged within a sub-narrative of heterosexual romance and/or love in three films. When women aspire to this patriarchal ideal, abandonment, deception and heart-break prevail. The deceiver initially appears as a genuine ally, but is inevitably hurtful towards the protagonist. In *Love Child* (1982), guard Jack Hanson deceives his lover Terry with promises of a permanent relationship, love, fatherhood, and a prison release. The charming drug smuggler Nick Parks, in *Brokedown Palace* (1999), promises hedonistic fun, sex, and adventure to young American tourists, transgressive subjects whose schoolgirl misbehaviour lands them in trouble at a luxury

<sup>320</sup> Alice's blue collar father is not only sick but is unable to secure the funds to travel to Thailand while Darlene's father cannot engage the authorities to reveal or admit to the corruption in his daughter's case.

hotel, and contact with an 'abuser/exploiter' who will change their lives forever. Nick's evilness is initially veiled in a young man who appears to be caring of the women.<sup>321</sup> And in *White Oleander* (2002), prisoner Ingrid's ideal of middle-class romance is crushed by Barry Kohler, whose infidelities and rejection pushes her to plot and then murder him with the extract of the white oleander flower.<sup>322</sup> Sometime earlier, she coldly tells daughter Astrid, "*love humiliates you. Hatred cradles you; it's soothing.*" As a spurned partner, her anger and resentment spiral out of control when her hopes of love and monogamy are not realized.

Unlike former Hollywood melodramas, which position male characters as significant to the storyline in both visual and narratological ways, the film *Caged* (1950) is uniquely different. Men are not primary characters who positively contribute to happy endings, replete with prisoner transitions to domestic life or reconciliations with carceral circumstances. Rather, even though males embody roles peripheral to the main storyline structure, they become 'patriarchal power holders/oppressors' over the central protagonist, Marie Allen. These underlying oppressors, who appear in a brief cinematic scene, single shot, or whose off-screen actions are momentarily referred to in the prison narrative, have a primary effect on her confinement, and ultimately contribute to Marie's continued criminalization. By filmic end, it is husband Tom Allen's gas station robbery that criminalizes and imprisons Marie; it is the male police officer who transports her to the prison, outside of free side; it is male political officials who continue the carceral corruption and tyrannical reign of the sadistic matron, Evelyn Harper; it is stepfather Gus who rejects Marie's child, Tommy, which results in him being given up for adoption, it is male parole board members who deny her release, and it is the male syndicate that exploits her through prostitution (Berlatsky 2008: 4, 5).

<sup>321</sup> Nick helps when hotel security guards catch the girls falsely charging their cocktails to a phony room number.

<sup>322</sup> This flashback image is depicted in a "nightmare dream" that Astrid experiences upon being shot. Although the film is definitively unclear as to how Barry is actually killed, some viewers interpret this image to be the deadly White Oleander flower cocktail (Fitch 2003).



## Conclusion

An analytical exploration of the selected Hollywood titles, discussed herein, reveals the maintenance of patriarchal social relations through cultural texts that become the everyday objects of our leisurely consumption (Walter 1995: 22). Although, “progressive undercurrents” in representations appear to challenge traditionalist notions of womanhood, in characterological embodiments that reject normative femininity in underlying individualized attributes and actions, these alternate depictions ultimately re-entrench women in persistent oppression; whether it be continual imprisonment, or patriarchal control (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 2). The Hollywood style of sugar-coated endings, sappy melodrama, and unobjectionable or tone-downed content in some filmic storylines, contains the actualized, carceral world within the confines of the cinematic imagination that is resolutely appealing, offering little critical reflection or challenge. In other instances, however, an explicit resistance to American penal policy and systemic justice is, in part, decontextualized, downplayed, or deflected – either causally located within the shocking character personification of villainous women<sup>323</sup>, or in a demonized othered non-US penal system. In this respect, Hollywood mythmaking continues through the commercially-driven goal of entertainment, enveloped within heart-warming, or heart wrenching, affective audience engagements towards criminological portrayals that, although deemed as reflecting social statements, in fact remain enveloped in traditional, gendered ideology, and stereotypically discriminatory, fictitious portrayals.

In the subsequent chapter, on the independent film, filmistic representations create more alternate prisoner subjectivities that aim to bring forth *moments* of authenticity through stylistic techniques, thematic content, and socio-political commentary, which situates women’s criminalization and incarceration within the everydayness of life’s hardships and oppressions.

<sup>323</sup> An example would be Evelyn Harper, in *Caged* (1950).

## Chapter 8.

# The Contemporary Independent Film: Representations of Resistance: Ideological, Political, and Creative

*“Witnessing alternate representations of identities” is instrumental in urging people “to think critically about the cultural images that dominate our visual, social, and perceptual horizons” (Boler & Allen 2002: 255, 269).*

## Introduction

The independent film creates characterological portrayals of the criminalized woman, that emerge across the televisual, theatrical, or computer screen in stories that contour our understandings of crime and punishment to varying degrees of representational depth, specificity, and focus. Aesthetically, these films are situated within a range of narratological and visually expressive styles that touch upon the everyday ordinariness of the mundane, non-dramatic, and matter-of-fact over the melodramatics of life, to depictions that play upon elements (exploitable and formulaic) drawn from other filmic forms. For example, while some Hollywood films recreate the unreal in entertainment-based narratives that prioritize fiction and illusion over actuality, many independent titles aim to elicit an underlying commentary in portrayals that are politically conscious and resistant, factually driven, or appear commonplace in seemingly everyday terms. There is the overriding aim in presenting alternative cinematic depictions that symbolize authenticated moments congruent with the experiential lives of some prisoners. Therefore, in such a representational strategy, mediated constructions of the penal subject become those characterological embodiments that challenge and defy mainstream cultural portrayals that intentionally demonize, stigmatize, and pathologize criminalized women (Iorns MaGallanes 2005: 34). This chapter highlights

the ways in which categorical designations that emerge in criminological independent filmic representations provide important and unique portrayals for analysis and exploration.

## **Focus of Inquiry: The Alternatively, Counter Representational Prisoner Embodiment**

Independent filmic productions create a discourse of resistance in representational strategies, conventions and depictions that are uniquely different insights into the world of the criminalized female. The following analysis comprises six titles included under a single categorical designation; the 'confined woman.' An exclusive group of productions that span the most contemporary time frame, from 1995 to 2006, are classified as socially conscious commentaries (*Civil Brand* [2002]), urban fairy tale messages (*House of D* [2004]), factually driven, recreated stories (*Condition Red* [1995] and *Karla* [2006]) and authenticated portraits of prison life (*Nine Lives* [2005] and *Map of the World* [1999]). These films are conceptualized differently than either the standardized generic staple of the sexploitation market or the classical period film of the Hollywood prison melodrama. Moreover, in several cases, the titles explored herein are considered to be on the definitional margins of the prison film genre, as conceptualized by some media scholars (Mason 2003: 282). In a similar format to the other film-making forms, representational themes and formations of prisoner (and others) subjectivities are discursively constituted and interlinked to corresponding theoretical constructs. As well, intersectional differences both socially and criminologically 'located' more deeply contour subjectivity formation. Configurations of categories (subjectivities) move away from binary juxtapositions that create opposing characterological archetypes. Instead, in the independent film, prevailing criminological discourses that abnormalize, and pathologize 'difference' are challenged by competing discourses that humanize and contextualize prisoner embodiments and actions/interactions within particular thematic contexts (carceral, crime-based, and personal). In humanizing all prisoners, the 'us-them' dichotomy of binary thinking is deconstructed. Consequently, this film-making form propagates less negative, discriminatory, or oppressive representational effects on the on-screen and actualized prisoner. The independent film contextualizes and interlinks prison oppressions to systemic carceral policies, practices and/or the authoritairial power

of its agents, rather than inherently pathologized villains. In terms of the carceral world, the prison is a central storyline forefront, or it is a peripheral backdrop, tied to a broader narratological context. Films touch upon the daily realities of the carceral condition in all its banality, and at other times reveal systemic or individualized oppressions, which can be either downplayed in portrayal or exploitatively depicted. Of central importance is the absence of the discourse of correctionalism, either progressive reform or rehabilitation, as a primary objective. Rather, the prison remains discursively framed as a context of punishment or exploitative sweat shop labour.

In chapter nine, the cinephilic reception towards the independent film reveals, that critical cinephilic commentary explicitly challenges problematized images (stereotypical embodiments) or otherwise depathologized depictions of the criminalized female contingent upon the notoriety of the prisoner in question. Overall, reviewers delivered strong appraisals that are highly condemnatory, problematized and/or praiseworthy of a film's representational content, prisoner depictions, technical aspects, and filmic messages. In regards to the latter aspect, reviewers acknowledge the pedagogical aims of film-makers in educating the public about the actualities of incarceration that either lie outside of the formulaic, in more authentic, everyday portrayals or are enveloped in exploitative filmic storylines. Overall, the female prisoner is constructed through condemnatory, vilifying labels or more alternatively affirming, humanized adjective descriptors diametrically moving from the discourses of demonization and problematization to empowerment and humanization.

In contrast to the exploitation and Hollywood titles, the independent films discussed herein have received little if any scholarly attention with the exception of *Map of the World* (1999). Consequently, the revealed subjectivities represent my interpretive and creative engagement with select films that have not collaboratively incorporated insights from other media works analyses of such titles. Instead, the following discussion brings forth new understandings and meanings regarding how alternate cinematic portrayals can create categorical constructions of the penal subject that symbolize counter representational embodiments which more congruently fit with an experiential understanding of prisoners and the carceral world as 'voiced' through ex-prisoner, critical academic and/or activist writings. Therefore, filmic portrayals, indirectly validate prisoner's lives interweaved in the developing narrative as authenticated

representational 'moments' that validate *some* prisoner's experiences. This chapter highlights this uniquely distinctive challenge to those formulaic, corrosive, and ideologically saturated gendered personifications that emerged in the previous two chapter discussions.

Nonetheless, independent film-making emerges through a process of social construction as do all cinematic creative products. So accordingly, some titles contain a self-conscious acknowledgement of their stories' artfulness and social constructedness, while simultaneously claiming a particularized, interpretive degree of representational verisimilitude, or accuracy, in filmic meanings (Rafter 2000: 134/136). For example, the urban fairy tale of *House of D* constructs the imprisoned woman with a cinematic milieu that juxtaposes imaginary, make-believe moments against realist hardship and tragedy in 1970s New York City.<sup>324</sup> Other independent film titles make claims to factually based 'truth claims,' verisimilitude, or 'authenticated moments' through the filmic adaptation of *actual* crimes and events (*Karla* and *Condition Red*), marginalized voices and their experiences of systemic and individualized prison oppression (*Civil Brand* and *Nine Lives*), and controversial subjects such as pedophilia and child murder (*Karla* and *Map of the World*). In *Map of the World*, protagonist Alice Goodwin is accused of child molestation in a manner that serves to depathologize her away from an exploitative or demonizing portrayal; rather she is an average woman, in the most extraordinary of circumstances. In contrast, *Condition Red* and *Civil Brand* are respectfully critiqued for drifting off into exploitative fever or a plot-based predictability that at times undermines the gritty authenticity of the central filmic message or politicized commentary. Independent film-making reflects differential and/or interlocking aesthetic expressions, narratological variations, ideological perspectives, and claims to authenticity. In similar fashion to the Hollywood film, independence will be associated with a productive *style*, but one that alternatively serves to break with mainstream conventions to varying degrees. As well, some titles are related to particular auteurs known for unique film-making techniques or other artistic forms (King 2005: 148). For example, Rodrigo Garcia (*Nine Lives* [2005]) is known for creating a tapestry-like interrelatedness in stories that

<sup>324</sup> In *House of D* (2004) film-maker David Duchovny sets his cinematic tale within an actual place in his childhood memories; the Women's House of Detention, in New York City.

touch upon women's lives, while *Map of the World* (1999) is the first filmic production for Scott Elliott, a regular artistic director for theatrical works on Broadway. Lastly, the independent filmic form is industrially-tied to small scale and notable independent companies such as Lionsgate Films (*Civil Brand* [2002]).

Within the creative process, across the filmic titles discussed herein, stylistic elements can stress stark representation over Hollywoodized entertainment pleasures; for example, banality over sensationalism, emotional vacuity over sentimentality and unconventionality over the mainstreaming of cinematic representation and commentary. Conversely, an emphasis on character-studies over predictable plotlines unveils controversial criminological issues that may be left questionably unresolved, sparking meanings and reflection beyond the filmic milieu. Films elicit a multiplicity of emotions that range from condemnation and horror, anger, and heartache – to deep, poignant sentiment, and feelings of empathy versus ambiguity and emotional displacement. Crime and its commission may be an essential storyline component, depicted in flashback sequences, or, an all-encompassing narrative (chillingly stark and horrific in its portrayal); while in other instances, a prisoner's offense is either unknown, not depicted, minimized in severity, and/or constructed within the ordinaries of daily life. Yet, even though many independent films strive to create more authentic portrayals, social constructedness permeates these representations to varying degrees. Nonetheless, these works create cinematic portrayals that are important contributions to a growing popular cultural criminological knowledge base.

## **Independent Film-Making: An Aesthetic and Artistic Resistance to the Mainstream?**

The independent film is a unique and important cultural form that moves outside of the generic conventions/elements attributed to the WIP film, more specifically, in the exploitation tales. Its creative and artistic insights of *independence* generate a spirit and vision in film-making that emphasizes political challenges to dominant values, beliefs, and ideologies as well as the traditional conventions of Hollywood cinema. It is a 'cinema of outsiders,' exploring the worlds of those constructed as *other* living on the social and economic margins of society, marginalized, discriminated against, demonized or

excluded by mainstream culture (Levy 1999: 52; King 2005: 67). In some instances, the filmic protagonist appears intersectionally privileged, as a white, educated and middle-class woman, who doesn't fit the cultural stereotype of the criminalized subject. Yet, films quickly reveal how these women can harbour a horrifying secret, or be faced with seemingly intractable circumstances that result in their incarceration. In other titles, controversial subjects are dealt with in ways that ground representations in everyday lives and circumstances, revealing hidden and ignored experiences, making visible the invisible rather than emphasizing the escapist entertainment pleasures or lurid escapades of the respective Hollywood or exploitation film (Levy 1999: 52; Insdorf 2005: 30). Even so, as previously stated, independent films are interpreted at a relative rather than absolute degree of difference from the Hollywood film or each other. Some films may represent these qualities at a higher level than others, depending on the film-maker, for example.

The independent sector aims to explicitly resist those stereotypical depictions propagated through the cinematic conduits of simplistic, predictable melodrama or moralistic condemnation and rhetoric found in some in mainstream film-making (King 2005: 256; Kuhn 1994: 71). An emphasis on techniques of expression that privilege the ordinary over the sensational create an experiential authenticity that may be best understood as metonymic rather than realistic, in portrayals that construct a less objectified sense of the world, "a more egalitarian or horizontal and contextual phenomenal reality" ( Ryan & Kellner 1988: 94, 285) where "an artificiality heightened narrative frame...is greatly reduced" (King 2005: 68).<sup>325</sup> Authenticity is not conceptually homogenized but rather reflects both difference and contextualization. Representations of prisoners within their everyday lives, albeit often starkly different from the viewing audience's, still serves to construct them in less othered, or inherently pathologized, ways. In contrast, and less frequently, filmic stereotypes emerge in background characterizations and scenes, interjecting a central narrative that otherwise aims to create some degree of authenticity in aesthetics, narrative, or ideological message. In these depictions, the art of social construction is *explicitly* apparent. As well, politicized critiques and contentious or sensitive topics, regardless of their stylistic expression (and

<sup>325</sup> Metonymic here is defined as a means of expression.

whether gratuitous, imaginative, everyday or banal), may be situated as a secondary or covert backdrop to a storyline that appears to emphasize more traditional, factual, or exploitative representations (Maltby 2003: 276).

Independent films are uniquely different from the Hollywood product, and instead create alternative narratological, visual, and ideological expressions that are intelligently driven by film-makers, who seek varied levels of authenticity. These qualities usually take precedence over commercial profits and economic gains. But the contentious and offensive terrain of some titles also appeals to specific cinephilic interests and curiosities. Controversy sells, with condemnatory issues and figures (sexual offenders) becoming promotional draws in films that hold a deeper explanatory power, and for issues that Hollywood either ignores or fictionalizes in super predator or 'slasher' film crime narratives (King 2005: 200). Formally vilified persons, such as male and female sexual offenders, may be portrayed in ways that break with mainstream characterizations – through an ordinariness, or a distressing or sickening revelation (King 2005: 197, 198).<sup>326</sup> Regardless of the representational strategy, film-making ultimately serves both commercial and entertainment-oriented objectives to some degree. Thus, an emphasis on the everyday banality of crime and punishment in the world of the penal subject nonetheless makes the ordinary a commodity for filmic consumption (Ferrell et al. 2008: 49). As well, calls for censorship are ignited in very disturbing films, such as *Karla* (2006), where public outcry and vehement opposition constructed this production as nothing more than sleazy exploitation. Even so, in a hypocritical move, "much of the media who admonished the film-makers" ultimately increased newspaper sales and ratings, "by languishing in an orgy of Homolka-driven headlines and stories," in a simultaneous move that satisfied both prurient and puritanical interests (Hays 2005: 3). At the same time, the banned media publication of the details of the Canadian Karla Homolka/Paul Bernardo crimes served to promote a morbid curiosity towards the film that was further elevated by one promotional tagline that read "*The Barbie and Ken of Serial Killers*" (IMDb, 2011). The DVD box cover image depicts Karla Homolka's face; an apparent radiance of innocence and

<sup>326</sup> Three films exhibit this point respectively: *Map of the World* (1999), *Nine Lives* (2005), and *Karla* (2006).



attractiveness amidst a close-up of her eyes, one penetratingly blue and the other dark, with an image of Paul Bernardo in the center. The caption, “*Evil has a Beautiful Face*” reads along the top of the cover, which plays on the mythology of the mask of sanity, with Karla’s externalized beauty somehow hiding her deeper psychopathic tendencies. Yet, scratches across her face hint at the gross and hideous imperfections that are to later emerge. What appears to be the image of a corpse that is partly exposed under some underbrush, with a bloodied hand clearly visible, lingers below Karla’s image.<sup>327</sup>

Ideologically, films provide a space for perspectives that destabilize conservative notions that support white classist assumptions, patriarchal privilege and power through the traditional family form, proper femininity, and compulsory heterosexuality. As well, criminological institutions, practices and agents that may be glorified or viewed as legitimate responses to crime in other filmic forms, are critiqued in both explicit and implicit ways.

The voices of actual persons, disempowered and silenced in the movie industry and mainstream culture, including such groups as social activists, filmic creators/performers,<sup>328</sup> minority women and marginalized populations (prisoners), are given the opportunity in “transforming textual meanings for their own purposes,” in productions shaped, written, directed and cast by members of their respective communities (Kellner 1995: 8; Maltby 2003: 256; Green 1998: 7).<sup>329</sup> More specifically, a “blurring [of] the analytic boundary” between filmic creators and penal subjects emerges, with both groups collectively constructing and consuming representations of crime and punishment or imprisonment (Ferrell 1999: 411). In *Civil Brand* (2002), film-makers Neema Barnette and Joyce Lewis cast African American artists “who had voices of conviction and some sense of politics” because, they explained, whatever the filmic

<sup>327</sup> There are a few different box cover images for this film. This description is the most explicit example.

<sup>328</sup> Filmic creators may be persons whose works are marginalized, against Hollywood fare that has easier access to productive support (e.g., financing) and distribution.

<sup>329</sup> Historically, black women film-makers have struggled against [or “with”] both racial and gender inequality when it comes to having their films financed, produced, and distributed. This point is reiterated by Neema Barnett (2004), who wanted to build black female stars through her film projects such as *Civil Brand* (2002).

journey would entail, they wanted as many people “of [their] tribe” as possible (2004).<sup>330</sup> It was imperative to create an authenticity of perspective through the casting of such socially conscious persons, many of whom express their perspectives through music, such as female rapper Da Brat (prisoner Sabrina) and Mos Def (guard Mathews) who “has emerged as one of the more conscientious voices of new school hip-hop” (IMDb, 2011).<sup>331</sup> In this respect, performance is more authenticated, as African American activists are deemed closer to the political cause than the Hollywood star in understanding the systemic and carceral oppressions of their imprisoned sisters. In *Nine Lives* (2005), actress Elpidia Carrillo, (prisoner Sandra) in the film, claimed she felt an experiential affinity with her character, as a proud minority woman who undergoes difficulties and a sense of oppression in her life. Carrillo, along with film-maker Rodrigo Garcia, researched her role through visits and dialogical contact with actual prisoners. Carrillo learned of their daily struggles, the frustrations it caused, and how acts of protest resulted in correctionalist consequences and more injustice (Carrillo 2006). As well, in some independent films an “‘invisible style’ of acting imitates the expressions and emotions of the everyday world” compared to the exaggerated spectacle of the exploitation filmic performance (Maltby 2003: 378). Here, representational knowledge is produced by and for oppressed groups, in ways that sometimes become lost in Hollywood cinema (Kuhn 1994: 85, 86; Barker 2008: 281). There is no particular racial or female aesthetic or any representational form in any biological or ontological sense, although male-based film-making is critiqued as underlyingly patriarchal in orientation, especially in mainstream filmic forms (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 146; King 2005: 223, 224).

As well, the advent of innovations in technological production (e.g., low cost video, camcorder) has democratized the film-making structure to enable formally excluded groups to partake in this process (Maltby 2003: 256). Many of the titles discussed herein are secondarily positioned within a cinematic landscape that caters to films supported by the monopolistic power of Hollywood conglomerates and large-scale

<sup>330</sup> This year refers to the initial DVD release of *Civil Brand*, not the theatrical release of the film.

<sup>331</sup> In 2000, Mos Def gave a benefit performance for an African American death row prisoner, activist Mumia Abu-Jamal (“Mos Def,” 2013).

movie companies.<sup>332</sup> Even so, these independent films, or “indies,” reach audiences at differing degrees of interface, whether theatrically or exclusively within the home-based market.<sup>333</sup> Typically, distribution is selective and limited to a few initial exhibition venues which restrict a title’s theatrical run (Benshoff & Griffin (2004: 25)).<sup>334</sup>

An exploration of the aesthetic, formalistic, and stylistic conventions of independent film-making unveils a uniqueness that is unparalleled in other filmic forms. Narrative composition and form are key defining components (King 2005: 104). There remain gradations of difference, however, within both the independent and mainstream sectors. In terms of narrative structure, independent films diverge in form across a spectrum of styles, with one end more closely approximating the Hollywood aesthetic. Most films retain some aspect of traditional narratological structures (forward directed linearity), but sometimes with a twist, an unpredictability of progression, mundane slowness, or non-causal purpose. The Hollywood product, on the other hand, can break with standardized devices to become conventionally more diverse (Tzioumakis 2006).<sup>335</sup> For example, in *Map of the World* (1999) Alice Goodwin’s life is not idyllic nor necessarily vilified in the Hollywood sense; rather it is a struggle with the daily mundane domesticity of rural farm living, traditionalized motherhood, and gendered work responsibilities (as a school nurse), that are abruptly disrupted by a child’s accidental

<sup>332</sup> In addition, by the 1990s some independent films became box-office hits, making millions of dollars from theatrical and ancillary exhibition markets (Merritt 2000: 353). For the most part, however, many films do not reach the commercial viability of the Hollywood product. For instance, the following numbers reflect the gross monetary amounts gained from a film during its USA theatrical exhibition: *Civil Brand* – October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003 (\$243,347); *House of D* – May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005 (\$371,081); *Nine Lives* – May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006 (\$478,645); and *Map of the World* – July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2000 (\$544,538) (IMDb, 2013).

<sup>333</sup> To reiterate, *indies* will refer to independent films in this dissertation. This term also conveys other meanings in the filmic literature.

<sup>334</sup> For the most part, independent titles in the research had limited initial theatrical releases (Opening Weekend [USA]). Some of the films include *Map of the World* – December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1999 (two screens) and *House of D* - April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005 (two screens); and *Nine Lives* – October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005, which had seven screens. Surprisingly, the film *Civil Brand* – August 31<sup>th</sup>, 2003 was exhibited on thirty-five screens, although it initially went direct-to-video (IMDb, 2013). Although *Civil Brand* was released in 2002 it did not hit the theatrical market until 2003.

<sup>335</sup> One such extreme example is the excluded film *Natural Born Killers* (1994), an Oliver Stone production which is both visually and narratively unique and very different from much of mainstream Hollywood fare. In this title there is an abrupt and intrusive calling of attention and disjuncture to the storytelling process and narrative structure as previously mentioned (Pramaggiore & Wallis: 2008: 76).

death, criminal accusations, and imprisonment. In the opening filmic scene, a close-up shot depicts two hands that break eggs into a bubbling skillet as Alice narrates her impending journey, amidst the chaos of her life: *"I used to think if you fell from grace it was the result of one stupendous error, or else an unfortunate accident... but when the fall happens, it can happen anywhere."* Russell Smith (*Austin Chronicle*) comments on how the film defies conventional style: "There's plenty of suspense here, but not so much in the mundane plot point of whether or not Alice will get off the hook. Rather, the outcome we're all hanging on tenterhooks to see, is whether the belief systems of a strange, resolutely uningratiating middle-aged woman will prevail. All of this so contrary to standard movie logic, that ... [this film is] one of the truest ... movies ... seen in some time... ." (2000: 1).

The viewing experience is shaped by the *degree* to which independent films stray from mainstream narratological structures and aesthetic expressions (King 2005: 60). Films emphasize alternative styles that depart from the classical plotline conventions in diverse and idiosyncratic ways. Devices employed to construct variable narrative forms create unexpected storyline directions, produce an ambiguity of meaning, complicate and cloud sequential and thematic clarity and otherwise create a distorted effect. Techniques can also increase narrative self-consciousness, or create verisimilitude through downplaying, blocking, or fragmenting the narrative (King 2005: 64). In some filmic scenes, non-linear expressionism is more important. Critics contend that the independent film can be fraught with underdeveloped characters, discarded or downplayed major plot moments, unexplained happenings, boring, dull and slow moving stories, and unnecessary content or characters (Turner 1999: 91). In Hollywood film it is standard to have ellipsis; the exclusion of un-essential parts of the story (Turner 1999: 91). Conversely, independent films have been known for building the narrative around the banal and ordinary bits (King 2005: 68). As well, issues and themes may hold an intensity of meaning or may be momentarily introduced only to lack any further narratological development or explanatory links to the broader storyline. These departures from the classical narrative style emphasize the unique textures of life stories, distinct from the formulaic plots that drive character motivations and actions towards superficially affirmative, happy-ending outcomes, whether pseudo, partial, or full (King 2005: 68). Spatial and temporal positioning in narrative organization can be

interjected or associated with particular contrasts of visual expression. Temporal, narratological shifts may emerge in chronological, flashback sequences intercut with the present tense (*Karla*); the filmic narrative may completely depict past events, brought to the forefront of the storyline (*Condition Red* and *House of D*); or, the narrative may be interjected by dialogical commentary from a character outside the filmic scene (*Civil Brand*).

In other cases, a film's storyline may diverge from a single, all-encompassing narrative structure. In *Nine Lives* (2005), film-maker Rodrigo Garcia assembled thematic 'snippets' of unique, pivotal, and poignant moments in the lives of nine women. Multiple, open-ended, narrative threads are selectively left dangling in various degrees of meaning, problematic characterological outcomes, and resolute terms (Barker 2008: 186). In most cases the viewer must ascertain a deeper level of significance beyond the filmic presentation.<sup>336</sup> Women are intersectionally situated and emerge from diverse structural circumstances, with the inter-relationships between characters revealed as snippets through the interconnected nature of narrative segments.<sup>337</sup> These fragments reflect mutual resonances of different events that emerge in the film, and become clearer as the stories progress (King 2005: 88). Each life "holds the spotlight" in one continuous 10 to 12 minute take of real filmic time, like a window or snapshot into someone's life already in progress, reflecting an ensemble of non-linearly structured pieces that abruptly, or unexpectedly, end (Garcia 2006a; Schwarzbaum 2005: 2). The women's stories emerge in the everyday and ordinary places of their lives, and reflect an overarching theme of humanity and inter-relationality that envelopes the film (Monaco 2000: 216). As each vignette progresses, issues arise which culminate in deeply emotional crises that thematically contextualize women's lives within the broader

<sup>336</sup> This point assumes a theory of viewership, whereby film-makers utilize, in this instance certain techniques (e.g., non-resolutive narrative threads) to create selective ways of seeing outside the Hollywood conventions of socially constructed standardized endings. Now viewers can develop their own understandings shaped by what the film-maker presents; namely everyday moments of human struggle to which we all in some way can relate. In prisoner Sandra's story, the purpose of viewing is to seek understanding over re-entrenching misrepresentation in the public mind.

<sup>337</sup> There are a multiplicity of ethnic representations of women, including Caucasian, Hispanic, and African American. As well, class is dimensionally implied, as Sandra appears to be marginalized, while some of the other women are more privileged.

personal and familial circumstances that entrap them –, both literally and symbolically. In the first segment the prison becomes a metaphor for the ‘entrapment’ thematic focus.

Roger Ebert, of the *Chicago Sun Times*, comments,

A movie like this [*Nine Lives*], with the appearance of new characters and situations, focuses us; we watch more intently, because it is important what happens. These characters aren't going to get bailed out with a hundred and ten minutes of plot. Their lives have reached a turning point here and now, and what they do must be done here and now, or forever go unknown” (2005: 3).

*Nine Lives*' stories have an unforced, authentic feel; Ann Hornaday of the (*Washington Post*) writes “Garcia's is a film-making style of rare lyricism, compassion and discretion” (n.d.:2).

The opening vignette depicts the world of the prison. Sandra's story begins at the Los Angeles County jail. A static shot portrays a long stretch of prison hallway, contrasted in grey and white visual tones. Then there is a transition to the image of the name *Sandra* upon the screen, written against a background that appears to show the irregular pattern of matted and interweaving lines. Moments later, Sandra reappears in the frame, as she mops an endless stretch of floor down that same prison unit. She is low-key, ensconced in the monotony and repetitiveness of her work on the cleaning crew. To break the silence she begins to sing, but is verbally ordered by prison staff to stop, with the words “*shut-up, princess.*” At times Sandra's attention is briefly interrupted and diverted, in a quick, momentary panning towards acts that hold little relevance to her situation – a scuffle between a prisoner and staff persons, and a lawyer entering a prisoner's cell. During the latter event, Sandra is ordered to temporarily stand “*against the wall!*” Here, the camerawork is especially effective in creating an abrupt break in the boredom of Sandra's prison day. In other instances, events directly affect her. Another prisoner, escorted by a male guard, verbally threatens Sandra as she walks by – an image that brings the volatility of the prison into view. This scene juxtaposes the dullness and dreariness of prison life against the emotional turmoil and stress it causes,

depicting moments of authenticity in women's carceral lives.<sup>338</sup> Sandra is entrapped physically, legally, and psychologically within a correctional system that hinders her relationship with a daughter she feels disconnected from; a reality that is depicted later in the vignette. Although Sandra is juxtaposed against eight other women who are free from the constraints of confinement, "narrative strands" make claims to verisimilitude or the seeming truisms' of the other women's predicaments, that make Sandra's situation appear all the more authentic (King 2005: 90).

Peoples' lives often appear directionless and may serve no plot-driven purpose in any primary narratological sense, being primarily "lived without the contrivances of [the] conventional-mainstream narrative arc" (King 2005: 66, 67). To impose such a linear causality to cinematic representations in characters that are "heroically lifting themselves out of their difficulties, triumphing through adversity...is to impose a typically American capitalist ideological framework" that assumes that "those from the lowest reaches" of society can overcome their marginality and "achieve the dream of prosperity" (67). Yet, for many independent titles the emphasis on narrative diversity, obliqueness, and purposeless characterization tries to create an authenticity that better approximates people's actual lives in the outside world, rather than the fictional terrain of Hollywood imaginations, especially for those on the economic margins (King 2005: 67). In *Map of the World* (1999), "the film... inflates roles that serve little purpose, like ... [Nellie Goodwin] as Alice's discretely needling mother-in-law," and Paul Reverdy, as a non-descript, ineffective lawyer (Maslin 1999: 2). But, regardless of claims to verisimilitude, realism, or authenticity independent film-making still deals in social constructions – albeit ones that adhere to practices that depart from the commercial mainstream (King 2005: 68). For example, all narrative frameworks, to varying degrees, impose artificial, socially-constructed realities across filmmaking forms.

Claims to truth and realism emerge from various sources. In *Karla* (2006), filmmaker Joel Bender tries to accurately recreate the filmic events – the Homolka/Bernardo crimes- through scenes and actual characterological dialogue that was drawn from the

<sup>338</sup> In actuality, prisoners' antagonisms/fights resulted from several factors, including boredom, perceived unfair staff treatment, provocation, violation of rights and favouritism (Shaw 2000: 65). Shaw writes within the Canadian female correctional context.

public record, books, and his contact with Tim Danson, lawyer for the victims' families.<sup>339</sup> Although he was resistant to Bender's production, Danson's input was imperative, so that filmic details and depictions could be more sensitively portrayed in ways that were not too offensive to the girls' families (Kirkland 2005: 1). In *Nine Lives* (2005), Rodrigo Garcia's episodic, interrelated vignettes depicted in various women-centered stories, "feels like real life, in nine acts" (Stein 2005: 2). However, to reiterate, my position emphasizes the social constructedness of filmic representations, some of which hold fragments or moments of authenticity to some prisoner's lives, as I demonstrate in the following discussion.

Such verisimilitudinous impressions also emerge from camerawork. Handheld, jerky, *verité*-style shooting, sudden zooms, and digital video create an experiential, impulsive, unpredictable feeling of emergent events, rather than the appearance of preplanned and orchestrated occurrences, staged and structured for filming (King 2005: 108). Overall, these effects may be pleurably appealing, or visually assaultive to audience members; techniques that symbolize the independent equivalent to the Hollywood spectacle (Ryan & Kellner 1988: 286).<sup>340</sup> But this impressionistic realism can be visibly disrupted by unsteady camerawork that reminds viewers of the fictionalized creation of a film's visual expressions (King 2005: 119). As well, a visual banality of subtlety that does not draw explicit attention to itself can be juxtaposed against a shockingly expressive display. In *Karla* (2006), a crude form of cinematography – "faux home movie snippets, contrasting sunny innocence and stark horror," in one extremely disturbing scene foreshadows a horrific event. Serial killer Paul Bernardo, and girlfriend, Karla Homolka, prepare to sexually abuse Karla's sister, Tammy; an act that results in her death (St. Germain 2006:1). As Paul moves his video camera across the young, blond, schoolgirl's body, her innocence is abruptly taken away. Extreme close-ups and jarring and jerky movements create visual distortions of Tammy that look disturbingly

<sup>339</sup> Bender bought the rights to books that were used as research material. Specifically, Tim Danson represented the parents of schoolgirls Leslie Mahaffy and Kirsten French, the actual victims of the Homolka/Bernardo killings. Nonetheless these materials represent varying degrees of truth claims that may destabilize notions of authenticity to the critical cinephilic eye.

<sup>340</sup> Hand-held jerky camerawork is a form of aesthetically driven movement that in the Hollywood film may occur through a sequential, action driven scene of e.g., the car chase.



real, and signify an out-of-control, drug and alcohol induced state of unconsciousness. Her face, exposed breasts, nipple, and legs are seen in a sexually victimizing and abusive manner. The visuality of this scene symbolizes the perverse instability of Karla's relationship with her sister, who now becomes the incapacitated victim to their evil deeds, as Karla covers Tammy's mouth with an analgesic cloth. A blurred, extreme, jarring close-up of Karla's hand is repeatedly seen through the camera lens. This unstable video gazing creates "a strong impression of presence, rather than a more distanced [or] voyeuristic... approach" to such sequences of victimization (King 2005: 112). This alarming scene is juxtaposed against the seemingly festive atmosphere of the holiday season, with a shot of a Christmas tree in the background.

Other stylistic techniques are used to convey meaning, such as rejecting the traditional establishing shot, or close-up, for more idiosyncratic forms, including unusual angles, particular shot types (such as long shots),<sup>341</sup> static unchanging or still imagery, quick panning, and the inter-juxtaposition of clear, sharp colour versus desaturated or grainy black and white images. The industrial conditions or budgetary limitations of some films may result in the use of sound (narration, character dialogue) over visual expression and narratological devices, to communicate storyline details that could not be shot in a filmic scene because of time constraints.<sup>342</sup> The use of voice-over and narration in some films places the viewer firmly within a character's subjectivity (Pramaggiore and Wallis 2008: 81). This dialogue can be pre-emptive and set-up the primary thematic direction, the central storyline theme, and/or be an ongoing social commentary throughout the film. In *Civil Brand* (2002), the flashback narrative is intermittently interjected by Sabrina, the politically conscious prisoner 'voice' who either speaks directly to the camera, or whose words are accompanied by still cinematic shots of the primary prisoner and correctional authority characters. Director Neema Barnette

<sup>341</sup> Long shots create less intimacy between the character and viewing audience.

<sup>342</sup> In *Civil Brand* (2002), the merger of Mandalay productions with Lionsgate Films led to a reduction in the film's shooting schedule and last minute changes in the script. Two important scenes were deleted and communicated through other means, such as character narration (Barnette 2004). Many independent films have low or restricted budgets. For example the estimated budgets for several titles include: *Civil Brand* (\$500,000) and *Nine Lives* (\$500,000), compared to *House of D* (\$6,000,000) or the Hollywood films *Brokedown Palace* (\$25,000,000), and *White Oleander* (\$16,000,000) (IMDb, 2013).

contends that Sabrina embodies many of the young black prisoners who are susceptible to multiple incarcerations, and whose lives were explored by the film-makers, and informed the filmic representations. Sabrina's initial presence is temporally located in the opening credits, continuously intercut by the beginning of the feature film, presented in colour. She sits on the stairs, outside the prison structure with a newspaper in hand that reads "25 Women Win Major Abuse Case."<sup>343</sup> Sabrina then speaks directly to the filmic viewer: "There're a lot of young people going to prison these days. Some of them need to be there; some of them don't. Prison ain't no joke though...but there ain't nothin' like the experience I had in Whitehead. Being in this motherfucker changed my life. A newsman wants to get the background case; however, Sabrina insists, "I know what you want but I am going to tell the story my way; I lived this."

The conventions of mainstream continuity editing can be altered to create diverse and disjunctive effects to visual forms and traditional narrative structure and closure. The independent film sector employs unconventional editing regimes such as, temporal, out-of-sequence cutting, and jump cuts, or an unedited continuous take. Consequently, there may be disruptions to the continuity and flow of imagery that may distract viewers from the story or subsequent narrative sequences. A film's storyline and subject matter can shape the formalistic devices used. In *Nine Lives* (2005), each woman's filmic 'moments' are shot in one continuous take that required no editing (Garcia 2006b).

## **Subjectivities of the Confined Woman: Fairy Tale, Exploitative, and Authenticated Embodiments of Resistance**

The subjectivities of the confined woman emerge within the discourses of humanization, empowerment, correctionalism (classification), resistance and

<sup>343</sup> The film-makers contend that these headlines resonate with actual lawsuits filed by women prisoners whose rights are violated in prisons, where they are susceptible to abuse such as rape. At the end of the film, Sabrina narrates an epilogue commentary that criticizes the carceral maltreatment of prisoners, while acknowledging that their confinement is necessary for women who "do the crime." The film-makers reiterate this point in their DVD interview. Joyce Lewis (2004) felt it was important to portray the women as both criminally culpable and willing to do a prison sentence. Sabrina's image is shot in a desaturated black and white imagery that almost brings an authenticity to her words in the filmic prologue.

marginalization interlinked to the constructs of pathologization-condemnation (individualization) versus depathologization-contextualization, intersectionality, political consciousness, exploitation, experientialism-authenticity, and pedagogy. Formal and informal repertoires of interaction and/or specific correctional classificatory systems that exist within the carceral world correspondingly construct particular female lawbreakers (sex offenders) as condemnatory subjects within the prison subcultural code or correctionalist psychiatric terrain. Even so, these embodiments are depathologized within a representational backdrop that otherwise humanizes them.

Subjectivity is not grounded within the primary discourses and constructs of gratuitous, sensationalized violence (victimization, predation), voyeuristic sexualization (objectification), primary archetypical otherization (pathologization, intersectionalities) and feminized naturalization and beautification (celebratization, commodification), commonly linked to standardized women-in-prison narratological themes in the exploitation or Hollywood product. Characterological constructions commonly arise within the discourse of the everyday, human condition. Associatively, the materiality of the everyday life can be emphasized in ways that prevent the objectification of the penal subject, and contextualize her struggles within particular circumstances (Ryan & Keller (1988: 93, 94). As such, across the films discussed herein, the prisoner may symbolize a politically conscious voice; a realist embodiment, or mythical figure in her multifarious incarnations that may correspondingly commend, humanize, or mythologize her. In this vein, the following discussion conceptualizes the confined woman into the following categorical embodiments 1) the condemnatory subject (child sexual offender -abuser and/or killer), 2) the transformative change agent/mentor, 3) the resistant prisoner 'survivor' and 4) through motherhood (struggling, non-traditional or marginalized, racialized mother). As well, the male characterological roles encompass three designations that include: authorized or illegitimate correctional releasers, sexual offenders/killers, and child caregiving recipients.

Independent films can provide an arena hospitable to a number of intersectionalities – whether socially or criminologically located – that may be generally subjected to neglect, misrepresentation, or associatively tied to specific archetypical attributes and standardized behavioural repertoires (e.g., predatory violence, victimization) found in other film-making forms. In *most* filmic titles, representations of

the central prisoner character symbolize a cinematic resistance to the exploitative characterizations that have emerged within our cultural consciousness: whether it is the violent woman-of-colour, the transformative good woman-gone bad vengeance seeker,<sup>344</sup> the psychiatrically clichéd mad woman ‘druggie,’ or the hyper normalized woman, to name a few. As well, in the filmic titles discussed herein the protagonist is not binarily constructed as an innocent limpet victim, a character whose ability to survive prison is threatened by an opposing character juxtaposition of the evilly depicted woman inmate *other*. In regard to naturalization and beautification, women are typically constructed outside the “uniform discursive range of hegemonic femininity” (whiteness, heterosexuality, passivity) with many protagonists depicted as structurally marginalized, and/or racialized subjects who assertively struggle with, resist, endure and acknowledge their disempowered status in both prison and free society (Bosworth 1999: 150). Often unfamiliar women of colour make up the central protagonist characters. The exception to this is prisoner Karla Homolka, in the film *Karla* (2006), who is depicted as a beautiful, white woman; educated, middle-class and privileged. She epitomizes a traditional feminized beauty that is valued within a patriarchal society that visualizes women’s worth through their physical appearance. As such, the penal subject is primarily constructed outside Hollywoodized and cultural notions of beautification in the middle-class Caucasian prisoner(s) who is cast from the ranks of esteemed and mainstream star performers.<sup>345</sup> Consequently, womanhood is defined outside of traditional male discourse (Kirca 2001: 465). The social and criminological locations of race, class, heterosexuality, education, and a prisoner’s crimes, carceral status, and criminal proclivities/risk are significantly interrelated to particular subjectivity formations. Many prisoners are marginalized women of colour who are sensitized and resistant to carceral oppressions that symbolize a classist, white patriarchal prison system.

