

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

“We got ‘em by the balls”: A Qualitative Content Analysis of The Portrayal of Correctional Guards in Popular Film

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B.A. Applied Criminology (Honours) Thesis



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**“WE GOT ‘EM BY THE BALLS”: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
THE PORTRAYAL OF CORRECTIONAL GUARDS IN POPULAR FILM**

by

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ABSTRACT

Canada's correctional institutions are largely private and hidden from public view; because of this, much of the public gets their information regarding the criminal justice system from popular media. As it stands, there is a lack of research regarding the portrayal of correctional guards in popular media. A large portion of research pertaining to correctional guards is focused on how guards are portrayed in news media rather than popular media. The existing research into correctional guards in news presents them in a negative light with a tendency to focus on non-prisoner harassment, crime unrelated to the job, and budgetary issues (Vickovic et al., 2013). This thesis presents the result of qualitative exploratory study using content analysis as a means of understanding how correctional guards are portrayed in popular media. Ten of the top thirty grossing prison films released between 1994 and 2024 were analyzed thematically using grounded theory methods. The results show that correctional guards are generally portrayed as violent, aggressive, lazy, and lack respect for the prisoners. The significance of this study not only includes adding to popular criminology research but also offering a potential explanation for some motivations of becoming a correctional guard and explaining the gendered aspects of the ways in which correctional guards are portrayed and implications that may have on prisoners. Future implications of this study include contributing to the literature surrounding prisoning, correctional guards, and popular criminology and transforming people's views and perceptions regarding correctional guards by pointing out protentional inaccuracies

Keywords: Correctional guards, behaviour, portrayal, masculinities, pop culture, pains of imprisonment, typology

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INTRODUCTION

Canada's correctional institutions operate out of public view and are therefore largely hidden from the public. This leads the public and those who do not have any formal education or experience with the criminal justice system to be more likely to fall victim to the false narratives portrayed by various media outlets and sources (Milicevic & Drndarvic, 2023). Many criminological researchers have examined the portrayal of key figures within the criminal justice system in popular film such as prisoners (Levan et al., 2011; Milicevic & Drndarvic, 2023; Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004) and wardens (Wilson & O'Sullivan). That being said, a large portion of the picture is missing: the portrayal of correctional guards in popular film. The portrayal of correctional guards has been studied through a news media lens, but there has yet to be any research into the portrayal of correctional guards in popular film. This study will contribute to the literature on popular culture by asking: How are correctional guards portrayed in popular film?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Portrayal of Prisons

A large amount of research has been conducted into how film and new media portray prisons in general (few citations). In their meta-analysis of thirty-three studies of news coverage of prisons, Milicevic and Drndarvic (2023) found that media representations of prisons oversimplify the complexities of incarceration. For example, prisons are often portrayed uniformly, yet in reality, prison conditions vary widely from institution to institution (Milicevic and Drndarvic, 2023). Not only does the media use a blanket portrayal of prisons, but that blanket portrayal is significantly different than the reality of prison life. More often than not the conditions, architecture, violence, racial divisions, role of security personal, sentence lengths, prison escapes, and cell privacy are all misrepresented (Milicevic and Drndarvic, 2023). Second, media representations of prisons tend to focus on the extreme and sensational stories which contribute to negatively skewed public perceptions (Milicevic and Drndarvic, 2023). Media portrayals of prisons and prisoners have the power to perpetrate stereotypes and influence the public's understanding of who is most affected by the criminal justice and their experiences while incarcerated (Milicevic and Drndarvic, 2023).

For instance, commercial advertising often portrays prisons and prisoners in an interesting manner to say the least. Ross and Sneed (2018) found that generally, television commercials that feature prisoners and/or correctional officers focus on the selling of clothing items, foodstuff, personal hygiene products, household cleaning products, or political campaigns (Ross & Sneed, 2018). More specifically though, 1/3 of the commercials displayed escape attempts, 6% implied that a prisoner had been sexually assaulted, and another 6% indicated the impending injury to a prisoner (Ross & Sneed, p. 81, 2018). Additionally, 69.7% of prisoners were male, 54.5% of correctional guards were male, and out of all prison officials features in the

commercials, 82.4% were correctional guards (Ross & Sneed, 2018, pp. 82-83). Of the prisoners portrayed in these commercials, 48.5% were white and 9.1% were of African American decent (Ross & Sneed, 2017, p. 83). This portrayal goes against the demographics of those who are incarcerated in America. As of 2014, 37% of male prisoners were white, 32% were African American, and 22% were of Hispanic decent (Ross & Sneed, 2017, p. 86). Furthermore, roughly 60% of these commercials portrayed prison as a negative experience, 37.5% portrayed prison as a neutral experience, and 3.13% portrayed prison as a pleasant or positive experience (Ross & Sneed, 2017, p. 86).

Authors Wilson and O’Sullivan (2004) used a case study approach to study the portrayal of prisons in television focusing on the show *Oz* created by Tom Fontana. This show takes place in the fictional Oswald (“Oz”) Maximum Security Penitentiary. *Oz* is portrayed as a kill-or-be-killed, amoral, and hyper-violent type of environment (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004). The show also constricts the institution as a failing on a plethora of fronts including: the inability of prison authorities to protect the prisoners from rape, abuse, murder; prison staff’s substance abuse problems and/or personal filings; and the lack of rehabilitation or deterrence. Prisoners rarely make it out of *Oz* alive – those who do eventually find their way back to the prison (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004).

Levan and colleagues (2011) conducted a study to determine the types of messaging the public is receiving regarding sexual violence among prisoners. The researchers examined eight films *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *American History X* (1998), *The Butterfly Effect* (2004), *Let’s Go to Prison* (2006), *Office Space* (1999), *My Cousin Vinny* (1992), *The Rock* (1996), and *There’s Something About Mary* (1998) (Levan et al., 2011). All eight films depicted a dramatic portrayal of sexual victimization. The most graphic portrayal of sexual assault was

found in *American History X* (1998) where a character is violently assaulted and raped in the shower while he is held down by other prisoners (Levan et al., 2011). The least graphic portrayal of sexual assault was found in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) where the threat of rape is repeatedly implied (Levan et al., 2011). For example, the main character, Andy, was asked by another prisoner if anyone had ‘gotten to him yet’ to which Andy explains that he is not homosexual and the same character as before explains to Andy that neither are they and that he should grow eyes in the back of his head (Levan et al., 2011).

In contrast, the comedic portrayals of sexual assault occur in passing. For example, in the film *Office Space* (1999), the characters refer to a federal institution as a “federal-pound-me-in-the-ass-prison” (Levan et al., 2011, p. 678). A second example was present in the film *There’s something about Mary* (1998) where the main character lies awake in his cell with a terrified expression on his face, implying that he has been sexually assaulted or is under threat of being sexually assaulted (Levan et al., 2011). In this case, the source of comedy is simply the fact that sexual assault is often the butt of a joke.

Some of the portrayals found in the analysis conducted by Levan and colleagues (2011) mirrored real life incidents of sexual assault in prison while others were dramatized. Research shows that the most likely locations for sexual assault include prisoner’s cells, the communal showers, and prisoner work areas (Levan et al., 2011). In the films analyzed, 50% of the sexual assault incidents took place in the showers (*American History X* (1998), *The Rock* (1996), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), and *Let’s Go to Prison* (2006)), rapes were perpetrated in the prison workplace or common area, or more often in the prisoner’s cell. Further, many of the films featured gang rape which is not uncommon amongst the male prisoner population (Levan et al., 2011).

Portrayal of Prisoners in News Media

In new and popular culture content, prison tend to be portrayed as dark, gloomy, violent, and dangerous places, while the prisoners themselves are often constructed as violent and predatory. In Wilson and O’Sullivan’s (2004) research into the television show *Oz* they found that this show presents a negative portrayal of male prisoners. While the show does attempt to humanize the prisoners, the overarching takeaway is negative. In attempt to humanize the prisoners, all characters have a storyline and dialogue and there are few large crowd shots depicting masses of dangerous offenders (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004). However, at some point during the show, all the key characters engage in some kind of predatory behaviour either as an act of defence or with offensive intentions (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004). Additionally, virtually all prisoners in *Oz* have had a direct or indirect involvement in the death of another prisoner (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004)

A study conducted by Andersen and colleagues (2019) examined the media construction of young female offenders in both Canadian and American news media. From their analysis, four key archetypes emerged; ‘sinister’, ‘uncivilized’, ‘harlot’, and ‘average Jane’ portrayals (Andersen et al., 2019). The most prevalent theme was the girls being portrayed as ‘sinister’ with just over half being depicted in this manner (Andersen et al., 2019). These young girls were described as angry, dangerous, manipulative, vicious, ruthless, pure evil, and volatile (Andersen et al., 2019). For example, in his article Pearson (1997) wrote “There’s a small core of female juvenile offenders who are, like their male counterparts, truly frightening” (as cited in Andersen et al., 2019, p. 356). These girls are also portrayed as engaging in violence to relive boredom as opposed to being motivated by revenge or other factors (Andersen et al., 2019). Finally, Andersen and colleagues (2019) found that young girls in America were more likely to be

portrayed as being calculated and controlling whereas young girls in Canada were more likely to be portrayed as manipulating boys to do their dirty work for them.

The second most prominent theme (just over 30% of articles) that emerged from Andersen and colleagues (2019) analysis was young girls being portrayed as being uncivilized and animalistic. Some of the language used to describe the girls included terms such as ‘inhumane’ and savage (Andersen et al., 2019). Interestingly, another difference was found between the portrayal of young girls in America versus in Canada. In America, this dehumanizing language was more commonly used for violent crimes committed by girls of colour (Andersen et al., 2019). In comparison, in Canada this dehumanizing language was reserved for girls involved in extremely violent cases such as the Reena Virk case (Andersen et al., 2019).

The third theme that emerged from this study was termed as ‘Harlot’ and refers to the media’s reliance on gendered stereotypes; this theme was found in roughly 30% of articles analyzed (Andersen et al., 2019). Articles that fell into this category would describe girls’ violence as stemming from their desire to be a good sex object and/or competing for male attention (Andersen et al., 2019). Coverage also heavily emphasized the girl’s physical appearance while portraying them as vain and materialistic (Andersen et al., 2019). The fourth and final theme that emerged was young girls being portrayed as ‘average Janes’. This category also accounted for approximately 30% of articles (Andersen et al., 2019). Articles in this category would describe girls who had “strayed off course” (Andersen et al., 2019, p. 360) or “went down a wrong path” (Andersen et al., 2019, p. 360). The blame for their violence was not placed on them but rather diverted to external factors and forces.

While the above study focused on the portrayal of young female offenders in news

media, there have been several studies conducted that look into the portrayal of prisoners and offenders in film. For instance, Clowers (2001) found that cinematic representations of female prisoners portrayed them as notoriously violent, worthless, and unworthy of humane treatment (as cited in Milicevic & Drndarvic, 2023).

Portrayal of Prison Staff (Non-Correctional Guards)

There has also been research into the portrayal of other staff members inside a prison institution such as the warden (sometimes also referred to as the prison governor). According to Gresham Skyes (1958), the prison governor has the power to make the lives of his staff and prisoners either be tolerable and productive or dehumanizing and miserable (as cited in Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). In many prominent prison films, the warden is either missing or only makes brief appearances (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). Some examples of films where the warden is either absent or only appears briefly include *The Green Mile* (1999), *American History X* (1998), and *Monster's Ball* (2001) (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). For the present study researchers examined four movies: *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1962), *Scum* (2015), *Brubaker* (1980), and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004).

