ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: WOMEN, CRIME AND CULTURE: LIFE STORIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE RESIDENTIAL PARENTING PROGRAM AT THE WASHINGTON (STATE) CORRECTIONS CENTER FOR WOMEN.

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This dissertation explores the Residential Parenting Program (RPP) at the Washington State Corrections Center for Women. In this unusual, experimental program, imprisoned women are allowed to keep their babies and small children with them during their prison sentences. Typically, a mother and child are released together before the child reaches the age of three. Data on the RPP were gathered, first, through extensive participant observation research in which an effort was made to learn how this "nursery program" functions on a day to day basis. Person-centered informal and formal interviews also were used to obtain information on how various people connected to the program, now and in the past, including administrators, service providers, staff, correctional officers, other women prisoners, and, especially, incarcerated mothers participating in the program, viewed the functioning of the RPP

and its benefits and problems. Detailed life stories of some 20 of the mothers were also obtained. These stories show how the women construct their past experiences in the drug world, how they describe everyday life in the RPP and how they articulate the hopes that they have for the future. The dissertation also explores the process through which women and children leave the prison and return to society. In general, all those associated with the program view it positively, and early returns suggest that the program is quite effective in helping women and their children make successful transitions back into society. This investigation offers insights into a unique and innovative rehabilitative program that aims to halt an ongoing cycle of criminality, which shows no signs of abating within a large segment of U.S. women who tend to be at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder, regardless of other demographic characteristics.

WOMEN, CRIME AND CULTURE: LIFE STORIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE RESIDENTIAL PARENTING PROGRAM AT THE WASHINGTON (STATE) CORRECTIONS CENTER FOR WOMEN.

By

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Figure I: The Washington Corrections Center for Women

Photo Courtesy of the Washington Department of Corrections.

The Washington Corrections Center for Women at Gig Harbor

Above is an aerial photo of the Washington Corrections Center for Women, just outside Gig Harbor, Washington, roughly 45 miles Southwest of Seattle. The 62-acre institution, nestled into an old-growth forest on a peninsula, houses an estimated 800 female offenders on any given day and employs nearly 400 workers, including administrators, corrections officers, counselors, health professionals and assorted contractors and social service providers. Dozens of volunteers also visit the facility on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

The compound is surrounded by 12-foot high chain-link fencing topped with razor-wire. The prison's perimeter is patrolled 24/7/365 by armed corrections officers. Although not distinct in this image, WCCW is horizontally bisected (with two parallel rows of fencing and wire) into two, separate sections.

The white-roofed buildings located in the top portion of the image all are located on the medium-and maximum-security side of the institution, referred to as "Downtown" by inmates and WCCW employees. Approximately 550 inmates, most of whom are classified as requiring high to medium levels of supervision, reside "Dowtown" on an average day.

Women and children admitted to the Residential Parenting Program, the focus of this study, reside in what's called the Mimimum Security Compound (or "MSC"), the area in the photo's lower left hand corner and distinguished by a series of one-story buildings with grey roofs, which are arranged in a horseshoe configuration around a football-field sized open courtyard area. About 350 offenders reside on the MSC side of the institution.

The number of women in the Residential Parenting Program typically range anywhere from 12 to 16. These women live in private, dormitory style rooms with their children, who can remain on-campus until they are 3-years-old. The release dates of most RPP participants are usually coordinated to coincide with their children's third birthdays.

Fig. 2: 'J Unit – Home of the RPP'

Photo Courtesy of Cheryl Hanna-Truscott

J-Unit – Home of WCCW's Residential Parenting Program

Above is J-Unit, a dormitory style building located on the minimum-security, southwest side of WCCW. The building houses roughly 150 general population inmates. J-Unit also is home to RPP mothers and their children, who occupy the West Wing of J-Unit (on the left side of the photo). Typically, the RPP population ranges between 12 and 16 participants on any given day. Some women are pregnant, while others have already given birth and are caring for infants or toddlers up to 3 years old.

While other parts of J-unit are adult double-occupancy, RPP mothers share their rooms only with their children. The West Wing of J-Unit also is equipped with a day-room containing toys, children's books and wall murals, offering a quiet place for mothers and children to spend time together away from the general J-Unit population.

But even though separate living quarters are maintained, non-RPP inmates who have been screened and trained are often designated caregivers, who baby-sit children when RPP mothers are programming, working, attending meetings or otherwise occupied.

Shaped like a huge capital H, the building's main doors are in the center of the structure, located on the right side, out-of-view in this photo.

Prologue: “I was on drugs; I just didn’t care.”

Prologue

It is a sunny spring day in 2004. Erin Delgado sits at rapt attention, cradling two-month-old Evan in her arms as she listens intently to the instructor of a parenting class in which she and her son are enrolled. The gathering, held at a federally funded Early Head Start Center in a western Washington State suburb near Seattle, is attended by about half-a-dozen other women, all of whom are holding their own children and anxiously soaking up the advice offered by the counselor. Today's topic is fundamental: caring for newborns.

Erin, 33, is Evan's mother. A white woman who acquired her Hispanic surname during a failed marriage to a Mexican national, Erin's platinum blonde hair is pulled back into a pony tail, showing off her piercing blue eyes and the subtle red freckles splashed across her cheeks and the bridge of her nose. Erin explains that she already has a daughter named Sally, who is nearly 10 years old. But Erin is quick to add that even though Evan is her second child, there's always room for improvement when it comes to parenting.

"I put a lot into my son and I'm not going to take any chances," says Erin, stroking Michael's wispy, strawberry-blond hair. "My whole life has turned completely around. My life is completely different. This little boy is going to grow up and be proud."

In many respects, Erin Delgado is typical. She is one of the thousands of women in the United States who each year give birth to newborns and then subsequently attends classes aimed at improving their parenting skills.

But in one highly significant way, Evan and his mother are far from ordinary. Erin Delgado is an imprisoned felon – convicted of drug possession and drug dealing – who is

now serving an 18-month sentence at the Washington Corrections Center for Women, a state prison about 45 miles south of Seattle on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. The Early Head Start facility where Erin and Evan attend classes is not typical either. Now entering its fifth year of operation, this is the only Early Head Start Center in the nation that is located on the grounds of a state prison.

Nor is little Evan an average infant. Born seven months into his mother's prison term, Evan lives on the prison grounds, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Erin and Evan, along with roughly 14 other women and their children at any given time, are participants in the prison's Residential Parenting Program, one of only four of its type in the nation. Two other states – Nebraska and New York – have similar, but not identical programs. Several other states have established partial or part-time so-called "nursery programs." Other states are still in the planning and development stages for such programs.

Erin says Washington's nursery, or "baby program," as it is sometimes called, has given her and her family the chance for a better life. She says she intends to take full advantage of the opportunity.

"I got, like, a second chance with him," Erin says of Evan. "There's no way I'm going to screw it up. What I can do is make the best of it and do what's right."

Like many of the women we will meet later, Erin was introduced to drugs at an early age, in this case by her parents. Erin's family – particularly her mother– was heavily involved in the local drug world in their area. Erin's parents both used illegal drugs and frequently drank beer and alcohol to excess. But Erin's mother also was a major drug dealer in the region, not to mention being desperately addicted to cocaine.

Looking back, Erin says her mother was also mean, paranoid and often behaved erratically, resulting in a fractious home life. Growing up in such an environment, it's not surprising that Erin was introduced to drugs at an early age.

From marijuana to cocaine to heroin and everything in between, Erin's Mom sold it. People came and went from their home – a trailer situated on several acres in the rural north Oregon countryside – at all hours of the day and night. It was never too early or too late to buy drugs at Erin's house. The store was always open.

It had been that way as long as Erin could remember. The life seemed normal to her. Pills. Weed. Cocaine. Scales. Paraphernalia. That was her reality.

"I didn't know any different," Erin says. "I didn't see that there was anything wrong with it. That's what I was brought up around. I knew it was something that was illegal. But I had been around it for so long. I don't think I really, honestly thought about it at the time. It was just something that was, you just done it, y'know? And not even really thinking, you know, about how serious the consequences could be."

By the time Erin reached seventh grade, she routinely smoked pot and drank beer at home, right in front of her parents and their friends. Not only did her parents condone and encourage Erin's drug and alcohol use, they tended to find it humorous. For example, when other adults came over to buy drugs or socialize, Erin would be given alcohol and a variety of drugs until she got so high that she would stumble around the trailer. More often than not, Erin's parents were the first to laugh at the sight of their 6- or 7-year-old child, intoxicated to the point of falling down.

"Picture this in your mind," Erin says. "There's like 20, 30 people at our house at all times, in and out, in and out, or just hanging out there. My Mom and Dad always had

parties, y'know? And there'd always be people sittin' around smoking a joint, drinking beer. They'd hand the joint to me, to pass it on to the next person. Well, I'd grab it, run around to the kitchen, and start smoking it. I'd be stoned and they'd think it was funny. *I thought* it was funny, too.Y'know? That was really part of my life. I don't think I really, honestly thought about it. It was just something that you done it, and it was cool that you done it."

Yet, despite the instability of her family life and her mother's drug dealing ways, Erin was a popular, above-average student in her junior and senior high school years. She played on the girls' softball and volleyball teams. And while Erin admits that she never really gave much thought to a profession or career as such, she did anticipate graduating from high school and beginning a normal, adult life.

However, just as things were looking somewhat positive for Erin, a string of life-altering tragedies hit. First, she got pregnant by a high school boyfriend. Then, she suffered a miscarriage, early in the first trimester.

That incident was followed by Erin dropping out of high school only two credits shy of the total needed for graduation. The decision was prompted by an unsettling and unannounced visit to Erin's school from local police officers, who questioned her about her mother's suspected drug dealing. The experience was so scary and intimidating that Erin refused to return to school ever again.

A few months after that, shortly after she had celebrated her 18th birthday, Erin's parents were brutally murdered before her eyes in a drug-related, home invasion robbery. The male intruder, after shooting Erin's parents, attempted to rape and shoot her. But in a

desperate fight for her life, Erin eluded the attacker and escaped to a nearby relative's home, where she hid until help arrived.

Since that fateful event, Erin has been married once, to the man who fathered her daughter, Sally. That marriage broke up after only a few years, though, and has been followed by a lengthy string of other relationships, some of which were based in commitment and love, while others were founded on convenience and a common interest in drugs and the drug culture. Erin's most recent relationship, with a 57-year-old trade-union pipe-fitter named Keith, resulted in her pregnancy with Evan.

Erin readily concedes that for nearly a decade after the death of her parents, she was a pinball in the arcade machine of life. For a while, she could be a model of rational, productive behavior, such as a brief stint as a certified nurse's aide at various health care facilities and even in private homes.

But within months, the ever-present lure of fast living, good times, partying and the drug culture drew Erin back to the streets. With no high school diploma, no steady job, no direction and no parents, Erin started drugging in a big way. To make matters worse, her increasingly frequent scrapes with the law made finding work more and more difficult.

"I needed, like, money every day for my drug habit. And I'm not talkin' forty or fifty bucks. I'm talkin' like six-hundred bucks or so. Oh, yeah! I'd spend $10,000 in less than a month."

Shortly after the death of Erin's parents, their estate – which included life insurance benefits, four vehicles, two trailers, personal property and cash on hand – was

valued at more than $500,000. The money was under the control of an attorney that Erin's extended family had engaged on her behalf.

But despite the best efforts of Erin's great-grandmother, other family members and the lawyer, all of whom knew Erin had a serious and growing drug problem, she blew through the money with astounding speed.

"I spent it in a year-and-a-half," Erin says matter-of-factly. "Gone. Smoked. That's a lot of money. And that's not counting the thousands of dollars that my grandmother had given me and I never paid her back. It was a mess."

Erin begins to tear up as she explains how things became even worse. With her parents' money now gone, and with no other way to feed her drug habit, Erin started stealing from her great-grandmother, who by then was in her late 80s.

"I used to take her checks and forge her checks. And she would come hunt me down at these drug houses and say, 'I know you took my checkbook. Where's it at?' And I'd tell her, "I threw it away, Grandma. I'm sorry. I threw it away.' When I really hadn't. And I'd start writing more checks."

This pattern, which would repeat itself many times over the years, might continue for days or weeks at a time, until Erin's grandma would lose her patience.

"Finally, after she'd had enough, she came to me at another one of those drug houses. That's where she'd find me at. And she'd go, 'I'm going to have to cancel my checks, Erin.' She knew if she canceled her checks and if I write more checks, then I'm going to get caught. But I was on drugs. I just didn't care. So I started getting the forgery charges."

About two years ago, Erin took up with Keith, the 57-year-old pipefitter. The relationship was one of convenience, not love. At the same time, more forgery and fraud charges were starting to catch up with Erin. Finally, while doing drugs one day at the home of a friend, Erin was found by police, arrested and hauled off to county jail. Erin Delgado, a multiple-offender with several outstanding warrants for her arrest, was on her way to state prison.

Erin had long-since stopped caring much about herself. But now, she was looking at a prison term that could be up to two years or more. More than anything, Erin was seriously concerned about what would happen to her daughter, Sally.

Erin's prayers were answered, however, shortly before she entered prison in the late fall of 2003. For years, Erin's best girlfriend from high school, Janet, had always felt sorry for Sally, whom Erin all but abandoned during her heavy drinking and drugging binges. Erin's modus operandi had always been to drop Sally off at Janet's for "a few days," which often turned into weeks and even months. This had gone on for most of Sally's young life. In fact, young Sally had taken to calling Janet and her husband, Dennis, "Mommy Janet" and "Daddy Dennis."

Janet and Erin had grown apart over the years, specifically because of Erin's drug abuse and irresponsible behavior. But when Sally was born and Erin began toting the child around and leaving her here and there as if she was little more than a knapsack, Janet had seen enough. Not only did Janet and Dennis intend to take Sally in for the duration of Erin's incarceration, they took the necessary steps, without telling Erin, to legally adopt the little girl.

These arrangements were in place by the time Erin was heading to prison. Already distraught over her prison sentence and leaving her daughter, Erin felt as if she'd been deceived by Janet. But this development turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Instead of losing Sally to the foster care system or adoption by strangers, Erin has enjoyed the comfort of knowing her child is in the custody of people she knows and trusts.

While biding her time in county jail awaiting sentencing, though, Erin learned that she was pregnant, a situation that presented more problems and questions, including where would she give birth? Who would take care of her baby after it was born? And what might be the chances of Erin ever getting the child back if she had to give it up?

Within a few days, however, Erin's court-appointed attorney learned of an unusual initiative at the Washington Corrections Center for Women called the Residential Parenting Program, also known as the "RPP" or the "baby program." As the lawyer explained it, offenders such as Erin who arrived at the institution pregnant or having recently given birth, if selected, would be allowed to keep their babies with them on prison grounds until the children reached age 3. In almost all cases, prisoner release dates were coordinated to precede, or coincide, with a child's third birthday.

Erin was excited to hear about this and strongly attracted to the possibility of entering the program. Because her crimes were not violent, because her sentence was less than three years, and because she successfully passed the rigorous screening process, Erin was admitted to the RPP. She was transported to a local hospital in the outside community to give birth to her child, after which she and Evan took up residence in their own room in the RPP wing of J-Unit, back on prison grounds.

Chapter 1: The Problem, the RPP, and A Literature Review

Table 1

Number of Sentenced U.S. Female Prisoners under State or Federal Jurisdiction by Gender, Race, Hispanic origin and Age at year-end, 2003.

	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
Total	*92,785	39,100	35,000	16,200
18 - 19	1,100	400	500	200
20 - 24	11,100	4,400	4,200	2,300
25 - 29	13,900	5,600	5,300	2,600
30 - 34	17,200	7,200	6,500	3,100
35 – 39	18,800	7,800	7,300	3,200
40 – 44	15,600	6,800	5,800	2,500
45 – 54	12,400	5,400	4,700	1,800
55 or older	2,600	1,400	700	300

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

* Note: Estimates are rounded to the nearest 100. Totals include Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Also, an estimated 60 percent of sentenced U.S. female prisoners in state and federal correctional institutions were mothers of minor children as of year-end 1999, the most recent year for which such statistics are available. This estimate does not include, however, non-U.S. citizens or those in transition from jails to prisons.

In early 2005, more than two million people in the United States are imprisoned, far and away the highest rate of incarceration in the Western world. Globally, the U.S. accounts for only 5 percent of the world's population. Yet, 20 percent of the world's prisoners are incarcerated here.[1] And in fact, nearly half of the two million people currently in custody, or undersome form of local, state or federal correctional supervision in the United States, are women. As Table 1 on the previous page indicates, nearly 93,000 women in the U.S. currently are doing hard time in federal or state prisons like the Washington State Corrections Center for Women.[2]

The rate of female incarceration has climbed steadily in recent years and continues to do so at a pace of roughly 5 percent each year. Of these women, approximately 80 percent nationwide have one or more young children.[3] This explosion of female incarceration in the United States, and the resulting separation of mothers and children have, and will continue to have, profound and far-reaching social and cultural implications that cannot be ignored.

At WCCW, the Residential Parenting Program, (or "RPP") is an unusual, relatively new, experimental effort, designed to rehabilitate female offenders and modify their long-term behavior and alter their potential outcomes in positive ways. The program aims to strengthen families and break generational cycles of drug abuse, child neglect, criminality and poor decision-making on the parts of women who tend to be at the bottom of the ladder in terms of class and socio-economic status. The program aims to rehabilitate women by allowing them to keep their babies and small children with them in prison and through a variety of educational programming.

This dissertation is a cultural exploration of the RPP program. Drawing on some documentary evidence, but based mainly on participant observation and interviewing, this study aims to discover how the RPP works as a social system within the prison and, especially, how those who are intimately involved with the program experience and conceptualize it. I seek to establish the social and cultural locations of participants and to discover the cultural meaning systems through which they understand the RPP world and their own roles within it. How, I ask, do participants assess the problems and benefits of the RPP, its degree of success, and its relationships to social worlds outside prison? While other voices also will be considered, I will focus especially on the life histories and voices of women prisoners with babies who are current participants in the RPP program.

While I am interested in the success of the program, this study is not a formal evaluation of the Residential Parenting Program. Nor can it offer much focus on children who have participated in the program – or the ultimate success of those children – in whatever way(s) success might be defined. Those questions, which are outside the scope of this dissertation, will remain to be addressed by other researchers on another day.

This dissertation focuses on a group of 24 women offenders who are now, or have been, participants in, or associated with, the RPP during its first five years. The hope is that these accounts will provide significant insights into the cultural implications of the program, including offenders' perceptions of the RPP's effectiveness, and their beliefs about its contributions (or lack thereof) to the well-being of inmates and their children.

Women and Prisons

Historically, women who break the law have confounded society's views of womanhood. Some scholars argue that this disconnect, and society's ambivalence about

female offenders, is at least partially to blame for the peculiar and often contradictory treatment that women have received in the past, and in many places, are still receiving. Butler asserts that a complex picture of U.S. society's expectations for women has helped blur the issues over the years, making the nation's public policies toward female offenders fuzzy, as well. "Religious, educational, governmental, literary, and economic structures," writes Butler, "plus a great wash of cultural practice and public opinion, all shared in the construction of notions of American womanhood prevalent by the second half of the nineteenth century. An energized patriarchal society, armed with a rigid code of feminine values, carved out parameters of women's lives, attitudes, and conducts."[4]

Van Wormer and Bartollas are among the many sociologists, criminologists, historians, social theorists and anthropologists who contend that women in the United States today grow up in social and cultural contexts controlled by males, and are therefore, subject to various forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse, not to mention racism, classism and sexism.[5]

Contradictory theories abound as to what factor or group of factors have precipitated the increase in crimes committed by women over the years, particularly since 1930, the year in which California became the first state to establish what we now define as a women's state prison. Explanations proffered have included biological influences, psychological impacts, sociological factors, gender issues, social class theories, and the effects of race and ethnicity. Daly, for example, writes that "women's social histories showed greater victimization," adding that, "[g]ender and class may operate in similar ways in justifying ways in punishment. Specifically, the utilitarian principles that judges

use in sentencing white-collar men may be more evident in sentencing common-crime women than men."[6]

Social class, race and societal attitudes toward marginalized populations also play major roles, according to Reiman. "[T]he system works to make it more likely that those who end up in jail or prison will be from the bottom of society. This works in two broad ways. 1. For the same crime, the system is more likely to investigate and detect, arrest and charge, convict and sentence, sentence to prison and for a longer time, a lower class individual than a middle or upper class individual," and, "2. Between crimes that are characteristically committed by poor people (street crimes) and those characteristically committed by the well off (white-collar and corporate crimes), the system treats the former much more harshly that the latter, even when the crimes of the well off take more money from the public or cause more death and injury than the crimes of the poor."[7]

Howe adds that many girls and young women – particularly those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale – are often "socially controlled across a range of institutions and settings," including their families, their sexuality, their employment prospects and their marriages. For feminist theorists, the "connections between the policing of the everyday life of girls with policing by and within official agencies has apprised us of intersections between the penal structure and the sex/gender structure."[8]

Indeed, the structural aspects of U.S. society that contribute to tens of thousands of women and girls finding themselves in such marginalized circumstances are complex, multi-layered and extensive. Many of these factors lie outside the scope of this dissertation and will have to be addressed in other studies by this researcher and others. Nonetheless, even if the rise in numbers cannot be fully or neatly explained here, the fact

remains that populations in women's prisons nationwide have continued to climb dramatically over the years.

To make sense of this, the basic philosophy behind the modern American prison must be understood. The French cultural theorist and postmodernist, Michel Foucault, offered his history of the modern prison, *Discipline and Punish* (1977), a work in which the historical shifts in the criminal justice systems of most civilized societies are traced from the late 18th century to the 20th century. During that time, most countries, including the United States, changed from systems of torturing, ridiculing and shaming those convicted of, implicated in, or even suspected of committing crimes, and instead implemented systems aimed at "controlling" prisoners. Foucault argues that, on the surface, this systematic change in the state's use of power and authority might appear to be more humane than the old way of torturing prisoners. But Foucault further contends that although controlling every detail of prisoner's lives – which is the convention used in many U.S. prisons today – might not be as violent or gruesome as the old system, it may actually represent a more complete exercise of power than ever before, and may, in fact, be more insidious than the previous penal system. Calling this new, more comprehensive system the "science of discipline," Foucault asserts that it contains five basic principles:

- **Spatialization,** which occurs when there is a place for everyone and everyone has a place, which indicates who or what he or she is;
- **Minute Control** of activities through a regimented schedule;
- **Repetitive exercises**, which are both standardized and individualized, according to one's rate of progress;

- **Detailed hierarchies**, made up of complex chains of authority, in which each level keeps watch over those below it, and;
- **Normalizing judgments** that provide a continual way to analyze whether those being disciplined deviate in any way from "normality," which of course, is dictated by society or more directly, the state.

Foucault points out that these principles and the science of discipline already are widely used in schools, hospitals, the military, and most certainly, in prisons.[9]

One must also keep in mind that even though most states established separate women's prisons at some point during the last 30 years, most of those institutions nonetheless were planned, constructed and continue to be operated using the same basic approach toward female offenders that have been used for male inmates, despite the obvious and not-so-obvious differences between the sexes. These differences include biological, cultural and communication distinctions, to name a few. And therefore, like most studies of prisons, Foucault's work does not address or explore the impacts on society if the convict is a woman, much less a woman with children.[10] However, Foucault's general orientation, like that of related theories such as those of Goffman and other American sociological critics of total institutions, and those of British Cultural Studies, have considerable pertinence to understanding the RPP program. That is, they would all suggest that programs like the RPP, which have an official "rehabilitative" function, can be understood to be, in effect, re-socialization programs that aim to bring deviant persons back into line with dominant culture values and orientations. For example, Goffman writes: "The total institution is a social hybrid, part residential

community, part formal organization… they are the forcing houses for changing persons; each a natural experiment on what can be done to the self."[11]

Meanwhile, Fiske, writing in *Channels of Discourse,* points out that"Social relations are understood in terms of social power, in terms of a structure of domination and subordination that is never static but is always the site of contestation and struggle. In the domain of culture, this contestation takes the form of the struggle for meaning, in which the dominant classes attempt to 'naturalize' the meanings that serve their interests into the 'common sense' of the society as a whole."[12]

In keeping with these concepts, note that the Washington Corrections Center for Women carries a "correctional" orientation in its very name. We will keep this perspective in mind as we explore the RPP, but we will also seek to see in depth and detail how participants in the program understand the RPP through their own systems of meaning and how these orientations relate to re-socialization theory.

Another major contemporary activist and theorist who has studied prisons is Angela Davis, author of *Women, Race and Class* (1983) and *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003).

In *Prisons,* Davis addresses what she calls the ineffectiveness of an often sexist, racist and corrupt U.S. prison system and its corrosive effects on U.S. society: "The reality is that we were called upon to inaugurate the twenty-first century by accepting the fact that two million people – a group larger than the population of many countries – are living their lives in places like Sing Sing, Leavenworth, San Quentin and Alderson Reformatory for Women. The gravity of these numbers becomes even more apparent when we consider that the U.S. population in general is less than five percent of the

world's total, whereas more than twenty percent of the world's combined prison population can be claimed by the United States."[13]

And for women, Davis adds, the socially gendered constructs that apply in the free world also obtain for women who populate the nation's jails, prisons and penitentiaries. In other words, women who tend to be marginalized in American society are even more likely to find themselves ensnared in the U.S. prison industrial complex than women in other societies.

> The economic and political shifts of the 1980s—the globalization of economic markets, the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy, the dismantling of such social service programs as the Aid to Families of Dependent Children, and, of course, the prison construction boom—produced a significant acceleration in the rate of women's imprisonment both inside and outside the United States. In fact, women remain today the fastest-growing sector of the U.S. prison population. This recent rise in the rate of women's imprisonment points directly to the economic context that produced the prison industrial complex and that has had a devastating effect on men and women alike.[14]

As Davis suggests, the contemporary prison system is a significant, important, and problematic aspect of American Society and, therefore, an important topic for American Studies. In fact, prison studies seems to be emerging as an important new subfield within American Studies. Here, issues of cultural normality, values, deviance,

criminality, social policy, law, economics and dimensions of difference including race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity intersect in important ways at both the macro and micro levels. While most studies so far have been oriented to male prisoners, it is clear that the dramatic increase in the rate of female imprisonment calls for more investigations of the imprisonment and the treatment of women "offenders."

But while the texts mentioned earlier speak eloquently to the challenges, difficulties and hardships families face when mothers are criminal offenders, none of the works address issues associated with the parenting of children who reside *inside* prisons with their mothers, as is the case in the Residential Parenting Program in Washington state. As might be expected, of course, corrections industry publications such as *Corrections Today* and daily, general interest newspapers including *The Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Minnesota's *St. Paul Pioneer-Press* and others, have published a few professional articles and individual news stories about nursery programs in U.S. women's prisons. The following excerpt, drawn from a news report about Washington's baby program shortly after it was established, appeared in the April 3, 2000 edition of *The Seattle Times* and was written by *Times* reporter Nancy Bartley.

> Washington's new Residential Parenting Program provides housing for up to 20 inmates who are pregnant or have children under 3. Mothers and babies live together in a special wing of the minimum-security unit. The women have round-the-clock responsibility for their babies, diapering and feeding and coping with teething.

> The program is unique, say its organizers, because of its partnership with Early Head Start, which runs a day-care center for inmates' babies. Inmates attend parenting classes, employment-training sessions and substance-abuse classes.
>
> Some women's prisons, like a minimum-security prison in Cambridge Springs, Pa., sponsor mother-child camping trips.
>
> The Kansas Department of Corrections allows children of female inmates to spend a day visiting in a room with a "homelike setting," said public-information spokesman Bill Miskell.
>
> But Washington, California and New York are among the few states that allow some inmates who give birth in custody to keep the babies with them.[15]

More typically, general interest publications across the country have occasionally reported on the negative effects that the incarceration of parents can have on teens. One such story, about a 13-year-old Minnesota girl named Lyndsey, appeared in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and is a prime example of such reportage. According to the article, the girl, who traveled 600 miles by bus to Illinois to visit her mother in a federal women's prison camp, herself seemed headed for serious trouble.

> Lyndsey exhibits some of the behaviors that are typical of children whose parents are in prison. She attempted suicide last year. She spent the past three months jumping from one juvenile detention center to the next –

> for cutting class, taking and crashing her grandmother's car, for running away. Her latest mishap resulted in 120 days of house arrest.[16]

Such reports are reasonably common, at least to the extent that news media devote time and attention to the plight of imprisoned women and their minor children. More to the point, however, the dearth of more in-depth and/or academic studies of prison nursery programs is notable specifically because such programs are indeed rare in the U.S., which explains why such research has yet to be done to any great detail.

It is exactly this vacuum that I seek to explore and fill in this dissertation, doing so by employing ethnographic field work at WCCW, includinglife histories of selected participants within the Residential Parenting Program and supplementing these contributions with contemporary literature on former and current incarcerated mothers and their children.

Why American Studies?

As Davis suggests, the contemporary prison system is a significant, important, and problematic aspect of American Society and, therefore, an important topic for American Studies. In fact, as previously stated, prison studies seems to be emerging as an important new subfield within American Studies. Here issues of cultural normality, values, deviance, criminality, social policy, law, economics and dimensions of difference including race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity allintersect in intriguing and important ways. While most studies so far have been oriented to male prisoners, it is clear

that the dramatic increase in the rate of female imprisonment calls for more investigations of the imprisonment and the treatment of women in such circumstances.

Viewed in terms of how women later would come to be treated in the nation's criminal justice system, female activism in the form of women's suffrage and pursuit of political and social recognition during the late 19th and early 20th centuries did not serve women well. The legacies of those attitudes remain with us to this day. Particularly with respect to white women, society's ideal of a prim, proper, "lady-like" Victorian-era female did not, and still does not, square well with the cases of so-called "fallen" women, those who brazenly transgressed sexual, cultural and legal boundaries. Views about such "fallen women" became embedded in the public psyche when influential early 19th century female prison reformers expressed serious doubts about the possibility of rehabilitating women who engaged in "deviant" behaviors that would have been considered normal if exhibited by a man. These abnormal behaviors included fighting, singing, dancing, swearing and gaming, among other things. In *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind: A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000* (2002), author L. Mara Dodge writes that such negative views of all female criminals, regardless of their individual and unique circumstances, quickly became the prevailing conventional wisdom: "Scholars fully subscribed to and widely promulgated these popular prejudices. In his influential 1895 work *The Female Offender*, Italian theorist and physician Cesare Lombroso, known as the father of criminology, advanced the concept of the 'born criminal.' Arguing that criminality was a biologically determined, masculine trait, Lombroso and his coauthor William Ferrero concluded that criminals were less highly evolved than law-abiding citizens. In their schema, female offenders were degenerate,

atavistic monstrosities, throwbacks to an earlier evolutionary stage. Thus, their very biological nature placed them beyond any hope of reformation."[17]

While these presumptions certainly did not apply well to the entire population of female criminals at the turn of the 20th century, Lombroso and Ferrero did not allow reality to interfere with their theorizing.

"Caricaturing them as more violent, aggressive, and sexual than normal women, Lombroso and Ferrero asserted that such biologically distinct females could be identified by their 'primitive' and allegedly more masculine physical traits: they had darker and coarser features, an overabundance of hair, shorter stature, less discriminating sense, and assorted skull abnormalities," Dodge writes. "Perpetuating the view that a female offender was far worse than a criminal man, Lombroso and Ferrero argued that 'women are big children; their evil tendencies are more numerous and more varied than men's but generally remain latent. [However], when they are awakened and excited they produce results proportionately greater."[18]

These highly unflattering and unhelpful stereotypes, not unlike the arguments historically made about black slaves and their descendants, as well as Native Americans and others, persisted well into the 20th century, complicating efforts to reform prison conditions for women, and for years preventing any serious or substantive efforts to rehabilitate female offenders in real or meaningful ways. As Esther Hefferman points out in her essay, "Gendered Perceptions," which appears in *Women in Prison: Gender and Social Control* (2003), much of the resistance encountered had more to do with societal constructions of gender roles than with the actual physiological and psychological differences between men and women.[19]

A few state-run, women-only institutions opened in places such as Massachusetts, Indiana and New York in the latter half of the 19th century. New York, generally noted as progressive in its orientation to prisons, also opened its first long-term nursery in 1901 at what was then known as Westfield Farms, "a correctional home for maladjusted girls."[20] The concept later would be the catalyst for what is now the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. As we will see in Chapter 3, this institution became a kind of paradigmatic model for later nursery programs like Washington's RPP.

Until the 1920s and 1930s, however, when the first federal and exclusively women's prisons began to appear, female offenders elsewhere typically were housed in men's prisons and essentially treated like males, assuming such women received any attention at all. For example, in 1935, some female prisoners in the Midwest deemed "dangerous," "desperate" and "incorrigible" were relegated to a sealed-off section of a cellblock at the male Milan Federal Detention Farm in Michigan, where Hefferman writes "they were guarded by armed officers and housed 'in the more traditional type of steel cell.'" Hefferman notes that a key federal prisons official at the time filed a report describing the women as "desperate and incorrigible… unregenerate keepers of houses of prostitution, gangsters' 'molls,' and confirmed drug users."[21]

Prison officials, Hefferman continues, "may have assumed that armed guards and steel cells were required for gangsters' 'molls' precisely because of their dependent relationship. Either the women of violent men follow 'their men' into violence, or violent men will stop at nothing to rescue 'their women.' Paradoxically, the danger posed by the 'madam' was her symbolic challenge to the very nature of women's apparent domestic dependency. As a capitalist entrepreneur selling the sexual wares of her prostitutes as a

commodity, the madam was not only an independent woman engaged in public business, but also in bringing women's bodies into the market as 'white slaves,' evoked images of supposedly vanquished black slave markets," a societal skeleton that establishment figures would have much rather kept in the closet.[22]

In *Gendered Justice in the American West,* Butler points out that for these reasons, it became easier to hold women to socially constructed ideals and put them in categories. Those who did not adhere to these guidelines or willingly and willfully chose to reject them could be easily demonized and disregarded, regardless of their race, creed, color or class. In simple terms, the goal, whether women were housed in male institutions or the rare female-only prison, was to "control" offenders by imposing on them the socially constructed norms of womanhood in contemporary U.S. society. "Motherhood and domesticity resonated through the nation as goals for women, regardless of ethnic and cultural diversities," Butler writes. "Even though a broad range of women, especially from ethnic communities, rejected or ignored these goals, a powerful sentiment championed them as ideal values for emulation. These unilateral standards crystallized into a 'madonna' image that froze all women, however unrealistically, into a model of intuitive virtue and maternal instinct."[23]

Women in the "Male Prison" Model

Female prisoners in the early 20th century, whatever their offense, typically entered penal institutions that were conceptualized by men, approved by men, constructed by men, organized by men, and managed by men. As in most of outside world, the early 20th century prison was totally male-dominated. In *The Cultural Prison,* Sloop invokes Foucault's *Discipline and Punish,* which astutely observed that the early

prison was little more than a holding place where prisoners awaited their true punishment, which would be public torture or beating. While that model had been largely dispensed with by the early 1900s, Sloop explains that the expectations were still aimed at imposing severe punishment, reflection and hardship on prisoners.[24]

This male-dominated model, according to Butler, produced an environment that was especially debilitating to the women placed in male institutions. "Four elements," Butler writes, "produces the environment inside a penitentiary: widespread fiscal corruption, conditions inappropriate for human habitation, institutionalized violence, and masculine community. The boundaries of the four often overlapped, compounding the impact of each single ingredient. Each contributed to shaping a world designed to be hostile it its main constituent – the prisoner; each helped to intensify that hostility when the constituent happened to be a woman."[25]

Paul W. Keve, writing in *Prisons and the American Conscience,* notes that it was not uncommon for "the accommodations for female prisoners continued to be little short of degenerate well into the twentieth century." If the prisoners were black, Keve writes, as was the case at the Virginia State Penitentiary circa 1910, "the treatment of the women tended to reflect their low social status." The treatment frequently involved whippings at the hands of prison officials.[26]

Such reports of violence against women, combined with the occasional revelation of fraternization and even sexual relations between male and female prisoners at some institutions, gave prominent women's prison reformers such as J. Ellen Foster, Mabel Walker Wildebrandt and later, Miriam Van Waters, the ammunition they needed to marshal support for the establishment of separate institutions for female prisoners.