<sup>344</sup> For the first two categories the exception is the film *Civil Brand* (2002).

<sup>345</sup> The notable exception is the actress Sigourney Weaver in *Map of the World* (1999). Sigourney Weaver has taken on non-traditional roles within other filmic genres namely that of character Ellen Ripley in the *Alien* science fiction horror trilogy (1979, 1986, 1992).

## Storylines of Marginalization, Struggle, Resiliency and Hope, in the Face of Hardship and Oppression in the Carceral and Outside World

In the 'confined woman' category, three titles situate incarceration as a background, thematic context to a more primary, non-carceral narrative. In these instances, confinement is a fragment of time in a prisoner's day (*Nine Lives* [2005]); a repeated, cinematic context that intercuts a broader, unrelated, non-criminalized narrative (*House of D* [2004]), or a contextual backdrop for a correctional process, such as a parole eligibility assessment, that interjects with flashbacks of the crime and its corresponding circumstances (*Karla* [2006]). Nevertheless, the prison continues to significantly shape the representational portrayal and subjectivities of the central prisoner embodiment. Conversely, in the other films such as *Condition Red* (1995), *Map of the World* (1999), and *Civil Brand* (2002), imprisonment and its individualized hardships and oppressions are largely depicted within the broader subculture of confinement and the varying interrelations, both primary and secondary, between the keepers and the kept.<sup>346</sup> Yet, regardless of the filmic structure, narratological or otherwise, all these films touch upon the daily actualities of the carceral condition which are either temporarily problematic, or underlyingly oppressive to prisoners' lives. These experiences may include living in segregation or enforced solitude in *House of D*, negotiating or dealing with uncompromising correctional staff in *Nine Lives*, holding an exclusionary status in the inmate social hierarchy in *Map of the World*, undergoing a psychological assessment to determine suitability for release in *Karla*, being caught in an inappropriate staff-inmate intimate relationship in *Condition Red*,<sup>347</sup> and attending to prisoner's rights and injustices in *Civil Brand*.

An overriding theme across these films is the humanizing of the penal subject within the broader context of her life circumstances and struggles – a strength and resiliency of the human spirit in the face of adversity and, at times, tragedy and hardship.

<sup>346</sup> In *Map of the World* (1999) protagonist Alice Goodwin is predominantly constructed in both the community and carceral contexts. Interrelations with the keepers are insignificant.

<sup>347</sup> In actuality, these relationships have occurred, but this is predominately an uncommon situation.

In *Map of the World* (1999), a “keenly female perspective” (Moore 2001) is presented in a story about “friendship, [loss], and forgiveness, and how we’re able to triumph over the greatest tragedies and still make our lives work” (Elliott 2001). Alice’s predicament, although exceedingly rare, nonetheless “throws back ... [the] possibilities of anything that can happen to you in a lifetime” (Moore 2001). In *Nine Lives* (2005), prisoner Sandra’s trials and tribulations are juxtaposed against the lives of non-criminalized women, in incidents portrayed as deeply affective.

These representations and others variously attest to how women become empowered through acts of individualized resistance (*Nine Lives* [2005]), political consciousness and exploitative violence, (*Civil Brand* [2002]), self-reflection and forgiveness (*Map of the World* [1999]), and the instilment of hope, courage, and personal reflection in non-carceral characters (*House of D* [2004]). Humanization creates an emotional response that is raw, deeply moving, genuine, and at times shockingly disturbing; one that viewers can experience, understand, or somehow legitimate in instances of incomprehensibility or ambivalence. For example, in *Karla* (2006) and *Civil Brand* (2002), film-maker’s often attempt to humanize the penal subject whose violence is otherwise correspondingly horrific and disturbing, or mutinously formulaic by contextualizing it within broader frames of understanding and reference. As well, the prisoner who personally vilifies herself is humanized and eventually depathologized in *House of D* (2004). A prisoner’s marginalization and struggles may be depicted as a subtly implicit, explicitly apparent, a matter-of-fact occurrence – monotonously banal or disturbingly real – or, are otherwise ones that culminate in a standardized fictitious crime narrative. Even so, women’s subjectivities emerge from events that are either glaringly apparent or that lay dormant until an underlying event unearths their presence.

In many films, the protagonist is constructed as flawed and problematic in a non-pathologized sense, a multi-constituted subject who is affected by her environments (carceral, structural, or personal) rather than by innate deficits.<sup>348</sup> To reiterate, unlike the exploitation and Hollywood product, entertainment pleasures that play upon the spectacle of archetypical performances (e.g., behavioural repertoires) or action-packed

<sup>348</sup> This is apparent in several titles, including *Map of the World* (1999), *House of D* (2004), and *Nine Lives* (2005).

sequences do not exist alongside most cinematic attempts to humanize the penal subject. Instead, some films create empathetic understandings and infusive meanings that attempt to deobjectify and depathologize oppressed subjects. In certain instances, prisoners may appear to embody qualities that viewers see within their own conceptions of self.

On the surface, a commonality of human experience may be shared with characters in the representational world. Relatable, familiarized elements such as motherhood, intimate relationships, and transitory interactions that significantly interface with people's everyday lives emerge in characterological embodiments and situations. But at a deeper level of interface, intersectional differences and structural marginalization embed these elements within circumstances that may not experientially resonate or fit with the lives of a mass audience of viewers. For example, it may be difficult to feel an experiential connection with women who are portrayed within seemingly convincing, yet uncommon representational contexts, that depict marginalized lives interfaced with the criminological concerns of crime and punishment: a snapshot of time at the Los Angeles County Jail; the sanitized, yet oppressive experiences of the Racine County Jail; and life on the margins between a law-abiding and criminalized life. Yet, for a select group of viewers,<sup>349</sup> the contextualized worlds and characterological embodiments of women prisoners strike a chord of experiential reality in their own lives. Also, an understanding of an authentic, toned down version of incarceration may be difficult for viewers to grasp, given the cultural reservoir of pseudo-realistic images that frame imprisonment in other filmic forms.

In other cases, *relatable* elements, such as the inter-relationships between family members or intimate partners, are incorporated in narratological contexts that may address controversial content or subjects in ways that completely assault or present the viewer with abhorrent and extremely rare crimes (sexual serial murder, rape), or acts that are alarmingly more pervasive in our society (child molestation) – a silent reality of criminological victimization. In both instances, offensive and disturbing content is binarily represented in either an explicitly abhorrent and dialogically graphic way (the

<sup>349</sup> These viewers could be currently or formally marginalized female lawbreakers who have experienced repeated contact with the law and incarceration.

random calculating violence in *Karla*, for example), or, within the most ordinary, everyday circumstances of seemingly normalized life (as with sexualized abuse) that is dialogically referred to in *Map of the World* and *Nine Lives* .

## **The Prison: A Context of Stark Banality and Monotony versus Exploitative Oppression and Hardships**

Imprisonment is multifariously constituted through the primary discourse of violence/disorder potentiality versus non-violence (correctionalism - classification/examination and personal reflection), politicization (e.g. black liberation), and the everyday, banal monotony of incarceration. Of central importance is the absence of the discourse of correctionalism (progressive reform/rehabilitation) as a primary objective. Rather, the prison remains discursively framed as a context of punishment and containment. The depiction of the carceral context in the independent film is uniquely different from the melodramatic excess of the Hollywood product or the lurid pleasures of the exploitation movie. Storylines littered with standardized elements and central archetypal villains – prisoner or authoritative or stock plots of individualistic survival, revenge or riotous escapes, and/or a major, criminogenic transformation (temporary or permanent) in the protagonist character, are not the cinematic norm. Instead, the prison is a place of legalized containment and control for charged or convicted women – not a predatory jungle, like the exploitation film. Most often, films portray those experiential actualities and struggles of everyday prison life “which fail to lend themselves to the imperatives of commercial cinema” (Jarvis 2004: 166). There are some exceptions to this. For example, *Condition Red* (1995) is unique in its brief depiction of the male penal context. Nonetheless, the film cinematically capitalizes on violence and intimidation, including correctional guard assault, prisoner staff victimization, attempted suicide, and the muscling of a weaker, vulnerable inmate.<sup>350</sup>

Accordingly, inside all its carceral formations, the genesis of disorder is a potentiality that usually involves a passing background character commentary or brief instance of prisoner antagonisms, verbal harassment and threats or physical altercations

<sup>350</sup> The weaker prisoner is an effeminate gay man, who is presumably sexually victimized.



– minor assaults, but often indicative of victimization that emerges from transgressions against the broader prison subcultural code or tiffs between prisoner rivals. For example, in *Condition Red* (1995), prisoner Gidell Ryan is physically victimized because she informs (snitches) on another woman’s illegal drug activities.<sup>351</sup> Alternatively, in *House of D* (2004) there is no disorder; the broader culture of confinement is not depicted.

Although the significance of these filmic events to the underlying narrative is minimal or questionable, they nevertheless serve to frame the prison as a volatile context, whether pseudo-realistically or seemingly authenticable; even if for an instant. The exception lies in one film, *Civil Brand* (2002), where Whitehead Correctional Institute is a place of major violence and oppression, including sexual assaults (off screen), beatings, individual predation, intimidation, and slave labour that is a widespread and ongoing narratological theme.<sup>352</sup> Formulaic prisoner archetypes, and Officer Deese, an embodiment of the brutish, uneducated male guard, make up the carceral cast in a clichéd storyline that capitalizes on many standardized, exploitable elements, including inmate fights, segregative stays and misogynous abuse (Britton 2003: 51). As well, inmate Aisha is the formulaic villain who snitches and steals from the other women. On two occasions a physical confrontation ensues between Aisha and prisoner Nikki, who in one incident, stabs Aisha. Prisoners launch a violently rebellious politicized struggle against an oppressive penal structure reaped in systemic oppression and exploitative actions. In *Condition Red* (1995), female prisoners are constructed as stereotypically aggressive – masculinized gang members, victimizers, and sexually assertive women who proposition guard Dan Cappelli, an authoritative, stern discipliner. It is within this film, that the background context of prisoner characterizations and relations constructs

<sup>351</sup> This behaviour, known as ‘ratting’ or ‘snitching,’ is an intolerable act within the prison code [of behaviour] that structures *doing time*. Barbara Owen (1998: 177) contends that the contemporary female prison culture appears to tolerate these behaviors to varying degrees which are strictly censored amongst male prisoners. In any case, snitching is problematic because it can inadvertently bring women *into the mix* in terms of drugs, conflicts, and confrontations with other prisoners (167). Owen writes within the US context of confinement; in particular, women’s imprisonment in California.

<sup>352</sup> The name Whitehead prison symbolizes the corporate owned correctionalist context with its southern white male officials who systemically represent and embody the white exploiter and abuser of African American confined women.

them as othered subjects, in a few brief but intense cinematic shots. Otherwise, disturbing and/or stereotypical filmic content, and violence, is absent in any primary representation of the prison world. The carceral experience is, instead, monotonously banal; structured in an environment that is at times physically sanitized, orderly, and strictly regimented by rules and regulations.

In (*Map of the World*, *Nine Lives*, and *Karla*), the carceral context is almost antiseptic-like, with few personalized effects (family pictures), limited or non-existent staff contact,<sup>353</sup> and an emphasis on the regime, or everydayness, of institutional life. In the latter two titles, the prisoner's cell is not depicted in the filmic feature presentation. Nonetheless, the prison takes on two distinct visual manifestations. It can be architecturally non-descript or not depicted in its exterior while it contains many signifiers of secure interior containment (closed visiting areas, guard stations, and barrier doors). Alternatively, the prison can appear as an archaic, rundown, and/or dirty housing unit, cell block, or cell; a setting that looks ever more masculinized in its exterior, (a cathedral-like structure and/or a massive complex)<sup>354</sup> with high security confinement and signifiers (gun/guard towers, razor wire, segregation cells, large chow hall<sup>355</sup>, and enclosed exercise yard) a context which, at times, contains unpredictable prisoners and strict staff

<sup>353</sup> Even though depictions of correctional staff serve little purpose to the primary filmic storyline, their underlying institutionalized power is felt. Alternatively, in *Nine Lives*, two male guards – Captain Ron and an unknown security officer – are instrumental in contributing to prisoner Sandra's oppression.

<sup>354</sup> The first representation fits best with the New York House of Detention, in *House of D* (2004), while the second describes Holmesberg Prison in the film *Condition Red* (1995). The Whitehead Correctional Institute in *Civil Brand* (2002) takes on both formations. In this latter title, the film-makers were denied access to a small, closed down South Carolina prison because their script did not "properly represent the Department of Corrections," and that access anywhere in the State was unlikely. It was then that the film-makers knew they had something special in their film (Barnette 2004). Holmesberg prison (*Condition Red*) was closed in 1995 and has been used for several male prison films such as *Animal Factory* (2000).

<sup>355</sup> The *chow hall* is characteristically a large area where a mass of prisoners eat their scheduled meals. Typically, the hierarchal nature of the prisoner subculture spatially structures the prisoner groupings and seating arrangements during meal times.

persons in the filmic background.<sup>356</sup> Interestingly, although some images portray a visually imposing prison architecture, exterior austerity does not necessarily correspond with an interior prison culture of overriding violence and prisoner carnage, that ensconces the cinematic narrative. This is especially the case for the segregated prisoner, Lady, in *House of D* (2006), while in *Condition Red* (1995), characterological prisoner antagonisms and groupings are implied through two momentary scenes in the prison yard and living unit bathroom. In *Civil Brand* (2002), the colour scheme in the cell house emphasizes deep blues and greens, to juxtapose the drab and dreary reality of confinement with the “internal strength and youthful hopefulness” of the imprisoned women (Barnette 2004).

Some film-makers aim to create non-exploitative, meaningful representations of carceral oppression that are exploitable elements in other filmic forms. For example, in *Civil Brand* (2002), the depiction of France’s and Nikki’s segregative stay is intended to depict the women’s experiences, over exploitative elements such as gratuitous nudity. Director Neema Barnette contends that “isolation...was about their journey, and their feelings, and [about] opening up” (2004). However, the particular posing of the women’s bodies, scantily clad with exposed legs, midriffs and partial breasts – seen at times from a high angle shot, overlooking their confinement – could be interpreted by many viewers as an exploitative and voyeuristic sexualizing of the women.

Overall, for the most part, prisoners’ daily lives reflect ‘dead time’ – boredom and essential and regimented tasks (eating, sleeping, and doing chores); solitary interests (reading and singing), and social activities (doing sports, watching TV, playing cards, sitting around and dialoguing) or otherwise in assessment-oriented processes – that serve little entertainment value or plot-driving purposes. For instance, in *Map of the World* (1999), a group of women congregate around the television “fiending for their

<sup>356</sup> In the title *Condition Red* (1995), the women are housed in a unit at Holmesberg prison, a large male correctional complex that has a traditional external prison design, with living units fanning out from a central circular rotunda. Prisoners congregate in a large prison yard that has a high razor wire fence and a perimeter guard. This facility is one of the most austere and imposing penal structures across all the films in the dissertation.

afternoon Oprah fix” (Morris 2000a: 1).<sup>357</sup> The gendered work that women do (janitorial [cleaning], craftwork [sewing]) is not rehabilitative or explicitly linked to instilling domesticity in women, but instead reflects banal monotony versus exploitative sweatshop treatment.<sup>358</sup> Even so, it is within these contexts that some films bring in narratological components that break with the dullness of the activity. For example, in *Map of the World*, it is during one Oprah show that protagonist Alice Goodwin is ridiculed as being “a baby killer,” by prisoner Dyshett. The inmate subculture and its associated antagonisms are often absent, downplayed in intensity (level of violence), or hold limited relevance to the central filmic theme; instead, they remain in the background, underdeveloped in character and significance. The exception is in *Map of the World* (1999), where the label of sexual offender/child killer, shapes a prisoner’s location within the prison hierarchy. In many cases, women do their own time, with little interest or opportunities in developing significant relationships with other prisoners. In films where imprisonment is a secondary context, visual symbols of confinement that frame the central prisoner character narratives include a segregation cell, living unit hallway, closed visiting area, and interview room that is adjacent to a centralized staff control area.<sup>359</sup>

Institutionalized power is represented in the systemic control of women through correctional policies and practices that include; prison rules, punishments, and the management of women through physical force, restraint, and so on. More specifically, the prison is associated with strategies of evaluation and classification; psychiatric or individualized –a formalized procedure (psychiatric interview) or informal interaction that entails prison staff interrogatory questioning, or observations – with the first process

<sup>357</sup> This relates to the Oprah Winfrey TV show. Oprah represents a maternalistic figure of strength and wisdom for the women, many of whom are African American. The women also watch the TV game show *Wheel of Fortune* in the film.

<sup>358</sup> These descriptions of prison life are variously depicted in other films that include: *Condition Red* (1995), *House of D* (2004), *Nine Lives* (2005), and *Karla* (2006). Activist Karlene Faith (1987: 206) contends that the creation of a realistic portrayal of the prison experience includes – “intense boredom, lethargy, and frustration, the arbitrariness of rule enforcements... [and] the loneliness and ... value of having close friends upon whom to depend for comfort and companionship.”

<sup>359</sup> In a non-contact visiting area, a partition separates the prisoner from her visitors, who communicate using a phone. A centralized control station enables the prison staff to watch the surrounding areas and to open the barrier doors to different institutional locations.

serving to determine the penal subject's criminal culpability, the underlying causes of her offense(s), and her propensity/risk towards further violence. Subsequently, some prisoners are constructed as unreformable subjects, regardless of the prison's lack of rehabilitative goals or potential, and whether stereotypically feminized or programmatically non-gendered in its manifestation. The carceral context may also take on uniquely different meanings. For example, in *Map of the World* (1999), the prison symbolizes a space of personal self-reflection, with protagonist Alice Goodwin interpreting her confinement as an exclusionary niche; a "deserted island," that facilitates in an almost introspective exploration of self-recovery under the most tragic of circumstances, and enables Alice to contemplate her current predicament, non-carceral struggles, and future.

## **Categorical Constructions of the Confined Woman: The Condemnatory Subject of the Child Sexual Offender- Abuser and/or Killer**

### ***Karla Homolka in Karla (2006) and Alice Goodwin in Map of the World (1999)***

The category of the 'condemnatory subject' - 'child sexual offender- abuser and/or killer' - is enveloped within the discourses of correctional or subcultural classification, normalization, naturalization, humanization, psychiatrization and otherization, which emerge within two distinct and underlying processes endemic to the carceral world. First, there is the regulatory procedure of the psychiatric interview, which determinedly rests upon the systematic and interrogative questioning by a psy-science expert, authenticable as the constructor of 'truth claims' regarding the subjectivity of the lawbreaking woman and her criminalized conduct (Rose 1996: 139). Second, the underlying subcultural rules of the prison hierarchy situate some groups of offenders within the lower echelons of a social system that shapes women's carceral experiences and interrelationships with others. In these respective instances, the prisoner's subjectivity is linked to the constructs of intersectionality, assessment-evaluation (causality) or pathologization and condemnatory judgments (exclusion), that determine her *suitability* for inclusion or place within either outside society (upon her release), or,

the prisoner subculture (during her confinement). As well, in these two films the deviant subjectivity of sexual offender is at times enveloped within the constructs of pathologization-depathologization and victimization. Overall, the intersectional locations of age, race, class, heterosexuality, and education are of paramount importance to prisoners primarily framed through their normative transgressions and/or heinous criminal allegations or acts. In *Karla*, subjectivity is embedded within psychiatric diagnoses of a disordered, inherent criminality and proclivity towards future crime in the prisoner/criminalized protagonist.

In two titles, *Map of the World* (1999), and *Karla* (2006), sexual deviancy is explored within these particular aforementioned processes and is associatively linked to the protagonist characters, alleged abuser Alice Goodwin and convicted killer Karla Homolka. Unlike other filmic forms, this category emerges under ostensibly normal conditions; at least, in the beginning. More specifically, women's perceived or actual sexually related crimes are situated outside of the penal context. Instead, what is uniquely different in these two films is that the sexual offender is not embodied in the exotic *other* of our childhood nightmares, but in personifications that appear ordinarily normal (King 2005: 198). These socially vilified women are constructed as white, middle-class, educated, and married. Alternate storylines emphasize their victimization of children, which thematically shapes the filmic narrative towards non-carceral themes, such as serialized sexual homicide in *Karla*, and alleged child molestation in *Map of the World*. Alice's alleged sexual offending is only dialogically referred to (in characterological commentary) and is not associated with any depicted actions/interactions or conditional context while in *Karla*, the grisly details of the Homolka/Bernardo crimes are left to the imagination. Even so, the female child molester and/or murderer symbolizes, within our cultural imaginations, the most hideous of female criminals; the monstrous maternal someone guilty "of breaking every [normatively] sanctioned code of femininity and womanhood;" a threat to normal life, and a destroyer of her own and other women's families in the most repulsive of ways (Jewkes 2004: 122, 123). This delineation is particularly applicable to Karla Homolka, a macabre embodiment of iconic female monstrousness; a subject notoriously meaningful within the geographical and cultural proximity of her horrific and depraved crimes, and someone

tied to our greatest fears – the serial killer<sup>360</sup> (Jewkes 2004: 124, 134). As a result, this image creates representational expectations in filmic viewers transpired from the intertextuality of meaning and imagery tied to other mediated and popular cultural constructions (news-based, book) of the Homolka/Bernardo crimes, which are similarly demonizing of Karla.

***Karla Homolka: Traumatized, Irresponsible, Reluctant Victim, Willful Accomplice, and Complicit Observer.***

*Karla* (2006) is a direct and seemingly everyday account of the relationship between Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka, “a seemingly simple, ordinary, banal, Southern Ontario couple,” who, by all indications appear normal; just two young people in love. Their grand wedding, at a historic church in Niagara-on-the-Lake, is a lavishly decadent, fairy-tale spectacle, complete with a horse drawn carriage, and well-wishers in awe of the beautiful bride and groom. This contentious film, however, chronicles and unveils the unimaginable; it implicates the couple in the abduction, sexual assault, torture, and death of several young women, including Karla’s younger sister, Tammy (Hays 2005: 2). This Americanized production of a shocking Canadian case sparked controversy and abject horror amongst political leaders and the public, who were outraged that film-maker Joel Bender would insensitively, exploitatively, and monetarily capitalize on such heinous crimes, which reflected a blatant disregard for the victims’ families.<sup>361</sup> This sentiment was exacerbated by Karla Homolka’s parole from prison in July, 2005, as it occurred shortly prior to the completion of the film, which recounts events that were strictly banned within Canadian media publications during the trial. As Mathew Hays (CBC) contends, however, “One may think that *Karla* is simply

<sup>360</sup> The Karla Homolka’s case was particularly associated with Canada, and the Ontario cities of St Catharine’s and Burlington, that had a heightened sense of fear and sensitivity given that the victims were abducted from these communities.

<sup>361</sup> This film met with strict opposition and resistance on other fronts. It was dropped from the *Montreal Film Festival* due to concerns from the corporate sponsor, Air Canada, executives insisting so, in an attempt to limit the exhibition of such a distasteful production (Hays 2005: 1). As well, film-maker Joel Bender had little experience in tackling such a sensitive subject, with his less than stellar filmography that included such titles as *Jennifer is Dead* (1979, horror), *Gas Pump Girls* (1979, comedy), and *Face to Face* (2001, family-comedy).

inconsequential garbage, but some of the most intriguing films of recent years have been accompanied by controversy... ” (1, 2).<sup>362</sup>

Unlike the frenzied pre-emptive hype, however, the film is actually not exploitative, or sensationalized in a gratuitous manner; there is no blood or gore. Although the content is extremely horrific and abhorrently realistic, the sexual assaults and murders are not visually depicted in any graphic way; yet the degradative terror inflicted on two of the victims is sickeningly shown. Structurally, the film is a temporal and chronological juxtaposition of more recent events, a parole eligibility assessment interview, eight years into Karla’s prison sentence, and the past; a personal rendition of her life with Paul and their crimes.<sup>363</sup> At the narratological forefront is the construction of Karla’s subjectivity, which becomes the primary thematic focus that is understood through the penetrative capacity of the correctional expert. The assessment procedure interrogatively unravels and links the roots of a disordered subjectivity to a psychiatrized knowledge base that makes claims to particular truths around Karla’s criminalized conduct/motivations and psychopathic tendencies (Rose 1996). Dr. Arnold’s commentaries, insights, and questions directly influence an interjection of selected filmic scenes that supposedly re-enact Karla’s version of events. At the same time, these inquiries serve to visually and narratively support her underlying sexual deviance and perversity, as well as her criminal culpability, enforced victimhood, and unreliable and deceitful character, in ways that are both disturbingly portrayed, and at other times, simply and ordinarily implied. He systematically tries to delve into her psyche by showing Karla pictures of her past – in an attempt, it seems, to somehow trigger an emotive response and determine the motivations for her actions. In her dealings with Dr. Arnold, she is coldly articulate, resistant, detached, and seemingly unaffected by the

<sup>362</sup> One film includes *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003), a documentary that chronicles the arrest, allegations against, and imprisonment of an esteemed New York schoolteacher, and his son, for shocking sex crimes.

<sup>363</sup> In some instances the film is shot out of sequence. In the introductory scene, Karla’s face is seen through the back window of a police car that transports her to the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatchewan, Canada, for her interview. A quick shot transitions to a grainy image of Karla placing a cloth over the mouth of another young woman. It is throughout these two short scenes that Dr. Arnold is heard instructing Karla prior to his assessment interview. The Regional Psychiatric Centre is operated by the Correctional Service of Canada. It is a forensic prison hospital that securely houses sentenced male and female offenders, who are referred from various home institutional contexts for assessment, treatment, and evaluation.



accusations made against her and the horror of the crimes. Karla is shown coolly smoking a cigarette as they converse, a stoic look in her face and mannerisms. A sliver of emotional vulnerability is expressed when Karla speaks of Paul's obsession with her sister Tammy.

Though a moral judgment, of her promiscuity and somewhat questionable sexual practices (voyeurism, bondage [handcuffing], sexualized paraphernalia, and fetishes) appear to portray an evolving sexual deviant, more explicit behaviours clearly intertwine Karla's perversity with Paul's misogynous and violent rape fantasies, which become a more overt indication of her propensity towards sexual offending. Although, she is implicated for her complicity in serial sex crimes, by all indications, Karla masks her inherent dysfunction and horrendous secrets. On the surface, her normalcy is veiled, both visually and behaviourally, by a beautified, radiant appearance, a middle-class background of apparent familial stability, education, and employment as a veterinary assistant. But as the film progresses, various interrelated sub-categories emerge from the primary subjectivity of the child sexual offender/abuser/killer. Karla is sub-categorically constructed as a 'traumatized, irresponsible, reluctant victim' (Bertrand 1999: 50), a 'willful accomplice,' and 'complicit observer' to Paul's carnage. Karla is the dualistic embodiment of contradictory imagery that portrays her as emotionally vacuous and cold towards her victims, juxtaposed against fragments of expressive, albeit superficial, feelings of comfort that emerge with school-girl Tina McCarthy.<sup>364</sup> Nevertheless, Karla is not depicted as the sadistic and sick victimizer that Bernardo is; she is never shown in the killing of any of the women, nor does the film depict her as the instigator behind the abductions, tortures, and murders. Nonetheless, in her interactions with Paul during his deplorable crimes, Karla herself emerges within these aforementioned subjectivities that represent differential levels of culpability and willingness to partake in such evil acts. The film also documents Paul's abuse of Karla, which is eerily similar to their victim's fate. In one horrible scene, Paul viciously beats and sodomizes Karla, and then throws her into the cellar where the body of first victim, Tina McCarthy is [she has been dismembered and been placed in concrete blocks].

<sup>364</sup> The character of Tina McCarthy is the embodiment of the actual 14 year old victim, Leslie Mahaffy.

During the brutal attack, he yells “*do you want to fuckin’ die, bitch ...I’m too fuckin’ nice to you, you know that.*” It is at this time that Karla becomes terrified of leaving Paul.

A surface reading of the primary filmic imagery constructs Karla as a needy, possessive, and jealous woman, who is transfixed by Bernardo’s seductive power and her twisted love for him. Throughout the film, Paul’s continual threats, physical abuse, and intimidation force a ‘reluctant, irresponsible and traumatized victim,’ Karla, to partake in his depraved and horrific acts – humanized representations that almost appear sympathetic to her plight. The sexual assault and death of her sister is an example, where Karla’s subjectivity of ‘enforced victimhood’ is allegedly influential in the indignities she inflicts. Nonetheless, Bruce Kirkland (*Toronto Sun*) argues that any sympathy or humanity felt for Karla is “slowly sliced away as the [brutality of later] crimes ... [is] depicted” (2005: 2). It is clear that Karla’s idolization and compulsive obsession with granting Paul, her ‘king,’ his every command, makes Karla guilty in facilitating this perverse act of sisterly betrayal and victimization. Initially, in his devious plan, she reluctantly, though knowingly complies at his insistence: *C’mon Kar, this is what the king wants [a virgin].*” He continues, “*It would make a great Christmas present for me ....*” Subsequently, Karla obtains from the vet clinic the Halothane used to render her sister unconscious. During the vile act, after Karla initially refuses to sexually abuse Tammy Paul violently hits her face, shouting “*you fucking slut...you fucking ruined my movie*” Paul strikes Karla again. Then, just as she is ostensibly forced to partake in Tammy’s assault, Karla realizes her sister is not breathing, and Paul quickly re-dresses the girl before the paramedics arrive.<sup>365</sup>

In a later filmic sequence, she takes on the subjectivity of ‘willful accomplice’ that becomes depicted in a matter-of-fact, undramatic way – although it is nonetheless very disturbing. Brief cinematic shots and dialogical commentary portrays her indifference and lack of empathy for one victim, Tina McCarthy. When the girl softly cries “*Help me,*” frightened, and held captive in another room, Karla goes to the door and ignores her pleas, instead going downstairs to feed the dog. Throughout the day, several shots depict Karla calmly reading a book, in wait for Paul’s return home, upon which she

<sup>365</sup> In actuality, Tammy was sexually assaulted by both Paul and Karla prior to this event.

stoically questions him, “*Are you sure no one saw you...when you got her?*” It is later that night that Karla becomes willfully complicit and involved in the assault of Tina. In this depiction she does not refuse to partake in the act.

In a particularly heart wrenching scene, Tina McCarthy sits on the bed, blindfolded, traumatized, and distraught, as Paul orders her to undress. In the scene’s most distressing moment Paul insists to Karla that Tina be killed after she opens her eyes and sees his face. Visually, the teenage girl is now seen sitting naked on the floor with her arms wrapped around her body, as she weeps. As a ‘complicit observer’ with the full knowledge of the young girl’s fate, Karla makes no attempt to stop the murder; rather, in a warped act of superficial kindness, she gives Tina a teddy bear to clutch – as if to somehow comfort the young girl who is about to die a brutal death. Karla gets up and walks away, and a close-up shot depicts Paul’s face contorting as he strangles the young woman, (off-camera) who chokes and gasps for life, before he finishes the cruel act. During this horrific murder, Karla appears sickened and distraught, by the cold brutality of Paul’s violence. The next day Paul orders Karla to help him dismember the body – a ghastly act that is not depicted. This visual downplaying of graphic violence is associated with independent film-making.

After Tina McCarthy’s death, Dr. Arnold asks, “*Did what happened change you?*” But Karla replies that she just put the death behind her; all she wanted to do was get married. Even more disturbing is Karla’s chilling revelation to Dr. Arnold, after the couple’s second torture and murder of school girl, Kaitlyn Ross.<sup>366</sup> He asks, “*What did you feel at that moment...watching her die?*” Karla stoically replies, “*Nothing. I was thinking about how easy it was to kill her. Not like the first time; [this time] it was easy.*” She shows no emotion or remorse, just coolly articulates a horrific crime, and remarks that she knew Paul wasn’t going to stop. Karla is a young woman monstrous in her actions, but innocent in her appearance. Her seemingly rational state and cold detachment constructs and vilifies her as an even more dangerous subject.

<sup>366</sup> Kaitlyn Ross is the characterization of the actual 15 year old victim, Kirsten French.

## ***The Monstrous, Inherently Disordered Subject***

By filmic end, any notion or belief in Karla's victimhood or her enforced complicity, as someone who succumbed to Paul's' misogynous violence and control in the slaughter of three young women, is nullified by the post-script commentary that clinically disconfirms "the battered woman's syndrome"<sup>367</sup> as an explanatory factor in Karla's case. Dr. Arnold's assessment, which addresses her future criminality and dangerousness, is chronicled in the commentary from the parole board review and appears on the screen:

*Karla Homolka is a person highly artificial, manipulative, who is egocentric, if not narcissistic, and whose behaviour cannot be explained solely on the basis of intimidation or abuse from Paul Bernardo. Despite her ability to present herself well, there is moral vacuity and an absence of empathy for victims, which suggest tendencies towards psychosis.*

This application of "mental disorder ... [as] a status or attribute that is socially constructed through the discursive process of [psychiatric] assessment itself" and its associative terminology serves to situate Karla within an 'inherently disordered, monstrous subjectivity,' an all-encompassing category legitimated by the psy-science expert, whose inquiries throughout the storyline culminate in a psychiatrized explanation, even when the storyline does not equivocally do so (Allen as cited in Armstrong 1999: 69). In this respect, the official correctional discourse "places subjects within sets of knowledges [psychiatric]" that produce specified meanings tied to the bureaucratic, systematic objectives of punishment, that will continue to monitor and control the conduct of the unreformable offender (Burton & Carlen 1979: 46; Rose 1996: 139). Other popular cultural sources similarly provide a vilified commentary on Karla as the embodiment of an inherent evilness a seemingly significant truth claim derived from actual psychiatric reports and criminal court records. Author Patricia Pearson (1998: 46, 47, 56)<sup>368</sup> provides a parallel commentary that constructs Karla as follows:

<sup>367</sup> The potential linkage of Karla's behaviours to this syndrome is problematic for feminists because it "lends medical and professional credibility to the very stereotypes of female passivity and masochism... ." (Worrall 2002: 57).

<sup>368</sup> Patricia Pearson's book *When She was Bad: How and Why Women Get Away with Murder* (1998) has been cited as a backlash against feminist interpretations of women's violence.

[She is an] immature, moody, shallow, rigid and hostile individual preoccupied with themes of violence and victimization... . [Sitting in court] her face was as blank as a doll's. She seemed eerily plastic, her hair shiny, her smooth skin artificially tanned, as if everything that made her human had been air-brushed away... . her wheat-blond hair fell across her wan face like a curtain...[a demeanor] that divested herself of a soul.

Although, Karla Homolka appeared to embody the epitome of womanhood – a feminized and beautified appearance, conservative ideals of marriage, and a seemingly caring nature as a vet assistant – this facade of proper femininity soon crumbled away to reveal a monstrous subjectivity that took on a ruthlessness, coldness, and calculation more attributable to criminalized men. As Anne Lloyd postulates, those women who commit the incomprehensible and unexplainable acts that involve the “torture and murder of children... must be unnatural and truly evil to have chosen to go against ... [their] own womanly [and perceived inherent] nature. Such a ... [person] is beyond understanding, beyond redemption, hardly human at all” (Lloyd 1995: 48, 49). Humanized representations of Karla as a victim of Paul's domestic abuse or which construct her within a bland, toned-down banality of the everyday actions of their horrific violence, will continue to ignite both controversy and condemnation from cultural critics and cinephilic audiences alike, who deem these portrayals as not demonizing enough.<sup>369</sup> As well, it is argued that the film does little to add to the criminological debate, other than to serve as a painful reminder of horrific crimes; a representation that some critics find distasteful, but not harmful (Kirkland 2006: 2).<sup>370</sup>

<sup>369</sup> Following Karla Homolka's release, the court authorities determined her to be a continued threat to society. She was unremorseful towards the victims' families and expressed little insight into her crimes (*Karla* 2006). Various restrictions were imposed on her freedom, but Karla eventually legally appealed them. As of 2011, she relocated with her husband and infant son to Antilles, West Indies. Then, in 2012, journalist and lawyer Paula Todd found her living in Guadeloupe, with the brother of her former prison lawyer and their three children. Todd's story is chronicled in the book *Finding Karla* (2012), which has received both condemnatory and praiseworthy reviews on *Amazon.com*.

<sup>370</sup> In actuality it is reported that Karla Homolka was placed in protective custody during her confinement, because she alleged that other prisoners threatened to kill her due to her crimes and the notoriety of the case.

### ***Alice Goodwin: The Condemnatory, Pathologized Subject***

In *Map of the World* (1999), the sexual offender- child abuser/killer is discriminately judged within the inmate subculture, which excludes and condemns women whose victims are children. The film constructs two characterological embodiments of such vilified women. At the forefront, there is protagonist Alice Goodwin; a middle-class mother who is accused of fondling a student in her capacity as a school nurse/employee. In the background is Alice's roommate, Debbie, who is another outcast; a child-like, overweight, emotionally unstable, white bigot, who sparks condemnation at the murder of her two small, black infant sons. The film does not performatively depict either crime. Both women are subjected to humiliating comments and condemnatory labels from other prisoners – especially Dyshett, an African American woman who instigates the harassment.<sup>371</sup> Alice and Debbie are constructed outside the behavioural and dialogical repertoires commonly associated with violent and/or sexual deviant penal subjects; namely, predatory victimization, verbal threats and intimidation, and individualized violence, that are graphically displayed within the cinematic spectacle of other filmic forms such as the exploitation movie. On the contrary, their propensity towards alleged or actual acts of violence or sexual deviation does not carry over into acts of abuse within the prison world.

Alice's predicament symbolizes a deeply human condition, a woman's fall from grace in the most ordinary of circumstances. Film-maker Scott Elliott constructs Alice as "completely flawed... she is the quintessential anti-heroine" (2001), a multiply constituted subject whose multifarious subjectivities interlock to create a complex character, and whose otherwise humdrum life takes a series of tragic and unfortunate turns. After the accidental drowning of her best friend's daughter, Alice's life unravels in depression and self-alienation, community ostracism, and criminal allegations, the latter of which results in her confinement. It is within these scenarios – young Libby's death, and schoolboy Robbie MacKessy's and other children's accusations – that Alice becomes sub-categorically constructed as the 'condemnatory, pathologized subject'. At the Racine County jail, Alice's status as an accused sexual offender, lawbreaker,- and irresponsible

<sup>371</sup> The film could be criticized for depicting racist stereotypes of the black female aggressor.

caregiver, dualistically constructs Alice as a child rapist and killer, or “*baby fucker*,” as prisoner Dyshett calls her in the first personification (Jewkes 2004: 115).

In one scene, upon her return to the living unit after a visit, Dyshett walks behind Alice, and mocks her: “*Tell me, how exactly does someone like you fuck a kid? ‘Cause as far as I can tell, you ain’t got no dick to do it with.*” She giggles, then adds, “*Unless you hiding something.*” The women congregate together, but Alice is treated with even more disdain because she is housed with Debbie. Dyshett, a powerful and vocal person within the women’s unit, continually taunts and ridicules Alice with persecutory and demonizing remarks that are also directed towards Debbie, who is psychiatrized as a suicidal, sexually inappropriate person, albeit in a pathetic way. Alternatively, Alice’s subjectivity is characterologically depathologized in a person who otherwise appears altogether ‘normal’, even though within the cinematic world she is ostracized by everyone – including community members, former friends, work colleagues, and prisoners. Alice is even alienated from her own family. At one point, her husband, Howard, appears to question her innocence. In another scene, Debbie sits on the floor and wallows in self-pity and sorrow, as she looks at the pictures of Alice’s two girls, Claire and Emma. The young woman, snivels “*I wish there was something here I could kill myself with.*” Standing at the door, Dyshett starts in, “*ah don’t cry my blubbery fat elephant, she goin’ take care of that breezy fat pussy.*” Alice tells Dyshett, “[to] *leave it alone.*” Dyshett then redirects her taunts towards Alice, asking, “*Tell me, what you use, flashlight, broomstick, big old banana?*” When Alice simply indicates that her sex charges are only allegations, Dyshett yells to the other women, “*Hey, everybody, grandma’s innocent!*” Debbie angrily speaks under her breath, “*I hate that nigger.*” Here, Dyshett’s ridicule and commentary regarding sexual offending, and Alice’s apparent inability to assault a child without the corresponding genitalia, results in her associatively linking child rape with male phallic symbols.

Dyshett also situates both Alice and Debbie within the subjectivity of ‘baby killer,’ and even more condemnatory label that serves to further exclude them within the prison subculture, and particular inter-relationships amongst other prisoners. In a subsequent scene, Dyshett’s smiling face appears in the window of the door to Alice’s and Debbie’s room. Alice invitingly welcomes her in, knowing the inevitable. Dyshett all cheery faced, jeeringly says, “*Hey Debbie, I know something you don’t know. You know how, and this*

*just drives me crazy, how sometimes you just can't tell nothing by just looking at it. I'd be walking down the street past Alice here, think she was the perfect person. I come to find out she's just like you, fatso, she' a baby killer too.*" When Debbie inquires with a smile, "what does that mean?" Alice seriously responds, "It's the real reason I'm here." But, not all the women react to Alice in this manner. It appears that some background prisoners stay clear of applying the derogatory labels, and rather provide comfort and support to her, especially after a particularly traumatic event at Racine. As well, confirmation of Alice's maternal status and emotional connection to her daughters appears to stop Dyshett's harassment. The women make a collage patchwork of their children's pictures, which collectively bonds them through their role of motherhood.

In actuality, women incarcerated for child-case crimes, although typically positioned lower than the ordinary prisoner, and deemed as highly repulsive by the other women, nonetheless experience varying degrees of exclusion within the inmate social hierarchy (Eaton 1993: 48; Owen 1998: 111). Such outcast women are excluded from "acceptable [modes] of femininity and social acceptability" because of their transgressions (Eaton 1993: 48). In accordance to this, *Map of the World's* depiction of outward prisoner antagonism, through the character of Dyshett, may arguably symbolize a somewhat overplayed constructed cinematic effect. But, regardless of its interpretation, condemnatory subjectivities that relate to the death or abuse of children serve to support the informal prohibition against actual prisoners revealing their crimes to one another within the off-screen, carceral world (112).

## **The Prisoner as Transformative Change Agent/Mentor**

### ***Gidell Ryan in Condition Red (1995) and Bernadette Odell (Lady) in House of D (2004)***

The prisoner protagonist as 'change agent' emerges within the discourse of humanization, interrelated to the constructs of depathologization, transformation, and intersectionality in which her otherwise othered status disappears as she briefly, yet significantly, facilitates in life-altering changes in a two male protagonists. In two films, *Condition Red* (1995), and *House of D* (2004), two African American prisoners Gidell



Ryan and Lady (from each of the films, respectively) positively enrich the lives of prison guard Dan Cappelli, and teenager, Tommy Warsaw. Accordingly, this subjectivity emerges through a prisoner's brief but significant actions/interactions with a central character that leads to inspiring and transformative outcomes. In these depictions the intersectional social location of race is important, in women who impact the lives of white males. Alternatively, in *Map of the World* (1999), it is the background black prisoner population that impacts protagonist Alice Goodwin in a positive way, despite the problems she encounters within the prison subculture.