The results from their study were mixed with some wardens were portrayed positively, some were portrayed negatively, and some were portrayed neutrally. The warden in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1962) was portrayed fairly neutrally. While he was deemed to be “oblivious to the regime that surrounds him” (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004, p. 162), he did appear to care for the prisoners under his care as he purchased plastic boots for a prisoner who refused to wear leather boots. (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). The warden in *Brubaker* (1980) was a more progressive warden when he took over and was deemed to be both weird and unintelligent by his coworkers. For example, he wanted to abolish prisoner beatings and to turn

the prison into a twentieth century farm leading to one of the trustees to tell Brubaker that he is “one weird fucking individual” (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004, p. 163). Further, the head of the board vocalized that he thought that Brubaker’s degree in penology was not sufficient to run the prison (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004). Finally, the warden in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) is portrayed in a negative manner. At various points during the film the warden abuses his power and obstructs justice (Wilson & O’Sullivan, 2004).

Portrayal of Correctional Guards

Vickovic and colleagues (2013) where they analyzed four hundred and thirty-nine newsprint articles published in the United States between 2009 and 2011 to examine the manner in which news media outlets depict correctional guards. They found that 79.6% of the articles they examined depicted correctional guards in a negative way (Vickovic et al., 2013, p. 460). Within this, they found a number of subcategories. For example, 4.9% of articles depicted non-prisoner harassment and/or discrimination such as a male officer repeatedly harassing a female officer (Vickovic et al., 2013, p. 461). A second subcategory was that 15% of articles reported crimes committed by correctional officers that were unrelated to their correctional work (Vickovic et al., 2013, p. 462). The issue here is that these articles reinforce negative stereotypes surrounding correctional officers (Vickovic et al., 2013). Other subcategories included correctional budgetary issues (9.3%), correctional officers dealing with violent prisoners (25%), job related misconduct (40%), sexual harassment or assault of prisoners (4.5%), correctional officers bringing in contraband (6.5%), excessive use of force (13.4%), and a failure to preform job duties (17.9%) (Vickovic et al., 2013, pp. 461- 465). Of the remaining articles, 13.6% depicted correctional officers in a neutral manner and 6.8% depicted correctional officers in a positive manner (Vickovic et al., 2013, p. 460).

Vickovic and colleagues (2013) work is somewhat consistent with how correctional officers are portrayed in television. Wilson and O'Sullivan's (2004) research into the television show *Oz* (1997 - 2003) portrayed correctional guards' behaviour as varying from overtly corrupt to weary of their surroundings (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). The overtly corrupt correctional guards would collude with prisoners and engage in the illicit prison economy. The correctional guards justified this behaviour as doing what they need to survive (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). Finally, the management at *Oz* were portrayed as complicit in prisoner's deaths – never formally disapproving of the abuse or the death of prisoners caused by the correctional guards (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004).

There is no research that directly addressed how prisoners react to the portrayal of correctional officers in popular culture. However, much of how prisons are portrayed in popular culture parallels how prisoners feel about correctional staff in general. For instance, Canadian criminologist Rosemary Ricciardelli (2016) interviewed fifty-six former federally incarcerated prisoners to gain insight into how prisoners view and interpret correctional guards. The study found six typologies of correctional guards: the harmony persuasion guards, the security persuasion guards, the harmonious dualist, the security dualist, the punisher, and the moral relativist (Ricciardelli, 2016).

Guards who fall under the harmony persuasion typology strive for harmony through positive interactions with the prisoners, they avoid physical violence, and are consistent in their behaviour (Ricciardelli, 2016). In contrast, the harmonious dualist strive for harmony over security (Ricciardelli, 2016). There are two types of the harmonious dualist typology: the moral dualists and the idealists (Ricciardelli, 2016). The moral dualists place and emphasis on gentler management practices while the idealists overlook institutional rules to focus on prisoner well-

being (Ricciardelli, 2016).

The third typology found was the security dualist (Ricciardelli, 2016). Guards in this category attempt to balance harmony and security but place a higher emphasis on security (Ricciardelli, 2016). Security dualists tend to fall into two categories: the operators and the managerial entrepreneurs (Ricciardelli, 2016). The operators are the more experienced guards who are focused on keeping the prison environment secure above all else (Ricciardelli, 2016). The managerial entrepreneurs on the other hand lack experience and follow the rules to the letter (Ricciardelli, 2016).

The final two typologies are the punisher and the moral relativist (Ricciardelli, 2016). The punisher guards do not care for the prisoners whatsoever and have a desire to encourage misconduct (Ricciardelli, 2016). The moral relativist is motivated by money rather than harmony or security (Ricciardelli, 2016).

The portrayal of correctional guards is significantly under researched in the field of criminology and popular criminology. There is a plethora of research surrounding popular culture portrayals of prisons in general (Levan et al., 2011; Milicevic & Drndarvic, 2023; Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004), of prisoners themselves – both male and female (Andersen et al., 2019; Clowers, 2001; Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004), and the portrayal of correctional guards in news media and guard's feelings about these media portrayals (Ricciardelli et al., 2024; Vickovic et al., 2013; Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). Yet no research to date has evaluated how correctional officers are portrayed in popular culture – specifically film – and the impact of these portrayals on public opinion, the lives of incarcerated people, and correctional officers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

At the cornerstone of masculinity theories is a concept commonly referred to as ‘hegemonic masculinity’. This concept was initially formulated in the 1980’s to shed light on and address societal practices that were promoting favorable social conditions for men over women (Morettini, 2016). Hegemonic masculinity allows us to understand how the existence of multiple masculinities produces a hierarchal domination between men and women, and amongst men (Morettini, 2016). It is a relational pattern of power and/or dominance over others (Wedgwood et al., 2023). Raewyn Connell’s initial use of the concept of ‘hegemony’ was in relation to gender that maintained hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity; each represents patterns of power relations between men and women (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024).

Hegemonic masculinity is something that is embodied; it is a set of behaviours and attitudes rather than a specific type of man (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024; Luisi, 2022). It is a way in which men position themselves through discursive practices (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The best way to illustrate what hegemonic masculinity looks like in everyday practice is through trait-based definitions. Many definitions emphasize the following personal characteristics: aggressiveness, competitiveness, physical strength, toughness and invulnerability, emotional coolness or control, and being heterosexual (Wedgwood et al., 2023). Other popular definitions emphasize an idealized, dominant, and heterosexual masculinity that is constructed in relation to women and subordinated masculinities and restraining the flow of vulnerable emotions – in other words, remaining stoic (Morettini, 2016). Interestingly, hegemonic masculinity among teen boys may look different. Here they are more likely to display characteristics such as instrumentality and assertiveness, emotional stoicism, competition and

status seeking, aggression when threatened, physical competence and strength, sexual conquest, and avoidance of femininity (Wedgwood et al., 2023).

Men do not necessarily need to directly engage with these behaviours and attitudes to reap the benefits of hegemonic masculinity. When men receive the benefits of the patriarchy without engaging in hegemonic behaviours it is referred to as complicit masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This is a large reason as to why hegemonic masculinity is so dominant. Further, the internal and external pressures to conform and relate to this masculine dominant ideal perpetuates this gender biased hierarchy (Morrettini, 2016).

Part of what makes hegemonic masculinity so dominant is because of the collective practices of men who reinforce the hegemonic pattern (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024). What also plays a role in hegemonic masculinities dominance throughout society is the fact that it largely goes unexamined (Katz, 1999).

There is somewhat of a debate between masculinities theorists regarding whether or not violence is a direct characteristic of hegemonic masculinity or not. Jackson Katz argues that hegemonic masculinity emphasizes toughness, physical strength, respect, and admiration of others through violence and/or the threat of violence (1999). In contrast, Wedgwood and colleagues (2023) argue that what leads to violence is the tension produced by the fact that many males lived experiences fall outside of the hegemonic masculine discourse (Wedgwood et al., 2023). This phenomenon is referred to as masculine discrepancy stress (Reidy et al., 2014). Masculine discrepancy stress can arise when a man believes that he is or that he is perceived to be insufficiently masculine according to societal mandates (Reidy et al., 2014). In a study conducted by Reidy and colleagues (2014), they found that masculine discrepancy stress does in fact predict the perpetration of intimate partner violence because they are more likely to act out

in stereotypical masculine ways in order to confirm their masculinity to themselves and/or others (Reidy et al., 2014). Regardless, what is clear is that one way or another, violence is a part of hegemonic masculinity.

As previously mentioned, hegemonic masculinity is fluid and dynamic, it is a social construct and a projection, therefore, it will look different among different populations. Raewyn Connell conducted an experiment at two high schools that illustrate this point. The two schools were Milton College, a private high school for boys, and Rockwell high school, a working-class school for boys and girls (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024). At Milton College the dominant masculinity emphasized and embodied toughness, endurance, competitiveness, confrontation, and a fear of losing (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024). Whereas other masculinities that emphasized studying, non-violent games, theatricals, and debate were subordinated (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024). In contrast, at Rockwell High School hegemonic masculinity was found via resistance directed at the school. Boys would maintain anger regarding the arbitrary authority of the teachers and administrators, a gendered sense of opposition towards the school's policies, a hostile attitude directed at school authorities, and sexually exploitative relations with girls (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024). Boys who behaved in this manner would receive praise and kudos from the other boys. However, when violence got involved this praise and kudos was revoked; only a certain toughness was worthy of praise (Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2024).

Finally, hegemonic masculinity can be analyzed in more than one way; Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) identified three different levels in which hegemonic masculinity can be analyzed. First, it can be analyzed on a local level which refers to hegemonic masculinity constructed amongst face-to-face interactions of families, organizations, and immediate

communities (2005). Second, it can be analyzed on a regional level which is constructed at the cultural level and/or the nation level (2005). Third, it can be analyzed on the global level which is when hegemonic masculinity is constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and media, and global businesses (2005).

Hegemonic Masculinity in Film

A primary factory in learning ‘what it means to be a real man’ comes from various media sources such as movies, television, magazines, and social media. As prominent gender and violence researcher Jackson Katz stated, “[A] Powerful and pervasive media system that provides a steady stream of images that define manhood as connected with dominance, power, and control” (Katz, 1999, 5:40). In other words, the media constructs violent masculinity as something that is a cultural norm, an everyday occurrence even (Katz, 1999). As time has gone on, the portrayal of mens bodies had shifted to place a greater emphasis on physical strength. For example, superheroes and wrestlers’ bodies have become larger and more muscular (Katz, 1999). Additionally, the guns that are used by these dominant male characters have become and more powerful (Katz, 1999; Katz, 2013).

There are a countless number of films that perpetuate this notion of hegemonic masculinity. One example is the *Rambo* film series (1982 – 2008). From a masculinity’s perspective, this film is about the idea that if America was emasculated after the Vietnam War and that if America reasserts its masculinity everything will be fine (Katz, 1999). The film follows a man named Rambo who is the ultimate rugged individual able to take out whole armies on his own (Katz, 1999). A second film that perpetuates this notion of hegemonic masculinity is *Rocky* (1972). According to Jackson Katz, this film is a metaphor for working class men attempting to reassert their authority against recent challenges to said authority that was coming

from various civil rights movements at the time (1999). For example, when Rocky takes on Creed, a Mohammed Ali-like figure, he is also taking on everything that Mohammed Ali represented at the time; a challenge to the system of white supremacy (a key factor in hegemonic masculinity). When Rocky ultimately won the fight, he emerged as a cultural icon representing the continuation of the dominant white culture remaining on top (Katz, 1999). A third example comes from the film *Smoke Signals* (1998). There is a scene in this film where one character is explaining to another character 'how to be a real Indian'. To be a 'real Indian' you must get stoic and not show any emotion, you must look mean, or nobody will respect you, and you must look like you have just come back from killing a buffalo (Katz, 1999).