Estelle Freedman writes in *Maternal Justice* (1996) that the Progressive Era, which began in the early years of the 20th century, led many white, highly educated women to pursue careers in social work. "This emerging profession rested upon a long tradition of voluntary female benevolence in which middle-class women assumed social responsibility for the welfare of poor, sick, or delinquent women and children," Freedman writes. "Others, especially those who needed a self-supporting income, often employed their new training as paid public servants working in the expanding arena of social welfare administration. Increasingly, women professionals played a critical role in the movement to ease the harsh impact of industrialism on workers and the poor, while they enthusiastically joined campaigns to rationalize government through electoral reform and new bureaucratic structures."[27]

Keve writes that J. Ellen Foster, who had been a special agent for the U.S. Department of Justice in the early 1900s, had once asserted that: "An ideal prison for women should be a reformatory located in the country several miles from a city or town. It should be in the midst of arable and timber land and with health giving and beautiful natural surroundings… The sun and the wind, the dew of the morning, the heat of mid-day, the frost of nightfall."[28]

Some reforms that occurred during the Progressive era were based on therapeutic models aimed at modifying the behaviors of prisoners and rehabilitating them in the process. These efforts were based on beliefs that inmates suffered from physical, mental, and social pathologies or illnesses.[29]

Wildebrandt, who served as an assistant U.S. attorney general in the 1920s, reached out to other communities of women to help ensure the establishment of the

nation's first federal women's prison in Alderson, West Virginia. The women's organizations that helped push through the initiative included the Daughters of the American Revolution, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The facility opened in 1928 and marked a significant new beginning in attitudes toward and treatment of female prisoners.[30]

There can be no doubt that crime became a hot political issue in the late 20th century. The issue was seized upon by politicians at all levels of government, by academics and the media, and by powerful and elite constituencies that hoped to contribute to the debate, at minimum, and influence the outcome if possible. Many pages have been written about the intersections between race and crime, but in *The System in Black and White,* Markowitz makes a new, refreshing, compelling and cogent argument for the causal relationship race has on the commission of crime: "Rather than seeing race as a deterministic factor that predisposes individuals to one type of behavior or another, the model proposed here portrays its relevance in dynamic terms, shaping both the individual and his or her environment. From this perspective, the phenomenon of criminal behavior can be understood as a developmental product of socialization, the nature of which is affected by institutionalized assumptions regarding skin color."[31]

But irrespective of inaccurate deviancy labels, race as a catch-all causal factor for criminal behavior, or throwback claims of the fallen woman, some salient facts are irrefutable: at the turn of the 21st century, women are being incarcerated at more than twice the rate of men, a rate which continues unabated.

It is true that the nationwide population of female inmates (as well as males) is overwhelmingly black, brown, red and yellow, disproportionate to the extreme in relation to the numbers of these racial and ethnic minorities in the overall U.S. population.

But, as we will learn in chapters to come, other major factors and significantly influential common denominators in the unprecedented incarceration of U.S. women, regardless of color or ethnicity, are social class and economic status. Simply stated, women from socially disadvantaged, educationally deprived and/or economically impoverished backgrounds are highly susceptible to drugs and the drug culture.

Women, Drugs and the Drug Culture

R. Barri Flowers, author of *Female Crime, Criminals and Cellmates* (1995), states the hard facts succinctly: "Women are using and abusing every illegal or nonprescription drug available in the United States, including marijuana, cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, LSD, PCP, and Darvon."[32] In recent years, in many parts of the country, methamphetamines have increased dramatically in their popularity among drug users and drug dealers.

Flowers further asserts that while it's virtually impossible to guess how many women in the United States are using drugs illegally, there can be no denying that drugs and drug- related crimes are far and away the leading cause of female incarceration. In 1998, the most recent year for which such statistics are available, nearly 70 percent of all arrests of women were for larceny-theft or drug/alcohol offenses. "The relationship between women who abuse drugs and commit other crimes is strong. One-third of the women drug addicts are prostitutes, while a high percentage of the women abusing or addicted to drugs commit thefts, often to support their habit."[33]

Drugs are an equal-opportunity predator. Women from all walks of life, regardless of class, geographical origin, race, ethnicity, family history, educational level or other such important variables, can still find themselves addicted to drugs and attracted to the drug culture for any number of reasons.

The drug war's focus on poor black people in poor black communities has been documented in various media in recent years. And in point of fact, the possibility for drug use, abuse and criminality is a fact of life for many black women, and a serious threat for many other females regardless of their stations in life.

However, such a life is all but prescribed for many girls and women (not to mention boys and men) who come from poor families. In other words, social class and economic status are major common denominators in determining criminality among women, regardless of their race.

Writing in …*And the Poor Get Prison*, Jeffrey Reiman joins other academics and criminology experts in arguing that U.S. prisons are essentially the national poorhouse. This situation is acceptable to, and indeed, supported by average citizens who are convinced that locking up poor people makes them safer. These views have been codified into such initiatives as "three strikes and you're out," as well as other tough sentencing laws for drug offenders, all applauded by the public. "Dangerous crimes, they think, are mainly committed by poor people. Seeing that prison populations are made up primarily of the poor only makes them surer of this. They think, in other words, that the criminal justice system gives a true reflection of the dangers that threaten them."[34]

However, Reiman asserts that the criminal justice process, written by the elite, protects members of the elite by writing, approving and enforcing laws that define criminality in ways that target the poor.

"[T]he criminal justice system effectively weeds out the well-to-do, so that at the end of the road in prison, the vast majority of those we find there come from the lower classes," according to Reiman. "For the same criminal behavior, the poor are more likely to be arrested; if arrested, they are more likely to be charged; if charged, more likely to be convicted; if convicted, more likely to be sentenced to prison; and if sentenced, more likely to be given longer prison terms than members of the middle and upper classes. In other words, the image of the criminal population one sees in our nation's jails and prisons is distorted by the shape of the criminal justice system itself."[35]

As we shall see, this is certainly true in Washington State, which is predominantly white. The inmate population at the Washington Corrections Center for Women roughly mirrors the population at large, with an estimated seven out of every 10 offenders being Caucasians. However, the vast majority, according to prison officials, come from economically and/or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

Consequences for Women, Children and Families

While "getting tough on drugs" is a simple message that makes for good bumper sticker language and catchy political campaign fodder, it fails to address the complexities associated with crime and incarceration, especially when the offender is a woman. Of the roughly 1 million women currently ensnared in the U.S. criminal justice system, federal estimates suggest that nearly 70 percent are mothers of at least one child under the age of 18. Karen Anderson, author of *Changing Woman,* writes that this statistic will have far-reaching and insidious consequences that were not contemplated or anticipated in the "get tough on crime" debates that have occurred locally, regionally and nationally during the last two decades. "Because women have a major role in the socialization of the next generation and because they create the emotional milieu in which identity is formed and experienced, the politics of gender, culture, and identity are emotionally freighted."[36]

Besides the political and cultural implications of incarceration, practical considerations such as the emotional and psychological effects of parental incarceration on children and the many related child-care and child-rearing issues that can arise are all issues that only now are beginning to reveal themselves. Denise Johnston, executive director of the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents in California and co-editor of *Children of Incarcerated Parents*, writes that the impacts on such children can be devastating, long-lasting and contributive to multi-generational delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse and criminality. Parent-child separation "is a source of emotional injury to children of prisoners. Parent-child separation due to parental incarceration produces its effects through several mechanisms, including a sense of loss, multiple placements and lack of a parental role model," Johnston writes. "The most typical trauma-reactive

behavior seen in children of offenders is aggression; others include hyper vigilance and other anxiety states, attention and concentration problems, and withdrawal. Aggressive behaviors and attention/concentration difficulties lead to academic and disciplinary problems at school."[37]

Child care issues, about which Sandra Enos writes in *Mothering From the Inside*, a quasi-ethnography of women prisoners, is a constant worry to the typical incarcerated woman. "A variety of living arrangements are potentially available for these children," according to Enos. "For example, children may live with fathers, with grandparents, or with other kin (including sisters, aunts, friends, and others), or be in foster care. However, the options actually available to individual women for the placement of their children are constrained by a number of factors. Women may find their families are undesirable or unavailable as caretakers; husbands and boyfriends may not be available or be considered not competent to care for children. For some women, the prospect of placing a child in foster care is an option of last resort, one that will not be freely selected by women but one that may be imposed after all other alternatives have been exhausted. The placement of children illuminates how resources – family and other– are deployed during incarceration and how these choices and options are affected by race, ethnicity and class."[38]

It is hardly surprising that the idea of relinquishing control of one's child to the very state that imprisoned you would be an agonizingly difficult decision for a mother to make. However, as Enos and others point out, these are decisions that female offenders confront every day. However, placement of a child with an ill-equipped or ill-intentioned caregiver can have far-reaching and tragic implications, according to author Melvin

Delgado (2001). "A recent report by the Columbia University National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse highlights how communities and child welfare have been transformed in the last decade: 'A devastating tornado of substance abuse and addiction is tearing through the nation's child welfare and family court systems leaving in its path a wreckage of abused and neglected children, turning social welfare agencies and courts on their heads and uprooting the traditional disposition to keep children with their natural parents.'" Delgado contends, in short, that the relationship between drugs and neglect is extremely strong. Nearly 70 percent of all cases of child abuse and neglect can be attributed to substance abuse by one or both parents, which make such children vulnerable to the same factors themselves and contribute mightily to inter-generational cycles of abuse, despair, neglect, poverty and criminal behavior.[39]

Life on the "Inside"

Since the nation first began incarcerating large numbers of females, the fate of women sentenced to jail or prison has changed with the times. In the late 19th century, female offenders were considered beyond redemption. Typically, such women were forced to perform hard labor, were subjected to beatings and sexual assaults at the hands of both male prisoners and prison officials. (This was especially true for women of color).

The Progressive era brought a welcome change. While prisoners of color were still subject to abuse and harassment no matter what, the establishment of women only penal institutions somewhat reduced the threat of violence for many women. These new institutions fell into essentially three categories:

1) **Treatment Oriented:** These adopted a more lenient, rehabilitative and treatment-oriented approach to incarceration. These facilities, operating under the basic assumption that female offenders had "lost their way" or had somehow misplaced their moral compass, sought to return or "rehabilitate" women to pursue lives of domesticity and womanliness. These were largely reserved for middle-class white women who might be "redeemed."

2) **Authoritarian/Disciplinarian:** These were patterned, more-or-less, after male prisons, which for the women inmates meant hard labor, separation and segregation and plenty of solitary time to reflect on why they were behind bars in the first place. Lower-class whites and some blacks deemed incorrigible.

3) **Racist based:** Disparate and often brutal treatment was meted out to blacks and other women of color at the institutions. In addition to hard labor, these women were subjected to rapes, beatings and typically denied any agency whatsoever.

Author Dana M. Britton writes in *At Work in the Iron Cage* that these three fundamental structures, with some variations thrown in depending upon the location and geographic region, form the basis of what we now refer to today as the U.S. prison system for women. These practices continued until the 1970s. At that point, sheer numbers began to drive everything. Dodge reports that in virtually every year since 1970, the number of women sentenced to and actively serving time in state and federal prisons

has increased faster than that of men. By mid-2000, of the nearly one million women in local, county, state or federal custody or control, some 93,000 women were doing time in state or federal prisons, another 70,000 women were incarcerated in local jails, and 800,000 were on probation.[40]

While the days of hard labor, beatings and rampant sexual and physical assaults are all but over, life on the inside for most women is not easy. For one thing, the numbers point to the practical problem of jail and prison overcrowding. Close quarters among populations already drug-addicted, psychologically fragile, physically diseased, mentally impaired or criminally inclined, makes for dangerous environments. In an essay that appears in *The Incarcerated Woman,* Chesney-Lind argues that the sheer numbers of inmates since 1970 has forced law enforcement and corrections officials at all levels to reevaluate and re-conceptualize rehabilitation and what that means. That has resulted in, among other things, construction of more prisons across the nation that are exclusively for female offenders. The nation is responding, albeit slowly. In 1990, the U.S. had 71 female-only institutions. By 1995, the number had increased to 104.[41]

As was mentioned earlier, the goal in early women's prisons – particularly for white offenders – was to redeem or "rehabilitate" the women, raising them up to a socially constructed ideal of womanhood. Today, while the main focus of vocational and educational offerings for women is aimed at helping them become productive members of society upon their release, traditional and contemporary social constructs of gender are still involved. For example, Pamela J. Schramm points out that some states in the recent past have resisted various types of vocational, educational and rehabilitative programs based on the outmoded notion that women are not "potential breadwinners."[42]

Some states and localities around the country are willing to experiment. Washington is one of a handful of states that have implemented innovative new therapeutic, educational and counseling programming for female prisoners that is aimed at both rehabilitating offenders and improving their odds for success upon release. One such initiative at the Washington Corrections Center for Women is the Residential Parenting Program, the focus of this dissertation.

Another problem in women's prisons is sexualized violence. While the frequency of incidents involving the abuse of power and sexual assaults seems to have lessened in recent years, such horrific events still occur. A 1999 report issued by the global human rights organization, Amnesty International, found that once inside the criminal justice system, many U.S. female prisoners can find themselves in a netherworld of torture, abuse and sexual slavery in many correctional institutions across the land. Amnesty International reported that "in November 1998 the state of Washington agreed to pay a former prisoner $110,000 to settle a lawsuit she initiated after she was raped and made pregnant by a guard at the Washington Corrections Center for Women in 1993. Similar cases are pending, including one case in which an inmate who had been imprisoned since 1985 gave birth to a child in 1997. In the latter case, the woman alleged that she was raped but prosecution authorities declined to charge the officer identified as the father because they considered they could not prove the officer had used force or the threat of force." As unbelievable as it may seem, prior to these events, Washington State had no law or policy that prohibited consensual sex between inmates and staff. This, of course, raises the dubious question of whether such a thing as "consensual sex" can actually exist in a prison setting where one person is an offender and the other is an

armed correctional officer or even an unarmed staff member. Clearly, such activity is morally and ethically wrong, regardless of what the law was at the time.[43]

In response to these revelations, the Washington Department of Corrections introduced a written policy prohibiting sex between prison employees and inmates. In January 1999, the Washington State Legislature approved legislation prohibiting sex between staff and inmates. Washington's governor signed the legislation.

Similar circumstances to those reported in Washington occur annually in jails and prisons from Alabama to Wyoming, according to Amnesty International. "Many women in prisons and jails in the USA are victims of sexual abuse by staff, including sexually offensive language; male staff touching inmates' breast and genitals when conducting searches; male staff watching inmates while they are naked; and rape. In the overwhelming majority of complaints of sexual abuse by female inmates against staff, men are reported to be the perpetrators. Contrary to international standards, prison and jails in the USA employ men to guard women and place relatively few restrictions on the duties of the male staff. As a consequence, much of the touching and viewing of their bodies by staff that women experience as shocking and humiliating is permitted by law." The Amnesty report also suggests that victims are often reluctant to complain out of fear that the accusations will not be viewed as credible and because of concerns about retribution and retaliation. As stated earlier, such disturbing events allegedly occur in nearly every state and the District of Columbia. However, Amnesty finds that six jurisdictions have particularly bad records with respect to the prevalence of sexual abuse: California, Washington, D.C., Georgia, Illinois, Michigan and New York.[44]

In terms of consensual sexual activity, or more specifically, consensual homosexual activity between inmates, most jails and prisons have formal policies that strictly prohibit such behavior based on the rationale that it can be disruptive, prevent cohesion and discipline, and serve as a distraction to the rehabilitative process.

Watterson, author of *Women in Prison: Inside the Concrete Womb*, confirms that this viewpoint about sex and sexuality in women's prisons is one thatis widely held. "When the topic of sex in prison comes up, people are shocked and curious, as if they've never considered what people do with their sexual and emotional needs when they're confined behind bars. Others seem to think that if you lose your liberty for breaking a law, you also ought to lose your sexuality and your right to intimacy and sexual contact."[45]

Yet another major issue for female prisoners has been and will continue to be health care and health problems. Many correctional facilities, even those that are exclusively female, are ill-equipped to handle the mental and physical health needs of women, which are considerably different than those of men and seem to occur more frequently in female offender populations. One obvious difference is that unlike their male counterparts, female offenders can become pregnant or have babies or small children in their care, which can present a host of issues, depending on the circumstances of the inmate. For instance, was she homeless prior to her incarceration? Is she a drug or alcohol abuser? What is her HIV status? And a myriad of other questions pertain when the offender is female.

Also, given that the leading cause of female incarceration in the United States is drugs, or offenses closely related to the sale or distribution of drugs, substance abuse

treatment programs, as well as timely access to them, is yet another issue that administrators of women's prisons must attend to even more frequently and in greater detail than those who manage male institutions.

Watterson also notes two other important aspects of imprisonment for women not analogous for men who are incarcerated. First, it is not unheard of for a man's family to be waiting – relatively or completely intact – when he is released from jail or prison. But women who go to jail or prison tend to be single parents, heads of household with no real connections to the father(s) of their children. When such people are incarcerated, the lucky ones, as was discussed earlier, have family members – parents, siblings or extended family – willing and able to take the offenders' children until such time as she is released. Those offenders who are less fortunate more often than not have their children taken away from them by the state and placed in foster families and/or adopted homes. In cases such as these, women released after serving their sentences often have no home or family to go home to. Women often serve their sentences with these concerns heavily on their minds. Thoughts such as these – whether or not they come true – obviously can have serious psychological effects on offenders. But Watterson contends that when such realizations are accepted by heterosexual female offenders, they begin to open up to the idea of sexual relationships with other women, if only for comfort. "We forget how long people must live in that prison environment: one year, three years, ten years, twenty years. Americans sentence lawbreakers to longer terms in prison than any other nation on earth. But no matter the sentence and no matter the crime, the circumstances that dictated imprisonment do not turn people into automatons. It isn't realistic to expect human beings to survive without intimacy or affection for long, lonely months or years. If

anything, inner life becomes more intense in this strange world. The need for warmth and identification and support is greater."[46]

Watterson, Sloop and others also point out that incarcerated women, denied access family members by distance, time or circumstance, are prone to establish new cultures, new structures, psychological adoptions, new different connections and quasi-family models, some negative and some positive, to replicate or replace their contacts on the outside world. In essence, many female prisoners struggle to find ways to psychologically survive.

Beginning 15 to 20 years ago, a number of states began considering and implementing so-called nursery programs. A growing recognition of such psychological struggles and despair among women prisoners prompted Corrections Department officials and prison administrators in Washington State to begin contemplating a new approach to these old problems. After nearly a decade of planning, studying, learning and experimenting, what emerged was the Washington's Residential Parenting Program, increasingly recognized nationally for being innovative and "outside-the-box," and also a bit controversial and risky.

The body of literature related specifically to women's prisons and women prisoners also includes a handful, but nevertheless important, set of ethnographic studies. These include ethnographies and quasi-ethnographies such as *Mothering from the Inside* (2001) by Rhode Island College Sociology Professor Sandra Enos; *In the Mix: Struggle and Survival in a Women's Prison,* (1998) by California State University—Fresno Criminology Professor Barbara Owen, and; University of Illinois at Chicago Professor Patricia O'Brien's *Makin' It in the Free World: Women In Transition From Prison.*

(2001) These texts explore to some degree the estrangement, disorientation, feelings of abandonment and psychological and emotional distress female offenders often experience when contemplating the effects their imprisonments have had on their children, both in the short- and longer-terms. As we will see, such concerns are not without foundation.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Approach and Research Methodology

Research Background:

The seeds for this study were sown in the Fall of 2000 when I enrolled as a non-degree seeking student in an Ethnography course at the University of Maryland — College Park, the first class I took in what would, in fact, become my pursuit of a doctorate in American Studies.

At the first meeting of that class, the instructor, Prof. John Caughey, asked me and my colleagues to suggest topics we might wish to investigate during the semester. When my turn cameto speak, the idea of performing an ethnography at the Washington Corrections Center for Women inexplicably popped into my head and out of my mouth.

On one level, it was simply common sense: At the time, I was residing in Washington State and flying – weekly – into the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. area to attend class at Maryland. It also happened that I lived just minutes away from the women's prison in Gig Harbor, Wash., a place I had heard about, glimpsed from the outside, but never entered; a place that represented an important and ongoing issue in American Society.

Therefore, the logistics made sense. I reasoned that once a week, I would fly east to attend class. Then, during the remainder of the week, I would do my research and interviews at the prison in furtherance of the study.

Beyond those practical considerations, however, it is still unclear to me exactly why, of all possible and interesting topics, I chose a prison. As a national correspondent in the mid-90s for Congressional Quarterly's *Weekly Report* magazine, I covered a wide range of issues at the White House and on Capitol Hill, including the federal budget, K-

12 education and education standards, welfare reform, job and vocational training, prayer in the public schools and affirmative action.

Later, as a staff writer for *The Seattle Times,* I covered business trends and economic issues as they related to the Pacific Northwest and global firms such as Microsoft, Boeing and Starbucks. I also wrote a lot about issues pertaining to social and public policy, federal, state and local politics, and more.

And earlier in my career, as an editorial writer and columnist at *The News Tribune* of Tacoma, Wash., I had written on a variety of topics ranging from campaign finance reform to states' rights to a woman's right to choose. In addition to all of that, I had served as both a part-time and full-time instructor of Communication and journalism at American University and elsewhere for several years. With those experiences under my belt, I was confident thatI had the skills to adequately tackle nearly any subject.

Nonetheless, I surprised myself that Fall 2000 evening by blurting out that I wanted to explore the inner workings of a prison. In hindsight, perhaps it was the sheer challenge of taking on a complex and foreign topic. Maybe it was curiosity. Or possibly, it was the lure of learning more about the criminal justice system, a topic with which I had only scant knowledge and vague familiarity. Most likely, it was all of the above.

Contacting the WCCW

Excited and anxious, I proceeded to contact administrators at the prison. Doing so would prove difficult. As is well known, prisons are notoriously difficult places for journalists and ethnographers to gain access. After numerous failed attempts, I finally made initial contact with an aide in the prison superintendent's office in mid-September. I

told the aide that I was a former staff writer at *The Seattle Times*, and that I was taking a graduate class in American Studies at the University of Maryland. I advised her that I wanted to see if I could get permission to perform an academic study at the prison and I would like to set up an appointment in the near future to meet the superintendent and discuss these ideas with her.

After consulting privately with the superintendent, whose name is Belinda Stewart, the aide said the first available date would be at the end of October, nearly six weeks later. She also said warned that my audience with Superintendent Stewart would be only 15 minutes. Having covered the Clinton White House, members of Congress, the U.S. Supreme Court, and several state governors in Washington, Virginia and elsewhere, I refused to be put off or discouraged by the long wait or the short meeting. I had my appointment; now I needed to use it well.

I made sure I was well prepared for my meeting with Superintendent Stewart. I brought along my resume, writing samples and clear, straightforward ideas of how I would like to proceed and why an academic study of the prison and some of its innovative approaches to rehabilitation issues might be helpful to all involved. The meeting lasted for more than an hour. And at the end, Ms. Stewart accepted my proposal. In fact, the Superintendent invited me back to the prison the following week so that she could introduce me to all of the key officials at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. I was asked to give a brief explanation of what I intended to do. The administrators were free to ask me questions. Atthe conclusion of the meeting, Superintendent Stewart urged her colleagues to make every accommodation for me.

Needless to say, I was surprised and pleased. My access to the institution was excellent. I was given carte blanche to investigate, explore and research.
Which is not to say, staffers, administrators, corrections officers and certainly inmates, have not at times been apprehensive and very cautious about dealing with me. But over the following four years, those apprehensions have lessened tremendously. And as we will see, staff and inmates have often talked to me and with me in ways that seem very candid and open. From a personal perspective, this study has been illuminating, shocking, unsettling, candid, graphic, real and extremely informative about the Residential Parenting Program.

Research Methodology

This study was performed using a combination of ethnographic and journalistic methods. I was concerned, first of all, to use participant observation methods to study the organization and everyday workings of the RPP. I wanted to observe all the basic activities and programming and I wanted to observe the social interactions, including the relationships between prisoner-mothers and their children, relationships among prisoner women, and relationships between prisoners and staff. I spent roughly 100 hundred hours in participant observation research at WCCW, most of it in the RPP. In addition to observing and participating in ordinary prison conversations in the RPP, I also wanted to do extensive, in-depth interviewing. As will be discussed below, I wanted to obtain the perspectives and experiences of staff, inmate caregivers, and especially prison mothers participating in the RPP. First, I wanted to do life history interviews; that is to get the women talking about their lives prior to their entry into the WCCW. I wanted to hear

their stories and I wanted to hear how they constructed their lives in the RPP, as well as their hopes and plans for life on the outside when their sentences are over. In general, I was successful in encouraging women to speak freely and at length on these topics. I conducted approximately 75 hours of in-depth interviewing. In analyzing and interpreting their stories, as we will see, I found that the women were typically involved in several different systems of cultural meaning.

In keeping with ethical and privacy considerations, as well as the University of Maryland — College Park IRB Human Subjects policy, the identities of current and former offenders, their children and extended family and social contacts have been protected through the use of pseudonyms. However, the names of prison administrators, civilian staff members, corrections officers, service providers and other such officials are true and accurate.

In terms of the ethnographic and life history elements of this dissertation, I am guided by the *Handbook of Ethnography* (2001), in which Cortazzi writes: "There is increasing recognition of the importance and usefulness of narrative analysis as an element of doing ethnography. This is hardly surprising. Narrative is now seen as one of the fundamental ways in which humans organize and understand their world."[47]

With that in mind, this dissertation features a significant amount of narrative input from those who participated in the study. However, narrative alone does not represent adequate research. Proper analysis and interpretation is necessary if meaningful results are to be yielded. At every turn, ethnographers recreate voices, whether or not they quote from fieldnotes, tapes, or film, or reconstruct memory of voices. For, as Riessman notes:

'Informants' stories do not mirror a world `out there.' They are constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and interpretive."[48]

Much of this dissertation is constructed using person-centered interviews and research techniques, defined by Levy and Hollan as "a mixture of informant and respondent questions and probes," focused on language, meanings and at least a fundamental understanding of the culture being studied.[49]

With that in mind, this dissertation aims to analyze and interpret the language used by a group of people associated with the Residential Parenting Program, being careful to accurately grasp group members' meanings so as to better appreciate participants' conceptual frameworks and understandings of the program. Toward that end, the personal backgrounds of participants are explored in an effort to discern how individual women experience and understand the RPP. Such individual, in-depth portraits demonstrate the dynamic, intimate and compelling nature of life history and ethnographic research techniques, which can offer unique windows into the lives and culture of research subjects. As Caughey points out, "Ethnography of this kind has helped us understand a great deal about the very different ways people of particular communities perceive themselves and their worlds and it has deepened our knowledge of how cultures work at the community level. If we think of culture as a system of meaning, an interpretive framework, a language-concept system that a particular set of people use to interpret experience and act in the world, then ethnography has usually focused on the ways in which a set of people who 'share' a given frame of reference view themselves and their world and how it influences their behavior."[50]

Participant Selection

Choosing women to participate in the study was largely a arbitrary process that took four years to accomplish. I gave some basic consideration to issues such as age and race, being careful not to have a participant pool that, on the surface at least, was homogenous. But beyond that, the process was unsystematic. After several weeks and months of simply attending meetings at the prison or hanging around in the hallways, chatting informally with inmates and prison officials, or simply observing activities, I would be approached by offenders intrigued by my research, some of whom would volunteer to participate. Others would be recommended by fellow inmates or prison officials. Still others I would seek out after hearing about a unique circumstance or life experience. A few women declined to participate. And to the best of my knowledge, under no circumstances were participants forced or coerced to talk with me.

After four years of this process, I have accumulated dozens of tapes, hundreds of pages of notes and manuscripts, representing extensive conversations with nearly 60 women and more than a dozen prison officials, service providers, corrections officers and others.

The interviews and excerpts contained herein are not intended to be representative of the Residential Parenting Program as a whole. But hopefully, this research does provide an interesting and informative window into the lives of specific individuals who have participated in the program, and/or are still involved with or influenced by it in some way.

Similarities and differences that emerged during the course of this study also will be investigated, analyzed and interpreted, in hopes of determining what might account for

any diversity of views, or lack thereof. In many instances, for example, the narrative excerpts of participants incorporated into this dissertation sometimes contradict each other, and in some cases, participants even contradict themselves, a circumstance described by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw. “The excerpt strategy provides a particularly effective device for highlighting dialogues between the voices of the ethnographer – author and the social actors in the setting. Though recorded by the ethnographer, the voices of the local people can be heard in the excerpt. In the analytic text, the author then can engage those member voices in various ways, for example, by augmenting them with additional information, or by highlighting the implicit contradictions in what they said.”[51]

In short, dealing with multiple voices and multiple viewpoints – and even self-contradictory viewpoints – within ethnographic text requires careful analysis and interpretation of records and discourse, which I have attempted to achieve here.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is another key research method I have employed in my work at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. I have tried to follow the goals and standards articulated by Spradley: “Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from a native point of view.”[52]

During my work at the prison, I have engaged in what Spradley calls “dual purpose” participant observation. In other words, I have both engaged in activities appropriate to the situation at hand and I’ve observed the activities, people and physical

aspects of the situation. I've recorded both objective observations and subjective feelings during such activities, and I've engaged in participant observation at many levels.

For instance, I've been a passive participant, present during meetings at the prison and on the scene, but not interacting with others to any great extent. I've been a moderate participant, meaning I have sought to maintain a balance between participation and observation. This has occurred during instances when I've helped mothers transport, feed, clothe or bathe their children, for example. And I have been an active participant on occasion, seeking to do what others were doing in an effort not only to gain acceptance, but also to learn the cultural rules of behavior. The only level I could arguably never attain is what Spradley calls a "complete participant." The reasons are obvious: I am male, not a female prisoner, and therefore, not capable of being a "mother," per se. I am not even a parent, which would make such emulation even more impossible. Nor am I a convicted felon. No matter how much time I spend at the prison or in the company of current or former inmates or Corrections Department workers, I may never completely know what it is like to live and/or work in a penal institution day after day after day. I am also African American, yet another difference that sets me apart from the majority of the prison population, which is predominantly white. Nevertheless, I believe I have made a thorough and systematic attempt at identifying, analyzing, contextualizing, and interpreting the culture of the Residential Parenting Program and some staff and women associated with it.

Other key informants/interviewees included in this dissertation – besides offenders, their children and other intimates – are prison administrators, corrections officials at all levels, current and former probation officers, other prisoners and other

involved parties, such as counselors, rehabilitative program instructors, teachers and social service providers. Where they gave permission, the true and actual names of those individuals are used to identify them in this study.

Navigating WCCW

Getting started with the study was a bit difficult at first for several reasons. For one thing, I struggled internally with concerns about how I might be received by the women and whether I would be able to get them to open up to a male, especially since many female offenders find themselves in prison because of, to a greater or lesser extent, unhealthy relationships with men.

Another early personal issue for me was "the badge." As a frequent visitor to the prison and a researcher sanctioned by prison officials, I initially was introduced to inmates by prison officials and given a yellow badge bearing my name and a photo not unlike a mug-shot. While these accommodations sound innocent enough, they were significant developments at a place that is all about control.

For example, general visitors to WCCW enter the facility through an area called "public access," which faces the institution's parking lot and the local streets and major highways beyond. First-time or infrequent visitors to the prison must state their business and the purpose of their visit to an armed corrections officer who sits behind a faux-wood paneled console situated in the center of a large room. Visitors must then sign into a register, being careful to provide their home address and the exact time and date of their arrival. Visitors must also show positive photo identification such as a driver's license or military ID. Then they must empty their pockets of all foreign objects (which are stored in lockers) and pass through a metal detector. After all of that, visitors are given clip-on

badges that clearly state visitor, and as such they must be escorted everywhere on-campus by at least one full-time prison employee.

Visitors also are required to essentially take the long way around, no matter where on-campus they're going. For instance, although the building in which the RPP is located sits no more than 200 yards in a straight line from the public access, a regular visitor to the unit would be required to walk in what amounts to a half-circle, traversing a series of security gates, mechanized doors, security cameras, courtyards, armed officers and of course, the elements. A walk that might be two or three minutes long for an able-bodied person could well take 15, 20 minutes or more, depending upon time of day, circumstances and foot traffic.

That is why yellow badges are equivalent to gold bullion. A person wearing a yellow badge can go anywhere on campus that he or she wants. Yellow badge wearers can come and go as they please. Yellow badge wearers rule.

But one WCCW policy is inviolable for all and quickly learned. And that is: all badges – no exceptions – must be visible at all times. The reason is simple. At a glance, corrections officers must be able to distinguish inmates from employees, guests from contractors, and officers from everyone else.

Typically, yellow badges are given to contractors who are frequently on-campus and/or provide ongoing services to the prison. Yellow badges also are given to trusted volunteers whose visits are so frequent that requiring of them the same security safeguards imposed on less frequent visitors would be an inconvenience to them and the prison.

Since it was established early on that my visits to WCCW would be frequent and ongoing, the prison superintendent, Belinda Stewart, authorized my receipt of a yellow badge. With this badge, I had easy access to nearly every place and person at WCCW, a distinction that did not go unnoticed by inmates, whose movements are circumscribed by the institution.

In short, my yellow badge was all about control. I had some. Offenders, as such, did not. On some occasions, I even was introduced to inmates by people who made decisions about the circumstances of their everyday lives and who could influence their futures. All prisoners obviously were denied agency, in addition to most of their basic civil rights as U.S. citizens. These issues were not lost on me or them. And the badge issue, combined with me being introduced to inmates by DOC officials, may have implicitly or explicitly sent the message to RPP participants they *must*, or at the very least, *should* talk to me if I sought them out, whether they wanted to or not.

In my mind, this raised questions of coercion. I wondered to what extent I would be told what offenders may have thought I wanted to hear, or what they thought prison administrators wanted to hear. The idea of social control concerned me, as it does Claire M. Renzetti, author of the chapter "Connecting the Dots: Women, Public Policy and Social Control," which appears in *Crime, Control and Women: Feminist Implications of Criminal Justice Policy*. "Social control is not inherently bad. To the contrary, it's a necessary part of organized social life," writes Renzetti. "Social control makes social order possible and imbues our everyday interactions with a degree of predictability." But Renzetti's next passage struck at the heart of my concerns, and prompted me to think carefully about and watch closely how I was perceived and received by offenders in the

RPP. Renzetti writes that it "is the extent to which controls over women are proliferating–multiplying and extending into women's lives like tentacles that grasp prey and squeeze it into submission."[53]

Clearly, I did not want to be viewed as predatory or otherwise opportunistic. The Yellow Badge was an issue. The fact that I am a male working largely with women, except for the occasional correctional officer, in a women's institution was an issue. The fact that I am a Black man, of a certain age and having attained a certain level of education, working with mostly white women, mostly younger than I, and mostly less educated than myself, were all issues of initial concern.

But these worries eventually were tempered by experience. As discussed earlier, as a working journalist at several major national and regional publications during the last 15 years, I've learned how to cultivate relationships, communicate effectively, put people at ease and conduct personal interviews that are informative, productive and highly ethical. As a result, over a period of more than four years now, I have come to know and become comfortable interacting with staff members and offenders at WCCW. I visited the facility frequently, at least once or twice a month and as often as once or twice per week, depending upon the circumstances and the time of year. Regardless of frequency, I tended to stay on site from one hour up as many as three hours per visit. Through participant observation, one-on-one interviews with inmates and employees, and casual conversations with other people I encountered, I became a familiar figure. I gained a considerable degree of trust, and I have been able to construct what I believe to be a fair and accurate representation of the Residential Parenting Program environment and some of the current and former participants, staff members and others associated with it.