In *Condition Red*, the setting is Holmesberg Prison, Philadelphia 1994, as Dan Cappelli, an embittered guard, negotiates his day within the men's maximum security unit. In a voice-over narration, Dan contextualizes his life as living between two worlds – “*the one on the outside [society] and the one on the inside [carceral context]*” – with his inner being constantly feeling under a state of alarm; an embodiment he terms “*condition red*,” that is precipitated by the continual dangers he experiences in an unpredictable and volatile prison system. The film juxtaposes how Dan feels both physically and mentally, confined within a thankless job that he hates and his difficult circumstances beyond the walls – both of which subject him to instability, hardship, marginality, and unhappiness.

The film has a gritty, realistic edge to it, with an overriding mood of cynicism. Dan, an ex-amateur boxer, closes himself off from personal relationships, and lives a reclusive life in an impoverished area of Philadelphia. His only solace is his dying mother, whom he visits regularly. Dan's exterior self is intensely hardened; his worn, haggard, and tired appearance is heightened by an abrasive personal demeanor, clenched jaw, and piercing eyes. He is a man fueled by alcoholism, anger and negativity. Dan is constructed within the historicized conceptions of prison disorder, and the stereotypical brutality of the male guard, as someone who asserts his power in unethical, unprofessional and abusive ways (Britton 2003: 69). As a stark disciplinarian, Dan's propensity to react violently and impulsively towards inmate transgressors relegates him

to the guarding of women, and a transfer to another prison unit.<sup>372</sup> Initially, his presence here paints a stereotypical picture of the women as a more unruly population to manage than the men. In one short scene, Dan physically escorts two prisoners into segregation, with one woman's frustrations escalating into an angry resistance towards his actions. Her pleas for leniency eventually spiral into sexualized expletive abuse, as she yells, "*Give me a fuckin' break! C'mon man; you know I hate this, what do you want, a blow job? Do you want a fuckin' blow job...fuck you, fuck you, you asshole, you're a fuckin' cock sucker!*" Dan immediately retreats to the bathroom and covers his face with cold water, clearly exasperated from this experience.

The primary, filmic flashback narrative, however, focuses away from these images to otherwise chronicle Dan's relationship with Gidell Ryan, an African American prisoner whom he serendipitously meets in the prison day room. Gidell appears to be Dan's mirror opposite: a personable, engaging, charming, well-spoken, and relaxed young woman who appears different than those othered prisoners introduced within the filmic background context. Gidell radiates a sultry beauty and sensuality that attracts Dan's attention. They embark on a sexual liaison that is not only raw, primordial, and confrontational, but which also leads to hope, deception and then tragedy. When Dan attempts to break off the relationship, after learning of Gidell's illicit liaisons with other guards, she informs him that she is pregnant. In a deceptive ploy to reunite with her drug-lord boyfriend Angel Delgado, she pleads for Dan to help her escape a confinement that would be detrimental for their child. Dan intently complies, and smuggles Gidell outside the prison. Disregarding what her true intentions might be, Dan is driven by love and by the new found hope of a life that he doesn't have – a family, children, and new beginning with Gidell, even though his spirit remains intensely hard and, at the same time, vulnerable. But their relationship soon dissolves after Gidell involves "Angel" in their lives, immediately after her release, and Dan tells her that once they reach New Mexico, Gidell is on her own.

<sup>372</sup> This commentary does not imply that the guarding of either men or women is necessarily conducted in a professionalized manner. However, many ex-prisoner, critical academic and/or activist writers such as Michael Jackson (2002), Karlene Faith (1987,1993), and Gayle Horii (1994) respectively unveil the injustices in the guarding, prisoning, and management of law-breaking women; especially those racialized prisoners and/or women constructed as resistant or unreformable subjects

Although, *Condition Red* is inspired by a true story, its characterological underdevelopment and central plot eventually tapers off into a standardized and illogical crime narrative, complete with suspect actions (Gidell's deceitful ways), villainous characters (drug dealers), and a deadly gunfight, all of which appear clichéd and overdone, with Gidell dying in the melee. This filmic ending undermines and questions the authenticity of its closing filmic message. The last scene depicts Dan (in the present), driving along the highway en route to Mexico, a fugitive headed towards a new start. His words acknowledge Gidell's significant presence in his life as he remarks, "*It's strange, I never got to know her, but still I will never forget her. She helped me break a vicious cycle. She showed me the way out.*" There is a close-up of Dan smiling for the first time, with Gidell in the back seat behind him – a symbolic image of the hope she instilled in him. Deception aside, through their brief, yet intense relationship, Dan is empowered to make a life-altering change, one that frees him from a tumultuous and self-destructive cycle of anger, bitterness, isolationism, negativity, and abuse that engulfed his soul for many years.

In *House of D* (2004), the woman prisoner emerges as a symbolic, mythical image, within an urban, heartfelt fairy tale, where "*you never know who your angel is gonna be*" (tagline). In the life of young Tommy Warsaw, such an archetypical figure comes from a most improbable place, the New York House of Detention, where African American prisoner Lady, becomes "a repository of ancient female wisdom" to her young confidant (Ebert 2005: 1). A high angle overhead shot looks down on Tommy and best friend, Pappass, as they bury their tip monies from a local delivery job outside the massive cathedral-like structure, deciding that it was a safe place. It is here, during one such ordinary day, that the image of Lady in a fleeting, cinematic shot, appears as a darkened figure in the prison. Later, she calls out to Tommy, "*Hey kid; you, with all the money... Why don't you go over to Washington Square Park and score me a dime bag of weed?*" Tommy shouts back to her, "*No way,*" but it is then that they first begin to converse, and slowly connect.

At first, Lady is the unknown prisoner whose outstretched arm holds a mirror through a barred window to catch a glimpse of who's below. But as the film progresses, and Tommy continues to talk with her, in each successive and interactive scene the camera reveals Lady's exterior self, as her face slowly emerges in all its beauty from the

darkness, eventually being engulfed in a radiant light towards the end of the film. It is only the off-screen viewer who witnesses her gradual, representational emergence. Lady's mirror signifies the creation of make-believe images, within a visual medium which usually reflects the looking at oneself, but which becomes the communicative vehicle through which the strong interrelationship between Tommy and Lady develops (Duchovny 2005).

Even though Lady is faceless<sup>373</sup> to Tommy, she is nonetheless humanized in her spirit and mentorship towards the schoolboy who stands amongst the archetypical, flamboyant pimps who yell up to their confined, ladies of the night.<sup>374</sup> Lady's guidance is comedic, refreshing, and serious as she provides motherly support to a teenager whose life is changing; she counsels him on girls, friendship, love, impending manhood, and making the ultimate decision. In one of the more light-hearted filmic scenes, Lady laughs and sings as she instructs Tommy on how to dance. Amongst the quietness of one evening, Tommy moves to the sounds of her song as he holds the light pole, and then dances in the street, in a moment of fantasy-like tenderness with young Melissa, his first date and love to be. It is at this time that the viewer begins to see Lady's beauty through the bars of the archaic, brown stoned prison cell. She is a slender, afro-haired woman, who dances as she sings, almost in remembrance of a heartfelt moment in her life. She watches Tommy with delight and remarks, "*There now, I know why you look so familiar, I must have seen you on soul train.*"

Lady radiates a spirit of hope for Tommy, whose coming of age is otherwise wrought with parental hardship, conflict, and eventual tragedy in the death of his mother from an accidental drug overdose. Afterward, when he returns to the House of Detention one last time, it is to find his buried monies, and talk to Lady. Tommy confronts her with both anger and devastation about his uncertain future and the unknown relatives who are about to take him away. As she smokes a cigarette, Lady coolly responds, "*Man life is hard, but you're a lucky man. Be free. Run.*" Tommy looks

<sup>373</sup> Typically when prisoners are faceless they are dehumanized (O'Sullivan & Wilson 2004: 83).

<sup>374</sup> David Duchovny (2005) wanted to create a realist aspect of the story, having Tommy's fairy-tale interaction with Lady being interjected by his conversations with characters on the street (pimps), who hear their most intimate discussions.

up towards her window and cries, “*I want to wait for you, Lady; I want to see you.*” In order to push him towards independence, she plays into the mythical construction of the murderess woman, as someone to both fear and loath, as she rants “*Boy you will never see me. You know why I’m in here, boy? I murdered my husband in his sleep with my bare hands. She yells, “I’m a murderer. I hate men! And if they let me out of this bitch I’ll kill again. I mean if you in my way I might even kill you!”* Both visually and dialogically, Lady is intense and serious in her words. She is seen as she stands in the prison cell. Lady, however, in an act of tough love adamantly shouts, “*Look – I’m not playing with you no more, Tommy; run. Get out of here. Get away from me...I ain’t your momma. I can’t help you. I got nothing for you!”* Lady throws the mirror out the window, and a piece of glass cuts Tommy on the cheek. Tommy sobs, and then runs. Film-maker David Duchovny describes this moment as “fairy tale” – in which Tommy is wounded and driven away by Lady’s harsh and rejecting words (2005). In the most heartfelt moment in the film, Tommy then makes a devastating, yet otherwise compassionate decision at the hospital. With the realization that his mother will not recover, he takes her off life support. Distraught at having to live with his actions, he then flees New York, with the help of Pappass, his mentally challenged friend and father figure.

Tommy travels to Paris and assumes another identity that he eventually reveals to his wife and son many years later. He later returns to New York in a redemptive attempt to heal from his past and locate the woman who set him free. Tom searches for Lady only to learn that she lied about her offense; the House of Detention never housed violent women.<sup>375</sup> He locates Lady’s home, in a rough inner city neighborhood, and speaks through her apartment door about his journey, and how he had “*made it,*” that young boy she counseled outside the prison. He slides a picture of his family under the door; he has named his son, Odell, after her. As Tom walks away from the building, Bernadette goes to her window, a free woman, and yells to him her last words of motherly wisdom, and it is now for the first time that he sees her beautiful face. Bernadette says, “*Tommy, we did what we had to do, didn’t we? It’s alright, she understands, your poor momma; she understands a boy have to go away before he come back.*” Tommy looks up with tears in his eyes, as he hears her words. She says

<sup>375</sup> Lady’s actual offense is never revealed; it is assumed that she is a prostitute

“run Tommy,” and he replies “I don’t have to run anymore Lady, I can walk now.” Lady opens the package from him that contains a mirror, a medium through which she saw a young boy, and to which she sees the beauty in herself and what she brought to Tommy Warsaw’s life: motherly advice and transformative change. They are both survivors, and symbolize the strength of the human spirit – freed from their pasts, in the most human of ways. Some critics focus on the unbelievability of the film. Peter Travers (*Rolling Stone*) remarks, “[*House of D*] looks and feels authentic, but Duchovny has powered his undeniably personal journey with a counterfeit heart” (2005: 3).

Nonetheless, in *House of D*, the woman prisoner, often vilified in our criminological imaginations, mentors the courageous journey of a young man within a realist fairy tale of beauty, courage, hardship, and ultimate pain, where the achievement of maturity, independence and eventual manhood is the introspective work within one’s innermost self; a transformative process that is helped along the way by the most unlikely of heroines.

In the film *Map of the World* (1999), Alice Goodwin emerges all the wiser and transformed by the women at the Racine county jail, whom she holds with a sense of wonderment and respect despite her exclusion from the inmate subculture, her lack of close interpersonal relationships, and prisoner Dyshett’s relentless harassment. The film does not equivocally represent the women in any remarkable way, yet it is their resilience, under intractable circumstances, that humanizes them. In knowing that other prisoners have children who they miss, Alice is comforted by a group of women during a particularly deep, emotional moment, when she realizes the effect of her situation on daughters, Emma and Claire.

## **The Resistant Imprisoned Woman as Survivor**

The category of ‘survivor’ emerged within the discourses of humanization, oppression/disempowerment, politicization (black carceral liberation), resistance and otherization and is tied to the primary constructs of injustice-justice (authenticity), contextualization, and exploitation further intertwined within the micro conditions of rebellion, agency and self-preservation. The construct of intersectionality is also

important. This demarcation of 'self' is linked to the coping strategies women use to negotiate power that is 'relational rather than absolute' in transitory, contextualized situations, which arise in oppressive interactions with correctionalist agents and other prisoners within the world of institutionalized, carceral practices, and the inmate prison subculture (Bosworth 1999: 127, 130). These constructs are interconnected with survivalist subjectivities which shape particularized forms of resistance, that "highlight the struggles prisoners undergo to retain a sense of choice and [individual] autonomy, in situation[s] where they [remain] relatively powerless" (Bosworth 1999: 155; Bosworth & Carrabine 2001: 503, 505). In some instances, coping strategies bring a sense of idealized hope to women's circumstances, even if they are not actualized in any systematic or personalized way. These 'survivors' emerge within the social and criminological intersectional locations of race, class, politicized causes, socio-structural marginalities, and carceral experiences, including oppressions and injustice.

As well, a woman's carceral fate may be uncertain, and non-resolutive in an undisclosed filmic ending. Contrary to other representations, specifically the sexploitation film and Hollywood product, women's ability to cope is not associated with the gendered behaviours of hegemonic masculinity or normative femininity in those characterological, or collective tactics of behavioural repertoires of violent revenge against adversarial prison predators/abusers<sup>376</sup> in the former style, or the embracement of maternalistic domesticity that nurtures women's rehabilitative potential into proper womanhood, as in the latter filmic form. Rather, in the independent film, women's endurance reflects an individuality of spirit, strength and resilience to the daily hardships they experience, that include both major oppressions and minor irritations, but that nevertheless take on significance and meaning in women's prison lives (Bosworth 1999: 130). In this sense, these prisoner 'survivors' utilize a multiplicity of mechanisms to deal with their confinement, negotiate their inter-relations with both correctional staff persons and other prisoners, and *survive* prison. These mechanisms emerge within particular filmic exemplars and include 1) collective revolt (politicized speechifying and riotous action), 2) personal struggles (small scale rebellions) such as challenging correctional authority ('confrontation-retaliation'), 3) non-involvement in the inmate hierarchy (e.g. doing one's

<sup>376</sup> The exception is *Civil Brand* (2002) as articulated below in a filmic exemplar.

own time) ('withdrawal'), 4) enforced exclusionary practices of others ('incorporation'), and 5) an implicit verbal or behavioural resistance and protection of self from the stigmatizing labels and persecutory harassment from other prisoners. Many of these strategies correspondingly reflect prisoners' actual experiential responses to confinement, documented from critical criminological research (Eaton 1993: 42-51). In many instances, these conditions are interrelated, and multifariously shape a woman's life.

These survivalist strategies may be conceptualized as actions/interactions of resistance that emerge from both collective and individualized efforts to challenge conditions of perceived injustices or subtle oppressions that women experience. As well, consequential outcomes emerge that may reflect tragedy or further carceral oppressions for some prisoners. In some cases, resistance symbolizes acts such as politicized defiance and voice, retaliatory disorder against grave prison injustices, both institutional and personally perpetuated, as depicted in the film *Civil Brand*, and minor, non-violent challenges to seemingly uncompromising male guards, as in *Condition Red*, and *Nine Lives*. In the latter filmic title, prisoner frustrations and feelings of disempowerment culminate in an emotionally volatile response to perceived correctional staff unfairness.

### ***Survival as Political Consciousness and Retaliatory Disorder: Prison Sisters – Wet, Nicky and Frances in Civil Brand (2002).***

In *Civil Brand* (2002), the corporate enslavement and victimization of African American women is explored through "a strong whisper of political consciousness" (Hardy 2003: 1) that emerges from the voices and actions of a group of prison sister 'survivors' who openly resist their oppressive treatment in the Whitehead Correctional Institute.<sup>377</sup> The film aims to invoke a truthfulness in spirit, performance, and themes

<sup>377</sup> The term *prison sister* denotes relational ties that characterize a mutuality of respect and camaraderie between women. Lil'Momma is the fourth sister who is less involved in the struggle.



that unveil the stark realities of women's confinement (Maltby 2005: 378).<sup>378</sup> The accrument of capital from the sweat-shop labour of confined women reflects an element of the prison industrial complex, which "build[s] [upon] older systems of racist and patriarchal [control] to ensure the super exploitation of black women" (Sudbury 2002: 58, 59) through the contemporary punishment industry, that Angela Davis contends is "a parasitic seduction of capitalist profit" (1998: 2). She argues that "to deliver up bodies destined for profitable punishment, the political economy of prisons relies on racialized assumptions of criminality ... ." (2).

Film-maker Neema Barnette (2004) characterizes prisoner Wet as the political motivator of the script; the characterological embodiment of activist Angela Davis, who assertively criticizes the corporatization of confinement. Wet's dialogical commentary clearly represents an acknowledgement and explicit challenge towards her oppressors, the Walker Corporation that benefits from the prisoner's marginalized labour. As the sisters, including newcomer Frances Shepard, stand outside the garment shop, Lil' Momma explains the laborious regime the women live under – long hours in the sweatshop and little free time, all for a \$1.50 per day. After Frances questions the legality of their treatment, Wet quips "*Hell no, that shit ain't legal, slave driving motherfuckers.*" A white male guard orders them into work: "*Alright ladies, it's time to earn your keep,*" and Wet looks back to Frances, and says, "*Welcome to the plantation sister, Frances.*"

In a still introductory shot of Warden Nelson, Sabrina's narrates (off camera), "*Now most people don't know that prison is big business; everybody was trying to make a buck, legal or otherwise.*" But with extended work hours, and continued prisoner abuse (for example, Nikki's beating), Wet proclaims that she's had enough mistreatment and voices a resistance that seeks action and reform. Accordingly, Frances and Wet organize the women in solidarity against the corrupt administration, by covertly circulating a petition that they intend to give to corporate officials, during their official

<sup>378</sup> Initially the film-makers intended to have an opening filmic scene that depicts sister Frances killing her abusive husband, because, the research shows, there is a prevalence of prisoners incarcerated for the crime of domestic homicide, and the abuse and violent oppression of women "is a gender-related factor of their lives" (Comack 1996: 39). This scene was deleted, however, due to production problems.

prison visit. Upon their arrival at the sweat-shop, Frances, in politicized defiance to the prisoners' hardships, stands up and declares "*this is peaceful work stoppage; we stand in solidarity with all reform movements demanding fair treatment for inmates, better living conditions, better work conditions, better heat, and an end to the vicious beatings and sexual abuse we face every day.*" Once Nikki hands the men the petition, the entire group of workers stand in unison for the cause, as captain Deese exploitatively yells "*your black asses are going to pay for this; get back to work, I say!*" The women expletively refuse and a melee ensues, visually expressed through a canted angular shot, with fast jarring and slow motion movement. After another heartless beating by correctional staff, Frances and Nikki end up in segregation.

Although, the filmic characters are initially presented as articulate, smart and politically conscious women who strive to expose corporate greed, and prisoner maltreatment, *Civil Brand's* narratological direction primarily focuses on an exploitative tale of clichéd archetypes, individualized depredations, and prisoner violence and disorder albeit within a politicized commentary that aims to unveil racialized systemic injustice and individualized carceral oppressions. The central villain, Captain Deese, becomes the misogynous rapist, who targets prisoners for sexual victimization, extortion, and verbal and physical abuse. As well, the corporate greed and exploitation is embodied in male characterizations that cross racial lines – the African American, opportunistic, Warden Nelson, and the business representatives, all of whom are privileged southern, white men.

In this way, the film's underlying intention falls short, even though important threads of socially conscious commentary appear, especially through the characterological traits and actions of guard Mike Meadows, a soft-spoken, sensitive, black college student (majoring in criminal law) who empathizes with the women's plight. The film attempts to authenticate the reality of the prison industrial complex by a multiplicity of articles that appear across his computer screen as he researches this issue; titles that read: "*Profit and Punishment,*" "*Today's Prison Parallel of Early South,*" "*If You Build It, They Will Come,*" and "*The Harvest of Human Labour Equals Big Profit for Public Corporations.*" Rather than speechifying about this issue, the film-makers felt that if they showed guard Mike Meadows searching "*prison as business*" on the computer that it would encourage viewers to seek a broader understanding of the prison

industrial complex through the same process (Barnette 2004). Mike's face becomes superimposed across the articles, as he strives to understand the inmate-for-profit, corporatist mentality, while Sabrina's narrative voice simultaneously documents how ski coats, made for \$1.50 per day, are sold in France for \$1,000 dollars. Later in the film, Mike searches deeper into the women's plight, and other articles emerge that include such titles as, "*Increasingly These Women Suffer Sexual Abuse and Harassment*," and "*When Corporations Take Over, Guards Make Their Own Rules*."<sup>379</sup>

Eventually, the women turn violently against the system, after Lil' Momma, a pregnant, Christian teenage preacher, subsequently dies following a sexual assault by Captain Deese. In an act of retaliation, Wet, Nikki, and Frances, traumatized and angered, brandish guns and take hostages in the infirmary. They are constructed as desperate and impulsive renegades who identify themselves as the "*Women's Reform Committee*"; prisoners who will shoot their hostages (Captain Deese and Doctor Moss) in a riotous mayhem, - if the Governor does not contact the women within an hour. Wet asserts, "*We gotta make our demands. We gotta do what real revolutionaries do to get attention.*" An agitated Warden Nelson reacts: "*What do you think this is? Some kind of political action?*" Frances replies, "*Everything is political... she who got the gun makes the motherfuckin' rules!*" The women's violent and active resistance towards their carceral plight and the murder of their prison sister was necessary, as Joyce Lewis contends: "The sacrifice of [their] people [was] meaningful on every level" (2004). Eventually, the women die in their heroic efforts. After Wet is shot in a gun battle with guards, Nikki and Frances are killed in a blaze of gunfire, when a group of guards, with shotguns drawn high, ambush them as the women attempt to surrender. Eventually, though the prison authorities are taken down by unveiling the documented injustices

In a post-script narration, Sabrina concludes, "*We're dedicating our victory to the memory of my girls.... We did the crime and we had to do the time, but ain't nobody said nothing about abuse and exploitation being part of the sentence. ...Now that you know what I know pass the word along, please; we got work to do. We can't do it up in no jail.*" Film-makers Joyce Lewis and Neema Barnette wanted the message to be clear that

<sup>379</sup> Canadian ex-prisoner, academic and activist Gayle Horii argues that the imprisonment of women ensures job security for correctional workers (2001: 244).

“revolution is made on youth,” and that it is imperative to show women’s fight, violent or otherwise, for justice, particularly because resistance to legalized injustice is often rare and unpublicized (Barnette 2004). The women’s aggression is legitimated by the film-makers even in the beating death of guard Deese; an act that symbolized good triumphing over evil (2004). Although the underlying social commentary offers a politicized critique of the prison industrial complex, the filmic message continues to support imprisonment as a legitimate response for female lawbreakers, provided that they are not susceptible to injustice or abuse. Neema Barnette’s (2004) commentary reiterates this point, as she remarks that the women are not “convicts that will tell you I don’t belong in jail. They know they belong there, but they say [that] being used and abused ... for slave labour for no wages was not part of what the judge sentenced them to.” In this respect, an understanding of confinement as the automatic oppression of women through an “generic and absolute imbalance of power within prison systems” (Horii 2001: 238) appears to be lacking in the film-makers’ perspectives. Furthermore, *Civil Brand’s* filmic depictions, racist structures, and ideologies that strategically render punishment a profitable and palatable practice, are embodied in fictitious and exploitative themes, characters, and exploitative behavioral repertoires of heroic revolutionary violence and resistance, that link institutionalized oppressions with male villains, and criminalized women who require carceral containment and death (Davis 1998: 2). Nonetheless, “beyond exploring the reality of the prison industrial complex and its machinery of lobbying, marketing and image, we must research and expose the full collateral damage of mass incarceration” (Schlosser as cited in Ferrell et al. 2008. 78).

***Survival As An Everyday Personal Rebellion: Sandra in Nine Lives (2005) and Gidell Ryan in Condition Red (1995).***

Women’s preservation of self-dignity/respect, autonomy, and control can emerge through small scale rebellions, that are “expressive, everyday forms of subversion and dissent” and that symbolize women’s performative attempts to address the disempowerment they experience, through the preservation of those ‘normalized’ non-prison subjectivities that help prisoner ‘survivors’ endure their confinement (Bosworth 1999: 130, Bosworth & Carrabine 2001: 505, 511). As Bosworth asserts, “while inmates’ identities as ‘women in prison’ [appear] to be defined by the closed walls of the prison,

their alternative interpretations of meaning of the material and symbolic choices open to them ... [give] them some possibility of resistance” (1999: 150). For example, the subjectivity of mother, albeit in the non-traditional sense, is maintained through familial visiting privileges, while the momentary preservation of inner solitude from the broader prison subculture may emerge in subjectivities which unveil a prisoner’s non-criminalized selves. In these instances, resistance is not related to hegemonic male actions, associatively linked to the prisoner-initiated riots and mayhem. Instead, women’s subtle, yet forceful actions defy qualities of proper femininity, such as passivity and deference to male authority, in ways that are non-violent, and almost implicitly banal. Two films – *Condition Red* (1995) and *Nine Lives* (2005) – depict women’s ability to actively challenge the interrelations of power that uncompromising male guards enforce upon them, during their interactions with prisoners - a power that is all-pervasive within a carceral world, that discursively controls women through correctionalist techniques of inmate management, surveillance, and control.

In *Condition Red*, Officer Dan Cappelli abruptly approaches prisoner Gidell Ryan, who sits in the prison dayroom, and loudly sings to the tunes on her Walkman radio. Figuratively, Dan symbolizes the correctionalist eye of surveillance, embodied in the prison guard, who strictly stands watch over people under his supervision. In the moment, Gidell enjoys her leisurely retreat, actively withdrawing from the mix of the inmate subculture that predisposes women to trouble and victimization from others; she is an ordinary prisoner doing her own time (Owen 1998).<sup>380</sup> It is within this inner space that Gidell’s subjectivity changes, through her redefinition of herself from prison inmate to vocalist – her real occupation on the street, as a night club singer (Eaton 1993: 44). However Gidell’s solitude is disrupted by Dan, a strict disciplinarian who slams his hand on the table and abruptly orders “*let’s go; kitchen!*” She explicitly resists his demands, “*I have a mother. She lives in Chicago.*” Dan is not impressed. Gidell who appears friendly, instead kindly asks his permission to stay a little longer, saying, “*you know I hate this*

<sup>380</sup> Barbara Owen (1998: 167) termed the concept ‘in the mix’ as it pertains to the culture of confinement in the women’s prison. As prisoners negotiate the carceral world, styles of doing their time can be intermixed with “trouble, hustles, conflicts, and drugs, known as ‘the mix.’ ” Owen developed this understanding from her work and research at the Central California Women’s’ Facility, in Chowchilla, California.

*place, [the] same faces day in, day out.*” She tries to engage him in conversation, or a game of chess, but Dan adamantly insists that she is to leave the dayroom immediately. Gidell complies, but does so with an overt resistance that deconstructs Dan’s subjectivity as someone who is inherently troubled and susceptible to prisoner abuse – allegations made against him at the men’s facility. She responds “*you’re the boss, creature.*” He forcefully grabs her arm. “*What you’d say?*” Gidell calmly reiterates her words, as she looks directly at Dan (in a close-up shot) “*creature; it suits you. Do you want me to tell you about yourself? You’re not married; you live alone [and] you like busting motherfuckers upside the head.*” But when he angrily replies “*you don’t know shit about me,*” Gidell says “*I don’t envy you Officer Cappelli. You’re not free; you might as well be in here with us. As a matter of fact, you are.*” Here, Gidell’s resistance binarily constructs Dan, the prison guard, as *other* to anything human; as the “*creature*”, a subjectivity that is commonly associated with the criminalized woman in her multifarious othered incarnations.

In the film *Nine Lives* (2005), film-maker Rodrigo Garcia, situates his first vignette within the authenticable experiences of prison injustice, protest, and its carceral consequences through the characterological experiences and actions of prisoner Sandra, at the L. A. County jail.<sup>381</sup> A single, uninterrupted, cinematic shot depicts Sandra’s acts of resistance that moves from her direct and insistent challenges towards an unnamed guard, to an emotional crescendo of physical rebellion and confrontation towards an unjust system and its agents, including supervisor Captain Ron. In this depiction, Sandra’s protest is clearly tied to the discourse of maternalism and the subjectivity of prison mother, and she uses this status to directly challenge an underlying social control which is grounded in both individualistic, authoritative actions, and systemic prison practices. A visit with her child helps Sandra survive another day in her prison sentence. The filmic sequence begins after Sandra finishes her janitorial job, and prepares to meet with her young daughter. As Sandra quickly moves throughout the

<sup>381</sup> The independent film, to varying degrees, tries to create a sense of authenticity through narrative frameworks or aesthetic conventions. Many films downplay characterizations of the criminal woman (*Karla, House of D, Map of the World, Condition Red, and Nine Lives*) that were neither clichéd nor demonizing formulations (exploitation,) nor characters constructed under melodramatic circumstances (Hollywood).

institution, two security barrier doors open to direct her way to the visits area, where she then approaches a male security officer, in a momentary exchange/interaction to inform him of her preplanned arrangements, approved by the administration. In anticipation, Sandra calls out "*Officer, I have visitors.*" The guard quickly asserts his power over Sandra, and strictly informs her that there are no visits that day, despite Sandra's belief to the contrary. She insists, "*No – yes, they okayed them again. I'm pretty sure they okayed them; please check!*" The guard sarcastically replies, "*Anything else you need? I've been here two minutes; already I've got to deal with her Majesty. Tickets please.*" He stares at Sandra through the barrier window, and makes a call to determine if there are visits that day. Sandra is adamant, "*I'm pretty sure they okayed them.*" The guard continues his stare and reasserts his authority, "*I'm not asking you. Step back madam.*" He then remarks, "*You know, people like you don't do well in here.*" Sandra's softly asks, "*Why do you say that?*" The guard replies "*You just don't. It's natural selection.*" A close-up shows Sandra up against the wall, with an emotive look of humiliation on her face. The guard's condemnatory remarks clearly reflect his disdain towards a prisoner who openly challenges, albeit in a polite and respectful way, his condescending attitude, disrespect, and abuse of power.<sup>382</sup> At times, the shot of the guard does not clearly distinguish his face; almost symbolic of the commonality or generic quality of this encounter that prisoners are susceptible to experiencing with guards. Finally, he opens the door and grants Sandra access to the closed visiting area. Then in an uplifting voice, he informs her, "*Okay, it's your lucky day.*" In this instance, the independent film-maker focuses on presenting an inconsequential, non-dramatic scene to include in the film, which is not sensationalized or overdramatic in characterological performance in its depiction of prisoner resistance.

Conversely, as the sequence progresses towards its climatic ending, Sandra's resistance intensifies, and eventually spirals into an emotionally volatile reaction that is fuelled by feelings of frustration, disempowerment, and disappointment, during a failed family visit. Initially, Sandra is filled with enthusiasm and eager anticipation at the sight of her daughter through the glass barrier window. Soon afterward, though, it becomes

<sup>382</sup> These situations are all too familiar in actual prisoners' lives, as documented by activist Karlene Faith in her work with incarcerated women (Faith 2000: 166).

apparent that their communication is blocked by a phone that malfunctions in the visiting booth. Increasingly irritated, Sandra yells to correctional staff, "*She can't hear me!*" She communicatively reassures her child by loudly declaring, "*They're going to fix it... are you okay?*" Sandra then shouts, "*Are you alright; are you alright baby?*" Her daughter puts her ear up to the window, but still cannot hear Sandra. The guards make no attempt to rectify the situation. After Captain Ron tells her to quiet down, Sandra confronts him; with the fear that with only five minutes left, she will not have another visit until next month. She grabs his arm and insists, "*What the hell do I suppose to do now? I need to talk to the girl. Why is it that I can't talk to my own daughter?*" Ron informs her that the visit is over and that she must keep her voice down. But the two become engaged in a confrontational exchange, as Sandra screams, "*Why! Why!*" and pounds her elbows down on the visiting booth's lower ledge. She is now physically restrained by Captain Ron and another female guard, who grab Sandra around the neck. A distraught and visibly upset Sandra then apologizes and makes an impassioned plea (spoken in Spanish) to Captain Ron, who permits her to go back to the booth. Sandra says her goodbyes to her child: "*Baby I'll see you next time. Momma loves you so much.*" The two kiss through the glass in a heartfelt moment of a mother's love and a child's loss. Sandra then explodes with anger, crying "*Nothing works in this piece of shit!*" as she forcefully smashes the phone against the cubicle window. The shot abruptly ends as the guards forcefully press her face down on the booth ledge, and Sandra yells, "*You motherfuckers!*" She is then physically dragged away in a state of agitation and anger.

Sandra's defiance, and the violence which results in excessive measures of physical control and containment by correctional staff, is given significance and meaning through the context of a failed institutional prison visit (Shaw 2000: 62, 63, 66). There is no resolution or happy ending to her situation, nor does the viewer learn about the long term consequences of her actions, except to hear the staff-voiced sanction, "*You're in lockdown.*" Sandra's disempowerment is clearly expressed in a volatility of emotional vulnerability, agitation and anger. Captain Ron's perceived insensitivity to her predicament, refusal to move Sandra to another visiting cubicle, or extend the visit beyond the regulated scheduled hours contributes to her reaction, governed by a strict regime of prison rules and practices. It is, nevertheless, the human condition that makes Sandra's struggles and emotional outrage all the more understandable, given the



difficulty and uncertainty of her unrelatable circumstances – namely, the loss of contact and connection with her daughter, a consequence of Sandra's imprisonment. Even so, beyond this filmic portrayal viewers may question how Sandra's reaction to failed parental contact with her daughter may ultimately problematize her subsequent interrelations with correctional staff, her potential treatment within the prison, and her carceral release. In actuality, prisoners feel a sense of responsibility and experience both anxiety and concern regarding children and familial responsibilities lost during a carceral stay (Shaw 2000: 66).

Prior to this event, Sandra was an otherwise seemingly model prisoner, going about her day in the most ordinary way and doing her own time without incident. Conversely, an alternate, more conservative cinephilic interpretation may redefine Sandra's actions as inherently problematic; perhaps as an emotional or mental health issue that reinforces existing stereotypes and pathologizations of the criminal woman. In particular, the volatility and explosiveness of Sandra's rage may serve to support the impetus to confine women who are deemed as unpredictably aggressive. Later in the film, Sandra's life circumstances are contextualized more deeply, as she appears for an instant in another woman's story.

***Protection of the Self: Resisting the Label of Disordered or Criminalized Subject: Alice Goodwin in Map of the World (1999), Sandra in Nine Lives (2005), and Karla Homolka in Karla (2006)***

In the titles *Map of the World* (1999) and *Karla* (2006), prisoners reject the labels that construct them as subjects that are particularly demonizing in the criminological imagination. Here, individual resistance to constructions of the prisoner's subjectivity somehow protects women's own conceptions of self from the condemnatory labels attributed to them by others, in particular non-carceral, community members, prisoner adversaries, or classificatory correctional agents. The creation of such labels serves an exclusionary purpose, whereby these women become the ultimate *other*, juxtaposed against the more ordinary, non-labeled prisoners. In this way, rejection of such constructions contributes to women's survival through self preservation.

In *Map of the World* (1999), Alice Goodwin's reaction (at times inaction) to her characterological defamation is dialogically and behaviourally framed, in her active withdrawal from the institutional subculture and/or her explicit indifference, and at times, in her complete defiance to the labels and accusations made against her, from prisoner Dyshett, or outside community persons. As well, criminalized labels, such as 'baby killer,' may reference a particular meaning for Alice; namely, the accidental death of Libby, her best friend's child. In these depictions, acts of resistance "are not always recognizable in purely material or instrumental terms" (Bosworth 1999: 126). In one scene, as a group of women, congregate around the television set, Dyshett's taunts are especially damning, as she theatrically mimics an Oprah moment. Dyshett begins, "*Hello, hello all you white girls watching, who think you not racist because you just love Oprah. Today, today we are talking to baby killers. Our first guest is Debbie; she strangled her two nigger babies in the back seat of her car. Welcome, Debbie.*" (Debbie gets up and leaves the common room). The women wail like babies. "*Our next guest is Alice,*" Dyshett continues, "*Alice likes to drown her babies in her very own pond. Welcome Alice. When did you first realize that you were a baby killer?*" Alice, who remains calm and composed, slowly responds in a subtly sarcastic but resistant tone, "*One of the reasons I like you so much is you do all the talking; it is very restful.*" In the last cinematic shot, Dyshett screams "*Fuckin bitch!*" as she lunges towards Alice. The film abruptly cuts to another scene outside the prison context, with nothing else shown of the confrontation. Although, the viewer is left to assume that Dyshett victimizes Alice, the film takes an unpredictable turn. It is Alice who wakes up in the infirmary with a self-inflicted head injury, in an act of self-punishment for her now acknowledged transgressions: Libby's fatal accident, and the inappropriate discipline given to student Robbie Mackessy (the child who falsely accused her of molesting him), a fact revealed later in the film. Alice violently hits her head against the table twice and falls backwards onto the floor as Dyshett lunges towards her. After she returns to the unit, Alice learns what actually happened from a few women who comfort her. Dyshett, it turns out, had not physically assaulted her.

Initially and throughout Alice's prison stay, she rejects the charges made against her with a frivolous and flippant sarcasm towards her accusers. Impatient with husband Howard's feelings of community ostracism and victimhood, Alice angrily laments, "*What – what, are people saying? [Are they saying] that I'm some vicious woman, who runs*

*from funerals and tortures children with rectal thermometers? I have a right to know so I can defend myself; tell me what's being said."* She is arrogant, strong and self-righteous in her convictions, cocky and overconfident that her imprisonment is only a temporary reprieve from her otherwise muddled life.

Alice also withdraws from any involvement with the other women, or the dynamics of the prison subculture, even though her status as a 'baby fucker/child killer' throws her into the mix. She has a unique reaction to confinement – one of indifference and inconvenience. Alice does not embody the subjectivity of the harassed, weak victim. Rather, she appears unthreatened by her subordinate and condemnatory position within the inmate hierarchy, and any potential repercussions for her crimes. Her enforced exclusion from others, however, results in her exclusionary commentary towards another woman, Debbie (Eaton 1993: 44). Earlier in the film, during her first visit with Howard, Alice complains about the absurdity of her predicament and the people she meets. She constructs Debbie within the crimes of infanticide, explaining, "*See the girl next to me... that's my cell mate. She killed her kids. She's so fat she didn't know she was pregnant.*" Such an underlying commentary that constructs Debbie as the *other*, serves to exclude Alice from being labeled in similar vein symbolic of Alice's implicit rejection, of taking on the label of the condemnatory, guilty subject. Still, underneath her seemingly strong exterior and attempts at self-preservation, Alice clearly holds incredible guilt and responsibility for acts that somehow self-legitimate her imprisonment.

In any case, Alice's outward indifference to the condemnatory labels she receives from Dyshett serves to protect her from confrontational exchanges with the other women that might consequentially create more conflict in her relationships and further problematize Alice's prison time. As well, the rejection of persecutory constructions insulates an already fragile inner-self that is subject to the carceral outsider-ship, and the corresponding personalized strain and hardship it brings.

In *Nine Lives* (2005), Sandra rejects an implied subjectivity of 'repeat offender' in her interactions with a female guard, and then another prisoner. At the outset, it is clear that Sandra remains low key, stays to herself, and becomes actively detached from the carceral world in which she lives; an act that facilitates in her prison survival. The "*trick is...making yourself invisible*" Captain Ron informs her. As such, any indication or

suggestion of Sandra's permanence within the prison becomes extremely problematic. This is apparent after she briefly crosses paths with a female guard, whose commentary is particularly distressing. The woman constructs Sandra as "*someone who is everywhere...you're becoming a fixture around here* – " a designation that troubles Sandra, who softly replies "No," to the guards hints of her permanency within a place, the prison, from which she just wants to disappear.

In a subsequent scene, Sandra meets an older, presumably long term offender outside the visits area. After, when the woman senses Sandra's gaze towards her, she looks up asks, "*Why are you staring at me, sister?*" Sandra, politely replies, "*I'm sorry.*" The lady then inquires, "*You looking to make friends?*" Sandra answers, "*No.*" The lady remarks, with a smile "*[So] you think you don't need any.*" They two women briefly converse, as the unnamed prisoner tries to place Sandra within the inmate culture, and her carceral sentence. When she queries Sandra as to why she is "*locked up,*" Sandra silently hesitates and responds, "*The first time was a mistake.*" She then immediately lashes out against the woman, who tries to offer a friendly tip of advice. Sandra's has a disrespectful and condemnatory attitude towards the older woman's prison status. "*I don't need a tip from you, stay off my back! What advice can you give me? Look at you, in prison at your age. It's embarrassing; no, it's disgusting!*" This prisoner symbolizes, within the discourse of ageism, what Sandra fears the most – continued and subsequent incarcerations. In addition, the woman's identification as a prison mother, with a daughter Sandra's age, symbolizes Sandra's need to dissociate from the master status of prisoner, so that she can maintain a self-image of good mother, if only for an transitory period during her visit with her child, but nonetheless a role that is continually questioned, especially for someone possibly on the verge of a repeat offender status (Celinska & Siegel 2010: 466). Sandra wants to become invisible from her circumstances and current predicament, and any indication of future or longer term imprisonment is either implicitly ignored or abruptly and angrily rejected. It is in this way that she preserves some part of her 'self' from the prison and its associated insider statuses, while trying to maintain fragments of a pre-prison identity (Eaton 1993: 42).

Women resist particularized subjectivities, even if they are grounded in a discursively-based terminology that attempts to diagnostically understand a prisoner's criminalized actions. Karla Homolka, in *Karla* (2006), is a case in point. She is a woman

who de-psychiatrizes herself to Dr. Arnold, as she leaves the Regional Saskatchewan prison, with the commentary, “*I’m not a psychopath, you know,*” a subjectivity that nonetheless is deemed appropriately suitable for a woman, implicated in such heinous acts.

## **Motherhood**

In the independent film, motherhood is related to the discourses of maternalism (non-traditional), humanization, and marginalization, associated with the constructs of intersectionality, depathologization, contextualization, criminalization, and transformation. Women are portrayed away from conventional notions of white middle-class parenthood, proper femininity, or compulsory, male-dominated, patriarchal familial units, idealized in the Hollywood film. These women don’t aspire to an idealized version of mothering; instead, they may parent outside the normative expectations placed upon women. In most cases these maternal transgressions do not negatively construct women as deficient or flawed mothers, with the exception of Alice Goodwin in *Map of the World* (1999), whose lax supervision of a friend’s child, and a terrible accident further spiral into allegations of child molestation. Prisoners may be single-parents, or they may reject, struggle with, or embrace their parental responsibilities to varying degrees. Whatever the case, their deviation from traditional motherhood is contextualized rather than pathologized or demonized. As well, the intersectional social locations of race and class are emphasized in the subjectivity formations of the prisoner as mother. Two sub-categorical embodiments emerge – the ‘struggling non-traditional’ and ‘marginalized, racialized’ mother.

