



# WomanView

Fall 2021

*The Newsletter of the Section for the Advancement of Women  
Society of Counseling Psychology (Div 17)  
American Psychological Association  
Morgan Grotewiel, Ph.D., Editor*

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## Notes from SAW Chair

*Nicole "Nic" Johnson, Ph.D.*

Hello SAW community,

Allow me to reintroduce myself, my name is Nic Johnson and I am so honored to be the chair of this amazing community! For those of you who closely follow our newsletters you may already be acquainted with me from our Spring 2021 newsletter, and if you aren't please check out my introduction [here](#) (p. 3).



For a synopsis, I am an Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology at Lehigh University and my research and clinical work focuses on the prevention and intervention of gender-based violence (e.g., violence against individuals with marginalized gender and sexual identities). I coordinate an amazing lab, [The Resistance](#)

[Lab](#), and am dedicated to intersectional feminism. The SAW leadership is committed to growing our membership and as such have waived our membership fee for the next year (2022), we ask you to share this initiative with your community!

As chair, I am dedicated to not only growing our membership by also diversifying it. In line with SCP's executive board, I am committed to Anti-Racism and decolonizing our section. One steps towards the decolonization of our section is engaging in conversations and initiatives to *both* continue to center women's voices *and* acknowledge the colonized reality of the gender binary and the importance of including our non-binary and trans masculine community within conversations of gender liberation. We are currently in conversation about our presence at APA 2022, so please look

out for future calls to be involved. My hope is to bring the conversation on decolonizing our section to the forefront of our programming at APA. I encourage the SAW community to reach out to me ([nij316@lehigh.edu](mailto:nij316@lehigh.edu)) with any questions and/or comments! Also, we invite contributions to our newsletters – we would love to hear from more of you. If you are interested in contributing to our newsletter please contact our newsletter editor, Morgan Grotewiel ([mgrotewiel04@webster.edu](mailto:mgrotewiel04@webster.edu)).

In solidarity,

Nic Johnson

SAW chair

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## Women: Trauma, Substance Use, and Incarceration

*Katya Marsh*

Many women in the criminal justice system have complex health histories which include diagnoses of substance use disorder and comorbid mental illness. Often, a trauma history links these mental health conditions, prompting affected women to use substances as a means of coping with emotional pain. Illegal substance use puts women at greater risk for involvement with the criminal justice system, creating a difficult pattern. Treatment, as an alternative to incarceration alone, offers the best hope for interrupting the cycle (American Psychological Association, 2004). Counseling psychologists working with woman-identifying clients who have a substance use disorder, trauma history, and a history of offending behavior can offer an effective and gender-specific approach to treatment by attending to the unique needs of this population.

Women in the criminal justice system present distinctive personal histories which differ significantly from those of men (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Addicted women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, and personality disorders. Female offenders are also more likely to report a history of physical and/or sexual abuse (Covington, 2007). While incarcerated, women typically do not receive mental health care or substance abuse treatment, and without treatment, they are at a higher risk for homelessness, violence, and repeated involvement in the system after release (Covington, 2007).

Within the criminal justice system, *desistance* refers to the process whereby someone abstains from crime. Women released from incarceration can desist from substance use and offending by engaging in targeted treatment and utilizing protective factors like, recovering from traumas and coming to engage in pro-social activities (Hammersly, 2011). For those who have historically been outcast and

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othered, finding supportive social connections can be an immense challenge (Cyrulnik, 2009; Hammersly, 2011). To understand the motivations for behavior and reasons why women commit crimes, an interpersonal context should be considered (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Often drug dealing, substance use, and addiction are primary aspects of a woman's life experience and have been a part of her social environment for a long time (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Behaviors based on trauma survival, histories of abuse, and poverty precede both substance use and criminality (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Although trauma and addiction are inherently connected issues for women, they have historically been treated separately. Addiction is a complex issue involving environmental and psychosocial challenges. When a person is presented with a trauma cue, or trigger, strong feelings of substance craving are elicited and the severity of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms can more strongly predict relapse—the implications of which apply directly to women in recovery (Saladin et al., 2003). Given that trauma cues trigger relapse, it is often appropriate to address trauma history and PTSD symptoms prior to or in conjunction with substance use treatment. At the very least, a continued understanding of these risk factors, triggers, and interactions is critical throughout treatment.



