

Movies for an Introduction to Sociology Class Unit on Deviance and Crime

(Prepared by Yolanda Marie Bergstrom-Lynch)

Boy A, 2007: After spending most of his life in prison for a murder he committed as a child, a young man (Andrew Garfield) is returned to society, where a dedicated caseworker (Peter Mullan) helps him start a new life under a new identity, Jack Burridge. When he lands a job and falls in love, things seem to be taking a positive turn for Jack. But his new existence hangs by a thread, as he discovers when one simple act threatens to expose him. (great for teaching about either labeling theory or prisoner re-entry)

Boys of Baraka, The, 2006: Follows a group of 12-year-old boys from the most violent urban communities of Baltimore to the Baraka School, an experimental boarding school in rural Kenya, where children live by strict guidelines, yet are given the freedom to grow.

Bowling for Columbine, 2002: Famed filmmaker and left-wing political humorist Michael Moore tackles America's obsession with firearms in this Oscar-winning documentary. Focusing mainly on the Columbine massacre in April 1999, Moore also visits a Michigan bank that gives new customers a free gun, recites statistics for gun deaths in the United States and interviews folks ranging from National Rifle Association spokesman Charlton Heston to shock rocker Marilyn Manson. (I use this to talk about moral panics around school shootings. Goes well with the work of Barry Glassner)

Frozen River, 2008: On a Mohawk reservation on the Canadian border, Ray (Melissa Leo, in an Oscar-nominated role) teams with widowed tribe member Lila (Misty Upham) to smuggle illegal immigrants into the United States. Although the work provides the women with much-needed money, each trip puts them in danger. How long will their luck hold before the authorities close in? Charlie McDermott co-stars in this drama nominated for multiple Independent Spirit Awards, including Best Feature. (this would be good for talking about anomie/strain theory)

La Operacion, 1982: More than one-third of all Puerto Rican women of childbearing age have been sterilized. So common is the procedure that it is simply called la ó. In this documentary exposé, the personal testimony of sterilized women is conjoined with newsreels, excerpts from government propaganda films and interviews with doctors, birth-control specialists and politicians to unmask the controversial use of sterilization as a tool of social policy. Begun in the 1930s as a means of curbing the ?surplus population? and reinforced in subsequent decades, the sterilization of women was tied to America's interventionist economic policies. Women were encouraged to undergo this ?fashionable? procedure without being informed about the operation or its consequences. When the jobs promised by the 1950s Operation Bootstrap program failed to materialize, the campaign for female sterilization intensified. In the 1960s Puerto Rican women were used as guinea pigs in the development of the birth control pill. Using data derived from these experiments, the U.S. Agency for International

Development promoted sterilization and birth control in developing nations to prevent revolutions troublesome to multinational corporations. More recently, Puerto Rico's dependence on welfare subsidies has caused political leaders to recommend sterilization, a procedure that has also been urged among minority women in the South Bronx. (great for contemporary examples of negative eugenics & forced sterilization campaigns. Goes great with Dorothy Robert's book, "Killing the Black Body," and the older writings of Lombroso and Goddard.)

Laramie Project, The, 2002: An all-star cast delivers a compelling performance based on the theatrical version of the Matthew Shepard murder story, a real incident that took place in 1998 in Laramie, Wyo. (Shepard's plight became a lightning rod for rallies against homophobia and hate crimes.) Portraying the residents of Laramie are Christina Ricci, Dylan Baker, Peter Fonda, Jeremy Davies, Janeane Garofalo, Laura Linney, Steve Buscemi and Amy Madigan. (good for discussions around hate crimes)

Live Nude Girls Unite! 2000. Documents the efforts of strippers in San Francisco to unionize.

Lord of the Flies, 1990. Young military cadets are marooned on an island and must take up adult responsibilities. With no supervision, they create a new society -- but two chiefs emerge with vastly different leadership styles. Ralph (Balthazar Getty) organizes shelter and fire for his followers, while Jack (Chris Furrh) would rather have fun and hunt with his entourage of adventure-seekers. In the end, the foes face off in a battle of primal urges and civilized behavior. (selections can be used to illustrate social control & social bonding theories)

Mario's Story, 2007: Shot over the course of seven years, this documentary from filmmakers Susan Koch and Jeff Werner relates the inspiring true story of Mario Rocha, an East L.A. teen who unlocked his talent for writing while serving out a murder sentence behind bars. As his family and a team of pro bono attorneys labor on the outside to clear his name for a crime he didn't commit, Mario keeps himself grounded on the inside by writing poems, short stories and plays.

Pornography of Everyday Life, The

SherryBaby, 2006: Newly released from prison, recovering addict Sherry Swanson (Maggie Gyllenhaal) struggles to normalize her life so she can be a good person and a trustworthy mother to her young daughter, Lexie (Ryan Simpkins). The stresses mount as she clashes with her sober housemates, disappoints a parole officer who's growing impatient and faces old temptations, all the while her daughter grows attached to Sherry's brother, Bobby (Brad William Henke).

Tough Guise, 2002. Looks systematically at the relationship between the images of popular culture and the social construction of masculine identities in the U.S. at the end of the 20th century. Jackson Katz argues that there is a crisis in masculinity and that some of the guises offered to men as a solution (e.g., rugged individualism, violence)

come loaded with attendant dangers to women, as well as other men. (great for discussions around masculinities and violence and the gender ratio problem in offending)

When the Levees Broke, 2006: Spike Lee commemorates the people of New Orleans with a four-hour epic documentary that doesn't just recount the events of late August 2005 but asks why they unfolded the way they did in the first place. Weaving interviews with news footage and amateur video, Lee uses the film to give meaningful voice to the people who were left behind. With a detached unsentimental eye, he delivers a poignant account of a major moment in recent U.S. history. (great for getting students to think about what counts as "white-collar crime" - Disc 1 and 2 in particular)

Reefer Madness, 1936: This 1936 propaganda film took on a life of its own when the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws dug it out of the Library of Congress in the early 1970s. Since then, the movie has become a cult hit among modern audiences, who appreciate the story line's comedic value. In short, a group of teens seduced by the power of "reefer" take a few puffs -- and instantly become psychotic killers, jazz addicts and whores. (can be used to talk about the creation of moral panics around drugs. Goes great with work Joseph Gusfield's work on symbolic crusades, & Jeff Reinerman and Harry Levine's, "The Crack Attack: Politics and Media in the Crack Scare" in Newman and O'Brien's reader, "Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life" 4th ed.)