### ***The Struggling Non-traditional Mother: Alice Goodwin in Map of the World (1999)***

*Map of the World* (1999) is the complex, characterological study of Alice Goodwin, a middle-aged, Caucasian, educated woman whose world is turned upside down by a sudden tragedy. The film is the readapted version of a dark novel, by author Jane Hamilton that explores a woman’s feelings towards her family, during a crisis that could happen to almost anyone. Although Alice is ensconced in a routine and

uncomplicated regime as a dairy farmer and part time school nurse, her life is anything but simple. She is a complex woman: at times, distant, caustic, abrasive, opinionated, self-possessed, and unconventionally inappropriate and misunderstood in the most idiosyncratic of ways; an outsider to a pastoral Wisconsin community, in which she resides. Critic Russell Smith (*Austin Chronicle*) notes that Alice “responds to most situations... with a detached sensibility... [and] ruthless honesty that wounds and confuses most people who are unaccustomed to such [an] open expression of ‘unacceptable feelings’ most of us suppress by mutual consent” (2000: 1). Alice’s peculiarity emerges in one notable scene, when she is questioned by the police regarding Robbie MacKessy, an incorrigible student. As the female officer queries her in the school hallway, Alice becomes silly, and inappropriately jokes as she flippantly responds to their questions. Visually, Alice looks dishevelled in her dress and demeanour. At one point she turns to them with a smile and laughs, “*you see I’m sick...you want to know the truth, I’m trying to have a complete nervous breakdown, and no one will let me do it in peace. [giggles and laughs] I hurt everybody.*” She then turns away, and scurries down the hall.

Her emotional responses to family are similarly scattered and unusual. Alice Goodwin is first introduced through her varied domestic roles of wife, mother, and homemaker; subjectivities she is not particularly reconciled with, and to which she holds inner reservations that are blurted out in moments of stressful, almost witty, frustration. In one scene, Alice, exacerbated by daughter Emma’s continual temper tantrums, simply walks out the door, with the cat in hand, shaking it to relieve Alice of her frustrations. As her husband walks by Alice nonchalantly smiles and remarks, “*what am I doing? [laughs] I’m about to suffocate this cat instead of our daughter, that’s what I’m doing. I think I’m handling it fine Howard, I really think I am.*” Earlier in the film, Alice admits to friend Teresa Collins, “*Sometimes I don’t even like her [Emma].*”

Actress Sigourney Weaver reflects an anti-Hollywoodized version of motherhood – one that is not embodied in the beautified, plasticity of glamorous stars, who “muck about in pajamas [where] a little epiphany ... [is] signaled by a broken cereal bowl on the kitchen floor” (Maslin 1999: 1). Alice, instead “plays one of those harried, overworked women you see fighting to get a child-seat safety bar over her kid’s head. You wouldn’t put it past her to eat her young – and with the annoying child acting on display here, you

wouldn't blink if she did" (Morris 2000a: 2). Motherhood and domesticity overwhelm her. Alice doesn't embrace traditional womanhood; in fact she despises it to some degree. She is the 'struggling, non-traditional mother.' A jarring, panning shot displays her chaotic, disheveled home; a nightmare of sloppy housekeeping and disorganization, unruly, squabbling children, and a husband, Howard, who seems oblivious to everything – even an enflamed frying pan on the stove. On the contrary, Alice's best friend Teresa is the exemplary mother, someone who embraces childcare and domesticity with an ease that makes Alice appear all the more awkward and inept in her maternal duties. It seems that Alice is persistently self-absorbed in contemplative struggles with herself, which result in moments of distraction and preoccupation, one of which creates a tragic and pivotal narratological turn in the film.

One morning, while under Alice's care, Teresa's daughter, Lizzy, wanders outside the house, only to drown in a nearby pond on the Goodwin's property.<sup>383</sup> Accordingly, this tragedy further constructs Alice as a 'negligent, pseudo caregiver' to Teresa's daughters, amidst her friend's grief, which is "a small gem of truthful heartbreak" that envelops the film (Ebert 2000: 1). Alice is soon ostracized in the community, and her role as a protector and nurturer of children (as a school nurse) becomes further questioned and denigrated by allegations of child molestation, and her eventual imprisonment. Her maternal transgressions result in the worst punishment of all, alienation and temporary separation from her husband, children, and extended family members. Contrary to other popular cultural representations of the penal subject, in this film, Alice rather emerges from her carceral ordeal in a state of grace and transformation, and a woman alleged to be neglectful and victimizing of children is somehow returned to her former subjectivity, in an almost more humanized way. Alice re-emerges with a strength and resiliency that enables her to achieve some level of personal forgiveness and peace. Her hardened, prickly, opinionated, and detached exterior that appeared uncaring towards those whom she had hurt, now becomes reconstituted in a woman resigned to her fate, in a peaceful solace of almost quieted

<sup>383</sup> Just prior to this event Alice goes upstairs to find her swim suit, and amidst the untidiness she opens a drawer and looks at a childhood picture with her mother, and Alice's drawing of her envisioned *Map of the World*. It is now that Alice fondly remembers her past, which distracts her from the chaos of her present situation, but causes a lapse in her supervision of the girls.

acceptance of the way her life has changed. While she still has moments of anger and resistance towards her fate, and the hurt she has caused others, in the end, she comes to terms with forgiving herself, amidst the punishment and self-injurious actions that she felt were so deserved. In the closing filmic scene, Alice's *Map of the World* becomes a recreated terrain from her childhood memories – that envisioned, an ideal country, where she was alone and at peace. Now, if Alice can remake that world over, it will include those persons most important to her; her family – Claire, Emma, Howard, and herself – “*outcasts making a perfect circle,*” who sit together in a semblance of peaceful harmony as the shot slowly fades to black, in a symbolic gesture of renewed faith and hope.

### ***The Marginalized, Racialized Mother: Sandra in Nine Lives (2005) and Nicky and Frances in Civil Brand (2002)***

In *Nine Lives* (2005), issues of mothering originate in another woman's story, external to the carceral world that illuminates the momentary connectedness of people's lives. An unhappily married woman prepares to embark on a forbidden rendezvous at a roadside motel, with her lover, Mr. Stanton. Ruth Stein (*San Francisco Chronicle*) remarks “Much thought has been put into giving her ... a fitting name – Ruth, with all the biblical weight it carries.” (2005: 2). As the two walk to their room, he looks towards the sky. “*That's the same moon that Jesus saw, and Buddha and Mohamed. They're a reminder to us all that we are linked to everyone and everything on this little planet. Connections; we make them and we're made of them,*” he tells Ruth. Stanton swings Ruth around in a romantic embrace as the two affectionately dance and then kiss their way to the room. It is then that they come upon the image of two policemen accosting a woman in another suite, across the parking lot. Stanton seriously remarks, “*A turn of events for someone. I hope it's something she can laugh about tomorrow. It's laugh or regret; the ugliest feeling in the world.*” Ruth looks down almost in contemplation of what she is about to do. In their room, she reluctantly engages in Stanton's delight at her adulterous decision. After he leaves to get some ice, Ruth stands outside the motel and witnesses Sandra's apprehension by police (prior to her imprisonment). With an inquisitive curiosity, Ruth walks towards the open door and peers inside, as the chambermaid inquires as to whether she knows the woman. In a brief conversation,



Ruth learns of Sandra's plight: she'd been living as a fugitive and feeling a sense of personal injustice and marginalization, which are somehow decontextualized by the maid, who laments that [Sandra] was on the run:

*You know that didn't stop her from talking my ear off. Something about her little girl and how unfair life was...how the stars all line up for some people and not for others. I mean she had this whole world view. You would not believe the people that pass through here on a full moon. I mean, they're just like ghosts dragging their chains....Well, hey we all make our beds, huh.*

It is this momentary exchange regarding Sandra's circumstances, perceived choices, and their impact on her child that has a sudden influence on Ruth's current predicament. She thinks of her own relationship with her daughter, Samantha; one fraught with conflict and strain in a household where Samantha becomes the conduit of communication between her two detached and conflictual parents, Ruth and her physically disabled husband, Larry. Upon re-entering the motel room, Ruth chooses maternal responsibility over a hedonistic rendezvous of illicit passion. As Mr. Stanton returns, Ruth sits on the bed and speaks to her daughter on the phone, emotively telling her, "*I love you Sammy; your mother loves you.*" Mr. Stanton, with a look of disappointment realizes the painful outcome, and as he looks into Ruth's eyes his commentary, "*she's a good girl,*" signifies a hint of moralistic support for her decision. Ruth's words to Samantha reflect a heartfelt sentiment similar to that conveyed by Sandra to her daughter during a failed family visit. In this vignette though, it is the middle-class, white mother, Ruth, who returns home to reunite with her daughter, while Sandra, the marginalized, woman-of colour, is sent to prison, separated from the outside world and her child.

Marginalized motherhood in *Civil Brand* (2002) is contextualized within two domains of influence: the prevalence of gang violence in inner city communities, and the over-imprisoning of the African American transgressor. In the former condition, Frances Shepard loses her young daughter, Maxine to a drive-by shooting, while in the latter case, parental contact and connection is directly affected by the long term incarceration of prisoner Nikki Barnes. For both these women, the loss of their maternal responsibilities through death, custody issues, and a prolonged carceral absence results in their lives being perceived as meaningless. During the women's riotous resistance,

guard Cervante's attempt to appeal to their motherly concerns, and the impact their actions will have on their children's' lives, has little deterrent effect – but this act nonetheless plays into the gendered notion that maternalism will somehow tame the criminalized woman. As well, in *Civil Brand* the film-makers aimed to politicize parenthood through the characterological commentary of expectant mother to be, Lil' Momma, who expresses to newcomer, Frances Shepard, the anticipation that the women feel towards Mother's Day. Joyce Lewis (2004) felt it was imperative to acknowledge how imprisonment is difficult on the family, which often disintegrates in the absence of the mother or caregiver figure. In *House of D* (2004), Lady is absent in the lives of her two young sons, whose picture hangs on the wall, the only fragment of humanity in the archaic, stone segregation cell. But, in her absence from their lives, Lady takes on a 'pseudo maternal' role with young Tommy Warsaw, who is often the provider of emotional strength for his own depressed and grief stricken mother, a troubled woman who is unable to provide the parental advice and support that he needs. This non-traditional depiction of the prison inmate challenges those culturally and criminologically based notions that construct the criminal woman as a bad mother, like that found in the Hollywood film *White Oleander* (2002).

## **Male Characters: Authorized or Illegitimate Correctional Releasers, Sexual Offenders/Killers, and Child Caregiving Recipients**

In the independent film, adult male characters primarily comprise two categorizations or masculinity formations: 'authorized or legitimate correctional releasers,' and 'sexual offenders/killers,' that emerge within the discourses of patriarchal power, correctionalism classification – official versus commonsensical – oppression, and violence respectively tied to the constructs of institutionalized regulation/control and formal/informal networks, versus individualized abuse, predation, victimization and death. The construct of intersectionality is also present. It is within two specific films – the exploitative, yet socially conscious *Civil Brand* (2002), and the controversial docudrama *Karla* (2006) – that the latter aforementioned subjectivity emerges within villainous, disordered males who are depicted in a disturbing manner. This characterization is particularly abhorrent in *Karla*. As well, males represent a third

embodiment; namely, youth/children with either primary or secondary ties to the female prisoner protagonist, in ways that place her within a pseudo caregiving role. Hegemonic masculinity in the filmic exemplars below portrays the power, whether authoritatively welded or misogynously abusive, that male characters have over confined women. For example, correctional agents carry out various roles in the prison, from conducting a psychiatric assessment to the guarding of inmate wards. Such depictions can be downplayed and come into view as part of the everyday goings on in the carceral world. Therefore, the location of these men's prison experiences and corresponding responsibilities/roles are directly linked to their actions/interactions with prisoners which result in various potential or explicit outcomes that affect women's confinement status. Alternatively, age, race, class and education are associated with serial killer Paul Bernardo.

'Authorized male correctional releasers,' such as the psychiatrist or prison guard, occupy positions of power within the carceral system, and are correspondingly sanctioned as agents whose particularized constructions of prisoner's subjectivities hold a certain degree of power in the granting of women's discharge from prison. This form of legitimate release is contingent upon prisoner compliance and engagement in specific processes that are either associatively linked with the bureaucratic objectives of the carceral system, or are underlying, informal, and repressive strategies prison staff uses to manage the prisoner population.

In *Karla* (2006), psychiatrist Dr. Arnold conducts a parole eligibility assessment interview to determine Karla Homolka's level of individualized risk, based on her ability to articulate remorse, emotionality, and a sufficient level of responsibility for the crimes committed. In order to make a reliable determination, it is essential that Karla "*approach [his] evaluation in a spirit of complete openness and truthfulness in all matters,*" just as it will be indispensable for Dr. Arnold "*to keep an open mind.*" In the end, the discourse of psychiatry and his expert opinions and recommendations create a penal subject too dangerous for release, with *Karla* being denied parole.

Conversely, in *Nine Lives* (2005), particularized subjectivities can be contingent on actions/interactions between the keepers and the kept, which may arise from a chance encounter. In Sandra's story, Captain Ron approaches her in the prison hallway,

after she is expletively threatened by Nicole, whom he escorts past Sandra. He is direct and abrupt, asking “*So what was that about?*” Sandra, looking surprised by his inquiry, replies that the incident was “*nothing.*” He warns, “*Don’t fuck with me Sandra. Be straight with me. And I can help. I know you’re trying to be on your best behaviour here, don’t fuck it up.*” Sandra then provides a generic construction of Nicole as an antagonistic inmate with everyone. He retorts, “*If I gets wind of anything, you’re going to regret it.*” Sandra passively looks down, and deferring to his authority replies, “*Just minding my own business.*” Captain Ron then aggressively interrogates Sandra for information regarding a prisoner assault in the infirmary. He could help her if she identifies and implicates another woman as the perpetrator of the act; but this is a demand that will jeopardize her safety with other prisoners, as Sandra relates to him: “*Help me what – get my ass kicked?*” The guard insists that he could act on her behalf with the sentencing judge, by advising him of Sandra’s institutional behaviour – a condition that could facilitate in her early release. Sandra eventually gives in, to Captain Ron’s continual barrage of inquires. He pushes Sandra, “*So tell me something I don’t know... ‘C’mon. C’mon. C’mon.... You do not want to grow old in here.*” A close-up shows the intensity in both their faces; Sandra knowing the power the guard holds over her and Ron adamant in using his authority to get the information he needs. Sandra subsequently provides him with a woman’s name, but offers no other details. This exchange abruptly ends and is no longer dealt with in the vignette.

Captain Ron’s actions reflect the power of line-level staff to construct the prisoner in various ways (for example, into a good, redeemable prisoner) that are not associated with any formalized regulatory process, such as by interview, but which nonetheless symbolize an implicit form of social control, an actuality in the everyday experience of prisoners’ lives.<sup>384</sup> In these above depictions, correctional staff commentaries contribute to a knowledge base that constructs women’s subjectivities from law and order ideologies, interrelated to prisoner risk, culpability, and responsibility that emerge from authorized or informal penal processes embedded within both official discourses (social scientific) and commonsensical (individualized staff) perspectives (Burton & Carlen

<sup>384</sup> A line staff person is a correctional officer (CO) who has direct ongoing, daily contact with prisoners in various contexts, such as *living units*. This definition is geared to the Canadian context of corrections.

1979: 34). As a researcher, in my experiential contact with prisoners, many people have reflected on the power of staff (guard) commentaries, which serve to construct prisoners in particular ways that may affect their suitability for release, and which may be recorded in prisoner case files, or remain as grapevine-*like* discursive views that circulate across and within the prison world. Often these constructions are recorded without a prisoner's knowledge and may not have emerged from any formalized process of contact, such as interviews, with the prisoner.

Illegitimate prisoner release involves unlawful actions, such as escape, that are not linked to an elaborately planned scheme or a precipitous uprising that erupts in a riotous spectacle of violence and destruction. In *Condition Red* (1995), guard Dan Cappelli facilitates in a prisoner's escape in a rather bland and ordinary undertaking. After he is indefinitely suspended, Dan returns to the facility gate house under the pretense of picking up his belongings, but once inside the institution, he appears in uniform and falsely informs line staff that he has been reinstated.<sup>385</sup> He then simply walks prisoner Gidell Ryan off her living unit, by falsely informing a rookie guard that she has a court date. Upon exiting the large facility gate, Gidell hides under several items to conceal her appearance, in the back seat of his car.<sup>386</sup>

There is the juxtaposition of two diverse interpretations of the sexually abusive prison guard in *Civil Brand* (2002) and *Nine Lives* (2005), depicted with the discourse of oppression and correspondingly tied to the constructs of victimization: exploitation versus non-sensationalism. In the former title, Captain Deese is depicted as a misogynous, sleazy, and tyrannical man. In a brutish and arrogant manner he expletively refers to the prisoners as "*animals*" and "*bitches*" that need harsh discipline and structure. The effects of his abuse, sexual and physical, are disturbingly portrayed through the women's physical scars, psychological humiliation, and 'accidental' death.

<sup>385</sup> The gate house is the exterior security barrier going into the prison. It is manned by correctional staff.

<sup>386</sup> In large correctional institutions prisoners have been known to simply walk out of the facility. Various identification tags are worn by everyone inside the prison to differentiate between prisoners, staff persons, and visitors. If a prisoner were to secure a visitor tag, she could have access to less secure areas that might make escape more feasible, by simply walking out of the prison in large institutional settings.

Film-maker Joyce Lewis aims here to portray the broader societal stigmatization and condemnation regarding imprisoned women, through incorporating these perspectives within the persona of guard Deese (Lewis 2004). But her intention to create some level of authenticity to these views within a characterological role is significantly lost by the exploitative way in which this villainous man is portrayed. A.O. Scott (2003) of the *New York Times* agrees, "There is a real issue here, but the film-makers do not find an effective way to dramatize it, preferring to focus on the depredations of Captain Deese."

In *Nine Lives* (2005), a filmic vignette, subsequent to the opening prison narrative, eavesdrops into a conversation between two young women in their childhood home, amidst haunting memories that imply a dark and traumatic past for one of them. The story opens with Holly, who appears at a front door, her presence a bewildering surprise to the younger woman who answers the door, and remarks, "*you scared me.*" As Holly walks in and inquires about their father, she retorts, "*If he's not home there's no reason to be scared, right?*" The woman, presumably her younger sister, replies "*don't start.*" Holly is a wounded woman who confronts her sibling about their neglectful and problematic childhood, and the unspeakable deeds of their father that imply Holly's victimhood from his sexual abuse.<sup>387</sup> She is desperate to confront him, and demands that he be contacted immediately. Holly moves about the house, painfully and emotionally reliving her memories. When her sister asks, "*so, what happened? What changed?*" Holly, in a restless and agitated state, is direct: "*I'm tired. I want to put an end to it.*" At times, her sister appears unsympathetic to her concerns, but tells Holly that she is not taking sides. Holly is adamant though, that once their father returns home her sister must leave immediately, without incident.

As Holly looks out into a barren, backyard, she remarks, "*I can't believe you still live here; this place is a fucking graveyard.*" She walks into this landscape of her past, a seemingly lifeless terrain void of any lushness or greenery. It is visually desaturated and colorless, with sun drenched grass, brown-leaved trees, and a single child's swing, a shot that somehow symbolizes the unhappiness of an upbringing marred by dysfunction. Once she returns to the living room and then moves towards an open bedroom door,

<sup>387</sup> Holly is African American, while her unnamed sister is Hispanic. It is not determined if they are biological, step sisters or whether Holly was a foster child.

Holly is emotionally overwhelmed. Eventually, just as her father, Captain Ron, walks through the front door, Holly hyperventilates with extreme fear and anxiety towards him, and warns Ron, “*Don’t come any closer!*” She pulls out a gun from her bag and puts it up against her head, distraught and in tears. Holly then points the gun towards her abuser, her face contorted with anguish and anger as she cries, before suddenly directing her threats inward, by placing the gun in her mouth and then slowly taking it out. For an instant she appears somewhat calmer. This dramatic and emotionally retching cinematic shot abruptly ends in a quick cut; Holly’s desperate act is left dangling with no resolution. Actress Lisa Hamilton, brings meaning to Holly’s trauma as something she “was looking to end... Ending that pain, she discovered, wasn’t what she thought it would be – be it killing herself [or] killing this person” (2006). Although Captain Ron’s abuse is not directly linked to the penal context, its implicated presence here unquestionably authenticates prisoner abuse as a possibility by a man whose contact with inmate Sandra, in a previous narrative, is but a brief, interrogative instant. And lastly, the sexual offender is also depicted outside the subjectivity of the prison guard, in a criminalized male character who is intimately tied to the female prisoner protagonist; most specifically, the sadistic, sexual predator and child killer Paul Bernardo, in the film *Karla* (2006).

The final male categorical formation is the ‘child caregiving recipient’ to the female offender’s caregiving actions, which are embedded within the traditional, gendered roles of pseudo-mother and school nurse. The social locations of age and race contour male subjectivity formations. In these portrayals, the discourse of maternalism and medicalization, tied to the constructs of transformation or problematization, frames prisoners’ interrelationships with young, white male characters who are either positively changed or negatively affected (even if for only an instant) by women’s actions. In the films *House of D* (2004), and *Map of the World* (1999), young Tommy Warsaw and schoolboy Robbie Mackessy, are the respective recipients.

## **Conclusion – Independent Film**

A cinematic resistance of alternate representations mostly characterizes independent movie productions that aim to transcend the filmistic landscape of the sensational, fantastical, and glaringly fictional, in unique portrayals that locate

lawbreaking women within the everyday banality of life – whether carceral and otherwise – despite the controversial and contentious terrain of storyline content. A creativity of expression, that emphasizes characterological studies over plot-related elements, causality, and clear narrative resolution in various titles, attempts to create authenticized and politically conscious messages; even though gradations of social constructionism permeate individual filmic texts. Subjectivity becomes humanized, within imagery that positions female prisoners within terrains of understanding that provide the cinephilic viewer with an interchange of meanings to choose from. A bridging of the imaginative gap between an objectified naturalism, versus a metonymic contextualization in portrayals, validates the perspectives of the marginalized or demonized subject, regardless of their representational embodiments.

In most depictions, the criminalized woman interfaces ordinary life in a various ways: as someone who symbolizes the characterological personification of our everyday fears; as someone whose mundane, carceral circumstances interject the lives of others; or, as someone subjected to an extraordinary criminological event that changes her matter-of-fact world. Even though the independent film is not immune to exploitative excess or stereotypical archetypes, it is a space that expands the range of intersectional representations that are embedded in alternate social, political, and ideological perspectives (King 2005: 199).



## Chapter 9.

### Supplementary film review and textual analysis

*The cinema is “kept alive not just through systems of production distribution, and exhibition, but also through the circulation of debates which provide the cultural context in which it can flourish” (Cook as cited in Maltby 2003: 493).*

#### Introduction

This chapter aims to analytically explore individual cinematic reviews,<sup>388</sup> to reveal the underlying social understandings and ongoing cinephilic appeal of the women-in-prison movie as a popular cultural commodity.<sup>389</sup> Filmic textual products are created specifically for public consumption for the mass or specific cinephilic viewer. It is an underrepresented area of inquiry with the criminological landscape of feminist media studies. As such, the following discussion provides an in depth exploration of audience generated ‘review talk’ regarding the selected filmic titles. Of central focus is film criticism that is situated outside the realm of academia (film, cultural studies) and the professional entertainment lens, which produces commentary through the communicative conduit of the media theorist or movie critic.<sup>390</sup> To the contrary, layperson textual readings primarily symbolize a form of evaluative reportage that emphasizes description over deep critical engagement (with some exceptions), in ‘user comments’ or

<sup>388</sup> Information courtesy of The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>) and Amazon.com (<http://www.Amazon.com>) used with permission.

<sup>389</sup> Historically, movie criticism emerged as an intellectualized discipline and a “legitimate object of academic study” (film studies), once “it had ... develop[ed] a set of theoretical concerns [that were] recognized by the academy’s established institutional criteria” (Maltby 2003: 500, 501).

<sup>390</sup> Maltby (2003: 56) contends that “as part of the academization of the cinema, film criticism” has emphasized the “individual feature movie as a text, and has largely ignored the conditions under which its audiences experienced it.”

'customer reviews' that summarize films within inquisitive, affective, and perspectival domains of reflection, interpretation, and opinion (Monaco 2000: 389). Yet, in the relatively straight-forward process of writing a review, the individual spectator creates micro-texts of meaning that hold explanatory power through "circuits of discourse" that endlessly flow in the everyday, textual talk about crime, in cyber cinephilic forums (Walter 1995: 15).<sup>391</sup> More specifically, review commentary is enveloped within particular discourses – otherization, familialism, maternalism, and humanization, uniquely attributable to different cinematic styles, and present across distinctive filmic titles. As well, movie reviews contribute to the 'dialectical relationship' between the cinematic world and social reality (Rafter 2000: 8) in assumptions about the criminological condition, propagated in mediated representations that shape social thought, and refuel the cinematic machine with creations of the penal subject in her most alternately varied and stereotypically formulaic incarnations. And given that audience reviews become part of an ongoing filmistic dialogue, it suffices to conclude that the content and viewpoints articulated by people often reflect rearticulated and redundant material, taken from previously posted comments.

Of equal importance to the evaluative purpose of the film review, and its corresponding meanings, is the promotional function of "reviewing ... as a secondary, supplementary activity [that supports] the motion picture industry as a whole, a part of the machinery of publicity that the industry propagates" (Maltby 2003: 495).<sup>392</sup> By this, individual textual readings become reactivated through their leisurely engagement with movie buffs in a continuous sequence of perusal and reflection, with the film review "advertisements embody[ing] the changing expectations and preferences of audiences" (Baumann 2007: 137). Consequently, the lay person review serves to culturally promote the continual consumption of films through covert and explicitly overt recommendations in relation to specific titles. Such a process symbolizes the inter-textual marketing of the entertainment text outside the industrial-based contexts of movie production, distribution,

<sup>391</sup> In this context, the word *spectator* is used as the synonym for the words *filmic viewer*. *Spectator* here has no association to its definition within the feminist film theory literature.

<sup>392</sup> This is especially the case for professional (critic) reviews that are found in entertainment magazines such as *Variety* and *Premiere*. But, it can be argued that lay person reviews also serve that function.

advertisement and endorsement. The evaluative rating of the film in its entirety, with corresponding recommendations regarding the watch-ability of the title (namely, its entertainment value, meaningful message, or overall importance for prospective consumers), is typically linked to particular descriptors and comments incorporated within the posted review. In some instances, people comparatively juxtapose their analyses of a specific movie with other similar titles, usually within the same genre or subject matter – a practice often associated with the exploitation film (Baumann 2007). It is interesting to note the extent to which viewers intellectualize their discursive talk about films or rely on more impressionistic, or opinion-based, perspectives. Particular entertainment personalities or film-maker creators also contour people’s perceptions of films in ways that endorse filmic messages, whether revealed in subversive or seemingly authenticized portrayals (O’Sullivan & Wilson 2004: 83).

### ***The Cinephilic Review: An Overview***

This inductively-based analysis is grounded in 1,161 film reviews<sup>393</sup> that comprised a supplementary database drawn from two online contexts; the entertainment cinephile website, *Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*, and the retail marketplace of *Amazon.com*. Cyberspace forums create a “convergence of technology, [cinematic] information, entertainment, and consumer culture... .” (Barker 2008: 368) that is facilitated through “communities of virtual meaning and emotion” regarding the women-in-prison film (Ferrell et al. 2008: 59). Audience reviews reflect contemporary writings that span over a ten year time period, from September 3, 1998, to February 28, 2009.<sup>394</sup> Several criteria are varyingly encapsulated within consumer commentaries and include: 1) A storyline/plot synopsis; 2) an emphasis on specific filmic aspects – for example, themes and characterizations – and their associated meanings; 3) an assessment of the productive and creative aspects of the film-making process, such as writing (the screenplay or filmic version of a popular novel), direction, and actor performance; 4) the

<sup>393</sup> To reiterate, all film review material information is courtesy of the IMDb and Amazon.com with permission. The reviews move outside the cultural location of North America to include Europe, Asia, South America and Australia.

<sup>394</sup> These two dates are associatively tied to the earliest recorded film review for the dissertation sample (September 1998) and the end of the second filmic sampling period (February 2009).

particular narratological structures and aesthetic expressions that emerge, and 5) filmic messages (criminological or otherwise). For the most part, the Amazon.com reviews were shorter, less comprehensive, and provided fewer individual examples than their IMDb counterparts. At times, select exemplars unveil distinguishing cinephilic features; however, for the purposes of the following discussion, the commentaries and descriptor words from reviewers were drawn across both websites, unless otherwise specifically identified or cited in the text.

The chapter is organized into three subsections, each of which centers on a particular cinematic form. The first subsection commences with the exploitation film, and this is followed by the Hollywood, and then the independent film. Diverse areas of cultural focus emerge from the voices of the cinephilic subject, whose gender is indicated where it is possible. Selected, verbatim, quoted phrases from anonymous viewers appear under each section heading and also become exemplars within the analysis. In addition, single, punctuated words represent adjective descriptors drawn from separate reviews. I endeavour to uncover how viewers across film-making styles engage in the process of evaluative criticism, appraisal and movie promotion. Importantly, the chapter emphasizes people's affective feelings, perspectival judgements, interpretive understandings, and inquires into crime, criminality, and imprisonment (State sanctioned or otherwise), as depicted within mediated portrayals of the penal subject. The question as to how, for example, people intertwine their preconceived criminological understandings, expectations, or beliefs in the process of assessing a film's representational capacity – whether fictional, fantastical, or seemingly realist – is discussed. These beliefs are typically not experientially grounded, but symbolize socially constructed understandings of confinement gained from other mediated representations, filmic or otherwise. As well, I reveal some implications of talk that arises from people's perspectival insights, or more specifically, their recommendations or action-oriented suggestions in response to filmic depictions and messages.

A cultural criminological filmic inquiry unveils the feelings of excitement, pleasure, trepidation, condemnation, and fear that mediated crime imagery elicits in its viewers (Greer & Jewkes 2005: 30). Unlocking the hidden practices of carceral containment through the visual screen garners our upmost attention, and elicits contradictory

reactions that range from our most morbid and lurid curiosities, to legitimate concerns. The mediated constructions of sexualized objectification, heroic efforts, dangerous predicaments, deprived, unjust and/or everyday prison hardships, individual oppressions/tragedies, systemic rebellion, resistance to authority, and adversarial confrontation, all emerge within the leisurely context of movie watching (Rafter 2000: 9, 10). Consequently, it is these constructions and others that viewers find appealing across titles in a particular mode. Tales of crime spark “[affective] feelings as meaning,” that are inter-linked to viewers’ perspectives regarding criminality – its supposed reality, or imagination (Presdee 2004: 281). The cinematic apparatus is infused with varied, thematic ‘messages’ about the female offender, that discursively envelope prisoner subjectivities in various personifications, ranging from the recycled archetypical, normative, or pro/counter patriarchal (hegemonic femininity/masculinity), to the subversively countercultural, mythical or alternate characterological embodiments. Consequently, the discussion identifies cinephilic viewers’ conceptions of prisoner subjectivities tied to particular labels and descriptor word(s), which emerge within narratological structures, visual expressions, storyline aspects, and filmic messages. For instance, some reviewers textually rearticulate, accept, or revel in slanderous cultural labels and misogynous images that continue to pathologize the penal subject and continue crimes’ imaginations. Furthermore, I seek to alternatively explore, viewer’s critique of representational practices and their associated meanings, through the ways people overtly resist particular caustic or corrosive images of the penal subject. More specifically, viewers variously embrace alternate, more sensitive, empathetic and authenticized representations that lie outside the stereotypical, formulaic, or condemnatory domain - those that emerge within the independent film-making form, for example. I also explore viewer’s textual talk that focuses on the productive and creative aspects of film-making. And lastly, some film-making forms or individual films serve an overt pedagogical role in their messages and content. The emergent themes and insights in the following discussion both converge and diverge with my own categorical and thematic analyses chronicled in the filmic results chapters. As well, cinephilic review discourse is interpretively discussed through its interlinkage with discourses and/or constructs which may resonate with aforementioned articulations (e.g., stereotypification,

contextualization), or symbolize new formulations and associated terminology (e.g., genre, performative authenticity).<sup>395</sup>

## **Filmic Formations**

### **The Sexploitation Film**

*The Big Doll House*, (1971): “Anyone who likes women in prison films will appreciate this classic... a lot of death and gore plus eye candy...you’ll enjoy it” (“Ladies in the Big House,” November 3, 2006, Amazon.com, unidentified).<sup>396</sup>

*Chained Heat*, (1983): “IT IS A VERY GOOD AND VIOLENT MOVIE WITH RAPES, NUDITY, AND VIOLENCE – EVERYTHING GOOD” (“I Love this Movie,” December 13, 2005, Amazon.com, male).

Consumer reviews for the exploitative women-in-prison film cross a periodical range of titles associated with the cleverly parodied, yet sinister and sadomasochistic, tales of campy, jungle foreign captivity in the 1970s productions, to the low-budget sleazefest or graphically harsh and violent 1980s and 1990s portrayals that primarily reflect domestic US confinement, with a few exceptions. Ripe with exploitable elements – thematic content, formulaic scenes and characterological embodiments – the cult-like consumption of the exploitation film continually feeds the perverse appetites and cinephilic expectations of mainly male viewers, who celebrate these promotional gimmicks across the exploitative terrain of misogyny. In these salaciously wicked tales, condemnatory or guilty desire “can neither be extinguished nor grasped;” whether it is defined as “instinctive or sexual...it breaks out in the form of cruelty, madness, [and] violence” in a cinematically acceptable, entertaining, and leisurely way (Lefebvre as cited in Presdee 2000: 61). A perusal of viewer textual talk reinscribes various archetypical prisoner constructions into an ongoing dialogue that re-entrenches the demonization of *some* intersectionally located women into the public, cinephilic eye. Alternatively, people emphasize seemingly pseudo-feminist personifications as well. Overall, descriptor commentary is predominantly drawn from the IMDb cinephilic reviews.

<sup>395</sup> These specific examples in parentheses above are constructs.

<sup>396</sup> ‘Unidentified’ denotes that the gender of the reviewer is unknown.

In general, the categorical designation of the penal subject takes on diverse conceptualizations that resonate with those constructions tied to particular time periods and auteur-created films. Across the Roger Corman/Jack Hill productions of *The Big Doll House* (1971), *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), and *Women in Cages* (1971), and Jonathan Demme's *Caged Heat* (1974), film reviewers bring forth descriptive labels associated with the discourses of feminist liberation/empowerment and otherization, tied to the constructs of stereotypification and formulaic standardization. Several viewers stressed the attributes of 'female power,' embodied in prisoners too smart, "strong willed," "resourceful," "feisty," and "defiant," to succumb to their torturous victimization, such as Blossom in *The Big Birdcage*, the "machine gun carrying [token heroine] revolutionary," applauded for her resiliency and resistance against patriarchal oppressions. At times, the reinscription of recycled archetypes appears more condescending than demonizing, and includes the reconstructed characterizations of the "political prisoner," "embittered, ex-addict prostitute," and "ditzzy blond, ex-stripper," while the "butch" man-hating lesbian remains the target for the most condemnatory labels. In *Women in Cages* (1971), an IMDb viewer demonizes the character of Alabama as a "nihilistic lesbian head prison guard [played] with such venom... this hard boiled devil woman... ." [by actress Pam Grier] ("Pam Takes Charge," November 29, 2006). For the same film, another IMDb commentary made the distinction between the actresses' dualistic exploitation roles: "Far from her bodacious, sympathetic action heroine, she here plays as nasty a personage as can be imagined: a pot smoking, white race hating, lesbian sadist from Harlem... ." ("Pam's No Hope Emerson," November 29, 2007). In addition, drug addiction, mental illness, sexual promiscuity, and particular offences (infanticide) are similarly associated with disconcerting subjectivities that involve the labelling of some women as "psycho" or "weird" - a "junkie," "vegetable," "pyromaniac," and "baby killer" (*The Big Doll House*), "sex starved nymph" (*The Big Bird Cage*), "smack addicted rat fink," (*Women in Cages*) and "kleptomaniac felon" (*Caged Heat*).

In subsequent exploitation works linked to film-makers such as Paul Nicolas (*Chained Heat*, 1982, and *Naked Cage*, 1986), Tom DeSimone (*Concrete Jungle*, 1982), Eric Louzil, (*Lust for Freedom*, 1987) and Joel Silberg (*Prison Heat*, 1993), viewer-based textual formations are linked to the discourses of demonization-otherization and sexualization related to the construct of archetypical clichés that create both disturbing

and lustful adjective descriptors at the polarized, dimensional extremes. At the one end is the pathologization of women as “bitches,” “deranged,” “evil,” “cruel,” “violent,” “psychopathic and sadistic” subjects, who are feared and loathed, while at the other end is the sexualized object of male desire, that ranges from the virgin and “shapely [female] prisoners,” to the “sex goddess,” and “porn stars.”<sup>397</sup> As well, women’s bodies become entertainment delights fetishized as “tits and ass.”<sup>398</sup> A single IMDb male reviewer compared *Caged Fury* (1989) to a peep show. In limited cases, people acknowledge and emphasize female strength through the actions of the avenger, who is described as a “robo cop or terminator”<sup>399</sup> in annihilating villainous, “scum of the Earth” female abusers (*Vendetta*, 1986). Generally, in the sexploitation titles across all eras, it is women who are primarily judged, pathologized, and demonized, with cinephilic consumers providing little or no perspective regarding male characters who are overwhelming offensive in either an explicitly sadistic or underlying oppressive way. In textual talk about the female lawbreaker at the condemnatory extremes, the emergence of particularly demonizing terms creates an otherness in prisoners, “whom we actively establish and outwardly maintain the greatest distance, and toward whom we are [the] most punitive and vindictive” (Greer & Jewkes 2005: 21).

Evaluative review commentary and affective expression is interdependent on the generic-based tastes and expectations that people bring to the women-in-prison film experience, across all the sexploitation titles. However, what becomes disturbingly evident is viewers’ primary, explicit endorsement and lack of resistance to the misogynous representations which create a visuality of degradative and humiliating expression towards females held captive, often in circumstances beyond the arm of the law, within a nightmarish, carceral world that exploits spectacles of punishment, predation, and victimization. These disconcerting revelations textually emerge within the discourses of misogyny, violence and sexualization, tied to the constructs of exploitation, titillation and genre in individual appraisals that reveal the positive and negative filmic

<sup>397</sup> The single descriptor “violent” comes from an Amazon.com review.

<sup>398</sup> In the Amazon.com reviews, constructions of the penal subject are more descriptive than demonizing.

<sup>399</sup> These IMDb terms are made in reference to *good woman* protagonist Carole Henderson, in *Chained Heat* (1983), but could also characterize the female avenger Laurie Cusack Collins in *Vendetta* (1986), and police officer Gillian Kaites in *Lust For Freedom* (1987).



aspects viewers emphasize as contouring their spectatorial experience. Overall, the objectification and brutalization of prisoners through gratuitous fetishized nudity, lesbianism, sadistic torture, rape, and sexual slavery, is an expected and sought out cinephilic attraction that gratifyingly titillates the tastes of viewers, many of whom conceptually celebrate such misogyny as humorous and 'off-the wall.' For example, the *Naked Cage* (1986) offers such delights to one unidentified IMDb reviewer, who pleasurably remarks, "It's a cheap thrill to watch women slap, stab, pull hair and lez out" (lesbianism) ("Fun, Exploitation Trash," January 7, 2004). Such elements are appallingly promoted for the hard core sexploitative fan. As well, audience satisfaction is interconnected with feelings of criminalized pleasure and excitement, symbolizing reviewers' affective expressions of amusement, fun, and enjoyment from representations valued for their fantastically exploitable themes, that if downgraded in intensity, graphicness, or presence, resulted in a more dissatisfying filmic evaluation and experience. A masochistic Amazon.com male consumer writes, "Watch Pammy [Grier] whip, beat, torture, and [hurt] inmates all the while wishing it was you taking Pammy's abuse," for *Women In Cages* (1971) ("Nobody Escapes," August 5, 2002). However, a few exceedingly alarming commentaries illustrate how these titles can feed upon masculinist, misogynous fantasies of men who enjoy watching the degradative maltreatment of women. The "rape fetish flick" *Prison Heat* (1993) is a disturbing example, and contained the following reviews from three consumers, across the IMDb and Amazon.com websites respectively. One IMDb comment reads, "The prison warden Saladin ...starts by giving her the eye and then proceeds to molest her [prisoner] (in one of the most erotic sexual assault scenes I've seen on film)" ("What Happens to Women," January 1, 2008). Two Amazon.com consumers provided similarly disconcerting comments. For example, one man enjoyed the repeated scenes of rape against a prisoner targeted by the male warden, while the other unidentified reviewer maintained that such offensive and misogynous acts were justified because, in the end, the women emerged as victors. In these commentaries, violence has lost its ideological message and is clearly marketed for entertainment pleasures over meaning (Lynch and Krzycki 1998: 327).

In rare cases, audience resistance is implied from some IMDb viewers who explicitly communicated their disapproval of a particular representation, such as sexual

assault (*Prison Heat*, 1993), or otherwise appreciated the lack of hard core exploitable elements (gratuitous nudity and rape) in some films (for example, *Cage Heat*, 1974), or toned down violence in another (as in *The Big Doll House*, 1971). Despite representations to the contrary in the last filmic title, one viewer perceived it as less abhorrent than other films, remarking, “You never get any of the uncomfortable, misogynist sleaze you most definitely get from *Ilsa*... a film that delights in ... [its] torture”<sup>400</sup> (“Finally, An Exploitation,” July 30, 2008). In other instances genuinely more empathetic concerns emerge, as from one IMDb viewer’s feelings of sympathy towards a character’s plight of victimization (*Women in Cages*, 1971).

Largely, people utilize various descriptors that emerge along a dimensional continuum that is both disparagingly negative and admirably positive about films, dependent upon which title is under review. For example, *Women in Cages* (1971) is described by viewers as an “ugly film with little redeeming value;” “squalid;” “weird;” “dreary” and “unpleasant;” while *The Big Bird Cage* (1972) is otherwise seen as one of the “most entertaining and best made *WIP* movies of the 1970s,” with its crass humour overriding shock and gore. *Caged Heat* (1974) holds the distinction of continually being called a “masterpiece,” and “a brilliantly entertaining little grindhouse flick.”<sup>401</sup> More specifically, the Roger Corman-Jack Hill productions of the *Big Doll House*, (1971) and the *Big Bird Cage* (1972) garnered positive evaluative support from Amazon.com viewers, who appreciably enjoyed the comedic parody emergent in “revolutionary humor,” “wacky situations,” “hysterical monologues,” “crazy dialogue” and “raunchy and endearing” characterological embodiments. The productive use of slapstick humour appeared to lessen the offensive nature of representations, which are instead understood as sheer entertainment, with little implications or effects.<sup>402</sup> As well, the subversive messages in films, particularly in relation to the empowerment of women, were comedically conceptualized by some viewers.

<sup>400</sup> *Ilsa* refers to the Nazisploitation films such as *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1975) that depicts the degradative abuse of captive women in the Nazi stalag camp. *Ilsa* is the wicked sadistic warden.

