

2010

Prison Blockbusters: Relationships Between Prison Cinema and Student Perceptions

Jeremy Scott McQueen
Eastern Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McQueen, Jeremy Scott, "Prison Blockbusters: Relationships Between Prison Cinema and Student Perceptions" (2010). *Online Theses and Dissertations*. 05.
<https://encompass.eku.edu/etd/05>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Encompass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Online Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Encompass. For more information, please contact Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu.


PRISON BLOCKBUSTERS:

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRISON CINEMA
AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

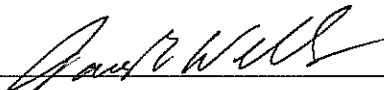
By

Jeremy S. McQueen

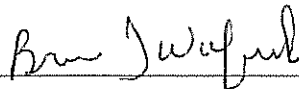
Thesis Approved:



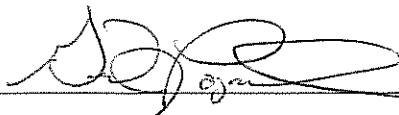
Kevin Minor, Ph.D., Chair, Advisory Committee



James Wells, Ph.D., Member, Advisory Committee



Bruce Wolford, Ph.D., Member, Advisory Committee



Jerry Pogatshnik, Dean, The Graduate School

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Science degree at Eastern Kentucky University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from, or reproduction of this thesis, may be granted by my major professor, or in his absence, by the Head of Inter-library Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature Jimmy S. Malmon

Date 12/16/10

PRISON BLOCKBUSTERS:
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRISON CINEMA
AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

By
Jeremy S. McQueen

Bachelor of Arts

Berea College

Berea, Kentucky

2008

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
December, 2010

Copyright © Jeremy S. McQueen, 2010

All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family.
Thank you for your love and support throughout my life.
Hopefully, this document serves as evidence as to what
I have been doing for the past seven years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Kevin Minor, for his guidance and patience. I appreciate the thorough reading and editing. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. James Wells and Dr. Bruce Wolford, for their comments and assistance over the past year. Thanks for getting on the ship and not jumping overboard. I would like to express my thanks to my fiancé, Rebecca, for her understanding and patience during those times when the end did not seem near. She encouraged me and provided limitless motivation through her work ethic. She knows how to lead by example.

I would like to thank members of my family in Annville, Kentucky: my mother, Ida and my stepfather, Dannie. Maybe one year soon you will begin to get a return on your investment. I need to also give thanks to my father, Scott and my stepmother, LaDoonna. You had a major influence in my development as a person. I would also like to thank my grandmothers, Joyce and Jewell. You both helped carry the load of a sometimes, unruly grandson. I thank you both for teaching me discipline at a very early age.

I need to also address my appreciation for my future in-laws, the honorable Dr. Ray Tucker and his wife, Rebecca. They are both fine educators that have been a blessing in my life during the past two years. Thank you for allowing another graduate student to grace your home for countless meals and many weary nights. I will never be able to adequately express my gratitude.

ABSTRACT

This study examined college students' perceptions, as they relate to prison cinema. It also discussed and analyzed reoccurring themes in prison cinema that perpetuates the prison culture in the United States. Specifically, this research addressed the following research question: How is exposure to prison cinema related to student perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff? By asking this question and analyzing the responses given by students, this study hopes to contribute to improved understanding of how popular cinema shapes the perceptions of prison culture in the United States.

The researcher utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods in gathering research data for the project. Students in a prison film course at Eastern Kentucky University viewed five popular prison films as a class over six weeks. After viewing each film, the class discussed the themes and concepts of the film based on a rubric used in the course. Then, each student submitted a film review for each prison movie. The films reviews were also guided by a four-level film review rubric. The researcher used a content analysis approach to gather detailed responses from the students to be included in the study's findings. Student opinions and perceptions were also categorically entered into a data computing software program to provide statistical percentages regarding student perceptions of the films.

This study illustrated numerous themes regarding student perceptions and prison cinema. First, students expressed considerable amounts of empathy towards prisoners in the films viewed in the course. Secondly, students were more negative or neutral toward prisons after viewing the prisons portrayed in the films. Thirdly, students perceived prison staff extremely negative after viewing the prison films in the course. There were also additional findings associated with

students' personal connections towards the films and their perceptions of world reality associated with the films. More than half of the students in this study displayed more negative personal connections, which were affirmed through their comments of negative associations and memories. Lastly, the students in this study were fairly balanced in how they associated the films with world events that occurred in the time periods attached with the prison films.

It was concluded that student perceptions of prison, prisoners, and prison staff have a strong relationship with prison cinema. Often film images and themes that are portrayed in various films influence the perceptions students develop for the roles characterized in the prison films. This link suggests that the importance of cinema in society is much more critical than ever before. Specifically, the importance of prison cinema is even fairly dangerous, considering its possible impact on citizens. Prison cinema has potential to influence public opinion, and public opinion influences policy. Therefore, if the two are continually linked, policy makers will be enacting laws that are shaped through media outlets, such as prison cinema.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Garland’s Culture of Punishment.....	11
Previous Literature.....	15
Prison Violence.....	19
Staff Corruption.....	20
False Convictions.....	22
Content Analysis Research.....	25
III. METHODS.....	27
Participants.....	27
Research Question.....	28
Variables.....	28
Research Procedures.....	30
Limitations.....	33
IV. RESULTS.....	35
Cool Hand Luke.....	39

The Green Mile.....	42
The Hurricane.....	45
The Shawshank Redemption.....	48
Sleepers.....	51
V. DISCUSSION.....	54
Perceptions of Prisons.....	54
Perceptions of Prisoners.....	55
Perceptions of Prison Staff.....	56
Personal Connections.....	57
Perceptions of World Reality.....	58
Conclusions.....	60
REFERENCES.....	63
APPENDIXES.....	67
CURRICULUM VITA.....	73

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
4.1 Student Perceptions (All Films)	37
4.2 Student Perceptions (<i>Cool Hand Luke</i>).....	40
4.3 Student Perceptions (<i>The Green Mile</i>).....	43
4.4 Student Perceptions (<i>The Hurricane</i>).....	46
4.5 Student Perceptions (<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i>).....	49
4.6 Student Perceptions (<i>Sleepers</i>).....	52

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1.1 Perceptions of Prison Culture in the United States.....	7
2.1 Media, Political Ideology, and Punishment Practice.....	9
2.2 Garland’s Cultural Analysis of Punishment.....	14
2.3 Prison Cinematic Themes.....	16
3.1 Four Level Film Review Process.....	29
3.2 Research Variables Operationalized.....	30
3.3 Research Project Overview.....	32
4.1 Student Excerpts (All Films).....	38
4.2 Student Excerpts (<i>Cool Hand Luke</i>).....	41
4.3 Student Excerpts (<i>The Green Mile</i>).....	44
4.4 Student Excerpts (<i>The Hurricane</i>).....	47
4.5 Student Excerpts (<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i>).....	50
4.6 Student Excerpts (<i>Sleepers</i>).....	53
5.1 Research Study Themes.....	60

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past century, the media has become more influential in nearly all areas of the global world (Mason, 2006). It is one of the leading contributors to human perceptions in a world that has truly become the essence of an Information Age. Thus, it should not be surprising that the portrayal of crime and punishment have also become intertwined in the webbing that encompasses the realm of mass communications (Shefrin, 2004). Much, and maybe most of what the global population knows about crime is provided through a lens that often distorts what is accurate and emphasizes what is more fictitiously entertaining to the masses and beneficial to politicians (Simon, 2007).

There are numerous stable elements of the media that have thrived for many decades, and there are also recent additions that have opened new doors to the inside world of crime and punishment (Brown, 2004). The role of the mass media in delivering an image of crime and punishment to the general population is critical because the media provides a major visual aid that citizens outside the criminal justice system use to shape their images of what crime and punishment entail (Brown, 2004).

The most influential among the many mediums of mass communication is popular film (Mason, 2006). All communication mediums have rooted themselves in the daily lives of Americans and the rest of the information accessible world. As a result, media has influenced and continues to influence the opinion and understanding of crime and the criminal justice system (Shefrin, 2004). However, *film* is the most notable of all media communications due to

its historical reference in the United States and its ability to remain in the mainstream through the use of other media outlets (Mason, 2006). This study will focus on film because it continues to be a driving force in influencing American perceptions of the criminal justice system, as well as other facets of American culture (Mason, 2006).

Popular film has developed remarkably quicker than most people probably expected over the past decade (Shefrin, 2004). This rapid growth has provided many educational and cultural conveniences that have allowed immediate access to a plethora of film genres and topics. Crime and punishment have always been popular news segments, but with cinema, crime has gotten even more exposure, which has permitted the media to infiltrate wider target audiences (Shefrin, 2004).

Crime and punishment films may be fairly inaccurate or no more informational than heresy or slightly researched rumors (Mason, 2006). Unfortunately, the general public does not have any method of deciphering the difference unless they are astute enough to actually do the research that is required to understand criminal cases (Peritz, 1998). This raises another serious problem with crime in cinema. Most citizens do not care enough to decipher what has been “spoon fed” in the movies they watch. Most citizens would rather take the films at *face value* because, to research the facts, would be too much effort (Shefrin, 2004). In addition, the consensus among people seems to be devoted to the reliable trustworthiness of the mass media.

Although the public opinion of crime in the United States is not always accurate, criminal justice officials cannot and should not place all of the blame on broad forms of media, such as the Internet and television (Shefrin, 2004). Film has been a monumental contributor to public opinion about crime and punishment in the United States (Brown, 2004). For this reason, film will be the focal point for this study. More specifically, this research focuses on the portrayal of

prisons, prisoners, and prison staff in film. The cinematic portrayal of prisons continues to be one of the most influential factors in determining American perceptions of crime and punishment (Peritz, 1998). Film influence has grown over the past several decades. This growth has led crime and cinema to become more tied together in the classroom (Peritz, 1998).

Film courses across the country often feature crime as one of the major topics. There is an extensive coverage of topics in the field that have been incredibly influential in terms of educating the public about criminal behavior (Peritz, 1998). Crime dramas on the silver screen have been especially popular since the days of film noir in the early 20th century (Mason, 2006). Those films depicted crime in a manner that often ended poorly for everyone involved. Film noir dramas would regularly end with all, or most of the cast meeting an early demise due to their deviant behavior (Mason, 2006).

However, as film progressed into the middle of the 20th century, the plot for crime dramas swiftly changed. The newer plot outline for crime films directed more attention toward the “good guy” and “bad guy” roles (Mason, 2006). The popular ending for these films was certainly notable for the famous “good guy” finale. This trend in American cinema remained inspirational for numerous decades. Of course, this trend was fairly influential in creating a positive public opinion for the criminal justice system in the United States (Arrigo, 2006).

The success of such crime dramas and action flicks helped produce more support for criminal justice offices across America (Arrigo, 2006). One of the most inspirational characters for this film era was “Dirty” Harry. The character was made famous through a series of crime films starring Clint Eastwood in the latter half of the 20th century. It was the role made famous by Eastwood, along with similar roles by other Hollywood celebrities, that gave a much more heroic look for the criminal justice system (Peritz, 1998).

Cinema shifted again when Americans got bored with the “good guy” wins every time scenario. Thus, towards the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, Hollywood has focused more on attempting to educate audiences about the historical and hidden scenes of prison life (Brown, 2004). This transition in American cinema has definitely created more interest in the topic of criminal justice (Arrigo, 2006). Conversely, some of the more recent prison films have also underscored the notion that prisons may not be correct in every aspect of their mission and operation (Brown, 2004). Additionally, specific films have even emphasized the possibilities of corruption inside prison institutions (Arrigo, 2006). Therefore, film has been a double-edged sword in some aspects for criminal justice. It has undoubtedly helped spread the image of fear in the United States, but it has also attacked the injustices associated with crime in America (Arrigo, 2006).

Whereas film once promoted the dedication of criminal justice officials across the United States and stressed the threat of crime to tax payers, it is now more apt to educate or question the role that criminal justice agencies are serving in the punishment and rehabilitation spectrum of America’s crime problem (Arrigo, 2006). Although most film accounts are generally fabricated in many facets of the plotline, the overall production has a method that grabs the attention of viewers and introduces them to possibilities previously unconsidered (Brown, 2009).

The importance of cinema in American and global culture is unprecedented (Arrigo, 2006). Various mediums have established significant and effective models for approaching the art of sharing information and demonstrating the power obtainable through visual distortion (Mason, 2006). Crime and punishment appear within films in several forms. Many films depict scenes that advocate for more criminal justice resources (Peritz, 1998). And other films assault the negligence often present in any system that is overrun with predicaments, such as the

challenges the criminal justice system faces (Arrigo, 2006). Popular film is only one of the most successful current styles of media that continue to barrage people every day. The ideas and thoughts that are portrayed may not be original, but they are surely suitable to any audience that is not knowledgeable of the topic (Brown, 2009).