After wading in for several months and becoming oriented with some of the customs and cultures of WCCW, what developed most intensely was my interest in the RPP as an innovative and experimental program, and its role in rehabilitation process of offenders. While many of the life experiences my informants and life history partners have had are worlds from my own, I found, and continue to find, that we also often have much in common as human beings and Americans trying to make our ways in this world.

The information contained herein was gathered over the period from October 2000 through January 2005 during multiple visits to the Washington Corrections Center for Women, telephone calls and visits to the homes of former offenders. Most of the writing, analysis and organization of the project occurred between May 2004 and March 2005.

Throughout this study, I am guided by and rely heavily on many of the techniques discussed in Bernard, Agar, and Van Maanen, particularly with respect to understanding ethnography and culture, language and fieldwork, and making an ethnographic record. I also have drawn on the ethnographic approach employed by Geertz, by opening this ethnography with a scene observed while taking field notes and conducting interviews. I also draw here on work by contemporary ethnographic theorists – including Linde, Lindholm, and Caughey. These theorists are interested in person-centered ethnography or life history, and argue that we need to view individuals not as having one, single culture, but as multicultural. That is, entangled in a variety of social worlds that have quite different cultural values orientations and lifestyles. These different cultural meaning systems are not only out there in those worlds, but exist as different and often contrary systems of meaning in the individual's personal consciousness. Given this orientation, we

need to examine an individual's social situations, their conversations, and their personal narratives for evidence of the presence of differing cultural meaning systems – some of which will reinforce each other, some of which may be contradictory. As we think about and analyze these narratives, we will see there are some similarities and differences in what individuals say. A fair concern might be to question to what extent narratives provided by prison inmates are truthful, accurate and are not simply reflective of what the individual thinks the researcher wants to hear, or more to the point, what the women might understandably believe – rightly orwrongly – that prison officials want them to say. Without doubt, this is a challenge that ethnographers often encounter. The quality of the research data is vitally important to the credibility and validity of the research. However, a skilled researcher, can often work through such issues by establishing trust and a comfort level over time, and also by selecting other individuals with which to work. This is the approach I took in this dissertation.

Another concern might be the emergence of "conversion" or "redemption" narratives, that is, a sameness or pattern that might emerge in responses from participants – in this case prison inmates – who intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously, articulate the normative values of the group in power, in this case the administration and staff of the prison. However, as Cobley writes, narratives by definition represent points of view. "[T]wo of the most important features of narrative are the way in which it has been instrumental in the storage of memory and the contribution to the formation of human identity, and the way in which it is thoroughly selective."[54] Clearly, to some extent the circumstances of the women included in this study may have compelled them to speak in conversion or redemptive ways. However, as we will see,

most of the women seem to accept their situations, and at least to some degree, over time, expressed views that were ambivalent and even negative, on occasion.

Lastly, in terms of presentation, I have adopted much of the style and format employed by Clark-Lewis and techniques promoted by Linde, Kotlowitz and Patton to convey the words, ideas and concepts shared with me by my informants and life history partners.

Core Research Group:

In order to conduct the kind of ethnographic study of the RPP that I wanted to perform, I needed to identify the key people involved in the RPP. My initial observational work showed that there are several different kinds of people who are extensively and experientially involved in the RPP. As we shall see in more detail later, these categories turned out to be of four basic types:

1. **Prison Custody and Occupational Staff workers**: Prison Custody employees refers to correctional officers charged with maintaining safety and security at the prison. Other prison employees included various staff members who work in the RPP on a regular basis. These include people who play the official roles of unit supervisor, unit counselor/case workers, and assorted other educators, clerical help, social workers, mental health professionals and others. Approximately 20 such people work in the RPP at any given time.

I spent many hours observing custody and occupational staff during my participant observation work. I also had many casual conversations with approximately 30 custody and occupational staff members. I asked roughly 15 such people for formal interviews.

While two declined, I was able to conduct formal interviews with more than a dozen. While I drew on the information and perspectives from all those I interviewed, six interviews are featured in the chapters below.

2. <u>Inmate Caregivers</u>: These are WCCW prisoners who have been selected to work in the RPP as part of their prison work assignment. These prisoners, who assist mothers and children in the RPP, also have a great deal of contact with the program and a special perspective on it. Approximately 15 to 20 caregivers work in the RPP at any given time. I observed some half a dozen caregivers in action many times during my participant observation and had many casual conversations with them. I asked four of them for formal interviews. One declined, but I was able to conduct interviews with three others. The voices of all three caregivers are featured in the chapters below

3. <u>Women prisoners pregnant or with babies admitted into the RPP</u>: These, of course, are key figures; the very women for whom the program has been designed. Usually, there are about 16 such women in the program at any given time. Again, I observed and interacted with approximately 35 to 40 such women for many hours during my years of observational work. Of these, I asked 25 for formal interviews. Of those, five declined. But I was able to conduct formal interviews with 20 women of this type. All of these voices were important for my study. The voices of 10 such women are presented in detail in the pages below.

4. <u>Former RPP Mothers</u>: This set involves women who have participated in the RPP, made it though the program and been released back into society with their small child. They, too, have an important, but again, quite different location in relation to the program. While I wanted to focus on women in the prison, I also sought out some of the

graduates. Approximately 103 such women have been released form the program in the years since it began. I obtained some information on these women from prison records. I also spoke briefly with five such women in the world outside the prison. I asked all five of these women for interviews. One declined, but I was able to interview four such women. Of these, three are presented in detail in the chapter on the transition into society.

My goal was to observe each set of key participants in order to get a feel for how they related to other participants and to the program in general. I also especially wanted to hear how people in each set of participants constructed the baby program from their particular location and point of view. I sought to establish a good relationship with each of them and then to get them talking in detail about the RPP and about how they saw it working on a day-to-day basis. I sought to get them talking about what they perceived as the programs advantages and problems, and to obtain their general assessments of the effectiveness of the program. I wanted to explore variation within each group, but I also sought to identify general patterns in what members of each group had to say. Finally, I sought to compare the perspectives of the various key sets of people as to similarities and differences in their understandings and assessments of the RPP.

Erin Delgado, the woman whose experiences were recounted in the prologue to this dissertation, is a good example of the typical WCCW offender, particularly those accepted into the prison's Residential Parenting Program. The 33-year-old Delgado, who has spent the better part of her teen years and adult life hooked on drugs and alcohol, has been in and out of local jails and state prison on a laundry list of drug possession, drug dealing, theft and fraud charges. Despite repeated efforts over the years to quit drugs and

clean up her life, Delgado has always seemed to reach just a certain level of success, only to find herself sliding back into what she admits were old behaviors and bad habits. For Delgado, life has been a roller-coaster ride of drug-induced euphoria, selfishness, personal tragedy, emotional and physical bumps and bruises, all punctuated by a changing cast of characters. Eventually, this well-worn path has led Delgado to the same place, every time – days, months or years behind bars.

According to Washington Department of Corrections officials, on any given day, the same can be said of more than 75 percent of WCCW's roughly 800 prisoners, most of whom are serving time for non-violent drug offenses.

Federal crime statistics indicate the same is true at the national level. Involvement with drugs and the drug culture – as opposed to more aggressive, violent, and usually male-oriented behaviors, such as physical assaults, sexual assaults, weapons offenses and murder – are increasingly common among female offender populations across the United States. Chesney-Lind, writing in *The Incarcerated Woman: Rehabilitative Programming in Women's Prisons* (2003), notes that drug offenses in the last decade account for the largest source of population growth in women's prisons. "One explanation," she contends, "is that the 'war on drugs' has become a largely unannounced war on women." Chesney-Lind drives her point home with the assertion that "although the intent of 'get tough' policies was to rid society of drug dealers and so-called kingpins, many of the women swept up in the war on drugs are minor offenders."[55]

One major question that arises from this new and changing reality is: What have been the effects of drugs and the drug culture on individual members of the Residential Parenting Program research group included in this study?

Each woman has a unique and compelling story to tell. However, all of the offenders' experiences are consistent with the basic findings of various authors and researchers on womens' imprisonment, ranging from Watterson, Reiman, Pagliaro, Stevens and Wexler to Chesney-Lind and Owen, among many others.

As we shall see, while the women often have some attraction to the drug culture, (the "highs" of drug use, the money to be earned in drug dealing, and some of the "party" sides of the drug culture), drug use, drug dealing and general involvement in the drug worlds has been for these women mostly a corrosive, destructive, disruptive and often tragic enterprise that is not conducive to, or supportive of, happy or healthy lives. The damage often is even more widespread and destructive, over longer periods of time, when assorted family members and other intimates have suffered along with them – including their own children.

Figure 3: Diagram of WCCW

Aerial Photo Courtesy of WCCW Website

Chapter 3: Evolution of the RPP

An explosion of female crime

Prior to 1971, the year WCCW opened, female prisoners in Washington had been incarcerated at a men's penitentiary in Walla Walla on the Eastern side of the state, near the Idaho border.

A total of 162 women were assigned to the institution in that first year of 1971. But over a relatively short period of time, the crimes committed by women have grown more serious and increased in number. By 1991, the number of female inmates in the state had risen to 520. Five years later, that figure had risen 69 percent to 880 statewide. As a result, WCCW, or "Purdy" as it is sometimes called by staff and inmates, gradually began to take on the trappings of a true prison.

Today, heavy gates and 12-foot fences topped with razor wire come into view as visitors drive toward the grounds. Armed correctional officers patrol the perimeter around the clock. Officers inside the fences monitor every movement of the resident population, now well in excess of 800 prisoners on any given day. The number of female prisoners statewide continues to climb each year at an alarming rate, as Table 2 on the following page suggests.

At first glance, WCCW does not appear as threatening or severe as some television shows and Hollywood movies might depict. However, the metal detectors, the armed officers, the "big-brother" surveillance cameras and centrally controlled, electronic gates and doors serve to make the point abundantly clear: this is prison, not a day camp. Sternly worded signs on the grounds warn inmates not to stray into restricted areas close to gates and fences. At the entrance, posted messages caution visitors to put personal belongings and items such as candy, wallets and even loose change, in lockers located in a public access area at the front of the institution, off-limits to offenders.

Table 2

Resident Female Offenders in Washington State Correctional Facilities
by Race, Hispanic Origin and Age
as of December 31, 2004

RACE						
White	**Black**	**Native American**	**Asian/Pacific Islanders**	**Other**	**Unknown**	**Total**
1,036	240	70	20	35	6	1,407

HISPANIC ORIGIN			
Hispanic	**Non-Hispanic**	**Unknown**	**Total**
87	1,100	220	1,407

RACE	**TOTAL**	**AGE ATENTRA NCE**									**AVERAGE**
		18-20	**21-24**	**25-29**	**30-34**	**35-39**	**40-44**	**45-49**	**50-64**	**65+**	
TOTAL	1,413	63	195	239	275	295	195	109	42	1	34
WHITE	969	39	133	176	201	207	118	64	30	1	33.7
BLACK	319	11	44	36	51	70	59	36	12		35.7
AMER. INDIAN	74	8	10	15	16	11	10	4			31.6
ASIAN	13	2	3	2	1	3	1	1			29.9
ALEUT.	2							2			45.5
OTHER	28	3	3	6	4	4	7	1			32.7
UNKWN	8		2	4	2						27.1
HISPAN.	64	3	12	12	14	9	11	2	1		32.4
HISPANIC UNKNOWN	365	30	55	76	65	55	49	27	8		32.5

Prison officials explain the rationale for strictly prohibiting objects brought into the institution in the following way: In the past, some inmates, with nothing but time on their hands, have been known to fashion lethal weapons out of even the most seemingly innocuous objects, including paper clips, ink pens and toothbrushes. The term "watch your back" is top-of-mind at WCCW. Although such violent events appear to be few and far between at Purdy, the words security and safety have real meaning here, for inmates, officers, staff and visitors.

Parenting in Prison

The initial rationale for establishment of the RPP was based on a variety of factors, both economic and societal. For instance, incarceration of parents, especially those who come from low-income or indigent backgrounds, generates a variety of costs that might include foster care for displaced children, educational needs, not to mention health care and other child welfare expenses.

Economic consequences tell only part of the story, however. Johnston, writing in *Children of Incarcerated Parents,* notes that the psychological traumas and anxieties experienced by both parties during parent-child separations are real and can have adverse, long-term implications. While infants are unaware of events in their parents' lives and may initially be unaffected by early separation from their mothers, Johnston asserts that offenders unable to bond with their children are at a distinct disadvantage. "Of greater concern than attachment disorders in infants is the impaired bonding that can result from the incarceration of a parent and the parent's physical separation from the infant. This is a profound loss that can interfere with the full flowering of parental feelings and the sense of parental responsibility that grown out of the bond between a parent a totally dependent

infant. Ultimately, such a diminished relationship may produce more negative outcomes than any direct effects of parent-child separation on the infant."[56]

For young children – those 2 to 6 years old – prolonged separations brought on by incarceration can have lasting and deep-seated implications, Johnston writes.

"This is a source of emotional injury to children of prisoners," Johnston writes. "Parent-child separation due to parental incarceration produces its effects through several mechanisms, including a sense of loss, multiple placements, and lack of a parental role model." In terms of long-term effects, Johnston adds: "Typical emotional responses to childhood trauma include anger, sadness or grief, and anxiety. In most cases, children's natural resiliency allows them to recover from these immediate reactions to trauma. However, children with poor coping skills, and children whose families are so stressed that they cannot offer support, are more likely to be unable to overcome the emotional effects of trauma."[57]

Such emotional scars can, and often do, lead to behavior problems, academic and disciplinary problems at school, inappropriate and aggressive behavior and violence. The RPP at WCCW remains one of the few programs in the nation aimed at averting such problems before they begin. Sharp and Eriksen, authors of the essay "Imprisoned Mothers and their Children," which appears in *Women In Prison: Gender and Social Control*, correctly assert that if the nation fails to make programs like the RPP broadly available to U.S. female offenders, the consequence could be dire. "[T]he machinery of the criminal justice system currently pulls women into its clutches," write Sharp and Eriksen. "For that reason, we must develop programs that help women and their children who are caught up in the system. In particular, programs that offer alternatives to

incarceration and post-release transition services have promise." Sharp and Eriksen's conclusion is especially pointed. "As long as the United States continues its love affair with incarceration, marginalized populations will remain at risk. Clearly, poor women, especially women of color, are endangered. These women are the casualties of the war on drugs, their children the 'collateral damage.' Until the illusion of impartiality of the criminal justice system is made apparent, it is imperative that feminist and critical scholars continue to depict the consequences – for both mothers and children – of imprisoning women. Likewise, it is imperative that we continue to search for programs to ameliorate these consequences."[58]

As we will learn, the RPP is such a program, which aims to halt the emotional, psychological, economic and societal damage often wreaked by the imprisonment of parents, especially mothers of young children.

A Unique Approach

With 97 percent of inmates destined to return to society sooner or later, the emphasis at WCCW is on preparing women for successful reentry to a "normal life." As a result, a broad range of educational and vocational programs are available to inmates. And only those who are security risks to themselves or others – or those who are physically or mentally incapable – are excused from participating in some sort of work, training or educational programming during their stay at WCCW.

This programming includes standard academic subjects such as reading, writing and math. Offenders also participate in vocational training that includes cosmetology classes, computer-aided drafting and design, or industrial training such as the

manufacturing of clothing, airplane parts and other products. But in addition to these rather conventional offerings, one of the newest and most innovative programs at WCCW is the Residential Parenting Program, which was established in 1999.

In the early fall of 2003, Erin Delgado, the offender we met at the beginning of this dissertation, was living with her latest boyfriend, Keith, a 50-something journeyman pipe-fitter more than 20 years her senior. Although Erin and Keith had lived together on-and-off for about a year, their relationship was less than committed. Erin still liked to party from time to time. For his part, Keith drank beer and hard liquor – sometimes to excess – but he refused to touch other drugs or illegal and controlled substances. This point became a frequent source of friction between the couple.

Occasionally, Erin would become bored with Keith and leave for a day or two with some of her drug-running buddies. Sometimes, during the course of her field trips, Erin would have sex with other men. Keith strongly suspected Erin was being unfaithful when she was away. But she would always return –eventually – and they would make up. Then, days, weeks or months later, the cycle would repeat itself.

Finally, after another drug-binge and a series of her typical scrapes with the law, Erin was located by police, arrested and eventually sent to WCCW to begin a sentence of slightly more than one year, stemming from a hodge-podge of charges in Washington and Oregon that included forgery, drug possession and parole violations. It was Erin's second trip to WCCW in less than five years.

On her way to prison, Erin says she remembers hearing from her lawyer about the "baby program" at Purdy, which she was told allowed pregnant women and recent moms to keep their children with them during their stay. For Erin, and more than 100 other

women like her during the past five years, the Residential Parenting Program has offered a chance to break the seemingly never-ending cycle of drugs, arrests and incarcerations.

The concept of the Residential Parenting Program, commonly referred to by inmates and staff members as the RPP, was originally envisioned nearly 15 years ago. At the time, it was little more than a notion, informally discussed among a few correction officials from time-to-time as an unspecified possibility, "someday," off in the future.

But then, after years of planning, persuasion, politics and preparation, someday finally came. The program actually began operations in September 1999, funded primarily with proceeds from a $1.9 million federal grant to the state from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The mission of the RPP was and is to give pregnant women – or those with newborns and within three years of their release date – the opportunity to have their babies while in prison, or keep their children with them in prison during the child's early years. Only women carefully screened for violent behavior, temperament, past illegal behavior and overall demeanor are considered for the program. Many researchers such as Owen have found that a majority of female offenders identify relationships with their children as the most important attachments in their lives.[59]

Based on that premise, the RPP aims to allow time for those bonds between mothers and their children to develop and strengthen. The program also is designed to break the cycle of neglect, abuse and detachment that often befalls children who are separated from their parents, especially their mothers, due to incarceration. To date, more than 100 women have participated in the RPP since its establishment in 1999.

While a handful of other such prison nursery programs, which will be described shortly, exist elsewhere in the United States, the RPP at WCCW holds the distinction of being the only program in the U.S. to have a partnership with the federal government's Early Head Start Program, which operates the on-site daycare facility. This component is essential because it allows offenders to work and/or attend educational and/or vocational classes while serving their time. These rehabilitative initiatives at the prison are called "programming."

Inmates and staff members at WCCW say in combination, these programming, educational and child-care efforts help prepare women offenders to lead productive lives when they are "on the outside," or back in general society. These measures, particularly the parenting program, are critically important because children who are not afforded opportunities to develop meaningful bonds with their parents – especially their mothers – tend to be at significant risk of falling prey to sexual and/or emotional abuse, poverty, psychological problems, neglect, domestic violence and a myriad of other factors that could well lead to a continuing cycle of criminal behavior and tendencies, according to criminal justice researchers and theorists such as Owen and Bloom.[60]

At WCCW, the Early Head Start Center is staffed by state licensed caregivers who come in from the outside community every weekday to provide services. Similar facilities are available in other parts of Washington for parents who qualify as "low income" under federal guidelines. Many of the women at WCCW – even if they were not incarcerated – would qualify for the same services on the outside based on their socio-economic backgrounds. Incarceration, of course, further exacerbates the problem.

John Naegele, director of the Puget Sound Educational Service District, an entity created in the late 1990s for the purpose of operating Head Start and Early Head Start programs in western Washington State, explains how the services offered at WCCW are much like those offered at more than 30 other locations throughout the region.

"The child is the center of the whole thing," Naegele says, adding that all Head Start programs are founded on an "ecological model," a fancy way of saying that even a strong, well-functioning society will soon run into difficulty if its children, always among the most vulnerable of citizens, are denied stable, supportive and healthy starts in life. The district's Internet website further explains the agency's overall goals:

> Early Head Start (EHS) is a prenatal, infant, toddler, and family development program providing many free services to eligible children and their families," according to the site. "The Mission of Puget Sound ESD's Early Head Start is to promote and enrich the health, education and well being on of infants, toddlers, families and their communities. [Early Head Start seeks to] support virtually every aspect of pre-K-12 educaton, including instruction, technology, early childhood, special education, administration and finance.

According to PSESD and based on the following criteria, participation in Western Washington's Early Head Start program, including the inmate participants at WCCW, is available to:

- "Families of pregnant women, infants, and toddlers up to 36 months.

- Families must be living on a limited income of less than 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. (Roughly $14,000 annually for a family of four).

Families of infants and toddlers may be over the income guideline if the enrolled child has a diagnosed disability or other special need."[61]

The Early Head Start programs offered at WCCW and elsewhere are primarily funded by state, federal and private grants, as well as contributions from local school districts, public and private agencies.

Naegele, who says he can't think of a more appropriate setting than a prison at which to try to change lives and influence outcomes, says he and the four or five people who staff the WCCW center are proud of their record during the first five years of the RPP.

"We've run a lot of women through there," Naegele says. "I think that's pretty good in five years."

In addition to providing childcare for offenders, who may have jobs on the grounds, are attending vocational classes, taking academic courses or in drug treatment counseling, WCCW's Early Head Start Center also provides mothers with instruction and advice on topics such as early childhood development, child nutrition, parenting, child health and other related issues.

'You can't throw babies into turmoil'

Alice Payne, the superintendent – or chief executive officer – at WCCW from 1992 until 2000, says she and others in Washington researched the RPP concept for many years before it finally came to fruition. In fact, faltering steps toward a baby program at

WCCW already had occurred once or twice before it finally took for good in 1999, on Payne's watch.

"In fairness, it had actually been started a couple different times," says Payne. "Part of [establishing] a program like that is timing."

Indeed, a series of white papers, research materials and correspondence between WCCW staff and various state, local and community agencies demonstrate that prison administrators and staff, as far back as 1992, were serious in their interest to establish a baby program.

One such document, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Washington Department of Corrections and the Puget Sound Educational Service District, the federally funded agency responsible for providing Early Head Start services, established a series of binding agreements between the two entities in preparation for implementing the RPP. For example, the service district agreed, in part, to: "operate a Child Development Center at the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) which provides parent/child activities, child care, and opportunities for parent involvement in quality child development."

The Washington Department of Corrections agreed, in part, to: "contract with PSESD Head Start to operate the Early Head Start program within DOC," and "make available the Child Development Center at WCCW for the operation of the Early Head Start Child Development Center, including classroom and office space. This space will be provided rent-free to the Early Head Start Program and the maintenance and utilities will be paid by DOC."

This multi-page document was executed in May and June of 1997 by the Puget Sound Educational Service District's top officer and the cabinet secretary for the Washington State Department of Corrections. Notably, the final sentence of the document reads: "This agreement remains in effect until altered by mutual agreement, or until cancelled by one of the signing parties." In other words, the arrangement has no expiration date. Other such documents pertaining to the founding and grant proposal work of the RPP are stored in the prison files. But many of these documents are considered confidential and were not available for my review.

Documentation aside, though, Payne and other prison officials say the seeds for Washington's baby program – and the handful of others now scattered across the nation – actually were planted more than 100 years ago, not in the Pacific Northwest, but rather a continent away in the state of New York.

In 1901, New York established the first long-term nursery program at a facility for what was then called a "correctional home for maladjusted girls." That institution morphed and evolved over time into what today is the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a medium and maximum security prison for women about an hour's drive north of New York City. Bedford Hills has continued to operate its nursery program for more than 75 years. Today, it provides a total of about 25 beds. Inmates give birth to their children at a local hospital in an outside community near the hospital. Then, mother and child are returned to the prison grounds, where they live together in single or double rooms.[62]

However, given that Bedford Hills is a medium-to-maximum security institution; most of the offenders are serving sentences in excess of 18 months. Therefore, at the end

of one year, children are sent out to live with relatives, or in worst-case scenarios, are placed in foster homes. If arrangements can be made, children can be brought back to the prison periodically or on a regularly scheduled basis to visit with their mothers.

In the 1980s, the long tenure and relative success of the Bedford Hills Nursery Program prompted the state of New York to establish a second baby program nearby at a minimum security women's prison called Taconic Correctional Facility. Funded with federal grant money and further subsidized by the state, Taconic can accommodate roughly 20 mothers and their children at a time, and the program has been in continuous operation for about 20 years. Also, since the sentences of women serving time at Taconic are relatively short, many offenders are able to leave prison with their children.

Admission to and continued participation in both of New York's baby programs are strict. Offenders can have no violence, child abuse or neglect issues. The first sign of any such behavior that might be detrimental to their own children or the children of others is grounds for dismissal from the program and possibly revocation of parental rights. In terms of tenure and stature, New York's programs are the models upon which other states base their decisions and standards. Therefore, as the first – and for many years, the only – state in the union with experience in prison nursery programs, New York's experiences are oft-studied and emulated in terms of corrections issues, particularly with respect to women, children and the effects of incarceration on families.

Another state that has been progressive in these areas is Nebraska, which in the mid-1990s established what it calls the Nursery and Parenting Program at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in York, roughly 40 miles west of Omaha in the Southeast corner of the state. According to a 2003 article in a corrections industry

magazine, “The program is designed to assist pregnant inmates with parenting and infant care skills before and up to 18 months after the baby is born.”[63]

Nebraska’s program can accommodate roughly eight women and their children at a time. Since its inception, nearly 100 women have participated in the program. Renee Uldrich, the program’s coordinator and its driving force since implementation, says to warrant consideration for admittance, offenders are carefully screened and must meet rigorous criteria, including: criminal records free of offenses against children; no murder or manslaughter charges; good medical and physical condition; no current drug or alcohol abuse problems; satisfactory institutional records, and release dates within 18 months of their child’s birth. “If a new mother does not meet these criteria, within two days of the birth, the baby is taken away and given to the inmate’s family or to the state.”[64]

Establishing the RPP

When Alice Payne took over as superintendent at WCCW in the early 90s, she says she was extremely interested in advancing discussions and taking concrete steps toward establishing a baby program in Washington, similar to, or at least based on, the Bedford Hills concept.

Payne’s rationale was that after about 15 years in Washington’s corrections industry, she was beginning to see a disturbing phenomenon. Sons and daughters of former offenders – people she had first met when they were children years ago – were beginning to show up in prison as inmates themselves.

“From all that time of being in the institution, I knew, probably, just about every family of a criminal element in Tacoma,” Payne says, laughing at the thought.

But on a more serious note, Payne says as she watched mothers being separated from their children, disrupted families put under enormous strains, and children being taken into state custody or put up for adoption, she began to sense the time had come to do something that would alter the status quo.

"I knew that it wasn't working the way it was. I felt very, very strong about separation and the effects of that [on children]. It's so bad to have that separation. People don't understand that. They just don't understand crime. And I see [children] truly as the victims."

It also became clear to Payne that poverty, poor parenting, class, alcoholism, drug abuse, neglect and other such social ills were contributing directly and indirectly to an ongoing cycle of crime. At the time, however, Payne says WCCW and the state Department of Corrections were embroiled in a series of lawsuits stemming from charges that the institution was failing to provide female prisoners with adequate health care. These concerns prevented Payne and those working with her to get much past the exploratory committee phase of implementing a baby program.

Today, sitting in her current office as superintendent at the McNeil Island Correctional Center, a men's penitentiary located several miles off-shore in Washington's Puget Sound, Payne swipes a strand of hair from her face and elaborates on the thesis that timing is everything.

"I kind of thought to myself, 'if I'm worried about everything now, how can we start a new program and how can we have babies here?'" Payne says. "You can't throw babies into turmoil, in any situation, nor an institution. And you can't attend meetings if you're testifying in between either, you know?"

Payne says she was preoccupied with such matters for about the first five years of her tenure as WCCW's superintendent. Nevertheless, she and members of her staff made a point of taking frequent and periodic trips to the East Coast to visit the Bedford Hills and Taconic facilities. During such visits, Payne and her colleagues thoroughly debriefed staff members and inmates at those institutions and attempted to glean helpful information about best practices that could be adapted and implemented in the development of a nursery program in Washington State

In addition to these field trips, Payne and her staff researched and read as much as they could about early childhood development, the effects of childhood separations on children and their incarcerated parents, and long-term implications such as factors that contributed to recidivism, inter-generational criminality, the effects of poverty, displacement issues, impacts on the foster care system and a host of other issues.

Eventually, when the legal distractions had subsided fully and the situation at WCCW had stabilized, momentum toward finally establishing a baby program began to pick up.

Early Media Coverage of the RPP

From 1997 until early 2001, the years in which establishment of the RPP became a top priority for Superintendent Alice Payne and her colleagues at WCCW, a total of seven newspaper articles were published in local and statewide publications that dealt directly or indirectly with the Residential Parenting Program. Two ran in *The Seattle Times;* one ran in *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer;* two were written by Associated Press reporters and ran in an undetermined number of newspapers throughout the state; one

appeared in the *The Spokesman-Review* of Spokane; and the last one appeared in *The Columbian* of Vancouver, a southwest Washington border city situated on the north bank of the Columbia River across from Portland, Oregon.

Payne says the planning, forethought and advance work with the community, elected officials and other decision makers helped ameliorate any negative or adverse press coverage.

"We had done a lot of reading," Payne says. "Research, research, research. We were reading everything we could get our hands on about babies, and is it going to be good? Going through, playing it out in our heads, 'why would people not like this program?' The only thing that was against us in that program was that people would think that it was 'easy time.'"

Indeed, although such comments were muted and small in number, there were grumblings from some state lawmakers and members of the Seattle-Tacoma community, who argued that RPP participants were being "rewarded" for bad behavior with free child care, parenting classes and all the rest.

Such sentiments were voiced most forcefully by Lew Cox, the executive director of a community victims' advocacy organization called Violent Crime Victim Services, based Tacoma, Wash. In a news article that appeared in the April 3, 2000, edition of *The Seattle Times*, the article's author, Nancy Bartley, reported that:

"Lew Cox, executive director of Violent Crime Victim Services, however, thinks contact with children is a right prisoners should lose. And he fears for the children. 'I don't think it's healthy for a child to spend the first years of their life in that environment,'

he said. Officials in Arizona and Kansas voted against residential programs, saying they were concerned for the safety of children living inside a prison."[65]

But Payne, then and now, had a snappy response to such criticism.

"What's easy about getting up at 2 in the morning, feeding a baby?" Payne says of offenders' parental responsibilities. "And why shouldn't they be doing that instead of the grandmother? It didn't make sense. And it didn't seem realistic."

As a result, generally positive remarks, mostly from Corrections officials, seemed to dominate news coverage and perhaps helped to sway public opinion and prevent the RPP from becoming a political lightning rod or poster child for attack as a wasteful attempt at social-engineering doomed for failure. Instead, a forward-thinking message, such as that espoused in the April 3, 2000, article in *The Seattle Times,* was what got through to the public. For example, a passage from the *Times* article reads in part: "According to the U.S. Department of Justice, nearly 2 million children younger than 18 have a parent in prison. Nationally, the number of women incarcerated women has tripled over the past 10 years. The number of women at Purdy has grown to 765 from 200 a decade ago and as many as 90 percent are mothers, said residential-parenting unit supervisor Abby Kupper. 'A lot of studies have been done on effects of absentee fathers,' but not yet on the impact of absentee mothers, Kupper said. 'I don't think society will realize the effect of absentee moms until much later.'"[66]

In another news article, this one appearing in the Spokane *Spokesman-Review* on March 28, 1998, Department of Corrections official Pam Aden was quoted as saying that public attitudes about female incarceration were beginning to soften a bit. "A shift in state and local attitudes about child welfare, as well as more national emphasis on

allowing inmates to raise their children" in correctional settings was allowing such programs to begin, Aden said.[67]

Capitalizing on this shift in public perception, and building on years of planning, strategizing and researching, the Residential Parenting Program became a reality in late 1999. Much like the young human lives it aimed to influence, the RPP's first months were tentative and tenuous. And like any anxious mother who gives birth after a long gestation, Alice Payne was worried and watchful that first year.

Early on, separate incidents involving the children of two women of color threatened to undermine Payne's credibility and the continued existence of the program, she says. According to staff members and officers, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, one offender was Hispanic descent and the other was a Native American.

"We had to do separations," Payne says. "We had one where the mother was name-calling the baby. And another where they were really getting worried about the aggressiveness and the name calling. So I had to separate them. And put the babies with somebody safe. And I was worried about that. Those are the hard calls. But you've got to do what's right. Because the one thing that you don't want to do is start out a program negatively. You will never live that down. You will never survive again. They will say it's not safe "

Some DOC officials, including Payne, recalled research indicating that in some ethnic cultures – and/or specific family traditions – name calling, and what might be construed by some as rough treatment of infants, is acceptable, normal and expected behavior.

Nonetheless, the then-fledgling program would not have survived the glare of the media spotlight if news had broken about real or perceived child abuse at WCCW, Payne says. Instead, she unapologetically opted to keep both the babies, and the integrity of the RPP, safe.

Another issue about which Payne was concerned in those early days was the sleeping arrangements of babies and mothers in the RPP.

"I worried to death about crib death. You know, the SIDS? (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)," Payne says. "It was a big issue. [I was worried that] somebody's going to suffocate their baby. And I worried about that. I worried. Everything was about being safe. It's gotta be safe. It's gotta be safe. That was my big concern."

Looking back, Payne says it would be hard to establish the RPP in today's environment, largely because the dramatic rate of increase in female imprisonments in just the last five years. When Payne left WCCW in early 2000, the inmate population was roughly 500. Today, at roughly 800 prisoners, WCCW operates at about 110 percent of its population capacity, a situation that has created an environment in which it is all the state can do to keep up with just processing and housing offenders, much less consider starting an unconventional and largely experimental program involving infants and toddlers.

"You would not be able to replicate that program for a long, long time," says Payne, "Because you need those resources and partnerships. Everything has to be perfect."

Table 3

Washington Corrections Center for Women Population by Race, Hispanic Origin and Age as of December 31, 2004

WCCW POPULATION BY RACE			
RACE	**TOTAL**	**MINIMUM SECURITY**	**MEDIUM/MAXIMUM SECURITY**
TOTAL	*847	363	484
WHITE	538	243	296
BLACK	177	72	105
AMER INDIAN	39	12	27
ASIAN	13	5	8
ESKIMO	1		1
HISPANIC	67	29	38
UNKNOWN	12	8	4

WCCW POPULATION BY AGE			
AGE	**TOTAL**	**MINIMUM SECURITY**	**MEDIUM/MAXIMUM SECURITY**
TOTAL	*847	363	484
18 – 20	64	8	56
21 – 25	133	46	87
26 – 30	144	62	82
31 – 35	189	82	107
36 – 40	154	76	78
41 – 45	87	48	39
46 – 50	50	29	21
51 – 55	19	9	10
Over 55	7	2	5

*WCCW officials estimate that between 80 to 90 percent of all women incarcerated at the prison annually are mothers of at least one child prior to their arrival at the institution.

Chapter 4: Entering the RPP

In this chapter, we will enter the WCCW prison grounds and see how the prison is organized. Next we will consider the backgrounds of women prisoners at WCCW in general, the backgrounds of those women who enter the RPP, and most specifically the backgrounds of the 20 RPP women I interviewed. Following that, we will consider the RPP screening process. And finally, we will explore the RPP as a unique space within the prison.

A 'treatment center' no more

Located just outside Gig Harbor, Washington, a former fishing village, WCCW's setting is peaceful, even bucolic, harking back to the institution's days as a women's "treatment center."

A first-time visitor to WCCW initially might be struck by the sheer beauty of the setting. Nestled into a heavily forested tract of state-owned land, WCCW occupies roughly 70 acres. On a reasonably clear day, the 14,400-foot and snow-capped Mt. Rainier, along with the rest of the Cascade Mountain Range, are clearly visible from nearly anywhere on the prisons grounds.

