Mothering Behind Bars: How Addiction, Recovery, and Incarceration Affect Mothering

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Background

- Written in coordination with the Community Literacy Center, which organizes writing workshops with underserved populations to give them a space to share their voices.
- This essay will not only offer up the voices of the authors, but will actively engage women currently in jail in the shaping and crafting of the writing and perspectives the writers offer.

Purpose

- The aim of this project is to create a collaborative essay focusing on the experiences of mothering, addiction, and recovery that incarcerated women face.
- To engage the wider community of practitioners and scholars who work within literacy, language, and writing studies.
- To connect your community work to existing scholarship.
- To develop a new area of scholarly inquiry in community literacy.
- To negate the stereotypes of women who are addicts and in jail as ‘bad mothers’ who are ‘monsters’.

Methodology

- Collaborative Essay: co-authored by three women who co-facilitate writing workshops through the Community Literacy Center at a county jail and four women who are held at the jail. This core group will craft the essay.
- SpeakOut Journal: As a team, the writers will review selected poems and writing from the SpeakOut Journal in order to understand the breadth of experience that women have chosen to document. The SpeakOut Journal is a space that emerges twice annually across more than a decade of dedicated writing workshops.
- Call for Contribution: They will distribute a call for contributions in the housing unit and invite the lead co-authors to engage in both reflection and auto ethnographic/life writing.

Free Writing

- A short session of free association writing is done at the beginning of our meetings.
- These provided time to reflect and share our views, as well as to create personal but focused work to add to our essay.
- Some examples of our free writing prompts:
  - How Were You Mothered? versus How Your Mothered You?
  - What Does Mothering Mean to You?
  - What Does Addiction Mean to You?
  - What Do You Look Forward to?

Jail is first step. It’s forced sobriety. We are not monsters or terrible mothers. We are women currently in jail.

Secondary Sources

- Interns researched academic secondary sources that broaden the scope and context of the topics.
- Our co-authors connected songs and books they had read, own explorations and experiences, and those of the general population of the women at the jail.
- We also interacted with existing scholarship – such as Sandra Enos’ trajectories of motherhood.

Results

- These provided time to reflect and share our views, as well as to create personal but focused work to add to our essay.
- These graphs represent ‘situational contingencies’ that mothers who are imprisoned may experience and how it affects they are connected to their motherhood and their children.
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- The x axis represents the time line of pre-incarceration to post-incarceration.
- The y axis represents ‘mother Role Performance’ or how the mothers enact their mothering.

Concluding Thoughts

- Multiple identities and experiences are possible – we are not stereotypes.
- This essay is still being edited and prepared. It also has yet to be submitted and published in the collection.

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Works Cited