This pattern of perpetuating the notion of hegemonic masculinity in film is not only present in films made for more mature audiences but it is also present in children's films. Tim Luisi (2022) conducted a study that analyzed the framing of hegemonic masculinity in animated Disney films. His study found that four of the five films analyzed featured men displaying traits of hegemonic masculinity; those four films included *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000), *Brother Bear* (2003), and *Moana* (2016) (Luisi, 2022). In each of these films the male characters were responsible for bringing food back to their tribes whereas the female characters were not show hunting, gathering, or fishing (Luisi, 2022). Further, in both *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Moana* (2016) the male leaders are preparing their daughters to assume their duties as the leader of their respective tribes. However, the chiefs resisted any change that their daughters suggested a change in leadership style and called their daughters foolish for even thinking about it (Luisi, 2022). Regarding their physical appearance, the male characters in the four films were never shown wearing a shirt and they were depicted as extremely muscular (Luisi, 2022). The male characters were also shown performing great feats of strength that, in

reality, are nearly impossible; examples of this include physically combatting a bear, fighting a lava god, and fighting jaguars with their bare hands (Luisi, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research focuses on issues of meaning, process, and lived experience; this it is the most appropriate approach to generate thick descriptions of how correctional officers are portrayed in film. Qualitative methodologies are most appropriate to explore meaning and insight of understudied situations, to understand social lives via observation and interpretation, and to provide a detailed understanding of human behaviour, emotions, attitudes, experiences, and perspectives (Haradhan, 2018). It is fundamentally interpretive and focuses on exploring what, why, when, where, who, and how of a situation (Lim, 2024). Qualitative research prioritizes the circumstances where a phenomenon occurs and ensures that the findings are rooted in real world contexts (Lim, 2024); and it provides in-depth insights into specific contexts and captures both rich and detailed results (Haradhan, 2018; Lim, 2024). Qualitative research also provides a holistic approach, seeking to understand the phenomena in its entirety (Lim, 2024). Finally, qualitative research allows for flexibility in methodology as the data emerges itself (Lim, 2024).

Content Analysis

Qualitative methods all share a similar goal in the sense that they all attempt to achieve an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those who are experiencing it (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The specific qualitative method that this study will be using is a content analysis that relies on analyzing visual, verbal, or written content (Haradhan, 2018). More specifically, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) explain a content analysis as a “detailed and systematic examination of the content of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (as cited in Haradhan, 2018, p. 15). A content analysis is appropriate when the goal of the study is to understand the motivations behind the motivations, intentions, and/or beliefs of the source (Schulenberg, 2016).

Vaismoradi and colleagues (2013) provide a strong overview of a content analysis in their article comparing thematic analysis' and content analysis'. The aim of a content analysis is to conduct exploratory work on an unknown phenomenon (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The analysis process consists of description and interpretation, it is both inductive and deductive, there is a division of manifest and latent content, and the process itself is non-linear (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). During data collection both the manifest content and the latent content were noted and collected for analysis. Manifest content refers to what is truly said or done, it takes statements literally and is very surface level (Delve, 2022b). In contrast, latent content expands on the manifest content (Delve, 2022b). Latent content is more interpretive, it looks at the implicit meaning and what is under the surface of the statement or behaviour being looked at (Delve, 2022b). For example, if a correctional guard calls a prisoner a 'shithead', the manifest content is that the guard is calling the prisoner a crude name. Whereas the latent content is going to be more along the lines of the guard expressing his disdain for the prisoner or this is a way the guard is attempting to assert dominance over the prisoner

Sampling Strategy

To create the sample for this project a non-probability sampling strategy was used. Non-probability sampling is a branch of sampling that uses non-random ways to generate a sample (Qualtrics, 2024). This type of sampling allows for greater detail and a deeper understanding of the area of study (Qualtrics, 2024). Some other advantages of non-probability include that it can be used when there is no known sampling frame, it is a quick and financially viable sampling strategy, it does not fall subject to low response rates from participants, and the ability to connect with underrepresented or hidden populations (Qualtrics, 2024). Non-probability sampling is best used when attempting to gain the views of a niche or specific set of people based on their

location and/or characteristics (Qualtrics, 2024). Since this study is focused on films that specifically feature correctional guards, non-probability sampling is ideal for this study to ensure that all the films analyzed feature correctional guards.

There are various forms of non-probability sampling including convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling (Qualtrics, 2024). The specific method used for this study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows for the researcher to make a conscious decision regarding what the sample needs and therefore whether to include a participant (in this case film) or not (Qualtrics, 2024). When creating a sample with purposive sampling a criterion is used to dictate the relevant sources (Schulenberg, 2016).

The inclusion criteria for this study are the following:

- a) The movie must have been released in the past 30 years (1994-2024)
- b) Only relatively popular movies will be included (must be rated above 6 on IMDB)
- c) Must be a film
- d) Preferred – prison and/or correctional guards mentioned in the synopsis

The exclusion criteria for this study is the following:

- a) Films released after to 1994 and after 2024
- b) Films with a rating of 6 or less on IMDB
- c) Prison themed television shows
- d) Prison themed films that do not have a guard as a main or supporting character

Based on the above criteria and using key words such as prison, prison guards, and correctional guards across websites such as tvstuff.com, themoviedb, and IMDB, fourteen films were found that met the criteria. A key aspect in the selection of these films was that a correctional guard was mentioned in the synopsis. However, six films into the analysis

process it became evident that simply because a correctional guard was mentioned in the synopsis of the film did not mean they would be a prominent feature of the film. Due to this, an adjustment was made to the sampling process.

Once it was noted that an adjustment was needed, the trailers of the remaining films were watched and if a guard was not featured in the trailer the film was removed from the sample. After this process, three films were removed from the sample. To expand the sample the trailers from the top thirty grossing prison films were watched. After accounting for films that had already been watched and films that were too old, there was seventeen trailers to watch; of those, one film met the criteria. See *Table 1* for a list of the films included in the final sample.

Table 1 – Films Included in Research Study

Film	Brief Synopsis	Key Character(s)	Release Date	Director
The Shawshank Redemption	The main character become instrumental in the warden’s money laundering operation	Captain Hadley	1994	Frank Darabont
Sleepers	Four teenage friends are sent to reform school where they brutalized by the guards	Sean Nokes	1996	Barry Levinson
The Green Mile	Follows a death row guard who witnesses supernatural events	Paul Edgecomb & Percy Wetmore	1999	Frank Darabont
Animal Factory	Ron (a prisoner) is primed to fall victim to	Lieutenant Seeman	2000	Steve Buscemi

	bullying guards			
The Last Castle	A prisoner bears witness to injustices within the criminal justice system	Captain Peretz	2001	Rod Lurie
The Longest Yard	Disgraced pro quarterback lands in jail where the manipulative warden recruits him to advise the institutions team while corrupt officials try to fix the game	Captain Knauer	2005	Peter Segal
Felon	A prisoner suffers the wrath of the head guard	Lieutenant Jackson & Officer Collins	2008	Ric Roman Waugh
Bronson	The main character's behaviour gets him in trouble with guards, fellow prisoners, and a dog	N/A	2008	Nicolas Winding Refn
Death Race	An ex-con is forced by the warden of a notorious prison to compete in a car race to the death	N/A	2008	Paul W.S. Anderson
Escape Plan	Sadistic warden stands in the way of a prisoner trying to escape	N/A	2013	Mikael Håfström

The films must have been released in the last thirty years for a more accurate representation of how correctional guards are portrayed today. Thirty years ago, attitudes towards prisoners and the criminal justice system were likely significantly different and this may be reflected in the films. Additionally, the films must be relatively popular (indicated by a 6 or higher on IMDB) to get a fuller understanding of how larger parts of the population perceive correctional guards in popular film. Finally, prison filmed television shows are excluded from this study due to the limited time frame; to fully understand the character(s) and their behaviour, multiple seasons if not the whole series may have to be watched.

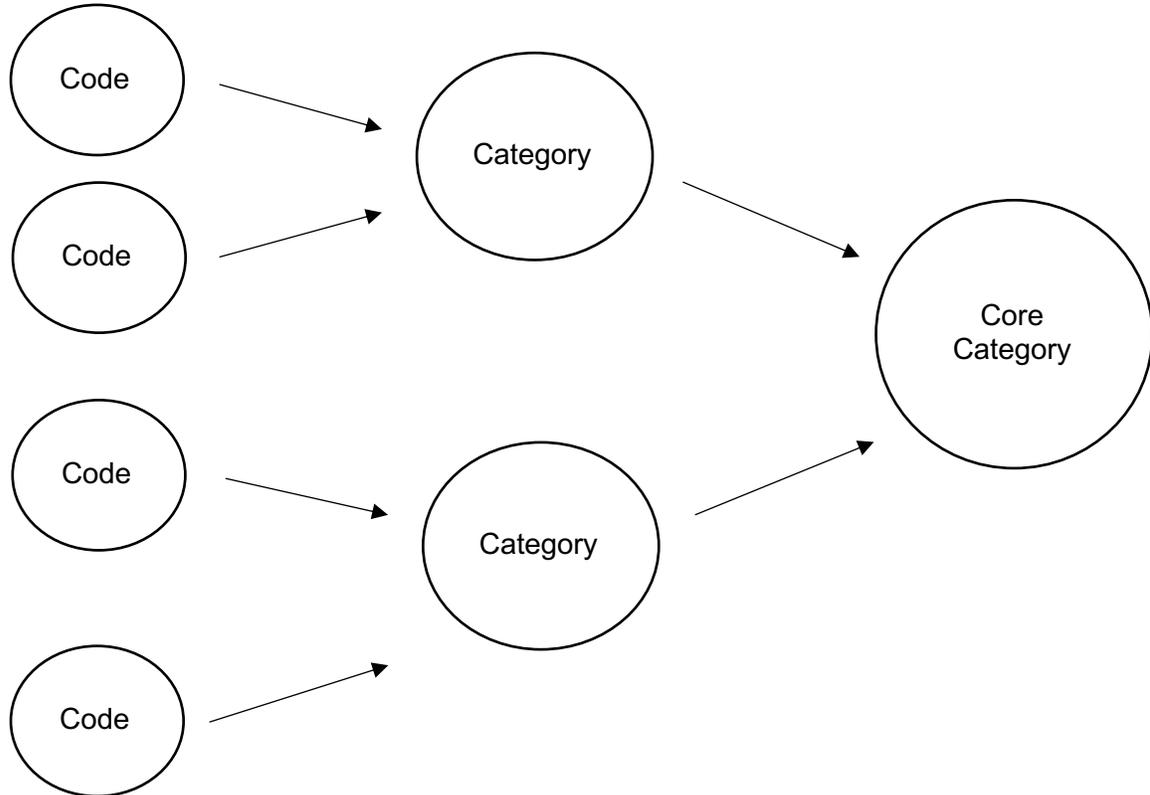
Data Collection and Analysis

Throughout each film data was collected regarding the behaviours, actions, and attitudes of the correctional guards featured. Each film was watched at least once. During analysis the subtitles were on to make sure the researcher does not mishear what the characters are saying and make it easier to pull quotes from the film. To analyze the data a three-pronged approach was used. This three-pronged approach uses open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The first step in open coding. In open coding the researcher attempts to break down the surplus of data into smaller more manageable pieces of data (Delve, 2024; Lim, 2024). To do so, the researcher reads through (in this case watch) the data carefully, you break up the data into small and meaningful segments, and then you assign it a code (Delve, 2024; Lim, 2024). The second step in the analysis process is axial coding. In axial coding the researcher begins to flesh out deeper patterns and reshaping that data in new ways to explain something new (Delve, 2024; Lim, 2024). During this step of the process the codes from the first stage are reviewed to look for connections and relationships between said codes. The codes that are deemed to be related are then placed into broader categories (Delve, 2024; Lim, 2024). This step may be challenging

because it forces the researcher to think abstractly about the data (Delve, 2024; Lim, 2024). The final step in this three-pronged process is selective coding. Selective coding is when the categories from axial coding converge around a central theme; these central themes then become the foundation of the theory and explanation (Delve, 2024; Lim, 2024). During this step the categories from axial coding are reviewed, a central category should keep appearing, then all other categories can be linked to this core category (Delve, 2024; Lim, 2024).