Visitors to WCCW park in a lot about the size of four football fields. Parking is at a premium most days, regardless of the time of day. One reason is because the prison employs nearly 400 people, including corrections officers, administrative staff, clerical support, counselors and maintenance supervisors. In addition, more than 800 community volunteers serve WCCW in many capacities, including academic instruction, chemical dependency counseling, transition planning, professional and educational tutoring and mentorship, anger management classes, religious advisors and many others. Add to that

traffic visitors of all kinds – those who come to see inmates, as well as private citizens who take tours of the facility – and it is obvious that WCCW is a busy place.

The building at WCCW which houses the prison's main entrance, commonly called "public access," is somewhat L-shaped. The main doors to the building are located in the opening at the angle of the L. In addition to receiving the public, this building also contains conference a series of conference rooms located on the left, or short, side of the L, while the right wing contains the offices of the Superintendent and several of her top aides.

Straight ahead in the public access building is a 10-foot long console desk, at which at least one, and typically two or three, armed corrections officers remain on guard, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Visitors must sign in, state their business and then be given security clearance. This includes emptying pockets of all objects including keys, ink pens, wallets, loose change, money paper clips, chewing gum, cell phones, pocket calculators and any other extraneous materials. Only under special circumstances – such as if the person is a contractor, researcher, or frequent volunteer – can these rules be waived. Visitors must then place all of this type of property in coin-operated lockers to the left of the main front doors. If the thought hasn't occurred by now, one definitely begins to think, "this is prison."

Once signed in and cleared for entrance, first-time and/or infrequent visitors must then walk to the opposite side of the public access console, remove their shoes, belts and all metal items such as watches, rings and keys, then pass through a magnetometer, a machine like those used to screen passengers at airports. The reason for this is obvious. Corrections officers must ensure that visitors are carrying no guns, knives or other

weapons – or potential weapons – that could create safety breaches on the prison grounds.

Depending on where they are going, visitors are then required to place a clip-on badge in a conspicuous place on their upper body. This is to ensure that visitors are never mistaken for inmates and vice versa. With badge properly attached, visitors then exit the building on the right-hand side of the building and about 20 feet out-of-doors, pass through a double set of chain-link fencing and magnetized gates, all of which is surrounded both top and bottom by razor-wire. This alley of fencing runs the entire width of the institution, and separates the medium/maximum portion of the institution to the north and west, from the minimum part of the prison, which lies to the south and east. This alley of fencing is in addition to the 12-foot tall and razor-wire protected and corrections officer patrolled fencing that rings the prison. These measures clearly were done to prevent any possibility of inmates scaling fences in any direction.

Inmates and visitors are prohibited from even approaching fences except for gated areas. This is enforced through an extensive video monitoring system, administered by officers who surveil the gates and fences 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, and 365-days-a-year. In addition to the gated areas, the entire institution is under the watchful eye of corrections officers who operate from a centralized command post at the center of the institution. No one – visitors, staff, other corrections officers and certainly not inmates – can travel from one side of the institution to the other without proper identification.

The wait is usually only a matter of seconds. But if an officer is distracted, a quick press of green buzzers posted at each gate and mechanized door will alert guards that someone is waiting. That said, visitors and employees alike soon learn that it is unwise to

hurry corrections officers, who may be monitoring a problem elsewhere on the compound. Sometimes it is in everyone's best interest to just wait.

Visitors who are allowed through the first set of double gates must then pass through the aforementioned control room in a heavily fortified building at the center of the prison grounds. This "Command" building houses not only the control room, but also all of the top corrections officers, including the institution's captain, the prison's top security officer. Other key administrators, including those who oversee the health operations, on-site investigations and other functions, are found in this building. To maintain maximum security in this structure, all public doors are plated with heavy metal, mechanized and controlled by officers in the control room. Only one public door at a time can be opened in the Command building, which means movement from place to place is slowed considerably so that every person can be visually scanned to ensure he or she is wearing an appropriate badge and is in the right place at the right time.

Unless meeting with someone in the Command building, visitors must pass through three mechanized doors until they finally reach the outdoors again. This final door empties into a concrete and brick courtyard surrounded by several buildings, which is known by staff and inmates as downtown. Located on the medium/maximum security side of the "alley," downtown consists of a series of brick and mortar buildings, which include the medium and maximum custody residential facilities for those offenders who generally have remaining sentences of five years or more, or those who have behavioral problems, mental health issues, or other circumstances that would make their presence on the minimum side of the institution a risky proposition for themselves or others. In addition to the residence facilities, "downtown" also has: a mess hall; a vocational and

education building; a law library where inmates can perform research on their cases if they choose; a multi-purpose gymnasium; the close-custody unit for difficult offenders; the segregation unit for those who have been assigned to solitary confinement; as well as buildings which house the prison infirmary, a pharmacy, the mental health center and a small non-denominational chapel.

If not headed “downtown” for any of the reasons mentioned above, a visitor, by definition then, would be on his or her way to the minimum security side of the institution, which would mean walking about 75 yards due south to another set of double chain link gates farther along the alley of fencing and razor-wire. Once buzzed through those gates by corrections officers, the visitor would be on the minimum security side of the institution, also known as “The Hill,” dubbed such because it sits at the apex of the slightly sloped property that WCCW occupies.

Those who reside on The Hill, generally speaking, have original or remaining sentences of five years or less. Also, residents of The Hill tend to have fewer behavioral problems and less violent offenses.

As mentioned elsewhere, The Hill consists of a series of mostly one-story, grayish-greenish structures. Imagine standing at the center of a massive rectangle, perhaps the size of the average high school football stadium. On one side are three large buildings, all basically shaped like the capital letter H. These are residential units, more or less styled like college dormitories, only with much better security, inside and out. Each building can house roughly 125 inmates.

In the center of The Hill is a large, open space, an area easily the size of a football field or even a regulation soccer field. Furnished with benches, walkways and green

space, this area is a place for inmates to gather in all sorts of weather, to talk, to play bean bag and other games, to breathe some fresh air, or just to think.

On the other side of this quad is a series of institutional buildings, the most notable of which are the Early Head Start Center, the minimum security mess hall and various office spaces for WCCW workers and storage areas.

The J-Unit Space and Environment

The H-shaped residence hall closest to the fence and razor wire alley that bisects the property is J-Unit, which is the home of WCCW's Residential Parenting Program. The entrance to J-Unit is at the center of the H, on the building's north side. Entering through those doors puts visitors into the structure's main hallway, which allows you to travel from one side of the building to the other, north to south. In the very center of the building – on opposite sides of the hallway – are the particularly high traffic areas. On one side, is the corrections officers' station, a small office with a door enclosed in safety glass. At least two officers typically are on duty, around the clock. The office is where people report to receive mail, to file formal or informal grievances, to report problems or to ask for help. This is also where initial punishment or admonishment for misbehavior is meted out.

Behind the corrections officers' station is a safety glass-enclosed day room, where inmates congregate to talk, watch television, read or just hang out. Episodes of Jerry Springer, Oprah and Dr. Phil are crowd favorites. On the far side of the day room, out of doors, is a small, enclosed porch and seating area, where offenders can catch a breath of fresh air without having to leave the unit.

On the opposite side of the hall, directly across from the officers' station and the community day room, are the offices of the unit supervisor and the counselor(s) who assist him or her. These civilian, non-uniformed officials help keep track of inmates, both literally and figuratively. For instance, all paperwork pertaining to an offender graces the desks of the unit supervisor and counselors. The unit supervisor and counselors, who are essentially case workers, are enormously influential in basic decisions such as who gets what room; who receives vocational or GED training and when; who receives drug treatment or mental health counseling; and who gets medical or dental treatment and when. These prison officials have the authority to recommend offenders for solitary confinement; they can restrict visitation privileges; and much more.

But having said all that, the atmosphere in J unit is much different that it is in other units on The Hill. While the circumstances of individuals are frequently difficult and even tragic, a general spirit of cooperation permeates the unit. In short, the atmosphere in J-Unit is much less charged than what might be observed Downtown or even other units on the minimum security side. For one thing, visitors not paying close attention as they enter J Unit could easily be run over, good-naturedly, by inmate mothers pushing strollers, hurriedly on their way to the Early Head Start Center for a parenting class. Another major way in which J-Unit is different is that nowhere else on the grounds of WCCW are corrections officers holding babies, playing ball with toddlers or reciting excerpts from "Green Eggs and Ham," by Dr. Seuss.

Notably, while all other corrections officers at WCCW carry loaded sidearms, those who work in J-Unit are armed only with batons. In the interest of safety for the children, inmates, officers and staff, J-Unit is a no-weapon zone.

With respect to discipline issues as a whole, behavioral problems of any kind are not tolerated in J-Unit. And that's not just a WCCW rule. As we will see later, that is an expectation of all who live and work in J-Unit.

Prisoner Populations

According to staff, prison records and Washington State Department of Corrections statistics, the typical WCCW prisoner is 35 years old. The average offender has given birth to at least one minor child prior to arriving at prison. Typically, she's serving a sentence of about three years for drug dealing or possession, or is doing time for an offense committed in furtherance of the drug trade, such as theft, embezzlement, fraud or burglary.

Reflecting the racial population of Washington State, about 70 percent of prisoners are white, 19 percent are African American, nearly 6 percent are Native American, almost 2 percent come from Asian or Pacific Islander backgrounds, and some 6 percent are of Hispanic origin, which can encompass any race or ethnicity. WCCW staff members say most offenders were under-, or unemployed, at the time of their arrests. Most offenders also come from socially and/or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The highest educational level attained by a majority of such women tends to be some high school. Most are high school dropouts. In terms of saleable, marketable professional skills, the majority of the women prior to imprisonment had relatively marginal, unskilled, low-paying jobs, if they worked at all. Many lived at, near or below the poverty line.

Virtually all of the mothers who have participated in the RPP during its five years of existence were involved in the drug culture, to a greater or lesser extent. Many of the

women were primarily users who began dealing or hanging with dealers to finance their own drug habits. A small few were strictly dealers, in the business for the money and the material comforts it afforded them and their children. Several candidly stated that the drug trade afforded them far more in the way of earnings potential than was possible in the menial, minimum-wage jobs otherwise available to them. Some were both users and dealers, but were drawn into the culture by husbands, boyfriends, lovers, family members, friends or acquaintances. Often, in cases in which RPP women were incarcerated, their male partners or counterparts avoided arrest altogether, were not arrested until sometimes much later, or ended up doing time on lesser charges. Usually, this was the case because women were at home using drugs when law enforcement showed up, or because women were the "mules" of the operation, who actually transported or delivered the drugs. In other words, in many instances, women – and by extension, their children – regularly seem to take the brunt of the punishment, while the men in their lives often get off more easily. Frequently, the mothers who have participated in the RPP have come from backgrounds and experiences of sexual, psychological and physical abuse or neglect, either at the hands of male intimates, family members, or both. It is also not at all uncommon for one or more of the parents of RPP mothers to have been incarcerated at some point. In addition, the overwhelming majority – more than 80 percent – of RPP mothers had given birth to at least one child prior to being imprisoned. Thus, while the circumstances of individual women and their incarcerations are by definition unique and different, the path to prison for many Residential Parenting Program mothers can be strikingly similar.

When compared to the larger population at WCCW, RPP mothers and their fellow prisoners tend to have both striking commonalities and differences.

First, in terms of commonalities, just like RPP participants, more than 80 percent of inmates in the general prison population tend to be mothers of at least one minor child prior to incarceration. Involvement in the drug world is another common theme, as is the related tendency to be involved in crimes committed to support drug habits, including forgery, fraud, theft and assorted property crimes.

In addition, like their counterparts in the RPP, general population prisoners have highly structured days, which include educational and vocational programming, as well as jobs.

Beyond these basic considerations, however, most striking are the differences between the two populations. For example, while the RPP admits no offenders with violent backgrounds, the general population at WCCW tends to contain numerous inmates who have violent pasts. Although drug violations or drug-related crimes represent roughly 75 percent of the offenses committed by WCCW prisoners, violent crimes such as first- and second-degree murder are the next most common crimes committed by inmates. Other serious and violent offenses include assaults, child abuse and rapes, armed robberies, arson and manslaughter, among others. Generally speaking, such individuals are kept on the medium-maximum security side of the institution, and are often transferred to community pre-release facilities and halfway-houses rather than being placed on the minimum security side, which is occupied primarily by non-violent offenders.

Another striking difference between the two populations is the psychological makeup. Those who apply for participation in the RPP and undergo the rigorous scrutiny and screening over the course of several weeks or months tend to be people willing to make the psychological commitment to dramatically alter their behavior and change their lives. RPP participants tend to be more motivated to take educational and vocational classes, parenting classes, enroll in drug treatment programs and take advantage of the many opportunities afforded to them. Also, RPP participants often willingly and intentionally choose to relocate to unfamiliar parts of Washington in an attempt to start their lives anew. Many purposely relocate and sever ties with friends, families and former associates in the drug world to improve their chances of success.

General population prisoners, on the other hand, can be easily drawn back to the streets over and over again, repeating the same self-destructive and criminal behaviors, which tend to result in increasingly longer stints in county jails and prisons.

In the RPP environment, language and labeling seem to make a difference. Unlike elsewhere at WCCW, a place where offenders are almost always referred to by contemporaries and prison personnel by their last names, participants in the baby program are typically personalized through the use of their first names, and as a group they are labeled as “RPP moms.” This stands in contrast to their fellow J-Unit and WCCW residents, who are typically labeled “offenders” as a group, (as opposed to the more common terms “inmates” or “prisoners” so prevalent in the media and popular consciousness.) Also, just like elsewhere at WCCW, J-Unit residents who are not RPP members usually are referred to by their last names in conversations with each other or amongst uniformed and civilian prison staff. Only RPP mothers seem to be called by

their first names on a frequent basis, a clear recognition by many of their individuality, personhood and perhaps even motherhood, and a factor that to some extent, mutes their identities as “criminals.”

Given these general mindsets and senses of purpose, RPP mothers typically keep to themselves, are protective of their children, tend not to associate or socialize with the general population, especially offenders who live outside of J-Unit. Furthermore, RPP participants tend to be focused on self-improvement and maintaining a positive, stable and safe living environment.

The same cannot be said, however, for those who live elsewhere on the prison grounds, whether on the minimum security side of the fence or downtown on the medium-maximum security side. While brawls or riots are extremely rare at WCCW, prison administrators say that tensions can run much higher among the general population than in the RPP. Regular prisoners are more likely to engage in criminal behavior such as contraband trafficking of cigarettes and other prohibited materials. Assistant superintendents and unit supervisors say general population prisoners are more apt to engage in physical and verbal entanglements with staff, officers and each other. General population prisoners are more prone to engage in or display disruptive behaviors. And those in the general population are simply more likely to bend, break and test boundaries and limits. Quite often, such individuals seem to feel they have nothing better to do and nothing left to lose.

RPP Subject Group

The group of 20 former and current RPP participants included in this dissertation are representative of the larger group of program alumnae in terms of several interesting factors. (Tables containing racial, ethnic and other characteristics pertaining to members of the study group can be found at the end of this chapter). Fully 90 percent of those included in this study were mothers prior to entering WCCW or the baby program. Nearly all came from poverty stricken, abusive and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. All but one was imprisoned on charges directly or indirectly related to illegal drugs or the drug trade. The one exception was a woman imprisoned on fraud charges related to obtaining legal drugs for legitimate health reasons. Ironically, however, the reason for that woman's imprisonment was still drugs.

The majority of the participants interviewed were white, just like the overall RPP population and the general prison populace. But the demographics are for the most part reflective of the RPP and the general population at WCCW:

- 13 participants – or 65 percent – were white
- 3 participants – or 15 percent – were African American
- 1 participant – or 5 percent – was a Native American
- 3 participants – or 15 percent – were Latina

Prior to the Residential Parenting Program, many of the participants said their lives were ravaged, ruined and destroyed by drugs and the drug culture. Erin Delgado, the participant we met in the prologue, is a good example of someone who was in desperate circumstances before entering prison and gaining admittance to the RPP.

The 33-year-old Delgado, who has spent the better part of her teen years and adult life hooked on drugs and alcohol, has been in and out of local jails and state prison on a laundry list of drug possession, drug dealing, theft and fraud charges. Despite repeated efforts over the years to quit drugs and clean up her life, Delgado has always seemed to reach just a certain level of success, only to slide back into what she says were old behaviors and bad habits. For Delgado, life has been a roller-coaster ride of drug-induced euphoria, selfishness, personal tragedy, emotional and physical bumps and bruises, all punctuated by a changing cast of characters. This behaviors have always led Delgado into trouble with the law. “I didn’t know any different,” Delgado says. “I didn’t see that there was anything wrong with it. That’s what I was brought up around. I knew it was something that was illegal. But I had been around it for so long. I don’t think I really, honestly thought about it at the time.”

Ruthie Farmer, a 37-year-old white woman serving a 19-month sentence on drug dealing charges, was sexually and physically abused by her father as a child. She’s been married and divorced twice and has three children, who range in age from 11 to 20, all of whom are waiting for her on the outside. In June 2004, she gave birth to 9-month-old William, the product of a relationship with a man she intends to marry when she’s released, which could occur as early as August 2005. Ruthie, who was several months pregnant at the time of her arrest, heard about the RPP while awaiting transfer from county jail to WCCW. She decided to apply for admission to the RPP and was accepted. She and William are now part of the RPP.

Ruthie’s incarceration is both curious and tragic. Despite coming from an impoverished, abusive and educationally disadvantaged background, Ruthie did not

develop a drug addiction until she was 31 years old. Prior to that, Ruthie had been only a casual and rare drug user. She cites the confluence of two circumstances as contributing factors. First, Ruthie's mother died suddenly after a short bout with an aggressive form of cancer. Subsequently, Ruthie met a man, struck up a relationship and moved in with him.

The problem was that the man was a recovering methamphetamine addict, who would disappear for days at a time on drug binges before reappearing. When he returned, he always promised that he would do better in the future. The promise would last, of course, until the next time he fell off the wagon. Ruthie says now that she was too weak to either leave him or put her foot down. So instead, she joined the party.

"The typical enabler," Ruthie concedes. "I knew I couldn't keep him away from drugs."

Despite having five minor children in the home – three of hers and two of his – Ruthie began using methamphetamines with her boyfriend. At first, they limited themselves to only occasional weekend binges every few months and never around their children. Soon, though, the frequency increased to every few weeks. Then, it became weekly. At some point, working at their minimum-wage, unskilled jobs became impossible, both practically and financially. So, Ruthie and her boyfriend began to manufacture and sell meth. Their spree finally came to an end when Ruthie was caught shoplifting Sudafed, a legal, over-the-counter medication, which is a key ingredient used in the production of methamphetamines. The last she heard, her ex-boyfriend was in an in-patient drug treatment facility. Ruthie says she looks back on her actions with regret.

"I'm not proud of what I did," Ruthie says. "There's times when I look back… it wasn't really enjoyment. You have a choice. You always have a choice."

But even when they had basic responsibilities such as raising children, setting a good example, and earning an honest living, all current and former RPP participants in this study said they fell significantly short when it came to making good choices and exercising good judgment. Resisting the lure of drugs, the drug culture and immediate gratification proved impossible for each of the women.

But for many, that changed when they reached prison and the Residential Parenting Program. Much like Ruthie Farmer, Erin Delgado and others, pregnant women, women with infants and small babies, and women who find themselves pregnant and in jail, often hear of the RPP from lawyers or other prisoners. A small few may not be interested in the program because they don't wish to care for the child, or perhaps they have family on the outside willing and able to care of it. But many women who find themselves in this situation, are attracted to the RPP concept and embrace it as a real possibility to explore. In order to be considered for the Residential Parenting Program:

- Inmates can not have violent offenses, such as murder, manslaughter, rape, child rape, child abuse or neglect, physical assaults, shootings or robberies on their records;
- Offenders' sentences should be no longer than three years.

In order to apply for admission to the RPP, a woman must:

- Undergo a rigorous screening process, including a series of personal interviews with prison staff, Washington Department of Corrections officials, Early Head Start workers and representatives of other state and local agencies.

- Agree to abide by RPP rules as well as prison mandates, including participation in parenting classes, anger management classes, drug treatment counseling, vocational training and education, and any other such "programming" deemed necessary and appropriate by prison staff, counselors and/or administrators.

The screening process is intended to accomplish several basic goals, all aimed at assessing whether individual candidates possess the motivations and mindsets to succeed. The definition of success, of course, is subject to interpretation. But prison staff agree that the baseline definition of success involves offenders kicking drugs, staying out of trouble with the law, maintaining a stable home environment and providing their children with a real chance at escaping the inter-generational cycle of criminality referenced throughout this dissertation.

More specifically, the screening interviews usually include one or more one-on-one sessions between prisoners and counselors and one or more offender interviews with small groups of prison officials, culminating with a mandatory interview in which the RPP candidate is questioned by members of a 16-member screening committee made up of assorted prison counselors, administrators, assorted state agency officials and others. Again, the goal is to gauge the commitment of women to change their behaviors and improve their own circumstances as well as the prospects for their children.

For offenders, the process can be grueling, nerve-wracking, intimidating and humbling. For Erin Delgado, the process of qualifying and entering the program was not too bad. She had only drug crimes on her record. And by the time she arrived at the

Washington Corrections Center for Women, Erin was highly motivated to do whatever it took to put the lives of herself and her children on a different trajectory.

For others, however, the RPP's anxiety ridden screening process does not itself guarantee acceptance. Take for instance the case of Peggy Woods, a former RPP participant. Woods, whom we will meet again later in a slightly different way, says the RPP admissions process was especially trying.

For one thing, Woods already had been arrested numerous times when she came to WCCW from a southwest Washington county jail in 2001. And secondly, while she'd never pulled a gun or knife on anyone, Woods had tried to escape from cops on more than one occasion, causing the words "assault of a police officer" to appear in her file. This behavior resulted in Woods being placed in a section of WCCW called the "Close-Custody Unit," or "CCU," for short.

Inmates held in CCU tend to be considered incorrigible and hard-core: Lifers and violent women doing time for murder, manslaughter, child rape and other serious offenses. Although she's a diminutive, blue-eyed blonde of Scandinavian descent who barely weighs 100 pounds, Woods' CCU address in prison – and her rap sheet – would be serious impediments to RPP admission. Such red flags ensured that nothing would be swept under a rug, waved away or ignored.

At the same time, however, Woods' was well aware that admission to the RPP probably represented her last, best chance to straighten out her life. She had to give it a shot. "I prayed on it," Woods says, "and I went and saw my counselor there and I was just beggin' and ballin'. He told me he *might* be able to get me an override."

Such a designation – basically a waiver from a DOC official with clout – would help make Woods eligible for the program. But without such an override, Woods would have had no choice but to give birth to her baby, then turn the child over to the state for placement in a foster home, and perhaps even adoption. For Woods, the idea was unthinkable.

"So, I wrote this big, long letter," Woods says, explaining that she requested that the document be inserted into her file. "I just let 'em know how important it was to me. I let 'em know that it was my past and I was really trying to change my life. If they would just give me this chance … to be a mom… Then, I prayed on it."

Several weeks later, Woods was asked to appear before a three-member panel made up of WCCW officials and state Corrections Department "suits," charged with assessing offender risk levels and classifications.

To this day, Woods says she's not exactly sure what happened, or why. But somehow, the board persuaded the prison superintendent – or vice versa – to grant Woods a rare double-override, which meant not only was Woods able to move out of the Close-Custody Unit, she also immediately became eligible for the RPP. Her long-shot chances for admission had just improved dramatically.

The final hurdle to admission required Woods to make her case to the Residential Parenting Program screening board. Everything depended on Woods' ability to convince the group of more than a dozen people that, despite all indications to the contrary, she and her unborn child deserved a chance to participate in the baby program.

That was scary. I remember 13 or 14 suits, sittin' around the table.

There was somebody from CPS [state Child Protective Services],

there was a mental health person, there was a couple of officers, some administrator dude, Early Head Start people; I mean, the list just went on and on. A nurse… I don't remember. I just remember there was a whole bunch of them. All of these adult, authority figures were all sittin' around the table. And I was at the very end of it, by myself. They were all just looking at me.

Woods was asked questions about her past, her personal history, and her drug use. She was queried about the alleged assault of an officer as well as her attempts to escape from police custody. She was asked why she was seeking admission to the RPP. And several board members wanted to know why, considering her past, Woods should be allowed to keep her baby.

I don't even remember what my answers were. There was no way I could've prepared for it. Even if you plan an answer, when you walk in there, you draw a blank. I know I did. I felt like I had cotton stuffed down my throat. And then, they don't even give you an answer! They just say, 'Okay, you can go now.' And you have to walk away and wonder. And that's good. That is a good thing, I think. Because it's a big reality check. And it made me realize my own feelings. It's not like when you're out there running and doping. You have to sit there sober and realize that there are these feelings that you're feeling toward your unborn. It's a real eye-

opener. And I think it's good that they make these women wonder, wait and worry.

Woods wondered, waited and worried for a good month. She went to her job in the WCCW laundry room every day. The mindless work offered no distraction from her troubles. And the more she waited, the more she worried. This much was certain: Sending the baby home to live with her boyfriend wasn't an option. After Woods was arrested following a high-speed police chase through a small western Washington town, her former boyfriend, "the idiot," as she occasionally calls him, had headed up to Alaska, where he soon landed behind bars himself on assault and attempted robbery charges.

That left Woods to contemplate two equally distasteful and disturbing alternatives: Either send the baby out to an uncertain future with an unknown foster family; or send it home to her mother, whom she has not seen or spoken to for nearly 10 years. Woods' mother had gone to court to terminate her daughter's parental rights. She then allowed the child's father – another of Woods' ex-boyfriends – to take custody of the child. In Woods' mind, there wasn't much of a choice.

"I mean, I'm estranged from my family," Woods says. "It's like, I would feel safer putting him in foster care where I would have a *chance* of getting him back – *maybe*."

The days dragged on interminably before Woods finally heard the news: She'd made it into the RPP.

> It felt like a year. I was just, like balling. It was a big relief, you know? Just relief. It was like God gave me a second chance, that's what it felt like. I mean, there are some women that come in there with the attitude, just knowing, 'Oh, yeah. I'll get in the RPP.' They're just almost cocky. So they never worry. I was devastated and terrified the whole way through. I just knew they were going to take my baby, you know? And nobody could tell me anything different. I really thought they were going to take him.

Once in the program, Woods cherished the time she spent with her newborn son, Elijah. The experience was invaluable, she says. "We got to spend a lot of time together," Woods says. "I only nursed my daughter for like two weeks or something. But with Elijah, it was different. I nursed him for a long time. That was a really intimate, bonding experience."

As we will see, since its inception in early 2000, the Washington Corrections Center for Women's Residential Parenting Program has allowed dozens of female offenders to bond with their children, reestablish connections with their families, take charge of their lives and start anew.

Entering the J Unit and the RPP

The moment that visitors walk into J-Unit it becomes readily apparent that this residence hall is different in many ways from the institution that surrounds it. One of the first things that strikes visitors is the photos. Pictures of small children are posted

everywhere, along the hallways, on bulletin boards and even in "official" places. For example, a constantly expanding collage of snapshots featuring babies, toddlers and inmate mothers adorns the wall behind the desk in the corrections officers' station. Likewise, the unit supervisor's office on the opposite side of the hall is saturated with photos of kids. Also, the floor is littered with children's books, toys and stuffed animals. The walls in the unit counselors' offices are equally crowded with the smiling faces of Residential Parenting Program participants, past and present. Toddlers frequently roam the halls, squealing with glee while their mothers or designated caregivers trail along behind. The presence of children seems to lighten the mood for everyone.

The number of participants in the RPP usually ranges between 12 and 16 at any given time. Space for the inmates and their children is reserved in the second leg of the giant H. Mothers sleep one to a room in the RPP wing of J-Unit, sharing their space only with their children. Non-RPP J-Unit residents typically share their rooms with other inmates.

The J-Unit wing has its own Day Room, which contains toys, games, stuffed animals and a playpen for the children. The walls of the room are decorated in bright colors and feature an assortment of cartoon characters. Even the doctor's office – a space equipped with a few supplies and an examination bed for use by an outside pediatrician who visits the RPP about once a month – has bright yellow walls and features Disney characters such as Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Goofy and Donald Duck.

The rooms of individual inmates can be equally festive and cozy. In these spaces, which are roughly 10 feet by 12 feet, offenders tend to post pictures of themselves, their children and other family members on the walls. When offenders first arrive, the spaces

typically have only a bed. Donations from local religious and community groups help pay for bassinets, strollers, diapers and toys for the children. No state funds are used to fund the Residential Parenting Program, which means that financially, Washington state taxpayers are paying no more than they would if the offenders were doing time without their children.

Some mothers hang mobiles above their children's cribs, while others keep favorite toys and blankets nearby. The rooms of most inmate moms are well-stocked with the essentials: diapers, wipes, baby lotion and lots of soap.

A Daily Routine

Every WCCW inmate, particularly those who participate in the Residential Parenting Program, has a daily routine. Those who are pregnant continue to "program" – meaning they attend vocational classes, GED classes, drug dependency treatment and the like – as long as they are physically able to do so.

Those RPP inmates, if their health permits, also are required to work if they are not programming. Jobs at WCCW, most of which typically pay less than a dollar an hour, are support functions such janitorial, grounds and building maintenance, laundry, and mess hall duty. It is important to note, however, that while programming is required, it is entirely possible for some women, for a variety of reasons such as unfortunate timing, a shortage of space, or personal lack of interest, to complete their prison terms without receiving vocational or educational skills that could help them become more employable in conventional work on the outside.

Money that women earn from jobs at WCCW is deposited in an account, which offenders can draw on to purchase "luxury" items from a prison canteen. These luxury

items include such products as candy, chewing gum and until last fall, cigarettes. In late 2004, in the interest of promoting a healthier environment for inmates, prison employees and others, the state of Washington mandated that no smoking is allowed at any correctional facilities. The policy was met with some initial grumbling. But by and large, the change occurred and was accepted without incident.

In addition to work and programming, RPP moms who already have given birth to children are much like working mothers on the outside. For instance, the typical day for an RPP mother might begin at 6 a.m., when mom and child awake. If the child is less than two months old, then mothers are allowed to be full-time moms, giving them important time to bond with their children, as we will see in future chapters.

But for those mothers whose children are eight weeks or older, the RPP requires them to work, program or both. This means that RPP moms generally have an hour or so to get themselves and their babies ready for each day. Some moms call on the help of certified inmate caregivers to watch their kids while the mothers take a quick shower or dash over to the mess hall for breakfast.

Other RPP mothers choose to maximize their time, however, by multi-tasking. For example, some opt to eat quick, pre-packaged foods (approved by prison officials and often provided by family or purchased at the canteen) in their rooms, while simultaneously feeding, burping or changing diapers. Soon it's time to place baby in the stroller, being careful to load up with an ample supply of diapers, wipes and formula. Then it's outside for the quick trip across the Quad to the Early Head Start Center. Mom drops off baby at Early Head Start, staffed by highly skilled, state-licensed and certified

child care professionals. Mom says her goodbyes and is on her way to class, work or treatment.

Anywhere from three to eight hours later, depending upon the job she holds or the programming in which she's engaged, the mom will return to the Head Start Center to pick up her child. Next, might be some quiet time before dinner. Or perhaps a parenting class, which requires the presence of both mother and child. If the weather is nice, children might be found playing together in a small, fence-enclosed play area located just outside the Head Start Center. The area contains a sandbox, plastic shovels and buckets, and a small slide.

At 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday is mail call, a popular time when inmates line up to see if they've received letters from home, correspondence from their attorneys, or some notification regarding their incarceration or other such legal issues.

Every inmate in the prison must be inside their respective unit and their assigned room by 3:50 p.m., Pacific Time. In J-Unit, all offenders must be visible through the windows in the doors to their rooms. This is one of the three formal "counts" that occur daily to ensure that the population of inmates – and children, for that matter – is accurate.

After count, which usually takes from 30 to 40 minutes, dinner starts. Inmates are free to wander to the mess hall, hang out in the day room, mill around outside if the weather is agreeable, or just stay inside. Some evenings, the prison sponsors organized sports in the gymnasium "downtown," such as volleyball or basketball. Some inmates head for the chapel for prayer services, to meet with visiting clergy, or to enjoy time for quiet reflection. Many of WCCW's 800 volunteers show up for a variety of night-time

events including resume-writing workshops, interviewing seminars and other transitional services.

By 9 p.m. most nights, however, things have quieted down substantially in J-Unit. Mothers have fed and bathed their babies and are putting them down for the night. By 10 p.m., lights are out in J-Unit and the cycle will begin anew in just eight hours.

Some offenders like Jeannette Albans, an RPP momabout whom we'll learn more later in the study, express ambivalence about such routine. While the repetition of each day can be annoying and monotonous on one hand, Albans also says she finds comfort in the discipline and the structure of each day. "Even though I'm here," Albans says in reference to her prison surroundings, "I still feel free. I have everything I need here and I'm not wanting anything."

As we will see, other RPP moms seem to view the situation in similar ways. While recognizing and often lamenting the circumstances of prison life, RPP mothers appear to appreciate the rather unique opportunities afforded to program participants.

Table 4

Washington Corrections Center for Women Residential Parenting Program, Historical Population by Race and Hispanic Origin as of December 31, 2004

RPP POPULATION BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN	
WHITE	80
BLACK	7
HISPANIC	7
NATIVE AMERICAN	8
ASIAN/PAC. ISL.	1
TOTAL	103

Table 5

Characteristics of Current and Former Residential Parenting Program Participants included in this study as of December 31, 2004

Characteristics of Current and Former RPP Participants						
Pseudonym/ initials	**Race**	**Offense**	**Length of Sentence**	**Number of Children**	**Successful Completion of RPP**	**Current Status**
Erin Delgado	White	Fraud/ Forgery	14 months	2	Yes	Released July '04
Jeannette Albans	Black	Drug Dlr.	30 months	2	In Progress	In Prison
Julie Cruz	White	Drug Poss.	13 months	2	Yes	Released Nov. '03
Sonya Guzman	Hispanic	Drug Dlr.	26 months	3	Yes	Released Mar. '04
Peggy Woods	White	Assaulting police officer	13 months	2	Yes	Released Jan. '03
B.M.	White	Drug Dlr.	34 months	2	Yes	In Work Release
Daphne	Native American	Drug. Dlr.	38 months	2	Yes	Released Oct. '03
B.W.	White	Drug. Dlr.	18 months	3	Yes	Released Mar. '03
Shelley M.	White	Drug Poss.	14 months	4	Yes	Released Mar. '01
Karen Carter	Black	Drug. Dlr.	21 months	2	Yes	Released Apr. '01
Rachel Lynch	White	Forgery	14 months	4	Yes	Released Jan. '01
L.B.	White	Forgery	13 months	2	Yes	Released July '03
Patricia	Hispanic	Drug Dlr.	44 months	2	Yes	Released Oct. '04
T.M.	White	Drug Poss	25 months	2	Yes	Released Sept. '03
L.S.	Black	Drug Dlr.	13 months	2	Yes	Released Apr. '03
Carolyn	White	Forgery	18 months	3	Yes	Released Sept. '03
L.L.	White	Drug Poss	13 months	2	Yes	Released Jan. '04
Ruthie Farmer	White	Drug. Mfg.	19 mos	4	In Progress	In prison
H.M.	White	Drug Poss	14 months	1	Yes	Released Nov. '04
M.J.	White	Drug Poss	17 months	2	Yes	Released Apr. '03

Chapter 5: RPP Administration

Figure 4

Photo courtesy of Cheryl Hanna-Truscott

A corrections officer looks on as three RPP kids play with a daycare provider at the Early Head Start Center located across the quad from J-Unit at WCCW. This caregiver, as well as the three others who work at the facility, are trained and state-licensed early childhood specialists. WCCW is the only state prison in the nation that has an Early Head Start Center on its grounds.