For women in the criminal justice system, comprehensive gender-responsive services must recognize and consider the context of women's lives. For services to be effective, an understating of women's pathways into trauma, crime, and substance use is critical, with treatment programs promoting reintegration into the community (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Program providers and helping professionals should endeavor to create informed relationships with their clients, rooted in understanding the larger social issues, risk factors, and individual circumstances at work for women.

*The following case study provides an example of trauma-informed treatment for a woman, "Jane," who was released from prison. "Jane" is a composite of several clients, with identifying information being significantly disguised to mask her identity.*

Jane a mid-30s single woman with no children and no relatives nearby lives independently. Jane was released from prison and referred to a local offender reentry program by her parole officer. Upon her release, a reentry support team consisting of a case manager and volunteers from the community, met with Jane weekly. Her primary treatment goals were for substance use disorder and addressing her extensive trauma history. Jane disclosed to the team that she had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and had a history of post-traumatic stress disorder.

While Jane had many friends still living close by, she indicated they were not positive influences. Jane's mother, with whom she is close, lived out of state. Jane spoke with her mother regularly but otherwise had no beneficial social connections. This had been a major source of difficulty for her, and she reported that she suffered greatly from the loneliness. Jane disclosed several traumatic events from her past including homelessness, a sexual assault, and multiple overdoses. She also experienced physical and emotional abuse. Jane expressed a need to address her trauma history as a preliminary

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step in the recovery process, and the team fully encouraged this approach, validating the experiences she shared. Jane's primary mental health concern was bipolar disorder and treatment was managed by the psychiatrist associated with her housing program. Additionally, Jane attended an Intensive Outpatient Program daily, where she addressed both mental health concerns and substance use.

Throughout her recovery process, the team offered resources and guidance to best meet Jane's specific needs. The team also inquired about concerning behavior to help Jane recognize vulnerabilities that might precede relapse. The team had a collective understanding that addiction, particularly with extensive trauma history and mental health concerns, is a complex and difficult situation, working continuously to find tools that were most supportive for her. After meeting for a year, Jane reported feeling positive about the work she was doing. She found additional support through attending a local Narcotics Anonymous meeting and began to create positive social relationships. She improved her living environment by planting a small community garden with her housing program, as gardening had been a source of comfort for her. As she continued to successfully meet her treatment goals, employment became a suitable next step, and she was excited to begin searching for job opportunities.

Reflecting on the literature, Jane's treatment approach aligns with the recommendations outlined above by considering the specific circumstances and psychosocial challenges she faced. This offender reentry program offered thoughtful support and guidance from a gender-informed perspective and worked both within and around the context of the client's life experiences. The program also involved various community-based care providers to work comprehensively to meet the Jane's needs. Their implementation of a gender-responsive support plan, and emphasis on reintegrating with positive social connections, meant that the services provided enabled significant progress. Through participating in treatment and meeting with the support team, Jane consistently met her goals for sobriety and began to knit herself into the social fabric of the community. She also continued to meet the expectations of the housing program, creating a more secure living situation. These achievements provided Jane with the stability necessary to continue her path toward fully supporting herself.

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## Women's Mortality by Suicide in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

*Silvia Canetto, Ph.D.*

A new 176-countries study by a multinational research-team including Cai, Chang, Yip, and Colorado State University's Canetto explored whether institutional discrimination against women, as indicated by the presence of laws that discriminate against women, is relevant to the variability by country in women's suicide mortality. The study also examined which discriminatory laws are associated with women's suicide rates in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).

Scores on laws discriminating against women in 176 countries were obtained from the Gender, Institutions and Development Database. Male-to-female (M/F) suicide ratios were the index of women's propensity for suicide.

To start with, LMIC had significantly smaller M/F suicide ratios than high-income countries (HIC)--which means that women's suicide rates were higher in LMIC than in HIC. As related to the research questions, in LMIC, higher levels of discrimination against women in laws about access to productive and financial resources were associated with smaller M/F suicide ratios, after controlling for male suicide rates and sex ratios at birth.