There is plenty of literature that discusses the influence of film on various topics in American culture. However, literature concerning the effects of crime cinema on American perceptions of prisons is limited (Mason, 2006). Research literature does not currently offer much detail as to how crime cinema specifically shapes public opinion of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. It is important to note that most people do not have any direct experiences with prisons. This is a critical argument as to why popular cinema is thoroughly influential. Unlike other topics in American criminal culture, such as the police and the courts, prisons are not regularly featured on television shows and news stories. Film has become the default in American culture for providing the inside look at prisons in American society. Therefore, this positioning as the pseudo-prison authority has allowed prison cinema to be much more important in shaping perceptions of prison culture in the United States.

Much prison literature comments on prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions. There is certainly some merit to all three of these topics, but like most prison themes, they are most likely exaggerated (Peritz, 1998). It is not surprising that prison cinema targets these three topics quite often in building characters, story, and screenplay to entertain imaginations (Shefrin, 2004). Indeed, such exaggerated themes are critical in creating realism for any audience. It is the direct motive of a film director to create a world that mirrors reality because it attracts the mind of the viewer (Shefrin, 2004). For instance, if the director can manipulate minds to believe a character was falsely convicted, then it will surely perpetuate that

climatic triumph when the character escapes from prison. These three themes will be discussed in this study to examine their role in molding perceptions of film viewers.

This study examined college students' perceptions, as they relate to prison cinema. This study also discussed and analyzed reoccurring themes in prison cinema that perpetuate prison culture in the United States. Specifically, this research addressed the following research question: How is exposure to prison cinema related to student perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff? By asking this question and analyzing the responses given by students, this study attempts to contribute to improved understanding of how popular cinema shapes the perceptions of prison culture in the United States.

Figure 1.1 illustrates a relationship between student perceptions and information about prison culture in the United States. The figure depicts how student perceptions of prison culture (i.e. prisons, prisoners, and prison staff) are defined and influenced by entities, such as cinema, society and political policies. The figure illustrates the filtering of opinions represented in cinema, society, and policies, and how they contribute to shaping student perceptions of prison culture. In addition, the figure also represents the criticality in understanding that the information that seeps through the filter is most influential in shaping student perceptions of prison culture. The figure attempts to simplify the notion that perceptions of prison culture is really a large umbrella term. It is a concoction that has many ingredients. There are numerous facets that help define that term. This study attempted to illuminate some of the complexities of prison culture, and how perceptions of it are easily altered.

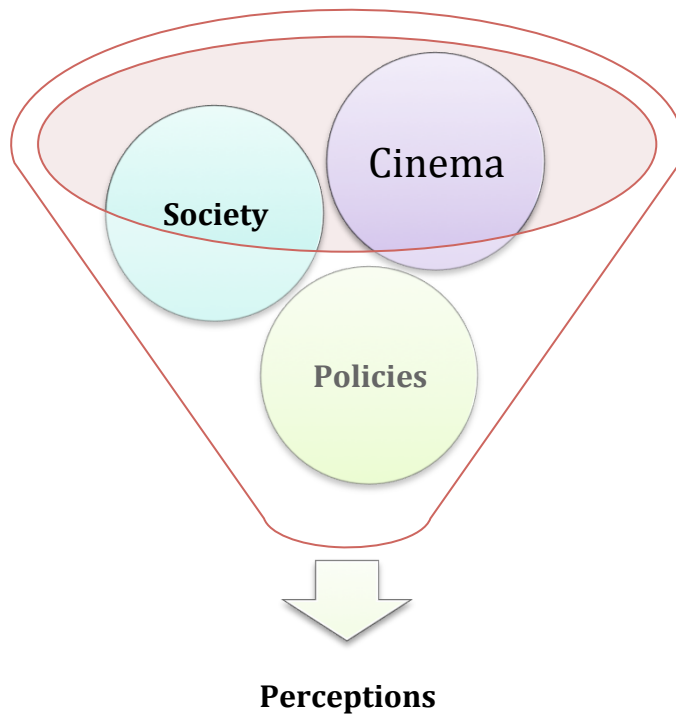


Figure 1.1 – Perceptions of Prison Culture in the United States

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of popular cinema on perceptions of prisons is astounding. The film industry's accreditation possibly projects an unrealistic amount of inflicted damage on American society via the culture of punishment (Mason, 2006). Prison culture was not always one of the major targets of popular cinema, although prisons have been a particular interest of varying forms of media for many years (Arrigo, 2006). Particular criminal justice events, such as Ronald Reagan's initiative against drug abuse, have always found their niche in media exploitation. Reagan initiated the infamous War on Drugs during his two terms in the White House lasting from 1980 to 1988 (Caulkins & Sevigny, 2005). During and since this period, there has been a dramatic increase in imprisonment due to the vast number of drug offenders being incarcerated, often for relatively long terms (Caulkins & Sevigny, 2005).

According to Shivy, Wu, Moon, and Mann (2007), incarceration rates in the United States increased 700% between 1970 and 2009. The strict stance on drug abuse in America won President Reagan many votes in both of his elections. However, it was also a stance that created many pressing problems for corrections in the United States (Shivy et al., 2007). While the drug war has caused numerous *real* problems in prison administration, the events it has spawned have also provided a bountiful supply of topics for cinema (Mason, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study stems from Garland's (1990) analysis of culture and punishment. Garland contends that culture shapes punishment and punishment, as depicted to the public, in turn, shapes cultural ways of thinking and feeling. Garland's theory of culture and punishment can be directly applied to research concerning prison cinema and perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. For example, punishment, as portrayed through media outlets, such as prison cinema, shapes public thoughts and feelings about prisons, prisoners, and prison staff due to the hidden nature of those elements (Figure 2.1). Most members of society have not experienced much punishment in the justice system. Therefore, society relies on media to communicate the *realities* of punishment (Figure 2.1).

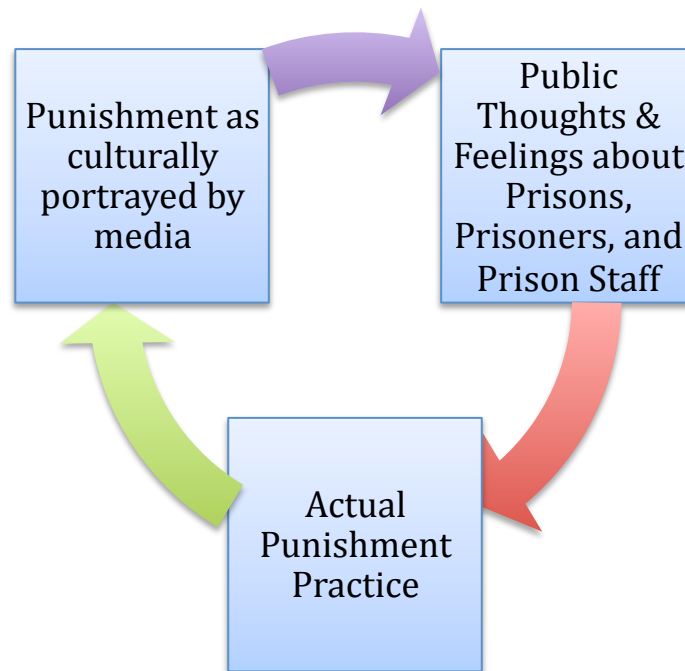


Figure 2.1 – Media, Political Ideology, and Punishment Practice

Prison cinema, as an element of culture, provides cinematic portrayals of punishment to the general public (Brown, 2009). The images that are depicted are much more significant than simply providing entertainment to the masses. Punishment, as culturally portrayed by prison cinema, not only provides images, but it also narrates and provides characters for the imaginations of the general public (Brown, 2009). Therefore, when film viewers witness a false conviction or a corrupt prison staff in a prison film, they are not simply viewing fictitious representations of punishment. Film viewers are connecting the cinematic themes and characters with actual associations that lead them to form opinions and perceptions of every aspect in that particular film (Brown, 2009).

The perceptions formed by the general public from viewing images of punishment portrayed by prison cinema tend to shape actual punishment practice (Figure 2.1). This is evident when citizens vote for certain policies and/or elect politicians, who campaign on specific safety issues. The politicians are simply campaigning on ideological issues they believe are significant to the general public (Simon, 2007). However, in actuality, the public is conveying to politicians the themes they view in prison cinema, or gather from some other form of media. Public mentalities and sensibilities thus shape actual punishment policies being instituted. Although prison cinema does play an exceptional role in shaping perceptions of punishment, society's perceptions of punishment also shapes prison cinema both indirectly via the medium of punishment practice, and directly via sales and other types of feedback on media portrayals (Figure 2.1).

The final element of the figure illustrated depicts how actual punishment practice helps shape the cultural representation of punishment via the media. That is, the media draws on select aspects of actual penal practice in the process of constructing cultural representations of prison

culture. As such, the images provided by media sources, such as prison cinema, are only one element of a constant cycle between culture and punishment. Eventually, that cycle flows back around to where it began. This is where punishment policy and practice shapes prison cinema's portrayal of punishment. Future filmmaking has to rely on *something* to extract material for films that are ultimately going to affect perceptions of punishment. This material is partly derived from policies and practices that are, or have been implemented by policy-makers. It is also partly a function of feedback from the public in the form of sales and other reaction "data". Thus, the cycle reaches its beginning, and the process continues to shape perceptions and culture.

Garland's Culture of Punishment

Garland (1990) argues that the rationalization and bureaucratization of the penal process is one of the most important developments to occur in punishment since the late 1700's. Garland notes the huge infrastructure of punishment today; punishment has grown into a system that is staffed by professionals, from increasing numbers of police and parole officers to the actual prison officials, who are all controlling the criminal as one gigantic bureaucratic form (Garland, 1990). In the infrastructure, there are different professions that have emerged, such as social workers and psychiatrists, who are all concerned with changing policies and are mainly responsible for rationalizing punishment.

The expectations for the culture of prisons are quite complicated. Garland argues that on the surface, prisons are a simple, discrete entity designed to deal with criminals in a way that is not public and allows the remainder of society to live their lives in peace (Garland, 1990). Garland quickly moves away from this idea to attest that prisons are a social institution that helps define and shape the nature of society (1990). The first point made by Garland concerning the

culture of prisons is that society has a tendency to think of prison culture as a simple means to a simple end. This does not seem fair to prisons as a social institution because all of the different facets of the entity, such as imprisonment, probation, or rehabilitative practices are all evaluated on their ability to control crime (Garland, 1990).

Recidivism and correlative crimes are also used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of these practices instead of actually discussing the worth of these policies as social practices (Garland, 1990). Of course, these underlying issues relating to prison culture are not caught on camera (Mason, 2006). Films persuade citizens with an imagery that invokes the excitement and the fear of dangerous people in a secluded environment. However, to include the issues that live under the surface of the institution does not sell theater seats (Mason, 2006).

The second point that Garland articulates concerning the culture of punishment is the fact that it is destined to fail by the standard of deterring crime. Garland continues by emphasizing that no method of punishment has ever achieved high rates of crime control, and he does not believe any method ever will (1990). Garland returns to his idea that only networks of mutual expectation, such as mainstream informed socialization, can promote law-abiding conduct on a consistent basis. Garland views punishment as simply a backup for those that slip through the mainstream socialization cracks. Punishment can never really control crime because the conditions that promote proper conduct, or that promotes crime and deviance, lie outside the jurisdiction of the penal institution (1990).

The final and possibly the most important point made by Garland in his discussion concerning the culture of punishment relates to the way that punishment is culturally judged or evaluated (Garland, 1990). Garland argues that cultural expectations of punishment shape evaluations and judgments of it (Garland, 1990). This point directly relates to this study

concerning prison cinema and student perceptions. For example, viewers do not generally *expect* to witness staff corruption and/or false convictions in cinema. Culturally speaking, justice system officials do not represent themselves as corrupt, or as convicting innocent persons. Therefore, when negative themes are portrayed, society is quick to evaluate or judge those images. This is exactly how perceptions are quickly altered about any particular subject matter. Garland reiterates this point throughout his synopsis of the culture of punishment. Punishment as a social institution is repeatedly evaluated in the context of an institution that has been created to eliminate or drastically decrease crime in society (Garland, 1990).

Garland continues to discuss his points by illustrating that punishment is constantly being evaluated on a single plane in relation to a single value (1990). Figure 2.2 illustrate Garland's culture of punishment. The figure is designed to illuminate the three specific points Garland discusses as important concepts in the culture of punishment. Society's perception of punishment is critical in understanding the other two points. The perception that punishment is a simple means to a simple end perpetuates the illogical and unrealistic standards for punishment. Those same unachievable standards are also responsible for perpetuating the poor evaluation of punishment in the United States. Unreasonable standards will always lead to perceptions of failure in the evaluation of any system.