In this chapter, we will begin our presentation and exploration of the voices of individuals closely involved with the RPP. Here, we will mainly be concerned with two sets of individuals integral to the day-to-day operations of the RPP: 1) Occupational staff members and Correctional Officers, and; 2) inmate caregivers.

Specifically, I will be concerned with the various roles these individuals play in the RPP. However, I will be particularly concerned with their voices, their language, their concepts, and especially the ways in which they understand and speak about the program. These insights will include issues such as how these individuals assess the unit in comparison to other units in the prison; how they see it functioning on a daily basis; what they see as its problems and successes; and how, and to what extent, they think the unit meets its stated goals for the women prisoners and their small children.

RPP Administration

Clearly, administration of a program as progressive and sensitive as the RPP is highly dependent on the services provided and the skills demonstrated by front-line occupationalprison staff and contractors responsible for making sure the operation runs smoothly. Such players include unit supervisors, counselors, uniformed corrections officers and the state-certified Early Head Start caregivers who provide daycare services to the RPP children while their inmate mothers are at work, in class, drug treatment or some other form of programming. Our discussion will involve in-depth analyses of the roles these important and influential individuals play in the Residential Parenting Program.

Category Analysis and Interpretation:

Occupational Staff: Of the roughly 20 prison staff members who work in and around the RPP and with its participants at any given time, an important category of prison employees is the Occupational Staff. These individuals include both civilians and uniformed employees, none of whom carry weapons, a rule in J-Unit because of the presence of children.

Nonetheless, all prison staff members have direct responsibility for the welfare, well-being, safety and security of J-Unit residents, especially RPP mothers and their children. These workers perform such duties as supervising, counseling, managing, advising and processing paperwork – or "classifying" – the 120 or so inmate residents of J-Unit, including the 12 to 20 mothers, as well as the children, of the Residential Parenting Program.

The terms "classifying" or "classification" refer to an inmate's security risk level, i.e., minimum, medium or maximum, as well as when, where, and how offenders will take vocational or educational classes, attend parenting courses, be assigned to drug treatment, and other such matters.

In J-Unit, civilian Occupational Staff usually consists of only two – and on rare occasions – three people. These individuals hold the following positions and perform the attendant duties:

- One Correctional Unit Supervisor: This person is responsible for overseeing the unit, including all inmates, RPP participants and their children, other occupational staff, and uniformed custody staff.

- One Senior Classification Counselor: This individual is responsible for advising, assisting and maintaining records on at least 70 inmates. (Budget constraints six months ago shifted front-line caseworker duties for all 125 J-Unit residents to one counselor.)
- One Junior Classification Counselor: This position is currently vacant. But those who held this job previously were responsible for assisting the senior counselor and Correctional Unit Supervisor with managing the unit and processing – or "classifying" – offenders. However, the junior position in J-Unit has gone unfilled since August, 2004, and is likely to remain open indefinitely –or perhaps even permanently – as a result of state budget constraints.

The individuals who hold these positions, all of whom have been women during the first five years of the Residential Parenting Program, are experienced professionals who have worked in the corrections field for at least several years, and in some cases, decades. In total, five women have served as J-Unit Correctional Unit Supervisors over the first five years of the RPP. Of those, one was a former uniformed correctional officer who traded in her badge and uniform nearly a decade ago in search of more advancement potential and more predictable work hours. Altogether, she has more than 20 years of experience in the corrections field, most of that time at WCCW.

J-Unit's Senior Classification Counselor has served since the inception of the RPP and continues to do so to this day. Prior to her service in the RPP, she was a member of the clerical staff in the Superintendent's office at WCCW.

Two women over the five years of the RPP have worked as Junior Classification counselors. One of them was a former uniformed correctional officer with nearly 10 years of experience at WCCW and elsewhere. The other junior counselor, who had about five years experience in corrections, had been a social worker for five years before that.

As for uniformed staff in J-Unit, six to eight correctional officers are assigned to the unit and are literally and figuratively on the front lines in terms of providing security, safety and stability to all of those who live and work there. All, with the exception of one officer who has only been on the job a few months, are highly trained and experienced professionals. In J-Unit, the subdivision of correctional officers is straightforward:

- One sergeant, who works five 8-hour shifts each week, is responsible for overseeing custody and security issues for the unit;
- Five full-time officers, who work five 8-hour shifts each week.
- One or two "floaters," or correctional officers capable of working in nearly any WCCW unit to allow for officer vacations, illness of regulars, or other circumstances.

Observations of Occupational Staff: It has been my observation over these four years of research that while all civilian and uniformed professionals have been compassionate, caring and competent in their work with RPP participants and their children, they have been equally smart, savvy and impervious to the attempted cons of convicts.

This, remarkably, has been accomplished in spite of what can only be described as a fairly constant churn of Correctional Unit Supervisors and Classification Counselors. (The core of the uniformed officers assigned to J-Unit has remained relatively

unchanged). While some civilian Occupational Staff have remained longer than others, only one person has seen the program evolve from nothing to what it is today.

Yet, despite these personnel changes, the RPP has remained on an even keel during its first five years of existence, largely because of the steady hand and leadership skills exhibited by all members of the civilian and uniformed Occupational Staff, irrespective of their tenure in the unit.

For the most part, my personal interactions with all of the Occupational Staff members who have worked in WCCW's J-Unit have tended to be warm, open, professional and friendly. While some have been more helpful and interested than others, all have been receptive to my research and supportive of my work. Six of the eight civilian staff members have sat for extensive, formal interviews. Four of the eight have sat for such interviews on multiple occasions each. I intentionally did not request or conduct formal interviews with two Occupational Staff members in particular, both of whom were Junior Classification Counselors who worked in the RPP for relatively short periods of time. Knowing that their tenures would be short, I engaged in informal conversations with them and observed their interactions with offenders, correctional officers and other Occupational Staff while they were assigned to J-Unit. Whether intentional or not, all of the Occupational Staff members who have worked in J-Unit and with RPP participants and their children during the past four years have been women. Again, while it is unclear whether this circumstance was intended, the heavy presence of women in control of the unit's custody situation appears to work extremely well for both the institution and its residents. Civilian Occupational Staff tend to communicate with inmates and their fellow employees by employing logic, excellent interpersonal

communication skills, empathy, humor, force of will and common decency. In doing so, Occupational Staff members seem to maintain the respect of inmates, uniformed employees and others. The relative calm and good order that permeates J-Unit can be in great measure attributed to Occupational Staff members, past and present.

As for uniformed workers, I have conducted many informal interviews over the years with at least six Uniformed Corrections Officers. However, and understandably, because of their intense focus and vigilance regarding safety and security in the unit, my contact and conversations with them have tended to be fleeting in nature.

That said, though, in general, my observations and interactions with the correctional officers who work in WCCW's J-Unit have strongly indicated that they are easy going and good-natured people. Also, whether intentional or not, the majority of permanently assigned J-Unit correctional officers – at least four of the six, including the sergeant – are women, all of whom have children of their own. All of the officers, except for one African American male, are white.

And while it is unclear whether this circumstance was intended, the heavy presence of women in Corrections Officer uniforms appears to work extremely well for both the institution and its residents. Just like their civilian counterparts, uniformed officers use logic, excellent interpersonal communication skills, humor, force of will and common decency, to earn the respect of inmates and their fellow employees.

What Occupational Staff say about the RPP: As stated earlier, virtually all of the civilian and uniformed Occupational Staff who work in J-Unit and with the RPP are highly qualified, experienced and devoted to maintaining a stable environment, especially

for the children of the Residential Parenting Program. All of the Occupational Staff members that I have interviewed and interacted with, save one, previously worked elsewhere at WCCW and/or other correctional institutions in the state. Thus, each brought with him or her excellent bases of experience upon which to contextualize the RPP and J Unit. Given the experience of Occupational Staff members over the years, each also had a good sense of what typical prisoners at WCCW are like. As a result, these employees are not people who would be easily duped or taken advantage of by prisoners. Occupational workers assigned to the RPP have ample opportunity to work with and observe offenders, which provides significant experiences against which to judge what prisoners say and do with actual behavior or information from prison files.

For example, employees assigned to J-Unit acknowledged that being responsible for maintaining order in the WCCW unit that housed the RPP and its children was an enormous concern. One former Correctional Unit Supervisor said supervising the unit was not an easy job, given that the entire population under her care were convicted felons. However, all of the Correctional Unit Supervisors with which I've worked noted that they felt an obligation to be positive role models for the offenders in J-Unit. Two of the former Supervisors, in particular, were working mothers with young children who made a point of sharing with offenders their experiences and struggles as parents, hoping to drive home the point that even for people with good jobs, educations, privileges and opportunities, parenting is not easy. Based on my observations, this type of candor and openness on the parts of supervisors was noticed by inmates and greatly appreciated.

Although referred to as a temporary, pilot program when it was first established, the Residential Parenting Program now seems to be well-established, well-received and

secure. This stability is, in at least some small measure, the result of what appears to be a conscious and deliberate campaign on the part of Occupational Staff to promote the RPP by increasing access to the prison through academic studies such as this, occasional media coverage, public tours of the institution and more engagement with the community through volunteer organizations, educational entities, business interests or private social service groups and religious organizations.

Occupational Staff who work in the RPP have an obviously vested interest in the continued success of J-Unit and the baby program. Working together to ensure the well-being, safety and security of everyone in the unit, RPP Occupational workers of all types quite often give incarcerated women the benefit of the doubt, even when past history suggests some problems might exist. Occupational Staff clearly are interested in doing whatever they can to break the inter-generational cycles of criminality and abuse that grip some families. By the same token, however, Occupational Staff will not allow babies to be endangered under any circumstances. As we will see later, on a handful of occasions, Occupational Staff have had to act swiftly and forcefully to protect children whose mothers were participants in the RPP.

However, it is not as if the livelihood of Occupational Staff is connected to the continued existence of the RPP. Should the program fail for some reason, experienced, well-regarded Occupational Staff assigned to J-Unit would still have jobs in their current locations, elsewhere at WCCW, or in other state correctional facilities.

And again, with almost no exception, my strong impression has been that Occupational employees have mostly shared with me honest and clear-eyed views of the

program, including its strengths, limitations, and its effects on RPP inmates and their children.

Individual Voices

To understand the Residential Parenting Program and the way it works, one must first understand Abby Kupper.

Kupper, one of the RPP's first Correctional Unit Supervisors and perhaps its most influential, took over the job in late 1999 and held it until 2001. A no-nonsense, 40-something woman who commands the respect of staff and inmates alike, Kupper's job was to oversee the Residential Parenting Program and establish order, discipline and culture for a program that had no history, traditions or guiding principles.

With her perfectly coiffed red hair and stylish attire, Kupper's manner is an effective mixture of regal and authoritative, tempered with humility and compassion.

Perhaps these traits can be attributed to the fact that Kupper started at WCCW 15 years ago as a rank-and-file correctional officer, then worked her way up through the ranks, one rung at a time. While many of the staff and officers at WCCW demand that offenders use courtesy titles such as "Ms.," "Mr." and "Officer" when addressing them, everyone is on a first-name basis with Abby, even though no one questions her authority. Also, as a single mom herself, Abby has a keen understanding and appreciation for how difficult parenting can be. As a result, she offers encouragement and promotes a can-do attitude to those in her charge:

> We're role models. I'm one of the lucky few that feels like what I do makes a difference. So, I love working here. I've worked in this facility for 10 years in various different positions. So I feel like it's where I'm supposed to be. There are no losers here. There are only winners that haven't won yet. That's kind of the message we like to send. We're very, very proud of our unit. And because we house the babies here, this is probably one of the better units to live in.

Abby's green eyes grow wide with enthusiasm as she talks animatedly about the progress women in her unit are making. But, she adds, the program was – and in some instances still is – looked upon skeptically by some prisoners, staff and even the larger community, as an inappropriate place to raise children.

> You know, there was quite a bit of resistance at first, I think. As the program got closer to opening, the more resistance. And I think there's a certain fear factor anytime you talk about doing something that's new and innovative. Then of course, you have the kind of old-time, hard-core correctional folks. You know, that have the "lock-em-up and throw away-the key" mentality. And that's unfortunate. But trying to get anything new started is sometimes like pulling teeth, because it's really difficult to sell these people on the idea.

Abby says much of that resistance has subsided since 1999. And after taking over the unit in February 2000, Abby says she tried to expand the program slightly by loosening the admission standards a bit to allow for at least the consideration of borderline cases that in the past would have been immediately rejected. For example, any inmate characterized as a "violent offender" was prohibited in the program prior to Abby's arrival. However, Abby lobbied hard recently to have an inmate admitted to the program who had been convicted of vehicular homicide for running over a man with a car. Upon closer inspection, Abby learned that the offender – who had been driving under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident – had not intended to kill the man. Other cases can be equally murky, says Abby, citing instances in which the state has taken children away from their parents under questionable circumstances, or when an inmate has a record indicating she is a sexual abuser, only to find out the incident dates back to pre-pubescent playground encounters with fellow students or children in the neighborhood. In some of these cases, offenders deserve a second chance, Abby says.

> The problem with some of those things is that, you know, you have to keep in mind that none of these ladies are Girl Scouts. They've all committed felonies. And they've got issues in their past. Say, for instance, if they have substance abuse issues, then yeah, they may have neglected their children as a result of that substance abuse and subsequently had run-ins with CPS [Child Protective Service - a state agency]. But that's a whole lot different from abuse. You know what I mean? So, we're taking a real hard look at

things like that. Then, there's violent offenders. There are some non-violent offenders… Their crime category does not meet the criteria by law to be considered a violent crime. But they've got a rap sheet as long as your arm. And the pattern of criminality. I mean, hello, they're doing the same behaviors over and over and over again. Whereas, a violent offender may have committed a single act of violence. I mean, to me, you know, you've got to look at those things. You've got to say "wait a minute.' And of course, I believe, and this is just my opinion, but I believe there are so many women and children that can be helped that I really don't ever want to see a day when we have to turn any away. You know what I mean? If they have a desire to change their lives -- and believe me, there's nothing like having a child to help you cash your little reality check -- you know what I'm saying? I mean, really. Anybody can have a child and give that child up for adoption, out of sight, out of mind. They don't have to worry, they don't have to deal with it. But there's something about gettin' up in the middle of the night with a pukin' child that reaffirms. You know? You're there. You're in it. There's no going back. So, I mean, to me it's being accountable for actions, you know? It's kinda like, um, you know, maybe this isn't how you wanted it to turn out. Maybe you had a different concept of what parenthood was all about when you

got into it. But now you're going to learn to be responsible, whether you want to be or not.

Correctional Officer Lonnie Cherry, a short, stocky African American man with close-cropped black hair, a round face and a quick smile, recently consented to a brief interview before being interrupted by a “movement,” one of several intervals during the day that prisoners change locations. Cherry, a corrections officer for only a few months, says in J-Unit, Occupational Staff and officers like himself always must be attuned to the needs of inmates, particularly RPP mothers:

> It’s a pretty good job. It’s challenging. But if you don’t have a sense of humor in this job, you’re defeated. These women have a lot of needs. You have to keep that in mind.

Wendy Gans is a contract Occupational Staff worker at WCCW and a state-licensed child care provider charged with helping to meet the needs of RPP mothers and their children. Wendy, who also works at other Early Head Start centers in Western Washington, actually receives her paycheck from the Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD), a local community agency that contracts with WCCW to supply child development and support services under the federal Head Start Program, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. PSESD runs Early Head Start centers and provides other family support programs throughout the Puget Sound Region.

A 30-something white woman with an easy smile, Wendy explains that Early Head Start is a prenatal, infant, toddler and family development program that provides many free services, such as child care, early childhood development training and parenting programs, to eligible children and their families. By virtue of their incarceration, participants in the Residential Parenting Program fall below the federal poverty guidelines, which is roughly an annual income of $14,000 for a family of four. Many of the women imprisoned at WCCW earn as little as $.42 cents an hour for the jobs they perform at the prison. Only those who have acquired skills such as heavy equipment repair or clothing manufacturing are eligible for the highest paying jobs, which offer salaries of up to $7 an hour. Currently, no RPP participants hold such positions. But even if they did, working full-time at such jobs would still place them just barely above the poverty level. Wendy says the mission of the Early Head Start center at WCCW is the same as it is at other centers in Washington State and elsewhere across the country. That mission is to promote and enrich the health, education and well-being of infants, toddlers, families and their communities. And while prison nursery programs exist in other states including Nebraska and New York, Wendy notes that the WCCW facility is special for a variety of reasons.

> One of the things that's different, that is really unique about our program versus some of the other prison nursery programs is that we're a licensed facility. The other ones are not. The inmates are allowed to be in the center, working with children. Here, because we're a licensed child care facility, they're not allowed, because

> they have felony records. Even though we're housed in a prison and we know they're all felons, but we still, because we're a licensed facility, we're not allowed to have inmates working in here. We think that would be great. That would be really beneficial to everybody. And plus, that would help us with staffing. That's a good thing that we have trained child development people working here. But it would be nice to allow the inmates, as well.

Wendy acknowledges the irony associated with the fact that inmate caregivers are allowed and even encouraged to care for children in J unit just 100 yards away, but nevertheless, are forbidden to provide the same services at the center.

> That's where I'm coming from. We train the caregivers, too. They are great with them, you know? And why not be able to help us and have them work in the center, as well. They would always be supervised, of course. They would never be left alone with children. But we're probably going to have to get some kind of special waiver or special blessing or something from the (state) office of Child Care Policy. I think there's some hope and potential there.

The fact that many of the children currently in the program are infants under a year old is a factor that keeps Wendy and her three colleagues at the center extremely

busy most days. Wendy says she's watched the attitudes of inmates and staffers change over the years as the RPP has grown and the number of babies on campus has increased.

> There are a lot of young infants that take a lot of one-on-one care. Whereas, in other settings, you'd have more of a mix. It's interesting. I think in general, it seems like it's added more of a positive kind of element, you know, where before, I don't know that people were… I didn't see quite as much social… I mean there was interaction, of course, always. But now we just hear a lot of 'em stop in and want to look at the babies. I mean, all just being very respectful with them and gentle. I mean, a lot of nurturing kind of stuff going on, which I think is really important.

Perhaps most importantly, Wendy says, is that the children are bonding with their mothers and receiving quality care around-the-clock, which might not be the case otherwise.

> The infants don't know that they're in a prison setting. What they know is that they are with their moms. They are being cared for by nurturing adults. They are having those attachments being built that are so important and essential for healthy development. And what's the alternative? Within five or 10 hours of delivery, the babies are taken away from the moms who are incarcerated. They

> may not see them for a year or more. So, that whole attachment isn't broken. Well for one thing, there's a very strong correlation between attachment disorder and criminal behavior. There's a lot of theory around that and a lot of things that are coming out about that. Folks that never build that healthy attachment oftentimes don't feel the sense of trust in others and all those things that are so important for healthy moral development. So, there often is a connection between socio-pathic behavior and attachment disorder. And so, we feel like what we're doing here is really building that foundation, and just doing really prevention work around child abuse and you know, anti-social behavior. We're trying to prevent that. It's really a preventive kind of program.

Few at WCCW are more aware of the far-reaching implications and the tremendous need for such preventative measures than Terese Jackson, who is the senior counselor for J-Unit and the RPP, holding the official job title of Classification Counselor 3.

One of Terese's many duties is to interact and coordinate with Wendy and other caregivers at the Early Head Start center. Terese says the work done by Early Head Start is an integral element of the rehabilitative training that RPP mothers receive while serving their sentences.

> I work a lot with the Early Head Start people. They're great. They really have, you know, what's in the best interest for making a good plan for the family. And it's a family thing, that's the way they look at it. And, I mean, they have a different perspective than we do coming from Corrections. They understand. They've been through the (Washington Department of) Corrections orientation and stuff. They understand the Corrections point of view. But they come from the Early Head Start point (of view). I mean, the child development thing. So, we have a real good relationship.

But Terese's interaction with Head Start workers and her interest in child development issues account for only a part of her responsibilities. Terese's primary duties involve day-to-day administration of the Residential Parenting Program and providing front-line counseling services to the women in the program.

In addition, Terese counsels the other 80 or so women in J unit and acts as a liaison with other areas of the institution to ensure that the needs of inmates are being met. Specifically, she's charged with helping offenders make smooth transitions back into society, to other parts of the facility, to pre-release or work release programs, chemical dependency treatment, mental health facilities or any other activities or resources that will help inmates get on their feet. She also does much of the screening legwork for prospective RPP participants and inmate caregivers.

Terese also handles paperwork for the dozens of cases she's managing at any given time, a labor-intensive task that literally never ends. This particular evening, it's about 8:30 p.m. and Terese is working late again, trying to whittle down the neglected piles of paper stacked neatly around her shoe-box size office. A soft-spoken, middle-aged white woman, her oval-shaped glasses and mild manners combine to create an image that suggests Terese would make an ideal librarian or public school teacher, the latter ofwhich , in fact, she once was.

But in a slow and deliberate voice, Terese explains it was a desire for a change of pace that prompted her to take a clerk typist job at WCCW in 1993. Now, more than a decade later, she finds herself as a primary player in what some contend is one of the most innovative prison rehabilitation programs in the nation. Terese says the significance of such a large responsibility – and the enormous need for the RPP – are factors that weigh heavily on her at times.

> Getting them in the program is not always easy because there are so many people that *need* the program. And scheduling is always difficult, especially when you have babies. I also have a lot of screening to do. Just to be in the unit, anybody that comes from receiving (the area of WCCW where new inmates spend their first few weeks after arriving at the institution) or from another unit, we have to make sure that they're screened to be okay in this unit with the babies. No crimes against children. No sex offenses. Violent offenses even. You know, unless, like they've had, like, a domestic

violence. That's not going to eliminate 'em most of the time. And if they've had infraction behavior. When I worked in K unit – which is minimum; I've never worked Medium or Close – I had like, 78 or something on my caseload. And that was when I first started. And I'm busier now than I was then. I mean, I was busy and I was just learning. Another thing that's part of this job is all the women that are in the institution that are pregnant, we have to make sure somebody's going to be picking up the baby if they're not in our program. And also they have to fill out all these forms for the Department of Social and Health Services so that they can get the baby paid for. And Social Security applications. That's my biggest pet peeve, knowing who I got to sign what, fill out what, and getting them to figure out how to fill them out. I hate it. It's what applies to whom. I'm now getting used to 'em. I hate the forms. I mean, it's hard for *me* to understand 'em. Much less them.

Separate and apart from the 12 to 16 women actively participating in the RPP at any given time, another 10 to 15 women incarcerated at WCCW might be pregnant at any point. Many women seek admission to the RPP because of the opportunities to keep their children, as well as the less oppressive atmosphere of J Unit. But not all who apply get in. Terese, who also is the person at WCCW responsible for tracking statistics, says typically half of the women who apply for admission to the RPP are given serious consideration, meaning they are

individually interviewed by the RPP screening board, then notified of the board's decision after members have had a chance to discuss each case and assess the appropriateness of the placements. On this particular day, one or two expectant mothers at WCCW probably will be released before they could get processed to join the RPP. Two others most likely will be sent out to a halfway house or work release. Two other women stand a good chance of being admitted to the RPP.

But several, roughly half a dozen, have been denied because they failed to pass the screening process. Terese says having as many as two dozen women either pregnant or having recently given birth is not an unusual circumstance at WCCW.

Despite the constant demands and pressures, Terese says most days she finds her work rewarding. But there occasions when it can be less than enjoyable, she says.

> It's frustrating sometimes. I think, 'I just want a regular counseling job.' But I like it, too. It has its rewards, too. Yeah, those babies are pretty cute. And, I mean, I'm just hoping that this all is going to be a benefit to those babies and the moms when they get out. I mean, you know, there are no guarantees. But I mean, I've seen some drastic improvements in some of these people. I mean, granted that I don't have a lot 'em that have already released that have been real successful for a long time. But time will tell. Most of 'em have been doing pretty well. They're doing fine.

Enthusiasm over these budding success stories are somewhat overshadowed by some former participants, whose experiences have been nothing short of tragic. For example, the five-month old baby of a former RPP participant who was released in May died in September 2004 of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Those who knew the mother and child were shaken by the news.

As bad as that was, Terese says she's still haunted by the memory of one former RPP inmate whose baby died in May of 2000 after leaving WCCW with its mother. Terese explains that the death occurred under dreadful circumstances, and was upsetting to staff members and many of the inmates that knew the mother and the child.

> I mean this is really, really sad. I was just shocked. She went to live with her mother – the mom and the baby. But she went to work and left the baby in the care of the dad, her boyfriend. [He] never had any criminal history. But he shook the baby. The baby was in the hospital for like, two days, before the baby died. Oh, it was just horrendous. I got an e-mail. I was working late on a Monday night. And I got an e-mail from one of the [people] that used to work here. She'd seen an [police] incident report or something. I couldn't continue working that night. It touched me. I mean, yeah, I've had inmates die that have been on my caseload. You know? And there's awful things happen to 'em. But that's the

lifestyle they lead, you know? But this baby didn't do a thing. And the mom, I don't think she had a clue, probably, that he would do anything like that, either. And he may not have had a clue himself. It was just so… Anyway, I went home. I went home early. The inmates knew this baby. I mean, you know, somebody had to talk to 'em about it before they heard about it on TV. But I wasn't in a very good shape to do it at that point. And so, I went home and I called [Correctional Unit Supervisor] Abby (Kupper) from home, and then she came in and then took care of it. She had more composure than I did. But it was just the shock of how it hit me. I ended up talking to… we have a person that works for the department that's like a staff counselor for any reason. That was helpful. I mean, I'd already talked about it to a million people. I'm a talker. I have to vent. That's a real good thing. It's been real needed. It didn't have anything to do with us [at the RPP]. I know I kept looking, 'Now what could I have done? What could we have done to make this not happen?' Because the moms all know about that, it might be a good lesson for them, to be careful who's watching your kids. You know? I mean, you can't know, though. You can't always know. Yeah, that was bad. But we made it through it. I've tried to call her (the mother) once and she never called me back. Hopefully, she's doing okay. She's getting mental health treatment and stuff.

While it might be ideal for RPP participants to come to the program with an attitude that allows them to enthusiastically embrace the idea of changing their lifestyles, Terese says such transformations do not occur overnight.

> We're not going to say if they don't have an (good) attitude they can't be in the program. I mean, that's part of all the stuff we're working on with 'em, is to help 'em develop those attitudes. I mean, we have one (RPP participant) in here that has a vehicular homicide. She doesn't think she has a problem with alcohol. But she's coming around. Now she's in Chemical Dependency treatment. She told her CD counselor, 'I don't like Miss Jackson. She's makin' me do this.' I mean, you know. But she's starting to somewhat accept that. I mean, she caused someone to die. One of her friends. She's in total denial about her actions caused this to happen. I mean, she acknowledges that it happened and she feels bad, she says. But she just doesn't relate the behavior because she just can't accept that she did it… or the guilt right now. But she seems to be doing a real good job with her baby. It's her first baby. Just being a bunch of people, confined, and having to work together as a team. And that's another thing about this program that's different from anywhere else in this institution. Before I was part of this program, inmates that were having trouble getting

along, I'd say, 'Okay, just stick to yourself, do your own time, don't get involved.' And usually they could say, 'Okay, I can do that.' I mean, some of them never could. But with this program, they have to be a team. They have to work with each other. They have to help each other. And sometimes they resist a lot, you know? They have their problems. They don't like each other sometimes – a lot of times. I mean, there are certain personalities. I mean they're just not real pleasant personalities. And I try to be fair. I don't like playing favorites with anybody. I totally hate that. So whatever the need is that warrants my attention that's what gets my attention, not just 'cause they want it, or want this or want that. You know? If there's a need to get something accomplished, that's what I'm going to work on.

As is the case in any facet of life, personalities and personal chemistry tend to play a major role in the culture of the RPP and the women who live in the J Unit of WCCW. Terese says the backgrounds of some inmates only make this dynamic more challenging.

It's a lot of personality conflicts among the women. And it's the fact that they're 14, or 35 going on 12, or whatever. Socially, they're just not mature. Some of 'em are and some of 'em aren't. Some of 'em have developed that maturity, to a point. And some of

> ‘em just, even though they’re bright or capable and being pretty good moms, but they just, it’s like, that junior high mentality. I mean, because of all those years of using drugs, I know, it’s stunted their development. [They’re] pretty high functioning, for the most part. I mean, and they get along pretty well, and then things start to fall apart and then we have a meeting. And then they’ll be fine for a week and then we’ll have to have another meeting. And then that’s it. And it’s nothin’ terrible. It’s just little stuff. Fightin’ over who got the most donated baby toys. I mean, *please.*

But for the most part, according to Terese, RPP participants rank among the best in terms of WCCW inmates who do well in their programming and are prepared to leave the institution when their time comes.

> They know that that’s part of their being in the program. That’s part of our purpose – our mission – is to kind of mimic what’s it’s going to be like out there. And they know that, that they have to be responsible. Sometimes it’s hard when they’re thinking ‘I don’t want to get up and do this.’ But they know they have to do it. Sometimes it’s really hard because of scheduling to get them into everything we want them to be in. I mean, I always put them on a work waiting list. But, like, when they have a little baby that needs

> to be fed… and then they have to do three hours of Chemical Dependency training a day, plus to have to be in school. And that's kind of one of the conditions we usually put on our RPP program is that they complete CD treatment anyway. So they're kind of a priority to get 'em in there. So they can get off and go to work release. Cause part of this thing is to get 'em into a work release, too. So they will be more ready when they're out there.

In the five years since the program has been in existence and the 103 inmates who have participated, five women and their babies have been removed from the program because of behavioral problems or infractions that could not be overlooked. Terese says making such decisions is sometimes difficult. But if she had them to do it all over again, she says she'd make the same calls.

> One was for fighting. I mean, she pushed, shoved another inmate. And the baby was sent out to live with the Tribe. She was Native American. So she went to segregation (i.e., solitary confinement). That was a hard one. But, you know, we couldn't afford that kind of behavior. I mean, this was in the baby day room. She was shoving another inmate in there. *Twice*. It was just acted on immediately. I mean, we couldn't afford not to do that. I mean, you know, to make our program viable, or to make it be real, there have to be consequences to our actions. They had all of that information

going in, that they have to be accountable and have to have good behavior. It's hard. 'Cause they have to go to segregation. They don't even have a chance to say goodbye to the babies because of the jeopardy they could be putting the baby in. And that's standard procedure. And another one: we had reports from other inmates – caregivers – that she was doing things to the baby. Like, pulling the baby's hair. Three-month-old-baby. There had been a report before that where they thought they had heard the mom yelling and hittin' the baby. I don't know. That was hearsay. Nobody saw that. But these caregivers actually saw her pulling the baby's hair. *Twice.* And saying things. Just real unpleasant things to the baby. And when we called CPS (Child Protective Services) they came here, interviewed her with us in her presence, and she says, 'Well, that's the way I was treated and that's the way I'm gonna treat my baby and nobody's going to tell me to do any different.' But CPS placed the baby with her family – [a] cousin. Her brother had her seven other children. She'd never had any CPS referrals. She was Hispanic. But that's not a Hispanic thing. It was their family thing. I mean, it was, the father had treated them like that and the brother said, 'Yeah, he did.' But it was like, I still have a problem with CPS's plan there. But, I mean, they try to place the baby with the family almost all the time. I don't know. That was a hard one for me.

Terese says in her years as a correctional institution counselor she's seen and heard many heartbreaking stories. But she says she tries not to let these experiences harden her or affect her life outside the institution's gates.

> I leave it here. I don't take it home with me, for the most part. 'Cause you can't. You can't survive that way. I used to be a teacher. I substituted for seven years. So, when I started working for the Department of Corrections, I said, uh-uh, I don't care what job I ever get. I started as a clerk typist, which was great. Because it was no stress. I mean, generally, it was real low stress. I needed that transition. And I learned a lot about classification because I was typing reports that the counselors did. So, it was a great, great learning ground for what I'm doing now. That kind of got me numbed, I guess. You kind of became tolerant of hearing all this stuff. But anyway, I decided I wasn't going to spend those kinds of hours on a job. And I saw that the counselors didn't take their work home with 'em. [And I thought], hmmm, maybe that's what I want to do. And it's one-on-one, that's what I like. I really like one-on-one, not 30-on-one. I totally believe in it. I wouldn't want to be in this job if I didn't. I totally believe if there's any chance of these moms and babies having a better quality of life and gettin' away from the drugs and stuff, that this is one of the best opportunities

> we have. I mean, they're a captive audience right now. And if we can't do it here, I mean, when they develop that bond (with their babies), that's the best chance we have. I mean, maybe they have other children and they've had some bonding with them. But they didn't have all the opportunities to learn and to have models and stuff that are helping them with that.

Patterns

If we review the ways in which Occupational Staff talk about theparenting program, we see little variation. While those who held the Custodial Unit Supervisor position were understandably and necessarily more focused on overall management of the unit and its interaction with other parts of the prison, both supervisors and Classification Counselors were focused intently on the welfare of RPP children and RPP mothers, who to a greater or lesser extent, were treated as the first among equals in terms of prioritization of needs in J-Unit.

The efforts of Occupational Staff members, as near as I could tell, were respected and supported by virtually all inmates, who tended to place the needs and well-being of RPP mothers and their children above other unit concerns. In that sense, the presence of pregnant women, new mothers, infants and small children tended to have a unifying and calming effect on what might otherwise be a more raucous environment.

The women who have in the past and continue to serve as J-Unit and RPP Occupational Staff were similar in many ways. Seven of the women were white, or appeared to be white. One was African American. Their ages seemed to range from late

20s to late 50s. As mentioned earlier, two were former Corrections Officers. Five came from social service and social worker backgrounds. One, prior to joining the state Department of Correctionsmore than a decade ago, has been a public school teacher for many years.

Yet, despite their differences in experiences, training, age, parental status and positions in the prison food chain, allOccupational Staff expressed similar opinions in their assessments of the RPP. All saw it as much-needed approach to getting at the root cause of many problems that can become inter-generational unless action is taken early in the lives of children. It also is clear that most think that the program is working well on a daily basis.

Occupational Staff said they have watched the positive effects that come from inmates being able to spend time with and care for their children in a safe, secure and drug-free environment. This stability, combined with the educational and vocational programming provide by WCCW, the counseling, and the typically rigorous daily schedule are helping women to become responsible, attentive and observant, all skills and behaviors that hopefully will transfer to the outside world when offenders leave the institution.

Occupational Staff members are quick to concede that a few serious problems have occurred over the years. However, tensions will always exist among a population of women imprisoned for long periods of time in relatively close quarters. In general, though, Occupational Staff modestly give credit to offenders and the program itself, asserting that the RPP is having a positive effect and perhaps even exceeding expectations.

Category Analysis and Interpretation:

Inmate Caregivers: Another key category of people to consider is the Inmate Caregivers, those offenders who are frequently called upon by RPP mothers, Occupational Staff and even Correctional Officers to provide assistance and support when needed.

To become a resident of J-Unit atWCCW, which is on the Minimum Security Side of the prison, offenders must:

- Have less than five years remaining on their sentence;
- Must be well-behaved – meaning no disciplinary incidents or infractions within the last 12 months;
- And must have no violent offenses, child abuse or sexual abuse charges on their records.

At any given time, J-Unit may have as few as seven caregivers, or as many as 15 or 20, depending upon circumstances such as the recent arrival or departure of RPP mothers, caregivers and inmates new to the unit that might become caregivers. The typical number of Inmate Caregivers, however, is usually between 15 and 20.

Those who do become Inmate Caregivers typically volunteer for such duty, although sometimes they are asked to do so. No one, however, is forced or coerced into performing caregiver duties, and only those who really want the job are ultimately accepted.