This type of coding is an inductive type of coding, also sometimes referred to as ground up coding (The Essential Guide to Coding Qualitative Data, 2024). With inductive coding the researcher does not start with any preconceived notions of what the codes should or could be but allow the codes to present themselves from the data (The Essential Guide to Coding Qualitative Data, 2024). See *Figure 1* for a visual representation of the above process.

Figure 1 – Ground up coding



Theoretical saturation is a concept that refers to when you reach a point in data collection where additional data does not add any new insight or theory (Delve, 2021; Lim, 2024). In this research project, theoretical saturation was reached quickly. Ten films were analyzed for this project; after about four or five films it became clear that new data was not adding more insight, only reinforcing the existing data. Themes started to emerge from the data after about four films and became redundant after about seven films. However, further sampling did end up revealing new codes. Sampling was concluded after ten films due to time constraints surrounding this project.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an approach to theory development that was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Lim, 2024). With this approach the theory emerges naturally from data collection and analysis (Delve, 2021; Lim, 2024). Grounded theory is inductive in nature because it is a process that begins with no preconceived theories but instead fosters an environment where collecting, coding, and comparing data allows researchers to make sense of what happening (Lim, 2024). Grounded theory is an iterative cycle that consists of a three-step process: data collection, coding, and comparison (Lim, 2024).

There is a plethora of benefits to using grounded theory. Some of the benefits are as follows: the study findings represent real world settings, the findings are tightly connected to the data, grounded theory is great for new discoveries, it offers new strategies for analysis, and it buffers against confirmation bias (Delve, 2021). Another benefit of grounded theory is that the data collection process and the data analysis are streamlined (Delve, 2024). In other words, as you collect data, you can analyze it, learn from it, and continue to collect data (Delve, 2024). For this project, ten films were analyzed using various coding techniques and grounded theory

methods.

Methodological Challenges

Throughout this research process I was very lucky and did not run into very many methodological challenges. The primary methodological challenge occurred when the original films selected for this research project were not providing the quality of information that was necessary. Due to this, adjustments in the sampling plan had to be made; this is discussed further above. A second, yet minor, methodological challenge was that all of the films were not on one streaming platform. The ten films were featured across four streaming platforms: YouTube, Apple TV, Amazon Prime, and Netflix. Additionally, some of the films required a fee to rent or buy the film. Another minor challenge was that in *Escape Plan* (2013) the main character is played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. The challenge here is that I found his voice to be very difficult to understand which made following parts of the film difficult. That being said, I overcame this challenge by focusing on the subtitles.

Research Ethics and Reflexivity

In qualitative research there are a plethora of ethical considerations to ensure that the rights, dignity, and the well-being of the participants is respected (Schulenberg, 2016). For example, informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical research. Informed consent ensures that the participants are aware of the research's purpose, the procedures, the potential risks and benefits, and how their data will be used (Schulenberg, 2016). A second ethical consideration is ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of participants. During the qualitative research process participants are likely to share personal and/or sensitive information pertaining to their lived experiences. It is essential that this information is not revealed in any way that could simultaneously reveal their identity (Schulenberg, 2016). Researchers must also have respect for

their participants (Schulenberg, 2016). They must value the participants perspectives, experiences, and cultural backgrounds (Schulenberg, 2016). Researchers must also use the findings in an ethical way (Schulenberg, 2016). The findings produced by the qualitative research must benefit the society and not cause harm (Schulenberg, 2016). These are not all the ethical considerations that must be made when conducting qualitative research, but they are some of the key considerations.

All that being said, most of these ethical considerations are not directly relevant to a qualitative content analysis. This project draws on publicly available content so there is not requirement by the TCPS2 to collect informed consent or conceal the names of the films. Of the ethical considerations discussed above, the only one relevant to this project is that the results must benefit society and not cause harm (Schulenberg, 2016). This study aims to demonstrate how correctional guards are portrayed in film and how that portrayal may impact who pursues the career of a correctional guard, the impact the guard's behaviour has on the prisoner's experiences in prison, and what can be learned from popular film about the dynamics of media, power, and masculinities.

Though this study did not involve human participants, reflecting on ethics and methodology is an important part of any qualitative process. Reflexivity is a process in qualitative research where the researcher examines their own judgements, assumptions, practices, and beliefs during data analysis (Delve, 2022). The primary goal of this process is to be aware of biases and how those may influence the results of the study (Delve, 2022). If these biases are not checked they may affect the way the data is collected, choice in data collection methods, how the data is analyzed, and how the data is reported (Delve, 2022). There are various forms of reflexivity but the two that are most relevant to this project include personal reflexivity

and emotional reflexivity.

Personal reflexivity refers to the process of reflecting on your values, life experiences, and beliefs (Delve, 2022). I was lucky enough to do my practicum experience in a Canadian federal prison. During this time, I interacted with correctional guards daily, thus, leading me to form my own opinion on the attitudes and behaviours of correctional guards. Since this project is centered around the portrayal of correctional guards in film, I had to do my best to set aside my own beliefs and perceptions surrounding correctional guards and make note of everything being portrayed – good and bad. There was one instance where I was unable to put my knowledge and opinions aside, but it did not exactly pertain to correctional guards. During *The Last Castle* (2001) the prisoner attempted to take over the prison from the corrupt warden. To do so they had made hundreds of shields out of baking sheets and a large catapult on wheels from spare wood and parts around the institution. Due to my practicum experience, I immediately thought about how inaccurate this is. I thought the chances of the prisoners being able to make and hide these objects was very low.

Emotional reflexivity refers to the process of reflecting on the feelings, moods, and emotions that come up during data collection and data analysis (Delve, 2022). Watching ten prison films in the span of a few months did bring up some strong and negative emotions for me. For example, in *The Green Mile* (1999) three prisoners were executed via the electric chair which was difficult to watch. During these scenes I had to close my eyes and cover my ears, luckily, I was watching with a friend who could inform me when those scenes were over. Further, one film featured multiple rape scenes which pulled at my heart strings and made me want to look away. Finally, a lot of racist and homophobic language was used throughout all ten films which also made me uncomfortable.

Some time and effort was also put into the decision what term to use when describing incarcerated people. The debate was around using the term offender, prisoner, or prisoner; ultimately, the term prisoner was chosen. The term 'offender' was not used because they are not offensive. They may have previously engaged in an offensive act, but as a whole, the individual's existence is not offensive. The term 'prisoner' was not chosen because it is associated with negative stereotypes, and I do not want to perpetuate those with this project. While there is still room for improvement, the term 'prisoner' was selected because it describes the individual's current state; they are in prison.

RESULTS

Broadly speaking, in the ten films that were analyzed correctional guards were portrayed as violent, aggressive, and controlling men. Emphasis should be placed on the fact that they were all portrayed as men as none of the films featured a woman in the role of a correctional guard. Further, the guards were primarily Caucasian followed by Latino and African American. Through the analysis process three major themes emerged: wasting time, overt violence and control, covert violence and control, and resistance to normalized patterns of violence.

Complacent Perpetuants

Wasting time

Throughout some of the film's the guards were seen wasting time and engaging in what some may call extracurricular activities while on the job instead of doing the duties expected of a correctional guard. For example, in *The Green Mile* (1999) the group of guards spend roughly ten minutes looking for a mouse that had been roaming around the unit. Further, Percy (another guard) was shown hiding in an office reading a pornographic comic while on shift. Most of the time-wasting behaviour was featured in the film *Escape Plan* (2013). *Escape Plan* (2013) follows a man who gets hired by prisons to go undercover as a prisoner and attempts to break out to test the security at the institution; after he escapes, he will give a report to warden about where the institution needs strengthening. While giving his report to the warden of an institution he escaped from, he said there was "seven minutes a day there were no eyes on me" (Håfström, 2013, 12:10) and "I know what the guys on the roof were still doing what they do, which is wasting time" (Håfström, 2013, 13:47). Shortly after, the guards are shown going up to the roof for a smoke break leaving the prisoners unattended. Further, instead of monitoring the cell block, the guards were shown flipping through magazines.

Inaction and Laziness

Inaction and laziness in this context differ slightly from wasting time. Laziness refers to the guards intentionally not doing something they're supposed to be doing. For example, in *Animal Factory* (2000) a guard told a prisoner to leave certain information off an official report because he did not want the headache that would come with the truth. Also, in *Animal Factory* (2000), when two prisoners were planning an escape one prisoner said to the other "the other thing we have going for us is nobody's tried it for a couple of years which means security gets a little lax" (Buscemi, 2000, 1:09:00).

Indirect Violence and Control

Abuse of Power

Much of the behaviour outlined above is an abuse of power. However, this subtheme refers to correctional guards abusing any potential connections they may have to get their way. For example, in *The Green Mile* (1999) Percy attempts to control and blackmail the lead guard by threatening to call his uncle who happens to be the Governor. In comparison, the Lieutenant in *Felon* (2008) abuses his power in a much different way. In this film, the Lieutenant abuses his authority to add time to a prisoner's sentence. The lieutenant and the prisoner, Wade, did not have a good relationship; the lieutenant's dislike for Wade got so strong that he told the courts that Wade was an accessory to the murder of another prisoner when Wade wasn't involved at all. As a result, Wade got six years added onto his sentence. The same Lieutenant also stated later in the film, "if I have to take out one of these assholes myself... We write it off that we stopped a riot" (Waugh, 2008, 1:27:00). This illustrates that he knows he can manipulate the narrative of a situation and he will be believed over the prisoners because of his authority and power. Another example of the guards in *Felon* (2008) abusing their power was evident in a conversation

between two guards. The conversation below illustrates that the lieutenant believes he can do no wrong because nobody is watching them or checking in on them. The conversation was as follows (58:13):

Guard: “You know, I was thinking we should cool it for a while”
 Lieutenant: “Cool what?”
 Guard: “You know, stick to CDC policy. Do it by the books just for a while”
 Lieutenant: “That bureaucratic bullshit does not work. You know this. You of all people should know this”
 Guard: “Just those fucking yard cameras, they pick up everything. All it takes is for one person to get a hold – “
 Lieutenant: “Those cameras are there to police ourselves. Aint nobody checking nothing. Nothing”

Name Calling and Bullying

Name calling was very prevalent throughout these then films and is important to make note of because the names the guards call the prisoners are indicative of how they view the prisoners. See *table 4* for an overview of the types of name calling that was used.

Table 2 – Type of Name Calling and Frequency

Type of Name Calling	Number of Occurrences
With profanity	10
General	5
Dehumanizing	3
Racist	2
Animalistic	1

Example of name calling with profanity include ‘dumb shits’, ‘piece of shit’, ‘ass wipe’, ‘super dick’, ‘asshole’, ‘wiseass’ ‘motherfucker’, ‘fuck stick’, and ‘fucking assholes. In contrast, examples of general name calling include ‘sorry sucker’, ‘scumbag’, and ‘clowns.

The remaining three types of name calling were used significantly less frequently. Racist

name calling refers to when a derogatory term such as the N- word is used to describe African Americans which occurred in *The Longest Yard* (2005), *Animal factory* (2000), and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994). In contrast, dehumanizing name called refers to when guards call a prisoner a derogatory and homophobic term like the F-slur which occurred in *The Green Mile* (1999) or when the guards would speak about the prisoners or the prison in manner where they were belittled. For example, at various points during *The Green Mile* (1999) Percy called the prison both a 'cradle school' and a 'bucket of piss'. Finally, animalistic name calling refers to when the prisoners or a single prisoner are called animals which occurred in *The Longest Yard* (2005).

Not only would the guards call the prisoners names and threaten them, but they would also bully the prisoners as another means to assert their dominance and attempt to exert control over them. In this context, bullying refers to anything that is not direct violence, name calling, or a threat but where the guards are still picking on the prisoners and/or treating them unfairly. This theme was not overly present during analysis but nonetheless present and important to the overall portrayal of correctional guards.