<sup>401</sup> The IMDb and Amazon.com marketplace unveiled similar commentary, with the exception that an Amazon.com consumer termed the descriptor of “masterpiece.”

<sup>402</sup> One female Amazon.com consumer also communicated this feeling in a review.

For the most part, in the latter filmic productions of the 1980s and 1990s, audience reviews are pleurably celebratory of films that are explicitly brutal, “seedy and depressing[ly]” dark tales of victimization, mayhem, and death, perpetrated by sick and twisted abusers; inmate and authority agent alike. Comparatively speaking, across the selected titles, many reviewers describe the films in conceptually similar ways: as an “unintended comedy” (*The Naked Cage*), “hilarious” (*Concrete Jungle*, *Chained Heat*), “laughable” (*Lust For Freedom*), and as “surprisingly amusing” (*Prison Heat*); descriptions that categorically symbolize minimizing and distressingly mocking attitudes towards representations that clearly serve to satisfy repugnant maculinist desires, as described above. One Amazon.com reviewer characterized *Chained Heat*, and the films that followed, as “unintentional parodies.” Titles such as *Chained Heat* (1983) were deemed to be the best of the genre, at this time.

The exploitation film interfaces with the criminological condition through the discourse of knowledge – perception versus imagination, embedded within binary constructs that separate pseudo-reality from archetypal fantasy. This interconnection of discourse and corresponding constructs is perpetuated in commentary that makes claims to the representational truthfulness in depictions of confinement, or that continues to recycle those exploitative cultural constructions of the female lawbreaker/prisoner that play upon our culturally dark imaginations. Subsequently, although most viewers articulate the fictitious and fantastical nature of most films, a limited group of consumers believe that some titles accurately portray the carceral world. For example in the productions of the *Big Bird Cage* (1972) and *Women in Cages* (1971), two Amazon.com posts, from a male and then female reviewer, respectively, commented, “This film has more to offer than just cheap voyeurism. The plot surrounds life inside a women’s prison in the Philippines,” (“Solid Grier Action,” January 13, 2005) and “[it is] a searing expose of prison life” (“Ex-Stripper, Ex-Addict,” September 18, 2008). A single Amazon.com commentary intellectualized the seemingly educational importance of *Caged Heat* (1974), as it reads, “The state of insanity in many prisons all around the world has been a subject of study and complex analyses” (“Intriguing and Fundamental,” September 9, 2004). For three other films, *The Concrete Jungle* (1982), *Chained Heat* (1983), and *Vendetta* (1986), commentary that parallels former titles emerges in descriptor remarks only, about gritty realistic portrayals, of imprisonment. Another IMDb reviewer of the film

*Chained Heat* (1983) implies a critical correctional discourse, commenting, “There should be more films like this one. Our prison system needs this type of exposure” (“One of the Greatest,” September 3, 1998). Conversely, some reviews categorically link criminological issues with exploitative characterological embodiments – “junkies” and “lesbians,” for instance – with both archetypes being a carceral threat to anyone who goes to prison, in *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *Vendetta* (1986).

Some reviewers condemned the exploitatively racist and discriminatory depiction of foreign confinement, in *Prison Heat* (1983) as explicitly xenophobic, unrealistic, scornful, and hateful against Turkish peoples and the Islamic world. It is here that the discourse of critical reception emerges within the construct of creative responsabilization. One IMDb viewer communicates the implication of this portrayal and challenges film-makers’ representational practices: “To an uneducated mind, this movie just builds to the popular misconception that anything from the Middle East is evil and repugnant and should be scorned. While entertainment is the primary concern for movie goers, responsibility and accountability should be factors seriously considered when film-makers wish to entertain audiences with movies like *Prison Heat*” (“Another Sexploitation Film,” November 21, 1999). So despite the ludicrous and fantastical nature of filmic imagery and storylines, the exploitation film sparks textual talk that appears informative, critically challenging, and pseudo-academic regarding the nature of confinement, while drawing upon criminological imaginations, rather than realities.

The consumer audience review interpretively uncovers the primary ways people process the textual and productive aspects of the filmic text. A deeper, more meaningful engagement emerges for the earlier seventies films categorized through the discourses of feminism/empowerment and misogynous violence, and the constructs of victimization-parody, formulaic standardization, genre and constructive (creative versus technical) aspects, that also serve to correspondingly shape people’s cinematic attitudes and opinions. A subversively politicized, pseudo-feminist undertone is associatively tied to a parodied female power, in the inverted victim-victimizer binary, where it is women who rape men in both the *Big Doll House* (1971) and the *Big Bird Cage* (1972), a depiction that one Amazon.com reviewer interpreted as either a promotional gimmick or feminist statement. Simultaneously co-existent with this seemingly transgressive theme of prisoner empowerment, is the exploitative sleazefest of sexualization, voyeurism,

fetishism, and tortuous violence – the obligatory women-in-prison elements that promotionally target generic-based sexploitative tastes. In contrast, *Caged Heat* was appreciated as an artsy, cleverly ingenious film that had a great cast, beautiful cinematography, oddball musical score, and impressive visual expressions. One IMDb viewer's commentary summarizes its distinctiveness, as he describes, "Demme's zesty, confident direction comes through with glorious abundance of astutely observed incidental details and delightful moments of engagingly quirky human behavior" ("A Simply Spectacular," May 26, 2006). Another IMDb viewer acknowledged the movie's artistic, versus exploitative, fervour: "*Caged Heat* proves that even a trash exploitation film can aspire to decent artistic values" ("Possibly the All-Time," April 4, 2003). Still, this film wallows in the torturous treatment of women and objectified bodies, despite its diversely unique qualities and "proto-feminist" message. The "mean spirited" *Women in Cages* (1971), on the other hand, was disliked for its production values, which appeared simplistic, unenergetic, and outlandishly sour.

In the subsequent sexploitation films of the eighties and nineties, film reviews emphasized productive aspects framed within the constructs of generic formalization, authenticity-realism, and production. The discourse of misogynous violence escalates in portrayals now devoid of feminist undertones. Evaluative commentary continued to center around the cinephilic expectations of an audience who revels in sexploitative and degradative elements. Interestingly, for some viewers, the titles of *Concrete Jungle*, (1982), *Vendetta*, (1986), and *Red Heat*, (1986) were described as authentically gritty, convincing, and ambitious in their particular representations and narratological themes - a disturbing finding. The quality of productive creation, character performance, and filmic aspects emerged along an evaluative dimensional range, contingent on the filmic title discussed. Various reviewers, across Amazon.com and the IMDb, constructed film-making within a range of appraisals that varied, even for the same movie. *Chained Heat*, (1983) is an example, garnering positive IMDb comments that include such descriptions as a "stellar cast," "brazen direction," and, "slick cinematography," to more problematic assessments, such as, "terrible plot," "putrid acting," "technical flaws," and "cheap, shoddy film-making." Such variegated, contradictory reviews also appear across filmic titles. Despite the negative evaluations for this film and other titles, the cinephilic viewer

continued to immensely enjoy these movies, while other films, such as *Lust for Freedom* (1987), received more uniformly negative production-related comments.

### **The Hollywood Film**

*Caged* (1950) “A harrowing, beautifully enacted account of one woman’s descent into prison hell” (“A Vastly Underrated Film,” February 26, 2003, IMDb, male)

*White Oleander* (2001) “[Ingrid] is lovely and deadly – a metaphor for the White Oleander [flower] itself” (“Best of Pfeiffer,” January 31, 2005, IMDb, unidentified).

The Hollywood film bridged a fifty year time frame, in four titles that commenced and ended with the Warner Brothers studio works; the classic, prison melodramatic production of *Caged* (1950), and the contemporarily distributed, *White Oleander* (2002). The other two films included a forbidden prison romance, in *Love Child* (1982), and a cautionary tale of exotic travel, in *Brokedown Palace* (1999). Despite cinephiles’ explicit acknowledgement of the formulaic characterological subjectivities of the female prisoner, many viewers felt the films’ storylines were authentically realistic, powerful, and affectively heartfelt. In many instances, consumers’ unabridged acceptance of explicitly racist, sexist and gendered images reveals how the fictitiously imaginative nature of Hollywoodized films seduces the audience, with seemingly naturalized portrayals whose legitimacy remains unchallenged by a critical cinephilic eye. Mainstream representations created circumstances that resonated with people’s own experiences, and projected sensibilities towards relatable, yet disconcerting predicaments such as criminal culpability and ‘forever friendship’ in *Brokedown Palace* and a conflicted, tense, mother-daughter relationship, impacted by carceral circumstances, in *White Oleander*.

Across the filmic titles, embodiments of the penal subject emerged along a dimensional range that interlinked the discourses of beautification, normalization, psychiatrization and demonization; tied to the constructs of normative feminization, infantilization-victimization, pathologization, intellectualization, vilification and stereotypification. These discursive-construct interconnections symbolize variegated degrees of viewer evaluative assessment that involved the mere description, glorification, indifference to, and/or condemnation of specific women. In particular, *Caged* (1950) created the *prototype clichés* as steadfast subjectivities that historically remerged in subsequent prison film productions (exploitation film). Across the Internet review forums, cinephiles characterologically highlighted various formulaic stereotypes,

in several ways; for example: (1) in merely descriptive terms – “regretful elderly lifer, Millie,” “vice queen Elvira Powell,” and the “burnt-out, dejected June,” (2) as value laden judgements – “spoiled rich lady, Georgia [Harrison],” (3) in explicitly derogatory ways – “dim-witted” or “loopy murderer [Emma Barker],” “hardened criminals,” or “evil” women, (4) using colloquial prison terms – “new fish” Marie Allen, or, (5) by using more affirming adjectives, such as “friend Kitty.” It is only the prison matron, Evelyn Harper, who is explicitly demonized as the “corrupt,” and monstrous villain, a “brutally cruel and sadistic Amazonian” opposite to the “sympathetic but ineffectual” Warden Benton. In addition, several viewers acknowledged the covert lesbianism that seeped through the narrative and particular characterological personifications.<sup>403</sup> Conversely, in the sparsely reviewed film *Love Child* (1982), Terry Moore was constructed as a “victim of the [prison system]” by one female Amazon.com viewer (“Loved this Movie,” March 30, 2005).

In the contemporary titles of *Brokedown Palace* (1999) and *White Oleander* (2002), audience reviews binarily juxtaposed good versus evil in various characterological incarnations. In *Brokedown Palace* (1999), the existence of the foreign dangerous male *other* compounds the almost child-like vulnerability, naivety, unpreparedness and corresponding victimization of two young, beautiful, American travellers, wrongly imprisoned in Thailand. The two protagonists symbolized the ‘good girl – bad girl’ dichotomy, with Darlene Davis as the “fragile,” “college-bound,” “nice” innocent, and Alice Marano as the “rebellious,” “immature,” “selfish troublemaker,” or “chronic delinquent.” In contrast, other viewers mocked both girls as “stupid, reckless,” and “arrogant” for getting into their legal predicament and expecting that their American citizenship would entitle them to immunity.

Alternatively, in *White Oleander* (2002), the subjectivities of prisoner Ingrid Magnussen emerged through the evaluative lens of adjective labels that facilitated in the inquisitorial search for answers to Ingrid’s criminal and familial transgressions tied to the construct of causality. This film elicited the most extensive review commentary regarding the characterological embodiments of a prisoner’s subjectivity, across the *entire* filmic database. Typically, commentary across both the IMDb and Amazon.com sites sparked

<sup>403</sup> Viewers primarily referred to the characters of Evelyn Harper and Elvira Powell.

an ongoing debate regarding the origins of her flawed characterological traits. However, despite the ways Ingrid is variously constructed – with wonderment, praise, explicit dislike, or condemnatory judgement – viewers continue to believe, discursively amplify, or propagate Ingrid’s demonization and otherization to varying degrees. In some cases, people’s understandings are infused through psychiatric pop terminology that somehow legitimately positions Ingrid within a disordered subjectivity, as a “controlling egomaniac,” a “narcissistic, dysfunctional, and manipulative borderline personality,” or a “self-absorbed psychopath.” In other instances she is demonized as diabolical; unremorseful; inhuman; a reptilian creature of deadly coldness – a “snake...a bloodsucker,” that is beyond redemption or understanding. One IMDb viewer expressed his search for meaning in such a villainous woman, by querying, “Astrid can’t understand her mother, and neither can we. Is she mentally ill? Is she inherently evil? Such questions are never answered ... .” (“Great Performances,” October 19, 2002). An Amazon.com reviewer saw Ingrid’s redemption as unbelievable and did not feel that she would sacrifice her life (freedom) for daughter, Astrid.

In both films, *Brokedown Palace* and *White Oleander*, the confined woman’s subjectivity was primarily embedded within a non-criminalized ‘self’ – that of ‘mother’ or ‘friend’ – which was nonetheless a central interrelationship that thematically contoured the broader prison narrative. Corresponding viewer commentary therefore articulated particular meanings directly related to these non-prisoner subjectivities. In the former title, Alice’s sacrificial decision for a friend is deemed heroic and selfless. Alternatively, in the latter film, the ‘bad mother motif’ is applied to Ingrid even though her crime is not against children; instead it is her “controlling, conniving” and cruel manipulation of daughter Astrid, that ultimately condemns her as a “rotten,” “evil,” “cold, self-serving” and “bitchy” mother, or ‘non-parent’ by many viewers. One IMDb viewer relates Ingrid’s selfishness to aspiring, independent women, judged as “mother’s who place a higher value on their own twisted ambitions than the welfare of their children” – a condition propagated by a “compulsively consumeristic culture ... [that] is conveniently ignored” in many cinematic representations<sup>404</sup> (“A Poisoning of the Pure,” May 13, 2003).<sup>405</sup> In other

<sup>404</sup> Typically in mainstream films, mothers who lose their children are constructed very negatively.



instances, Ingrid is problematized as a “well-intentioned, [yet] domineering” and “strong, but flawed,” “free-spirited mother,” who tries to inculcate her daughter with “unorthodox,” societal views. As one IMDb reviewer wrote, Ingrid is “trying to teach her daughter about the sensations of art, about observation, and about the power of independence” (“The Mother-Daughter,” April 7, 2007). Ingrid’s faults – jealousy, manipulation, coldness, and wickedness – were still stressed from some viewers who otherwise intellectualized her as “brilliant and talented,” in the most affirming of reviews (Amazon.com). One IMDb review described her as “a mix of aesthetically refined artist and imperious sociopath” (“Excellent,” September 30, 2008).

In *White Oleander*, a dualistic conception of beautification was interlinked with notions of ‘deadly beauty and criminal culpability,’ or ‘luminous beauty and non-criminality,’ in relation to Ingrid’s propensity to commit murder. Many viewers were awestruck by Ingrid’s stunning physical appearance, which for some people concealed an inherent evilness that defied explanation in questions of causality. One IMDb viewer called her a “beautiful creature.” In contrast to this, for other people, Ingrid was too attractive to commit murder, or belong in prison, she was rather a “beauty queen,” not a prisoner; a “feminist goddess,” who appeared “too clean” and “glossy,” for confinement and needed to be “a little dirtier.” In these commentaries Ingrid’s beauty somehow serves to depathologize her, and associatively link criminalization with uncleanliness and unattractiveness, in the female felon.

Hollywoodized tales were evaluatively interpreted within the discourse of critical reception (acceptance or resistance), tied to the the constructs of affective impact, representational efficiency and productive values. Viewers’ admiration and criticism focused on the creative aspects of film-making (technical, structural and expressive), the emotional expression filmic themes elicited in people, and the downplayed representational realism of specific portrayals (carceral setting, *Brokedown Palace*). Given the sheer volume of reviews, it was surprisingly to find relatively little audience resistance or critical questioning of the stereotypical or otherwise corrosive subjectivities of the prisoner; especially Ingrid Magnussen. Alternatively, several people challenged

<sup>405</sup> Another IMDb viewer felt a scathing theme of the film was that single mothers were “selfish monsters.”

the racist, classist, and anti-Christian discursive undertones that seeped through the underlying characterological embodiments, storyline themes and/or plot sequence in *White Oleander* and *Brokedown Palace*. In the latter title, the juxtaposition of two exemplar IMDb reviews, garner either praise or condemnation towards two representational practices; one that problematizes yet applauds the redemptive loyalty and depth of friendship in two American, female travelers, and the other that protests the racist depiction of Thailand – its peoples and justice system. A celebratory commentary from one male IMDb movie reviewer reads, “[Alice] learns the often horrifying price true friendship sometimes demands – and her final actions betoken a personal maturation that helps lift her character far above the rung of conventional movie heroines” (“Flawed But Worthwhile,” April 9, 2000). In contrast, a disparaging accusation ensues in an earlier unidentified viewer post: “Thais, caricatured in every guise from prison officials to citizens to prisoners, and even hotel security guards, are officious at best, covetous and despicable the rest of the time...these yellow swine” (“Broken Nails, Nasty Yellow People,” September 6, 1999). In *White Oleander* separate reviewers variously critiqued the following elements: The white, classist, portrayal of fosterdom; the glorification of ‘blondness’ over the racialized realities of this system; the disturbing portrayal of foster care, that would surely anger State officials; the ‘cheap shot’ taken at Christianity, and some characterological caricatures that denigrated the richness of the film. As well, reviewers did not emphasize or create alternate, less derogatory descriptors of Ingrid.

The cinematic experience elicits affective feelings and responses immersed within the discourses of critical reception, endorsement (promotion) versus devaluation (critique) interrelated to the constructs of filmic representations, creative content (relatability), and productive aspects. An emotionality of response, from heartfelt sentiments to condemnatory judgement, including shock, fear and surprise, emerged in relation to the underlying storyline themes and particular filmic elements, such as a prisoner personification (*White Oleander*), harsh depictions of confinement (*Caged*), or seemingly realistic overseas dangers (*Brokedown Palace*). In *Caged*, the depiction of the “horrors of incarceration” (June’s suicide, Harper’s murder, and the degradative shaving of Marie’s head) was shockingly unsettling. The strong, almost promotionally generating phrases of “terrifically engaging,” “profound and memorable,” “effective and affecting,” and “the most disturbing film... seen by 1951,” descriptively characterize

*Caged*'s impact on many viewers, who called it a "masterpiece," and "the best of its genre." One IMDb viewer wrote, "[I] never forgot the fear it instilled in me" years after watching the film as a child ("Most Disturbing," November 14, 2004).

A similarly deep, affective response was expressed for *Love Child*, *Brokedown Palace*, and *White Oleander*, despite representations that were arguably less intense, and at times, fictitiously sanitized, although resolutely satisfying for many audience members. More specifically, some viewers articulated feeling the emotions that characters performatively displayed. For example, although *Love Child* garnered few reviews, one IMDb commentary espoused feeling – "intimidated, hopeful, disgusted and downright 'in love" – emotionally similar to that of prisoner, Terry Moore ("A Real Eye Opener," November 27, 1998). But a male site viewer expressed his disdain towards Ingrid Magnussen in *White Oleander*, with the disparaging comment that the "atypical portrait of a sinister woman... makes us feel both disgust and pity for this lost soul who... is clearly unable to provide the proper moral guidance for the daughter she so obviously loves" ("Great Performances," October, 19, 2002). This poignantly complex story brings out feelings of sadness, misery, depression, hurtfulness, and heartbreak. It is a film with a "staying emotional resonance;" one that "reach[es] part of your soul that needed to be touched," as one female IMDb reviewer explained ("A Story Upon," October 18, 2002); while a subsequent reviewer expressed a profoundly engaging experience: "Words couldn't truly express the emotional journey you take while viewing [this] film... ." ("WO is a Kaleidoscope," October 22, 2002).

Across both the IMDb and the Amazon.com marketplaces, *White Oleander* (2002) was positively affirmed and endorsed as a "hauntingly beautiful, yet disturbing film;" one that is "powerful," "fascinatingly complex," and ultimately life-changing. Yet for other viewers, the story held little emotional power, and was disliked as a "shallow" and "trite" screenplay that overplayed Hollywoodized star power in a poorly readapted, sanitized and depthless filmic representation of a celebrated novel. *Brokedown Palace* (1999) tugged at the heartstrings of viewers, some of whom tearfully reacted to Alice's sacrificial and selfless decision, and humanized characterological strength, which became a powerful thought-provoking quandary many people related to the depths of friendship(s) in their own lives. Overall, most people did not conceptualize *Brokedown Palace* as a prison story, but rather, one that deeply explored the bonds of friendship,

within tragic circumstances. In other instances, the film's lack of intensity and predictability, and senseless, uninteresting storyline resulted in some people feeling very little for characters who performatively didn't express the emotions of rage, horror and hopelessness, towards such an intractable predicament of lifelong incarceration. Nonetheless, the film received praiseworthy descriptors that ranged from – “amazing,” “suspenseful,” and “captivating – a must see,” to the adjectively unfavourable words of “unconvincing,” “pathetic,” and a “[a] one sided Lifetime movie.” *Love Child* was described along a dimensional range from “fascinating,” “compelling,” “awesome,” and “enjoyable” to “a piece of crap.”

Viewer perspectives regarding female law-breaking and carceral containment (domestic and foreign), involve distinctive engagements with criminological issues that people interpretively/associatively conceptualize within the discourse of pedagogical knowledge (factuality over imagination), respectively related to the constructs of ‘presupposed realism’ or, ‘cinematic fiction.’ Cinephiles culturally ground understandings of the prison within interpretive frameworks that comparatively juxtapose Hollywood representations with their corresponding carceral place images, for a context that remains in its current anonymity, dependent on “its reel, uncanny cinematic [fictitious] depiction” (Fiddler 2007: 195). *Brokedown Palace* (1999) provides such an example. The vague, non-graphic, and apparent tame depiction of imprisonment in Thailand elicited much audience critique and disbelief at the supposed realism of confinement.<sup>406</sup> Third World imprisonment was expected to be overly sadistic, brutal, and oppressive; a threatening, horrific, and uncivilized predicament that the film-makers did not accurately depict. This belief, coupled with the xenophobic depiction of an arbitrary and corrupt foreign justice system, its corresponding agents, harsh drug penalties, and its “strict and oppressive laws” against foreigners, comparatively vilifies Thailand as the *other* to an

<sup>406</sup> One Amazon.com viewer comparatively juxtaposed the exploitable elements of violence, rape, murder, suicide, drugs, and corruption in the exploitation film *Purgatory* (1980) as a more accurate depiction of Third World imprisonment. One viewer felt that *Brokedown Palace* accurately portrayed confinement. The standardized, cinematic representations of female confinement that emphasize violence, hardship, danger and individualistic dysfunction, formulate and structure people's understandings, that are further shaped by male prison film representations. For example, the true story *Midnight Express* (1978), creates the image of the vile, tortuous, and oppressive foreign prison (Parrish (1991: 287), yet contends that the trade ad for the film reads, “Turkey...is no more guilty of penal corruption and brutality, than, say, the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, etc ... .”

Americanized correctional apparatus that is deemed as fair, just and civilized, despite widespread evidence to the contrary. One IMDb reviewer suggested boycotting such a foreign country, as Thailand. Many viewers believed that the girls' wrongful conviction and imprisonment was realistically possible. In turn, some people were reluctant and fearful of travelling abroad into unknown situations of potential dangers, and expressed concerns for the young female traveller. However, a few select viewers acknowledged this misrepresentation. One exemplar from a male IMDb reviewer read, "Hollywood's bashing of Malaysia and Thailand's justice systems is getting old. We should examine [the] inequities in our own system more often – [the film] *Dead Man Walking* was a start"<sup>407</sup> ("A Limp Recreation," April 16, 2000). As such, *Brokedown Palace* represents a cautionary communicative message for the unsuspecting First World tourist, that creates a fear of strangers, crime, uncivilized containment, Americanized prejudice, and unfairness, "regarded as useful in contributing to public knowledge" around issues of safety from crime (Schofield 2004: 123). The aforementioned commentary unveils how people continue to hold onto preconceived criminological pseudo-realisms and truth claims that symbolize imagination over reality; understandings of crime, criminality, and imprisonment that remain within the fictional terrain of cultural representations that permeate our consciousness.

In *White Oleander* (2002), the constructs of 'retributive-consequences' and 'personal redemption' emerged from limited consumer posts that addressed issues of penalty. In a few cases, the villainous Ingrid was deemed to be deserving of a lengthy prison sanction, while a single IMDb reviewer believed that confinement brought forth valuable lessons of love and ultimate salvation for Ingrid. For others, State fosterdom symbolized a carceral sentence that paralleled the horrors and hardships of incarceration.

<sup>407</sup> *Dead Man Walking* (1995) chronicled the execution process, interjected with the events of a horrific crime, committed by a man convicted of two brutal rape murders. The film critically presents the issues of the death penalty on both sides of the debate from both the offender's and victim's family. A nun takes on the task of providing a spiritual redemption to the condemned man, Mathew Poncelett. The film documents the experiences of Sister Helen Prejean, who is involved in prison ministry to death row inmates in Angola penitentiary, Louisiana. The storyline and characters are a composite of two separate Louisiana criminal cases and men – Patrick Sonnier (1977) for the rape and murder of 18 year old Loretta Bourque, and the killing of David LeBlanc, age 16, and, Robert Lee Willie (1980), incarcerated for the sexual assault and homicide of Faith Hathaway, age 18 years.

Alternatively, *Caged* (1950) holds the unique distinction in serving a pedagogical role, in cinematic messages that perspectively engage viewers in apparent facticities around specific carceral issues, such as institutional/systemic injustice, criminogenic 'prison' contagion, and progressive reformative change. As well, audience members deemed the representational portrayals regarding the perils of confinement and the need for correctional reform as meaningfully, factual messages, that held a relevance to carceral issues in contemporary times. Across both the IMDb and the Amazon.com cyber sites, reviewers adjectively promoted *Caged* as a "convincing and compelling" expose of the "horrors of incarceration" and the "brutal cruelty of a villain jailer," in a "chilling" and "searing" representational indictment of "life-behind-bars" that does not resort to "trashy histrionics." The film exposed an ineffective system, rampant with political and correctional "corruption and cynicism," and callous, apathetic officials. One IMDb viewer constructed the parole board agents as more "heartless and cruel" than matron Harper. The filmic message is explicitly and authentically clear; prisons are microcosms of deviance and immorality, breeders of new and habitual criminality; settings of "dire human conditions" devoid of any rehabilitative potential; a condition that is far worse than the crimes the women committed. Here imprisonment becomes the context through which Marie's former self becomes transformed into a criminalized subjectivity that defies normative womanhood.

Otherwise, some people specifically spoke to *Caged's* reformative stance. As one Amazon.com consumer described, "This 1950 film makes no attempt to obscure it's social agenda, which is to promote an overhaul of the American prison system, a system which the film-makers felt created and protected criminality as much as it punished it" ("Involving and Heart Rendering Indictment," August 17, 2007). Another IMDb viewer felt *Caged* (1950) empowered its represented subjects, and wrote "[The film] can be ... taken as a voice for those women who have no voice, those who, regardless of the gravity of their crimes, have been literally 'locked away' from society and forced ...into the subhuman, where the only way to survive is to become the antithesis of good and give into corruption, here dominated by the overpowering, smothering persona of Hope Emerson as Evelyn Harper" ("The Template," June 16, 2007). Also, *Caged* was comparatively juxtaposed with the prison documentary *Scared Straight* (1978), as a film with deterrent value that every parent should watch with their children.

In *Love Child* (1982), viewers similarly constructed the movie as informative in accurately depicting the workings of the criminal justice and correctional systems that were both problematized and also understandably accepted. One IMDb viewer described the movie as “fascinating” in its representation of Terry’s important, albeit difficult, predicament and wrote, “We can see both sides of the picture too – from Captain Ellis’s very logical advice to the lawyer’s dilemma” (“A Real Eye Opener,” November, 27 1998). In this regard, both *Caged* and *Love Child* engage many viewers in textual talk that interpretively accepts representations as factual knowledge over fictitious constructions. Conversely, a single unidentified Amazon.com reviewer did not see any authenticity in *Caged*.

The productive aspects of film-making highlighted in posted reviews centered on the discourse of promotion tied to two specific constructs, that included creative merit (technical, expressive, and narratological), and performative authenticity (realism versus entertainment). Again, *Love Child* (1982) is the exception, providing no specific commentary in these areas. It is the other three titles that appreciatively emphasize and/or critique the interrelated aspects of film-making that innovatively shape representational meanings. John Cromwell’s *Caged* (1950) was praised for its “artistry and craftsmanship,” in “dark and evocative” noirist cinematography, claustrophobic camera effects/angles, an engaging script, a sparse, “brooding and moody” musical score, and periodized, talented veteran actresses, “free from the glamorous trappings of regular [mainstream] fare.” In similarly articulated ways, viewers of the contemporary title, *White Oleander*, appreciably emphasized creatively rich elements that included the meanings infused in off-beat, aesthetic expressions, the diverse colour schemes, and the naturalistic, impressionistic, pre-emptive, scenic, storyline backdrops. The films’ verité camerawork creates an almost theatrical visual style, in a production viewers applaud as beautifully directed, powerfully performed, and hauntingly scripted, with a great musical composition; a film of realistic artistic merit “stripped of Hollywood glitz and glitter.”

*Brokedown Palace* (1999) received less admiration, yet some people appreciated its beautiful cinematography, soundtrack, and intriguing storyline. Nevertheless, films also received less than admirable adjectives that specifically referred to non-conventional productive aspects, including hand-held, jarring imagery, separate,

unresolved storylines (Astrid's foster homes), purposeless flashbacks and underdeveloped characters, (*White Oleander*), and downplayed scenes, unanswered questions, and an ambiguous ending (*Brokedown Palace*). As well, this latter title was evaluatively assessed as having a "lousy," predictable plot and uninteresting characters, while for some people the former film was a sappy, television Lifetime movie, or "chick flick." However, In *Brokedown Palace*, unconventional productive aspects were also appreciated, such as the absence of a complete feel good, happy ending, which also created a realistic effect.

Cinephilic viewers associatively tied notions of realism in representations to particular productive and creative elements such as thematic content, filmic messages, actor performance, and styles of narrative structure and visual expression. Characterological depth and performance directly influenced viewer's perceptions of realism, in embodiments that brought a believability to the broader storyline (Maltby 2003: 378, 379). For example, in the film *Caged*, gritty, realistic, Oscar-worthy, memorable performances from Eleanor Parker (Marie Allen), and Hope Emerson (Evelyn Harper) created authentic portrayals. Two female Amazon.com reviewers provided separate commentary exemplars and related that the effectiveness of Marie's transformation was facilitated through a characterological persona that "project[ed] subtleties and nuances" ("First Rate Film," October 24, 2007) while Harper's cruelty and corruption, was so horrifically performed that it "could easily be applied to today's standards of good versus evil"<sup>408</sup> ("Female Version," June 3, 2008). Alternatively, one IMDb reviewer of *Love Child* made claims to being a caring family member who was angered by the film's untruthful misrepresentation of Terry's dire and unsupportive familial circumstances.

In *White Oleander* (2002), reviewers either factualize or fictionalize film-making as distinctly entertainment oriented over message-based. The episodic, disjointed narratives brought an authenticity to the film over the mainstream, Hollywood plot sequence, for some viewers. In other instances, the unconventional filmic techniques

<sup>408</sup> This viewer categorized *Caged* as a female version of the more contemporary male prison film, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), that similarly portrayed issues of prison corruption, injustice, and a "decent soul who fell through the cracks," prisoner Andy Dufresne.



that take on more of an 'indie' vibe created authenticity, along with believable, three dimensional characters, relationships, and situations enveloped in a deeply integrative script. For other viewers, however, the film served as pure entertainment, with a glamorized female cast, clichéd scenes, "generalizations and predictable dramatic turns," and the traditional, happy ending.

*White Oleander's* credibility was criticized by reviewers who had read the popular novel, readapted into the film. It was denounced as an emotionally hollow, oversimplified screenplay that erased meaningful messages and ultimately committed "aesthetic crimes." One IMDb viewer scornfully wrote "The book is poetry, multi-faceted and richly textured, full of language and rich, complex characters. In comparison, the movie is like a still Polaroid from Ingrid's ... exhibit – a pose captured forever in two dimensions, without depth or soul." Ingrid is portrayed as "selfish, manipulative, [and] weak... [compared to her] dangerous yet, hauntingly seducing" character in the book ("Skip the Movie," February 5, 2005). Similarly, an Amazon.com commentary scathingly accuses *White Oleander* of epitomizing "yet another example of an exquisite, nearly flawless book being butchered and sacrificed to the Hollywood marketing machine" ("Powerful Book," September 28, 2004). A male IMDb reviewer praises the films' non-mainstream effects, however, in a protectively sanitized storyline devoid of meaningful messages but worth the dramatic journey it depicts, and wrote that the film "focuses lucidly on issues... while manifesting restraint in the use of trite Hollywoodistics and melodrama as it builds believable depth into its ...characters, conjuring top notch performances" ("Bravo," March 15, 2003).

In *Brokedown Palace* a multiplicity of comments across both Amazon.com and the IMDb revealed specific storyline structural and narratological elements, that creates facets of both authenticity and pure entertainment. For instance, some exemplifiers that develop strands of realism include an emphasis on the naturalized over the dramatic, real emotions and situations ("moral underpinnings, thematic depth"), characterological relatability, and alternative filmic conventions. In contrast, for other viewers the film reflected a "contrived and hampered realism," in implausible, "ludicrous sequences," unoriginal clichéd storylines, propagated stereotypes, unbelievable friendship ties, and a concocted, emotionally heartbreaking ending, that either made the film unenjoyable, or mindlessly entertaining. Many viewers comparatively validated the male version of this

film, *Return to Paradise* (1998), as a more in-depth, realistic portrayal of foreign confinement that was more effectively cinematically delivered.<sup>409</sup>

## The Independent Film

*Map of the World* (1999) “Create[s] a profound, unflinching look into the real and complex nature of life as a human” (“A Polished Stone,” March 28, 2007, IMDb, male).

*Karla* (2005) is not just about “entertainment but rather a barometer by which we can measure our own states of sanity or depravity” (“Disturbing but Important,” January 20, 2006, IMDb, unidentified).

The contemporary independent film is historically situated within a fifteen year time frame, beginning with the docudramatic, hard-edged prison production of *Condition Red* (1995) and ending with the controversial portrayal of serial killer Karla Homolka, in *Karla* (2006), that sparked public outrage and calls for cinematic censorship. Four additional, selected titles for review include the resolutely quirky, yet complex characterological study of Alice Goodwin, in *Map of the World*, (1999), the politically conscious, exploitative *Civil Brand* (2001), the periodized, urban fairy tale of *House of D* (2004), and the womanized tapestry of interconnection and heartfelt humanity in *Nine Lives* (2005). Despite the portrayal of the penal subject as a secondary character, or as, peripherally, part of a central, non-carceral storyline in some titles, cinephilic reviewers nonetheless distinctly and uniquely conceptualize prisoners’ subjectivities. In addition, people communicatively revealed their appreciative understandings of the productive artistry in films that created a uniqueness of meaning in both visual expression, and narratological disjuncture and variations.

The cultural labels that arise in textual talk are located along a continuum that rearticulates categorizations that are pathologizing and formulaic at one end, and alternatively creative and refreshingly insightful at the other; embedded within the discourses of demonization, problematization, psychologization, empowerment and humanization. The constructs of pathologization, stereotypification, vilification, problematization, and contextualization frame the ways in which viewers accept or

<sup>409</sup> *Return to Paradise* (1998) chronicles similar themes such as drug possession, imprisonment and personal sacrifice for a friend. *Brokedown Palace* was also compared to actual documented Australian experiences that typically ended in tragedy – murder or suicide – that further unauthenticated the film.

challenge filmistic constructions of the criminalized woman. Karla Homolka, in *Karla* (2006), for example, was the most reviled characterological persona across all the filmic titles, independent and otherwise, even though the movie's representational portrayal rather blandly and humanely constructed her as a culpable victim – albeit one unconditionally complicit in Paul Bernardo's sadistic acts. Across both the IMDb and Amazon.com sites, film reviewers expressed their uttermost dislike and disgust, correspondingly constructing Karla Homolka along a continuum of vilification, as a "sick monster," and "the evil spawn of the devil." A disparaging, artificial terrain of diagnostic attributes, emergent in IMDb reviews, served to further demonize her as inhuman; a "monster," "chillingly detached," and "[a] creepy, girlish, sociopath" with a disturbed and twisted mind. Otherwise, in the five other independent films, formulaic stereotypes were not primary categories, only recycled labels that materialize in isolated reviews commentary such as the "goody-goody inmate" Sandra (*Nine Lives*), "baby killer" Alice (*Map of the World*), "black hooker," "murderer," and "convict" Lady (*House of D*), and "hardened criminals" (*Civil Brand*).<sup>410</sup> In contrast, several Amazon.com consumers perspectively psychologized Alice Goodwin in *Map of the World* (1999) as a problematic, yet humanized "ordinary woman," with distinctly "detestable" personality flaws that characterized her as "aggravating," "caustic," "distant," "outspoken, abrasive, sloppy, and disorganized," – and a "misfit" in a "hostile" Midwestern town. Also in *Nine Lives*, Sandra's emotional reaction to her failed family visit is contextualized through her victimhood and enforced humiliations, "inherent in her [prisoner] status."

Alternatively, textual reviews reconstructed prisoners' subjectivities through more humanizing and affirming labels across several films, in both review cyber sites. These adjective descriptors positioned the central prison character(s) as empowered subject(s); "strong, edgy, and intelligent" women, who courageously challenge their carceral oppressions, "rising above the perceived stereotypes" (prison sisters, *Civil Brand*), or as a "self-assured, independent, and an educated person in control" (Alice, *Map of the World*). Lady (Bernadette Odell), in *House of D*, was delightfully perceived as "soulful and hilarious" as Tommy's "wise-cracking" prison confidante; a representation of

<sup>410</sup> All these labels are from Amazon.com reviews, with the exception of "murderer," which is from IMDb. The scant reviews for *Condition Red* provided no such labels.

wisdom, and helpful advice in a beautifully and uniquely crafted imaginative character. As well, select viewers extolled prisoners as instrumental agents in freeing the protagonist male from childhood tragedy (Lady in *House of D*, Amazon.com) and from adult alienation, bitterness and unhappiness (Gidell in *Condition Red*, IMDb).

Cinephilic consumers affectively responded to films in diametrically opposing ways, with extremely condemnatory commentary versus strongly positive appraisals, all of which were integratively related to the constructs of 'creative content' – including offensive, criminological and stereotypically thematic, and 'productive aspects' – visual expression, and structural variation. Viewers' feelings were directly related to their explicit filmic valuations (likes and dislikes), creating a corresponding discourse of endorsement (promotion) versus devaluation (critique). Again, *Karla* (2006) was condemned as "a shameless exploitation of such heinous activity;" a distinctly abhorrent production, that left viewers feeling "outraged," "disturbed," "angered," "sickened," "betrayed," "unclean," and saddened by a film that was "the most grotesque experience" of one IMDb viewer's life. Another IMDb consumer disparagingly wrote, "The film ... caters to those folks who...secretly harbour fantasies about and are sexually excited by the rape, torture and murder of women" – a commentary that demonizes prospective, interested consumers ("People Will Stoop to," April 27, 2007). In contrast to this, a single Amazon.com reviewer felt that watching the film kept the victims' memories alive, instead of glorifying the criminal perpetrators. For most viewers, however, this haunting film generated a viscerally negative response and was determined to be, as described in a single male Amazon.com review, "very deep, dark, and really disgusting" ("Where Has Horror," January 9, 2008). Also, *Karla* revisited or instilled fear, anxiety, and unsettling feelings in IMDb viewers, who were either experientially situated in proximity to the crimes, victims, offenders and/or community, or, who remained otherwise unconnected with the grim events. One male IMDb reviewer now believed "that monsters are not just in fantasy and horror films; they live right next door to you... ." ("A Chilling Film," January 24, 2006). Alternatively, a Canadian, who lived in the vicinity of the victims as a child, recalls the paranoia and fear her parents felt until the murderers were caught; while a young American couple voiced concerns about their personal safety against such predators, after watching the film. Yet, despite such commentary, other reviewers enjoyed an alternatively crafted, independent production.

Three other titles, *Map of the World* (1999), *Nine Lives* (2005), and *House of D* (2004) ranged in evaluative assessment, affective response, and general appeal, and were enjoyed as rich, complex, and intensely emotional works, respectively described as “honest and deeply introspective,” “intensely human,” and “touching.” Viewers often experienced a rollercoaster of contrasting emotions, from laughter and tears, to anger and joy, in *House of D*. *Nine Lives* was particularly moving; a film that was adjectively deemed as “unique and compelling,” “magical,” “luminous,” “breathtaking,” and “tragic.” One Amazon.com viewer poignantly wrote that the film “will reach you in ways you’re never imagined” (“Nine of the Best Movies,” July 12, 2008). Conversely, more problematized assessments of films brought critique directed towards particular elements – both productive and thematic. For example, *Map of the World* brought out feelings of “frustration” and “disappointment,” encapsulated in offensive and unrealistic stereotypicalizations that included Wisconsin typecasts, racist clichés of black prisoners, and “trashy” single mothers. Two reviewers specifically mocked the film’s “soggy Oprahfied storyline.” In *Nine Lives*, the banality of life’s everyday moments drew some negative commentary from viewers who found the film monotonously dull and boring, and characterologically shallow. This suggests that meaningful interpretations were difficult for those viewers uncomfortable with non-linearly connected, unresolved vignettes. In a similar vein, *Map of the World* was described by some IMDb viewers as “banal trash,” and too slow pacing narratologically. In many reviews, *House of D* (2006) was affectively affirmed and celebrated as a “gem,” “unique,” “a charming entertaining movie” that had a diversity of unique personalities, such as prisoner Lady, embedded within a heartwarming, emotional, sweet, and intense story. Others, in contrast, chastised the film as a trite, silly, contrived, and purposeless endeavour, that one IMDb viewer felt created denigrating female characterological roles.

The few IMDb reviews of *Condition Red* (1995) expressed either contempt for an unbelievable, low-budget storyline, or, praise, for its “effective” and “powerful” depiction of imprisonment. Overall, there were no affective feelings for a title that garnered little promotional support. Despite the non-exploitative, socially conscious aims of *Civil Brand* (2002), the film contained women-in-prison “stereotypes and clichés” that were affectively felt and pleasurably enjoyed by some viewers. One IMDb viewer of the film voyeuristically revelled in the voluptuous bodies of two prisoners depicted in a lengthy

segregation scene, while a female Amazon.com reviewer explicitly wrote that when the women “were beating his [Deese’s] ass I got an adrenaline rush!” (“The Actions of Corrupted Cops,” May 24, 2005). In other instances, when viewers’ expectations for exploitation (the standardized shower or lesbian scene) were not met, the film was either critiqued or negatively reviewed. In another case, the brutish Guard Deese so infuriated an unidentified Amazon.com viewer that they wanted to kill him, during the film. Other viewers served to either ignore or openly resist exploitable elements, and instead expressed “compassion” and concern for prisoners living under the oppressive and abusive conditions that the filmic storyline aimed to realistically, yet problematically, represent.