The process for becoming a caregiver is not simple. All inmates who become caregivers must first take classes and be trained by the professional caregivers across the quad who work in the Early Head Start Center. These classes, which last for several days,

introduce potential caregivers to the basics, such as how to hold babies properly, feed and burp them, as well as change diapers. But in addition, caregivers also are taught about early child development, such as the development of motor skills, appropriate stimulation techniques, hand-eye coordination and other topics. After completing this sequence of courses and being observed by Early Head Start professionals, Inmate Caregivers are awarded certificates, which allows them to serve not only as RPP caregivers, but to also serve as certified child caregivers on the outside when they leave prison.

Back in J-Unit, RPP mothers who work or program elsewhere on the prison grounds during the week leave their children at the Early Head Start Center for extended periods of time. However, Inmate Caregivers in J-Unit are called on to baby-sit children for any number of reasons, including while RPP mothers attend classes or vocational training, take a shower, eat a meal, make a phone call, or attend a meeting with counselors, doctors, clergy, mental health professionals or others. These inmate-to-inmate and inmate-to-child relationships allow RPP children to interact with other adults besides their mothers, just as they might in the outside world. The Inmate Caregiver system also seems to give RPP mothers greater flexibility, specifically when short-term, short-notice child care assistance can be found right inside the residential unit.

I observed some half-dozen Inmate Caregivers in action many times during my participant observation and had many casual conversations with them. I asked four of them for formal interviews. One declined, but I did conduct formal and informal interviews with three others. One of those caregivers was a white, middle-class woman from Southern Washington who was doing time on fraud chargers. The other Caregivers I

spoke with were two middle-aged African American women, both of whom were mothers and grandmothers. The voices of all three caregivers are featured below.

What Inmate Caregivers say about the RPP:

In terms of living in J-Unit and at WCCW, Inmate Caregivers, who we must remember are first and foremost prisoners themselves, have differing views about life in the unit and life in prison. To say the very least, some were less sanguine than others about their circumstances.

However, offenders in this category are among those closest to RPP participants. Trained expressly as caregivers for the children of the RPP, these women undergo more rigorous background checks than do other inmates, except perhaps RPP mothers themselves. Caregivers also are subjected to testing and receive extensive training to prepare them to meet the needs of RPP children whose mothers are at work, in class or otherwise occupied. RPP caregivers tend to speak proudly of their contributions to the RPP children and their roles in the unit.

Take, for example, Martha Conners, a 46-year-old African American woman who has served five years of a nine-year sentence for selling drugs. With time off for good behavior, Conners says she could be released in just under two years. Conners, a heavy-set woman with a gravelly, yet soothing voice, explains that many inmates in J unit see her as a “motherly figure,” owing perhaps in equal parts to her wisdom, her graying hair and the fact that she has six children and 10 grandchildren on the outside. Conners, who moved to J unit just about the time the parenting program began, became an authorized inmate caregiver about six months ago and says she believes establishment of the RPP

and the presence of infants has helped soften some of the harsher realities of life in WCCW's J Unit.

> Well, what I've seen and noticed about the whole thing is… some of the inmates here are homosexual, getting in trouble all the time, making infractions, going back to MSU (Medium Security Unit) back to CCU (Close Custody Unit) back to MSU and back up here. And now, since this unit have been started, I think that has stopped a lot of people from getting in trouble as much, because you have to be really cool to be in this unit. I've noticed there's been a lot of changes as far as we are concerned… inmates are concerned, because I was trying to get in this unit. Everyone wants to come in this unit now. Because of the baby program. Because we all have babies and grandkids out there and I've seen a change in a lot of the ladies here. They don't get in trouble as much. There's not too much homosexuality in here, in this unit. And everybody pretty well live up to the rules and stuff that go on in this unit. Not that we have to but because we want to. You know, because when you're with the babies like that, there's a sense of responsibility. When I first came in here I was denied being a caregiver. But then I finally became one and now that I am one, I really like being with the children. I really love it. And I watch the mothers. You know, it gives them that responsibility back. You know, raising a child

and going to work. You know, because we all have lost that because we've been in the drug world for a long time. Selling drugs. Easy life. And now we're out there trying to get it back and this is a good way to start off is in here. Because I feel if you can't do it in here, you get out there, you're not going to do it. You're going to end up coming back. I've seen a lot of changes over the years here. A lot of people out here, if they have children, they respect children if they see them. I've just seen a lot of changes.

Martha adds that the restrictive nature of the RPP and the rules associated with J unit also help protect the children and minimize the possibilities of conflicts and confrontations between inmates who might be resentful of the program for whatever reason.

There is a lot of resentment with some people because a lot of women here have got baby charges. Raping or all kind of stuff. So a lot of them can't come in this unit. A lot of them have violent crimes, have used a gun… robbery or something, and they've got that on their record. And I do think they kind of envy a lot of us that are in here because we don't have those kind of crimes. And every now and then you might hear someone say something negative like, 'Oooo, I wouldn't have my baby up in here.' Because you can't have your baby up in here. Because if you

could, you would. You know what I'm saying? So there are some resentments. Especially child molesters, violent crime people that can't come in this unit and I've heard them from time to time, out there say something negative about the program. There are anywhere you go, really. There's probably a lot here, 'cause it's prison, and there's a lot of jealousy. People are really jealous because they don't have their babies up here. You know? But other than that, I think it's okay.

Martha says her maternal tendencies toward many inmates and her deep religious faith are seen as benefits to women in J unit, and particularly the mothers in the RPP.

I'm kinda like a motherly figure here in the unit for younger people. I help them do this, or talking to 'em about that and everything. Because I'm saved and I go to church and I pray with a lot of the young girls because I've been there and the things they're going through, I went through it, you know? It has helped me get a sense of responsibility back, too. This program has really helped me. Because I have like 10 grandkids. And three or four of them – maybe four of them I have never seen or held. When I see the babies, they get me to know there is hope for me, you know? Because sometimes I'll be kinda down and out and I'll be like, 'am I gonna ever get out of here,' you know? But then I know, this too

will pass. But it has helped me to gain responsibility. Being able to watch a baby. Being right there for the babies needs and wants. Whatever their wants are. For me to be there for ‘em. And I talk to the mothers. Maybe pray with ‘em from time to time and talk to them about where I came from. And about the things about not to follow in my footsteps. Because most of ‘em are so young, I have kids their ages. And I just sit down and I talk to ‘em a lot and let ‘em know that this is not the end, you know? And they’re blessed to be able to have their babies here, because a lot of people lost their kids… and never see their kids. But they’re blessed, you know?

Although she didn’t become an RPP caregiver until her second try, Martha says she now fully appreciates and understands the rationale behind the strict screening process inmates are put through before being approved.

I feel that before you become a caregiver you need to be put in here and be kind of monitored, watched to see your everyday pattern. Are you gonna be a troublemaker? Are you gonna be this or you gonna be that? Because you never know, you know, who is what. I wouldn’t want no anybody holding my baby, either. To me, I feel honored being able to come in this unit, because a lot of people can’t even come in this unit. Just to live here you should

feel honored, because, you know, they're not just going to put anybody around the babies. I think they really do a good job as far as, so far picking the caregivers. Because every caregiver that's picked since I've been here are really awesome, you know? And really into it.

While she enjoys offering advice and sharing her perspectives with young mothers and other inmates, Martha says her favorite part of being an RPP caregiver is actually spending time with the children. Recently, Martha fell and suffered a broken leg, an injury that has relegated her to a wheelchair for six weeks. As a result, she has been unable to fully program, work at her job as a janitor or care for RPP babies as much as she would like. But Martha says she'll be back on her feet in about two weeks helping RPP mothers and the dozen or so other inmate caregivers who look after the RPP infants.

I read to 'em. I sing to 'em. Talk baby talk with 'em. There's a lot of things that we do. I haven't been able to change 'em yet, because I've been in the wheelchair and you have to be able to pick them up. I haven't been able to go make a bottle and all that and I'm really dying to do that. But I'll be holding 'em and singing to 'em and rocking 'em. I think they really love me a lot. I sing to a lot and I just love playing with 'em and stuff. They have the center. So, most of the time, when mothers have to go to work, we caregivers are there to feed the babies, change 'em, bathe 'em and

do everything that the mother would do. And then we have a choice of either taking them to the center and letting ‘em stay all day, or staying here and keeping if we have time. But most everybody programs. So it kinda works out good. We have to find the ones that don’t program all day and this and that, you know? They be able to keep the babies or take them to the center. The center is a lot of help because they do get to take the babies over there when they’re at work all day. And then they stop there and pick ‘em up.

Martha volunteers that in the year that she’s lived in J-unit and the months since she became an inmate caregiver, the inmates of J-unit have been supportive of RPP mothers and their babies and genuinely concerned about their safety and well-being.

Well, as far as how the caregivers… how do they treat the babies when the mothers are not around? And so far, I have seen no kind of abuse or anything. All of the caregivers are loving and kindly and you know, they’re really involved in taking care of these babies. Because babies, you know, you have to watch them closely and especially those that start to crawl or sit up. You have to kind of really be there for ‘em. All of the caregivers I’ve seen have been really good. Hasn’t been no abuse or nothing. And the mothers and the caregivers get along real good. You know, they know they can

> come… at any time and say, 'Oh, I have to school,' or 'I gotta go to the gym,' 'I have to be here,' and we as caregivers have to take our time – a set time, and keep the babies. The majority of the time when the mothers ask us, then we do. We do keep 'em, you know? They go to dinner. They go to lunch. You know? Just regular life. Like if they were on the street. Or they go to work. Then they come back in the evening and pick the babies up, and come back here. And I think that is really awesome.

Martha Connors, based on the prison subcultural adaptation pseudo-family theories mentioned earlier, clearly has assumed the classic roles of mother and grandmother to RPP participants and others.

Priscilla Masters, a 40-year-old African American woman who, on and off, spent much of the '90s in prison, is now serving a five-year sentence at WCCW for drug possession. She recently transferred to J-unit after spending several years living in various other parts of the institution. Priscilla is wearing a loose-fitting white shirt and matching pants. Her caramel-colored face is framed by a simple white head-dress, similar to that a Catholic nun would wear. Priscilla has two-and-a-half years left on her sentence, and says in time, she hopes to become an RPP caregiver. Explaining the prison atmosphere, Priscilla says that in the month since she moved to J-unit, she's already observed dramatic differences between her new environment and the other parts of WCCW in which she has lived.

I wanted to be in J Unit because of the different, I'd say, mentality as far as the officers and the CUS (Correctional Unit Supervisor) and the counselors back here. I want to be a caregiver because I love children. And it gives you an opportunity to um, you know what I'm saying, interact with children, and help. It gives you a lot of awareness of self. It actually helps you. Just being around 'em. It makes you more at peace. You're not prone to get in a lot of mess and want to argue or fuss and fight. In L unit, it was like 130 women. It takes you like 90 days to get a room. It's really loud, disrespectful. You see all kinds of acts going on. I mean, anything and everything you could think of? Yeah, it's happening. You never really get to sleep or have any space to yourself. It's a lot of disrespect. Even the staff, as far as the CUS, the staff, the counselors. And the officers are totally different from here. They have a lot of discord and a lot of tension in the unit. And that comes mostly from the staff. And it's like, uh, instead of them working with the inmates to try to make it a more relaxed atmosphere, it seems like they fuel the fire to make it more tense. You know? If you ever talk to any of the inmates in that unit – or even in K unit – they'll tell you that they don't like the unit. They don't care for much of the staff. There was a lot of disrespect to the inmates as a whole. But they wanted respect. And it wasn't given,

you know? They talk down to you. Instead of pushing your paperwork like they're supposed to they'd … come to the conclusion, is this inmate worthy? I was classified as not one worthy enough for them to push me through to advance myself so that I could have opportunity for change and to, um, be prepared for when I go back out, because it's not my first time here. I asked to be a caretaker because I'd rather have no job and come be at peace rather be in the discord and the tension. And so I asked, and I was shocked that they let me come. I'm kind of like an experiment. So, it's like, if I make it through and everything goes fine, then they'll take more inmates like me. 'Cause I was a problem inmate before. I was, like, not really a problem. I mean, if you got in my face – now I can just blow you off. Then, it was like, 'you better get on out my face.' They call that a problem inmate, you know, because you don't back down. I didn't go looking for trouble. None of that. In L unit, a lot of people will be disrespectful and they will get in your face and they will do things to try to make you go off just to see you go off, stuff like that. This unit, I must say, it has a lot to do with the staff. They instill it in us, you know what I'm saying, that we need to work together. To keep it clean, to keep it moving, to keep it at peace. Because they're not going to have havoc here because they have the babies here and it has to be a serene place and a peaceful place and an atmosphere that is for

> the betterment of the children. And so, that is a known fact. And this is a very peaceful unit. Anyone that's in this unit that's been to another unit, will tell you this is the most peaceful unit I've been in. And I've been in almost every unit. The majority of the staff are very caring. Very respectful. And they work for the betterment of the unit. And you won't find that in other places. You will see. And the babies have a soothing effect on you. Makes you want to goo-goo and ga-ga, you know? And that's good. This unit works, like I say. It works. And it's a good unit. We help the other people who are less fortunate, by choice. You care take freely. You don't get paid. It's a choice thing. And um, it's not too many people who would do that.

Priscilla adds that many inmates housed in other units on campus are envious of J unit residents for a variety of reasons. But she quickly adds that in J unit and in the RPP, the emphasis really is on rehabilitation and preparing inmates for returning to life on the outside. Recently, Priscilla was assigned to a janitorial job in one of the prison buildings that puts her in contact with the general public and also gives her access to the parking lot and the public road that runs by the facility. Priscilla considers this a significant step:

> A lot of people do have a lot of resentment because this is considered the best unit to be in at this time. And they say, 'Only

> the elite get here.' Well, I wasn't the elite. I made it. Like I said, I'm an experiment. I got like big old shoes to wear, you know? And it's like, real scary. But it's cool. It makes me know that there is people out there that will help you if you really want to change. And that the system can work for you if you have the people and the tools to use that will work with you, you know, to utilize your abilities and for them to use their help for you. And it works. It works. It makes a difference. My whole attitude has changed. I feel a lot better here. I work in what they consider, quote unquote, this is supposed to an elite job I work in, in this institution. For you to work in that particular building, and to be able to have access to the parking lot and everything like that, they have to trust you. And only certain inmates get that opportunity.

In terms of short-term goals, Priscilla says becoming an infant caregiver and helping RPP mothers also will be a positive step in her rehabilitation.

> I want to be a caretaker because I choose to. I want to be able to be around the babies and be able to hold 'em and goo-goo and ga-ga with 'em. You know? And help somebody whose in a position, you know what I'm saying, that needs help right now. Because the women have to go to school. They have to work. And then they have to take care of their babies. You know? And that don't give

> ‘em much time to do anything. You know? And some of ‘em have to do CD (Chemical Dependency treatment) on top of that and everything else and that’s a heavy program. So if I have an opportunity to give back some help to somebody, because somebody’s helping me. That’s how I look at it. You know what I’m saying? I’m with that right now. You know what I’m saying? That’s where I’m at today.

Priscilla, the mother of two daughters ages 19 and 17, is serving time at WCCW for the second time. Because of that – and because of her rather lengthy sentence – she consciously tries not to talk about or think too far into the future, a mindset she says is not uncommon among inmates who are serving longer sentences.

> I have two-and-a-half years. I can’t see past [the present] right now. I can’t go any further right now. Right now, to look past the present right now would probably be too much for me. That would be too far for me to think right now, because I’ve got to live for today. Tomorrow, I pray that it’s a better day. Now, if you say can I wish and dream, I hope that I’d never see this place again. All because when I got out, I didn’t have any support. I went to work for McDonald’s, just to get a square job. Just to do what I needed. But that didn’t pay the rent. When I got out I was all hopeful about

> maybe getting a receptionist job or something a little more than $6.50 (an hour), but it didn't work. Before I knew it, I went back to old, familiar places and got around old people, and I started to delusion myself that I need this money and I need it now. So, I did what I knew best that I had been doing a long time. Before I knew it, I was out and about and slingin' and interactin' and movin' and I paid the bills. And I took care of my daughters. And I like, I left my daughters $6,000 before I left. I mean, I'm a mom, and if my baby says she need, I'm gonna go get it. But today, I can't see me doin' it no more. I committed a crime. Does that make me happy? No. Does that make me able to accept my wrongs? Yeah.

Another challenge Priscilla says she's encountered at WCCW is a lack of respect on the part of some staff members. Priscilla says despite her demonstrable personal progress in recent years, several prison staffers that she declines to name have written off her – and other inmates – as lost causes.

> If I can make it up there interacting with all them different people, when every one of them almost – I'd say 80 percent of them say, 'Masters, how did you ever make it here? I can't believe you're up here. Who? Who put you here?' Stuff like that. That's what I hear, almost on a daily basis. I just laughed it off, you know, and say 'You know, I'm trying to figure that out, too. So, I must be doing

> good to here.' I roll it off my back. It's different. I'd say about 30 percent of them have turned around and now they're like, 'I'm glad to see you're doing really well.' I still hear it from certain officers and stuff.

Priscilla's experiences are consistent with the findings of those theorists who contend that the control imposed on female prisoners in the U.S. is more about psychological imprisonment, not just physical incarceration. Some women, however – usually those who come from more stable social and class backgrounds – find they can largely escape from the psychological devastation of imprisonment

Dina Rogers, 43, says being a caregiver in the Residential Parenting Program is nothing short of a God-send. A former paralegal in Lewis County, Washington – a semi-rural area about 100 miles south of Seattle – Rogers is serving a sentence of three years and seven months at WCCW for the unlawful practice of law on a real estate deal.

Dina, whose curly red hair cascades out from beneath a beige-colored baseball cap, is soft-spoken, articulate and polite. She says she became a Residential Parenting Program caregiver two months earlier because it reminds her of the world outside.

> It's the closest thing to outside and the real world. It's one of the only contacts that you have that makes you feel like you are not on this alien planet. You can be with the babies and not see the razor wire. You still hear the recall and the cease movement and the things – all the things that condition us on a daily basis. These are

> a real break. It's a wonderful program for the mothers, especially while they're pregnant and when they have a child. One of the finer things these mothers can do is Chemical Dependency (treatment), which a good majority of them need. And so it's very important for them to complete 12 weeks of Chemical Dependency. It's pretty intense for them. So knowing that they have caregivers that can watch the children when the (day care) center's not open – in the evening the center's not open – so a lot of the mothers have CD in the evening. So I donate all of my time. You can't be selfish. These women are in need of so much. They need to know their child is safe. Most of them haven't known a woman of their word. So they don't know what it's like to have someone who says, 'yes, I'll do it,' and have them be there. So, there's 11 babies, and they usually ask me first. Grandma, they call me Grandma. They do. I have the babies' pictures all in my room. Every one of them. They're just like my own grandchildren. I have their birthdates on a calendar. They're like my alien grandchildren.

Dina says, in her opinion, she has noticed that the impact of having RPP infants housed at WCCW depends to a great extent on the life experiences of different inmates.

I think it's two-fold. I think it has some negative impact on some women. There are women in here that have murdered their children. There are women in here that have had their children taken from them because of abuse and neglect. There are sex offenders in here that have molested children – murdered children. They're not allowed to be around children. But yet, they're free to roam around. I have an advantage and a disadvantage of knowing who they are. Because of the (WCCW) law library, because I helped a good majority of the women in this institution just since I've been here. So I do know who most of them are and I steer clear of them. They have absolutely no respect for the fact that they are court-ordered not to be around a child. These women are sex offenders. They undergo therapy, sex offender group therapy. And they know they're not supposed to be around children. But yet, every one of them will seek out a baby carriage when they're in the yard. And that's frightening. We do everything we can in this unit to keep these babies safe. No one in this unit is allowed to have any kind of assault. No violent crimes are allowed in this unit. So once you're past J unit, it's kind of like open territory. They're everywhere. They work in the kitchen. They're just everywhere. The babies don't go in the kitchen, but the point I'm making is that they are everywhere. The average woman in here doesn't know who it is. They don't know who they are. There are teachers' aides

in classrooms that are child murderers and sex offenders and they're in some of the places where I, frankly, think they shouldn't be. They're allowed in maintenance. They're allowed to be on crews that go outside of the institution. However, they are closely guarded, so that's okay. But the ones that work on the maintenance inside this institution are allowed to go into these units. And it disturbs me terribly and these mothers will tell you, I have run three of them out of this unit, because they were down D Hallway, which is the baby wing. They come in with their boss, with the maintenance supervisor. However, the maintenance supervisors, most of them don't know what those women have done. Most women won't be honest enough to tell you. We've had three of them in here. And I've gone to the unit officer and told them that there are child rapists in D Wing and I think you need to ask them to wait outside. They can find someone else. They need to be restricted from this unit. It's a big deal for them to be able to go in there and stare at those babies. And it frightens me. 'Cause if I'm taking care of someone else's child, it's my responsibility to keep them safe. And I take it seriously. Some women may not, and then, a lot of the caregivers don't know who the child molesters are, which is a disadvantage. So that's the negative side to what I see.

Dina also explains that even though the presence of infants has had a softening and generally positive effect on the environment at WCCW, some inmates have transferred out of the unit to minimize their contact with the babies.

> It disturbs some women in here even, because they can't be around *their* children. Some women have asked to leave this unit because of the babies. 'Cause it's too hard for them. Particularly women who have had miscarriages and lost children. It's very hard for them.

But by and large, the babies are a positive attraction and a reminder to everyone that there is life outside the confines of WCCW. As an RPP caregiver, Dina says she notices that an increasing number of WCCW staff members who work in other parts of the prison have begun to stop by the RPP to see the children.

> The babies have a big impact on the staff. We have staff members who come in here – like on their breaks – and they come into the baby wing. And then some officers – some male officers in particular, who have no children – and when you see them out in the yard, they are the hardest, meanest… And the minute they come in here, there's just something about these babies that brings out the human side of them that so few of us get to see. So that's

real touching to see that. And these babies are so happy. There isn't an unhappy baby in here. And there hasn't been, the whole time I've been in the program. They're not fussy. They're very well cared for. These are good mothers. They may not have been in the past. Some of them are first-time mothers. But they are doing everything humanly possible with this opportunity. There isn't any one of the mothers that takes advantage of this program. They did at first. Because some of these women have had nothing and they expected everything. So, now they realize that things are not handed to you. You have to work for these things. They're given every opportunity. They're given six weeks off after they have the baby, where they don't work and do not program. The minute that six weeks is up, these women are put out to work. These women go to work when their six weeks are up. There's no 'Oprah' watching for everybody. It's time to go back to work. The one thing that these mothers learn is that, they learn how to organize ahead of time, which is something most of them have never done. We had a problem getting them to come and ask us (caregivers) ahead of time to watch their child. Now, they know what their schedules are. But a lot of them are so used to, in the other world, the real world, handing the baby off to somebody because they have to run down to the store. You can't do that here. Here, the caregivers, everyone has to program.

Dina is herself an interesting case study, particularly given that she is one of that rare breed of inmate who is not serving time related to drugs. Also, as the product of a fairly well-off Lewis County family, Dina is not from the same socio-economic milieu as the majority of her colleagues at WCCW. That being the case, it would appear that the rare female, white-collar criminal may enjoy minor advantages over her less-accomplished, less-wealthy sisters-in-crime. If true, this hardly would be surprising. As we have seen, it certainly seems that poor, under-educated women of all races who come from abusive backgrounds or have been criminally influenced, are held in low repute and often deemed unworthy of help from society, especially if such women are mothers.

Patterns:

Just like the rest of the WCCW prison population, the pool of Inmate Caregivers can be a mixed bag. Caregivers tend to come in all ages, assorted races and various personality types. Their offenses also range from drug dealing and drug possession, to theft, forgery and fraud.

Despite these differences, however, the commonalities amongst the members of this group are striking. Inmate Caregivers tend to be mothers themselves, and even grandmothers. My observations during four years have been that Inmate Caregivers, as might be expected, tend to be excellent with children. In addition, RPP mothers tend to seek the help, advice and support of Inmate Caregivers when children are sick or their mothers encounter a problem.

However, all three Inmate Caregivers I interviewed were unanimous in their unequivocal praise for the Residential Parenting Program, including its structure, its administration, its implementation and its short-term effects and long-term goals. All agreed that the support the RPP provides to incarcerated mothers, who might otherwise find themselves ill-equipped and overmatched after leaving prison, was a wise and forward-thinking approach to corrective training and behavior modification efforts. The RPP, these caregivers agreed, Washington State got right.

Conclusions

It is important to note, in conclusion, that uniformed correctional officers and civilianstaff are located in a working- to middle-class zone of society. For example, uniformed officers earn salaries ranging from $27,600 for newcomers to $36,700 for more senior officers. Salaries for civilian prison personnel are comparable to that of uniformed officers, dependent of course, upon factors such as education, skill levels and experience. Uniformed officers and civilian staff typically appear to have stable household and family relationships. In general, they give strong evidence of being solidly involved in the dominant culture's worldview and value system – they believe in occupational dedication and working hard; in the value of high school educations, at least; in family; in material success; in being law abiding and responsible members of society; and in taking care of one's responsibilities, including responsibilities to one's family members, especially children.

In the second place, uniformed correctional officers and civilian staff members are located in the prison system in a literally "corrective" role. They are involved in the

punishment of women who have engaged in what are socially defined, in America, as criminal activities, especially participation in the drug world, with its use of illegal drugs, dealing, and associated criminal activities. Correctional officers and civilian staff members also are involved in the correction or rehabilitation of such women, that is, they are involved in programs that are intended to remove these women from the drug/criminal world, get them off drugs, and motivate them to become dedicated members of working class culture. In a sense then, while they don't understand it this way, they are involved, culturally, in re-socialization or re-enculturation programs.

Given this conceptual orientation, which is largely taken for granted, uniformed corrections officers and civilian prison staff assume that a working class/middle class, stable life is right and good, and that involvement in the drug world is destructive, irresponsible, and bad, as well as illegal. Given this orientation, officers and staff tend to see the women they deal with as having personal flaws and problems in need of correction. While rooting for offenders to "succeed," that is become working class citizens, correctional officers and staff characterize inmates implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – as "losers (who may become winners)" as "drug ravaged," as "not girl scouts," as irresponsible, as not mature, as indulgent, as promiscuous, as being like middle-schoolers, as "35 going on 14," as escapists and "in denial over the harm they have caused," and in need of counseling, drug programs, educational programming and other rehabilitative efforts.

Corrections officers and civilian staff take it for granted that moving the women prisoners toward and into a stable, responsible, "drug free" life style is a completely worthy and unproblematic goal.

While I tend to share this point of view, it is important – in an ethnographic analysis such as this – to recognize that this is a way of thinking, a point of view, and to see that others, such as the women the officials seek to correct, may see things somewhat differently. As we will see, they do.

Chapter 6: RPP Mothers

In January 2005, the time at which, for the most part, this dissertation was being written and edited, the Residential Parenting Program had compiled a roster of slightly more than 100 current and former participants. Members of this RPP sorority had many interesting similarities and differences. For example, more than 90 percent of that group had given birth to at least one child before their acceptance to the RPP, causing many to consciously – and perhaps some subconsciously or even unconsciously – look upon the program as a "second chance" for a variety of reasons that will be discussed in this chapter. Also, a majority of RPP mothers had dropped out of high school, some even earlier. And many had been introduced to alcohol and drugs at early ages.

Another interesting similarity is that a majority of the RPP moms included in this study declined to visit with their families and other children during their incarceration. Several said they did so because they were embarrassed about their circumstances and didn't want their older children and other family members to see them in prison. Others said that distance and logistics prevented visitations with their other children and their families. Still others cited estrangement and family tensions as their reasons for not receiving visitors during their stays at WCCW.

In terms of differences, the racial demographics of the group are somewhat reflective of the racial characteristics of Washington State and its dearth of ethnic diversity. For instance, during its five-year existence, whites have occupied about 78 percent of the slots in the RPP, while the remaining 22 percent have been almost evenly split among African Americans, Native Americans and Latinas, perhaps suggesting an under-representation of blacks and Hispanics in the program and a possible over-

representation of Native Americans, at least compared to the statistical presence of these racial groups in the overall prison and state populations.

For purposes of this study, of the 100 or so women who have participated in the RPP since 2000, I have included 20 in this dissertation. Of those 20, I formally interviewed, informally interviewed and/or engaged in participant observation with all of them while they were serving their prison terms. As of this writing, two of the RPP mothers remain in prison, and neither is due to be released until late 2005 or early 2006.

In racial terms, this group of key individuals was made up of 14 whites, three blacks, two Hispanics and one Native American.

Category Analysis and Interpretation:

Residential Parenting Program Mothers: As previously mentioned, the individuals in this group are key figures in this dissertation, in that they are both the target group – as well as representative of the type of women – for whom the Residential Parenting Program was designed. Typically, about 15 women, either pregnant or having recently given birth, are allowed into the program at any given time.

Over the course of more than four years, I observed and interacted with approximately 35 to 40 RPP women for many hours. Of these, I asked about 25 for formal interviews. Of those, five declined. But I was able to conduct formal interviews with 20 women.

Of the 20 RPP mothers with whom I spent time, 14 were white, two were Hispanic of Mexican descent, one was Native American of the Black Feet Nation, and three were African American.

All of these individuals were vital to my study, providing me with rich and detailed insights into their previous lives, their current situations, and their dreams for better tomorrows. The voices of seven women who were active RPP participants are presented in detail in the pages below.

What RPP Mothers say about the Program:

In general, the women accepted into and participating in the Residential Parenting Program were grateful, most of all. Not necessarily because they loved the program and the way it was administered, which we will hear more about later. Rather, RPP mothers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to have their babies with them in prison. As we know, upwards of 90 percent of women sentenced to prison are mothers before they are placed behind bars. It escapes none of the mothers of the RPP that they and their children are extremely fortunate to be together instead of temporarily or even permanently separated. All are cognizant that they have been given an enormous gift.

After that, however, the viewpoints of current RPP mothers are less than unanimous about the program, its short-term effects, its long-term impacts and its day-to-day operation. Some RPP mothers, for instance, are unfailingly positive and confident that they will learn from the adverse experiences of prison and that their relationships with their children and their families will be drastically better as a result of having been a participant in the baby program.

Other RPP mothers are more ambivalent. While such inmates recognize and even appreciate the positive aspects of such mandates as programming, drug treatment or parenting programs, they remain in ways large and small resentful and resistant to the highly regimented nature of prison and being told what to do and when to do it.

Several RPP mothers, while grateful for the program and hopeful about its long-term implications for them and their children, are extremely resentful of what they view as inordinate state control and influence over their parental rights and even their human rights. While such individuals, in keeping with the more-subdued cultural environment of J-Unit, tend not to be disruptive or belligerent, they are nonetheless unhappy about their situation.

And still other RPP participants have held alternating views of the RPP, depending upon the day, their mood and general circumstances. As we will see, and as has been alluded to already, when people are denied their liberty, imprisoned and instructed what to do as well as when to do it, reactions can be unpredictable, random and variable. These reactions may well be functions of age, sex, psychological makeup, race, cultural influences, personality differences, ethnicity, physiology or any number of other factors. Such is the case in the Residential Parenting Program at the Washington Corrections Center for Women.

Inmate Shelley M., 28, like many of her counterparts in the RPP, is serving time for drug possession and “distributing.” She initially declines to give many of the details that led to her incarceration in August 2000. But when pressed, Shelley reveals that her mother gave her a stark choice: Shelley could either turn herself into authorities for a past violation and kick her drug habit once and for all, or she would have to relinquish custody of her children. Angry, bitter and resentful, Shelley reluctantly turned herself in and began the process of trying to get her life in order. Now, within four months of being released, Shelley says she anxiously awaits the day she’ll be allowed to leave with her three-month-old daughter, Bethany, who was born just a few weeks after her mother's

arrival at WCCW. Shelley, a soft-spoken woman with shoulder-length blonde hair, blue eyes and a ruddy complexion, says she also has three other children – two girls and a boy – who range in age from two to 11. Until she gets out, Shelley's daughters are staying with her mother, while her son bunks temporarily with his father. Shelley is thankful she's had a chance to participate in the RPP.

> It makes you realize what you have. In this program you get to keep your baby with you. Just for the bonding time. It's nice to have her [Bethany] here. This program helps you understand. You look around, there's people here that don't have their kids here. That's kind of sad. It makes you realize what you have. A lot of the moms – a couple of them, if they didn't get to be in this program, they wouldn't have got to keep their babies. Their babies would have went up for adoption or CPS [Child Protective Services] would've took 'em. It benefits a lot of people. I mean, for me, my baby would've went home to my mom. You know? But the opportunity for me to be in this program was… still… greatly appreciated. But for some of these girls, they don't have family at home to take their babies, and they would've lost their kids. So, no matter how hard it is, it's a great program for them. And it teaches parenting skills, and stuff like that, too. For the new moms, like it's their first baby, you know, they don't have no other kids. It's helpful to be around other moms with new babies, or other moms that have had kids. And if some of these moms get stressed out and stuff, the caregivers help you.

Such recognition is what the founders of the RPP intended, mindful that the consequences of maintaining a status quo approach would yield dismal results for generations to come. As Pagliaro and Pagliaro write, "the pain and suffering inflicted upon children by their substance abusing mothers does not end or resolve itself in childhood. If these children survive, it follows them, particularly if they are girls, into their own adulthood." The authors also note that as adults, such children often suffer from depression, are more likely to resort to drug use themselves, and are more likely to contemplate or even attempt suicide."[68]

As it currently stands, Shelley and her daughter may be saved from such a grim future. However, while Shelley says the atmosphere of the RPP is mostly positive, supportive and nurturing, she says there's never any doubt that she's still in prison. Besides the armed correctional officers and barbed-wire fencing, the extremely structured environment is punctuated by the close quarters, scheduled movements and mandatory activities of prison life, all of which Shelley says can be difficult at times, even for participants in the RPP. The experiences and feelings articulated by Shelley are echoed by women incarcerated elsewhere across the nation. Owen, Seymour, Hairston, Chesney-Lind and other researchers, have found that many women tend to develop coping mechanisms that allow them to avoid mixing with others, thereby permitting them to serve their sentences and move on. That approach accurately describes Shelley's mindset toward WCCW.

> It's a rude awakening. You know you're not getting out. There's no chance of getting out. There's no bail. There's no nothing. You've just got

to stay. I've never really had to do too much without. But here you really have to do without a lot of things that you don't realize you take for granted out there, you know? Your freedom, for one. You have cravings when you're pregnant. Well, you can't just go and get what you're craving. As far as being as comfortable as you can be when you're pregnant, sleeping and stuff, you're treated the same way as the other inmates. You might get an extra mattress or something because you're pregnant. But you're pretty much treated the same way and you're expected to do the same things. Whether you like it or not. I realize what I miss out there. There's no drug that's worth this shit. It's not worth it. It's hard. It's hard living here every day. Because you're with other women in a small place with babies. You've all got babies. Everybody's got their stressed-out moments. It's hard. There's things, you know, if we were on the outside, we could get for our babies. But, you know, there's things that you can't get here. You know? You can't go shopping. Things like that. I did parenting classes. To be in this program you have to go down to parenting classes. These are mandatory if you're going to be in the RPP program. And they teach you about discipline, child diseases. Then they have Head Start over there… (it) has little classes that we go to sometime that teaches best practices for kids… You know, uh, toys that they can play with and at what ages. What to feed 'em. So they teach you a lot. Being in this program, they kind of teach you as the baby grows. They teach you different things. It's helped a lot.

Shelley says while the program has benefited her in many ways, she is determined to start a new life when she completes her sentence and returns to the outside.

