

# Mothering Behind Bars:

## How Addiction, Recovery, and Incarceration Affect Mothering

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### Background

- Collaborative Essay in response to Demeter Press' call for submissions for a new book on mothering, addiction, and recovery.
- 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 published poems and writing from the SpeakOut! Journal in order to understand the breadth of experience that women have chosen to document. The SpeakOut! journals that emerge 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.

## Results

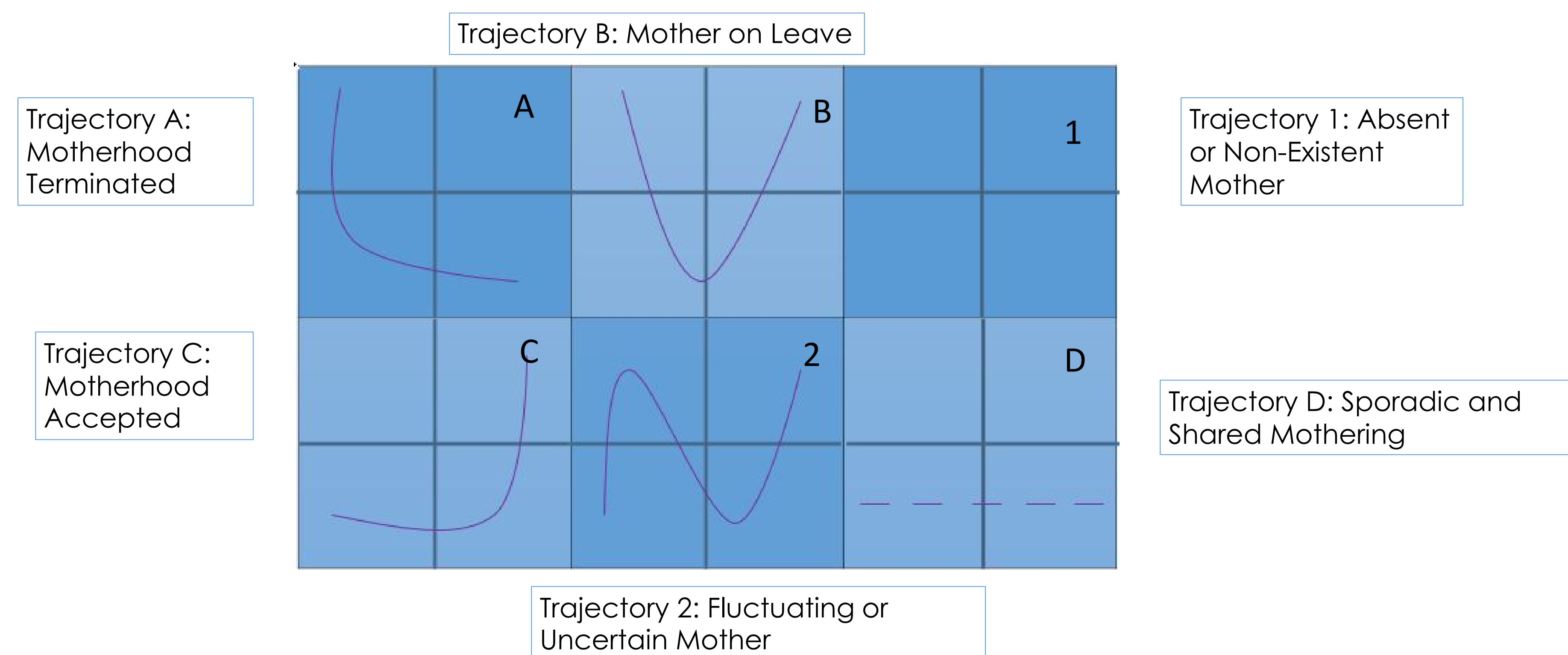
### Free Writing

- A short session of free association writing is done at the beginning and sometimes the end of our meeting.
- 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 You Mother?*
  - *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 making the decision to change. There are assumptions that people make about drug use. Once you are out as a drug user, that's all they see you as. Everything gets blamed on drug use. If I am labeled that way, I fall back into it. It was my number one reason for relapse. People don't always have to be an addict. I hate that label. I believe people can change. We weren't arrested, we were rescued.

### 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
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - Thus, the trajectory lines represent how women change their mothering during their time before, during, and after incarceration.
  - Trajectories 1 and 2 were developed by the writing group, feeling that these were needed to expand the possible ways to represent women's experiences as mother that Enos' charts did not show.



### Selections From SpeakOut! Journal

- We selected relevant writings from the Community Literacy Center's SpeakOut! journals, which are collections of writing and art from a writing workshop for people who are in jail.

*"I've been strung out.  
I've been called The Heroin Addict.  
The Liar.  
The Thief.  
The Lowlife.  
I never thought my life could amount to anything,  
My priorities now are different.  
I have a whole different outlook on life,  
I'm doing things I never wanted to do while using,  
but now all my mind is focused on is being sober,  
and becoming somebody!  
That's what I'm committed to doing.  
I tell myself this every day,  
I try to stay motivated,  
I do.  
Things can get hard,  
But if it's something you really want,  
Then put your mind to it,  
And it's yours!  
No one said it's going to be easy,"*

### The Larger Population's Ideas

- We put out a call for contributions to the women in the jail, to hear from more voices than just our own.
  - Letters: women gave input on what they would include in a letter to their children, to newly imprisoned women.
  - Our collaborators discussed the essay and its ideas with their pod (cell block) mates, deepening their own and each other's understanding of the topics of the essay

### 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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