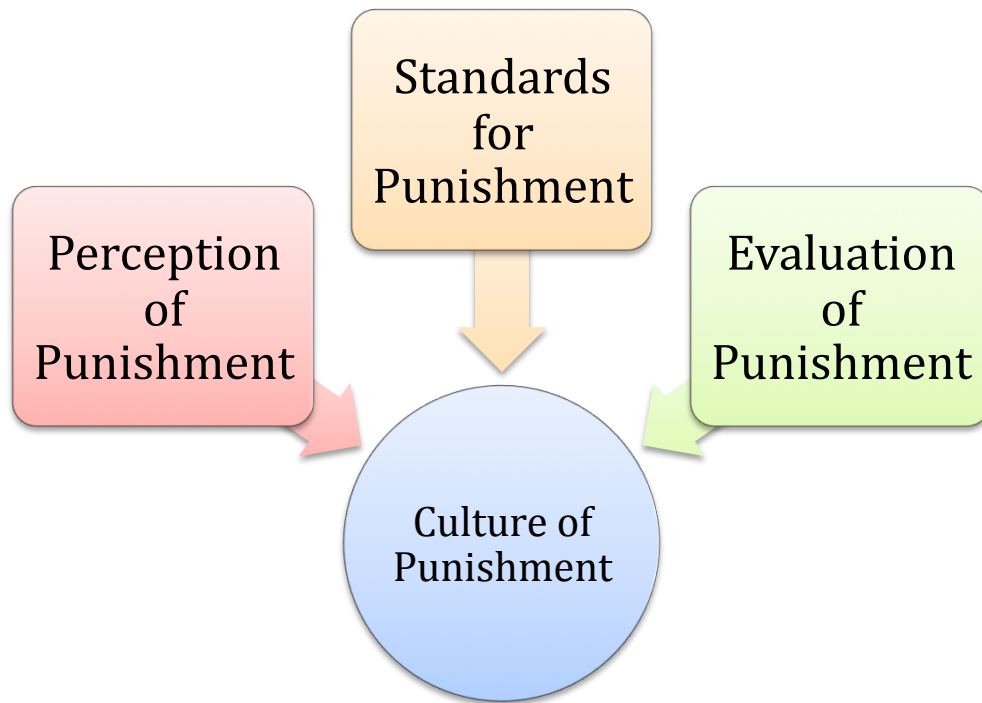


Figure 2.2 – Garland’s Cultural Analysis of Punishment

Garland argues that punishment must be analyzed and evaluated as a complex institution that has a wide range of penal and social functions. For example, the penal system could be evaluated squarely on the amount of recidivism that occurs or it could also include other factors that are generally not available to the public, such as the psychological violence that occurs within the prison (1990). When both values are measured, there is a slightly different feeling about the prisoner who recidivates back into the prison system. Also, other complexities of the penal system could be weighed against each other, such as the cost of prisons versus the possibilities of using those funds toward other methods of punitive retribution.

Summarizing Garland’s culture of punishment can be fairly complicated. There are many facets that could be included to create a more comprehensive view of prisons and the

nature of punishment. However, it may be more simplistic to view the relationship between the culture and punishment as wind streams that are constantly affecting each other. The most troublesome problem with this relationship is something that was mentioned briefly in the last chapter. Society does not have a clear understanding of prisons, or the nature of punishment. Society's understanding of prisons comes largely from the media, which is most often popular cinema. Therefore, when both culture and punishment are continually affecting each other, and one of those entities is being influenced by an outside force (i.e. popular cinema), Garland contends there are bound to be disparities in the culture of punishment (Garland, 1990).

Previous Literature

This section will analyze literature that has been presented on cinema influence, as well as how those themes affect perceptions of prison culture. There are frequent themes in American cinema that affect the perceptions of American citizens regarding both prisons and punishment. Some of the more recurrent themes in cinematic presentation regarding American prisons are prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions. Figure 2.3 depicts the three themes, and how they are equally influential in shaping cultural sentiments. Films display all three of these conceptual elements as if they are documentary style examples. However, in fact, there may be a hint of elaboration to accompany the realistic.

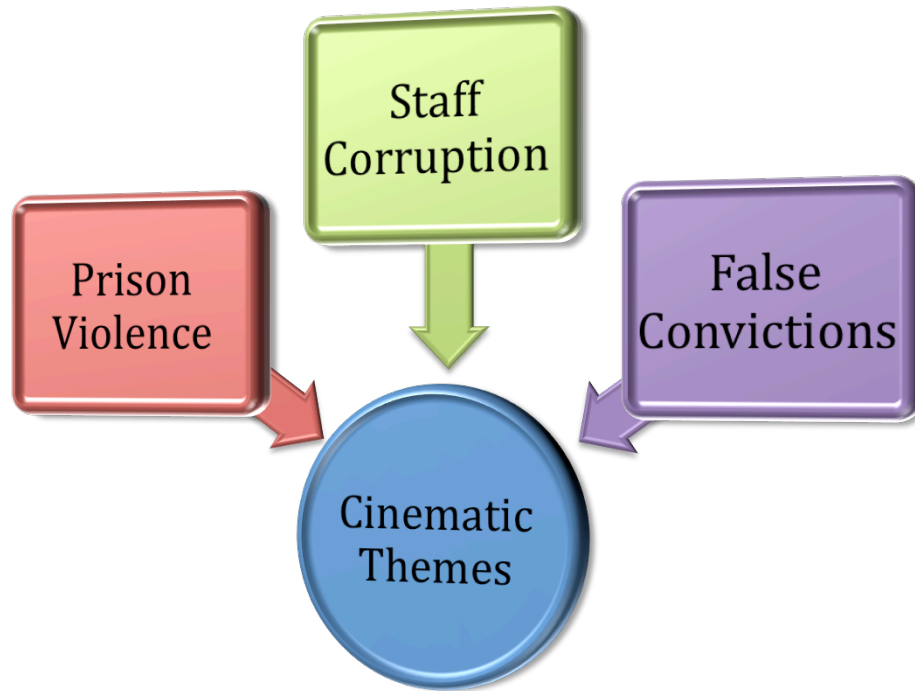


Figure 2.3 – Prison Cinematic Themes

The importance of understanding perceptions and how they are shaped by cinema content is critical for this study. By understanding how cinema content shapes social perceptions, it is much easier to comprehend how and why such themes as prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions are so prevalent in prison cinema. Laska (2000) discusses how sound technology is one of the main elements of modern cinema that has been incredibly effective in shaping audience perceptions. Before modern sound technology in cinema, images had to do much more to convey cinematic themes (Laska, 2000). With the additions and advances of sound technology in modern cinema, filmmakers can feel much more comfortable filming dark scenes, where lighting is not nearly important as it used to be (Laska, 2000).

Sound technology strongly impacts the perceptions of prison cinema. The impact of watching an execution in a film would not be nearly as influential in shaping perceptions if the

audience could not hear the electricity jolting through the room (Laska, 2000). It would be much more difficult to understand and be emotionally involved with a prison film if the audience could not hear the screams, tears, and suffering (Laska, 2000). These are crucial aspects of prison cinema that not only captivate the audience during the film, but also leave lasting impressions after the film (Laska, 2000). Those lasting impressions are the agents that are instrumental in molding perceptions of prison culture.

As important as sound technology is for prison cinema, it is not even close to being the only powerful element of representation. Crary (2001) discusses how the entire process of watching a film is powerful to the audience. The process itself has the ability to capture attention, present the spectacle, and change the perceptions of the public about various facets of culture (Crary, 2001). Crary (2001) argues that everything involved in the process of watching a film, from the crowded cinema theaters to the understanding of viewing something watched around the world, is a very powerful concept for cinema. Crary's remarks provide insight into the importance of prison cinema content that is depicted around the world. It should increase understanding as to how widespread perceptions of prison culture (i.e. prisons, prisoners, and prison staff) can travel, simply from the viewing of one prison film.

The notion of that film content has this colossal power of shaping perceptions is also supported by two other scholars. Stokes and Maltby (2001) suggest that Hollywood has incredible potential for leading the masses through their ability to change perceptions of their audiences. Stokes and Maltby contend that the spectatorship of watching a film is in itself a powerful tool for altering perceptions about numerous ideas in culture (Stokes & Maltby, 2001). Much as was mentioned by Crary (2001) in his analysis of the cinema experience, Stokes and Maltby note that regardless of the subject matter in a film, the film can easily transform how the

audience thinks about that subject (Stokes & Maltby, 2001). This idea in general should highlight the importance of prison cinema in American culture. Regardless of the subject matter of a prison film, the images and sounds can easily distort and/or shape the perceptions of viewers (Stokes & Maltby, 2001).

It is also crucial to summarize and tie this previous literature back to this study concerning prison cinema and perceptions. Brown (2009) discusses prisons, society, and the spectacle that citizens see in various forms of the media. Brown notes the importance of all three of these entities, and how they are all interconnected in American culture (Brown, 2009). The author continues by also mentioning how all three of these entities are continually affecting and/or shaping each other through their mere existence within culture (Brown, 2009). These points are central to this research study. Similar to Garland's (1990) work on culture and punishment, Brown also supports the notions that culture and punishment are linked together because public perceptions drive policies, and policies shape culture (Brown, 2009). This interaction between the three entities is a cycle that continues to repeat itself.

All of this literature describing the importance of film content and how it shapes perceptions leads to discussion of the topical themes that are most successful in shaping those perceptions. For prison cinema, those successful themes are prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions. These three cinematic themes repeat in numerous modern prison films. These themes were also extremely prevalent in this research study. Prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions were used in a manner that perpetuated negativity throughout the films. This will be addressed in future chapters. However, to understand the presence of these cinematic themes, it is crucial to explore the literature that addresses their significance in prison films, and how they indeed do shape public perceptions.

Prison Violence

A notorious concept portrayed in prison cinema is prison violence (Arrigo, 2006). This violent subculture creates problems, not only for the inmates that find themselves in a threatening position, but it also puts more strain on prison staff to monitor inmates and provide safety for more vulnerable prisoners (Arrigo, 2006). This cinematic theme is an excellent device for filmmakers because it can immediately create tension. An excellent example of a cinematic portrayal of prison violence is *The Shawshank Redemption*. This particular film used prison violence in a manner that displayed not only the sexual abuse that is sometimes present between prisoners, but it also added the dimension of prison staff abuse (Peritz, 1998). Both of these forms of violence immediately created a stressful environment inside Shawshank Prison.

The film also delved into the corruptive side of correctional institutions and how they could be fronts for other operations that occur behind the scenes (Peritz, 1998). *The Shawshank Redemption* compounds the themes of prison violence with staff corruption to paint a negative image of not only the prison, but also its staff. These themes are quite effective in creating the impression needed to cause viewers to form negative perceptions of both entities (Shefrin, 2004). The negative perceptions of the prison and prison staff fostered by the violence allow an easy transition into building the likeability of the main character, which happens to be a prisoner. Thus, before the audience can understand what is happening in their subconscious, they are rooting against the prison institution and its staff (Shefrin, 2004).

According to Arrigo (2006), America's prisons can be brutal scenes for the prisoners that inhabit them. The violence that may occur within prison walls often drives prisoners to project their frustration on not only other prisoners, but also prison staff (Arrigo, 2006). In some situations, the victims of prison violence even resort to suicidal tendencies as a method for

relieving the torture inside prisons (Arrigo, 2006). *The Shawshank Redemption* utilizes the violence theme exceptionally. The continual violence of prisoners and prison staff formulates a realistic chaos for the characters. This encourages an empathetic support for the prisoners, who are supposed criminals. Thus, the film succeeds at drawing the audience into the screenplay, manipulating their perceptions, and molding their anticipation for a gratifying conclusion.

The cinematic theme of prison violence can easily be traced back to Garland's framework for culture shaping punishment, as well as punishment shaping cultural ways of thinking and feeling (Garland, 1990). The cinematic portrayal of prison violence conditions cultural beliefs and sensibilities about prisons, prisoners, and prison staff (Garland, 1990). Therefore, the violent images and sequences depicted in *The Shawshank Redemption* are not only expressions of entertainment. The imagery is a part of culture that is shaping the thoughts and emotions of the audience about every aspect of the film. Thus, the audience will certainly hold on to those beliefs and sensibilities, and it will affect their stereotypic opinions of prison culture (Brown, 2009).