A communicative cinephilic dialogue emerged, in regard to criminological issues that arose from controversial, politically conscious, and alternatively depicted thematic content that sparked public inquiry, stringent criticism, and critical engagement. The discourse of pedagogical knowledge (experientialism) primarily enveloped the constructs of prison injustices (individual and systemic), representational formations (meanings and appropriateness), freedoms (vilification versus legitimation) and contextualization, which serve to categorically frame reviewers’ interpretations and resultant conceptualizations of crime, criminality, and carceral sanctions. In *Nine Lives* (2005), “expressions of an incarcerated mom” unveiled the immense “frustrations” and “oppressions” of prison life depicted outside the cinematically exploitative, which provided more authentic understandings (IMDb). For instance, some posts across cyber review forums perceived Sandra as a victim to the system, subjected to both small and large-scale humiliations, “mental cruelty by [a] guard,” and situations seemingly minor, but nonetheless deeply emotional and heart wrenching, that uncharacteristically spelled disaster for her – specifically, a failed family visit. Contrary to this, for *Map of the World*, reviews from Amazon.com provided particularly insightful commentary. For example, imprisonment symbolized a redemptive reprieve; a therapeutic environment, “where Alice stoically waits...almost as if she were expiating her real and imagined sins,” as one reviewer wrote (“A Surprising,” November 25, 2001). A subsequent reviewer constructed the prison as both a “safe haven” that protectively insulated Alice from “the real world’s unbearable torment,” and an “ideal delivery mechanism for the punishment she craves” (“There But for the Grace of God,” December 1, 2007). However, another site cinephile

realized the “psychological stripping” of prisoners like Alice, who needed to be “strong” and “resolute” to survive the aftermath of the tragic events, and confinement, which “tests” relationships, and puts strain and hardship on family members. One Amazon.com reviewer felt the sanitized depiction of Alice’s imprisonment was unrealistic.

The commentary for *Civil Brand* became intertwined within negative and critical evaluative assessments of the productive aspects of the film, that seriously compromised the representation of powerful and important criminological messages, considered to be “raw and the honest truth.” Across both the IMDb and Amazon.com sites, reviewers variously emphasized pertinent issues, such as the Prison Industrial Complex, and the hardships (slave labour, poor working conditions) and oppressions (mental and sexual abuse) that plague the female correctional system. More importantly, some individual interpretations specifically reflected the film-makers’ pedagogical aims; for example: the corporate enslavement of African American labour, contemporarily in the prison context; private profits from prison industry; systemic carceral corruption, and non-archetypical subjectivities (such as women prisoners as “survivors”). One IMDb reviewer called for societal opposition and resistance to a system, which “destroys human potential” and symbolized the “gendered persecution ... [of] women... in prison ... .” (“The Film That Could Have Been,” November 17, 2002).

Lastly, in *House of D*, a young boy’s relationship with Lady was problematized as irresponsible, “false,” and, from one male Amazon.com reviewer’s perspective, “bizarre....almost surreal in its unbelievability” (“Charmingly Pointless,” April 21, 2005). Contrary to this, a self-identified, former foster parent and detention centre worker found the story wholly credible, in comparison with his experiences with youth who were, as character Tommy Warsaw, similarly marginalized, and having to deal with parental co-dependency, drug addiction, and who relied on non-familial members for support (Amazon.com).

*Karla* (2006) was the film that initiated an intense debate regarding cinematic censorship versus freedom of representation. Many cinephilic viewers vehemently supported their position in ways that expressed their affective feelings, moral sensibilities of ‘right and wrong,’ beliefs in victims’ rights and opinions concerning civil liberties of creative expression. Many reviewers felt outraged by what they perceived as the

Americanized profiteering off “brutal child killings” that held neither entertainment nor educational value, and was macabrely unnecessary, and questionable as to why filmmakers would seek “analyzing the psyche of ... sick [and] twisted minds” in a production of exploitative human suffering (“Sick, Disgusting, and Pointless,” December 30, 2006, IMDb). Other reviewers promoted an outright boycott of *Karla*, which they contended, blatantly and atrociously ignored and disrespected the feelings of the victim’s families. One IMDb viewer claimed the film’s overt misrepresentation of the facts – including a retraction of schoolgirl Kirsten French’s courageous words, in direct resistance to Paul Bernardo’s sick demands –, was a “despicable artistic license that insults the victim[s]” (“An Inaccurate and Poorly Produced Film,” June 2, 2007).

Still, other viewers did not resist, question the legitimacy, or vilify the representational expressions in *Karla* (2006). Instead, some viewers insisted, artistic freedom was important in its own right, and the State should not regulate what is suitable for public viewing pleasures. Furthermore, cinephiles expressed other reasons for the justifiable acceptability of the film. One IMDb reviewer felt it was important and necessary in creating public awareness about potential future crimes and victims, while another validated the film as an “insightful and meaningful” story about “serial killers” that should be told. In an additional commentary, it was argued that other movies have depicted more graphically violent, horrific crimes without any concern or consultation with victims’ families. Interestingly, a few viewers expressed little or no resistance to the disturbing content, with a single male IMDb reviewer remarking, “I especially appreciated the attention paid to the gruesome details and the tasteful way they were expressed... [there was] definite sensitivity paid to the victims and their families” (“Fantastic Film,” February 8, 2006). In a similar vein, an Amazon.com reviewer felt the victims were treated with respect in the filmic representations.

The personification of the penal subject became problematized as offensively inappropriate in some specific films, but above all in *Karla* (2006). Across the IMDb filmic forums, the representation of Karla Homolka as a “weak, passive, victim,” was distastefully repellent and symbolically unjust for many viewers, who believed she was a willing participant in the torture and murders of the victims, along with her husband, Paul Bernardo – a culpability that was not mitigated by the depiction of Karla as an abused spouse. One IMDb reviewer made little qualms about the believability of such a



representation, and wrote, “By painting an obviously inaccurate portrait of [Karla] Homolka, Joel Bender discredits his own film” (“Even Amateurs,” January 28, 2006).<sup>411</sup> The film’s non-demonization of Karla, and the case, reiterated from her own perspective, added to this evaluative assessment from other viewers. The DVD special feature, *Facts Beyond the Film*, presented the real truths that were otherwise so blatantly disregarded. In light of this, one IMDb review felt both killers should have received the maximum sentence while another believed in Karla’s future risk as a dangerous offender to herself, others, and her young son. In other cases, however, some viewers believed that the film realistically represented the facts that were eventually released to the public. The film *Condition Red* (1995) offers no meaningful understandings or perspectives regarding criminological issues.

The following discussion will briefly touch upon some of the notable, articulated perspectives regarding the artistry and creativity of the culturally mediated product of the independent film. Many cinephilic reviews interpretively voiced an appreciation and critique of how certain micro-aspects of production created meaningful messages, grounded in diversely unique representations of the penal subject, and enveloped within the discourse of humanity and the constructs of realism (performative, thematic, productively expressive), relatability, and contextualization. Rodrigo Garcia’s *Nine Lives* (2005) was inimitable in the “everyday realism” it brought to the screen; a “subtlety,” of expression, that humanizes women’s life stories in a “powerful” “artistry” of “simply breathtaking” vignette segments “that are [all] profound and intensely spiritual.” Several reviewers across the cyber forums appreciatively valued the film’s unique productive style, that didn’t “pander to conventional standards of entertainment.” As one male IMDb reviewer remarked, [Garcia is] a “genius... a great author, mining vein after vein of truth and freeing his brilliant actors to be intensely, fearlessly human at every second” (“Masterpiece,” June 21, 2005). An IMDb reviewer remarked that seeing the unknown actress Elpidia Carrillo sweeping the prison corridor appeared almost documentary-like. In accordance with such admiration, other reviewers applauded *Nine Lives’* productive

<sup>411</sup> This viewer continues to demonize Homolka through her non-criminalized actions, which included objecting to her father’s grief over her sister, Tammy, and Karla being unemotional and inappropriately concerned with her unclaimed belongings in her former home where the murders took place.

aspects – the great script and direction, the deeply compelling character relations and situations, “intuitive acting,” “naturalized dialogue,” the absence of Hollywoodized “clichéd sentimentality” – in an ensemble film devoid of traditional chronology and sequence, plotlines, and ‘knowable,’ resolute, “trite, gift wrapped” endings. An Amazon.com reviewer appreciated that Hollywood stars discarded showcase roles to play “subtle, multilayered characters.” A male Amazon.com consumer praised the performances as “absolutely wonderful and believable, bringing raw emotion in the way that only film can” (“Superb Journey,” October 31, 2007). One IMDb post admirably reads, “Rodrigo’s writing is uniquely subtle and seemingly mundane and the unedited mise-en-scene camera gives [us] a feeling of authenticity... .” (“Well Worth the Payoff,” October 24, 2005). While another person poignantly remarks, “Garcia treats his characters with a gentle touch, even when revealing their flaws. We feel compassion for them in their anguish. ... [He] tells us enough to empathize, but not enough to judge” (“Women in Love,” January 31, 2005).

In Scott Elliot’s *Map of the World* (1999), filmic viewers comparatively praised the complex, and “deeply human” character-driven performances that created understandably relatable situations for the audience. One IMDb consumer wrote, “Elliott establishes the credibility of the film by creating an atmosphere and setting that is entirely real – so real. In fact, it will be more than a bit disconcerting to many who will so readily be able to identify with Alice and relate to her situation” (“Involving Affecting Drama,” July 11, 2002). Sigourney Weaver’s performance was assessed as “honest,” “complex,” “superb” and reflecting “a phenomenal depth and range of emotion.” In contrast to the primarily exemplary valuations given to *Nine Lives*, reviewers otherwise problematized the productive aspects of *Map of the World* as overburdened with too much thematic content: a child’s death; criminal accusations; imprisonment, and unnecessary scenes that, at times, lacked any integrative depth or meaning. As well, various people across the filmic review forums criticized specific micro-productive elements that included the “slow pacing” banality of the narrative, “the formulaic humdrum direction,” the predictable “swan dive” [Hollywoodized], melodramatic plot, and the exceedingly poor filmic adaptation of the book. Nevertheless, both *Nine Lives* and *Map of the World* were films that some viewers evaluated as worthy of academy awards (the ‘Oscars’).

Additionally, in both *Civil Brand* (2002) and *Karla* (2006), textual talk regarding the productive and expressive context of film-making further linked reviewers' conceptualizations of realism to the constructs of exploitation and non-sensationalization. For example, audience resistance to characterological personifications were juxtaposed with people's perspectives regarding the stereotypification of prisoners as formulaically clichéd (*Civil Brand*), and the humanization of the condemnatory monster, Karla Homolka (*Karla*). Both films lay claims to authenticity for viewers, who reiterated the inherent evilness of the murderous couple in a sort of "creepy realism" (Homolka and Bernardo) to the truisms of oppressive confinement for African American women. In *Karla*, however, the blandish and toned down visual expression of the "heinous acts" was variously interpreted by reviewers as unexpectedly unreal or reasonably sensitive, in downplaying such disturbing performative roles for the actors, that would somehow insulate the victim's families from further trauma. Alternatively, another IMDb reviewer characterized the depiction of violence as an aesthetic expression; almost Hitchcockian; recognizably apparent, but visually off-camera. The performative characterological portrayals ranged from perfect, excellent and brilliant, to amateurish and ridiculous acting. Technical aspects of *Karla* were also critiqued; particularly, the flashback, temporal structure of the storytelling, and the shaky, simulated, and video quality camerawork.

In *Civil Brand* (2002), the film-maker's aims of educating the public about prison injustice through a politicized form of storytelling fell short, by a marginalized budgetary and filming schedule that problematized the representational delivery of such important issues. Some reviewers directed various complaints towards the film's visual expression, dialogical milieu, performance, and musical score, that included judging the uncoloured texturing as amateurish, and the camerawork as too 'artsy,' with fades, jump cuts and editing tricks that became distracting. Other critiques referred to terrible to mediocre acting; lengthy, unnecessary scenes; Sabrina's voice-over narration, which distanced viewers from the characters, and the non-diegetic music that over took some scenes. In other instances, reviews appreciably affirmed the highly developed characters and tight script, and the quality direction, acting and writing, as strengths of the film.

Many viewers enjoyed the nostalgic, coming-of-age fairy tale, *House of D* (2005), a characterologically driven film devoid of Hollywood spectacle. Still, the film received

mixed reviews that ranged from affirmatively praiseworthy to mockingly critical. Two correspondingly exemplar IMDb assessments illustrate this juxtaposition. One man's commentary was disparagingly negative: "This film draws its inspiration more from Disney... than the art-house drama genre it aspires to" ("Unwatchable," May 22, 2005). In contrast, a female reviewer's post about this "masterpiece" was overwhelmingly positive: "The trembling in my voice at the catharsis I experienced in watching such a fantastically well written film, beautifully delivered by its cast and crew," is something, she wrote, that she wanted the film-makers to hear ("Quietly Powerful, Masterfully Realistic," April 10, 2005). Prisoner Lady's performance was described as "penetrating," "funny, touching," and even "convincing." An IMDb reviewer affirms the power of such a characterization, "Helping ...with issues of respecting those you love, Badu [Lady] delivers her lines with purpose and meaning through the [cell bars] with only a mirror shard to see him [Tommy] by" ("I Need the Dad," July 22, 2006).

Also, in both *Condition Red* (1995) and *Civil Brand* (2001), some primary characters, central to the filmic message or narrative, could have been more deeply personified. For example, in the latter title, prisoner Gidell was convincingly portrayed, even though the storyline backdrop was insufficient and unbelievable. Despite its problems, however, one IMDb reviewer remarked that they liked the low-budget-ness of a small scale, "mediocre, yet endearing [independent] film" that few people would see.

As well, viewers intersectionally and perspectively contextualized the film-maker auteur of selected titles. For example, Rodrigo Garcia's reputation as a woman's film-maker (*Nine Lives*) is eloquently articulated by one IMDb reviewer, who says, "I respect Garcia's recurring portrayal of women at the forefront of the struggle, illuminating the far more ignored characters that a sexist world and way more sexist industry shudder to exemplify... ." ("Dogmatic Stream of Consciousness," April 20, 2006). Some viewers acknowledged the importance of *Civil Brand* in creating a storyline that represented the politicized voice of African American prisoners and advocates, and which brought to view a production from black female film-makers who facilitated the careers of aspiring actresses.

## Conclusion

Popular cultural textual forms create criminological understandings that permeate the public consciousness and become representational commodities within a consumer-oriented culture of leisure and entertainment. This chapter has demonstrated the engagement of the cinephilic reviewer with the women-in-prison film through individual posted commentaries that bring forth several emergent themes of focus which flourish within two cinephilic forums of discussion - the IMDb and Amazon.com. This micro-dissertation focus of review 'textual talk' is essential given that filmic representations and messages are ultimately created for and received by the cultural movie consumer.

## Chapter 10.

# Reiterating Research Findings in Conclusionary Thoughts

*“Representation is not [a] reflection but rather an active process of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping, of making things mean” (Byars as cited in Walters 1995: 47).*

*“The manipulation of meaning and the seduction of the image; it is a cultural capitalism” (Ferrell et al. 2008: 15).*

## Introduction

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and into the millennium, criminological themes have remained a popular cultural commodity. Filmic sources initiate a text-reader relation, with the cinematic world as the lens through which understandings of crime permeate the public consciousness. Embodiments of the penal subject emerge in tales of transgression and confinement, performatively enacted on the visual screen, in a stylistically, aesthetically and politically shaped manner, where the criminalized woman, “as both person and perception, comes alive” (Ferrell et al. 2008: 2). As a cinephilic viewer, to the women-in-prison film, its televisual exhibition, and its corresponding representations and meanings, I positioned myself as an interactant observer – through a critical, analytic, deconstructive dissertation inquiry – of three diverse and interlocking film-making forms: the exploitation, Hollywood, and contemporary independent film. More specifically, the research aimed to unveil and interpretively analyze mediated representations of the penal subject that reflect a multiplicity of prisoner subjectivities, enveloped in various discourses, constructs, ideologies, and categorizations reflective of both mainstream and alternate representational portrayals. The autonomous, yet interdependent socio-political history of movie-production is revealed in conceptualizing it as distinctly unique, with diverse filmic styles that otherwise interconnect at varying levels of

contact along the historically and contemporarily grounded continuum of production, distribution, exhibition, and expression. The aesthetics of the criminal event, the criminal subject, and the creation of mediated ontological claims and symbolism are also explored. The discussion also examines the multifarious ways that films are conceptualized as an art form, communicative medium, generic style, and/or as an entertainment pleasure (lurid or emotively melodramatic) .

The chapter is organizationally structured as follows: First, I briefly reiterate and refamiliarize the reader with the research process; its ideological roots, theoretical backdrop, and methodological strategy. Second, I refamiliarize the reader with the central lines of inquiry and provide some summary commentary regarding their presence in the dissertation results. Third, a grounded theory template integratively incorporates a multilayered, analytical framework in the summarization of major research findings, based upon the central lines of inquiry and organized around selected thematic insights, brought forth within film-making forms. Each film-making form is outlined in a short discussion that is organized around several topical areas of focus that correspond with the organizational structure of the results chapters. Fourth, the communicative power of cultural definitions holds realist outcomes that move beyond imagination and the cinematic lens, for actual prisoners constructed with the apparatus of the entertainment media (Presdee 2004: 282). Fifth, the potentiality for a “critical image practice” that engenders resistance to problematic filmistic constructions is discussed in relation to the research findings (Valier 2004: 252). More specifically, I speak to my own work in this regard and its capacity to promote the consumption of alternate cinematic portrayals that provide moments of authenticity within a landscape of mediated productions that typically misrepresent, rather than experientially inform, viewers about women’s carceral oppressions and marginalized pre and post prison lives.

## **The Research Endeavour: A Brief Foundational, Theoretical, and Procedural Review**

The foundational motivations for the research, its topical focus, directive inquiries and analytical lens symbolize a self-reflexivity with the dissertation through a multiplicity of personal ‘social locations’ that include my gender, race, ethnicity, class, age,

educational level, academic perspectives (critical feminist), interests (prisoners' rights), and historicized contact with varied prisoner groups (female and otherwise) and carceral contexts. In particular, I aspired to conduct doctoral research to explore the cultural construction of prisoner subjectivities within a diverse cinematic landscape, to unveil how representations that are vilifying, denigrating, and pathologizing dissonantly conflicted with my experiential knowledge of the female criminological condition, while other more empowering, and/or authentic images or 'moments' congruently fit with my understandings.

An eclectic theoretical focus interpretively interweaves select principles from multifarious primary perspectives into the analysis, that include cultural criminology/media studies/cultural studies, social constructionism, feminism, and film studies. Post-structuralist and post-modernist threads tied to notable authors (Michel Foucault) are secondarily drawn from a particular study, or author (Vivian Burr) associated with one of the primary theoretical areas as identified above. These theories inform the research in various ways that are articulated below in select exemplar insights. Cultural criminology illuminates the interface of power, subordination and injustice within mediated textual forms (Ferrell et al. 2008. 128).<sup>412</sup> The art of social construction infuses itself within the representational process in a constant interplay of meaning-making and interpretation; whereby crime, criminality, and punishment are metamorphically transformed and 'created' into various cinematic conceptions and meanings (Hall 1997a: 5; Young 1996). However, despite the fluidity and constructedness of filmistic imagery, discursively constituted, culturally mediated knowledge, grounded in relations of power, assumes an authority of truth and materiality of effect (Hall 1997b: 49).

Feminist theorizing involves the scrutinization and denaturalization of the seemingly accepted, uncontested images and understandings of the female lawbreaker/prisoner that unveil gradations of disempowerment, gendered and racist ideologies, socially constructed pseudo-realisms and/or truth claims and understandings,

<sup>412</sup> The conceptualization of power is a representational technique. Feminist theory is conceptualized as a line of inquiry but I also choose to articulate it in the theoretical focus of selective thoughts in this conclusionary summary.



and patriarchal and oppressive notions of womanhood which are (re)produced, negotiated, critiqued, and challenged in mediated processes, representations and interpretations. The research analysis makes *the invisible visible*, by identifying the insertions (presences) and erasures (absences) that exist in the formation of prisoner subjectivities shaped by the mythical, fantastical, ideological, subversive, pseudo-realist, seeming truthful, and authenticated moments of representation. The post-modern feminist prisoner is a multiply-constituted subject; intersectionally located, contextually specific, and shaped through the various multi-level, analytical domains that interface and contour the movie-making process. Lastly, film studies theory does not inform the research; rather, it historicizes the landscape of distinctive and overlapping cinematic forms, and also interlinks film-making to centralized elements such as formalistic aesthetic style, political perspectives and the industrial context, for example.

A feminist grounded theory methodology, that facilitated in a deeply textured, layered and integrative process of examining the filmic text at various analytical levels, inductively and collaboratively revealed categorical embodiments of the lawbreaking woman cloaked within a backdrop of storyline/narratological themes and manifestations of the prison. The enveloping theoretical narrative interweaves a tapestry of ethnographic voices that created a multifarious interpretive account of the cinematic enterprise; from those parties involved with the filmic product at various, inter-related levels of contact, to the process of creation (movie-makers), and the public engagement with the image (audience). As such, the dissertation's textual narrative represents "the creation and reproduction of discourses through which my own and other 'selves' are constituted" (Alcoff 1991: 21). Cinematic subjectivities are inter-textuality embedded within similarly constructed images in a sequence of representational contexts, through which "the effectivity of ... [the] single [filmic] text depends on the larger discourse it is a part of" (Mitra & Cohen 1998: 182). This inter-textuality is more pronounced for particular film-making forms; especially the exploitation titles that utilize standardized promotional exploitative gimmickry, storyline structures, themes, behavioural repertoires, and stock characters that interface in meaning and understandings across the historically periodized landscape of filmic titles (1970s-1980s).

The online cinephilic website which is the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), served as the context for a purposive sampling of filmic titles, using specific parameter

search criteria and filtering options (thematic and numeric) that amassed a group of films for preliminary review, before their inclusion into the research study. Cyber layperson cinephilic reviews listed on the IMDb and on the Amazon.com website marketplace were analytically summarized as an chapter appendage to the primary filmic analysis. The movie database encompassed 22 titles, while consumer appraisals consisted of 1,161 single (individual) posted commentaries.

## **The Categorical Trajectories of the Penal Subject in Cinematic Representations**

### ***Central Lines of Inquiry Revisited***

The visual media, ever-present in its unparalleled availability to the viewing audience, privileges sight over literacy in the social saturation of criminological meanings and understandings, grounded in popular cultural representations (Surette 1998: 28). The integrative, conclusionary insights, brought forth in the following discussion reflect the multifarious lines of inquiry as framed in Chapter One. To reiterate, the central focus of inquiry explores the subjectivities of the female prisoner, within manifestations of the prison, that emerge through the representational practices of film-making. A feminist lens emphasizes how intersectionality, at social and criminological locations, contours subjectivity formations. The creative process is enveloped within many interpenetrating filmic domains (micro to macro) that include the meso-level, ethnographic voices' of various film industry agents, who collaboratively produce the cinematic prisoner, in all her characterizations. In addition, at the micro-textual level, understandings of aesthetic conventions that emerge from the film studies literature aid in illustrating how such techniques create (prisoner subjectivities and filmic themes) representations tied to ontological claims and ideological messages. Contemporary ex-prisoner, critical academic and/or activist writings serve as a backdrop, through which to legitimize my claims on the capacity of films to create counter, more authentic representations of the prison context and prisoner. A supplementary analysis of film review commentary and dialogue exposes how viewers reinscribe film imagery and narratives to fit with the meanings, messages, and affective feelings they gain from watching a film. Further, an analytic theme repeatedly interweaved throughout the dissertation is the

commodification of the penal subject as a socially constructed product, marketed for leisurely consumption within online globalized marketplaces.

### ***A Summary Analysis of Primary Dissertation 'Resultant' Themes***

The following discussion outlines *some* generalized significant conclusionary thoughts that emerged from the dissertation inquiry and analytical results as they relate to the lines of inquiry as identified above. The primary research insights are interpretively explicated in relevance, depth and understanding, through a feminist grounded theory (GT) framework that organizationally incorporates and integratively links the major analytic themes to a coding procedure emphasizing *structure (conditions/contexts)*, *process (action/interaction strategies)* and *consequences*, that directs the discussion around differential, yet interlocking levels of focus. Selected filmic exemplars are drawn out to illustrate particular analytical points in this regard, towards specific prisoner subjectivities. The *cinematic prisoner-mediated constructions of subjectivity* is the identified core categorical theme. Again, this is the central, integrative construct that represents the evolving theoretical narrative that interweaves throughout the research analysis, and that also definitively identifies the primary lens of interpretive inquiry and dissertation focus. There is an emphasis on difference and interconnection over homogenized, grand, theoretical notions.

The core category is analytically and descriptively interlinked with all other categories in a logical, uninterrupted flow within the textual analysis; the subjectivities or embodiments, personifications, or characterizations of the penal subject that are articulated in categorical constructions (e.g., imprisoned woman as 'lesbian predator') across the dissertation filmic sources. At the micro-analytical level subjectivities are configured as singular categorical embodiments or juxtapositional binary oppositions. Prisoner subjectivities are performatively and relationally enacted in thematic plots, storylines, and narrative threads, which juxtapose (binarily or otherwise) the central characters (protagonist and secondary subjects) with other figures that include carceral control agents, female inmate wards, male intimates/allies/abusers and/or non-prison-related persons. These inter-relationships correspondingly symbolize a dimensional range of interactions typified as oppressive, adversarial, combative, strained, accommodative, instrumental, indifferent, transformative, and/or otherwise close. A

similarity of representation emerges in films where the prisoner is *not* the protagonist character. All other categorical themes that emerge from the filmic texts are interrelated to the core category. For example, categories also reflect the thematic narratological contexts that depict the confinement of women, through which cultural constructions emerge and take form. As well, across the filmic forms, various versions of masculinity are related to the discourses of patriarchal power/authority/oppression, violence, hegemonic masculinity, correctionalism-classification and heroism tied to the constructs of predation-victimization, exploitation/abuse/deception, parody, regulation-control and protection-safety.

In speaking to this central focus of the dissertation, I conclude that different film-making forms which situate the penal subject within tales of crime and confinement across the mediascape of the women-in-prison titles, create divergent and interlocking, intersectionally located subjectivities that are historically recycled, alternatively varied, and/or diversely unique. As such, each film-making style – the exploitation, Hollywood, and contemporary independent film – correspondingly signifies a particular *sub-core* category, termed as *archetypical othered clichés*, *fictitious personifications*, and *alternate authenticized embodiments* that primarily frame subjectivities which emerge within enveloping discourses and broader theoretical constructs (representational frames). These *master* categorizations are organized under separate chapter headings in this conclusionary discussion that reflect differentiation, diversification and interrelation, and envelope the criminalized female in recycled (formulaic versus subversively empowered), patriarchally-oriented (normative), and/or newly emergent, more authenticized incarnations (humanized, depathologized). Overall, the “configurations ... [of] these categories ... provide [the] discursive structures for understanding the positioning of ourselves and others [the textual penal subject]” (Skeggs 1995: 7).

Across the filmic forms, women-centred relations take precedence – the protagonist or other prisoners continually engage with female characters both inside and outside the carceral setting. These interrelations emerge along a dimensional range from oppression, victimization, opposition, and conflict to accommodative (instrumental) and (emotive) friendships. The prison is a place of oppression in varied representations across the film-making forms from the depraved violent world of the exploitation film to the implicit injustice systemically ingrained through the authoritative power of

correctional agents in some independent films. Ultimately, it is these injustices that consequentially transform a prisoner's subjectivity either temporally or permanently – illustrating its instability. As well, in filmic titles that lay upon the margins of the women-in-prison movie, representations of the prisoner can be as vilified or humanized as those films designated exclusively as prison films. Therefore, it is important to analytically explore how these alternate titles construct the female lawbreaker in narratives that are not necessarily situated within the prison world in any primary way.

The dissertation inquiry, analysis, and resultant conclusions are filtered through the terrain of my varied 'selves' or subjectivities that interface with the *cinematic prisoner*, in an ongoing, interpretive examination of the filmic text and its corresponding techniques of textual aesthetic expressions that emphasize the visual, narratological, dialogic, performative, and thematic.

The representational mode multifariously links mediated portrayals to the institutional context and formalistic strategies of the film industry, all embedded within a broader historical, cultural and socio-political context (Schofield 2004: 130). Crime and deviance repeatedly reconfigure in collective meaning, "as part of an amplifying spiral that wends its way back and forth through [mediated] accounts, situated action, and public perception" (Ferrell et al. 2008: 133). Representational practice symbolizes distinctive notions of cinematic style and situated meaning that interpenetrate various analytical levels of interface, which conditionally and contextually frame cultural embodiments of the prisoner, in all her complexity and simplicity. In the on-screen cinematic world, it is within these spheres of influence that thematic findings emerge in relation to women's subjectivities, their discursive foundations, interrelated constructs, characterological formations, and underlying and/or symbolic meanings. Subsequently, these domains are integratively shaped by characterological performance, actions/interactions and/or behavioural repertoires and varied consequential outcomes.

The "internet [is a] globalized labyrinth of information and entertainment [that creates] ... a progressive space where individuals ... develop ... 'online personas' ... unencumbered by ... the demands of [a] physical everyday reality" (Ferrell et al. 2008: 145). It is here that the anonymous cinephilic consumer partakes in the endorsement of particular movies through the filmic textual review posted on cyberspace web forums;

specifically, the IMDb and Amazon.com marketplace. This process creates an ongoing cultural cinephilic dialogue of evaluative, interpretive and promotional commentary that facilitates in the rearticulation of mediated filmic representations, their associative meanings, entertainment possibilities and marketability as criminological commodities. The media creates particular identities that symbolize a subcultural viewer, positioned within the process of cultural construction that creates various audiences targeted for certain textual representational styles and formulations, such as the cult fandom male viewer of the exploitation film (Grossberg et al. 2006: 221, 226, 229). Ultimately, it is the public who engages with the dissemination of criminological knowledge that emerges from the prison film, in ways that support or challenge the cultural currency of its meanings

The mediated constructions “central to the transcarceral fascination with the prison” create a *consumerist penal subject*, through which “other people’s constraint,” becomes commercially commodified and inter-textually consumed by the cinephilic audience in leisurely acts of social relations (Carlen 1994: 135; Valier 2004: 252). In a consumer-driven, capitalistic culture, the filmic artefact becomes a cultural commodity of entertainment pleasures and perspectival messages. The visual and its perceptual shaping of meaning and representation endlessly circulates across various screens – the theatrical, televisual, and computer – facilitative in the everyday, omnipresent, process of filmic consumption and simulated engagement with the carceral narratives and criminal subjects of our imaginations. As well, promotional mediated culture moves outside the filmic textual mode, into non-celluloid formats that selectively rearticulate the penal subject in various supplementary forms such as taglines, box-cover imagery, and film-related products (posters, mouse pads, jewelry). The communicative expressions emergent in imagery and/or dialogical phrases, enact particular promises (e.g., of violence, sexuality) to the prospective consumer that further propagate constructions of confinement and prisoner subjectivities, correspondingly utilized as promotional elements. As well, filmic merchandize symbolizes a synergistic commodification, whether grounded in corporate or individual-based commercialism.

To reiterate, the cultural process of subjectivity formation is explicated across multi-layered, interrelated analytical levels, situated within a feminist grounded theory methodology that integratively incorporates structure (conditions), process

(action/interaction) and consequences as frameworks of explanation and understanding. These components, derived from the axial coding scheme, unveil the interrelationships between all thematic categories that are subjectivity-based (prisoner characterizations) or are directly related to the configuration of personhood, through interrelated trajectories of construction that bring forth exemplars of summarization. The next section explicitly interrelates an understanding of subjectivity formation through the coding scheme of grounded theory.

## **A Feminist Grounded Theory**

### ***A Organizational Framework for Understanding the Dissertation Results***

#### **Coding for Structure: Conditional Contexts**

The following discussion applies a feminist grounded theory in understanding how the categorical prisoner embodiments and themes emerged and took on meaning through my engagement with the dissertation data. To begin, categorically delineated themes emerge within particular, interconnected conditions that are multifariously conceptualized across the research inquiry. For the purposes of the discussion, and to restate film-making is sequentially contextualized within 1) the macro structural conditions/contexts of its emergence, 2) the meso milieu of the cinematic apparatus of creation (filmic-making forms) and 3) the micro-dynamics of representation at the textual filmic level (textual aesthetic expressions). Interrelated discourses and theoretical constructs interpenetrate all analytical levels to varying degrees.

The broader cultural and structural terrain symbolizes dominant socio-political ideologies, shifts in mainstream thought, or counter-cultural resistance to established institutions that oppress particular intersectionally located segments of the populace. These contexts, symbolic of differentially-situated relations of power, reflect the wider landscape through which the industrial, productive, and creative meso conditions of representational practice arise and take form. For example, film-making reflects a multiplicity of contextually grounded purposes – commercial, entertainment, communicative, pedagogical (subversive, realist, authenticated), and/or artistic – all of

which correspondingly structure filmic narratives that perspectively persuade, pleasurably engross, affectively stimulate, critically challenge, and/or authentically inform the filmic viewer about the penal subject. Within the performative dramaturgy of the filmic world and prisoner embodiments conditions are conceptualized as textual formations: primary/secondary narratological contexts and themes (carceral, crime-related, or personal), other circumstances, and visual and dialogical expressions. As well, conditions are conceptualized as multi-analytical theoretical constructs tied to corresponding discourses as outlined in the results chapters. Typically subjectivities are conditionally tied to intersectionally-based social and criminological 'difference' or 'locations' including – gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, and women's perspectival views, crimes and carceral experiences – that delineate specific characterological personifications (subjectivities) that, in more critical films, are situated within broader macro contextual conditions of socio-structural marginalization, discrimination, and systemic prison oppression. To more specifically summarize then in some film-making forms (exploitation titles) the locations of race and sexual orientation are typically individualized and pathologized while in other films (independent) prison experiences or marginalized social circumstances can create subjectivities within more contextualized domains. Therefore, the location of prison experiences and interrelations can conditionally contour particular subjectivities. As Ferguson (1993) contends:

Mobile subjectivities are temporal, moving along axes of power ... relational, produced through shifting, yet enduring encounters, and connections ... ambiguous, messy, and multiple, unstable but preserving... .They respect the local, tend towards the specific ... [and] are politically difficult in their refusal to stick consistently to one stable identity claim; yet ... they are less pressed to police their own boundaries" (Ferguson, 1993 as cited in Ogle & Glass 2006: 174).

However, some subjectivities, such as the exploitative lesbian predator, preclude women from embodying other more positive statuses.

A secondary, integrative theme to subjectivity formation is the social construction of the prison. Across and within the selected titles for review, representations of the carceral context and its conditions of confinement (institutional regime, punishment practices, inmate subculture, bureaucratic apparatus, and lack of programmatic options) differentially construct prisoner subjectivities towards varied, binarily juxtaposed



formations (pathologized versus humanized) across film-making forms. Filmic representations are communicated and given meaning through cinematic symbols, and signification devices (iconic or otherwise), inmate populations, and primary thematic content, illustrative of particular discursively framed images of the carceral world. As well, the gendered manifestations of the prison and the subjectivities of its inhabitants determine the legitimacy of the carceral context, as an apparatus of reform/rehabilitation, containment and/or punishment. More specifically, the function of confinement as a correctional practice and space of physical constraint is linked to the imaginatively fantastical, normatively cultural, and authentically experiential. Therefore, the disciplinary power of the prison and the proliferating discourses bring particular subjectivities into view.

### **Coding for Process: Action/Interaction Strategies and Consequential Outcomes**

Action/interaction strategies similarly shape the filmic product and its corresponding representational portrayals at the same interrelated analytical levels as conditions. Various parties, such as realist (actual) movie-makers, filmistically fictitious characters, or audience consumers, engage with the filmic text in its creation, micro-dynamics of narratological performance, and public release and presentation. At the macro-level, representational imagery and meanings influence public attitudes and criminological practices. Within the entertainment industry, (meso level) filmic production is a complex enterprise that involves various levels of coordinated contact with a multiplicity of agents (filmic creators, consultants, performers) who partake in the creative process, entrenched within the broader economically, historically and politically constituted cinematic framework. Contouring the penal subject into various subjectivities becomes a contested and negotiated interplay – a claims-making competition amongst the cinematic players that hold specific interests in accordance with how the film satisfies particular objectives such as message-based and/or commercial. For example, particular narratological, aesthetic, and representational styles are associated with specific auteurs or film-making forms. At the filmic textual level, the cinematic prisoner is circumstantially grounded in particular micro-contexts such as storyline themes, scenes, and prisoner relations that initiate a dramaturgical display of characterological performance, actions/interactions and/or behavioral repertoires. These elements are

embedded within conflictive, oppressive, disempowering and empowering conditions that correspondingly shape subjectivity along dimensional range of performativity - from proper femininity, to hegemonic masculinity, in some filmic forms. In addition, women may take on subjectivities and carry out particular acts to address problems that emerge from specific situations that intersectionally locate them a certain way – such as individual threat and victimization, to righting or challenging a prison-related injustice. As well, actions can be influenced by a character's politicized beliefs systems. Enveloped within this enactional mode, multifarious categorizations of subjectivity are shaped through particular performative styles (e.g., behavioural repertoires) and visual aesthetic expressions in narratological conditions that discursively propagate symbolic meanings in relation to deviance, transgression and incarceration (Schofield 2004: 129, 130). Interrelationships between characterological embodiments, embedded in particular situational contexts, can direct the plotlines in many filmic narratives towards specific outcomes; resolute or otherwise open-ended.

Consequences (intended/unintended) are conceptualized as separate outcomes, or are sequentially linked to action/interaction strategies and reflect different analytical levels. The reconfiguration of prisoner subjectivities, consequentially contoured by particular actions/interactions within a filmic storyline sequence to the impending broad-based implications that representations hold for popular mis/understandings of the female lawbreaker/prisoner, are two such examples. More specifically, the cinematic construction of personhood behaviourally enacted in pathologized characters communicatively creates a culture-bound, criminological knowledge that has realist outcomes for actual prisoners (Barker 2008: 216). Overall, both structure and process more deeply delineate and densify the properties and dimensional range of categories, especially prisoner subjectivities. As well, there is no rigidity between the aforementioned components. Particular events or happenings may be understood as conditions in one instance and action/interactions or consequences in another (Strauss & Corbin 1998:129). For example, the context of imprisonment is also a consequence of the protagonist's character's relational ties with a corrupt boyfriend whose illegal actions makes her an accomplice to crime or results in a wrongful conviction/confinement.

## **Film-Making Forms**

These aforementioned grounded theory coding schemes are interconnected in unveiling thematic insights that explicate the multi-layered development of the penal subject, bringing forth filmic exemplars of summarization. The remainder of the chapter comparatively unveils these findings drawn from the three delineated film-making forms that create cultural texts tied to complex “notions of style and situated meanings” (Schofield 2004: 121). I provide a brief summary per film-making form outlining some of the major findings that emerged from my deconstructive, exploratory engagement with the filmic text. These short discussions are organized around the following areas of descriptive focus, reiterated from the results chapters that include 1) the socio-historical contexts of films 2) the creative milieu of auteur film-makers, industrial contexts, formalistic aesthetics and socio-political and ideological underpinnings 3) the depictions of the carceral world 4) the primary filmic themes/storylines/narratives and 5) some examples of specific subjectivity prisoner formations..

### ***Grounded Theory Narrative Representative of Enveloping Theory***

Each film-making form symbolizes a grounded theory narrative that is associated with a sub-core categorical term, symbolic of corresponding prisoner subjectivities, storyline themes and carceral manifestations, as subsequently summarized in this chapter. In the discursively constituted filmic narrative within each film-making form the cinematic prisoner – mediated constructions of subjectivity - emerged from a feminist deconstructive, grounded theory comparative analysis. Categorical embodiments of the female prisoner symbolize multiple interpretive levels – macro, meso and micro – that spotlight crime, criminality and incarceration through the cinematic lens of understandings, perceptions, meanings and implications.

### ***The Exploitation Film: Archetypical Othered Clichés***

“*The Spectacle of Humiliation as Entertainment*” (Presdee 2000: 79)

The exploitation film, across the 12 titles selected, is decidedly generic in its overriding WIP exploitable themes/elements, which include misogynous violence,

gratuitous nudity, lurid voyeuristic objectification, fetishization, degradative and sadistic bodily assaults, and offensively titillating promotional taglines and imagery of enslaved, 'captive' women.<sup>413</sup> Two historically diverse, juxtapositional, socio-political contexts distinctly shape cinematic portrayals – the dissident, tumultuous 1970s and the conservative, right-wing 1980s -1990s – that were marked by diverse productive and creative contexts of communicative expression, representation, and meaning. The earlier productions symbolized a unique auteur related film-making style. Movies associated with Roger Corman's New World Pictures, (*The Big Doll House* [1971] and *The Big Bird Cage* [1972]) were ideologically non-mainstream: pro-feminist, anti-capitalist, anti-authority, and at times humiliating of patriarchal power; in fantastical narratives seeped in counter-cultural, counter hegemonic, masculinist and subversive commentary (e.g., insurrectionary), and inverted juxtapositional binary constructions. Characterological embodiments enveloped within parody, hegemonic masculinity and liberated sexuality, symbolized pseudo-empowered subjects in an explicit, counter-cultural resistance to Hollywoodized representations and filmic messages. The productive context was anti-institutional, democratic and radically non-traditional for women, who held both corporate and creative influence in the representational process. And despite the explicit misogyny of films targeted towards the lurid and distasteful pleasures of prospective male audiences, female film-makers/performers felt an unhindered artistic expression, free from the constraints of the Hollywood apparatus. Instead, these women were empowered through the productive process and performative enactments of strong, independent female characters.

However, a decade later, the exploitation films were markedly different from the Corman works. Gone was the clever campy parody, subversive resistance, unique visual expressions (camerawork, beautiful cinematography, and location shooting) and the memorable, quirky characters that were deemed as skilfully inventive (artistic). Alternatively, films were hopelessly gloomy (*Red Heat* [1986]), graphically violent (*Concrete Jungle* [1982]) or cheesy, amateurish, sleazily gore-fests (*Lust for Freedom* [1987]). Many titles were grim, dark and grotesquely depressing. The productive context of one film was exceedingly problematic. In *Chained Heat* (1983), director Paul Nicolas

<sup>413</sup> To reiterate, WIP denotes the women-in-prison film.

and producer Billy Fine created a misogynously repressive film-making environment that degradatively oppressed and abused female performers, forced into scripted performances and traumatized by violent scenes.

Overall the exploitation titles share standardized thematic features. Characterological archetypes (subjectivities) are situated within culturally recycled, linear, progressive narratological conditions that are exploitively presented and include the commission of crime(s) by protagonist(s) or others (sleazy, corrupt boyfriends), wrongful or legally sanctioned confinement, prison cruelties and corruption, and mutinous escape and/or rescue that culminates in action-packed, violent filmic outcomes. Such films articulate the female pleasures of revenge, physicality and violence (Clark: 1995: 15). Imprisonment does not facilitate the criminal justice objectives of rehabilitation, rather; it is a primary context of repressive control, abuse, and exclusionary isolationism for captive women punished within foreign or domestic contexts. This *mise-en-scene* is purely misogynous, containing the necessary props (e.g., instruments of punitive torture and conditions of segregative isolationism), conditional regimes (slave labour, regimentation) and stock characterological villains (male rapists, lesbian predators/abusers, and sadistic and stern authorities [wardens and guards]), whose corresponding behavioural repertoires (actions/interactions) of predation, victimization, exploitation and/or punishment oppress both central and peripheral characters. Overall violence and bloodshed abound. Reformist discourse that challenges the legitimacy of the prison and its corresponding inhumanities is absent or relegated to the actions of ineffective do-gooder authorities (Shelley Meyers in *Concrete Jungle*) and the dialogical commentary of violent renegade or vengeful prisoners (Bodine in *The Big Doll House*). The viewer is ultimately positioned as an off-screen voyeur into the misogynously titillating carceral world.