> I'm not coming back here. Ever. I won't be back. Because I almost lost my kids. I don't think any drug is worth this. This is crazy here. This was my first and last time here. It's helped me. Because I know the next time I come here, these opportunities won't be here. So, I was thankful they were here this time. But it doesn't make me want to come back. Coming here and being in here, and being around the other moms in this program, you know, you tend to talk, you know. And you learn a lot. A lot of us realize that this is an opportunity that a lot of women don't get. When pregnant women go to prison, [usually] they have to give up their babies. You have to go through a process when you come here to get into this program, but it was worth it. It was rough at first because they really make you worry. It's hard for you to get into this program sometimes, I think. The big thing was you had to sit in front of about five or six of 'em (prison administrators), you have to tell 'em why you feel you should be given a chance to be in this program. I told 'em I love my kids. I want to go home to my kids. That's the whole reason I came here was to get back home to my

> kids. But once you're in, it's alright. They help you with whatever you need help with.

The harsh realities of prison notwithstanding, Shelley says she believes the presence of babies on campus helps buoy the spirits of many inmates, even those who are not participants of the Residential Parenting Program.

> I think having the babies here brings a lot of 'em up… helps a lot of them smile. It just helps 'em sometime – seeing the babies. Babies are innocent. They smile at you all the time. And some of these women don't get smiled at, at all. It helps some of the women in here, I think. Especially if they're down or sad. I don't sense any resentment from anybody here.

Shelley's positive perception, along with the fact the she's a mother distracted by important responsibilities, may mean the way in which she views her circumstances is part of the coping mechanism asserted by Owen and others. If so, Shelley is certainly not the only one.

Karen Carter, a 24-year-old Seattle native, is scheduled for release from Purdy in about six months. Karen, who is African American, is serving a 21-month sentence on a drug-dealing charge, already has a 4-year-old son who lives with her mother in Seattle. A member of the RPP for about six months, Karen has thin features, closely-cropped black hair that stands almost straight up, and huge brown eyes. Her skin is the color of dark

chocolate, and Karen speaks in a voice that is smooth, measured and very matter-of-fact. She describes what life in the RPP is like for her and her three-month-old son, Kenyon:

> Busy. Babies crying. People working on their different agendas. There's 11 women and 11 babies, all working on what their schedule is, their projects, working on their babies. Washing. Cooking. Cleaning. Working. Everybody's doing what one household would do with 11 different people in it. It's good. The program's good. I like that I can have my son here with me. I have somebody here with me that is my blood, my family, and makes me feel better about different things that I'm trying to accomplish in here, other than just looking at a strange face that might not care, or say they care, or show concern. I can look at him and know that I have hope.
>
> And I see it working better for the girls that I interact with because they have drug problems and a lot of them have their kids tooken away or didn't raise their kids. So, I feel like they're gettin' a chance to be the moms that they want to be or they never got a chance to be or that they're trying to be. And whatever situation that they were going through out in the street that they couldn't stay focused on raising their kids or just really having a one-on-one with being a mother, it's easier for them here because they have rules and regulations to abide by and it makes them stay focused

on working on their relationship with their child. So, I think that's good.

[But the program] puts different holds on you and limitations of what you want to do with your life. I have a four-year-old child, and I have a large family, but he's majority with me. So it was a big thing for me to have to leave him with my mom, even though she's an educator, she's, you know, middle-class and everything's just great with her. And she didn't mind taking my son. But it hurt me to have to have to leave my child, and I didn't want to have to be away from a second child, so I thought it would be in my best interest to have him [three-month-old Kenyon] here and keep him here with me. So, we're bonding and interacting and then he can interact with his brother. He won't have to get adjusted to me, and then to his brother and create a lot more problems for me than I've already created.

Karen says although she likes the RPP in general, she's nonetheless concerned about Kenyon's progress during these early months of his life:

He seems pretty stressed. Different inmates in here call him 'Grandpa.' He's got that stressed look on his face. And he's been going through some things. Like we just diagnosed he has eczema, so I had to get his skin under control. And change his milk. So,

he's mellowing out a little more, but he's quite fussy throughout the day.

One key element of being a member of the RPP – and being incarcerated at WCCW – is learning to live as a prison inmate, and learning to survive in a culture so heavily dominated by females, says Karen.

I've never experienced anything like this in my life. It's totally disturbing, and that itself is enough for me to never be in this predicament again. I don't know, for some odd reason, I thought I could just sell dope and do whatever I wanted and nothing would ever happen. I don't know why. Then when I realized how much time I got, I was like, 'but I've never even been in jail before.' For some reason, I thought they would be a little bit more lenient. Maybe county time, or a couple months probation. But I didn't fight it. I didn't have a win. Well, half of me said, 'you do the crime, you do the time.' And the other half of me said, 'well they have all this evidence against you, you'd be a fool to go in there and say – I couldn't say I didn't do it. I'm not that kind of person. I couldn't make an ass of myself and say anything other than 'what I'm looking at?' It wasn't a surprise. It was heartbreaking because I knew what I had to look forward to – what I was facing. And I

wasn't prepared. And I didn't think I could handle it. That was the only thing I went through.

This is not an easy place to be. This is all new to me. I can't handle it. It's heavy. I commend people who have been here and have done time as long as they have. There's so many different issues here. Being a woman, I don't see how a woman can be confined to an area like this. Eat the type of things we eat. Get talked to the way we get talked to. I cried a couple of times. I just don't know how people can make it here.

Well, of course, women are going to be women. Women have their own style of doing things. And their domain is their domain. This is my feeling towards women in general. So, put that with 11 women and 11 babies, of course, you're going to come out with tension a majority of the time. I'm a firm believer, there's one woman to a household. And women have their own ways. But overall everyone counts it a privilege to have their kids with them, so they're going to do whatever it takes to make it stick and happen. No matter how they feel about each other personally inside or whatever, they know the rules and regulations and they're willing to abide by it, to have the privilege to have their child here.

Karen Carter's broader observations about learning to live and operate within the culture of an all-female institution are echoed and underscored by other participants in

this study and validated by other researchers and theorists. Indeed, while this participant-observer's research over the past four years has yielded many positive findings, the same-sex environment, combined with the close-quarters and the prison surroundings, often seem to prompt petty fights, complaints and childish behavior on the part of a few J-Unit residents and even a few RPP participants.

However, such events, in my experience, appeared to be few and far between, perhaps precisely because of the fact that the standards of behavior and personal composure are much higher in J-Unit than elsewhere at WCCW. Occasionally, an inmate might be reprimanded for unkempt personal space or eating someone else's food without that person's permission. But major infractions – such as verbal abuse, physical assaults or violence of any sort – is rare to almost non-existent in the RPP.

Rachel Lynch, a 36-year-old native of Portland, Oregon who is serving a 14-month sentence at WCCW for forgery, says she agrees that for the most part, residents of J-Unit are there because they want to be there, and because they recognize what the circumstances might be like elsewhere at WCCW.

Rachel, the mother of three-month-old Leann, also has two other girls and a boy. Her daughters, ages 18 and 13, are living in Oregon with their father. But Rachel 4-year-old son was adopted about two years ago when she was battling addiction to methamphetamines.

A diminutive white woman who was due to be released from WCCW in late December 2000, Rachel had nothing but positive things to say about the RPP. But even so, like many of her colleagues, Rachel's remarks were offered with the caveat that prison is not the optimal environment in which to raise a child.

It has its ups and downs. I've learned a lot. I take MRT – Moral Recognition Therapy – it's a program to where you kinda dig all the stuff out of your past: Some bad things. The good things. Put 'em in perspective. And learn about yourself. And how to correct and deal with things. I've learned a lot about myself. And being able to keep Leann here, I think, helps. If they would've taken her from the hospital… if it wasn't for this program, then, you know, um, I would've had a lot more resentment toward the system. It would've been a lot harder. It's going to make the difference in my future. Definitely. A lot of us, you know, was on drugs, and as we all know, it's mind-altering. So we're given this opportunity to bond with our kids. To get back to reality. To get a grasp back on things. And I think it's going to be a big difference. I think prison should be more about rehabilitation. We're still being punished. Because I'm still away from my other kids, and my family. But also I don't think our children should have to pay for our crimes. There's opportunity here. The time is what you make it. Actually, it's been good for me. There's a lot of opportunity in this prison if people want to take advantage of it. There's people that come in here and they want to get in trouble. There's a lot of people that don't want to come back.

Rachel says for her part, being a participant in the Residential Parenting Program was much like being the member of a large family.

> We're really close. Sometimes it's hard, because, you know, we're a lot of women living in really close quarters. Well, if you can imagine, if you've ever lived with your family for a long period of time. Now, I have five brothers and five sisters. But I'm the youngest and I've never lived with all of 'em at the same time. And I could not imagine living with all five of my sisters at the same time. Okay? And here, I've got 10 sisters. So, you know, it's like, you know, it's like brother-sister, 'cause like, you can say something about 'em, but don't nobody else dare say something about 'em, as far as other people in the institution. We live really close, so we try to give each other space, as much as possible. But we're also, like I say, we're also very close. Because we know what we're all going through and we all have our babies here. And we try to help each other with out babies. There's natural, normal friction. We handle it usually amongst ourself. We try to handle things ourselves like we would on the outside. We're really trying to prepare ourselves.

Unlike some of her fellow RPP participants, Rachel says resentment towards inmates in the program is palpable among many WCCW prisoners, particularly those

who are mothers, an astonishing 80 to 90 percent of all offenders housed at the institution.

> Naturally, a lot of them that don't know us are resentful because they have kids at home. And I can kinda understand that. But if they would not be selfish – but that comes down to the junk they've got built up in their self. You know? Being selfish and not thinking about the future and the children. They're thinking about their self. And they're without their kids. Just because of all their junk that they've got built up that they can't think about the kids, the future and what's best. And I can't see anything good coming out of taking a child from its mother. I think they would think different if it was them that was pregnant and in prison. A lot of resentment. People think that we're treated like queens. People think all you gotta do is get pregnant and come to prison. You know? That really wasn't my whole idea. You know? Not at all. But yeah, I think there's a lot of resentment. Not just from inmates, but [also from] society.

Rachel adds, though, that she believes the goals of the program are noble and worthwhile, regardless of what skeptics believe.

> Something's got to change. Out of 11 of us [currently], if two of us never come back, hey, you know, that's two of us out of prison and two kids.

Like many female offenders at WCCW and across the nation, Rachel says her problems with the law stemmed largely from a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. She nervously clasps her hands together and fidgets in her seat while explaining that she got married at 17, gave birth to her first child at 18, all followed by a pattern of behavior that would ultimately lead to her being incarcerated twice in recent years.

> I've been off track for five or six years. I'm co-dependent is my biggest problem. I've always been with a man that made my decisions for me. Even though I wanted to do something else or go somewhere else. It was kind of an abusive relationship. So it was always forced decision, you know? I never really got to do what I wanted at a young age, from like 17 on. And so, you know, and I didn't know no better, you know, that I could do. He moved in with me and my mom, and then I got married, and that was the end of it. So in all those years, even though I wanted to do something else, whether it be go out and party or this or that, you know, I couldn't. And he started getting more abusive. And then I swore that if he ever hit me, that's when I would leave. So when I left him, you know, I was making my own decisions and having fun

and shit just, you know, rocked. And I just got way off track. And it's very easy, and that's how I know this time, you cannot look off, step off at all. And I know now that my way is not totally the right way always. I don't always know best. It's okay to, you know, seek help. Its okay, you know, to be wrong. Its okay to step backwards as long as you step forward farther, instead of back, back, back. I wish I could change things. But I've learned a lot the hard way.

Rachel says while the resentment and hard feelings from some are understandable, she hopes the program will always be there for women who need it.

There's 800 drug addicts, murderers, thieves here… You can't trust everybody. We pretty much stay in the unit because of the weather. We keep our babies with us, 24/7. Unless we're programming or whatever. Or unless we go eat. They're with us all the time. We're pretty much secluded in this unit. Everybody out there says, 'I don't ever see you no more.' Well, I've got priorities. And my priorities are in here. When I left last time, I heard about the program. Myself, thinking back then, it was kind of odd to think about somebody having their baby in prison. I never dreamed that I would be here a year later pregnant being one of those people. I mean, I never would've guessed that in a million years.

> But I thought, that, you know, as a mother already, naturally thought it would be a great idea. I go home soon. But I owe so much to this program. I hope it will continue. Even though I won't be here or coming back pregnant and needing the program here, as much of a difference as the program has made in my life, I really think the program should continue for other women.

Jeannette Albans, 22, is a case in point. Jeannette is an African American whose light-skinned complexion is a classic café au lait. Her manner is serious and purposeful. But she also smiles easily and often, revealing a gap between her top two front teeth reminiscent of Lauren Hutton, the 1960s and '70's-era supermodel and actress whose gap-toothed smile graced movie screens and magazine covers worldwide. Sadly, Jeannette has experienced no such good fortune in her life.

It is October 2003, and Jeannette is now serving a sentence of nearly three years in connection with an attempted robbery and drug deal gone bad that took place earlier that year in Snohomish County, just outside Everett. While in the Snohomish County Jail awaiting trial, Jeannette learned she was pregnant with a little girl, who later would be named Renee.

The pregnancy complicated matters, to say the least. The mother of a 3-year-old son named Chase, Jeannette already had prevailed upon her older sister to care for the boy until the trial was over and the legal problems were resolved. But now, to make matters worse, Jeannette was pregnant with a child scheduled to be born just about the time she would be entering prison.

Jeannette says she was initially distraught at the prospect of being separated from her son and unborn daughter for three years.

“I was really scared because I didn’t know if I was going to be able to keep my daughter or not,” Jeannette says. “

Jeannette, who learned of the RPP while in county jail, says she immediately saw the program as her best chance to change her circumstances. Albans, who gave birth in June 2003 to a baby girl she named Renee, says the RPP was attractive for several reasons, some of which were apparent and some not so obvious.

“For one, my daughter being with me,” Albans says. “And for two, I knew there had to be something good I could get out of this program as far as parenting classes. At that point, I was willing to do whatever; any type of program they had to offer for me to better myself, for not only for Renee, but for Chase, too.”

Of course, being in prison – even in a program such as the RPP – has been a challenge at times, Albans says.

“Me being a parent here,” Albans says, “I thought it would kind of be hard, because there would be people in your business, or somebody trying to tell you how to take care of your child. And there is a lot of that. But I kind of stick to myself and just take care of my daughter in our own living space. Whenever we have an opportunity to go to, like, a mom’s group or something like that, I take her to those. We basically ‘kick it’ by ourselves a lot.”

Albans participated in two parenting classes, which among other things addressed issues such as cultural diversity and how to properly discipline children. Some of the topics dealt with basic care for infants. Not being a first-time mom, Albans was well-

versed on how to change diapers and how to burp a baby. But other topics, she says, were highly enlightening.

"There's a couple of things they had said that I didn't really know," Albans says. "Like, they were teaching you never bring a child to your level. You always stoop down to theirs so they don't think they're at level with you. Don't pick them up. Always go down to their level so that they can stay in their child's place. So they don't think they're up with you. Even if their toddlers. Kneel down. Look at them and look directly in their face. Be firm about what you say. I probably knew that, but didn't think about it in that way."

The other parenting class was designed for offenders who are separated from their children, a circumstance which applies even to RPP moms like Albans, who more often than not, have had kids prior to being incarcerated.

"It was basically a class where we made stuff for our kids so that we could connect with them. I've made my son a whole lot of stuff on the computer. I've also sent him a growth chart so that he can see how tall he's getting. And I've also made stuff for Renee, like this hanging mobile that goes above her bed. We made a lot of stuff for our kids."

But in addition to the work she's done to become a better parent, Albans is also trying to improve herself and her skills.

> I've also done a work ethics class and that's sort of to teach you how to fill out resumes, how to get a job, what you should wear, and all sorts of stuff like that. Then, I'm also taking classes to get my GED. It's going well. I'm almost done. I want to get it done. I think, right now,

maybe honestly, it's because I have so much time on my hands. I want to be doing something. Because I'm sure if I was at home, I'd probably be slacking. I'm not going to lie. So, basically, I'm just taking advantage of the time that I have. Doing every little program. Like I said, I want to take advantage of everything. Any program that they have for me. And I'm going to do it. So it looks good for when I get out. If I have to report to any kind of probation or to any drug and alcohol classes or anything. I have these certificates. I have my GED. And then I'll probably do TRAK [a vocational education program that provides inmates with a variety of industrial, technical and mechanical skills] or something and I'll be able to get a job. I want to be prepared for whatever. Whatever they've got planned, I want to be ready for, basically.

Moreover, Albans says perhaps for the first time in her life, she's actually enjoying the educational process and the classes she's taking at WCCW.

"Most definitely," Albans says, "I am enjoying them. And I'm way into it. I've never been into school. I've never been into, just, anything. And I'm into it now. I'm eager to get it done and say that I have done something right in my life. Despite the fact that I did it here, but who cares? At least it's done. I'm just enjoying everything and going with the flow. At this point in time, I'm finishing up my math. And I got, like, three more tests to take before I can take the big GED test. And then, I'll be rolling right along. I'm open to anything. I'm willing to do it."

One thing, however, that does not seem to be on anyone's radar screen with respect to Albans or her rehabilitation is drug treatment. Since the offense that landed her in WCCW was not directly drug-related, Albans is under no court mandate to participate in treatment.

But even if she were, the truth is it could be months or even years before Albans and others like her received such treatment. In Washington and many other states across the country, demands for drug and alcohol treatment far exceed capacity. Besides, Albans, who has already participated in two in-patient drug treatment programs in recent years, says the counseling, therapies and guidance provided by such facilities only work if and when recovering addicts are ready to change their habits.

> Because at that time, I wasn't really into drugs, heavily," Albans says, adding, "like, there was ladies there that came, and then left, and then came back. And, obviously it wasn't too effective. And there was one point in time that I did drink while I was there. When I was there, I was trying. I was trying to understand what they were saying. And sometimes I didn't agree with everything. But, I mean, some of them just don't make sense to me. Counselors and the people that do the classes. Because I almost went off on one of the ladies in there. 'Cause I wasn't understanding what she was saying and I was asking her, 'can you explain this to me?' I don't even remember what it was. But she couldn't even really explain it. How are you going to tell somebody about what they're doing when you haven't even been there, y'know?

Now, however, Albans says she's in a different place. And if given the opportunity, she says she would welcome another opportunity for drug treatment.

> Because I'd be scared to go back out there and use. There's always that other part of you that wants to – you know what I'm saying – do that. I think what I need is a couple of meetings a week. Definitely to stay around my family. I tend to drift off when I'm not around my family. My sister is all I have. I'm ready to be family oriented and be with my family and do things with them. And have family dinners and all that. I'm ready to. I'm going to be a single mom and I'm definitely going to need my family.

Although Albans says she's not heard from her sister, Andrea, for a while, she remains confident that all is fine. When they last spoke, Andrea informed Jeannette of plans to find a new place large enough to accommodate both of their families.

"I'm just waiting. I'll keep on writing, though," Albans said. "I'm sure she's doing okay."

But before Albans can begin thinking seriously about what it might be like to leave prison and return to her family and the larger community, she has at least another year to do at WCCW, a prospect that is sobering.

> It's alright," Albans says of daily life at WCCW. "I mean, it's the same stuff every day. So, I'm on a schedule that never changes, which is pretty cool. So, I can get used to getting up in the morning. I get up in the

morning. I start work at 8. I take a shower. I go to school from 10 to 11. Then, I go pick up my daughter from daycare and I bring her back here and I feed her. Then, I take her back to daycare at 1. I go to school from 1 to 2 and then I come home. And that's just, like, every day [Monday through Friday]. It's a schedule that never changes and I actually like it. We have our own room, our own space, so whenever we want to get away from everybody, that's where we go. I listen to music with her. I mean, except for the fact that we can't go off the grounds, it's alright. I don't mind it."

Albans, now balancing Renee on her knee, says while the routine doesn't bother her, the monotony of seeing and interacting with the same people day after day at times is annoying.

"Because I see these people every day, sometimes, yeah, they get on my nerves. I get irritated," Albans says, recalling an incident that occurred shortly after the birth of her daughter. "The baby was just born. She was, like, three-days-old, and this white girl walks up to her and says, 'Is that baby white?'"

Albans, shaking her head in disbelief, says the remark made her angry at the time, and still does.

'Girl, you know that baby don't look white,' Albans says she told the other inmate. 'Why you gonna ask if that baby is white?' That's ignorant. Things like that. I mean, I've got to walk away. Because, I'll… man!

> That's off the hook. Y'know, just ignorant questions like that. Tripped me out. Y'know, because if you were trying to ask a question, you could say, y'know, like… 'cause I asked her, 'what do you mean by that?' She goes, 'well, her dad could be white.' I said, 'well, why didn't you ask that? Not 'is that baby white?'

Still shaking her head at the thought, Albans gently balances Renee on her knee, whispers in the baby's ear, and reiterates that she tries to minimize such encounters by keeping to herself.

"It gets irritating in here sometimes. That's why we've got our own room, huh?" she says to Renee. "We go in there and play and eat and do whatever we want to do."

Many mothers adopt coping strategies similar to those employed by Jeannette. Doing so allows mothers to have time to bond with their children, write letters home, or make phone calls to their family and children on the outside. Such time to reflect and relax helps many of the women contend with the sometimes-trying circumstances of seeing the same people and doing the same things day in and day out.

Daphne, a 23-year-old Native American inmate serving a three-year sentence for drug dealing, says the birth of her 2-year-old daughter, Brittany, may well have saved her life. A native of Tacoma, Daphne is estranged from her parents and dropped out of school before she finished the 8th grade. She began dealing drugs at age 14 to support herself. As a result, Daphne has been in and out of juvenile detention centers and county jail for much of the past decade. Daphne is now serving time at WCCW for the second time in

five years, and readily admits that if not for Brittany, her first child, she would have no interest in the Residential Parenting Program or the prospect of going straight.

"Basically, that's the only thing that's going to keep me from re-offending," says Daphne, a tall, lanky woman with angular facial features.

Daphne has six more months on her sentence, and is making good use of the time. She's completed her high school equivalency while in prison and is set to complete a vocational program that teaches basic carpentry, welding and other labor skills. Daphne is hopeful that she will be able to catch on as an apprentice when she's released. The only thing of which she is certain is that the time has come for her to leave the Tacoma area.

"Tacoma is old to me," says Daphne. "I did my dirt there. I feel like the only thing that's going to help me is me. I can't imagine being separated from Brittany. I can't imagine being sent back here away from her. I want something different for Brittany. I have confidence I can do it."

Such self-reliance as that expressed by Daphne, as well as a strong sense of duty to their children, are common themes among RPP mothers. Even those who have been convicted of more serious crimes on the spectrum of offenses acceptable within the RPP criteria – in other words, more hardened criminals – seem genuinely transformed by parenthood. Patricia, 19, is one such individual. Convicted of 23 separate felonies, including first degree burglary, 16 weapons charges, drug trafficking, drug manufacturing, and trafficking stolen property among other offenses, Patricia was sentenced to two 44 month sentences. With good behavior, Patricia and her seven-old daughter, Tonya, could spend only three years at WCCW.

Patricia says she has no choice but to rely on herself. Her father is in prison in Arizona, and her mother is a drug abuser who lives in South Central Washington. Patricia was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend when she was 10, a situation that resulted in her and her seven brothers and sisters being farmed out to foster homes. By the time she was 17, Patricia had lived in 24 different places across the state. She turned to the streets to make a living. But now she says only one thing will make her alter her behavior.

"My daughter," says Patricia, a thin, brown-skinned Hispanic woman of Mexican, Native American and Irish descent, who bears more than a passing resemblance to the movie star, Winona Ryder. "She is what makes me want to change. That's not the kind of life I want for her."

Other RPP mothers that could be considered hard-core prior to their admission into the baby program echo the sentiments expressed by many of the moms, who say they don't want their children anywhere near crime, drugs or abuse. T.M. is now at WCCW for the third time in six years, this time serving a two-year sentence for drug possession and stealing a car. T.M. says she was convicted for 11 felonies between the ages of 30 and 39. But now, at age 40 and with a new 8-month-old daughter, T.M. says the future is now.

"People look at me with this criminal history of 11 felonies and think it's been my whole life," says T.M., a white woman who is a native of Spokane, Wash., on the eastern side of the state near the Idaho border, had been married to the same man for more than 14 years before her first offense. Also, she already had three other children and had held

down steady secretarial jobs when she was in her 20s. But when she reached her 30th birthday, T.M. says something snapped.

"I had this real issue with my age," T.M. says. "I went from one extreme to the other. I was using [drugs] more and more. I don't know why. It just got to me, I guess."

T.M. looks at her daughter, sighs deeply, and says this trip to prison, and the birth of her daughter, have shaken her out of her previous mindset.

"I know better than to say I'll never come back, because I've said that before," concedes T.M., but "I know that I've changed this time."

Carolyn, a 30-year-old white woman and the mother of four-month old Todd, is serving 18 months on forgery and identity theft charges. Carolyn, who has three other children ranging in age from 4 to 13, says an ex-boyfriend introduced her to two things that fed off each other: Methamphetamines and computer hacking. When her unskilled jobs working in restaurants and at a retail fish counter would no longer support her drug habit, she quit and went to work full-time as an identity thief, stealing mail from people's mailboxes, gleaning useful and sensitive data such as bank account numbers, birth dates and more, then using the information to hijack existing financial accounts or open new ones, all via the Internet. Carolyn estimates she made more than $74,000 during one very lucrative three-month stretch before she got caught.

Carolyn says she now owes restitution to people in Oregon, Washington and as far away as Alaska. She's hoping to land a job as a heavy equipment operator, or perhaps a construction site flagger, when she's released from prison. But regardless, she says Todd and his siblings need and deserve a mother who's clean and sober.

"You have to want to do something," Carolyn says. "Someone is not going to change unless they want to change. It's all in the mind. I'm sitting here for a reason."

Patterns: Overall, while individual views and experiences in the RPP differ depending upon the participant and her particular circumstances, the general view of current RPP mothers is very positive. All seem to recognize the significance of their opportunities to spend crucial time bonding with their children. All seem to understand that for many the RPP represents the last, best chance to reclaim a life for themselves, their children and their families. And all, while some are less confident and others more, are hopeful about their futures.

As we have seen, in addition to the largely positive assessment of the RPP, the women also tend to express a great deal of appreciation for the program's existence. The women say they are grateful to be there, and note that it is helping them and that they have changed for the better.

To be sure, some of the women grumble about several aspects of the program, especially the following three elements:

1. **Loss of freedom** – Many offenders, although they accept their plight and admit they have no one to blame for their circumstances but themselves, nonetheless express frustration about being unable to do what free citizens take for granted. Prison inmates can't just run errands, or dash out to the store to pick up whatever they need or want for themselves or children. Having said that, however, all recognize that they are being punished and that as a group

and individually, they have many advantages in J-Unit and the RPP not universally available to prisoners in other units.

2. **Living in close quarters with only women** – Many of the RPP participants say they chafe under the living conditions, which include the unnatural social situation of a women's prison; the absence of men; the absence of family members other than their babies; and being in forced proximity to a set of other women who are almost invariably strangers to start with. All of these are major sources of complaint. Again however, RPP mothers say they appreciate that the situation in J-Unit is better than in other units, and that the other women and staff are, for the most part, much better than those in other units.
3. **The rigid schedule** – The mandated times for daily activities such as eating, working, sleeping, programming and exercising, as well as being told what to do and when, tends to grate on the nerves of many women. Since many inmates resent and resist authority and control, such occasional aggravation is hardly surprising.

For the most part, however, RPP participants speak very positively about the program. All or most of the women specifically cite the following benefits and advantages.

1. **Time with their children:** Having a family member in prison with

them helps women cope with the difficulties of incarceration and the guilt they often feel about their past behavior and any real or perceived shortcomings relating to their current or previous parenting skills.

2. **Time to reflect:** Virtually all of the women said while they did not enjoy the circumstances of prison life, they did learn to appreciate having the opportunity to think clearly and critically about their lives, reflect upon their pasts, and make more informed decisions about the future. For some, who have spent much of their lives reacting to situations, the chance to be proactive and set their own courses was a new experience.

There is no doubt that the apparent enthusiasm of RPP participants needs to be carefully explored – as I attempted to do. Obviously, the women know – or at least think – that they are expected to offer praise and appreciation for the program, and that it is in their best interests to do so when talking with staff or with an ethnographer who may seem to be associated directly or indirectly with the staff. Failure to comply and talk, they are likely to believe, might jeopardize their situation. However, after watching, working with and talking to these women over a period of more than four years, gaining the confidence of many of them, and listening to all kinds of conversations, it does seem that most, if not all, of this enthusiasm is quite genuine. If this was not the case, many more contradictions would likely have appeared.

The fact that they are doing somewhat easier time than they would elsewhere in the prison, the opportunity to take programming that usually seems attractive and helpful

to their individual circumstances, and most especially, the opportunity to have their babies with them rather than losing them, are clearly prime reasons for their appreciation and generally positive perspectives.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that RPP inmates frequently tend to see their situation differently than do the correctional officers and civilian staff. Unlike these prison workers, it is apparent from their situations and in their voices that RPP offenders are ambivalently located between two cultural worlds. On the one hand, prisoners do have some attraction to the stable, working class lifestyle of decent jobs, decent pay, stable relationships, and the other rewards available in mainstream society. However, for most of the women in the RPP, access to such opportunities has never been a complete reality. Most grew up on the edge of poverty, with unstable, often abusive families on the margins, who were not receiving the rewards of "normality." If they worked at all, such women often worked in very low-paying jobs that typically are seen and experienced as menial and unrewarding, both in terms of personal job satisfaction and in pay.

The women of the RPP also are partly drawn to the drug worlds that are seen as immoral and bad by the prison staff and mainstream society. For offenders, the drug worlds offered pleasures, rewards and escapes that they usually did not find elsewhere. These included the enticing highs of drug use, the excitement, allure, and risks associated with this lifestyle, the "partying," the chaotic, but often thrilling friendships and sexual relationships, and very significantly, the relatively easy – if risky – money of drug dealing and small-scale criminal activities. Of course, it was money that, among other things, often allowed offenders to take better care of their children financially than was possible while working at the menial, low-paying jobs available to them.

As noted in our examination of the quotes above, if we listen closely to the voices of the women, it is quite possible to hear in their talk muted, but clear, signals of their continued attraction to the drug worlds from which they are officially supposed to be separating.

For example, T.M., the 40-year-old mother of four from Spokane, readily admits that she can't promise her children or herself that she will never return to prison. While she says she thinks she now has the will to walk away from the drug worlds, her remarks suggest, implicitly and explicitly, that the lifestyle still holds some attraction. The same can be said of Carolyn, the 30-year-old RPP mother and former computer hacker and identity thief. At several points, she openly talked about her drug use, the thrill of her criminal activity and the lack of remorse she felt about any of her behavior. Only now, after doing time in prison, having a small child to care for and facing the real danger that she could lose what little she has left, Carolyn says she has come to realize and accept her responsibility to think of the needs and desires of others instead of herself. For few of the women have these lessons come easily.

In general, however, the women's voices clearly suggest that they do want to separate from the drug world and take up lives in the straight world. To a large degree, the RPP has succeeded in motivating them to move in this direction, and to conceptualize their former selves as irresponsible, immature, reckless, poor judges of character, insensitive, careless and often just plain wrong. There are various reasons for these revelations, including the ideal of a more rewarding, law-abiding life, not to mention all of the bad and painful experiences they had in the drug world, including addiction, abuse, bad drug experiences, chaotic relationships, fear of police, and of course, prison.

However, it also seems clear that a truly central and important dimension here is exactly what the RPP has sought to capitalize on – the sense of love, care, and responsibility that offenders embrace and which follows from having a chance to bond with their babies.

Again and again, we hear the women expressing their desires to be responsible, law abiding citizens in order to take care of their children and to serve as good examples to them.

Everything in my work at the RPP – the observations and the interviews – strongly points to the program's success in helping the women to bond with their children and to develop the motivation and desire to live law-abiding, drug-free lives upon release, for their own sakes, and even more for the sakes of their children.

Unfortunately, as we shall see, this motivation can often meet difficult and problematic realities when the women are released from prison and return to society.

Chapter 7: Making the Transition

Category Analysis and Interpretation:

Former Residential Parenting Program Mothers: This category is made up of women who have participated in the RPP, made it though the program and been released back into society with their small children. These individuals have significant insights and commentaries to offer given where they are now in relationship to the RPP and their lives as former felons.

Using prison records, word of mouth and journalistic techniques of finding people, I located five former RPP mothers and asked them all for interviews. One declined, but I was able to interview four such women. Of these, three are presented in detail in the chapter on the transition into society. Two of the three are women with whom I had spent time when they were still incarcerated. Two of the women are white; one is Hispanic.

My goal was to observe each of these former RPP participants in their new lives to get some sense of how they compared to their counterparts who are now in prison. I also wanted to get at how these "graduates," if you will, view the RPP in retrospect, and what impact the program in general has had on their lives and the lives of their children. As I had done when they were inmates, I sought to get them talking in detail about the RPP and about how their lives have changed since then. I sought to get them talking about, in hindsight, what they perceived as the program's advantages and problems, and to get their opinions about the general effectiveness of the program.

What RPP Mothers say about the RPP: Sonya Guzman, 29, is clearly uncomfortable with the current topic of conversation. She squirms in her seat and tries to change the

subject. She talks to passers-by. Anything to distract, discourage or avoid dealing with the subject at hand.

It's a common condition that many inmates at the Washington Corrections Center for Women refer to as "S&S," or "short and shitty."

"Short," as in the amount of time left to serve, and "shitty," which refers to personal demeanor and general attitude. It's early 2004, and after almost three years and four months of imprisonment at WCCW, Guzman is finally within days of being released. Just the thought of it makes her anxious.

"I'm kinda, like, dreading it," Guzman says. "Getting out."

Guzman has good reason to dread leaving prison. At present, the obstacles to successful re-entry to society are significant for former prisoners in Washington State and elsewhere in the U.S. The stakes are even higher for women with small children. O'Brien points out that these barriers are both psychological and systemic. "Women exiting prison experience stigma by virtue of their conviction for a crime, regardless of having done the time associated with punishment for the offense. The status of ex-offender is only one part of the person's identity, yet it can become the most prominent defining characteristic for representing self. With the label comes the baggage of distrust and lack of credibility that may foster an attitude of hopelessness in the ex-inmate that she can be efficacious in her life."[69]

The first question that must be answered several weeks prior to an offender's departure from WCCW is the "release address," meaning the exact location at which the person and her child will reside immediately following their release from prison. The usual options are home to a husband or a significant other, or home to live with a parent,

grandparent or other relative or friend. If no family or intimate is in the picture, another option might be a state-operated halfway house, where the offender will live for several months while finding work and making arrangements for independent living.

Another alternative might be privately operated, for-profit "clean and sober housing," where those recently released from jail or prison can rent space and begin to make the transition back into society.

The conditions and circumstances of these alternatives can vary in terms of quality, location, accessibility and affordability. However, considering the explosion of incarcerations, prison populations and the lack of low-income and affordable housing in Washington State and elsewhere, all of these options are in short supply and space can be highly competitive, which can put psychological and economic pressure on former offenders, some of whom are in fragile psychological situations to begin with.

Other systemic barriers can include navigating the child welfare system, reconnecting with family and friends, if such relationships are healthy and advisable, finding employment, and locating dependable support systems, safety nets and social services that might be helpful in cases of emergency and stress. These might be organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, local churches, state welfare and social service agencies, local or state health departments, probation officers, substance abuse counselors and job training and placement agencies. Last, but perhaps most important, are affordable child care services. For former inmate mothers with small children, access to reliable, safe and affordable child day care is a key factor in whether access to other services is even a possibility.

Exacerbating the problem quite often is the fact that recently released offenders may have lost their driving privileges as a result of incarceration and/or do not have vehicles, much less the means or resources with which to purchase any. In major metropolitan areas, the various support services might be accessible via public transportation, thereby making these places more or less accessible. However, for ex-offenders who live in suburban or rural settings, inadequate or inconvenient transportation to and from these places can be a serious impediment.