Staff Corruption

Prison staff corruption is an extremely popular theme presented in American cinema. In the film course being studied in this project, there are at least two films that thoroughly portray the corruption of facility staff. One of those films, *The Shawshank Redemption*, has been discussed in the previous section. One of the main reasons *The Shawshank Redemption* gets much praise in the prison film genre is because it highlights many of the stereotypes and realities widely discussed within prison culture. However, other films focus on more specific issues and

tend to illustrate those subjects with more drama, which certainly provides lasting impressions for viewers.

One film that is exceptionally brilliant in depicting staff corruption is *Sleepers*. This film is also quite extraordinary because it approaches staff corruption in a juvenile setting with the main characters being New York delinquents who took a harmless prank too far. The film, *Sleepers*, appeals to audiences because it illustrates the most horrific fears intertwined with staff corruption. The institution's staff in the film not only beats and humiliates the delinquents in the facility, but they also sexually assault and abuse the children they have sworn to protect. The corrupt staff element is just one major theme in the film *Sleepers*. The other main theme is revenge. The revenge element is certainly one of the more appealing themes used in cinema and it is effective in the film *Sleepers* because it declares judgment on the corrupt guards.

A study by Cuomo, Sarchiapone, Giannantonio, Mancini, and Roy (2008) reported that inmates who suffer from high levels of psychological trauma often recidivate. These inmates have usually had more juvenile convictions and have more repeat offenses, which contributes to longer stints in the correctional system (Cuomo et al., 2008). The information published in this study helps illustrate that inmates entering higher security prisons are absolutely more vulnerable to experiencing increased trauma on the inside of prisons due to the social gap that is present between varying types of offenders (Cuomo et al., 2008). This study exposes some of the underlying themes presented in films, such as *Sleepers*. Delinquents who are tortured in facilities by supposed protectors, such as guards, have the distinct possibility of experiencing more crime in the remainder of their lives.

Again, Garland's framework relating to culture and punishment applies to the cinematic portrayal of prison staff as corrupt because this portrayal affects public and cultural sentiments

(Garland, 1990). The example referenced for the film, *Sleepers*, is already a sensitive topic in society. Physical abuse of any kind, especially sexual abuse, involving child victims is considered to be one of the more heinous crimes in society. Thus, the visual, cinematic portrayal of this crime being committed by not just perpetrators, but by correctional staff, does more than simply create character flaws for the correctional staff in the film. The imagery will have severe implications for public sentiments regarding perceptions of actual correctional staff (Garland, 1990).

False Convictions

Numerous popular prison films represent the false conviction theme that is an often unspoken possibility in the criminal justice system. For example, one of the more admired prison films of the new millennium is *The Hurricane* (Peritz, 1998). The film tells the story of Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, who despite his troubled youth, rises above the obstacles and becomes a top contender for the middle-weight boxing title. However, “Hurricane” Carter has his dreams shattered when he is falsely sentenced to three life terms after being accused and convicted of a triple murder (Peritz, 1998). Not only does the story of *The Hurricane* highlight the terrifying possibility of a false conviction, it also pinpoints some of the troubling realities in America, such as the influence of racial prejudice (Peritz, 1998).

According to Brown (2004), there are many fictions that exist in the criminal justice system. False conviction is often rendered as one of those fictions due to the implications it has for the justice system. Citizens naturally do not want to believe the system that has sworn to protect the innocent and punish the guilty could possibly make a mistake (Brown, 2004). If false convictions are suddenly deemed regular possibilities, there is less trust and support placed in

American prisons and in the entire criminal justice system (Brown, 2004). However, Brown (2004) does not suggest that false convictions are simply retold fictions. There have been exonerated prisoners who have had years, and in some cases, their lives stolen due to false convictions (Brown, 2004). Yet, false convictions are still a rarity in corrections, and much more prevalent in prison cinema (Brown, 2004).

The Hurricane introduces and emphasizes the false conviction theme very convincingly. There are actual exoneration cases that have occurred in the criminal justice system (Brown, 2009). It is not often that an individual is falsely convicted and later exonerated for their crime. Although there are curiosities about false convictions in the criminal justice system, it is not a subject that cinema will be able to accurately illuminate (Brown, 2009). However, it is that curiosity that provides a thirst that needs to be quenched. Thus, prison cinema has been incredibly influential in marketing the false conviction theme in various films throughout past decades (Brown, 2009). It is also that curiosity which helps manipulate the perceptions of individuals when there is an account of *one* false conviction case. A film about a falsely convicted champion boxer is just one unfortunate case, but cinema provides a different angle, which often skews the cultural perception of the entire subject.

The cinematic theme of false convictions can also be closely tied with Garland's framework for culture shaping punishment, and punishment shaping cultural ways of thinking and feeling (Garland, 1990). The imagery of false convictions in prison cinema shapes cultural sentiments in a manner that arouses many emotions for viewers. For example, with the film, *The Hurricane*, the cultural sentiment of racial prejudice is one that can be quite damaging to perceptions of prison culture (Garland, 1990). Racial prejudice is a sentiment that can shape public perceptions in a manner that can decrease faith and trust in the justice system. Society

does not want to feel as though punishment is unfair to people of particular racial backgrounds. Justice is supposed to be color-blind. If justice is biased, then that sentiment will certainly appear in future films.

The three cinematic themes outlined in this chapter are only a few reoccurring themes for prison cinema. Prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions are three popular themes that tend to emerge in almost every prison film. All three themes are also immensely influential in shaping public perceptions through affecting cultural mentalities and sensibilities about prisons, prisoners, and prison staff (Garland, 1990). These three themes are strongly connected to Garland's theoretical model for culture and punishment. Cinematic themes in prison films are the key element in shaping perceptions of prison culture (i.e. prisons, prisoners, and prison staff). In turn, those perceptions of prison culture also shape prison cinema over the duration of time.

The perceptions of prison culture, as portrayed by prison cinema, first shape political ideology in the United States. Public opinions, which are often developed by cinema, suggest certain practices be implemented to *improve* the correctional system. Of course, politicians and policy-makers listen to public opinion polls, and thus, actual punishment policy and practice are affected. This cycle could have very easily begun with a simple prison film, which may or may not have been accurate. But the cycle does not end with new policy and practice implementation. Those new policies and practices will also make their way around the cycle, only to eventually shape future filmmaking, along with feedback from the public to filmmakers. In the present day, prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions are the more prevalent themes. But future themes will only be derived from future policies and practices implemented from cultural mentalities and sensibilities (Garland, 1990).

Content Analysis Research

As discussed in the next chapter, this study will use content analysis to evaluate student perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. A content analysis is the systematic analysis and selective classification of the contents of mass communication (Hagan, 2006). Content analyses are often used for comparative studies that examine historical or discerning trends in existing phenomena. There have been numerous studies that have utilized imaginative subjects for content analysis research. For instance, Davis (1952) studied the amount of space devoted to crime in select newspapers. He then related this subject to local crime rates. Furthermore, as part of a much larger study, Bielby and Berk (1980) did a content analysis of accounts of crime and column inches devoted to the subject in large city newspapers. Both studies were incredibly influential in comparing a medium for mass media with crime in society.

Another study that used content analysis examined government response to crime. Jacob, Lineberry, and Heinz (Jacob et al., 1980) examined and reanalyzed a wide variety of available data, such as changes in local ordinances and state criminal codes, changes in amount and distribution of police manpower, court decisions, inmate populations, court and correctional expenditures, type and shifts of city government, and mayoralty election year and their relationship to UCR data. They also examined newspapers (Jacob et al., 1980). And finally, Chermak (1994) did a content analysis on the crime news production process, both print and electronic. The study analyzed nine newspapers and three evening television newscasts. He coded nine newspapers for content every fifth day for the first six months of 1990 and an additional eighteen days for a three-month period in 1991. He followed this analysis with ethnographic observations of newsrooms and forty interviews with people in the news trade (Chermak, 1994).

The aforementioned studies constitute important precedent for the current study based on their attempts to examine large phenomena, and gather detailed data that provides insight into the phenomena through content analysis. At the same time, the researcher is not aware of any content analysis research addressing prison cinema. As illustrated in the studies previously mentioned in this section, more content analyses have been used to explore themes and issues in print journalism, rather than cinema. Most content analyses used to examine prison culture usually explore prison programming, such as education programs. Therefore, there is a need for more research regarding prison films and their relationship with social perceptions. A content analysis may be the best method for exploring this relationship, due to its ability to provide detailed, qualitative data. The anecdotal data is usually crucial in providing insights previously unconsidered.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Participants

The participants in this study were undergraduate students enrolled in COR 320: Crime, Corrections, and Cinema at Eastern Kentucky University. The students who participated in the study were taking the course for completion of various curricular requirements, such as a major, minor, or free elective course. The sample size for the study was 21 students in one course section. The intended sample size for the study was targeted at 100 students across multiple sections of the course. However, the target sample size could not be attained due to the unexpected cancelation of subsequent course sections.

Demographic characteristics were not collected for this study because these did not directly relate to the guiding research question. However, the researcher observed the demographic representation of the course. The participants for this study represented the demographic population of Eastern Kentucky University. Most of the students were Caucasian and were typical college-age students. There was a fairly equal ratio of men to women in the course. And, although there was not a wide range of racial diversity, African-American men and women were present in the course. The researcher did not collect any other type of identification for the study, such as class rank, or major concentration.

Research Question

The guiding research question for this study is: How does exposure to popular prison cinema relate to college students' perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff? The main dependent variable is perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. This variable was examined through the use of a content analysis. The independent variable for this study was the specific films being viewed. The analysis focused on reflection papers submitted by students throughout the semester. After each participant submitted their weekly reflection paper of a specific prison film, patterns and themes were computed from the responses. Based on the responses provided during the course, varying themes arose in the study. The themes that emerged presented descriptions as to the types of images depicted in popular prison cinema as these influenced college students.

Variables

The main dependent variables for this research project were perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. Two other categories of the dependent variable were personal connections and perceptions of world reality. All variables were measured subjectively through analysis of student film reviews. The film reviews were guided by a rubric that outlined a four-step process in reviewing the films (Figure 3.2). There were specific sections for the students to comment about their emotions and perceptions about various aspects of the films (Figure 3.2). Most of the data analyzed regarding the perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff were extracted from the *Feelings* section of the rubric, under the subcategory, *Emotions* (Figure 3.1). The data gathered regarding personal connections was also extracted from the *Feelings* section, but under the subcategory, *Associations/Memories* (Figure 3.1). Finally, the perceptions of

world reality data was extracted from the *Facts* section, under the subcategory, *World Reality* (Figure 3.3).

<p>Facts:</p> <p>A. Film Plot Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write 2-3 paragraphs about the plot summary• Reference other film reviews of that movie <p>B. World Reality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What else was going on in the world that could have affected the film?• Was the plot set in the past, present, or future? <p>Feelings:</p> <p>A. Associations/Memories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you associate the film to present day or your life? <p>B. Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does this movie make you feel?• What feelings did the movie generate? <p>Funneling:</p> <p>A. Ah-ha Moments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Were there any scenes/phrases in the movie that caught your attention?• Why did those scenes/phrases command your attention? <p>B. Assign Significance/Form Concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What were the most significant scenes in the movie? <p>C. Literacy License</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there any evidence the author of the movie twisted history?• Were there details in the film that did not seem to fit that time period? <p>Forward:</p> <p>A. Re-Title the Film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suggest alternative titles for the film and explain your suggestion <p>B. Linger Questions/Short Closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Closing comments and questions about the film
--

Figure 3.1 – Four Level Film Review Process



Figure 3.2 – Research Variables Operationalized

Research Procedures

During the course of a 6-week undergraduate prison film class, 21 students viewed, analyzed, discussed, and critiqued five popular prison films. The five films chosen for the course had been used frequently in past sections of the same course. The prison films chosen by the instructor for the section of the course included in this study were (in sequential order): *Cool Hand Luke*, *The Green Mile*, *The Hurricane*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, and *Sleepers*. All students enrolled in the course, who were included in this study, viewed these films in a classroom setting. Then, all students discussed the films with classmates and the instructor. Finally, students were required to submit film reviews for each prison film viewed in the course (Figure 3.3). The data for this study was extracted from 102 film reviews. The data and themes

formulated in this study were developed from the personal perceptions communicated through the undergraduate film reviews.

Each participant enrolled in the film course watched approximately one popular prison film each week across six weeks. The students participated in class discussions about each film during the next class session after viewing a given film. There were two class sessions per week. The class discussions were organized in a manner that allowed groups to lead discussions on specific films. The course instructor provided a rubric to guide each student group in leading the other students in analytical and organized discussion concerning the themes in each film.