All prisoners are subject to objectification through the commodification and fetishization of the female body for a multiplicity of voyeuristic gazes. The depraved carceral world depicts the degradative torture, sexualized terror, and sadism inflicted upon the prisoner's body, objectified and owned for the perverse pleasures of vile prison officials/guards and/or the leader of the inmate hierarchy, lesbian predator. As well, women's bodies are marketed for monetary ventures or debt payments (prostitution). The bodily awareness of humiliating and misogynous acts such as rape or sado-

masochistic punishments and rituals are intensified through visual and auditory sensory expressions. Segregative confinement heightens this experience. These formulaic features, associated with our cinematic place maps of the prison world, its inmate inhabitants and carceral control agents, consistently create “a confirmed expectation”<sup>414</sup> and morbid curiosity in representations enveloped within the constructs of stereotypification, mythologization, and pathologization (Maltby 2003: 107). Male characters are often (with some exceptions) peripheral to the principal plots or carceral narrative, and represent diverse embodiments in the seventies’ and eighties’ titles. In the latter period, for example, versions of hyper masculinity are visually repugnant in macho-rapists (*Concrete Jungle*) or visual codes of masculinity (*Caged Fury*), in the sexualized physique of the hero-rescuer for the female gaze; a powerful, dangerous body that protects women from lesbian contagion and male/female rapists.

Nevertheless, despite the overriding aforementioned thematic homogeneity, there are historicized differences at the micro level in filmic portrayals, linked to the two separate eras. Narratological variation and specificity is an example. In the 1970 titles, multi-strand, interlocking storyline threads emphasize a trilogy of themes: female relationships, politicized issues, and carceral hardships, (indignities and custodial escape). Third World liberation struggles and insurgent activity provides a secondary backdrop to the primary carceral context. White American protagonists and foreign women of colour are confined in jungle-like detention compounds or campy plantations, imaginary in creation with little resemblance to Americanized imprisonment.<sup>415</sup> Confinement quells the radicalized actions of politicized revolutionaries, countercultural norm violators, and patriarchal-based offenders (domestic homicide, prostitution). The prison is framed within the discourse of cruelty, depravity and sadism. Fantastical and medieval-like, torturous contraptions inflicting bondage, whipping and other sadistic practices sexually objectify, barbarically punish and torment targeted women in torture chambers through the venomous actions of a villainous female head guard, or prisoner trustee (Lucian in *The Big Doll House* and Alabama in *Women in Cages*). As well, the

<sup>414</sup> These elements are genre-related and account for why exploitation cinema best fits within the classificatory framework of the women-in-prison film; especially as it pertains to the dissertation database (Maltby 2003: 107).

<sup>415</sup> The exception here is African American actress Pam Grier.

penal context reflects a microcosm of repression that mirrors the structural marginalities and oppressions of broader society. Alternatively, in *Caged Heat* (1974) women are similarly susceptible to the corrupt, torturous and illegal practices found in the Roger Corman titles. But, the prison is situated within the US correctional landscape. Overall prisoner interactions reflect affective bonds and camaraderie, instrumental unity and solidarity.

Conversely, a decade later, a differential intertextual formulaic storyline emerges across the selected 1980s titles. A wrongly convicted, kidnapped, unlawfully confined 'innocent', or otherwise minor 'accidental' offender – good woman (protagonist(s) is incarcerated in a depressingly nightmarish and corrupt Americanized or foreign prison setting. Particular conditions (segregative) and characterological behavioural repertoires position prisoners (central and otherwise) into archetypes (mentally disordered, victim) to the degradative actions of sick, macho-rapist guards, (Elizabeth in *Concrete Jungle*) or crude ownership practices (tattooing) (Barbara in *Red Heat*) by the evil inmate archetype villain – lesbian predator. As well, opposing racially segregated prisoner gangs vie for control of the prison's illicit economies (drugs). The prison is a claustal space, devoid of almost anything human; an animalistic world of rampant, grisly violence, ghastly victimization, and unavoidable terror and danger. It is a necessary sanction to securely contain unreformable and habitually criminalized population of misfits, with the worst culprits deserving death. No one is safe; only the strong survive in climatic filmic endings that play upon gory spectacles of riotous or individual vengeance, seeking bloodshed. This depiction typifies the male prison film. Criminal offending is linked to various crimes; serious accidental offenses (vehicular homicide) or women's wrongful convictions for espionage, prostitution, or drug activity.

Behavioural repertoires associatively linked to particular embodiments delineate the primary attributes (categorical properties) that become standardized in inter-textually recycled, formulaic villains, misfits and innocents. To reiterate, across the exploitation films for both periods the sub-core category reflects 'archetypical othered clichés.' Subjectivity formation is intersectionally located in prisoner embodiments that pathologize or otherize 'difference' such as women's political perspectives, race, and sexual orientation. Some specific exemplars are discussed below. In the former 1970s titles, the personifications of the criminal woman are dualistically summarized here as

'pseudo-empowering subjectivities' and 'formulaic caricatures' that emerged within two conditions – the perspectival (political) and carceral. The discourses and corresponding constructs of counter-cultural dissidence/resistance women's emancipation, pseudo-feminism, (revolutionary power, normative transgression, and contextualization) and otherization (inherent pathologization) primarily framed prisoners' embodiments. The 'revolutionary subject' was the figurative embodiment of performative resistance to foreign governmental repressions, including structural marginalization and carceral enslavement that deflected critique away from US militaristic force and problematic domestic confinement. She is a masculinist freedom fighter, a liberated woman, whose actions/interactions, politicized agenda and prison rebellion lead to insurgency, rioting, and escape; and the consequential outcomes of personal vengeance, rebellious bedlam and eventual death (Blossom in the *Big Doll House* [1971] and Bodine in *The Big Bird Cage* [1972]). As well, the revolutionary's radical perspectives and anti-feminized behaviours created a form of otherized empowerment from the constraints of patriarchy and the mainstream status quo.

The discourse of otherization constructed formulaic characterizations such as the 'sex starved' prisoner or 'sick druggie' madwoman, who symbolized cultural fears towards particular behaviours/lifestyles that were deemed immoral (liberated and alternate sexualities), anti-patriarchal (non-familialism or maternalism), or illegal habits (drug related). The first categorization, a promotional embodiment of male fantasy, challenged normative conceptions of proper womanhood, monogamy and passive sexuality. More specifically, in exemplar scenes of opportunistic pleasure, the sexually starved woman emerged, in part, to destabilize and denigrate patriarchal aggression in an inversion of the traditionalized binary structure of female victim-male victimizer. As such, satirical elements interjected offensive material (rape) that juxtaposed males as 'inept and humiliated victims' to prisoner sexual aggressors, empowered in parodied behavioral repertoires that exploited a performatively of masculinist violence and humiliatory power. Two such scenes include inmate Alcott and bumbling prison worker, Fred, in *The Big Doll House* (1971), and prisoners Karla, Bull Jones (and the animalistic 'nut pen' women) against the 'effeminate gay' guard, Rocco in *The Big Bird Cage* (1972). Also, these embodiments serve to position prisoners outside the stock characterization of the sexual assault victim.



Women's seemingly inherent pathology (madness) and evilness is decontextualized and associated with rebellious and pathologized behaviours such as drug addiction. The deceitful, 'sick druggie' is the designated villain diabolical stalker or impulsive murderer who commits acts of violence, calculated predation (attempted murder), or frenzied, homicidal rage against targeted victims that result from either a diabolical attempt to gain a needed daily fix, as with the character (Stoke, in *Women In Cages*) or from a drug-sick psychosis (Harrad in *The Big Doll House*). In the latter personification, madness is further intensified by constitutional pathologies linked to infanticide in the biologically disturbed Harrad. However, despite their societal transgressions and individualistic aggression, othered subjects are more problematized than explicitly demonized with the revolutionary deemed an intelligent, strong, political transgressor and the sick druggie an inherently pathetic and unpredictable figure.

In the 1980s films, characterological personifications of the female penal subject emerge within the discourse of otherization (abnormalization), with the femme, masculinized butch, or dark figure, 'lesbian predator' (bad woman) embodying the extreme dimensional end of inherent evilness and homophobia; a diametrical opposed juxtaposition to normalization, with the protagonist first-time detainee (good woman) personifying innocence and heterosexuality. In between such clearly demarcated categorical boundaries lie a motley group of aberrant and demonized, intersectionally and individually located characterological embodiments, including the 'bad' and 'mad'<sup>416</sup> prisoners, who are typically the degenerate followers of the lesbian queen bee and accomplices to her sadistic reign and twisted ventures. A particularly detestable embodiment is Kay in *Vendetta* (1986), a homicidal psychopath whose behavioral repertoire of victimization and violence reflects an inherently warped caricature of patriarchal power and control. In contrast, prisoner Christine in *Red Heat* (1986) is young, attractive, middle-class and embraces the patriarchal marital union.

These binarily opposed subjectivities, along with other archetypal embodiments, set up primary narratological conditions and corresponding actions/interactions enacted in plotlines framed within adversarial conflict, victimization,

<sup>416</sup> Madness is also related to drug addiction similar to the 1970s titles. Women are often murdered by being overdosed on heroin in the 1980s titles.

and brutalization that sequentially propel films towards violent resolutions. A recurrent theme depicts the characterological transformation of the protagonist prisoner(s). In a continual struggle to endure prison maltreatment and cruelties, (e.g. the lesbian's fury), avenge an injustice(s), and earn her release, the good woman morphs into an opposing binary juxtaposition; a hardened convict 'avenger' (deadly vigilante), 'reactive victim,' or 'rescuer-protector.' In these embodiments, hegemonic violence and predatory actions are used to defeat adversarial villains and abusers, in visual displays of gory retribution and rebellion. Such women enact individual or collective vengeance, for the actions (abuse, death) done to others (Laurie in *Vendetta*) and/or in retaliation for personal victimization that culminates in a fight-to-the-death sequence<sup>417</sup> (Michelle in *The Naked Cage*) or some misogynous act - rape, which leads to the castration of the villainous male culprit (Bonnie in *Prison Heat*).

Also within the context of opposition, antagonistic conflict between racialized inmate gangs (blacks versus whites), headed, for example, by Dutchess and Erika in the *Chained Heat* (1983), correspondingly constructs the 'bad/bad black women' as inherently more violent and masculinized than their 'bad white women' counterparts, typically headed by the lesbian butch or femme. Yet despite this construction, black women rarely occupy the forefront of the carceral narrative, rather it is the white women who reign within the prison power structure. As well, the black woman's behavioral repertoire of ferocity is exemplified in pre-emptive dialogical warnings (*Concrete Jungle*) or ferocious, animalistic violence (*Chained Heat*). Alternatively, in one film, the black prisoner re-emerges within the opposing juxtaposition as a non-violent person; a 'rational pacifistic peacemaker' who preaches diplomacy in dealing with prison oppressions and abusive carceral villains (Brenda in *The Naked Cage*).

Overall, across the exploitation titles the actions/interactions of the female 'rebel,' 'avenger,' or 'rescuer-protector' develop instrumental partnerships and interrelational ties with former prison adversaries (victimizers<sup>418</sup>), who provide aid in vengeance-seeking or

<sup>417</sup> This is also prevalent in the climatic action-packed sequence that ultimately leads to the demise of the lesbian, primary villainous archetype.

<sup>418</sup> In some films such as *Chained Heat* (1983) and *Prison Heat* (1993) this would include the lesbian predator.

freedom-fighting efforts. In *Caged Heat* (1974), former enemies Maggie and Jackie break into Connorville institution to save friend Belle from a perilous and horrifying fate. The masculinized violence of the exploitative, yet legitimated, action heroine – seemingly equated with broader issues of empowerment and feminism (as intended by the film-makers) – actually symbolizes female power within a simplified vigilante mentality of decontextualized, individualist-driven reactions associated with a legitimated form of feminized aggression, behaviourally enacted in embodiments of cinematic fantasy and imagination. In summary then, the exploitation film symbolizes a continued re-articulation of stock characterological archetypes, either depressingly grim or satirically caricatured, that nonetheless performatively replay a culturally pathologizing and denigrating form of prisoner disempowerment, through the many screens of filmic reception.

### ***The Hollywood Film: Fictitious Personifications***

“*The myth of normative culture as natural*” (Ferrell et al. 2008: 32).

Overall, Hollywood cinema has a stronger global presence among the mass cinephilic viewer than the exploitation or independent film. The central category of the ‘imprisoned woman’ is explored across four titles historically associated with the industrial contexts of either the classical or contemporary period, contextualized within the studio system of the past in *Caged* (1950), and *Love Child* (1982), or, the conglomerate owned subsidiary of the present, in *Brokedown Palace* (1999), and *White Oleander* (2002). These films, juxtapose fictitious cultural constructions with alternative prisoner embodiments that challenge masculinist beliefs and control, but which nonetheless lead to women’s oppression and confinement, rather than their emancipation. Films emerged within specific periodized socio-political contexts (post-war, conservatist 1980s) that perpetuated gendered anxieties regarding women’s challenge to patriarchally regulated institutions, of familialism, maternalism, and proper femininity. Anti-feminist sentiment and traditional ideology continues to impact representational embodiments, their resultant properties (behaviours, and consequential outcomes) within mainstream filmic storylines.

Comparatively speaking, the Hollywood films are distinctly varied from the other titles analyzed within the dissertation database. At the meso-contextual level, film is

conceptualized as an institutionalized representational style of aestheticism, narratological structure, traditional ideology, and pseudo-realist or truth claiming messages that satisfy commercial interests and audience appeal over authenticity and artistic expressions. The symbolic power of the mainstream textual form infuses a taken-for-granted pseudo-realism and objectivity into the stigmatization and stereotypification of particular intersectionally-located persons (the racialized or lesbian other), and the seemingly naturalized gendered roles and responsibilities of proper womanhood. Such portrayals which aim to depict unmediated truth claims become intertwined in fictitious, melodramatic tales that propagate intersectionally related oppression. However, despite Hollywood's political and ideological conformism towards mainstream culture, some films attempt to challenge patriarchal authority and dominance in characterological embodiments and thematic content that supports a counter-hegemonic world view (*Caged* and *White Oleander*).

Mainstream conventions of visual expression involve a smooth, continuous flow of imagery (shots), uninterrupted in clarity and sequential order that adds to the stability of a narratological structure based on realist orientations and character plot-related causal motivations (psychological, moralistic), sympathetically portrayed protagonists, and logically affirming outcomes in some titles. The emotion of crime is not associated with the spectatorial sensationalization of the exploitation film that is luridly pleasurable, humiliating or condemnatory. Instead, criminological predicaments and personal issues are interrelated to create 'heart-breaking,' 'feel good' or 'gut-wrenching' melodrama that appeals to viewers' ethical and moral sensibilities, in ways that are affectively varied. In this respect, films do not assault or unsettle the audience with controversial subjects and disturbing portrayals that rely on graphic images, and subversive messages threatening to traditional belief systems. Such elements would undermine a film-maker's aims of comfortably creating conceivably more positive depictions and emotionally satisfying resolutions in some filmic narratives. The exception lies in the title *Caged* (1950).

Mainstream filmic narratives simultaneously blend *entertainment pleasures* with *criminological messages* that provide seemingly realist communicative/educative commentary towards specific issues such as prison injustice and reformative change, or cautionary warnings of travelling abroad and foreign justice systems. Here the viewer is positioned to determine the plausibility of such questions, given the cinematic

representations. Unlike the traditional Hollywood melodrama, heterosexual relations are disruptive rather than resolutely affirming to a narratological structure that spirals towards crime, imprisonment, hardship, and/or interrelated events that represent an initial or aggravating conflict or disequilibrium to the otherwise harmonious or marginalized life of the central prisoner character. Young, white, esteemed and/or attractive actresses make up the primary cinematic cast. The micro-dynamics of the on-screen world primarily frame prisoner subjectivities within two distinct storyline structures: the prison and its corresponding subculture and injustices (*Caged* and *Love Child*), or within experientially *relatable* thematic conditions (family conflict, friendship loyalties) external to the penal context, yet characterologically propelled through the predicament of confinement (*White Oleander* and *Brokedown Palace*). As well, it is in this latter instance that precarious issues, such as Third World wrongful imprisonment, become believable within the minds of the mass cinephilic viewer.

In its domestic (Americanized) manifestation, the penal context is gendered in its underlying objectives and visual presence.<sup>419</sup> Its external architecture is either unremarkable or visually austere, with masculinized security symbols (razor wire, gun towers) and oppressive institutional practices (solitary confinement) that construct the prisoner population as dangerous and unreformable felons (*Caged* and *Love Child*). Alternatively, in its feminized form, the prison aims to discursively instill idealized versions of womanhood (patriarchally-based familialism, maternalism and gendered tasks) through an institutional regime of educative re-domestication; a reformist rhetoric that civilizes the prison as a rehabilitative milieu. Supportive and caring prison workers symbolize a maternalistic and paternalistic care towards fallen women (Warden Benton in *Caged* and Captain Ellis in *Love Child*). And despite the pre-emptive imagery and dialogical content that situates the carceral context within the discourses of fear, potential abuse and even death, violence is symbolic only, or not explicitly seen, with displays of victimization and aggression being limited to single events, minor confrontations, and/or antagonisms initiated from background carceral adversaries. Nonetheless, regardless of its varied depictions, the prison is a place of punishment that can be shockingly portrayed. In *Caged* (1950) protagonist Marie Allen becomes

<sup>419</sup> In *Caged* and *Love Child* the prison is both masculinized and feminized.

suspended as a non-subject, buried deep within a purgatorial netherworld of State sanctioned isolationism and deprivation (solitary confinement); a primordial cruelty that denies her human existence altogether, a fate far worse than confinement itself. It is only in *Caged* that explicit violence leads to the demise of the villainous prison matron, Evelyn Harper. As well, the State regulation of a prisoner's reproductive status, 'the policing of the womb,' reflects an anti-maternalistic stance towards women about to birth a child outside of the marital familial unit (Marie in *Caged* and Terry in *Love Child*). Across the films, protagonists' crimes include domestic homicide, armed robbery, and allegations of drug trafficking or wrongful conviction. The discursive problematization and vilification of male characters is a categorically embodied theme, with the exception of the 'paternalistic rescuer/saviour' (*Brokedown Palace*). In *Caged*, male background characters are 'oppressive power holders,' who further marginalize Marie Allen within hierarchies of control symbolic of differential patriarchal conditions – familial (spousal), institutional (correctional bureaucrats, police) and illegal (criminal syndicate) – which correspondingly lead to her crimes/incarceration, prison oppressions and probable recriminalization.

Hollywood storylines binarily juxtapose the prisoner protagonist with another central character (adversary or ally) that symbolizes power relations in interrelationships marked by conflict/antagonisms depicted in primary thematic content. In turn, these relationships enact particular actions/interactions (e.g., characterological choices) that categorically contour subjectivities, and predictably direct linear sequences and plots towards consequential individualistic resolutions (outcomes) – whether tragic, problematic or positively affirming. With the exception of *Love Child*, films present female-based primary interrelations.

In the selected Hollywood titles, subjectivity categorically symbolizes 'fictitious personifications' that emerge within the patriarchally-based discourses of familialism, maternalism, domesticity, and heterosexism that reflects or challenges normative expectations of proper womanhood. Thematically speaking, women's actions (specifically resistance, adherence, or embracement) towards traditional femininity in the biologically deterministic role of motherhood results in diverse characterological roles and outcomes that invariably lead to tragedy, conflict and/or hardship for the central prisoner character. For example, in *White Oleander* (2002), prison mother Ingrid

symbolizes a 'radical feminist' subjectivity that is independent, anti-patriarchal, aesthetically astute and fiercely opposed to traditionalized belief systems. Yet she is vilified as a selfish, narcissistic, manipulative, and abandoning non-mother who permanently loses daughter Astrid to unrealized, and failed pseudo-parental and State caregiving figures within the turbulent terrain of traumatic fosterdom experiences; conditions which further fracture an already fragile mother-child relationship. Ingrid emerges in transitory subjectivities, each of which enacts an explicit dialogical resistance and sabotaging of Astrid's relationships with these portable mothers, but despite the dysfunctionality of State mothers for hire, the failed biological mother is the most vilified of all, even though every maternal figure symbolizes defective notions of idealized mothering. Alternatively, In *Love Child* (1982), expectant mother Terry Moore's legal challenge to protect her parental rights secures a prison release and a maternalistic rehabilitative potential that tames the unruly woman. In this depiction, Terry's actions consequentially destine her towards a fairy tale future, presumably devoid of any subsequent hardship, socio-structural marginalization and recriminalization.

In the Hollywood film, *truth claims* are enveloped in exploitative and stereotypical storyline themes and clichéd archetypal characterizations that situate subjectivity within the discourse of otherization.<sup>420</sup> Some women exemplify inherently pathological actions, such as the impulsive psychotic self-injury of the delusional mad woman, Georgia, in *Caged*. Similar to the exploitation film, intersectional differences (sexual orientation and race) are interlinked with specific archetypes and behavioural repertoires: the lesbian is particularly demonized or exploited in the sadistic cruelty of masculinized prison matron Evelyn Harper (*Caged*), the sexual predation of protagonist Terry, from background prisoners (*Love Child*), or the corrupt racialized *other* (Thai authorities and harassing prisoners) in *Brokedown Palace*. Alternatively, in many films (*White Oleander*, *Brokedown Palace*) subjectivity takes on the qualities of beauty, intelligence, class privilege, and heterosexual attraction that are associatively anti-thetical to the monstrous and masculinized, criminalized woman in our cultural imaginations. Irrespective of this, Hollywood performance and characterological embodiments, located in white celebrity star personas, problematize representational expressions – both visual and behavioral –

<sup>420</sup> Such truth claims may also be conceptualized as pseudo-realistic or factually-based in origin.

in fictitious, middle-class personifications that demographically and socio-structurally misrepresent the lives of actual prisoners, especially those racially marginalized women disproportionately susceptible to criminalization and incarceration.

In *Caged*, prisoner Marie Allen represents the ‘transitional subject,’ an alternating, embodied symbolization of femininity and masculinity who eventually transforms into a new master status, circumstantially shaped through culminating cinematic narratological events enveloped within a series of actions/interactions. Initially, it is within individually problematic losses of parental rights and freedom (parole denial) that Marie’s feminized self (law-abiding innocence) transforms into a masculinized con-like demeanour. But, the film’s explicit message questioning the legitimacy of the prison as a rehabilitative milieu, amenable to reformative ideologies and efforts in changing a system fraught with corruption and indignities (humiliatory and harsh punishments), further exacerbates Marie’s crumbling femininity, impending criminality, and ultimate characterological change. By filmic end, with her metamorphosis complete, Marie’s subjectivity reflects a ‘revolutionary, resistant personhood’ – the embodiment of a hardened femininity and masculinized gun moll mentality; neither the feminized innocent victim, nor the re-domesticated traditional femme. Alterations to Marie’s subjectivity emerges from the abusive actions of villainous persons (matron Harper) and the inaction (apathy, indifference, or non-support) of penal authorities who disregard Harper’s reign of terror, the corresponding prison injustices, and Warden Benton’s rehabilitative goals – all of which conditionally frame Marie’s decisive act of choosing crime over marriage and family. Hollywood film-making, to conclude, continues to uphold patriarchal social relations in textual representations that evaluatively judge, problematize, and criminalize women for their moral and normative transgressions against proper womanhood, symbolizing the propagation of oppression through the seemingly naturalized.

### ***The Independent Film: Alternate Authenticized Embodiments***

*“Images of and for resistance”* (Valier 2005: 252).

The primary category of ‘confined woman’ is attributable to a select group of independent titles produced within the most contemporary time frame (from 1995-2006) across the entire dissertation filmic database. Independent film-making represents a



counter-strategy of representational techniques/conventions (narratological structures, visual expressions, ideological challenges, political viewpoints) and depictions that symbolize a *discourse of resistance* in alternative authenticated embodiments of prisoner subjectivities. These subjectivities emerge within opposing narratological contexts from the mundane everydayness of life to the exploitable, sensationalized event(s) of incarceration. Characterologically strong women of colour, disempowered through marginalized circumstances and prison oppressions, make up the central casts in many films. They do not fit with the Hollywoodized versions of womanhood in whiteness, star personas, or aims towards traditional feminized ideals (marriage) or roles (spousal partner). *Cinematic resistance* is diversely conceptualized as politically conscious commentaries (*Civil Brand* [2002]), urban fairy-tale messages (*House of D* [2004]), factually driven, recreated stories (*Condition Red* [1995] and *Karla* [2006]), and realist authenticity in portraits of prison life (*Nine Lives* [2005] and *Map Of The World* [1999]). Some titles are considered to be on the definitional margins of the prison film genre as determined by specific media scholars (Mason 2003). Films position the viewer as a critical cinephilic eye to those representations that aim to deconstruct and resist the stereotypification, or, inherent pathologization and demonization, of particular intersectional locations (class, race, sexual orientation, gender, and crime-based), that create demonized subjectivities (the prison mother or female sexual offender) which function as fictitious and fantastical entertainment pleasures in other filmic representations and forms. As well, a topical filmic terrain depicts the contentious and controversial (serial homicide and child abuse, for example) in non-exploitative, often blandish un-melodramatic representations (*Karla* and *Map of the World*). The mass exhibitory presence of the Hollywood product is comparatively limited for some independent films; however, many titles reach specific audiences at various degrees of interface.

Historically, the independent film grew out of a socio-political context marked by an enveloping and interdependent relationship with the mainstream sector. However, within the historicized landscape of the times, independent film-making creates a representational space that aims to create more authenticated understandings (or *moments*) of women's lawbreaking and confinement, despite the problematic implications of some cinematic portrayals and characterizations.

At the meso level, independent film-making is conceptualized as a productive *style* that endeavours to break with Hollywood filmic conventions in gradations of difference. As well, specific productions are associatively auteur-related, and reflect unique perspectival directions and emphases, as depicted, for example, in Rodrigo Garcia's tapestry of female interconnections in *Nine Lives*. There is an implied emphasis on the aesthetics of authentication, that creates a metonymic experientialism, in contextually grounded, less objectified portrayals, reducing the artificiality of social constructedness. And although most films contain aspects of Hollywoodized narratological structures (linearity), conventional departures create stories textured in the everyday authenticity and uncertainties of life's trajectories, and include narrative diversity and non-causality; mundane slowness in storyline pacing; unnecessary scenes or characters; banal, and un-melodramatic elements, and unresolved and ambiguous thematic content or filmic endings. Typically, many films emphasize complex character studies (*Map of the World* and *Nine Lives*) or carceral issues (*Civil Brand* [Prison Industrial Complex]) over conventional logical plot-oriented, entertainment storylines. Verisimilitudinous impressions emerge from verité camerawork, or digital video that creates a naturalized unpredictability of un-orchestrated expression. As well, the artistic process productively incorporates the perspectival voices of groups formally silenced in mainstream filmic culture, such as racialized creators, performers and/or prisoners. Finally, this form of film-making is associated with specific industrial contexts and companies.

Filmic storylines are enveloped within two configurations variously tied to the penal context. The prison and its corresponding subcultural rules, interrelations and oppressions is either a significant thematic setting (*Condition Red*, *Civil Brand*, and *Map of the World*), or incarceration is a peripheral backdrop, interrelated to the broader storyline forefront or series of interrelated thematic vignettes (*House of D* and *Nine Lives*) or correctionalist techniques of assessment and evaluation (*Karla*). In the latter two scenarios confinement is instrumental in shaping the central prisoner characterizations. An overriding theme is the humanization of lawbreaking women, subjected to particular conditions such as racialized hardship, or personnel tragedy, in the interrelated contextualized domains of their lives. Despite the intensely raw affective engagements that emerge from representations, humanization nonetheless

depathologizes prisoners in more authenticated frames of understanding for the filmic viewer. As well, relatable thematic elements, such as motherhood, familial relationships, and transitory interactions emergent in characterological embodiments and situations, creates a commonality of experience that resonates with the everydayness of life. Nonetheless, at a deeper level, intersectionally located marginalities and struggles embed these elements within circumstances that may be incomprehensible to the mass viewer. For example, the oppressions inherent to a woman's prisoner status, such as living through the monotonous routine and underlying hardships at the Los Angeles County jail (Sandra in *Nine Lives*), is one such case. As well, despite film-makers' socio-political aims to expose actual carceral injustice and conditions (e.g., corporate capitalist enslavement, sexual abuse), a single title, *Civil Brand*, situates formulaic archetypes (prisoner and correctional authority) within narratives that play upon exploitative plotlines and outcomes tied to prisoner violence and rebellion.

The dualistically depicted American prison is the primary carceral setting for all the films, with the exception of the Canadian-based setting in *Karla* (2006). In one formation, the prison is an imposing structure; visually austere, with its masculinized signifiers of control and containment, including cathedral-like appearance, manned guard towers, razor wire, secure housing units and segregation cells variously depicted across some titles (*Condition Red*, *Civil Brand*, and *House of D*). Otherwise, the penal context appears non-descript in its architecture and almost antiseptic and civilized in its institutionalized environment and regime. It is devoid of the traditional carceral iconography (*Map of the World*, *Nine Lives*, and *Karla*). Despite its manifestations the prison is primarily depicted in ways that serve little entertainment purposes or plot driven value with the exception of *Civil Brand*. The carceral world is monotonously banal and ordinary; with daily regimented tasks (personal, gendered work) and strategies, both solitary and social, enacted to relieve the constant boredom. There is no discourse surrounding the reformatory or rehabilitative potential of the prison. The prison setting punishes and contains women. The inmate subculture and its associated antagonisms and rules are either absent, downplayed or non-essential to the primary storyline. However, *Map of the World* and *Civil Brand* depict otherwise. Although violence is a potentiality within the prison, it is typically portrayed in a background or a momentary shot of prisoner antagonisms (occasionally intense), verbal harassment or physical

altercations that may be related to transgressions of the prison subcultural codes, that serve to *other* particular characterological embodiments. Alternatively, confinement symbolizes alternative purposes. In *Map of the World* it is an insular place of introspection, recovery, hope, and personal forgiveness for protagonist Alice Goodwin.

At the micro performative filmic level, prisoner subjectivities emerge within the discourses of humanization, otherization, oppression/disempowerment, empowerment, classification, resistance, politicization and marginalization. Formal and informal classificatory processes endemic to the prison, such as the regulatory procedure of the psychiatric interview (*Karla*) and the underlying subcultural rules of the prison hierarchy (*Map Of The World*), conditionally construct prisoners as condemnatory subjects (child sexual offender- abuser and/or killer) based upon women's alleged or actual crimes. In *Map of the World*, such a status consequentially positions Alice within the lower echelons of the inmate hierarchy, which shapes her carceral experiences and interrelationships with the other women. One particular prisoner (Dyshett) treats Alice in humiliating ways, attributing the label of "*baby fucker*" to her subjectivity. As well, a psychiatrist's recommendations frame correctionalist outcomes regarding the reformability and suitability of offenders for release (Dr. Arnold in *Karla*). These processes serve to vilify women who are nonetheless humanized to varying degrees in their cinematic embodiments and broader representations. Even so, what is uniquely different in these personifications is the apparently middle-class normalcy of such white, educated protagonists, especially Karla Homolka, a monstrous figure in our cultural reservoir of iconic female murders.

The humanization of the penal subject emerges in counter-representational embodiments. Women associated with particularly heinous crimes, such as Karla Homolka, provide unique exemplars. Lengthy flashback sequences chronicle Karla's version of horrific events that multifariously construct her as a 'traumatized, irresponsible, reluctant victim,' 'wilful accomplice,' and 'complicit observer,' in subjectivities correspondingly tied with an apparent humanity and enforced victimhood that slowly crumbles away as the story progresses. Karla's subsequent actions construct her as more culpable and facilitative in the brutal crimes of serial killer husband and tormentor, Paul Bernardo. These subjectivities, which respectively emerge in acts of sexual abuse, unlawful confinement, and murder, are aesthetically and narratologically

expressed in scenes depicting blandish banalism to heart-wrenching horror. Nevertheless, by the filmic end, and in spite of film-maker Joel Bender's problematization of Karla's subjectivity over any explicit demonization of her, a definitively psychiatrized post script commentary deems otherwise; constructing Karla as a cold, emotionally vacuous, unremorseful and dangerous person with "*tendencies towards psychosis.*"

Humanistic portrayals also arise in the prisoner personification of the 'transformative change agent/mentor,' whose interrelations with the centralized male character facilitate in meaningful life changes. Under these conditions the potentiality of othering the criminalized woman soon disappears. The mythical African American Lady, in *House of D*, for example, brings forth moments of ancient female wisdom and honesty in a characterization that is authentically humanizing, despite the mythical nature of the filmic storyline. Lady emerges from the darkness of her segregation cell, in successive cinematic shots that slowly reveal her visual beauty and identity as an unknown prisoner at the New York House of Detention. White, middle-class schoolboy Tommy Warsaw begins to converse with her from the street below, amidst the archetypical pimps who symbolize the oppressive interrelations of her marginalized life. Yet their interactions soon develop into a deeply significant, albeit temporary, relationship that juxtaposes a 'pseudo motherly figure' with a child recipient to Lady's caring counsel and advice, towards Tommy's coming of age, filled with heartfelt comedic moments and eventual tragedy. In the end, Lady's fictitious construction of herself, as a dangerous murderer, pushes Tommy towards manhood and independence – a journey that mentors his life towards healing and hope by the most unlikely of heroines.

The categorical embodiment of 'survivor' is interlinked with particular actions/interactions and symbolizes strategies of resistance prisoners' use to address diverse carceral oppressions, some of which are subtly implicit. It is through everyday expressions of dissent that women preserve non-carceral-related statuses, such as the subjectivity of motherhood, through performatively resisting the disempowerment they experience in particular systemic practices and individualistic authoritative actions. In *Nine Lives*, prisoner Sandra's continual, yet respectful, insistence on challenging the actions of an uncompromising prison guard during her confirmation of a scheduled family visit, symbolizes a non-violent, almost commonplace depiction of the relations of

power within the prison. As the filmic sequence progresses, however, Sandra's frustrations at a malfunctioning phone lead to an emotional crescendo of physical and expletive rebellion towards prison staff persons, who fail to empathize with her underlying concern – the inability to communicate with her young daughter, whom she will not see for another month. But in contextualizing Sandra's oppressions – prison rules and staff actions – her outrage is understandably reasonable given the circumstances: parental attempts to maintain contact with her child, under the conditions of State confinement. Alternatively, in *Map of the World*, Alice resists the condemnatory labels associated with her alleged crimes against children through inaction (outward indifference, flippant sarcasm) towards her tormentors (carceral and community-based); a survivalist attempt to protect an already fragile inner-self.

A thematic male embodiment is the 'authorized/illegitimate correctional releaser,' who holds the power to discharge women from their confinement in ways that are legitimized, problematized or criminalized. Formal and informal correctional classificatory systems and repertoires of interaction, respectively linked to the psychiatric expert or prison guard in processes of offender assessment, institutional behaviours (compliance to staff authority and demands), or a staff-inmate prohibited relationship, provide exemplars of understanding. In *Karla*, psychiatrist Dr. Arnold's parole eligibility assessment denies the release of the disordered penal subject, while in *Condition Red*, officer Dan Cappelli orchestrates a rather uneventful prison escape for his lover, Gidell, the transformative change agent. And in *Nine Lives*, a particular dialogical interchange between Hispanic prisoner Sandra, and Captain Ron, reflects an insidious form of social control in the formation of an instrumentally-based subjectivity, despite the apparent purposeful and meaningful intent of his actions. The guard promises to construct Sandra positively as a potentially releasable subject, if she provides details to his interrogative questioning and implicates another woman in a prisoner assault; all the time knowing that such an act will jeopardize Sandra's safety within the prison subculture.

## **Implications of Filmic Representations**

*“The federal government [needs to] promote public access ... and exposure to [the] prison, with a view to facilitating public education and dispelling myths with respect to the*

*realities of the role, conditions, and ineffectiveness of our prisons*" (Pate 1995: 61). The Canadian Association of the Elizabeth Fry Society

### ***The Naturalization of the Archetypical, Clichéd and Fictitious Representations – Imaginations as Realities – Exploitation and Hollywood Films.***

The criminological condition imparts implications beyond the cinematic lens. Popular culture symbolizes "the discursive, mythical, and fabulist techniques by which ... [the media] communicates particular imaginations [about] crime" (Tzanelli et al. 2005: 97). Self "is a dialectical relationship with the socio-cultural context," that creates versions of criminalized selves performatively enacted in filmic portrayals that maintain, create and transform cultural formulations and understandings of the female penal subject (Qin 2004: 305). As a leisurely entertainment pleasure, film infuses into the public consciousness corresponding crime trends and debates in ways that reinforce existing and legitimized criminological discourses (97). In the exploitation and Hollywood film, the socially constructed lens of reality is abundantly clear upon delving deeper into layers of mediated understandings. However, for the uncritical cinephilic eye, repeated exposure to the seemingly fictional or fantastical nonetheless influences and constructs cinematic understandings, based upon imagination and perception over experientialism and authentication. The fantastical, discriminatory, and oppressive exploitation filmic tales of nightmarish prisons and archetypical villains or pseudo-feminist renegades, creates a hyper-reality, solely situated within sensationalized, ludicrous, and/or heinous falsehoods regarding women's imprisonment – cultural depictions that ultimately legitimate the confinement of criminal women in need of punitive control and lethal actions. As Faith contends, "By capitalizing on the hostile, media-mythologized themes," films distort and obscure the actualities and problems of prisoners' confinement and of "those [keepers] guarding over them" (1987: 204).

Alternatively, Hollywoodized representations that appear to reflect a naturalized and a taken-for-granted reality in the lives of women, propagate an oppressive form of patriarchally-based ideological misconceptions. The discourse of proper femininity and its associated, normative expectations, is utilized to further criminalize, problematize and demonize women whose subjectivities, behaviours, or values in some way challenge or reject this white, patriarchally constructed embodiment. Overall, individualistic and

pathologized conceptualizations of crime and criminality, fueled by positivistic theories, continue to support a form of commonsensical and populist criminology with an ever-present social existence (Tzanelli et al. 2005: 99, 100). Accordingly, these filmic artefacts, across the exploitation and Hollywoodized terrain of representation, exemplify “misperceived source(s) of cultural pedagogy” (Kellner 1995: 5).

Such portrayals resurrect, within the public mind, a re-stereotyping of the pathological and threatening female offender; an object whose presence amplifies ubiquitous fears in decontextualized notions of inherent criminality. As well, corrosive, formulaic and normatively stereotypical correctional portrayals and prisoner embodiments “provide a more salable product that resonates with what the public knows” (Sanders & Lyon 1995: 31), with many film reviewers’ endorsements, acceptance, or indifference to such constructions heightened by existing cultural value systems, and the populace’s prohibited contact with the carceral world (Surette 1998: xv, 45).<sup>421</sup>

### ***Mediated Effects on Actual Prisoners***

Overall, the homogenizing effects of otherization and misrepresentation, discursively embodied in particular cinematic personifications, results in a materiality of effects on the lives of actual female prisoners. The stigma prisoners carry, from the master status of ‘criminal’ to other institutional, carceral identities, is “grossly exacerbated by fictionalized film images ... which defy all reasonable understanding[s] of women’s lives” (Faith 1987: 207). Academic myth-making and social scientific attribution of objectifying characterological constructions (e.g., sex-related and racialized) performatively played out in mediated imagery, are challenged by prisoners as slanderous and denigrating to their identities and selfhood, which holds political implications (Faith 1987: 182, 183). The cultural power of representational systems

<sup>421</sup> For example, some representations, despite their problematic exploitative elements, were deemed as factually accurate filmic messages on the state of confinement, its agents, oppressions and reformative capabilities (*Caged* [1950]). In contrast, sanitized prison imagery that challenges the traditional carceral iconography of, for example, foreign or domestic imprisonment, is deemed as unbelievable by viewers in some filmic forms (Hollywood, *Brokedown Palace* [1999]). This was not the case in independent films, especially *Map of the World* (1999) and *Nine Lives* (2005).



serves to relegitimize the action/interaction strategies of criminal justice bureaucracies, in the oppressive control and lengthily imprisonment of women deemed a threat to the moral and social fabric of a patriarchal society. As well, mediated imagery garners support for punitive crime control policies that advocate for the *prisoning* of unruly subjects. Historically, within the Canadian context, for example, federal correctionalist initiatives, linked to seemingly progressive reforms (*Creating Choices* 1990), pathologize particular intersectionally situated groups. Racialized perspectives disproportionately construct Aboriginal women as violent, unreformable prisoners who require more masculinized security containment measures in seemingly women-centered prisons.<sup>422</sup> In addition, particular ‘offender characteristics’ such as single parenthood or welfare dependency are conceptualized as risk factors for future incarcerations and crimes (Hannah-Moffat 1999b: 81). Ultimately, mediated representational realities uphold paradigmatic systems of thought that conceptualize crime and its control as a “contagious social problem,” unrelated to its culturally produced manifestations (Barak 1994: 20).

### ***Counter Strategies of Representation – Representations as ‘Moments’ of Authenticity***

There are no absolute truths; regimes of representation can be contested through counter cinematic strategies (Hall 1997c: 270; Valier 2004: 252). Popular culture is a powerful medium in forging an educative challenge against cinematically propagated misunderstandings of imprisonment, its corresponding oppressions, and law-breaking wards. The independent film symbolizes a critical image practice that engenders *moments* of authentication and resistance to those formulaic, otherized, and/or inherently denaturalized prisoner subjectivities that litter the cultural mediascape with pathologized and problematized categorical embodiments. Instead, performative characterological enactments that nonetheless reflect gradations of social

<sup>422</sup> In 1990, the *Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* developed and advocated for a “culturally appropriate, women centred model of corrections that attempted to address the longstanding concerns” of several groups, including prisoners, feminist advocates/reformers, Aboriginal women and correctional bureaucrats (Hannah-Moffat 1999a: 199). However, this seemingly reformative initiative, upon its implementation, became oppressively punitive in isolationist strategies for women constructed as unreformable prisoners (208, 209).

constructedness, aim to create alternate, empowering depictions that resonate with facets, or instances of prisoners' experiential lives. For some filmic viewers, the independent film creates a space through which to demystify the formulaic and embrace the alternately authentic.<sup>423</sup> Consequently, representations of resistance initiate a critical and deconstructive engagement with filmic portrayals in ways that bring forth understandings, reflections, and perspectival changes. Therefore, such a cinematic form is critical in contributing to a developing popular, cultural knowledge base that encourages the filmic viewer to engage with more authenticized representations that symbolize the discourses of humanization and marginalization over individualization, otherization, and criminological positivism.