The Longest Yard (2005) featured the most bullying of the films. In this film the guards see that the prisoner football team has been practicing and getting good; this makes the guards feel threatened, so they decide to flood the field that the prisoners have been using to practice so they can't anymore. Additionally, the guards pick on the most valuable player on the prisoner's team in attempt to bate him into doing something they can punish him for so he can no longer play on the team. *Sleepers* (1996) also features more bullying than the other films. In this film, officer Nokes forces the boys to eat their lunches off the floor after a fight breaks out and they dropped their trays. Officer Nokes also waved one a letter containing release date information in

front of the boy's face and tore it up, not giving the boy a chance to read the letter.

Some other more one-off acts of bullying include Percy from *The Green Mile* (1999) killing one of the prisoner's pet mouse in front of him. In *Felon* (2008) the infamous Lieutenant confiscated family photos from a prisoner who had been transferred to the institution because the Lieutenant didn't like him (2008). Finally, in *Animal Factory* (2000), a guard said to a prisoner "shut up, Earl. No talking" (Buscemi, 2000, 20:31). What makes this bullying is that Earl hadn't been speaking prior to this demand.

Threats of Violence

In these films, threats were another common way the guards would try and assert their dominance and control over the prisoners. There were various types of threats that were used by the guards. These include threats of violence, death threats, threats of sexual violence, and other. The 'other' category refers to types of threats that do not fit into either of the previous categories.

The most common type of threat used was threats of violence. Some examples include a guard threatening to 'thump skull' a prisoner (to thump skull someone is to hit or punch them in the head). Two of the violence threats came from the Lieutenant in *Felon* (2008). He was speaking to one specific prisoner, but the threats were being made as a broad blanket statement. He said "I don't succumb to pressure. I inflict it" (Waugh, 2008, 1:08:10) while holding an electric baton to a prisoner's groin and "I guess I gotta put a little more fear in you motherfuckers" (Waugh, 2008, 1:08:20). Further, when the prisoners arrived at the prison in *Felon* (2008) a guard told them to "stay down stay quiet or I'll CN gas the whole fucking bus. Let you choke on it" (Waugh, 2008, 21:00).

The broader and more general category of threats includes threats such as "your time here will be a whole lot easier is you just participate" (Segal, 2005, 13:52). This was in reference to a

prisoner being coerced into helping the prison staff football team. As well as “you pull any shit in my house and I will show you what true fucking vengeance is” (Waugh, 2008, 37:36). The final “general” threat was “son of a bitch. I will put you in the hole [segregation] till you’re fucking an old man” (Waugh, 2008, 23:03).

The final two types of threats that were featured in these films were death threats and threats of sexual violence, both of which were found in the film *Sleepers* (1996). The death threat took place during a prisoner versus guard football game when officer Nokes said “you’re gonna die motherfucker. You’re gonna fucking die” (Levinson, 1996, 52:30). Later during the film another guard tells one of the boys to “We don’t hear no praying. You better start or Styler might lose his baton up your ass” (Levinson, 1996, 1:29:56).

Promoting Violence

Correctional guards would both directly and indirectly encourage violence between prisoners. For example, in *The Last Castle* (2001) there was a fight in the yard and the guards watched the prisoners fight from above and did not do anything to break up the fight. This was also present in *Felon* (2008). However, in this film, that guards intervened when the fight was over. Additionally, in the film *Felon* (Waugh, 2008) the Lieutenant actively prevented a newer guard from trying to break-up a fight between prisoners. The same Lieutenant told a prisoner–Wade - that he must start a fight and that the fight must “go all the way” (Waugh, 2008, 1:22:00). In other words, the Lieutenant is telling Wade that if he’s going to fight, he must kill the other prisoner. Further, at one point when the guards in *Felon* (2008) were placing bets on who would win the fight between two prisoners.

Explicit Violence and Control

Weapons

All ten films that were watched and analyzed featured weapons of various kind. Twelve different types of weapons were featured. Batons were featured most appearing in seven films followed by various types of guns which appeared in five of the films. The third most common weapon used was a pellet gun followed by knives and water cannons. Other weapons that were only featured once include: an electric baton, a smoke bomb, a taser, a hornet's nest, and drugs. Given the nature of this project, it is important to note that all of these weapons were used against the prisoners as a means of gaining control of prisoners, beating on a prisoner, or threatening a prisoner. For example, in the film *The Last Castle* (2001) prisoners in the yard are sprayed with a pressurized water cannon because they are suspected of helping another prisoner take someone hostage. A second example comes from the film *Felon* (2008). Here, Lieutenant Jackson holds an electric baton to Wade's (the main character) groin after already having been shot with a pellet gun multiple times for not following an order to fight another prisoner.

Table 3 – Weapons used and their frequency of appearance

Weapon	Number of features	Films Featured In
Baton	8	<i>Felon, Escape Plan, Animal Factory, The Longest Yard, The Green Mile, The Last Castle, Sleepers, Death Race</i>
Gun(s)	6	<i>Felon, Escape Plan, Animal Factory, The Longest Yard, The Last Castle, Death Race</i>
Pellet Gun	3	<i>Felon, Escape Plan, The Last Castle</i>
Water Cannon	3	<i>The Green Mile, The Last Castle, Death Race</i>
Knife	2	<i>Felon, Escape Plan</i>

Taser	1	<i>Escape Plan</i>
Smoke Bomb	1	<i>Escape Plan</i>
Hornets' Nest	1	<i>The Longest Yard</i>
Electric Baton	1	<i>Felon</i>
Drugs	1	<i>The Green Mile</i>
Taser Gun	1	<i>Death Race</i>
Bomb	1	<i>Death Race</i>

Physical and Sexual Violence

Physical violence instigated by a correctional guard was by far the most prominent theme that emerged during analysis. See *table 3* below for a brief summary of the types of violence portrayed and how many times each type of violence occurred.

Table 4 – Types of Violence and Frequency

Type of Violence	Number of Occurrences
Hit or beaten with a baton	8
Physically beaten by a guard	7
Thrown around and/or handled aggressively	3
Sprayed with a water cannon or hose	3
Shot with a pellet gun	3
Shot with a real bullet	2
Shocked using an electric baton	1
Pushed down the stairs	1
Guard intentionally scared a prisoner so he would fall	1
Attempted to push a prisoner off the roof	1
Shocked with a taser gun	1

Of these violent incidences, some of them were more violent natured than others. For example, in *Felon* (2008) the prisoners in the yard get into a fight, while they are fighting the guards stand by and watch. After the fight is over, the guards use pellet guns to shoot the

instigating prisoners in the shins as a punishment (2008). Also, in *Felon* (2008) a prisoner is shot by the Lieutenant multiple times with a pellet gun because he did not follow the Lieutenants order to start a fight in the yard.

In *The Longest Yard* (2005) what makes some of the violence more interesting is the hypocrisy behind it. When the main character Paul, a former NFL player, arrives at the prison he is taken directly to the warden's office. Before entering the office, the captain tells Paul that he must reject the warden's offer to help the staff football team, when Paul attempts to question this and speak up, the captain punches and kicks Paul in the groin and torso (2005). When they enter the warden's office and the warden asks Paul to help the staff football team and he says no, the captain beats Paul with a baton for rejecting the warden.

The Last Castle (2001) also featured a significant amount of violence. Prisoner Irwin upset the guards when he attempted to intervene with another prisoner's punishment by reminding him that the horn has sounded, and his horn-to-horn punishment is over. To teach Irwin a lesson, the guards hit him with their batons, including a hard whack to the head. Additionally, they push a prisoner down a flight of stairs for not complying with the warden's orders to snitch on his fellow prisoners. Finally, when there is a potential hostage taking, all of the prisoners in the yard (who are unlikely to be involved) are sprayed with a pressurized water cannon that knocks them over and temporarily immobilizes them.

Sleepers (1996) was also a particularly overtly violent film. For instance, when the boys are ordered to eat their lunches off the ground and one of the boys objected, he was hit in the chest and knee with Officer Nokes' baton. When the boys begin to eat their lunches off the floor, Officer Nokes kicks one of them in the stomach.

Two of the films in this analysis did not feature the guards much at all; those two films

were *Bronson* (2008) and *Death Race* (2008). That being said, when the guards were featured in these films they were engaging in violent behaviours. For example, in *Bronson* (2008), there was at least five instances of the guards engaging in violence with a prisoner and they were rarely featured otherwise. In the film *Death Race* (2008), the guards were featured even less and there were about two instances of violence instigated by one of the guards.

Sexual violence was only featured in one film, but in that one film it was featured frequently and important to the plot; that film was *Sleepers* (1996). *Sleepers* (1996) follows four young boys, Shakes, Michael, John, and Tommy, who are sent to The Wilkinson Home for Boys after a prank went wrong, during their time they are brutalized by the guards. Very quickly into the boy's time at the detention center, we learn that this "brutalization" includes sexual violence at the hands of the guards. There is one scene where a group of guards take the boys from their respective rooms to an unused part of the detention center. When they arrive not only are the boys beat with batons, but they are forced to give the guards oral sex. In another scene shortly thereafter, a guard was seen leaving John's room with his shirt unbuttoned and his tie undone. During this scene Shakes was speaking via voice over and said:

"The sounds of pained anguish. Those cries can change the course of a life. They are cries that once heard can never be erased from memory. On this one night, those cries belonged to my friend John when Ralph Ferguson paid him a visit" (Levinson, 1996, 47:47).

This scene and the voiceover taken together insinuate that John (one of the young boys) was sexually assaulted by Ralph Ferguson (one of the guards). Later, the four boys are sitting together discussing what they have been through when John says, "I want to be able to sleep one night and not have to worry who's coming in my room, what's going to happen to me" (Levinson, 1996, 57:40). This also insinuates that the boys are sexually assaulted by the guards in their rooms.

Sadistic Displays of Power

The theme of sadistic behaviour was another one of the more prominent themes that came out through analysis. For this analysis, sadistic behaviour refers to any behaviour where the correctional guard clearly enjoying hurting and/or humiliating another human being (McCarthy-Jones, 2020). Sadistic behaviour was present in five of the films.

In *The Green Mile* (1999) the sadistic behaviour comes at the hands of Percy, a low-level guard on death row. Arguably, the most sadistic thing that Percy did during the film was leaving the sponge dry during an execution which caused the execution to be significantly more painful for the prisoner. Percy chose to do this because that prisoner had previously embarrassed Percy. Percy's second act of sadistic behaviour was also related to the execution of a prisoner. After the execution of another prisoner Percy leans into whisper "Adios, chief. Drop us a card from hell. Let us know if it's hot enough" (Darabont, 1999, 45:59).

In *The Last Castle* (2001) the sadistic behaviour comes at the hands of various guards in the institution. For instance, two of the prisoners are forced to participate in something called horn-to-horn punishment where they must engage in the same task from the morning horn to the evening horn (or vice versa). In one instance, a prisoner – Aguilar – was forced to stand outside overnight during a rainstorm while saluting the whole time for breaking a prison rule. In the second instance, a prisoner – Irwin – was forced to move large rocks from one end of the yard to the other in the sweltering heat, even after he was tripped and hit his head. Also in the film, the prisoners were speaking about multiple instances where the guards have intentionally shot prisoners in the head with rubber bullets leading to their deaths. It was explained to a newer inmate that "twice in the last year there've been accidents where men have been hit in the head at killed. Nothing can be proven" (Lurie, 2001, 21:50). Finally, near the end of the film during a

large fight scene one of the guards in the watch tower opts to switch out the rubber bullets for real bullets and says, “to hell with this rubber bullet shit” (Lurie, 2001, 1:52:25).

Similar to *The Green Mile* (1999), in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), all of the sadistic acts and behaviour comes at the hands of one guard. Early on in the film the head guard, Mr. Hadley, becomes frustrated with a new prisoner who was crying in his cell, so he beat the prisoner so bad that he died from his injuries. Later in the film Mr. Hadley severely beats up a second prisoner for picking on another prisoner. The prisoner was beaten up so badly that he never walked again and had to eat through a straw. Finally, Mr. Hadley and the warden killed a newer prisoner because he knew that Andy – a prisoner who was doing taxes for all the guards – was wrongfully convicted. The motivation for this was to keep Andy in prison and continue using his banking knowledge.