After the students viewed and discussed a given film, each student was asked to complete a weekly reflection paper focusing on each specific prison film. Students were asked to address the content of the films, as well as the details that altered their perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. Upon completion of each reflection paper assignment, the researcher read and analyzed the papers for content themes. The themes were entered and analyzed in a data computing software program (Figure 3.3). Notable similarities and differences between the participants are addressed and commented on in the next chapter. The themes that the researcher highlighted relate directly to student perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. The researcher was not in personal contact with any of the participants in this study.

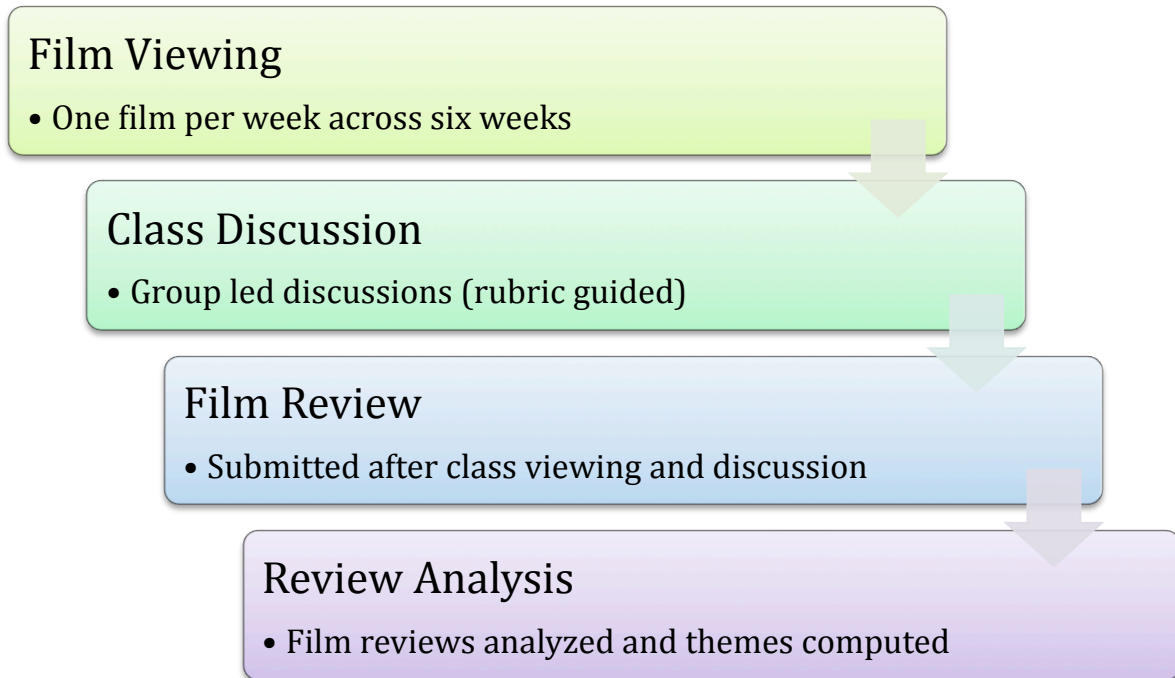


Figure 3.3 – Research Project Overview

The class discussions, which focused on one film each week, were guided by a rubric titled, *Conversation into Action*. The rubric stemmed from the rubric the course instructor used for the film review process, which was titled, *Four Level Film Review Process* (Figure 3.1). Both of these rubrics required the students to think critically, discuss emotionally, and write analytically about the prison films viewed in the course.

Limitations

As with most studies, there were some limitations that must be mentioned for this research project. The first obvious limitation for this study is the use of a convenience sample of participants in a single film course at Eastern Kentucky University. The participants were different than the general public because they were viewing the films in a course, which discussed, analyzed, and critiqued the material viewed. The participants were viewing the films in a setting that provided more educational understanding about the images depicted. Therefore, the findings from this research cannot be generalized beyond the sample.

The second limitation of this research study is also connected to the sample. The film reviews gathered for the data portion of this project were from only one film course. There were more than 100 reviews submitted from that course. Although this is a strong number for gathering qualitative data about the perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff, it is not ideal for quantitative data sets. The researcher would have preferred a larger sample for quantitative results. It was the original goal of the researcher to gather data from multiple film courses for this project. However, with cancellation of later sections of the course, that was not possible.

Another limitation for this research study is the lack of demographic diversity for the sample. Since the participants of the study were taken from one film course, the researcher was aware that university demographics would naturally be illustrated in the final results of the study. Although demographic data were not collected in this study, demographics were being monitored loosely for generalization purposes. There were minority races represented in the data for this project. However, it should be noted as a limitation that the diversity of the data set was

reflective of the diversity of Eastern Kentucky University. Therefore, the sample is not representative of the general American population.

There was also a limitation regarding film selection for the course as it related to findings. The course instructor chose the five prison films viewed in the course. The selection of the films is chosen from a film list that sometimes rotates. Occasionally, the course instructor changes one or two of the films each semester. Therefore, depending on each semester, there could have been different perceptions communicated regarding prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. And since the data for this project was only taken from one film course, there was not an opportunity for comparison of data across semesters and film viewings. This limitation can also affect generalization because the results found in this study may be uniquely associated with the semester they were gathered and the particular films viewed.

Finally, there was also a limitation regarding the method used to conduct this research project. Content analyses are very valuable in conducting research in any field. It is important to have detailed qualitative research that provides insight into simple numbers and figures. Content analysis enabled more depth in the discussion about prison cinematic themes and how these relate to perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. However, in the case of this study, the researcher graded responses due to personal opinion. There was not an objective protocol for rating students' comments as positive, negative, or neutral. Although most comments were clear as to their categorization, the absence of an objective rating method is crucial for future research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics presented for all of the films in this study are: perceptions of prisons, perceptions of prisoners, perceptions of prison staff, personal connections to the films, and perceptions of world reality. The researcher assessed each category as neutral, positive, or negative based on the comments submitted in the *Four-Level Film Review* guidelines (Figure 3.1). Of the student reviews, overall, only about 12% displayed positive perceptions of prisons (Table 4.1). In contrast to this low positive percentage, about 25% of students had a negative perception of prisons (Table 4.1). The remaining 63% were neutral about their perception of prisons (Table 4.1).

One of the most noteworthy statistics for this research study is the favorable perceptions of prisoners generated after viewing the films in the course. According to student reviews, nearly 73% of students had positive perceptions of prisoners (Table 4.1). Only about 7% of the student sample expressed negative perceptions of prisoners (Table 4.1). The remaining 20% of students in the course were neutral about their perceptions of prisoners (Table 4.1). Another important finding in this study that is coupled with the positive perceptions of prisoners relates to prison staff. According to student reviews, only about 6% of students had positive perceptions of prison staff after viewing each film (Table 4.1). In contrast to this low percentage, 48% of students expressed negative perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.1). The remaining 46% were neutral about their perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.1).

The final two categories for this research were personal connections and perceptions of world reality as it relates to the films viewed in the course. According to the student reviews for the course, about 38% of students formed positive personal connections associated with the films (Table 4.1). However, 50% of students expressed negative associations with the films in the course (Table 4.1). The remaining 12% of students were neutral about their personal connections towards the films in the course (Table 4.1). The student perceptions of world reality varied throughout the course. There were numerous events, both personal and universal, mentioned by students in connection with the films in the course. According to reviews, about 34% of students communicated positive perceptions of world reality after viewing each film (Table 4.1). This percentage slightly increased for negative perceptions. About 36% of students expressed negative perceptions of world reality associated with the films (Table 4.1). The remaining 30% were neutral about perceptions of world reality as it related to films in the course (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 – Student Perceptions (All Films)

	<u>POSITIVE</u>		<u>NEGATIVE</u>		<u>NEUTRAL</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>PRISONS</u>	12	12%	25	25%	65	63%	102	100%
<u>PRISONERS</u>	74	73%	7	7%	21	20%	102	100%
<u>PRISON STAFF</u>	6	6%	49	48%	47	46%	102	100%
<u>CONNECTIONS</u>	39	38%	51	50%	12	12%	102	100%
<u>WORLD REALITY</u>	35	34%	37	36%	30	30%	102	100%

To demonstrate some of the remarks that defined positive and negative perceptions in the data collected for the films in this course, there are sample texts in Figure 4.1 taken from the film reviews.

“I was excited to learn the film was about prisons because I knew it would mostly be about survival for the main character.” – Student Review (Positive Perception of Prisons)

“My favorite part of this film is when Red describes Andy as a person who could swim through a river of shit and come out clean on the other side.” – Student Review (Positive Perception of Prisoners)

“This film made me really despise Percy Wetmore, and it also made me really question the professionalism of some prison guards. There are most likely more guards like Percy out there somewhere.” –Student Review (Negative Perception of Prison Staff)

“This film reminds me of growing up in a small town with just a few swimming pools...we would run around town in the summer, trying to stay cool and stay out of trouble.” –Student Review (Positive Personal Connection)

“I was outraged over the evident racial issues of that time and equally incensed about the judicial injustices fueled by the thinking of that time.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of World Reality)

Figure 4.1 – Student Excerpts (All Films)

Cool Hand Luke

Student perceptions of prisons after watching the film, *Cool Hand Luke*, were quite interesting. According to the student film reviews, only 33% of students had a positive perception of prisons in the film, *Cool Hand Luke* (Table 4.2). In contrast, nearly 43% of students had a negative perception of prisons after viewing the film (Table 4.2). There was a smaller population of 24% that had a neutral perception of prisons after viewing *Cool Hand Luke* (Table 4.2).

An interesting trend that emerged from the data collected from the *Cool Hand Luke* film reviews related to the drastic difference in perceptions towards prisoners and prison staff. According to the reviews, nearly 62% of students had a positive perception of prisoners based on the film (Table 4.2). In contrast to this high percentage, only 14% had a negative perception of prisoners (Table 4.2). Another 24% were neutral about their perception of prisoners after viewing the film (Table 4.2). A considerable difference in student perception percentages was evident concerning prison staff. According to the reviews, only about 5% of students had a positive perception of prison staff after watching *Cool Hand Luke* (Table 4.2). Contrary to the low percentage of positive perceptions of prison staff, more than 52% of students had negative perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.2). The remaining 43% of students were neutral about their perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.2).

The final categories of this study that produced interesting results from students related to personal connections and perceptions of world reality. All students described personal connections and examples of events that related the films to world reality. According to the film reviews, nearly 67% of students developed positive personal connections after watching *Cool Hand Luke* (Table 4.2). Only about 29% had negative personal connections towards the film

(Table 4.2). The remaining 4% were neutral about their personal connections (Table 4.2). Students were even more resounding with their perceptions of world reality. According to student perceptions, more than 76% of students had a positive view of world reality as it related to *Cool Hand Luke*. There were only 5% of students who had negative perceptions of world reality relating to the film (Table 4.2). The remaining 19% of students were neutral about their perceptions of world reality relating to *Cool Hand Luke* (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 – Student Perceptions (*Cool Hand Luke*)

	<u>POSITIVE</u>		<u>NEGATIVE</u>		<u>NEUTRAL</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>PRISONS</u>	7	33%	9	43%	5	24%	21	100%
<u>PRISONERS</u>	13	62%	3	14%	5	24%	21	100%
<u>PRISON STAFF</u>	1	5%	11	52%	9	43%	21	100%
<u>CONNECTIONS</u>	14	67%	6	29%	1	4%	21	100%
<u>WORLD REALITY</u>	16	76%	1	0%	4	19%	21	100%

To demonstrate some of the remarks that defined positive and negative perceptions in the data collected for the film, *Cool Hand Luke*, there are sample texts in Figure 4.2 taken from the film reviews.

“I did not like the prison, or any of the officials that tried to hold Luke down. I thought it was a shame that Luke was kept in prison for such a petty crime.” –Student Review (Negative Perception of Prisons)

“I found Luke to be amusing. I could only laugh when he escaped for the third time. I was hoping he would eventually get away.” – Student Review (Positive Perception of Prisoners)

“The film makes me feel angry at prison guards for the mistreatment of prisoners, as well as the misuse of power.” – Student Review (Negative Student Perception of Prison Staff)

“This movie made me think of the days when I had to work on the farm during the summer. I hated those summer because I had to break my back in the hot sun. I felt Luke’s pain when he was digging ditches.” – Student Review (Negative Personal Connection)

“During filming, America was having one of its most troubling periods, and the biggest event happening was the war in Vietnam.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of World Reality)

Figure 4.2 – Student Excerpts (*Cool Hand Luke*)

The Green Mile

The data and themes in the film, *The Green Mile*, were also fairly intriguing. Students enrolled in the film course expressed their perceptions regarding the five measured categories as they related to *The Green Mile* by being extremely vocal in their agreements and disagreements with the film and how it relates to society. According to the student reviews, only 6% of students had a positive perception of prisons after viewing *The Green Mile* (Table 4.3). This percentage was exactly the same for negative perceptions. The remaining 88% of students were neutral about their perceptions towards prisons (Table 4.3).

