

to the ‘good mother’ and how have I come to understand and embrace my difference?”

Despite being a highly readable contribution that articulates and embraces alternate ways of mothering to destabilize stereotypes, I was left at points wanting to go deeper into the stories and personal histories of the authors. Perhaps knowing a little more about each of the writers would give a better sense of the context, geographical locale, etc. that would deepen the connection of the reader to the author’s message. One way this may have been achieved would be to have the biographical portion of the book interwoven into each piece, or to provide fewer entries with greater depth around the backgrounds of each author’s life, although this would have been a difficult call given that each entry was very compelling. I also found *The Good Mother Myth* to be limited in its theoretical underpinning. Incorporating a theoretical framework of post-structuralist and post humanist perspectives to these powerful stories would draw this work closer to academic audiences and connect it to the larger issues of equity, the image of the mother and child, the role of technology, and marginalization of women and children. As an academic, I am left wanting a stronger link between these engaging commentaries and current theory to help us all move beyond description and into deeper epistemological ontological thinking around what it means to mother/love/nurture. Perhaps this is the job of the reader or other scholars who might take these stories as examples of American feminist advocacy and link them to the work of feminist post-structuralist theorists like Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, or Donna Haraway.

Mothers of Bedford

Jennifer McShane, Director

New York: Women Make Movies, 2011, DVD, 96 minutes

REVIEWED BY NAOMI M. MCPHERSON

Located in New York State, Bedford Hills is a maximum-security prison for women who are serving sentences from five years to life. The film notes that 80 percent of women incarcerated in the U.S. are mothers of children whose ages range from infancy to adolescent to young adult. Director McShane makes a powerful case for providing Children’s Center programs in all prisons for women. Filmed over a four-year period, McShane follows five women as their lives and their relationships with their children unfold within prison walls.

The Children's Center program at Bedford was initiated 19 years earlier by Sister Elaine Roulet. Sr. Elaine, who appears in the film, points out that when mothers are incarcerated, their children are also penalized due to separation from their mothers. Compounded by the fact that they are often too young to understand full explanations about the context surrounding their mother's imprisonment, children wonder why their mother abandoned them; perhaps fearing they have done something to cause mother to leave them and finding little comfort in assurances that, at some future point in time, their mother will return. Some children are cared for by their grandmothers or their aunts (rarely by their fathers) while their mother is in prison, a situation that may or may not work out for all concerned. Most of the children of mothers in prison end up in the less than ideal "system" of child services and foster homes, which can lead to problems for them in families, schools, and society.

Mothers never cease being parents no matter where they are, and the women in Bedford try to retain connections and active parental involvement in their children's lives. The Children's Center at Bedford facilitates the women's efforts at mothering-from-a-distance. The program provides facilities, parenting sessions, and support from volunteers and other inmates so that mothers and children are able to create and maintain strong bonds. There is no hint of prison drab in the aesthetics of these mother and child areas. The Children's Center has an outdoor courtyard and playground where one mom, who excelled at basketball in high school, shoots baskets with her two adolescent sons. Indoors, the gathering place is beautifully decorated and furnished with child appropriate décor. This is where children's birthday parties, Mother's Day visits, arts and crafts sessions, scrap-booking, face-painting, and story-telling activities occur. It is a space where children and their mothers can talk, play, or simply curl up together for physical and emotional expressions of caring. Sr. Elaine comments that the Children's Center program provides the women an opportunity to begin again, to become a good mother. The Center director, who started as a volunteer, invests hours of time and buckets of emotional and psychic energy helping inmates in their mothering. Her aim is to foster "transformative experiences" for the women as they strive to cultivate valuable and lasting relationships with their children.

The film's director deftly follows the life stories of the five women who discuss what got them into Bedford, what life "inside" is like for them, and their struggles to be the kind of mothers they want to be for their children. For some women, the social circumstances that led them to prison seem unfortunate in the extreme: Mona, for example, was a passenger in a vehicle hit-and-run that killed the victim, for which she received a life sentence on the charges of second degree murder. If she had agreed to plead guilty to murder, she would have been given a three-year sentence, but she refused. "I am not

a murderer,” she says. Before prison, Mona was a childcare worker; in prison she is known as Mona “the maker of magnificent moments.” She is a dynamo of energy leading parenting workshops and special craft sessions, organizing Mother’s day celebrations and children’s special occasions to make children’s visits with their mothers into “magnificent moments.” After twenty-four years in Bedford, more than half her life, we watch as she is finally released into a new-to-her world of cell phones, computers, ATMs, and so many other cultural and social changes she has never experienced. Her two adult sons, with whom she has maintained contact through the Center program visits, collect her from the prison gates on her release. They will help their mother create her new life on the outside.

And then there is Melissa, a rebellious, drug involved, middle-class 18 year old, who was sentenced to two years in maximum security for attempted robbery. She discovered she was pregnant after she was sent to Bedford and, in due course, gave birth to her daughter in prison. The Child Center’s program permits infants to live with their mother in her cell with their own crib until they are eighteen-months-old. Melissa was able to breastfeed and be in constant contact with her daughter for 24-hours a day. Melissa’s release from Bedford coincided with her daughter’s 18 months age limit and they left prison together. A happy little girl when the film ended, she has no recollection of “doing time” in Bedford, although Melissa muses she will have to tell her daughter someday.

There is much to ponder and to wonder about in this excellent film. Not least among the issues that had me reflect deeply was the engagement of volunteers, prison staff, and inmates in the Children’s Center program. Together they work to create a successful program. Notable, too, is the work the women invest in their mothering practices working on the good mothers they want and know they can be. The Bedford program appears to provide a successful model for incarcerated women to mother (and learn to mother) their children. I searched the literature to learn if a similar program exists in Canada. The short answer is no, there does not appear to be a comparable Mother and Child program operating at this point in time. Brennan (Canada’s Mother and Child Program) reviews the history of Corrections Services Canada’s Mother and Child programs from 1995 to 2014. Some penitentiaries implemented programs but despite inmate enthusiasm for the program, had low participation rates and were discontinued. Brennan suggests that Corrections Services changes to program eligibility criteria created barriers to accessing the program thus low participation level. A footnote to the film notes that, since its release in 2011, funding for the program at Bedford Hills was cut by 40 percent. No reason for the massive cuts is offered.

This case study of a program for mothers and their children in very specific