In one of the more sadistic films – *Escape Plan* (2013) – there was multiple instances of guards killing prisoners and torturing them. For example, a secondary character tells Portos (the main character) that, “the last guy they killed, they let his body rot for three days” (Håfström, 2013, 32:57). A prisoner was also tortured in hopes of breaking him down to snitch on another prisoner. Their torture techniques included tasing the prisoner in the heart and waterboarding him. Further, when prisoners are thrown in “the hole” or segregation, bright lights are shone directly at them causing them to be incredibly uncomfortable and sweat profusely.

The film *Sleepers* (1996) was also quite sadistic in nature. Not only did it feature multiple instances of sexual assault, but it also featured severe violence. For example, after a prisoner versus guards’ football game Shakes (one of the four boys) was beaten so badly his face was bruised, his eyes were swollen shut, and he fell into a coma. Also, as a result of the football game, the guards beat another prisoner to death. This was the conversation between two of the

boys when Shakes awoke from his coma:

Michael: “They’re alive” [their two friends they entered the detention center with]

Shakes: “Who isn’t”

Michael: “Rizzo”

Shakes: “They killed him?”

Michael: “They took turns beatin’ him until there was nothing to that kid to beat” (55:50)

The last film that featured sadistic behaviour was *The Longest Yard* (Segal, 2005). In this film there was only one instance of sadistic behaviour, but it is still very much relevant. During a fight in the cafeteria a guard attempts to break up the fight by throwing a hornet’s nest at the prisoners (Segal, 2005). A hornet’s nest is a grenade like weapon that is filled with tiny rubber pellets used to break up riots (Did You Catch This?, 2024). What makes this a sadistic act was the wide grin the guard had on his face when preparing to throw the weapon.

Hierarchies of Power and Resistance

Questioning the Higher Authorities

Challenging the routine behavior refers to any time that a lower-level guard who normally follows direct orders from a guard who holds a higher position than them or the warden acts against said order. For example, in *The Last Castle* (2001) the warden is unhappy with the prisoner’s behaviour and orders the captain to call lunch early; in response, the captain questions the warden because it is out of the ordinary. While this is a small gesture by the captain, it gives the viewers a glimpse into his true morals. Much later in the film when all of the prisoners are attempting to take over the prison, a team that resembles the SWAT team arrives and they are ordered by the warden to shoot a specific prisoner – Wade; they all refuse comply with the order. Immediately after this the warden ordered the captain to shoot Wade and he also refused to comply with the order. Earlier in the film, the captain had attempted to stop a group of guards from beating up a prisoner but was unsuccessful.

In *The Longest Yard* (2005) the captain who was particularly rude and violent throughout the film acted against his typical behaviour near the end of the film. The warden had previously threatened a prisoner with adding time to his sentence for being an accessory to the murder of another prisoner (which he didn't do). The captain approached this prisoner and told him that he knew this wasn't true and if need were, he would stand up in court and say so.

Majority of the acts of resistance came from one specific guard in the film *Felon* (2008). This guard was a new guard, he was immediately thrown into the depths of this violent natured institution, however, he did not conform with the routine violence. During the film, this guard tells Wade to keep an eye out during yard time, he gave Wade extra time during visitation because he knew how horribly Wade had been treated and turned the cameras back on after the Lieutenant had turned them off before he went to attack Wade in the yard. A secondary guard in this film also challenged the routine behaviour of the guards. This guard normally complied with the Lieutenant's orders and behaviour, however, there was a point in the film where this guard stopped the Lieutenant from shooting a prisoner.

In *Animal Factory* (2000) there were multiple instances of the Lieutenant challenging his own routine behaviour. Some examples of this include offering to let Earl (a long-time prisoner) out early after a lockdown, bringing him cigarettes in segregation, visiting and chatting with him multiple times in segregation, and saying to another prisoner "I just don't wanna see Earl blow a chance at parole over some beef that involves you" (Buscemi, 2000, 30:17).

Another challenge to the routine behaviour came from Captain Peretz from *The Last Castle* (2001). The captain politely reminded a prisoner to remove his hands from his pockets when speaking to the warden by gently tapping his arms. What makes this a challenge of the routine behaviour is that prior to this the captain had normally followed orders and acted in line

with the warden's behaviour, but this time he actively prevented a prisoner from getting in trouble. Additionally, other guards featured in this film may not have done the same thing.

Finally, in the film *Sleepers* (Levinson, 1996) there was a guard who stepped in and stood up for the young boys after officer Nokes made them eat their lunch off the ground, however he was never featured in the film again.

Respect and Care for Prisoners

Majority of the data above paints a dark and gloomy picture of correctional guards in popular film. However, all hope is not lost. In *The Green Mile* (1999), all of the guards except Percy treated the prisoners with respect. For example, Paul – the main/head guard – takes time out of his day to chat with the prisoners and listen to their stories, he saw them for more than the crimes they committed, he brought homemade cornbread for the prisoners, he did not tolerate the racist treatment of any of the prisoners, and he offered to take care of a prisoner's pet mouse after his execution. Additionally, when it came time to execute John – a prisoner – Paul and the other guards shook his hand which they had not done with any other prisoner. Finally, when preparing for John's execution he asked not to be covered during the process because he is afraid of the dark; the guards granted him this wish even though it is not standard protocol. While this behaviour does not challenge that structural violence present in the film, it is important to note that guard's behaviour is not 100% negative.

Just like some guards displayed disrespect for their job, some guards showed that they really respected their job and their responsibility as a correctional guard. For example, Paul from *The Green Mile* (1999) said that considered the prison an intensive care ward rather than a prison or a place of punishment. He also explained to Percy that their job is to speak with the prisoners gently, not to yell at them.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The data suggest significant occurrences of routine violence that can be categorized in three ways: complicit violence, indirect violence and control, and explicit violence and control. Explicit or active violence includes correctional guards being portrayed enacting overt violence such as beating prisoners with a baton, shooting prisoners with a gun, pushing prisoners down the stairs and so forth. Many instances of violence had sadistic undertones including examples of guards' nit wetting a sponge before an execution. Acts of indirect violence is slightly more passive and includes guards frequently threatening prisoners with violence and calling the prisoners names such as 'super dick', 'asshole', 'sorry sucker', and referring to prisoners using racial slurs. The third category of violence may be referred to as complicit Perpetuants of violence – which includes inactions such as unwillingness to fill out paperwork or report abuses by staff or outright wasting time that could be spent addressing some of the abuses that prisoners are subjected to in these films. The inactive and outwardly non-violent, complicit violence contributes to a hierarchy among prison staff that permits and perpetuates violence against prisoners in these films. The data also suggests some small gestures of resistance to the social hierarchy of prison guards – a few characters were shown treating prisoners with a small amount of kindness and respect such as bringing baked goods for the prisoners and listening to their stories. However, these characters were only featured minimally throughout their respective films.

The analysis of these data was guided by the following question: How are correctional guards portrayed in popular film? The data suggest that the answer to this question is that for the most part, correctional guards are presented in ways that are masculine codes and feature the most problematic aspects of the normalization of violent masculinity: control, dominance,

brutality, and sadism. These characteristics were presented as inherent to both the nature of a correctional officer's job and to the individual men in the role of the correctional officer. Yet, it would be a mistake to think about this phenomenon in individual terms – but rather, what the portrayal of correctional officers in film reveals about how prisoners are constructed in popular criminological content – and how we might understand this as contextualized by a broader social and cultural context that normalizes violent masculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity and The Portrayal of Correctional Guards

Hegemonic masculinity is a form of masculinity that characterizes certain traits and characteristics such as aggression, competition, physical strength, emotional coolness, control, being heterosexual, and the domination of others through violence or the threat of violence (Wedgwood et al., 2023 & Morettini, 2016; Katz, 1999). At the heart of hegemonic masculinity is asserting dominance over others, the ways in which this is done is dependent on the person and the setting. The ways in which correctional guards in these films embody the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. First and foremost, all nine key correctional guards as well as all of the secondary correctional guards portrayed in the ten films analyzed in this study are men. Additionally, in half of the films all the guards were Caucasian, followed by Latino/Hispanic, and a few African American guards. Many of the films used derogatory terms when describing African American people. A final thing to note regarding the portrayal of race in these films is that in the one film where an African American male is the head guards, he is labelled as sadistic in the synopsis due to his behaviour whereas Caucasian guards engaging in the same behaviour were not.

Control

Much of the guard's behaviour can be seen as an attempt to influence or change the

prisoner's behaviour; the guards portrayed in the ten films attempted to exert control over the prisoners in numerous ways. For example, in several the films, *Escape Plan* (2013), *Animal Factory* (2000), *The Longest Yard* (2005), and *Felon* (2008), the guards nearly always have some type of gun on their person. This ensures that the prisoners have a constant physical reminder of who is in charge and the harm the guards could inflict in moment's notice. Another act that conveys a similar message is when the guards in *Escape Plan* (2013) kill a prisoner and let his body rot on the prison floor for three days. One can infer that the guards did this as another show of 'hey, if you screw around, this is what will happen to you'. Some other attempts to control and influence the behaviour of the prisoners include telling the prisoners that breathing is a privilege and placing a prisoner in a strait jacket. During *The Last Castle* (2001) one of the guards emphasized the importance of having physical control over the prisoners by stating "He [a prisoner] can have them by their hearts and minds, sir. As long as we got 'em by the balls" (Lurie, 2001, 53:16).

Throughout the films there was also some obscure examples of the guards displaying their control. For example, in *The Last Castle* (2001), two prisoners were forced to engage in horn-to-horn punishment where they must engage in the same action for twelve hours while the guards stood back and watched. Instead of giving these prisoners a one and done style of punishment, they prolonged the punishment for their sadistic enjoyment and search for power. There was also an instance of a lower-level guard attempting to assert control over another guard – who happened to also be his boss. Percy, a lower-level guard featured in *The Green Mile* (1999), threatened to call his uncle, the governor, in an attempt to blackmail his boss.

Aggression and Physical Strength

Males who display hegemonic masculinity will also use brute strength and aggressive

behaviours in attempt to assert their dominance over others. Much of this aggressive behaviour was displayed through routine beatings from the guards across the films. For example, a guard beat up a prisoner laying defenseless on the ground, a prisoner is severely beaten for crying in his cell, a prisoner is beaten up for asking the guard questions, that same prisoner is beaten up for rejecting a guard's 'offer' to assist with the correctional guards' football team, prisoners are regularly hit with batons, they are tossed around, and one prisoner is pushed down the stairs. There was also a plethora of more severe displays of physical strength and aggression. For example, in *Felon* (2008), the lieutenant shoots a prisoner with a pellet gun roughly four or five times for choosing to not engage in a fight in the yard. This illustrates to that prisoner and all other prisoners who were a witness to this, if you do not comply with the lieutenant orders, you will be punished. Other examples include beating a prisoner so bad he becomes paralysed, shooting at prisoners after a whistle to break up a fight, and switching from rubber bullets to real bullets with the intent to injure prisoners for attempting to resist the guards' abuse.

Along with actual displays of aggression and physical strength, there was also threats of aggressive behaviour in attempt to control and dominate the prisoners. For example, upon arrival to the prison a group of prisoners was told to "Stay down and stay quite or I'll CN gas the whole fucking bus. Let you choke on it" (Waugh, 2008, 21:00). In the same film, the lieutenant told a prisoner "Pull any shit in my house and I will show you what true fucking vengeance is" (Waugh, 2008, 37:36). Not only is this a threat to use physical violence to control the prisoner's behaviour, but the guard is also positioning himself significantly higher on the hierarchy of men by claiming that the prison his 'his house' and 'his territory'.