The trend concerning student perceptions of prisoners versus perceptions of prison staff continued in the data extracted from *The Green Mile* film reviews. More than 83% of students had a positive perception of prisoners after watching the film (Table 4.3). In contrast to this percentage, only about 17% of students had a negative perception of prisoners (Table 4.3). By comparison, only about 17% of students had a positive perception of prison staff after watching *The Green Mile* (Table 4.3). More than 55% of students had negative perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.3). The remaining 28% of students in the film course were neutral about their perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.3).

Unlike the statistics found in the data for the film, *Cool Hand Luke*, percentages relating to personal connections and perceptions of world reality were quite the opposite for students after viewing *The Green Mile*. According to student reviews, only about 28% of students had positive personal connections towards *The Green Mile* (Table 4.3). Nearly 67% of students developed negative personal connections towards the film (Table 4.3). The remaining 5% of students were neutral about personal connections regarding the film (Table 4.3). Although percentages regarding student perceptions of world reality were not as strong, students were still

adamantly negative about their perceptions of world reality in connection with the film. Only about 22% of students had a positive perception of world reality after viewing *The Green Mile* (Table 4.3). In contrast to this percentage, more than 44% of students had negative perceptions of world reality (Table 4.3). The remaining 34% of students were neutral about their perceptions of world reality as it related to *The Green Mile* (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 – Student Perceptions (*The Green Mile*)

	<u>POSITIVE</u>		<u>NEGATIVE</u>		<u>NEUTRAL</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>PRISONS</u>	1	6%	1	6%	16	88%	18	100%
<u>PRISONERS</u>	15	83%	3	17%	0	0%	18	100%
<u>PRISON STAFF</u>	3	17%	10	56%	5	27%	18	100%
<u>CONNECTIONS</u>	5	28%	12	67%	1	5%	18	100%
<u>WORLD REALITY</u>	4	22%	8	44%	6	34%	18	100%

To demonstrate some of the remarks that defined positive and negative perceptions in the data collected for the film, *The Green Mile*, there are sample texts in Figure 4.3 taken from the film reviews.

“I think the injustice of executing John Coffey, even though they knew he was innocent, was the worst part of the film.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prisons)

“I felt sadness and pity at the end of the film when John Coffey was executed because I know there have been innocent people executed in the past.” – Student Review (Positive Perception of Prisoners)

“Percy greatly angered me in the film because of his malice towards everyone and because of his family connections.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prison Staff)

“This film made me value life a little better when I first watched it. It also made me want to become a police officer.” – Student Review (Positive Personal Connection)

“This movie really moved me. Racism was still everywhere and it is saddening to think about people being convicted for crimes based solely on their race.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of World Reality)

Figure 4.3 – Student Excerpts (*The Green Mile*)

The Hurricane

The student perceptions provided after viewing *The Hurricane* were not as decisive. There were some clear themes that surfaced from the data, but other categories measured in previous films were not as illustrative. For example, only about 5% of students had a positive perception of prisons after watching *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4). In contrast to this low percentage, only about 19% of students had a negative perception of prisons (Table 4.4). An overwhelming 76% of students in the course were neutral about their perceptions of prisons in relation to *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4).

Certainly, the statistics for *The Hurricane* depict a more character-based film that helps viewers formulate more opinions about the individual characters in the film. This notion is supported again with the student perceptions of prisoners after watching the film. According to student reviews, nearly 67% of students had positive perceptions of prisoners after viewing *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4). The remaining 33% were neutral about their perceptions of prisoners (Table 4.4). The important point to note here is there was not one student who displayed a negative perception toward prisoners after watching the film. Contrary to the favorable perceptions toward prisoners, the themes for perceptions of prison staff were quite flat. Nearly 5% of students had a negative perception of prison staff in relation to *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4). The remaining 95% were neutral in their perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.4). Although these statistics demonstrate overwhelming neutrality, it is again important to note the lack of positive perceptions toward prison staff. There were zero cases of positive perception toward prison staff for *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4).

Similar to the data for *The Green Mile*, students were quite negative in their relationship with *The Hurricane*. According to film reviews, only about 24% of students developed positive

personal connections towards *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4). The remaining 76% of students expressed negative personal connections relating to the film (Table 4.4). The data for student perceptions of world reality were not as one-sided as the personal connections toward the film. However, the statistics were still strongly indicative of negativity. According to reviews, only 24% of students had positive perceptions of world reality, as it related to *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4). More than 57% of students demonstrated a negative perception of world reality toward the film (Table 4.4). The remaining 19% of students were neutral about their perceptions of world reality in relation to *The Hurricane* (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 – Student Perceptions (*The Hurricane*)

	<u>POSITIVE</u>		<u>NEGATIVE</u>		<u>NEUTRAL</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>PRISONS</u>	1	5%	4	19%	16	76%	21	100%
<u>PRISONERS</u>	14	67%	0	0%	7	33%	21	100%
<u>PRISON STAFF</u>	1	5%	0	0%	20	95%	21	100%
<u>CONNECTIONS</u>	5	24%	16	76%	0	0%	21	100%
<u>WORLD REALITY</u>	5	24%	12	57%	4	19%	21	100%

To demonstrate some of the remarks that defined positive and negative perceptions in the data collected for the film, *The Hurricane*, there are sample texts in Figure 4.4 taken from the film reviews.

“This movie was very emotional for me. I felt angry at prisons and the justice system for taking away so many years from the Hurricane.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prisons)

“Overall, the film has some happy undertones because Rubin Carter never gives up and gets out of prison.” – Student Review (Positive Perception of Prisoners)

“This film made me very angry at racist people, especially those who have authority and use it wrongly to oppress others.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prison Staff)

“This film shows how people of different backgrounds can come together to help others.” – Student Review (Positive Personal Connection)

“Racism was definitely a major element of American life in the 1960’s. Dr. King and President Kennedy were both assassinated. Americans could feel the social and political strain on the country. This era provides some additional conflict to the setting of the film.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of World Reality)

Figure 4.4 – Student Excerpts (*The Hurricane*)

The Shawshank Redemption

The themes that transpired from *The Shawshank Redemption* data were even more reverberating than many of the statistics from previous films discussed in this study. Naturally, *The Shawshank Redemption* has been recognized for providing exceptional imagery throughout the film. The film's booming visuals were clearly represented in the data for this study. However, as with *The Hurricane*, reviews did not provide major differences in perceptions of prisons. According to the student reviews, only about 10% of students had positive perceptions of prisons after viewing *The Shawshank Redemption* (Table 4.5). In contrast, only 19% of students had negative perceptions of prisons after viewing the film (Table 4.5). The remaining 71% of students were neutral about their perceptions of prisons (Table 4.5).

The most astonishing statistics concerning *The Shawshank Redemption* relate to the student perceptions of prisoners and prison staff. The theme exhibited throughout this study has portrayed prisoners in a more positive image and prison staff in a more negative representation. The data for *The Shawshank Redemption* perpetuates this trend much further. According to the reviews, 100% of students had a positive perception of prisoners after watching *The Shawshank Redemption* (Table 4.5). The statistics for perceptions of prison staff were not quite as one-sided, but still very definitive. Only about 5% of students had a positive perception of prison staff after watching *The Shawshank Redemption* (Table 4.5). In comparison to the low percentage of positive perceptions, nearly 62% of students had negative perceptions of prison staff after viewing the film (Table 4.5). The remaining 33% were neutral about their perceptions of prison staff in relation to *The Shawshank Redemption* (Table 4.5).

The data for student personal connections and perceptions of world reality were similar to the sentiments expressed in the *Cool Hand Luke* film reviews. According to student reviews,

nearly 43% of students had positive personal connections with *The Shawshank Redemption* (Table 4.5). Although this percentage is fairly significant, 38% of students conveyed negative personal connections with the film (Table 4.5). The remaining 19% of students were neutral about their connections with the film (Table 4.5). Student perceptions of world reality in relation to *The Shawshank Redemption* were more definitive. According to reviews, more than 33% of students displayed positive perceptions toward world reality relating to the film (Table 4.5). In contrast to this percentage, only 19% of student communicated negative perceptions (Table 4.5). The remaining 48% of students were neutral about world reality in relation to *The Shawshank Redemption* (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 – Student Perceptions (*The Shawshank Redemption*)

	<u>POSITIVE</u>		<u>NEGATIVE</u>		<u>NEUTRAL</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>PRISONS</u>	2	10%	4	19%	15	71%	21	100%
<u>PRISONERS</u>	21	100%	0	0%	0	0%	21	100%
<u>PRISON STAFF</u>	1	5%	13	62%	7	33%	21	100%
<u>CONNECTIONS</u>	9	43%	8	38%	4	19%	21	100%
<u>WORLD REALITY</u>	7	33%	4	19%	10	48%	21	100%

To demonstrate some of the remarks that defined positive and negative perceptions in the data collected for the film, *The Shawshank Redemption*, there are sample texts in Figure 4.5 taken from the film reviews.

“It is difficult to swallow the possibility that some prisons are, or have been as corrupt as Shawshank.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prisons)

“Andy’s iron will was quite admirable. I cheered him on as he overcame his troubles.” – Student Review (Positive Perception of Prisoners)

“This film stirred up many emotions for me. I felt utter disgust toward Norton and Hadley for their hypocrisy and corruption.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prison Staff)

“I can relate to the film because I have been in jail. When you’re there, all you can do is dream of being out.” – Student Review (Negative Personal Connection)

“The film is set in the 1940’s during a time of much unrest. World War II had caused much social and political upheaval in the United States. The director does a good job at capturing the era accurately.” – Student Review (Positive Perception of World Reality)

Figure 4.5 – Student Excerpts (*The Shawshank Redemption*)

Sleepers

The film, *Sleepers* was the final film the undergraduate course watched during the 8-week term. It is also the only film in the series that depicts visual images of life inside a juvenile institution. Therefore, any data relating to prisons should be noted as being illustrative of juvenile institutions. This is important because only about 5% of students perceived the “prison” institution as positive after viewing *Sleepers* (Table 4.6). In contrast to this low percentage, more than 33% of students had negative perceptions of the “prison” (Table 4.6). The remaining 62% were neutral about their perceptions of prisons after watching the film (Table 4.6). Perhaps the high percentage of students that expressed neutrality is a result of most of the negative attention being directed toward prison staff in relation to *Sleepers*.

The theme of student perceptions of prisoners versus prison staff is more unsettling when comparing the statistics from *Sleepers*. All of the films viewed in the course have painted a better portrait of prisoners than prison staff. This theme has been more than evident in the data provided throughout the course. According to the reviews from *Sleepers*, more than 52% of students had positive perceptions of prisoners (Table 4.6). This percentage is compared to only about 5% of students who had negative perceptions (Table 4.6). The remaining 43% of students were neutral about their perceptions of prisoners (Table 4.6). By contrast, the comments from the reviews articulate that more than 71% of students had negative perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.6). The remaining 29% of students were neutral about their perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.6). It is critical to note that there were zero students who communicated positive perceptions of prison staff after viewing *Sleepers* (Table 4.6).

The personal connections and perceptions of world reality associated with the film, *Sleepers*, was much more negative than the data gathered from *The Shawshank Redemption*.

According to student film reviews, only about 29% of students expressed positive personal connections after viewing *Sleepers* (Table 4.6). This percentage compares to nearly 43% of students who had negative personal connections after watching the film (Table 4.6). The remaining 28% of students were neutral about their connections associated with the film (Table 4.6). Student perceptions of world reality in relation to the film *Sleepers* were even more drastic. According to the film reviews, only a little more than 14% of students had positive perceptions of world reality relating to the film (Table 4.6). Contrary to the low percentage of positive perceptions, more than 57% of students had negative perceptions of world reality associated with the film (Table 4.6). The remaining 29% of students were neutral about their perceptions of world reality relating to the film *Sleepers* (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 – Student Perceptions (*Sleepers*)

	<u>POSITIVE</u>		<u>NEGATIVE</u>		<u>NEUTRAL</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>PRISONS</u>	1	5%	7	33%	13	62%	21	100%
<u>PRISONERS</u>	11	52%	1	5%	9	43%	21	100%
<u>PRISON STAFF</u>	0	0%	15	71%	6	29%	21	100%
<u>CONNECTIONS</u>	6	28%	9	43%	6	29%	21	100%
<u>WORLD REALITY</u>	3	14%	12	57%	6	29%	21	100%

To demonstrate some of the remarks that defined positive and negative perceptions in the data collected for the film, *Sleepers*, Figure 4.6 shows sample texts taken from the film reviews.