For feminists, it is imperative to unveil more authentic, contextualized and positive images of the penal subject in cinematic embodiments and thematic conditions. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the potentiality of disorder and violence in the lives of some prisoners, because to ignore such realities is to strengthen the very fabric upon which deviant imagery and filmistic representations rest in traditional decontextualized explanatory and interpretive frameworks, "that carry the imprimatur of authority, and the potency of legal sanction and enforced stigma ... [in a] labelling process ... [that symbolizes] power and marginalization" of *othered* (prisoner) populations (Ferrell et al. 2008: 37; Shaw 2000: 61).

But ultimately, it is about "listening to women's [prisoners'] own voices; to their stories....To dispel the tendency to view criminal women as *other*" (Comack 1996: 39). Accordingly, mediated representational systems (entertainment or documentary-based) need to engage and empower prisoners/ex-prisoners in the process of "naming" and culturally constructing alternative visions of their subjectivities, contextualized within the actualities of their carceral and non-prison lives. This process builds upon challenging

<sup>423</sup> The film review discourse provided exemplars of these perspectival insights. It was only in the film *Karla* (2006) that filmic viewers remained condemnatory in expressing their utmost revulsion towards a woman, whom they vilified with labels, in a film that otherwise humanizes Karla Homolka on various levels. Otherwise, people embraced and reconstructed prisoners through more reaffirming labels in the other independent titles. As well, some viewers are able to draw out meaningful filmic messages from portrayals that are identified as exploitative (e.g., *Civil Brand* [2002]).

and destabilizing dominant cinematic portrayals towards a more experiential, less socially-constructed authenticity of understanding and trajectory towards social justice.

### ***Praxological Outcomes of the Research***

A final thematic implication involves the praxological outcomes of the research. A textual dissertation inquiry that identifies alternate cinematic practices, (as with independent film-making, for example) or particular films, such as *Nine Lives* (2005), as facilitative in portraying authenticated moments of discursively constituted representational portrayals, aims to endorse an informed public filmic consumption. As well, embedding the cinematic process within a multi-layered, analytical framework of understanding serves to educate the cinephilic viewer regarding the interconnected complexities of the cultural process of filmic creations. In particular, making the invisible-visible through a micro-investigation of the narratological, aesthetic, and perspectival expressions of cinematic meaning-making, exemplified in the embodiments of enacting prisoner subjectivities, creates a pedagogical lens of filmic engagement that deconstructively unveils epistemologically-perpetuating representations infused with injustice, stigmatization, and oppression. As a result, the dissertation inquiry may encourage some viewers to watch films with a more critical cinephilic eye that correspondingly challenges and questions the seemingly naturalized or pathologized cultural reservoir of mediated representations and messages, that *appear* to reflect an existing reality of an otherwise hidden, carceral, socially constructed world. Such an inquiry also unveils how “the power of naming” and constructing prisoner subjectivities is symbolic of a politics of representation that “can be a source of oppression as well as a source of resistance to repression,” depending on the film-making form (Boler & Allen 2002: 256).

### **Dissemination of the Research Findings**

The dissertation is a more contemporary analysis which seeks to add to the existing Canadian mediated literature. Therefore, it is imperative to disseminate the research findings in formats outside of the formal dissertation document. Two viable trajectories of distribution include 1) academic criminology and 2) popular cultural

criminology. In the university setting, I could create a feminist media studies 'special topic' course that specifically explores the women-in-prison film, and which brings forth insights from the dissertation. A new directive focus could include how the criminology student engages with the filmic text(s). Although, this group is considered to be within the public domain, students are positioned differently by perspectives contoured through criminological pedagogical understandings at the university level. It would also be interesting to explore how the intersectional locations of students shape their polysemic readings of films (an inquiry that could not be ascertained from film review commentary). Ultimately, students could engage in the practice of learning to read films, critically, outside of the box, unveiling deeper levels of symbolism, significance and meaning that emerge beyond a surface reading of the text. Lastly, I have pondered the idea of writing a book from the dissertation research.

In the public domain, the dissertation work could be transformed into a more popular cultural format. Social media sites (e.g., *Facebook*) could be utilized as a conduit through which research findings and information maybe be shared with a potential online readership that posts comments and engages in conversations about the prison film. In such a social-networking context the audience moves outside the academic domain to include the cyber-subject who searches for meaning and discussion through online blogs. The possibility of creating a specific website for such purposes must take into account copy right issues, in the dissemination of particular filmic material such as visual images. Also, I could rearticulate my research results into a more readable 'pop' book version for the layperson, non-academic cinephilic movie-buff to engage with. It is here that I would not only rely on a textual written discussion but I would bring the visual into my work by integrating actual still movie images into the write-up.

## **Future Research Directions**

The dissertation work has directly identified two specific areas for potential inquiry that would enhance the knowledge base on the cinematic prisoner. First, the cinephilic layperson reviews (audience reception focus) are underrepresented within the landscape of criminology-based media studies. Public engagement with filmic texts, through consumer criticism and reviews, reveals how representations impact

contemporary understandings and affective feelings regarding the female penal subject within a carceral system of confinement, correction and punishment. The text-reader relation symbolizes a form of cultural production and reproduction, through the circulation of commentary and debates that keep the cinematic prisoner alive in our mediated and cultural consciousness.

Second, a qualitative research project that would incorporate the experiential voices of actual prisoners/ex-prisoners into the dialogue regarding the constructions of prisoner subjectivities in the entertainment media would be the most significant contribution to future research in this area. Some areas of inquiry could include - the interconnection between prisoners' cinematically propagated subjectivities, and their own conceptions of 'self' as multiply constituted and intersectionally-located subjects. More specifically, a question to be asked in this regard, is, how do culturally created subjectivities intersect the terrain of correctionalist terminology and labels— tied to informal and formal correctional classificatory systems (psychiatric interview) and repertoires of interaction (guard-prisoner relations) that actual prisoners experience in the carceral world?

In addition to the above delineated insights, I make some further recommendations. In my examination of the women-in-prison film, it became apparent that the cinematic prisoner emerges in thematic contexts outside the selected focus of the present inquiry. Therefore, future research could emphasize how the adult prisoner is constructed within the two separate master statuses – the 'ex-prisoner' and 'condemned woman' – that are enveloped within various intersectionally and discursively-based subjectivities, correspondingly tied to criminological themes of prison release/reintegration, or State-sanctioned death. Academic work (doctoral or otherwise) in these areas would enhance existing understandings through a continued and deeper critical investigative focus and analysis of important filmic titles. Each topical focus would require a separate inquiry. Alternatively, further study could involve the rearticulated micro-analysis of single filmic titles, identified by other academic writers as resistantly insightful, meaningful portrayals and contributions to our mediated understandings of the female prisoner. One such title is the Canadian independent production of *Johnny Greyeyes* (2000). This singular focus would be free from the challenges encountered in

conducting a multi-leveled analysis across multiple films, as was the case in the present research.

In a final post script thought, the dissertation symbolizes a “cultural excavation,” that lays bare and unleashes an understanding of the criminological condition; one communicatively buried within representational systems that bring into view cinematic embodiments of the penal subject within cultural processes of meaning. These are constituted through the “power of the image,” and seen through the screen of imagination, feeling, persuasion and critical resistance – all within performatively enacted tales of crime, criminality and the prison (Valier 2004: 252; Presdee 2004: 283).

## Epilogue

In contemplating the research inquiry and resultant conclusions, my thoughts project towards the future of the women-in-prison film within the cultural landscape in the years to come. More specifically, will things stay the same or is change on the horizon in the representation of the female prisoner and carceral world? Several potential scenarios come to mind. Given the continued and future proliferation and creation of cyber-based technological mediums through which to market and exhibit the women-in-prison film (WIP), historicized titles will remain in their availability for consumer engagement and review. Of continued concern is how cyber spaces, such as the contemporary *Youtube* and other publically generated online websites, can reappropriate, WIP imagery in fragmented snippets of visual images, or scenes that hold specific purposes such as titillating the cyber-watcher with sexualized and/or misogynous messages that continue the oppression of the on-screen/off screen prisoner.

Alternatively, there is the hope that a popular criminology will become more deeply engrained within criminology departments as an important pedagogical disciplinary area of research and course offerings. Of central importance is the continuance of a critical image practice that will become more firmly established in the entertainment media, and in film-making, in particular. Cultural productions are characterized as “cultural activism” – a distinct form of cultural politics that utilizes artistic

forms (film) for the purposes of creative expression and to “mediate historically produced social ruptures” through for example, challenging stereotypes and perceived injustices and to construct/redefine, and communicate meanings associated with intersectionality grounded identities and subjectivities (Mahon 2000: 474/475). As it appears in current works, such as *Civil Brand* (2002), it is imperative to include the ‘voices’ of the politically active, (scholars and otherwise), and those women oppressed through incarceration and their intersectional locations (race) that are interlinked to criminogenic subjectivities in discriminatory and pathologizing ways. Such a critical image practice will deconstruct those images that have historically held a resiliency in meaning and strength within the public consciousness. Inclusion of marginalized groups into the filmic process (entertainment-based) or more importantly a move into documentary work would facilitate in ex/prisoner groups securing control over representational practices, while engaging in the practice of cultural politics (476). This process expands and democratizes the representational process for those populations (prisoners) excluded from more mainstream film industry networks. Ultimately, “articulating the voices of the marginalized” enables criminalized women to create their own subjectivities in opposition to those hegemonic, traditionalized and corrosive discourses that serve to construct them as the *other*, which further marginalizes and oppresses them through the cinematic lens. But an analysis must move beyond political critique, to also emphasize and value the aesthetic dimensions of filmic productions – e.g., the creative and artistic choices that inform film-makers work (Mahon 2000: 479). Therefore, it is possible to see films dualistically - as sites that produce pleasure and incite critical resistance (480). As bell hooks “envision[s], the marginal ... [becomes] the site from which dominant discourses, moralities and ideologies may be most readily critiqued and resisted, the site from which ‘creativity and power’ have the greatest opportunity to emerge and provide resistant visions of future possibilities” (hooks as cited in Sloop 1996: 192).

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<sup>425</sup> The filmography denotes all producers in italics with the other individuals listed as executive, associate or co-producers. Some of these film-makers are uncredited.

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## Appendix A

### Filmic Parameters in the Selection Process: Purposive Sampling

#### Context for Filmic Selection Procedures

##### The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)

The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) emerged on the worldwide web through Cardiff University (Wales) in 1993. It is an extremely accurate database and is maintained by hundreds of contributors and editors worldwide. In 1996, it incorporated advertising into its site, becoming a commercial business. It was taken over by Amazon in 1998 (Monaco 2000: 643). The IMDb is located at [www.IMDb.com](http://www.IMDb.com) and provides detailed information regarding films including: user ratings of films, demographic breakdowns of users (gender/age), film reviews (*user comments* and *external reviews*), message board forum, filmic videos and trailers, promotional taglines, trivia and specific filmic details including plot summary, full cast and crew, and other specifications such as technical specs and box office proceeds. Throughout the research I accessed the IMDb informational sources that were continuously changing. For example, I monitored user commentary to include material posted after the initial selection of films in August 2008.

The IMDb's mandate is to list every film, telefeature, and TV show despite their current or historical availability (e.g., some films may never have been released in auxiliary formats). It's primary purpose is not sales. But this website is part of the Amazon.com companies and as such it links site users to an online retail catalogue of films in various formats (video, DVD, and Blu-ray) marketed worldwide. In addition, it links users to online sites that promote films through theatrical trailers, videos, and products such as posters.

## Filmic Selection Dates

August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008

February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### ***Primary Selection Parameters (Advanced Search)***

Each heading denotes a specific search criterion.<sup>427</sup> Each keyword represents a separate or individual search using all the other parameters listed. The following procedure is relevant specifically during the time of the filmic selection processes and may have been revised or changed on the IMDb in current times. Separate power searches were done using two distinct keywords in order to ensure that no relevant film was missed for inclusion into the research

#### **Keyword Criterion**

##### **Primary Keywords<sup>428</sup>**

***Women's-Prison***

***Prison<sup>429</sup>***

##### **Secondary Keywords<sup>430</sup>**

Female-criminal, female-prisoner, imprisonment, jail, penitentiary, prison-life, prisoner, women's-correctional-center, women-in-prison, and WIP.

<sup>427</sup> The *IMDb* enables the user to combine several distinct criteria into a single powerful search engine that is directed towards 'super-specific' inquiries. As previously mentioned, this original search engine was eventually retired, some years after the research selection procedures.

<sup>428</sup> The IMDb allows registered movie viewers to submit keyword descriptors for any listed film. An *Update* button on the filmic site enables viewers to modify any information regarding a film (including correcting and deleting existing information or adding new details). Once the information is provided the IMDb managers must examine and approve any changes subsequently posted on the film's listing. It was important to use keywords that were clear in their meaning to reduce any ambiguities. These keywords (along with other descriptors attributed to a film) are listed under the plot keywords category on the film's face page.

<sup>429</sup> The keyword 'prison' was used to include films not included under 'women's prison.'

<sup>430</sup> Several films had multiple keywords associated with them both primary and secondary. But, it was the primary keyword that was listed with the film over its secondary descriptor.

## Additional 'Specific' Criteria for Inquiry

### IMDb power search engine

Year of Production (Range) 1950-2008<sup>431</sup>

Language English

Country of Origin Canada or USA<sup>432</sup>

Colour Any

All Genres

Exact matches only

Included TV movies and movies (direct- to- video)

Excluded TV series and TV episodes

Must have<sup>433</sup> User comments<sup>434</sup> on IMDb

### Filtering Parameters

Films drawn were filtered through numeric parameters as outlined below

1. Films included in the database for preliminary review (from both selection dates) must have one of the following on their IMDb information listing at the time of the filmic selection

The film must have earned 100 or more user rating votes on IMDb, with at least five *user comments/customer reviews* across the IMDb and Amazon.com, or within a single site.<sup>435</sup> The minimum user comments/customer reviews only have

<sup>431</sup> This time period was chosen to create a historicized sample of films. Films prior to 1950 were not included due to their small number and the difficulty in finding available titles to purchase and view. The 2008 year end was chosen because it denotes the sampling year of the first selection process.

<sup>432</sup> The dissertation focused on the media culture of Canada and the United States (US). The *country of origin* reports the country of production or countries of co-production. In the selection of films search criteria were set to only draw titles that were Canadian, American or co-produced works (with these two countries). The majority of filmic sources were US productions or co-productions with Canada, the Philippines, and Europe (West Germany). As such representations of the prison system and the criminal woman are Americanized. The film *Karla* (2006) was a Canadian case that was an American filmic production.

<sup>433</sup> The *must have* section on the IMDb power search form provides various sub-categories such as Sales, Reviews, Literature, User Comments and so on which if chosen will search for all those films which meet these categorical options. I chose the user comments only.

<sup>434</sup> User comments (IMDb) are the recorded cinephilic layperson reviews on this website.

<sup>435</sup> The Amazon.com customer reviews were accessed via a link on the IMDb filmic homepage to this online retailer marketplace.

to satisfy the numeric parameter. Therefore, a film is included even if all reviews are posted on only one of the online websites, for example, the *IMDb*. An example of one such film is *Condition Red* (1995). The film must have a minimum *user rating* of 2.0/10.

OR

Otherwise, films that have not met the minimum numeric parameter of 100 rating votes must have earned 10 or more *user comments/customer reviews* across these two online websites, or within a single site.<sup>436</sup> The film must have a minimum *user rating* of 2.0/10.

### **Key for Above Parameters**

*Rating/10* - The viewer rating out of ten is a weighted average tabulated from the *IMDb* user rating votes. The *IMDb* publishes *weighted averages* rather than *raw data averages* to prevent users from randomly vote stuffing and changing the rating of the film. The *IMDb* applies various filters to create as accurate a vote average as possible.

*User Rating Votes* – These votes are recorded as users from particular demographics (gender and age) who place their vote for a particular film.

*User Comments*: Registered site users are provided a *user comments* forum on the *IMDb* to freely express their opinions, commentaries, and feelings regarding a film. The posted reviews do not necessarily reflect the position of the *IMDb* or its personnel. Users are required to follow only broad guidelines and otherwise are not given further editorial advice. The viewer must use their own words (original work only) and write about a specific filmic title including e.g., whether the film was liked or disliked and for what reason. The *IMDb* guidelines include: a limit on review length (1,000 words); unannounced *spoilers*, viewer personal identifiers (e.g., phone numbers, mail addresses, and URLs).<sup>437</sup> Any user comments can be rejected (not posted) or edited for any reason. Registered users on the *IMDb* can do a number of things – rate films, post user commentary, dialogue on message boards, and can submit movie information, updates, and corrections on the database. Registration is free of charge and requires an active e-mail address.

<sup>436</sup> Typically films with more than 10 reviews had them across both the *IMDb* and Amazon.com sites.

<sup>437</sup> A spoiler is a comment that reveals significant elements of a plot (filmic ending, plot twist) that will spoil the film experience (e.g., pleasure) for the viewer who has not seen the movie.



## Amazon.com Customer Reviews

The Amazon.com *customer reviews* are posted by Amazon account users who have made one purchase on the online retailer. Film reviewers are encouraged to be honest in their evaluative appraisals (positive or negative) that will assist consumers in smart buying choices regarding movie products. Amazon.com prohibits the following content in its reviews including offensive material, promotional content benefiting non-Amazon-based companies, inappropriate content (repeatedly quoting other author's material) and information regarding the ordering, shipping and receiving of a product reviewed. All customers are asked to rate the film out of 5 prior to writing and submitting a review. Reviewers are not required to purchase the film in order to review it (Amazon.com, 2012).

## The Above Outlined Parameters Were Chosen for the Following Reasons

The research will rely on film reviews posted by viewers on the *IMDb* and the *Amazon.com marketplace* as a secondary supplementary data source. As such, a specified number of at least 5 user comments were required to ensure that *some* diversity of perspectives and opinions could emerge for each film. As well, reviews from individual films contribute to overlapping and divergent commentaries across titles from the same film-making form, such as exploitation cinema, for example. Titles that have numerous user comments are indicative of multiple users' interest in the writing up of a review for a film.

A filmic parameter requiring 10 or more user comments/customer reviews would include films that might not have a high rating, in particular the 100 rating vote minimum but which had a number of user review posts indicative of viewer interest (in writing a review) which *may* outline the significance of the film for viewers. Viewer interest is not equated with quality or content of the film review, rather; it only indicates a minimum of viewer dialogue regarding the film. An example of a film drawn under these parameters was *Vendetta* (1986).

A specified number of user rating votes (minimum 100) ensured that the film had received *some* viewer activity. Even though, the casting of votes factors into the overall rating of the film these votes are not an accurate indicator of the film's popularity. Many films rated under 5/10 have a significant number of votes. As such this filmic parameter permitted the inclusion of several *WIP* films which although rated low were very important to the research. For example, the films *Concrete Jungle* (1982) and *Chained Heat* (1983) have low ratings but were important *WIP* films for their time.

A minimum user rating of 2.0 out of 10 was required for three reasons 1) to exclude films with extremely low ratings 2) to continue to make the database more manageable and 3) to exclude very low rated exploitation '*women-in-prison films*' that have redundant imagery, plotlines, and themes and which offer little new information beyond what other more highly ranked exploitation films provide.

The rating vote numbers offer a glimpse into the world of the viewer (e.g., the overall gender and age of the audience who cast a rating vote and the ratings that each age/gender subgroup gives to the film). For example, the exploitation film the *Big Doll House* (1971) accumulated 418 votes and was rated as 5.7/10. This meant that 418 *IMDb* users have given the film a weighted average vote of 5.7 out of 10.

## Appendix B

### Total Numbers of Films Drawn Per Keyword<sup>438</sup> (and Other Selection Parameters) Prior to the Filmic Filtering Process

Filmic Parameters Utilized: Primary and Secondary keywords as outlined in Appendix A  
 Selection Dates: August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009<sup>439</sup>

<i>Primary or Secondary</i>	<i>Keyword</i>	<i>Aug 27, 2008 Number of Films Drawn (Total Titles Listed)</i>	<i>Feb 27, 2009 Number of Films Drawn (Total Titles Listed)</i>
Primary	Women's-prison	129	131
	Prison	723	769
Secondary			
<i>Criminalized Women (thematic)</i>	Female - criminal	24	24
	Female - prisoner	19	19
	Women-in-prison	20	20
	W.I.P	39	39
	Prisoner	139	155
<i>Carceral Settings/Prison Culture (thematic)</i>	Imprisonment	43	47
	Jail	277	305
	Penitentiary	9	9
	Prison-Life	35	35
	Women's- correctional-center <sup>440</sup>	*	2

<sup>438</sup> Many of the films listed under the primary keywords also were linked to secondary keywords. The selection process held a procedural stability with the outlined additional specific criteria used (e.g., year range, language and so on).

<sup>439</sup> Over a six month period the filmic lists changed little in total numbers. The telefeature (TV movie) was included in all keyword numbers for both selection dates.

<sup>440</sup> The asterisk (\*) denotes a keyword not used in the August 2008 selection procedure. This keyword was only drawn in the February selection process. It was a suggested additional search area from a committee supervisor.

## Appendix C

### Films in the Database by Filmmaking Form

August 2008 and February 2009 Selection Dates

These films met all the parameters and stayed in the database.

#### Definitional Key

Production Company – A production company can be involved in a variety of processes, including filmic financing and overall productive roles such as scripting, scheduling and casting. As well, production companies can also be distributors (e.g., New World Pictures) (*The Big Doll House*, 1971) or be tied to parent companies such as media conglomerates or have production and distribution deals with particular companies (Gaylord Pictures with Warner Brothers) (*White Oleander*, 2002) (“Production Company,” 2013; IMDb, 2011).

Film Distribution Company – A film distribution company markets the film for distribution (exhibition) in a particular context and format, for example a theatrical exhibition venue (celluloid) or initial and/or subsequent home viewing context (VHS, DVD, or Blu-ray format). Some distributors only work within the latter home context or in certain countries (“Film Distribution Company,” 2013; IMDb, 2011)

## The Exploitation Film (10 titles)

**August 2008**

Included in the research after being drawn, filtered, and preliminarily reviewed

<b>Film Name</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Distribution USA</b>  <b>Original Format Theatrical (unless otherwise delineated as home-based)</b>	<b>Industrial Context Details</b>	<b>Keyword</b>  <b>Selection Date August 27, 2008</b>	<b>Rating/10</b> <b>Rating</b> <b>Vote</b> <b>Numbers</b> <b>Total Film</b> <b>Review</b> <b>Numbers</b> <b>(as of</b> <b>selection</b> <b>date</b> <b>recorded)</b>
<i>Big Doll House</i> (1971)	New World Pictures	New World Pictures	New World Pictures Roger Corman founder (1970) independent motion picture production - distribution company – exploitation films	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	5.7/10 418 23
<i>Women in Cages</i> (1971)	Balatbat Production  New World Pictures	New World Pictures	Same as above	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	3.1/10 272 13
<i>Big Bird Cage</i> (1972)	New World Pictures	New World Pictures	Same as above	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	6.0/10 324 22
<i>Caged Heat</i> (1974)	Artist's Entertainment Complex	New World Pictures	Same as above	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	5.3/10 521 28
<i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982)	Ideal Films	Pentagon Releasing/ Motion Picture Marketing (MPM) <sup>441</sup>	Sexploitative WIP genre	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	2.7/10 221 7

<sup>441</sup> This is one listed theatrical distributor. Some films have two USA distributors.

<b>Film Name</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Distribution USA</b>  <b>Original Format Theatrical (unless otherwise delineated as home-based)</b>	<b>Industrial Context Details</b>	<b>Keyword Selection Date August 27, 2008</b>	<b>Rating/10 Rating Vote Numbers Total Film Review Numbers (as of selection date recorded)</b>
<i>Chained Heat</i> (1983)	Jensen Farley Pictures	Jensen Farley Pictures (theatrical) <sup>442</sup>  Vestron Video (USA) 1984 (VHS)	Sexploitative WIP genre	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	3.7/10 655 28
<i>Vendetta</i> (1986)	Chroma III Productions  Concorde Pictures	Vestron Video (USA) 1986 (VHS)	Concorde Pictures Roger Corman company after 1983	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	5.5/10 71 10
<i>Lust For Freedom</i> (1987)	Mesa Film/ Troma Entertainment	Troma Entertainment	Independent filmmakers Eric Louzil and Lloyd Kaufman known for the ultra cult-fandom figure the Toxic Avenger <sup>443</sup>	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	2.0/10 146 9
<i>Caged Fury</i> (1989)	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Film Corporation	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Film Corporation	Sexploitative genre WIP	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	4.3/10 207 8
<i>Prison Heat</i> (1993)	Global Pictures	Cannon Home Video	Sexploitative genre WIP	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	2.2/10 280 21

<sup>442</sup> There is no date listed regarding the theatrical release. Therefore, I do not know if the home-based release preceded or followed the theatrical exhibition.

<sup>443</sup> The toxic avenger is a cult fandom super hero who mutates from a 98 pound weakling to a "hideously deformed creature" after being exposed to toxic waste ("Toxic Avenger," 2012).

February 2009 Additions (2 titles)

The Exploitation Film (Only)

<i>Film Name</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Distribution USA</i>  <i>Original Theatrical (unless otherwise delineated as home-based)</i>	<i>Industrial Context Details</i>	<i>Keyword</i>  <i>Selection Date</i> <i>February, 27, 2009</i>	<i>Rating/10</i> <i>Rating Vote</i> <i>Numbers</i> <i>Total Film</i> <i>Review</i> <i>Numbers</i> <i>(as of selection date recorded)</i>
<i>Naked Cage</i> <sup>444</sup> (1986)	Cannon Group	Cannon Film Distributors  Media Home Entertainment Direct-to-video (USA) (1986)	US group of companies (including Cannon films) involved with low to medium budget films many of which were 'serious marginal films.'	<i>Women's-Prison</i> February 2009	4.7/10 110 6
<i>Red Heat</i> <sup>445</sup> (1985)	International Screen	Vestron Video Direct-to-video (no date)	Sexploitative genre WIP	<i>Women's-Prison</i> February 2009	4.3/10 306 5

<sup>444</sup> This film accumulated the rating vote numbers from ninety-three to one hundred and ten.

<sup>445</sup> The user commentary increased from four to five on the IMDb.

### The Hollywood Film (4 titles)

August 2008 Selection Period

There were no February 2009 additions

<b>Film Name</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Distribution USA</b>  <b>Original Theatrical (unless otherwise delineated as home-based)</b>	<b>Industrial Context Details</b>	<b>Keyword</b>  <b>Selection Date</b> <b>August 27, 2008</b>	<b>Rating/10</b> <b>Rating Vote Numbers</b> <b>Total Film Review Numbers (as of selection date recorded)</b>
<i>Caged (1950)</i>	Warner Bros. Pictures	Warner Bros. Pictures	No Conglomerate at this time	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	8.0/10 574 51
<i>Love Child (1982)</i>	The Ladd Company	The Ladd Company in conjunction with Warner Bros.	Ladd company independent	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	5.5/10 115 7
<i>Brokedown Palace (1999)</i>	Fox 2000 Pictures  Adam Field's Productions <sup>446</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation	Parent Company Fox Entertainment Group [owned and controlled by media conglomerate [21 <sup>st</sup> Century Fox]	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	6.1/10 8,402 259
<i>White Oleander (2002)</i>	Warner Bros. Pictures/ Gaylord Pictures (uncredited)	Warner Bros. Pictures	Warner Bros major studio subsidiary of Time Warner conglomerate	<i>Women's-Prison</i> August 2008	7.0/10 10,283 252

<sup>446</sup> The primary or most notable production company/companies are listed even though they may have worked in conjunction with other production companies as in the case of this film (Two Girls Productions, for example).



## The Contemporary Independent Film (6 titles)

August 2008 Selection Period

There were no February 2009 additions

<b>Film Name</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Distribution USA</b>  <b>Original Theatrical (unless otherwise delineated as home-based)</b>	<b>Industrial Context Details</b>	<b>Keyword</b>  <b>Selection Date August 27, 2008</b>	<b>Rating/10</b> <b>Rating</b> <b>Vote</b> <b>Numbers</b> <b>Total Film</b> <b>Review</b> <b>Numbers</b> <b>(as of</b> <b>selection</b> <b>date</b> <b>recorded)</b>
<i>Condition Red</i> (1995)	Marianna Films	Arrow Releasing	Small scale independent	<i>Women's—Prison</i> August 2008	4.6/10 151 5
<i>Map of the World</i> (1999)	Cineventa	Overseas FilmGroup	Overseas Film Group-worldwide independent film distributor	<i>Women's—Prison</i> August 2008	6.4/10 1,976 61
<i>Civil Brand</i> (2002)	Mandalay Sports Productions Lionsgate was its parent company 1997-2002	Lionsgate Films <sup>447</sup> Direct-to-video Theatrical <sup>448</sup>	Lionsgate large scale independent production - distribution co. (USA)	<i>Women's - Prison</i> August 2008	5.0/10 275 42
<i>House of D</i> (2004)	Bob Yari Productions	Lionsgate Films	Lionsgate Same as above Yari productions one of première homes for independent films	<i>Women's - Prison</i> August 2008	6.7/10 3,506 125

<sup>447</sup> Lionsgate is considered to be a conglomerate and highly successful studio that for some time had operated outside Hollywood. Lionsgate moved out of its home context of Vancouver, BC in 2006. Its takes its name from the Lions Gate Bridge and the 'Lions' two mountainous peaks north of Vancouver, that are visible landmark seen from various points in the Lower Mainland.

<sup>448</sup> Both contexts are listed, as it appears that, shortly after the video release, *Civil Brand* was released in select theatres.

<b>Film Name</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Distribution USA</b>  <b>Original Theatrical (unless otherwise delineated as home-based)</b>	<b>Industrial Context Details</b>	<b>Keyword</b>  <b>Selection Date August 27, 2008</b>	<b>Rating/10</b> <b>Rating Vote</b> <b>Numbers</b> <b>Total Film Review</b> <b>Numbers</b> <b>(as of selection date recorded)</b>
<i>Nine Lives (2005)</i>	Mockingbird Pictures	Magnolia Pictures	Magnolia specializes in foreign & independent films - large scale	<i>Prison</i> August 2008	7.0/10 2,550 99
<i>Karla (2006)</i> <sup>449</sup>	Quantum Entertainment	Quantum Entertainment <sup>450</sup>	Quantum Entertainment production and distribution company	<i>Female-Criminal</i> August 2008	5.4/10 1,422 59

#### Total Number of Films by Year

<b>1950</b>	<b>1960</b> <sup>451</sup>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980s</b> <sup>452</sup>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Total</b>
1	0	4	8	4	5	22

<sup>449</sup> *Karla* is the only film that depicts a Canadian penal subject.

<sup>450</sup> *Karla* was originally distributed to Canadian screens.

<sup>451</sup> Very few prison films were made in the 1960s.

<sup>452</sup> Many of the exploitation films were made in the 1980s and account for 7 out of the 8 titles.

## Appendix D

### Film Review Commentary Numbers

#### For The Final Filmic Database

The filmic review secondary database included *all* written commentaries for a specific time period. No selection/sampling procedure was conducted on this source material. Reviews were counted from the earliest filmic commentary on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, <sup>453</sup> 1998, until February 28, 2009, at the second and final preliminary selection date. The review numbers reflect the total number of reviews for the specified time period.

#### Total Across film-Making Forms (1,161 Commentaries)

##### The Exploitation Film (total 189)

Name	IMDB	Amazon	Name	IMDb	Amazon
<i>Big Doll House</i> (1971)	13	11	<i>Red Heat</i> (1985)	5	0
<i>Women in Cages</i> (1971)	9	5	<i>Vendetta</i> (1986)	10	1
<i>Big Bird Cage</i> (1972)	13	9	<i>Naked Cage</i> (1986)	5	1
<i>Caged Heat</i> (1974)	13	16	<i>Lust For Freedom</i> (1987)	5	4
<i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982)	6	1	<i>Caged Fury</i> (1989)	7	2
<i>Chained Heat</i> (1983)	27	5	<i>Prison Heat</i> (1993)	16	5

##### The Hollywood Film (total 572)

Name	IMDb	Amazon	Name	IMDb	Amazon
<i>Caged</i> (1950)	30	22	<i>Brokedown Palace</i> (1999)	173	84
<i>Love Child</i> (1982)	2	5	<i>White Oleander</i> (2002)	157	99

##### The Contemporary Independent Film (total 400)

Name	IMDb	Amazon	Name	IMDb	Amazon
<i>Condition Red</i> (1995)	6	0	<i>House of D</i> (2004)	80	48
<i>Map of the World</i> (1999)	34	27	<i>Nine Lives</i> (2005)	59	40
<i>Civil Brand</i> (2002)	21	21	<i>Karla</i> (2006)	50	14

<sup>453</sup> This date denotes that the earliest film review was dated September 3, 1998 for the title *Chained Heat* (1983).

## Appendix E

### Film Industry Personnel

Women's Impact on Filmic Creation as Writers,<sup>454</sup> Directors, and/or Producers

Female filmic personnel are indicated in *Italics*

#### Definitional Key

Film Director – The director shapes both the artistic and dramatic aspects of film-making that include, for example, developing the filmic vision and message, readapting the script into the on-screen storyline through scenes and shot sequences, and deciding on particular techniques of aesthetic expression, such as camera angles, shot sequence/selection and cinematographic effects. As well, the director orchestrates the direction of actors (in their performative roles) and the film crew during the film-making process. Other responsibilities may range from hiring cast members and financing and/or writing a film, to post-production work at all levels, from colour scenes to musical scores. As well, the director may be required to follow agreements set-up with producers or a studio ("Film Director," 2011; IMDb, 2013).

Producer – The film producer has the overall responsibility in controlling primary aspects of the filmic production process that include "integrating the contributions of other personnel and balancing creative and financial considerations" (Maltby 2003: 587). Some specific responsibilities include pre-production work, such as securing the rights to produce a film from a novel, and hiring the director. The producer may hold a special interest in the film, or be tied directly to the distribution company. For example, the Roger Corman titles were distributed through his company, New World Pictures. As well, the producer is responsible for acquiring and securing a distributor ("Producer," 2011).

Executive Producer – The executive producer is not involved in any of the technical aspects of the film but is the head of the overall production process (IMDb, 2013). As well, business decisions and legal issues are the responsibility of the executive producer.

Co-Producer – These agents hold variable roles across the cinematic spectrum and may become part of the production team. A specific responsibility may include production-related managerial aspects.

<sup>454</sup> All directors and writers are credited, unless otherwise indicated.

Writer – A writer is an individual who writes a novel or another literary work (screenplay, teleplay, or script) that is readapted into a film or televisual production (IMDb, 2013).

### The Exploitation Film

<b>Name</b>	<b>Writers, Screenplay, or Story</b>	<b>Directors</b>	<b>Producers<sup>455</sup></b>
<i>The Big Doll House</i> (1971)	Don Spencer	Jack Hill	Producer <i>Jane Schaffer</i> Executive producers Roger Corman <sup>456</sup> (uncredited) Eddie Romero
<i>Women in Cages</i> (1971)	David R. Osterhout James H. Watkins	Gerry de Leon	Producer Ben Balatbat Roger Corman (uncredited)
<i>Big Bird Cage</i> (1972)	Jack Hill	Jack Hill	Producer <i>Jane Schaffer</i> Executive producer Roger Corman
<i>Caged Heat</i> (1974)	Jonathan Demme	Jonathan Demme	Producers <i>Evelyn Purcell</i> Roger Corman (uncredited)
<i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982)	Alan J. Adler	Tom DeSimone	Producer Billy Fine
<i>Chained Heat</i> (1983)	Paul Nicolas Vincent Mongol	Paul Nicolas	Producers Billy Fine <i>Monica Teuber</i>
<i>Red Heat</i> (1985)	Robert Collector Gary Drucker	Robert Collector	Producers <i>Monica Teuber</i> Ernest R. von Theumer
<i>Vendetta</i> (1986)	John Adams <i>Laura Cavestani</i> Emil Farkas Simon Maskell	Bruce Logan	Producer Ken Dalton Executive Producer Roger Corman (uncredited)
<i>Naked Cage</i> (1986)	Paul Nicolas	Paul Nicolas	Producers Samuel Benedict

<sup>455</sup> Not all filmic producers are listed; mainly, well known or noted persons are identified. Typically films have multiple producers, including co-producers, associate, executive, and line producers.

<sup>456</sup> Auteur Roger Corman typically produced these films and could either be credited or uncredited in the filmic industrial details. Corman was an uncredited producer in *Women in Cages* (1971).

<b>Name</b>	<b>Writers, Screenplay, or Story</b>	<b>Directors</b>	<b>Producers<sup>455</sup></b>
			Chris D. Nebe
<i>Lust For Freedom</i> (1987)	Eric Louzil Duke Howard Craig Kusaba	Eric Louzil	Producer Eric Louzil Co-producer <i>Laurel A. Koernig</i>
<i>Caged Fury</i> (1989)	Bill Milling	Bill Milling	Producer Bob Gallagher Associate Producer Erik Estrada <i>Edith Sims</i>
<i>Prison Heat</i> (1993)	David Alexander	Joel Silberg	Producer Allan Greenblatt

### The Hollywood Film

<b>Name</b>	<b>Writers Screenplay, or Story</b>	<b>Directors</b>	<b>Producers</b>
<i>Caged</i> (1950)	<i>Virginia Kellogg</i> Bernard C. Schoenfeld	John Cromwell	Producer Jerry Wald
<i>Love Child</i> (1982)	<i>Anne Gerard</i> <i>Katherine Specktor</i>	Larry Peerce	Producer Paul Maslansky
<i>Brokedown Palace</i> (1999)	Adams Fields David Arata	Jonathan Kaplan	Producer Adam Fields
<i>White Oleander</i> (2002)	<u>Novel</u> <i>Janet Fitch</i> <i>Mary Agnes</i> <i>Donoghue</i>	Peter Kosminsky	Producer John Wells Executive producers <i>Kristin Harms</i> <i>Tracy Underwood</i>

### Contemporary Independent Film

<b>Name</b>	<b>Writers Screenplay, or Story</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Producers</b>
<i>Condition Red</i> (1995)	Andre Degas	<i>Mika Kaurismaki</i>	Producers Andre Degas
<i>Map of the World</i> (1999)	<u>Novel</u> <i>Jane Hamilton</i> Peter Hedges <i>Polly Platt</i>	Scott Elliot	Producers <i>Kathleen Kennedy</i> Frank Marshall Co-producer <i>Lisa Niedenthal</i>
<i>Civil Brand</i> (2002)	Preston Whitmore <u>Teleplay</u> Preston Whitmore <i>Joyce Lewis</i>	<i>Neema Barnette</i>	Producer <i>Neema Barnette</i> Jeff Clanagan
<i>House of D</i> (2004)	David Duchovny	David Duchovny	Producer

<b>Name</b>	<b>Writers Screenplay, or Story</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Producers</b>
			Bob Yari Jane Rosenthal Co-producer Melanie Greene
<i>Nine Lives (2005)</i>	Rodrigo Garcia	Rodrigo Garcia	Producer Julie Lynn Associate producer Amy Lippens
<i>Karla (2006)</i>	Joel Bender Manette Beth Rosen Michael D. Sellers	Joel Bender	Producer Marlon Parry Executive producers Manette Beth Rosen Pamela Viastas

## Appendix F

### Ethics

The university ethics requirements were addressed prior to presenting the research in the prospectus colloquium. This dissertation is not human subject research, but relies solely on secondary textual and image data drawn from filmic sources and online Internet websites. As such, the public availability and access to all primary and secondary data material made my research exempt from the university ethics application process. In submitting my research protocol for application and review, I was advised that it met with the exclusion criteria as outlined in the SFU Research Policy.<sup>457</sup> The Director of the Office of Research Ethics (Dr. Hal Weinberg) confirmed that I did not need ethics approval given that all of my data was in the public domain (and could be accessed without the permission of a person or agency).<sup>458</sup>

<sup>457</sup> This is policy # R20.01, which states that any research “on matters that in a free and democratic society can be properly considered as part of the public domain is not required to undergo an ethics review.”

<sup>458</sup> In an e-mail dated May 14, 2008 Dr. Weinberg confirmed this decision. Nevertheless, I chose to seek permission from both the Internet Movie Database and Amazon.com in regards to incorporating *user comments* and *customer reviews* into the dissertation.



## Appendix G

### Primary Categorical Embodiments (Subjectivities) of the Prisoner and Male Characters Per Film-making Form

Time Period(Year[s])	Primary Categorical Embodiment Sub-categories in parentheses	Exemplar Films Primary ones
1970s	The liberated female offender (non-criminal innocent, liberated criminal, and revolutionary subject)	<i>The Big Bird Cage</i> (1972)
1980s	The good woman versus the bad woman  Unseasoned first timer  The lesbian predator (masculinized butch, feminized femme, and dark figure)	<i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982) <i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982) <i>Vendetta</i> (1986) <i>Prison Heat</i> (1993)
1980s	The otherized gang member (bad white women - the bad/bad black women)	<i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982) <i>Chained Heat</i> (1983)
1980s	The pacifistic peacemaker	<i>The Naked Cage</i> (1986)
Both periods	The sexualized, objectified, and victimized penal subject (and authority) (sexually liberated, sexually starved, lesbian, repressed women, abused and fetishized women)	<i>The Big Doll House</i> (1971) <i>The Big Bird Cage</i> (1972) <i>Caged Heat</i> (1974) <i>Red Heat</i> (1985) <i>Prison Heat</i> (1993)

Time Period(Year[s])	Primary Categorical Embodiment Sub-categories in parentheses	Exemplar Films Primary ones
Both periods	Animalistic criminal	<i>Women in Cages</i> (1971) <i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982) <i>The Naked Cage</i> (1986)
1970s	The mad woman (diabolical stalker, impulsive killer)	<i>The Big Doll House</i> (1971) <i>Women in Cages</i> (1971)
Both periods	Victim-victimizer (passive, reactive, and resistant victim)	<i>The Big Bird Cage</i> (1972) <i>Red Heat</i> (1985) <i>Prison Heat</i> (1993)
Both periods	Female action heroine (rebel, avenger, and rescuer-protector)	<i>Big Bird Cage</i> (1972) <i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982) <i>Vendetta</i> (1986) <i>Lust for Freedom</i> (1987)
Both periods 1990s	Instrumental partnership – emotive friend	<i>Chained Heat</i> (1982) <i>Red Heat</i> (1985) <i>Caged Heat</i> (1974) <i>Prison Heat</i> (1993)
1970s	Male filmic Characters Inept/ humiliated victims Zany revolutionary Effeminate gays	<i>Big Doll House</i> (1971) <i>Big Bird Cage</i> (1972)

Time Period(Year[s])	Primary Categorical Embodiment Sub-categories in parentheses	Exemplar Films Primary ones
1980s	Sadistic abusers Abductors/exploiters Hero-rescuers	<i>Concrete Jungle</i> (1982) <i>Chained Heat</i> (1983) <i>Lust for Freedom</i> (1987) <i>Caged Fury</i> (1989)

## Appendix H

### Total Number of Films per Year - Specific Film-Making Forms