Arguably the most severe example of control through aggression and physical strength comes from the film *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994). In this film the main character, Andy,

is a wrongfully convicted banker who helps the guards with their taxes and other financial issues. When a new prisoner arrives at the prison taking about Andy's innocence and who actually committed the crime, the warden and a guard killed this prisoner so they could keep Andy in prison and continue to use him. This is undoubtedly an overt aggressive tactic to control the livelihood of another human.

Asserting Dominance

Throughout the films there were other more subtle ways that the correctional guards would attempt to assert their dominance over the prisoners in the prison social hierarchy. The guards in all of the films engaged in a significant amount of name calling. Prisoners were called 'super dick', 'clowns', 'assholes', 'animals', racial slurs, and homophobic slurs. By calling the prisoners names other than their own, the guards are perpetuating the notion that prisoners fall at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy and that the guards are at the top. Further, the guards tended to boss the prisoners around in rude and verbally aggressive ways. For instance, the guards would tell prisoners to 'shut up' or 'move it' instead of a more polite statement that conveys the same message. Finally, there were multiple instances where multiple guards would come to deal with a singular prisoner. By doing this, the guards are taking advantage of the power in numbers to make the prisoner feel small and less than. Also, important to note that by using homophobic slurs the guards are perpetuating the aspect of hegemonic masculinity that emphasizes heterosexuality as a key part of being a man.

Complacency

As previously discussed, one does not necessarily have to engage in the stereotypical behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity to reap the benefits. This is called complacency or complacent masculinity. A handful of the guards portrayed in these films did

engage in this complacent masculinity. For example, during *The Longest Yard* (2005), a fellow guard sees his captain beating up a prisoner, laughs, and walks away. He does not engage in the direct act of violence, but he does not do anything to stop it knowing that he will also benefit from the prisoner fearing being beaten up again. Further, during many of the fights between prisoners the guards would simply sit back and watch them fight allowing the prisoners to also engage in hegemonic masculinity. The largest act of complacency came from Captain Peretz from *The Last Castle* (2001). Based on some of his actions it is clear that Captain Peretz does not wholly agree with the way the warden run the institution. However, he still followed the warden's orders, he still watched the prisoners fight without intervening and he still hurt the prisoners. While this is a different type of complacency than discussed above, it is still complacency because Captain Peretz is not acting in accordance with his own values but with the values of someone who holds a hire spot on the institutional hierarchy.

Competitiveness

Competitiveness was not very common amongst the ten films but nonetheless still present. There was one film that did feature some competitiveness on behalf of the guards. In *The Longest Yard* (2005) the guards and the prisoners are set to play a football game, when the guards see that the prisoner team is getting good, they start to engage in competitive behaviours. For example, the guards used another prisoner to spy on the prisoner team to gain intel regarding their plays and who their star players may be. Once they determine who the star player is, some of the guards find him and pick on him so they can punish him. Further, when the guards feel that the prisoner team is getting too good, they flood the field they were using to practice. All of this is done because the guards are feeling threatened and needed to secure their spot at the top of the hierarchy.

As illustrated above, majority of the guards portrayed throughout the ten films engage in characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. For example, a plethora of guards attempted to assert their dominance over the prisoners by engaging in name calling. Above all else the guards display their aggression and physical strength in attempt to assert their dominance over the prisoners. Analyzing the correctional guard's behaviour in this manner illustrates that this behaviour is not a characteristic of correctional guards or the role they occupy, rather it is characteristics of the individuals who are attracted this job.

Correctional Officer 'Punisher' Masculinity

The data present are consistent with some of the typologies of correctional officers presented by Ricciardelli (2016) briefly discussed earlier. As previously discussed, the study found six typologies of correctional guards: the harmony persuasion guards, the security persuasion guards, the harmonious dualist, the security dualist, the punisher, and the moral relativist (Ricciardelli, 2016).

The harmony persuasion guard strives for harmony through positive interactions with prisoners. They treat prisoners with dignity, honesty, they avoid physical violence, the avoid verbal slandering, and they act consistently (Ricciardelli, 2016). These guards understand that the prisoners are people first and criminals second and they provide prisoners with the access to the goods and services that they are entitled to (Ricciardelli, 2016). In contrast, there is the security persuasion guards. These guards strictly adhere to the rules and disallow their personal insights to influence how order is enforced (Ricciardelli, 2016). These guards are solely focused on a safe and stable penal environment (Ricciardelli, 2016).

The next typology of guards is the harmonious dualists. These guards are persuaded towards harmony over security (Ricciardelli, 2016). They are motivated by fairness but also

consider the unique experiences of each prisoner and may make exceptions in rule enforcement (Ricciardelli, 2016). There are two types of harmonious dualists: the moral dualists and the idealists. The moral dualists tend to favour gentler prisoner management practices. These guards are strict but fair and present the benefits of following the rules while in custody (Ricciardelli, 2016). In comparison, the idealists overlook institutional rules selectively to promote prisoner well-being instead of enforcing all institutional rules universally (Ricciardelli, 2016).

The next typology found in this study was the security dualists. The guards that fall into this category strive to balance harmony and security but have a stronger persuasion towards security. These guards are control oriented, they want to feel control over the prisoners every movement in order to maintain and enforce prisoner security (Ricciardelli, 2016). They will use punitive (but lawful) measures without considering the individual circumstances of the individual (Ricciardelli, 2016). There are two subcategories of security dualists, the operators, and the managerial entrepreneurs. The operators have years of experience under their belts and have developed an intolerance towards prisoners. Their actions are directed towards keeping the environment secure, but they aren't friendly with the prisoners while doing so. These guards take a forceful and strict approach to their job (Ricciardelli, 2016). In contrast, the managerial entrepreneurs lack experience and are stringent rule followers. They are confident and willing to prove themselves to colleagues and prisoners (Ricciardelli, 2016). They do not treat necessarily engage in misconduct, but they do push the boundaries with prisoners (Ricciardelli, 2016).

The fifth typology is the punisher. The punishers loathe all incarcerated men, they disrespect prisoners' rights, they often participated in verbal slandering of prisoners, engaged in physical violence with the prisoners, and habitually picked on prisoners (Ricciardelli, 2016). Their actions were never grounded in safety-oriented way; their actions were rooted in a desire to

encourage misconduct, they also played games with the prisoners to get a rise from them until the prisoner(s) reacted and provided a reason for the guards to use force (Ricciardelli, 2016). The sixth and final typology is the moral relativist. The moral relativist’s primary motivation is not harmony or security, but a paycheck and they lack any passion or ambition (Ricciardelli, 2016).

Of the guards portrayed in the nine films, majority of them embodies the *punisher* typology (Ricciardelli, 2016). This aspect of the analysis will elaborate on Ricciardelli’s typology by highlighting the gendered nature of the punisher archetype identified by the prisoners in Ricciardelli’s work. See *table 5* for a visual representation of the typologies of guards present in the films.

Table 5 – Typologies Present in Films

Typology	Number of Occurrences
The Punisher	5
Harmonious Dualist	2
Security Dualist	1
Harmony Persuasion	0
Security Persuasion	0
Moral Relativist	0

The five guards who fall into the punisher typology were featured in *The Green Mile* (1999), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *The Longest Yard* (2005), *Felon* (2008), and *Sleepers* (1997). Percy from *The Green Mile* (1999) is a prime example of a guard who embodies the punisher typology. Percy would repeatedly hit prisoners with his baton, he referred to the prisoners using homophobic slurs, he intentionally scared a prisoner, and he intentionally left a sponge dry during the execution of a prisoner. In contrast, Captain Hadley from *The*

Shawshank Redemption (1994) fits the punisher typology which also going above and beyond the archetype outlined by Ricciardelli (2016). For example, he repeatedly beats up multiple prisoners, one became paralyzed from the beating and one to the point of death. He also engaged in a significant amount of name calling and other controlling behaviours. Another guard whose behaviour aligned with the punisher typology was Captain Kanauer from *The Longest Yard* (2005). He engaged in multiple punisher behaviours such as prisoner beatings and name calling. For example, as a means of showing control Captain Kanauer dangled a prisoner from the roof.

Lieutenant Bill from the film *Felon* (2008) is arguably one of the most punisher esc correctional guards portrayed. Not only does he repeatedly beat up prisoners and call them names, be he messes with and manipulated the prisoners as well. For example, he withholds family photos from a prisoner and adds six years to a prisoner's sentence as a means of control. The final guard that showed punisher tendencies was Officer Nokes from the film *Sleeper* (1997). For example, he beats up multiple prisoners, he rapes the young boys, he forces the prisoners to eat off the floor, and he torments the boys. One example of the torment is when he waved a letter in front of one of the boys faces and then ripped it but before the boy could read the information inside.

Two guards embodied the harmonious dualist typology, specifically the idealist type. Idealists will selectively overlook some institutional rules to promote prisoner well-being (Ricciardelli, 2016). Lieutenant Seeman from *Animal Factory* (2000) did this quite frequently for one specific prisoner, Earl. For example, lieutenant Seeman offered to let Earl out of lockdown early, he brought Earl cigarettes when he was down in solitary confinement, and he sat with Earl in his cell while in solitary confinement to keep him company. This behaviour was not duplicated for any other prisoners. The other guard that embodied this typology was Officer

Collins in the film *Felon* (2008). It was evident that Officer Collins had a soft spot for the main prisoner character, Wade. For example, Officer Collins tells Wade to keep an eye out for the other prisoners during yard time in an attempt to protect him and he gives Wade extra visitation time with his girlfriend. Once again, this behaviour was not duplicated for any other prisoner and all other institutional rules were followed.

The final typology that was embodied was the security dualist typology. Only one guard portrayed this typology, and that guard was Captain Peretz from *The Last Castle* (2001). Throughout the film he consistently enforces the institutional rules and follows orders from the warden. However, on occasion, he would break up fights between prisoners and other guards, he stood up to the warden, and would show respect to some prisoners.

There are a lot of parallels between Ricciardelli's punisher typology and characteristics hegemonic masculinity. The punisher typology is one where the guards engage in physical violence (Ricciardelli, 2016) much like men who embody the characteristics hegemonic masculinity (Wedgwood et al., 2023 & Morettini, 2016; Katz, 1999). Further, the punisher guards enjoy engaging in the verbal slandering of prisoners (Ricciardelli, 2016). This can be viewed as an example of asserting dominance, a key characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (Wedgwood et al., 2023 & Morettini, 2016; Katz, 1999). Viewing the punisher typology in this manner it becomes clear that there is a gendered element to the punisher typology. This behaviour by the correctional guards is not unique to the prison environment, but rather reflects the societal normalization of the violent masculinity.

Implications

Masculinities and Correctional Officers: Who wants this Job?

According to a few researchers "many individuals who choose correctional officer

positions come from industries with little autonomy or power within their organization, a correctional officer position may attract those seeking power and control over others” (as cited in Burton, 2023). In 2023 a study set out to examine if there was any truth to this. This study surveyed six hundred and seventy-three correctional guards before they began their jobs to examine their motivations for becoming a correctional guard (Burton, 2023). Of the six hundred and seventy-three, thirty-eight or 6% had problematic motivations for becoming correctional guards. These problematic motivations included the use of force, a punitive focus, having power and control, cavalier ulterior motives, and problematic social bounties (Burton, 2023).

Like previous research suggested, the most common problematic motivator was looking to have power and control over others (Burton, 2023). In their responses participants expressed that the primary reason for becoming a correctional guard was “power over offenders”, “power over prisoners”, “being in charge”, “advancement and authority over offender”, and “control over offender” (Burton, 2023). The second most common problematic motivator was the punitive nature of prisons. Some examples of participant responses included treating prisoners a lesson, a moral objection to offender treatment, training dogs (prisoners), disciplining offenders, finding contraband, and treating offenders like the animals that they are (Burton, 2023).