“I found it very disturbing and frightening to watch scenes at the Wilkinson Center for Boys. The facility was like a nightmare you see in horror movies. I felt embarrassed and horrified for the boys that had to endure that torture.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prisons)

“I felt mostly disgust while watching this film. Most of the characters were crooked and corrupt.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prisoners)

“Everyone was taught to get even at all costs in this film. The idea of being nice was insulting in the eyes of the community.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of Prison Staff)

“This was the first time I had seen this movie. It reminded me a lot of growing up back home.” – Student Review (Positive Personal Connection)

“The world was going to Hell in a hand basket in 1968. Vietnam, Civil Rights, and Feminism all clogged the social world.” – Student Review (Negative Perception of World Reality)

Figure 4.6 – Student Excerpts (*Sleepers*)

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The main focus for this chapter centers on some of the findings from this study that should be considered important. The main points this study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between prison cinema and social perceptions are clearly depicted within the themes that emerge from the student film reviews. As films varied in this study, from *Cool Hand Luke* to *Sleepers*, student perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff also varied to some extent (Table 4.1). This is a critical finding because it is consistent with the proposition that film content does shape social perceptions. This finding also supports Garland's theoretical model for culture and punishment, which was used for this study (Garland, 1990). Prison cinema did contribute to the shaping of student perceptions, and it was incredibly influential in developing reoccurring themes in the student film reviews.

Perceptions of Prisons

There are several notable themes that emerged within this study. Cinema seemingly and understandably brings out intense emotions for its viewers (Brown, 2004). In many ways, that is the cornerstone of this study. Emotions shape opinions and perceptions of entities. In this study, cinema is the agent that shapes the student perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff. The first major theme in this study focused on student perceptions of prisons. Student perceptions of prisons were either negative or neutral for *all* of the films examined in this study. Prisons were

not perceived as positive entities in one film. The students who participated in the film course decidedly leaned in favor of the incarcerated prisoners.

Again, there must be some observations made as a result of the data provided on this matter. First, it is easier to portray prisons as a negative institution, even though taxpayers continually contribute millions of dollars in support of prisons each year. Secondly, people are still on the fence about prisons (Elsner, 2006). Americans seem to still be confused about the role of prisons in the United States (Elsner, 2006). Citizens are still unsure if they are good/bad, a privilege/punishment, or if we need more/less of them to confine the deviant (Elsner, 2006). And finally, the student perceptions suggest that prisons in cinema are portrayed either negatively, or not portrayed in a manner that makes the viewer care. In some ways, indifference about prisons may be worse than a negative perception.

Garland's theoretical model for culture shaping punishment, and punishment shaping culture is clearly relevant in examining the findings for perceptions of prisons (Garland, 1990). Student perceptions of prisons were shaped to favor a more negative, or neutral opinion for one reason: the images and sequences portrayed in the prison films were more positive toward prisoners. It is this point, framed by Garland, and supported by film reviews in this study, that illustrates the significance of film content in relation to social perceptions (Garland, 1990).

Perceptions of Prisoners

Another theme, and maybe the most notable and most surprising theme within this study, is the amount of empathy communicated for the prisoners in the various films (Table 4.1). In fact, the majority of students perceived the prisoners in *every* film positively. This is noteworthy for three main reasons. First, it means that Hollywood is portraying prisoners as more favorable

characters, displaying more good character than credited by their peers. Secondly, prisoners are often portrayed as being falsely convicted in films. And finally, student perceptions from this theme support the notions that people had still rather relate to the individual, rather than the institution, regardless of which is the “good guy”.

The empathy displayed for the prisoners in the films viewed in this study is consequential of the type of characters portrayed in the films. All of the prisoners depicted in the prison films viewed in this study were portrayed as victims. Some characters were falsely convicted, some were heroic, and some were simply abused and victimized. These images were certainly influential in shaping perceptions of not only prisoners in the films, but also prisoners in general. Garland’s theoretical model suggests that the images depicted in the prison films are very instrumental in shaping the social perceptions of viewers (Garland, 1990). It is those same perceptions that can eventually shape punishment policies and practices. And, of course, new prison cinema will emerge with new themes, based on policies and practices that have been influenced by social perceptions (Garland, 1990).

Perceptions of Prison Staff

One theme this study illustrates that could be potentially troubling is the perceptions of prison staff. Student participants in this study communicated negative perceptions of prison staff in almost every film they viewed in the film course. The only exception was for the film, *The Hurricane*, in which 95% of participants were neutral in their perceptions of prison staff (Table 4.4). This disturbing theme suggests that prison staff may not be considered the “good guys” inside the prison walls. In fact, society may view them as being as, or more deviant than the inmates they have been hired to guard within the institution.

According to modern Hollywood cinema, the line between good and bad is very hazy inside the prison. This idea is easily translated with a montage of images that illustrate brutality from both prisoners and staff. It is unsurprisingly easy to understand how film viewers in this study could interpret staff as being just as corrupt as the criminals under their supervision (Elsner, 2006). Criminal justice officials would like to disregard these images as only fiction, but with numerous lawsuits occurring in the past two to three decades for prison violence, there is at least a smudge of validity to what Hollywood puts on the big screen (Elsner, 2006).

Garland's theoretical model, which illustrates the relationship between culture and punishment, may be most effective in examining perceptions of prison staff (Garland, 1990). Most of the films in this study portrayed prison staff extremely negatively. The student film reviews were very clear in describing prison staff as brutal, abusive, and corrupt. This supports Garland's claims for his culture and punishment model. The brutal, abusive, and corrupt images were directly responsible for producing an overwhelmingly negative perception of prison staff in the study (Table 4.1). And, it is the perceptions shaped by these prison films that have incredible potential to shape future policies and practices that could surely affect prison staff in many aspects of their profession (Garland, 1990).

Personal Connections

Personal connections was a wild card variable when this study was conceived. The researcher was not sure what, if any, personal connections would be discussed by the students in the course. However, there were definitely certain aspects of the prison films that triggered memories for the participants of this study. The most notable theme regarding personal connections in this study was that 50% of participants had negative personal connections relating

to the prison films (Table 4.1). The majority of reviews indicated strong negative associations and/or memories for the students, which is very illustrative of the images and themes portrayed in the films.

Some of the students in the course were interested in pursuing careers in criminal justice. Most of the films viewed in the course portrayed criminal justice officials in a negative manner. Therefore, it is not surprising that negative images induce negative associations and/or memories. Once again, Garland's theoretical model of culture and punishment is illuminated by the personal connections students recalled after viewing the films (Garland, 1990). The images portrayed in the films were displayed in such a negative manner, they not only created negative perceptions towards characters and entities in the films, but the films also revived negative associations from memory (Garland, 1990). Students were very responsive about violent and abusive themes in the films, which were influential in their recollection of violence and abuse in their earlier lives.

Perceptions of World Reality

The final theme for this research study centered on the perceptions of world reality. World reality was a subcategory in the film reviews submitted for this course and the study. The researcher chose to include it as a variable due to its general connection to culture and perceptions of culture. The research in this study depicted balanced results for perceptions of world reality. Approximately 30-36% of participants indicated either positive, negative, or neutral perceptions of world reality connected with the prison films (Table 4.1). Thus, there was a fairly split perception of world reality.

This was not a surprising find due to the vast variability in American history and culture. There have been many good and bad deeds for the United States as a relatively young country. It was fairly predictable that the films, which were all set in various time periods, would conjure an array of emotions and perceptions regarding the world of not only the film plot, but also the time period it was released. This finding should also be noted as supporting Garland's theoretical model for culture and punishment. The content presented in the prison films were not only instrumental in shaping perceptions about prisons, prisoners, and prison staff, it also shaped perceptions of culture in general for the United States (Garland, 1990).

The findings for this study are illustrated in a visual format in Figure 5.1. The figure represents the themes that were widely present in the findings for this study and have been influential in molding student perceptions. It is important to note that most of the content the prison films portrayed was highlighted with negativity (Figure 5.1). The only finding that really depicted positive perceptions in this study was related to the perceptions of prisoners. However, the main method used in the cinematic approach for shaping positive perceptions of prisoners was depicting other entities, such as prisons and prison staff negatively (Figure 5.1). This method was clearly effective when considering the vast negative perceptions communicated in the student reviews.

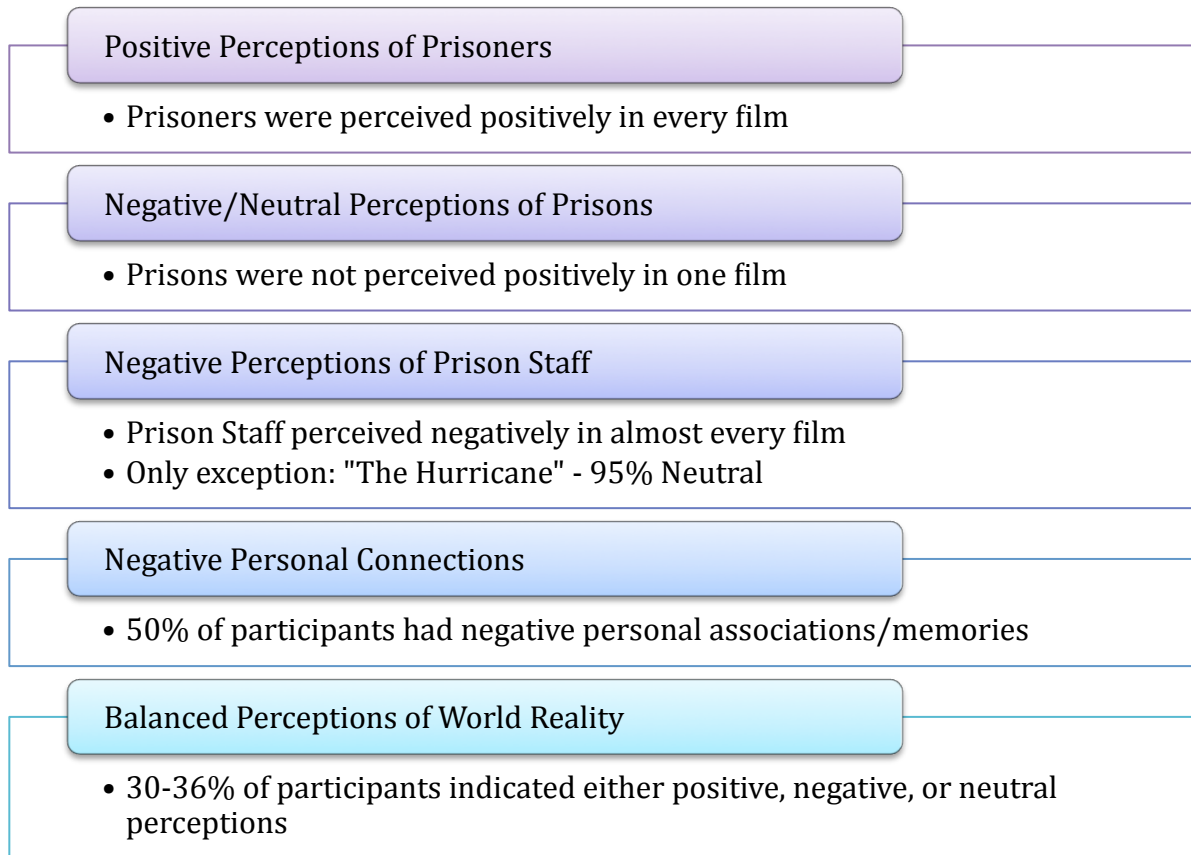


Figure 5.1 – Research Study Themes

Conclusions

As American corrections attempts to solve some of the enormous issues that are facing the system, the issue of the media will always be pertinent, especially popular cinema. The concepts of prison violence, staff corruption, and false convictions are among the most salient and widely used themes in prison films (Mason, 2006). The future remains uncertain for prisons in the United States. However, they will continue to be under a microscope by the public media. Hollywood usually only gives its attention in minor detail, with the occasional blockbuster that re-opens the same “can of worms” for the prison industry (Mason, 2006). Regardless as to how

prison culture really improves or worsens, the mass public will develop a perception that is driven by media—more specifically, the prison films people watch in theaters and in their homes.

Prison films have educated Americans and the world for years about the life that exists within prison walls (Brown, 2009). These cinematic presentations will continue to be produced. Hollywood has the luxury of producing what it wants to produce (Mason, 2006). There does not have to be too much realism in its adaptations of the world—this is precisely why people have a perception of prisons that is generally outdated by several decades (Mason, 2006). This fact suggests that people will have to combat their perception of prison culture received from film with self-research and education. Only then, might society as a whole, gain a balanced understanding and conceptualization of prison culture.