Guzman has gone through dramatic life changes in the past three years. Foremost, Guzman's biggest life event was the birth of her son, Miguel, who was born only days after his mother arrived at WCCW. Miguel, now almost 3, suffers from a variety of health and developmental problems that may have been brought on by Sonya's drug use during her pregnancy. This is an emotional and sensitive issue, one that Guzman resists talking about in any detail. She will only allow that Miguel is "a special little boy."

Guzman, a native of Sunnyside, Wash., a small farming community on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountain range, is an engaging woman with high cheek bones and deep brown eyes.

Until her arrest in 2001 on drug-dealing charges, Guzman had supported herself and her two daughters, both under the age of 7 at the time, by juggling a variety of jobs. In season, for instance, she did what members of her family have done for generations in Eastern Washington. She cut asparagus in the summertime and picked apples in the fall. The rest of the year, she worked as a clerk for a local chain of convenience stores.

Guzman says she never cared much for school, and remembers getting in trouble at an early age. She would hang out with her older brothers, who would steal eggs from

their neighbor's barn and break them just for fun. When Guzman was 11, her brothers introduced her to drugs, including marijuana.

"They thought it would be cute," Guzman says now. "It wasn't real serious until I got older."

When Guzman was 8, her parents split up. Her mother moved to Santa Rosa, California, and eventually married to another man. Guzman spent much of her early teens bouncing back and forth between California and Washington, alternating between her mother's and father's homes, which turned out to be a recipe for disaster.

Guzman was young, pretty and vibrant. Since school was little more than an afterthought, Guzman quit during her freshman year of high school. She was friendly, open and carefree. Men were drawn to her, and she was flattered by the attention. But she would soon pay the price for her inexperience and naiveté.

By the time she was 15, Guzman was pregnant with her first child, whom she named Maria (a pseudonym). At age 17, Guzman gave birth to her second child, Juanita (also an alias). Before she reached the age of 26, Sonya Guzman had been pregnant 10 times, all by different men. Of those pregnancies, Guzman miscarried several times and had three abortions.

Caring for two kids on a single salary was harder than Guzman had imagined. Previously a casual drug user, Guzman began using more and more methamphetamines to remain high for longer periods of time. Doing so gave her the energy she needed to juggle two or three jobs each day to keep food on the table for her daughters. She also began to deal drugs as a way to make extra money.

But eventually, a former friend, roommate and dope-dealing partner set Guzman up in a sting operation. As part of a plea bargain, the other person paid a small fine and spent a few nights in county jail, but avoided prison time. That person is still on the streets. Guzman, however, was sentenced to slightly more than three years in prison and had to send her daughters to California to live with her mother.

Guzman says now she was angry at first about getting caught. But gradually, she has come to realize that she brought her problems on herself, a circumstance for which she is embarrassed and which makes her feel badly for her daughters and most of all, her own mother.

"Before I didn't," Guzman says, "but I feel responsible to my mom. She came [to the rescue] and pretty much put her life on hold for my mistake. I'd have a big problem if it wasn't for my mom."

Guzman's daughters, now 10 and 7, have spent much of the past four years in California with their grandmother and her husband, a self-employed electrician. The girls have their own rooms at their Grandma's house, and despite Guzman's incarceration, both seem to be enjoying relatively normal childhoods. In a rare reflective moment, Guzman concedes that she's not proud of her former life or her behavior.

"I've been in trouble and I've done all kinds of stuff," Guzman says. "I've grown up a lot. Being here has given me time to think about myself and think about my kids."

Guzman, who was pregnant with Miguel when she was arrested, was eligible for the RPP because her crime was not of a violent nature and because she is a textbook example of the kind of woman Washington corrections authorities believe can benefit from the program.

Another factor in Sonya's acceptance into the RPP is Miguel, now almost 3 years old. Guzman and RPP officials say it was fairly obvious when Miguel was born that he was – and still is – a special needs child, a condition possibly caused, or at least exacerbated, by his mother's drug use during her pregnancy with him. Miguel has a host of problems: He seems to have trouble focusing on anything for a set period of time, an indicator of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He seems developmentally delayed in several areas, including speech and motor skills. Miguel doesn't like to eat food, he doesn't like to be touched, he becomes agitated by too much light or too much noise, and at times, he displays anti-social behaviors.

"I feel like that had to do with the drugs I did," Guzman says. "I wasn't thinking about the consequences. I wasn't thinking about what I was doing."

Guzman, scheduled to be released in just a matter of days, says she's decided to stay in the Tacoma area when she's released instead of going back to the Yakima Valley where many of her family, friends and old running mates still live. Too much is at stake to take the chance that she might revert to her old ways, Guzman says.

"I'm gonna miss 'em. I love 'em," Guzman says. "But they're not what I need. I don't want to come back here [to WCCW]. Miguel needs me. My daughters need me."

"Making It on the Outside"

For nearly all female ex-convicts, particularly those who, like Sonya Guzman, have been imprisoned on drug charges, the fear of freedom is sometimes more terrifying than incarceration. Freedom – or more to the point, temptations – even within the structure of clean and sober housing or a halfway-house under the control of state corrections officials, can lead offenders recently released right back to jail or prison. This

is true at WCCW and other U.S. women's prisons, where recidivism rates for entire institutions can range from 40 to 50 percent, and even higher in some instances. Factors including, but not limited to: poverty, feelings of displacement, loss of family, poor choices, severe drug addictions and predilection toward criminal behaviors often combine to return women to jail or prison after their initial release.

The RPP exists in stark contrast to realities elsewhere, and what O'Brien refers to as "the social context," which, in her view, accounts for some of "the reasons that women commit crime cannot be separated from their social and biographical context." She further argues that while theorists such as Berger and Luckmann and others have written extensively about the social construction of reality, what she dubs "social expectancy" theory "is also important for understanding ex-offenders' behavior because stigmatizing beliefs about criminals contribute to the women's personal feeling of inadequacy and lack of self-efficacy. According to this theory, women who are striving to rebuild their lives and self-identity after release from prison are expected to fail due to assumptions about who they are and a lack of appreciation for their human potential."[70]

"Been there, done that"

No one is more aware of the trials and temptations of the streets – and the social expectations for female ex-cons – than Peggy Woods, whom we met earlier. Woods is now a housing coordinator for the Taylor House, a privately owned group of "clean and sober" houses in the Tacoma-Seattle area. Woods, 33, is herself a former felon who did time at WCCW on drug charges.

A born-again Christian, Woods is honest and open about being the product of a broken and dysfunctional home. Her father, a schizophrenic, was physically and

psychologically abusive to Woods and her older sister and brother. Woods's mother, the family's breadwinner, was emotionally unavailable, and often away from home.

"She didn't take care of her kids," Woods says now. "She took care of her career. I mean, she took care of us monetarily. But there was no cuddly stuff."

As a teenager, Peggy was unhappy and lonely, which caused her to run away often. She was drinking beer, hard liquor and smoking pot by the time she reached puberty. And she tried cocaine for the first time when she was only 15.

Tears are never far from the surface for the diminutive Woods, whose sky-blue eyes alternate between hopeful and melancholy whenever she talks about herself, and particularly her formative years.

"I have a hard time remembering my past," Woods says, reaching for a tissue. "It was a waste. It shouldn't have been like that. I started out a good kid. All kids start out that way."

Woods says the running away from home, the acting out, and especially the drugs and alcohol were her ways of dealing with her family's dysfunction. Little was expected of her, so she expected little of herself.

"Cops were already the enemy to me," she says. "I already had a reputation. I was a runaway. A high school dropout."

For years, Woods bounced back and forth between Alaska, where she spent much of her childhood, and Western Washington, where her father relocated when her parents formally separated.

Woods worked occasionally as a retail clerk, a bartender and at other odd jobs. In the mid-90s, while working at a grocery store in Juneau, Alaska, Woods met a man

named Tim, and struck up a relationship. The couple would have a daughter together, named Melanie. But within five years, drugs, mistrust and a nasty custody battle robbed Peggy Woods of her child, her relationships, her home and her property. She says her relationships and living arrangements were based strictly on drugs: While she never resorted to prostitution, Woods says, “I was sure passed around a lot.”

An epiphany

On April 24, 2001, Peggy Woods had an epiphany. By any measure, it came at an unusual time.

It was roughly mid-day in the small town of McCleary, Washington, just west of Olympia, the state capital. Just minutes earlier, Woods had stolen a car. Ostensibly, the plan was that she and her then-boyfriend would use the vehicle to travel to an undetermined major metropolitan area. When they arrived there, wherever “there” was, they would seek drug treatment. Together, as a couple, they were going to go straight.

But since neither had money or transportation, first they had to steal a car. The pair reasoned that Woods should be the designated thief because her criminal record was not as extensive – or as violent – as her boyfriend’s. The rationale was simple: if Peggy got caught, she presumably would be treated less harshly than her companion.

The plan fell apart, however, when Woods, alone in the car, was spotted by local law enforcement officials. Unwisely, she opted to lead sheriff’s deputies through town on a high-speed car chase. The drama ended rather abruptly with Woods trapped at the end of a dead-end street.

Police ordered her out of the car, and Woods remembers lying face down, prostrate, on the cold, damp pavement. She says now it was a blessing. Moreover, she says, it was a message from God.

“It wasn’t until I was on my knees in my addictions,” Woods says, “and had lost everything I had. Everything. My daughter. My home. My family. Everything. I had nothing left. It wasn’t until then. But God wants us when we come to Him, He wants us to come to Him humble. He wants us to come to Him naked. With nothing. And that way, He can build us back up.”

Ferraro and Moe argue that such unquestioning acceptance of religion by incarcerated women is just an extension of the same level of control that prisons exert on subordinate and submissive inmates. However, this does not seem to be the case with Woods, who says she accepted Jesus Christ as her personal saviour before she arrived at WCCW. And while in prison, Woods says she seldom, if ever, engaged in public displays of faith.

A Fresh Start

Regardless, Woods says that the arrest meant that her long search for instant gratification and emotional escape was over.

Sensing the potential for a new life and a new beginning, Woods said she underwent a psychological and attitudinal change.

“I was looking around myself going, ‘I’ve got to get out of here.’ You know?” she says. “I should’ve really felt right at home, technically. These are people that I knew out on the streets. [But] I did not belong there. That’s how much I changed inside.”

When Peggy Woods was released from the Washington Corrections Center for Women in January 2002, she had a baby on her hip, less than $50 in her pocket, and absolutely no place to go and no one to help her find her way.

Some inmates, the lucky ones, at least have a relative or friend willing to pick them up at the prison's front door. But with her boyfriend in prison nearly 3,000 miles away, estranged from her family, and intentionally distant from those with whom she'd associated prior to her imprisonment, Woods and her baby were alone – and frightened.

A representative of a private social service organization eventually showed up to offer Woods and her son a ride to Tacoma, about a 20-minute car ride away.

Once there, Woods was directed to some temporary housing. And within a few days, Woods had found her parole officer's location, as well as an out-patient drug treatment provider, an Early Head Start daycare center for Elijah, and several local Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, which she began attending conscientiously.

Even so, establishing a new life had sounded somewhat dreamy and magical as the ideas swam around in Woods's head during her stay at WCCW. But the reality of being vulnerable and out on the street with no guidance and no safety net was terrifying. Slowly, cautiously, Woods found her way. For a while, she lived on state assistance and looked for permanent housing. Anxious for independence, within months she had started working as a flagger on road crews. The work was boring, long and offered no future.

In the second half of 2002, Woods and Elijah took a room at a privately owned clean-and-sober facility in Tacoma called Taylor House. The owner, a Puget Sound-area entrepreneur named Robert, was a former drug treatment counselor and social worker

who had stepped away from that line of work a few years earlier to begin investing in real estate.

Robert was soon impressed with Peggy's leadership and diplomatic skills. She quickly rose from being just another tenant at one of his properties to helping manage affairs at the house. And it was apparent to Robert thatshe was sincere in her efforts to stay in recovery, be a good mom and turn her life.

With four properties in Tacoma, at least one in Seattle and other acquisitions and interests on his radar screen, Robert decided he needed someone to oversee his operations in the South Puget Sound.

One day, after asking Woods a lot of questions, "including some he had no business asking," Robert offered Woods a deal she couldn't refuse: a salaried job managing Taylor House properties in the Tacoma area; a company car, a company cell phone, a corporate gas card, and cut-rate rent on a single family home in a fairly quiet neighborhood on Tacoma's East Side.

Woods gladly quit her job as a flagger, and recently celebrated her one year anniversary as housing coordinator for Taylor House, which now rents nearly 80 units in about half-dozen properties in and around Tacoma.

At Taylor House, former drug addicts, alcoholics and ex-cons can rent rooms after being released from prisons, jails, drug treatment centers and halfway houses. Tenants at Taylor House properties are permitted to stay up to a year or more in some cases. Taylor House rooms, some of which are private and some shared, generally range from $235 to $375 a month, price points that often are just manageable for those living on fixed incomes, welfare, disability payments, Social Security, or minimum wage jobs.

The goal of Taylor House, whose employees have “Where Sobriety is Taylor Made” printed on their business cards, is to give people safe and affordable places to live while they get back on their feet.

In fact, on several occasions in the past year, it has been Peggy Woods of Taylor House waiting to welcome back to society those newly released fromWCCW , as well as local jails and treatment centers. Although physically and psychologically draining at times, Woods says the work is also meaningful, because it gives her a chance to provide the guidance, support and assistance that’s often missing for those forgotten citizens who move and live just out of the consciousness of mainstream American culture and society.

One family Woods tried to help in 2004 was that of Sonya Guzman, who was released from WCCW early that year. For several months, Guzman and her son, Miguel, stayed at a Taylor House property. Guzman attended occasional Alcoholics Anonymous meetings with Woods, and on weekends, the two young mothers hung out together while their children played.

But, according to Woods, Guzman began wanting autonomy. Gradually, she also began to take advantage of her friendship with Woods in various ways. Soon, Guzman had a boyfriend and moved several doors down from the Taylor House property where she and Miguel had been living. Then, within a few months, Guzman moved again. Woods says she’d recently heard through the grapevine that Guzman had been seen either drunk, stoned, or both at a Tacoma-area bar.

Last year, just before she was released from WCCW, Guzman made what may have been a prophetic statement about her future: She said she knew she was going to

have to be careful. “If I don’t, I’ll be back here,” Guzman said at the time. “I know myself. I’ll mess up. I’m not that old. But I’m too old to be doing this.”

While the fate of Sonya Guzman and her son, Miguel, remains uncertain, the future for other current and former RPP moms looks bright.

Erin Delgado, who was released from WCCW in July 2004, moved with her son Michael to a small town in Eastern Washington. She’s since made amends with her grandmother, her daughter Sally, and was hoping to start work in February 2005 doing oil changes and auto detail work for a small business owner who had become a good friend.

As a single mom, some days are tough and she gets lonely from time to time. But for the most part, she says her life is good, and she wouldn’t change a thing.

“I am completely on the straight and narrow,” Delgado says. “I think I’m doing pretty good. I stay focused. All in all, I feel more grown up. I went through a lot to get here.”

The Residential Parenting Program, says Delgado, gave her and Michael the opportunity to become a family.

“I was really grateful for having a chance to bond with my son,” Delgado said, “and the chance for him to get to know me.”

Jeannette Albans, the African American mother of daughter Renee, is back at WCCW after a few nearly calamitous months at a Seattle halfway house. Albans, who at first thought the change would be less isolating because she would be closer to her sisters, says in hindsight, the switch was a big mistake.

First, the facility, designed for offenders who are working but have not yet completed their prison sentences, was more like a prison than WCCW. Since she had no

job, Albans was only allowed to leave under the strictest of circumstances. And as for Albans' daughter, Renee, whereas WCCW has the Early Head Start center and interaction with other kids, the halfway house had no similar accommodations for young children.

Then, Albans' younger sister, who recently had been living in Seattle, died suddenly. The circumstances of the death remain unclear. But in any case, Albans, who hasn't seen or heard from her father in years and whose mother died several years ago, was distraught.

"It really took a toll on me when my sister died," Albans says. "I don't want to lose no more of my family."

To make matters worse, several other female offenders at the halfway house took a disliking to Albans. The exact reason for the animosity is unclear. Albans says she doesn't know if the ill will was race-related – the other women were white – or if the conflict was personality based.

But either way, the mutual dislike had serious consequences. Two of the other inmates told halfway house officials that they had personally witnessed Albans slapping, shaking and force-feeding her daughter. Just recounting the story, Albans becomes outraged by the accusation.

"It's not true," Albans says. "It wasn't true."

Based on those accusations, however, Albans was arrested in early October 2004 and charged with assaulting a minor. While authorities tried to sort things out, Albans was sent to county jail and her daughter was sent to stay with her older sister, Andrea. The investigation, which lasted several days, was inconclusive.

Meanwhile, WCCW officials went to bat for Albans, whom they always had observed to be an excellent mother. By the end of October, both Albans and Renee were back at WCCW and the familiarity of the RPP.

"I was going out of my mind," Albans said, adding that she plans to keep her head down, mind her own business and serve out the balance of her sentence, which ends in January 2006. "My next stop," Albans says, "is going to be home."

Patterns: Patterns that emerged during conversations with the women in this category included the obvious expressions of gratitude and appreciation for having had the RPP experience and the opportunity to bond with their children.

But as we have seen, the first days and months of transition from prison back to the real world can be rocky. All of the women said the possibility of failure and the terror associated with it was heightened by the uncertainty of being newly released, the forced habit of having been reliant upon the prison for all their worldly needs, the presence of a small child in the picture, and the lack of any easily definable path to the social services, agencies and organizations that might help them get on their feet.

Despite these obstacles, all of the women said they had surprised themselves with their resilience. And all agreed much was at stake. So much so that each seriously committed – in some instances for the first time in their lives – to work hard to avoid alcohol, drugs and crime.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

As we saw in Chapter 1, the rise of the prison industrial complex is an important issue for American Studies. Prisons represent a site where legal policy, the drug worlds, economics and cultural differences, race, class, gender, and ethnicity, allintersect in complex ways. In recent years, the increase in rates of imprisonment has affected women as well as men. Today in the United States, nearly 1 million women are in prison, jail or under state or federal custody, and an estimated 80 percent of those women have children, many of whom are babies, toddlers or small children. The consequences of incarceration for many of these mothers and their children can be devastating – and the consequences for society are also dire, with many economic, social, cultural and moral implications.

For instance, according to federal statistics, children of inmates are five times more likely to be imprisoned in adulthood than other children, thus posing significant risks for the inter-generational cycles of criminality mentioned throughout this dissertation. Also, more than 60 percent of inmates have not finished high school. This lack of basic educational skills often has a serious impact on the ability of such people to find and secure gainful employment and provide for themselves and their families. Lastly, an estimated 50 percent of offenders are unemployed at the time of their arrests, often indicating existence at or below the poverty line as well as possible heavy reliance on public social service agencies, all of which can have significant effects on taxpayers, policy-makers and the political process. Simply stated, when a mother goes to prison, the impacts can be far-reaching and dramatic.

As we established earlier, in the state of New York, the prison nursery concept has been in existence for 100 years at the women's prison at Bedford Hills north of New

York City. But in Nebraska and Washington, on-site, full-time nursery programs were initiated in recent years with the intention of countering the many ill effects of female incarceration on individuals, their children, their families and on the larger society.

However, as yet we know little about such programs. Nebraska's program has been in existence less than a decade and Washington's only recently celebrated the five-year anniversary of its baby program. Despite the massive growing literature on prisons, to date there have been no scholarly ethnographic explorations of such programs. Gabel and Girard have deplored this lack of attention. "As the number of women in jails and prisons grows, efforts are needed to document the nature of existing prison nurseries, to examine the effects of nursery programs on babies and their mothers, and to explore the advantages and disadvantages of such programs for prisoner mothers, their infants, correctional facilities and the state."[71]

Suggestions for future research

The possibilities are endless for future scholarly work in the area of women in prison, the criminal justice system, rehabilitation efforts, nursery programs such as the Residential Parenting Program, and the long-term effectiveness of such initiatives on the lives of children and families of women who have been incarcerated.

One obvious area of research could be the longitudinal study of children who spent portions of their early childhood in the RPP. At various milestones in their lives, these children of previously incarcerated parents could be interviewed and studied to determine what discernible impacts, if any, the program has had on them, including their relationships with their mothers, their siblings, their performance in school and other

social institutions, as well as their behavioral growth as human beings, including drug or alcohol use or abuse, involvement with the criminal justice system and socio-economic status.

A related line of research could focus on the relationships between so-called "children of the RPP" and their siblings, either those born before or after the incarceration of their mothers. Doing so might help determine the effectiveness of the RPP parenting classes and the long-term impacts of such training.

Yet another avenue of research might be the socio-economic effects of the RPP. As we discussed earlier, while all RPP mothers are required to program if physically able to do so, it also is quite possible for a woman to be released from the program and prison without receiving the training, education or even the drug treatment counseling that could boost her likelihood of success on the outside.

Finally, three years ago, McNeil Island, a men's prison in Western Washington, established a program called "Long Distance Dads," which aims to reconnect incarcerated fathers with their children in hopes of reducing the incidents of inter-generational crime. One of only a handful of its type in the nation, this effort also would make for rich research in the field of American Studies.

Sumary: This dissertation has been an effort to begin to remedy this significant gap in the prison literature. In 2000, I approached the Washington Corrections Center for Women and succeeded in gaining access to offenders, civilian and uniformed prison administrators and staff, contractors and some foundational documents and correspondence pertaining to the establishment of the Residential Parenting

Programming. From October 2000 to March 2005 I conducted research in the WCCW's Residential Parenting Program. I reviewed such prison literature and documents as were made available to me, and I interviewed prison administrators. However, I spent the bulk of my time doing ethnographic participant observation and interview-based research in the RPP. I sought to understand the culture of the program, the admissions process, and especially the everyday organization of the program and day-to-day life of the RPP. I spent roughly 100 hours doing participant observation in the RPP and J-Unit. As discussed in Chapter 4, I learned how this institutional system operates and was able to document how the RPP works in a remarkably efficient manner on a day-to-day basis. The presence of women and children and the extensive, multi-faceted programming that the women engage in, has transformed the RPP into a strikingly unusual space within the prison, a space in which a spirit of trust, cooperation, camaraderie, and working together prevails. I learned that in the RPP environment, language and labeling make a difference. Unlike elsewhere at WCCW, where offenders are almost always referred to by their last names, participants in the baby program are typically personalized through the use of their first names, and as a group they are labeled as "RPP moms." This stands in contrast to their fellow J-Unit and WCCW residents, who are typically labeled "offenders" as a group, not "inmates" or "prisoners." Also, just like elsewhere at WCCW, those J-Unit residents who are not RPP members typicallyare referred to bytheir last names in conversations with each other or amongst uniformed and civilian prison staff. Only RPP mothers are referred to frequently and sometimes even exclusively by their first names, at some level clearly a recognition of their individuality, personhood and perhaps even motherhood.

I also engaged in numerous casual conversations, and conducted some formal and informal interviews with prison civilian and uniformed staff, inmate care-givers, and participants in the Residential Parenting Program. I sought to use my journalistic and ethnographic interviewing and interpersonal skills to encourage participants to open up and talk honestly and forthrightly about their lives and their involvement in the RPP. I took detailed life histories of the women participants and learned about the cultural complexities and difficulties of their previous lives, including their engagement in the drug worlds of rural, suburban and urban Washington State. I also interviewed other female residents of J-Unit about their experiences with and assessments of the RPP. I asked these individuals about various aspects of the program, including queries about what daily life was like, how they experienced the program and individuals in it, and what they saw as its problems and benefits.

Using contemporary culture theory and conversational analysis methods, which employ interpretations of conversation and narration as a way of accessing different cultural meaning systems, I sought to see how staff and prisoners used different systems of meaning to think about the RPP.

As we saw, civilian and uniformed prison staff saw it as a significant effort to improve the circumstances of current offenders, but also to break multi-generational cycles of criminality in some families, while preventing others from beginning. Some saw some minor problems with the way the program functions, such as the RPP's strict adherence to admitting no inmates with even the slightest hints of violence in their pasts. But basically, even such criticisms as those were supportive of the program itself and were intended as constructive observations as to how the RPP could be further improved.

Others saw it only as a positive, noting that RPP mothers – whether parents for the first time or the fourth time – were able to learn new parenting techniques and child care practices that would enrich and improve the lives of offenders and their children.

Civilian and uniformed staff members, themselves involved in the dominant mainstream culture, tended to view offenders' prior engagements in the drug worlds as the results of poor judgment, character flaws, psychological and emotional trauma, addiction, neglect, abuse, poor socialization, inadequate education and training, poverty and social class. With these views in mind, civilian and uniformed prison staff members see their primary task as rehabilitative in nature. In other words, WCCW civilian and uniformed employees want to direct offenders admitted to the Residential Parenting Program into making real and firm commitments to living more responsible, dominant-culture lifestyles.

How, then, does this orientation of the RPP fit with culture theory? As discussed in Chapter 1, many theorists, including Foucault, sociological critics of total institutions, and many theorists writing out of a cultural studies orientation, would see the program that staff have designed as an "institutional state apparatus," a cultural program intended and run as a form of forced re-socialization, a program intended to "correct" non-conforming deviants and to force them into conformity with dominant culture values and lifestyles.

My ethnographic research at the RPP shows that there are some pertinent and important issues embodied in this kind of theoretical perspective. The degree of surveillance and corrective control is very high in the RPP, and there is little doubt that enforcing mainstream American values is strongly at play. However, cultural

investigation of the actual situation reveals that what is going on here is much more complex than the rather narrow, ideologically oriented "re-socialization" theory would suggest.

First of all, we have seen that the drug-criminal worlds of Washington State in which the women were previously entangled, are not experienced as unproblematic, viable, alternative counter-cultural systems. One can strongly argue, for example, that U.S. government attempts, through programs like the Carlisle school in Pennsylvania, to separate Native American youth from their Native American tribal cultures, involved forced re-socialization out of a viable, well organized, satisfying, fully functioning cultural system into the dominant culture mode. Such is not the case with these Washington women's experience with criminal-drug worlds.

As we have seen, the drug worlds have some attraction to these women in comparison to alternative worlds available to them. As their stories show, the drug world involves the attraction of drug highs, some degree of camaraderie and excitement, a satisfyingly cynical, opposition stance against the straight world, and for dealers, some opportunity for large amounts of "easy money" and a way to support their families. However, the women are ambivalent about these worlds because they have also had many very negative experiences within them. They also have experienced chaotic drug states, addiction, violence, abuse, humiliation, danger, fear, depression, and self-disgust. The attraction of these worlds is based largely on the fact that the available alternatives for them has not been a stable, satisfying working class life, but rather a poverty level experience, involving low-paying jobs that are exhausting, dissatisfying, menial, and

which do not provide adequate income to take care of themselves – let alone their children.

Author and cultural theorist Cornel West asserts that such views are understandable, given that the dominant culture experience is often dissatisfying for those struggling to exist at a marginal level of subsistence. It "has something to do with the fact that large numbers of people in the world, especially in American society, don't believe that they make a difference. Especially in the black community; that's what the meaninglessness and the hopelessness and the state of siege that is raging is in part about: the collapsing structures of meaning and the collapsing structures of feeling, such that hopelessness becomes the conclusion and walking nihilism becomes the enactment of it."

At the same time, most of the women have had some degree of contact with a more stable, working class or lower middle-class culture. Erin Delgado, for example, had glimpses of the possibilities of a more stable and satisfying lifestyle through her grandmother, her early success in high school, and through the family of her friend, Janet. Relationships like these provide women with some sense of a viable alternative that is attractive. However, the reality for Erin and most of the other women has not been of this nature. As we saw, Erin's own family was heavily into drugs and drug-dealing, and they were giving her drugs by the age of 7. What she experienced in her chaotic family, and in the murders of her parents and her subsequent tailspin, landed her in the marginal, menial, poverty zone of rural, small town Washington. It was the negative experiences of this cultural situation that made the drug world a temptation.

As we have seen, an overwhelming majority of the women who enter the RPP are mothers before they reach the prison. But for at least some of these women, the children

with whom they enter the program become transformative and significant life events not only because they are manifest representatives of future generations, but also because of the mere existence of the RPP. In other words, participation in the RPP becomes much more transformative and symbolic for some because of their previous experiences as mothers, particularly for those who believe they fell short as a parent with earlier children. In this sense, the program provides such women with the opportunity to redeem themselves through their newest child, thereby becoming responsible, attentive and "good" mothers, in the societal and normative senses discussed in previous chapters.

If the Residential Parenting Program did not exist, however, it's possible and even likely that for many of Washington's female offenders, the events of pregnancy, childbirth and prison would be much like their previous experiences with motherhood and crime. When the women enter the RPP, they are attracted by the possibility of programs that will help them shake off drug addiction, and the acquisition of education and job skills that will help them attain a better economic situation on the outside. This orientation, as we have seen, is given an extremely powerful push by the central dimension of the RPP, that is, the opportunity to keep their babies with them to develop bonds of affection and love with their children, and thereby to develop the strong desire to take good care of their children. They also know thatthey will not be able to take care of their children in the chaotic drug-criminal worlds they have recently been entangled with.

It is clear from all of the observational and interview material that the women – either naturally, of their own volition, or through a conversion process – are powerfully oriented towards a straight, sober, job-holding lifestyle by their love for their children. At

some level, they clearly want this themselves; they want to take good care of their children and they want to see themselves as good examples for their children. No doubt, the RPP involves re-socialization, but it is not something forced on the women, but rather something the women come to want and/or accept for themselves to a large degree because of their love and sense of responsibility for their children.

As we saw, women prisoners speak very highly of the program. All said the opportunity to keep, rather than lose, their children to other family members, state custody, adoption or the unknown, was of utmost significance. In addition to the bonding experiences with their children, they stated with convincing sincerity that they often were helped immeasurably in some cases by the various programming at WCCW, such as Early Head Start parenting instruction, vocational education courses, high school equivalency and college computer classes, all of which have helped women re-orient to a more responsible, dominant-culture lifestyle. And in most cases, the women have seemed to sincerely adopt this orientation. To some extent, of course, the circumstances in which RPP mothers were living – dependent on prison employees and the state for everything – required women to speak in generally positive terms about the program and their experiences in it. As we learned in Chapter 2, such comments may have been the result of a psychological conversion process, in other words, the willing or coerced adoption of mainstream, normative values. I am sure, given the situation, thatsome women did provide narratives early on that were less than totally candid. However, over time, many of the women did say things that were not at all positive and/or outside mainstream values, including remarks that, if heard by or relayed to prison staff, would not have been in the women's best interests. Such honesty and openness on the parts of the women are

strong indicators that, on balance, the RPP moms included in this study were forthcoming, truthful and sincere when sharing their views.

As we learned in Chapter 7, some women experienced problems, particularly when making the sometimes difficult transition from imprisonment back into the community, a time at which new-found freedom, temptations and responsibilities can be overwhelming and disorienting.

Yet, despite such transitional difficulties, most RPP offenders manage to navigate their way through these largely uncharted territories, finding their way to new communities, reuniting with their families, finding new, better-paying jobs and re-entering society as functioning members of the dominant, mainstream culture.

However, as we saw with Sonya Guzman in Chapter 7, some former RPP participants also evidenced a continuing attraction to the drug worlds after being released from prison, especially when such options present themselves as alternatives to the menial, minimum-wage jobs and struggles associated with making a new life on the outside with small children to care for.

The ability of former RPP members to succeed in the straight world often seems to depend on luck, perseverance, self-control and a commitment to becoming a responsible parent and citizen, as well as the ability to find decent jobs, adequate housing, satisfactory child care and a degree of social support.

While my observations and interviews clearly show that participants experience and view the RPP as successful and beneficial, the long-term results and success of the program are not yet in. One measure will be the ultimate effects on children. Some critics continue to suggest that growing up from infancy to age 3 in prison may have negative

consequences on children. But while such long-term implications have yet to play out, the clear alternative to the RPP is the status quo, which is simply unacceptable. Simply put, throughout the vast majority of the U.S., the system works something like this: Children of incarcerated parents – if they're lucky – are farmed out to family members, some of whom may or may not be up to the task of raising and caring for them. That, of course, represents the best-case scenario.

Another measure of success will be recidivism rates over time for women prisoners who have been released from RPP. Recidivism in the context of Washington State prisons means as follows: Parole violations or criminal acts that result in the re-arrest, re-conviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following a prisoner's release. Washington State Department of Corrections statistics on recidivism in general suggest that approximately 50 percent of inmates re-offend or violate parole. (This rate is consistent with national trends, according to federal statistics). The majority of these re-offenders – more than 70 percent– committed property or drug crimes, meaning that when inmates come back to prison, they tend to do so after having committed the same type of offense.

While the returns are still early, it does appear that the RPP has a remarkably higher success rate. Of the 103 RPP participants released from WCCW so far, only eight – or 8 percent – have returned to prison on other charges. The RPP success rate is more than six times better than the 50 percent success rate typical among WCCW's general population.

This suggests that the program is and promises to be very successful. It also provides indirect support for the accuracy of my observational material and the sincerity

and accuracy of the interview material. As we saw, both prison staff and prisoners speak very favorably of the program. Skeptics might suggest that some of this apparent enthusiasm was not genuine. My own observations and interpretations suggested that the enthusiasm was mostly sincere, but as discussed above, I also came to understand the problems women face on transitioning back into society and the temptations that returning to the drug culture posed.

The success rate so far suggests that the combination of allowing the women to bond with their children, combined with the educational and counseling programming available at the prison, and such support as exists for female felons transitioning back to society, have succeeded remarkably well in helping women turn away from the temptations of the drug world to a lifestyle in the straight world that allows them to be conventionally successful, and perhaps most importantly to them, allows them to take better care of the children the RPP has allowed them to bond with and love.

The alternatives to the RPP represent business as-usual in many states. But in contrast to Washington's program, other options are frightening and unappealing. For mothers who arrive in jail or prison pregnant, the only choices are short-term, long-term or permanent separation from their children. And for the children, if not placed with family, the prospects might be even more alarming: State-administered foster care, multiple placements, and the vagaries of the child welfare system. Cynthia Seymour, co-author of *Children with Parents in Prison,* writes that such circumstances are too often detrimental to children and their imprisoned parents.

"[C]hildren whose parents are incarcerated experience a variety of negative consequences, particularly in terms of their emotional health and well-being," according

to Seymour. “Most children with incarcerated parents experience a broad range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness and guilt.”[72] Trauma at home permeates the lives of children and can influence everything they do in life.

The situation’s no better for imprisoned parents separated from their children, according to Owen. “On countless occasions, women would speak of the pain of being removed from their children and the tragedy of separation,” Owen writes. “The desire to ‘just be home with my kids’ and the need to ‘be a good mother’ were echoed in numerous interviews. Women repeatedly spoke of their concerns about their children and the worry over the effects of this separation on their children’s well-being.”[73]

But psychological and emotional costs are only part of the story. The emergence of the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex, about which Davis writes, took root in the 1980s with the so-called “war on drugs” and continues to grow today. “Punishment no longer constitutes a marginal area of the larger economy. Corporations producing all kinds of goods – from buildings to electronic devices and hygiene products – and providing all kinds of services – from meals to therapy and health care – are now directly involved in the punishment business. That is to say, companies that one would assume are far removed from the work of state punishment have developed major stakes in the perpetuation of a prison system.”[74]

The Residential Parenting Program at the Washington Corrections Center for Women is about making careful and calculated investments in people in a small, but meaningful attempt to break multi-generational cycles of criminality. And in an era in which “getting tough on crime” and declaring a “war on drugs” have become buzzwords for both politicians and the general public, the RPP represents a bold and progressive

undertaking aimed at improving the plight of some among us who have been relegated to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. This confluence of several keystone American Studies issues – including class, gender, race, ethnicity and social control, to name a few – have combined to make Washington's Residential Parenting Programs, and other programs like it, important developments worthy of scholarly attention and research that can help in determining the function, efficacy, success and societal contributions of such initiatives.

Notes

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