The third most common problematic motivator was labelled as cavalier ulterior motives which was described as being more interested in being a correctional guard for reasons that indicated a lack of seriousness about the role (Burton, 2023). Some responses from participants included viewing the job as weird, thinking you can’t get fired, having less responsibility than other jobs, the adrenaline rush that comes from the job, keeping the prison safe, thinking the job will help with their mental health, and assisting in sobriety (Burton, 2023). The latter two responses indicate a lack of understanding of the role itself and the seriousness of the role

(Burton, 2023). The fourth most common problematic motivator was being excited by the potential use of force (Burton, 2023). Participants responses included paper spray, using defensive tactics, carrying a shotgun, and tactic teams (Burton, 2023).

The final two categories include problematic social boundaries and ‘other’. Problematic social boundaries refers to when potential guards are interested in the position due to relationships they already have or relationships they hope to make (Burton, 2023). For example, some respondents stated they wanted to work in the institution because their brother is in the institution, or they wanted to be around prisoners (Burton, 2023). The final and least common category was ‘other’. Responses in the category included having a correctional guard mentality and not being a people person (Burton, 2023).

While these respondents only made up 6% (Burton, 2023), they do still exist. The issue is that by portraying correctional guards in a negative and aggressive manner, it is illustrating to viewers that this is the reality of the position. It shows the viewers that being a correctional guard is an inherently violent natured job. If viewers are attracted to this inaccurate and overtly violent portrayal of correctional guards, this 6% of pre-service correctional guards with nefarious and disconcerting motivations (Burton, 2023) may begin to increase.

Exacerbating The Gendered Pains of Imprisonment

A classic study conducted by Gresham Skyes in the 1950’s identified five fundamental deprivations that characterize prison life; these deprivations are collectively known as pains of imprisonment (Shammas, 2017). The five deprivations include: the loss of liberty, the loss of desirable goods and services, the loss of heterosexual relationships, the loss of autonomy, and the loss of security (Shammas, 2017).

A correctional guard’s job is to guard offenders, prevent disturbances, conduct security

checks, promote rehabilitation, and observe behaviour (Government of Canada, n.d.). However, the ways in which correctional guards are portrayed in these films, they do nothing of the sort. They engage in toxic hegemonic masculine behaviour that does not protect the offenders but exacerbates the pains of imprisonment.

The deprivation of liberty is a double deprivation. Prisoners are confined to the institution and are then further confined within the institution (Skyles, 1958). Within the institutions they are confined by a system of passes, military like formations, and controlled movements (Skyles, 1958). Further, there are constant signs pointing to the prisoner's degradation such as the anonymity of a uniform, a number rather than a name, and subordination when addressing correctional guards (Skyles, 1958). Due to all of this, the prisoners are never allowed to forget that by committing a crime they have lost the claim to the status of being a trusted member of society (Skyles, 1958).

The guards play a large role in degradation of the prisoners and the constant reminder that their freedoms have been significantly restricted (Skyles, 1958) This is done so by repeated name calling at the hands of the guards (see *table 3* for a detailed breakdown). The name calling illustrates that the guards view the prisoners as 'less than' for the crimes they have committed. After the prisoners hear this enough, they are likely to internalize these names and believe them to be true. In the film *Sleepers* (1997) a guard tells a group of prisoners that they "are still the same fucking bunch of clowns you were the day you walked in here" (Levinson, 1997, 37:30). Not only was this guard degrading the prisoners by calling them clowns, but he was reminding them of the fact that they are confined to the institution. Additionally, in the film *Felon* (2008), the power-hungry head guard is constantly reminding a secondary prisoner character that he is a murderer and will be locked up for the rest of his life.

The second deprivation is the deprivation of goods and services. This deprivation refers to the fact that prisoners cannot access many of the goods and services they would enjoy in the outside world (Skyles, 1958). While the basic needs are met in prison in the sense that they are fed and have a roof over the heads, the overall standard of living is low (Skyles, 1958). For example, prisoners were only given a certain number of calories per day, they are only granted a certain amount of recreation time, and they are deprived of material possessions (Skyles, 1958). Further, in the world we live in today, material possessions become a large part of an individual's conception of themselves; to be stripped of that attacks the deepest layers of one's personality (Skyles, 1958).

Regarding the deprivation of goods and services, there was only two real examples of the guards going out of their way to intentionally (or otherwise) exacerbate this pain of imprisonment. In the film *Felon* (2008), the power-hungry head guard takes family photos from a prisoner, therefore, depriving him of the few personal possessions' prisoners are allowed to have. A second example of the guards exacerbating the deprivation of goods and services included Percy from *The Green Mile* (1999) killing a prisoner's pet mouse that he was permitted to have.

The third deprivation is the deprivation of heterosexual relationships. When prisoners are incarcerated, they are figuratively castrated by this involuntary celibacy (Skyles, 1958). A man's sexuality is an essential component of a man's self-conception so to strip him of that calls into question his status of a male (Skyles, 1958). Further, the male prisoner's image of himself is in danger of becoming fractured due to the lack of heterosexual intercourse (Skyles, 1958). Living in a society that is fully comprised of men also tends to generate some anxiety within its members regarding their masculinity (Skyles, 1958). The guard's hegemonic masculine

behaviour does not necessarily do anything to exacerbate this pain of imprisonment as they do not have any control over the fact that the institution is male only.

The fourth deprivation is the deprivation of autonomy. In this context, the loss or deprivation of autonomy refers to the prisoner being subjected to a vast body of rules and commands designed to control every minute of their behaviour. It also refers to one's self-determination being withheld (Skyes, 1958). For the hours of sleep, what they eat for each meal, what they do for work, the hours of work, who they live with, etc., prisoners have no choice. Similarly, prisoners are often left in the dark when it comes to denial of parole; they are told that they have been denied, but rarely are they told why (Skyes, 1958).

At various points during the films the guards went above and beyond at enforcing these rules as well as making up their own as they pleased. For example, in the film *The Last Castle* (2008) which follows incarcerated former military, prisoners are forbidden from saluting which is as second nature to them as breathing. Further, in the film *Sleepers* (1997) the boys lunches get thrown onto the floor, the guard demanded that the boys eat off the floor. After stating that he is not hungry, the guard still forces him to eat; therefore, depriving the boy of his choice to eat or not. A third example can be found in the film *Felon* (2008). In this film the main character had become quite the fighter during yard time, however, towards the end of the film he wanted to refrain from fighting. The head guard tells the main character that he must keep fighting and in the next fight he starts, he must kill the other prisoner. A fourth example is from the film *The Longest Yard* (2005). Here, the main character is forced to recruit prisoners to create a football team. When originally presented this 'offer' he declined and told both the captain of the guards and the warden that he just wants to keep his head down and serve his time, but they did not let him do what he wanted to do. Each of these examples illustrates the guards searching for ways to

assert their dominance and exert control over the prisoners all while exacerbating the pains of imprisonment the prisoners are already facing.

A secondary aspect of the deprivation of autonomy is keeping prisoners in the dark regarding parole and other relation notions. In the film *Sleepers* (1997), one of the guards has a letter for one of the young prisoners that contains his release date and other important information. Instead of giving the letter to the young prisoner, the guard waves it in front of the young prisoner's face and tears it up.

The final deprivation is the deprivation of security. One interpretation of this that prisoners are thrown into prolonged intimacy with other men who have histories of violent and aggressive behaviour (Skyles, 1958). A part of prison culture is being 'tested' by other prisoners to see how far each prisoner will go to fight for his safety and possessions. Should he fail, he is in danger of being an obvious victim. If he succeeds, he may become a target for other prisoners who wish to prove themselves and seek to climb the hierarchy (Skyles, 1958).

The second of the two main pains of imprisonment that the guard's hegemonic masculine behaviour exacerbate is the deprivation of security. The original explanation of the deprivation of security was focused on the fact that prisoners are housed with other dangerous people (Skyles, 1958) However, what was portrayed in these films is that the guard's behaviour also interfered with the prisoners' sense of security. The best illustration of this comes from the film *Sleepers* (1997) where one of the young boys' states: "I want to be able to sleep one night and not have to worry [about] who's coming in my room, [and] what's going to happen to me" (Levinson, 1997, 57:40). Some other examples include all of the violence the prisoners are subjected to at the hands of the guards; all of the hitting, kicking, pushing, and use of weapons can't make the prisoners feel safe and or protected.

By simply being incarcerated prisoner's experience significant pains of imprisonment and the gendered behaviour at the hands of the guards displayed in these films only makes this worse. For example, regarding the deprivation of liberty, when the guards are calling the prisoners names, they are reminding them of their place within the institution but also reminding them of their place within the broader masculine hierarchy. Further, the guard's constant acts of violence, competition, aggression, and asserting dominance exacerbate both the deprivation of autonomy and the deprivation of security by forcing the inmates to engage in certain actions and/or behaviours against their will as well as further depriving them from feeling safe while they serve their time.

Limitations and Future Work

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. For this study, ten films were analyzed. The prison film genre is a large and expansive genre, however, to find films that heavily featured correctional guards in the film was a difficult task leading to a smaller sample size. A second limitation of this study is that all the films were directed and produced in The United States, therefore, not necessarily reflecting the Canadian criminal justice system. That being said, these films are all readily available in Canada and without the proper education surround the two criminal justice systems, viewers may not know a difference exists. Another limitation of this study is that of the ten films analyzed, only eight featured guards as main characters. Attempts were made to avoid this problem but only so much could be done without significantly altering the sampling strategy. That being said, those two films *Bronson* (2008) and *Death Race* (2008) still contributed data to the study.

This study opens opportunities for continued research into the portrayal of correctional guards and related topics. Future research should consider if these portrayals align with the

public views and understanding of correctional guards, how correctional guards feel about the portrayals, does the portrayals affect their work, whether these films can be seen as critiques of the criminal justice system or not, the portrayal of correctional guards' overtime. Future work could focus on larger-scale violence in prisons such as riot films. One could focus on that broadly or one could examine the types of violence the guards use in attempt to stop said riot, if it differs from the violence they engage in regularly, or how the prisoners are able to get past the guards – did they outsmart the guards or were the guards engaging in lazy behaviours.

Future research should consider focusing on the portrayals of the prison warden. There were three films in this research study where the warden was featured as a main character and playing a role in dictating the correctional guards' behaviours. Those films include *Escape Plan* (2013), *The Last Castle* (2001), and *Death Race* (2008). Wilson and O'Sullivan (2004) have previously conducted some research into the portrayal of wardens in television, but that literature is not twenty-one years old and may be outdated. Additionally, their research is some of only of its kind.

CONCLUSION

The field of popular criminology had previously left a significant gap in literature surrounding the portrayal of correctional guards in film media. A plethora of research has been conducted into the portrayal of the prison environment (Levan et al., 2011; Milicevic & Drndarvic, 2023; Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004), the portrayal of prisoners (Andersen et al., 2019; Clowers, 2001; Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004), the portrayal of prison staff (Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004), and the portrayal of correctional guards in news media (Ricciardelli et al., 2024; Vickovic et al., 2013; Wilson & O'Sullivan, 2004). To address this gap in literature the present study provided a critical examination into the portrayal of correctional guards in popular film. To do so, a content analysis method was used to analyze ten films in the prison film genre. The films included *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *Sleepers* (1996), *The Green Mile* (1999), *Animal Factory* (2000), *The Last Castle* (2001), *The Longest Yard* (2005), *Felon* (2008), *Bronson* (2008), *Escape Plan* (2013), and *Death Race* (2008).

Analysis revealed a consistent pattern correctional guards being portrayed as primarily violent, aggressive, and controlling figures who frequently embody traits that are associated with hegemonic masculinity. The correctional guards were frequently portrayed engaging in both overt and indirect violence, sadistic behaviours, and systematic abuses of power. Occasionally, some guards were portrayed in a positive manner by engaging in some redeeming qualities and acts of resistance. While research has shown that there is a fraction of truth to these portrayals (see Burton, 2023), the portrayal of correctional guards in this manner makes a small fraction of the truth look like the whole truth. These negative and incorrect portrayals have the potential to create distorted public perceptions regarding prison life, those who staff the institutions, and the prisoners.

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