The central findings for this study are consistent with Garland’s theoretical model for culture and punishment (Garland, 1990). The findings suggest that not only does film content shape social perceptions, but also the main agent in shaping those perceptions is negative emotionality and mentality. These two central findings are critically connected to both future punishment policies and practices, and to the filmmaking enterprise. Prison cinema’s content and its use of negative imagery toward prison officials are influential in shaping public perceptions, and could possibly lead to new policies and practices. Since politicians and policy makers respond to public opinion, public perceptions of prisons, prisoners, and prison staff is very important. Furthermore, new policies and practices will inevitably affect the prison officials and prisoners in most circumstances more than any other entity.

Possible implementation of new policies and practices will eventually become a new subject in prison cinema. The connection that the central findings of this research have for the

future of the filmmaking enterprise is related to profits. Negative imagery sells better in the world of cinema. Imagery depicting prisons as effective in managing prisoners, and as providing safe, secure, and efficient facilities for housing criminals is not going to sell as well as violence and illegal prison activity. Similarly, correctional staff professionalism is unlikely to sell as well as staff corruption. Viewers are less likely to recall staff professionalism than to recall staff corruption and violence. For example, there are many empathetic and professional prison officials in the film, *The Green Mile*. The film even has Tom Hanks, who is notorious for his “good guy” roles. Yet, 56% of student reviews perceived prison staff in the film negatively due to the one, or two corrupt prison officials (Table 4.3).

Future research on the subject of prison cinema and social perceptions should incorporate theoretical models, such as Garland’s culture and punishment model (Garland, 1990). Further research needs to be conducted concerning cinema and social perceptions that will be more comprehensive (i.e. larger sample, surveys, etc.) and more generalized for the public population. If more comprehensive and generalized research can be conducted to learn more about the relationship between cinema and social perceptions, then society will hopefully understand more about the realities and falsities of prison culture. In addition, with further research in this subject area, policy makers will also hopefully understand that public opinions about prisons, prisoners, and prison staff are very easily misconstrued, and are sometimes not grounded in valid information.

REFERENCES

- Arrigo, Bruce. (2006). Punishment, Freedom, and the Culture of Control: A Review of Torture: America's Brutal Prisons. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 9, 229-233.
- Bielby, William T. and Berk, Richard A. (1980). Source of Error in Survey Data Used in Criminal Justice Evaluations: An Analysis of Survey Respondents' Reports of "Fear of Crime". *National Workshop on Research Methodology and Criminal Justice Program Evaluation*.
- Brown, Michelle. (2009). *The Culture of Punishment: Prison, Society, and Spectacle*. New York: New York University Press.
- Brown, Michelle. (2004). Crime Fiction and Criminology. *Criminal Justice Review*, 29, 206-220.
- Caulkins, J. P., & Sevigny, E. L. (2005). How many people does the U.S. imprison for drug use, and who are they? *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 32, 405-428.
- Chermak, Steven M. (1994). Body Count News: How Crime is Presented in the News Media. *Justice Quarterly*, 11, 561-582.
- Cuomo, C., Sarchiapone, M., Giannantonio, M. D., Mancini, M., & Roy, A. (2008). Aggression, Impulsivity, Personality Traits, and Childhood Trauma of Prisoners with Substance Abuse and Addiction. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 34, 339-345.
- Crary, Jonathan. (1999). *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Davis, Angela Y. (2003). *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.

- Davis, James F. (1952). Crime News in Colorado Newspapers. *American Journal of Sociology*, 57, 325-330.
- Duguid, S., Hawkey, C., & Pawson, R. (1996). Using Recidivism to Evaluate Effectiveness in Prison Education Programs. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 47, 74-85.
- Ehrlich, Linda C. (1990). The Name of the Child: Cinema as a Social Critique. *Film Criticism*, 14, 12-23.
- Elsner, Alan. (2006). *Gates of Injustice: The Crisis in America's Prisons*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Engelen, Leen. (2007). Back to the Future, Ahead to the Past. Film and History: A Status Quaestionis. *Rethinking History*, 11, 555-563.
- Garland, David. (1990). *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hagan, Frank E. (2006). *Research Methods in Criminal Justice and Criminology*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Haridakis, Paul M. (2006). Men, Women, and Televised Violence: Predicting Aggression in Male and Female Television Viewers. *Communication Quarterly*, 54, 227-255.
- Jacob, H., Lineberry, and Heinz. (1980). The Study of Governmental Responses to Crime. *National Workshop on Research Methodology and Criminal Justice Evaluation*.
- Lastra, James. (2000). *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, and Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mason, Paul. (2006). Prison Decayed: Cinematic Penal Discourse and Populism 1995-2005. *Social Semiotics*, 16, 607-623.

- Narevic, E., Garrity, T. F., Schoenberg, N. E., Hiller, M. L., Webster, J. M., Leukefeld, C. G., et al. (2006). Factors Predicting Unmet Health Services Needs Among Incarcerated Substance Abusers. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 41, 1077-1094.
- Peritz, Ed. (1998). Teaching the Toughies: Correctional Education and Hollywood. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 49, 6-8.
- Rafter, N. & Brown, M. (2010). *Criminology Goes to the Movies*. New York: New York University Press.
- Shefrin, Elana. (2004). Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and Participatory Fandom: Mapping New Congruencies between the Internet and Media Entertainment Culture. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21, 261-281.
- Shivy, V. A., Wu, J. J., Moon, A. E., & Mann, S. C. (2007). Ex-Offenders Reentering the Workforce. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54, 466-473.
- Simon, Jonathan. (2007). *Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a World of Fear*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stephens, T., McGee, W., & Braithwaite, R. L. (2007). Age-Based Correlates of Substance Misuse Among Convicted Felons in Georgia. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 33, 885-892.
- Stokes, M., & Maltby, R.E. (2001). *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences*. London: British Film Institute Publishing.
- Sutton, Paul. (2004). Afterwardsness in Film. *Journal of Cultural Research*, 8, 385-405.
- Vacca, J. S. (2004). Educated Prisoners Are Less Likely to Return to Prison. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 55, 297-305.

Wald, J., & Kurlaender, M. (2003). Connected in Seattle? An Exploratory Study of Student Perceptions of Discipline and Attachment to Teachers. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2003, 35-54.

Wexman, Virginia W. (2009). Media and the Academy: A Tangled Tale. *Cinema Journal*, 49, 140-146.

APPENDIXES

FILM 1

TITLE:

COOL HAND LUKE

RELEASED DATE:

NOVEMBER 1, 1967

LEADING ACTORS/ROLES:

Paul Newman and George Kennedy

PLOT SUMMARY:

Lucas Jackson, natural born world shaker, someone with more guts than brains, a man who refuses to conform to the rules he has been given, is sent to a prison camp for a misdemeanor. Luke soon gains respect and becomes an idol. He has some fun in jail doing things for the hell of it. After his mother dies, the Bosses put him in the box. They are afraid he might want to attend the funeral. When he gets out of the box, he repeatedly runs away from the camp, only to always get caught. The prison tries to break him, but he just will not break.

FILM 2

TITLE:

THE GREEN MILE

RELEASED DATE:

DECEMBER 10, 1999

LEADING ACTORS/ROLES:

Tom Hanks and David Morse

PLOT SUMMARY:

Paul Edgecomb is a slightly cynical veteran prison guard on Death Row in the 1930's. His faith, and sanity deteriorated by watching men live and die, Edgecomb is about to have a complete turnaround in attitude. Enter John Coffey, an eight feet tall prisoner with hands the size of waffle irons. He has been accused of the murder of two children, and he's afraid to sleep in a cell without a night-light. And Edgecomb, as well as the other prison guards – Brutus, a sympathetic guard, and Percy, a pompous, perverse, and violent person, are in for a strange experience that involves intelligent mice, brutal executions, and the revelation about Coffey's innocence and his true identity.

FILM 3

TITLE:

THE HURRICANE

RELEASED DATE:

JANUARY 14, 2000

LEADING ACTORS/ROLES:

Denzel Washington and Vicellous Reon Shannon

PLOT SUMMARY:

The film depicts the story of Rubin “The Hurricane” Carter, an African-American man, who rose above his troubled youth to become a top contender for the middleweight boxing title. However, his dreams are shattered when he is accused of a triple murder, and is convicted to three natural-life terms. Despite becoming a cause célèbre and his dogged efforts to prove his innocence through his autobiography, the years of fruitless efforts have left him discouraged. This changes when an African-American boy and his Canadian mentors read his book and are convinced of his innocence enough to work for his exoneration. However, Hurricane and his friends learn is that this fight puts them against a racist establishment that profited from his travesty, and have no intention of seeing it reversed.

FILM 4

TITLE:

THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

RELEASED DATE:

SEPTEMBER 23, 1994

LEADING ACTORS/ROLES:

Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman

PLOT SUMMARY:

Andy Dufresne is sent to Shawshank Prison for the murder of his wife and her secret lover. He is very isolated and lonely at first, but realizes there is something deep inside your body that people cannot touch –Hope. Andy becomes friends with prison “fixer” Red, and Andy epitomizes why it is crucial to have dreams. His spirit and determination leads the audience into a world full of imagination, filled with courage and desire. Will Andy ever realize his dream?

FILM 5

TITLE:

SLEEPERS

RELEASED DATE:

OCTOBER 18, 1996

LEADING ACTORS/ROLES:

Kevin Bacon, Robert DeNiro, Dustin Hoffman, Jason Patric, and Brad Pitt

PLOT SUMMARY:

Four boys growing up in Hell's Kitchen play a prank that leads to an old man getting injured. Sentenced to no less than one year in the Wilkenson Center in upstate New York, the four friends are changed by the beating, humiliation, and sexual abuse by the guards sworn to protect them. Thirteen years later and a chance meeting lead to an opportunity for revenge against the Wilkenson Center and the guards.

CURRICULUM VITA

JEREMY S. MCQUEEN

CONTACT INFORMATION:

234 Tahoma Road

Lexington, KY 40503

Phone: (859) 625-4201

Email: Jeremy_mcqueen13@eku.edu

EDUCATION

M.S., Correctional & Juvenile Justice Studies:

December 2010, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY

B.A., Sociology and Africana Studies:

May 2008, Berea College, Berea, KY

SIGNIFICANT WRITTEN WORKS:

- *Prison Blockbusters: Relationships Between Prison Cinema and Student Perceptions*
(December 2010)
- *Pillow Talk Confessions: Youthful Thoughts on Wisdom and Spirituality* (March 2010)
- *Campus Intoxication: Comparing Appalachian and Non-Appalachian Alcohol Consumption* (May 2008)
- *The Persuasion Within Conversation: An Ethnography of Berea College's Student Government Association* (December 2007)

- *Fearing the “Black” Man: The Color Barrier in Appalachia* (December 2007)
- *Juvenile Justice in Eastern Kentucky* (December 2007)
- *Wood-Stocked: How Music Affects the Social World* (May 2006)

SERVICE and PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

2008-2009 Graduate Research Assistant:

Eastern Kentucky University, College of Justice and Safety

- Research and review various articles
- Enter and analyze data in statistical programs
- Organize and summarize data in written and graphical forms
- Assist professor in teaching online courses
- Review and grade undergraduate written assignments

2007-2008 Kentucky Intern:

Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice

- Research juvenile justice court cases
- Visit juvenile detention and treatment facilities
- Attend juvenile court hearings
- Attend and analyze juvenile drug court meetings
- Create and organize juvenile case journals for final assessments

2007-2008 Alumni Relations Student Director:

Berea College, Alumni Relations

- Create and coordinate Senior Leadership Committee
- Create and establish Student Ambassador Program
- Oversee Berea College Phone-a-thon

2004-2008 Bonner Scholar:

Berea College, The Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation

- Actively participate in service learning events in Berea community
- Motivate college students to engage in activism in their communities
- Work with various community partners to promote sustainable living
- Travel abroad and work with service programs in foreign communities

2005-2007 **People Who Care Coordinator:**
Berea College, Center for Education and Learning Through Service

- Coordinate service learning programs each week for the campus community
- Manage program budgets for extensive learning events throughout each semester
- Actively recruit campus members to participate as community partners

2006-2008 **Staff Writer:**
Berea College, *Berea College Pinnacle*

- Research and interview campus and community members about various local, national, and global issues
- Report on at least 3-4 articles each week about contemporary issues
- Occasionally review and critique local events in the community

DISTINCTIONS:

- Dean's List, Berea College
- Ernest and Emily G. Graham Service Award, 2008
- Robert B. Street Prize in American History, 2008
- Dallas and Betty Johnson Sociology Scholarship, 2008
- Senior Class President, Berea College, 2007-08
- Student Government Senate Speaker (Chair), Berea College, 2006-07
- Junior Class Vice-President, Berea College, 2006-07
- Sophomore Class Senator, Berea College, 2005-06