

Jim Crow era, both of which are instances where discriminatory biases were written into law. Johnson concludes her book with recommendations for addressing the concerns of incarcerated women, and more generally, for responding to what she identifies as discriminatory criminal laws. In sum, her recommendations focus on taking preventative measures for women at risk of imprisonment; developing stronger rehabilitation programs; offering social services specific to women, such as child and health care; and finally, challenging what she identifies as unjust practices within the criminal justice system itself.

Inner Lives will be of interest to many, including individuals researching the criminal justice system; those studying narrative and oral histories as a means of understanding how policy and institutions impact individuals; and scholars interested in how marginalized voices might gain public agency through self-expression. Johnson's call for more educational programming for incarcerated individuals should be of particular interest to researchers in Rhetoric and Composition. Research on and development of literacy-based service learning programs in prisons could be headed by these scholars, who have an already established history of critical pedagogy and literacy theory from which to build. For those interested in doing this type of activist fieldwork, Johnson includes in the appendix to her book an extensive list of organizations and advocacy groups who provide resources and information on prison reform, legal and social resources for prisoners, and current educational programming.

Ultimately, Johnson's book implies that the astonishing disparities in racial and class representation in prison point toward systemic injustices that need to be engaged on the level of law and prison reform, as well as through the activist work of individual educators and researchers.

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Sing Soft, Sing Loud

Patricia McConnel. Flagstaff, AZ: Logoria Books, 1995.

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Patricia McConnel's *Sing Soft, Sing Loud* had me captivated from the beginning to the end. The book is divided into two sections based on the two main characters, "Iva" and "Toni." These two women's stories drew me in. I found myself laughing aloud, tearing up in sadness and anger, and silently cheering them on. Although they are two totally different characters, they are very much the same, which is often the story of incarcerated women, regardless of what crime got them jailed.

The stories are followed by an "Afterword," which is very significant to the book. It is thought provoking and causes the reader to contemplate the why's:

Why do women end up in prison? Why do jailers abuse the jailed? Why is it difficult for society to believe the atrocities that do take place in jails and prisons? What is the effect on prisoners of the inhumane treatment?

There are probably as many factors that lead women into the lifestyles that result in them being incarcerated as there are women locked up. Most commonly lack of self-esteem and lack of education, skills and other resources lead women to end up in prison. Many of these women come from broken and abusive homes where drugs and/or alcohol destroyed the lives.

Iva and Toni's addictions are not confined to drugs and/or alcohol, but extend to their toxic personal relationships. This is very common among the women I have come in contact with during my terms of incarceration, and even true for myself. Lack of both self-esteem and hope run rampant.

The author does not like the idea that some associate the plight of women being incarcerated with the men in their lives. "NBC did a TV special on women in prison and *Parade* ran an article on women in jail. A central point in both features was that most women end up in prison because of dependencies on men who are involved in crime...that this simplistic and harmful idea was presented by women journalists, who ought to know better, infuriates me" ("Afterword" 243).

However, unlike the author, it has been my experience and belief that the men in women's lives play a contributing part to their dilemmas. Like the two main characters, Iva and Toni, many women will continue to struggle with deliverance from their lifestyles when they continue to stay in toxic relationships that involve controlling men.

It is not my intention to remove all responsibility from the woman herself; we are each responsible for our own decisions. But many women have not been empowered with the knowledge and resources that give them options and make them self-sufficient. We all tend to go with those situations, persons and characteristics that are familiar. Women often seek self-worth through others eyes and ideas. Their lives revolve around what their man says, thinks and does. And based on their past, their idea of love is tainted with the acceptance of physical and sexual abuse. I, too, never felt complete without a man in my life.

In prison, the abuse that the characters experience and witness becomes a way of life. In jail they are subjected to verbal, sexual, physical and emotional abuse by their "caregivers." These are the very ones who have been hired and are paid to provide the women the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, medical care and *safety*.

One theme of the book is the abuse prisoners experience, and ninety percent of what McConnell describes either actually happened to her, or she was a witness to the events during her days of incarceration. The character Toni reflects on the general attitude of society towards prisoners' claims of abuse when she

finds herself with a marshal with a kind face and lets down her guard. "...What hits me right away, when I see how nice she looks, is that I got to tell her what goes on in that jail. If I can just tell somebody decent, they'll see that a stop is put to it. So I say to her, 'I have to tell you something. Terrible things go on in that jail. People nearly starve to death on the food in there. Sometimes they put so much pepper in it you can't eat it. They do it on purpose. I saw two cops beat a man in the stomach, and he didn't even do anything. And a girl got scalding water thrown on her because she wouldn't be quiet'" (133-34). The marshal becomes angry and responds: "Really. What kind of fool do you think I am?" (134). Then the character Toni comes to the conclusion: "What the hell made me think for one second that decent old Aunt Martha would listen to me, a 'big time' dope smuggler?" (134).

I used to be an Aunt Martha, "a disbeliever," until I saw and experienced the acts of discrimination, the hate, and the violence.

McConnel writes, "As a culture, we are not willing to believe what goes on in our jails and prisons." For the most part, most of us are taught and conditioned to believe that the person in the uniform with a badge is our friend and is there to serve and protect us. I mean officers, ministers, and teachers are our community leaders and our role models, who we look up to keep our communities safe and morally upright. Right?

In our age it is easier to believe that a priest has molested a child than it is to believe that an officer has raped, beaten or killed a prisoner, abuse which dates back to the biblical days.

McConnel writes, "I had a hard time getting anyone to believe the stories were based on truth. No one would publish them for a long time...Prisoners are often starved, beaten and locked in dark isolation cells for months at a time. A lot of them go crazy."

It is not so much that people disbelieve what is going on. Some staff have told me that they do believe that certain officers have committed alleged offenses against women here. The problem is that label which we have been given, defining our status in life: "convicted felons." Based on one's status in society, one's value and word is measured. Officials may "know" an officer has violated a woman and/or her rights, but ten offenders' words will not defeat one officer's claim.

This book came at a time when we just had two deaths that could have been prevented. One was a suicide. Both happened within a month's time.

It occurred to me one day that jailers, policemen, judges, teachers, ministers and parents are nothing more than people. They are not a special breed, they are imperfect people—like me and the women on my wing.