Based on the findings it was concluded that the relatively high suicide rates recorded among women in LMIC might be related to the high level of institutional discrimination women experience in these countries.

Specifically, in LMIC, where, by law, women had restricted access to productive and financial assets and to justice, and/or where they had unequal rights regarding citizenship, household-responsibilities, divorce, and inheritance, M/F suicide ratios were lower—that is, women's suicide rates were higher.

Based on these findings, the authors recommended that suicide theory, research, and prevention targeting women incorporate social-context and social-justice perspectives.

The study, which is entitled "Women's suicide in low-, middle-, and high-income countries: Do laws discriminating against women matter?" is published online in *Social Science & Medicine*.

Citation:

Cai, Z., Canetto, S. S., Chang, Q., & Yip, P. S. F. (2021). Women's suicide in low-, middle-, and high-income countries: Do laws discriminating against women matter? *Social Science & Medicine*, 282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114035>

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## Poetry by Ayla Goktan

### Relapse

I leave my house and the mood ring sky  
 crystallizes my desire, I dream  
 I swallow the road that hooks  
 like a piece of candy, I need  
 the wet bright dying leaves to taste  
 the way they smell, like soil  
 and smoke, beauty shocks me  
 into the present but not cleanly  
 enough, longing collapses me, under  
 everything there is you, I've carried  
 you where you don't belong,  
 the turquoise truck, the faded mailbox,  
 broodmares huddled by the fence,  
 the best I've felt all day and I ache  
 to share, it's selfish of me, I hear  
 what you'd say if you were here,  
 any fool can wrap their legs  
 around a man, I'm partial  
 to you, I'm less than whole

### House Party

The creature was screaming into a black cloud;  
 or, the creature was screaming, releasing a  
 black cloud.  
 We didn't know which—you hadn't finished  
 the painting. We were out of clove cigarettes.

There was nothing to do but go to the party  
 and bum smokes off some cellists, who knew  
 we played flute and smirked when we coughed.

As always, you charmed strangers, especially  
 men,  
 but when we were alone, you confessed,  
*I never wanted to be the object  
 of jealousy, I just wanted to be happy.*

I couldn't tell you the truth: you were too  
 beautiful  
 for happiness, as beautiful as my mother

in the photograph of her before she was a  
 mother.

In the morning you finished the painting.  
 We were surprised by our pity—we'd love  
 the creature if it were real, we swore to each  
 other,  
 then curled up with your cat and went back to  
 bed.

### The Cicadas Came While We Were Sleeping

*After the painting by Joni Sullivan*

My arm on the pillow was like a lighthouse  
 keeper's wife waving to her husband  
 from the kitchen window. The bed was  
 a sloped island, the sky a constant green.

Those cicadas with wings as big as cat ears  
 came when they heard me crying. As for the  
 man  
 you see beside me, head thrown back? I dreamt  
 him there, and dreamt the ring on my left hand.

You act surprised, but who are you to invent  
 stories to explain what you see? You can't  
 blame me for dreaming. What did I say  
 goodbye to  
 today, yesterday, last year? Just remembering

all the comings and goings in my life  
 sets me off, but the good thing is, cicadas  
 are pitiless, and ugly too. They curb my urge  
 to sentimentalize. I hear their tymbals

vibrating like a radiator in a distant room,  
 hissing like a bathroom tap left on—  
 far from how they sound in real life,  
 which is only like themselves.

Crooning now in my neon window,  
 they swear their species is new. Once here,  
 they never leave. I forgive them for thinking  
 they're the answer I craved.

**Notes from the Author**

For me, *Relapse* is about a particular experience of womanhood which involves romantic attraction between a woman and a man. (Obviously, this experience is not limited to heterosexual women.) Because of the patriarchy, women can feel shame around their “neediness” and desire for men. The speaker of this poem has internalized her shame so much it makes her feel “less than whole.” At the same time, though, the poem attempts to reclaim that “neediness”—to exaggerate and bring to the surface the desire which so many women try, in their shame, to hide. Because shame is about secrecy, I hope this resurfacing is somewhat healing.

For me, *The Cicadas Came While We Were Sleeping* is about the same “neediness” and desire seen in *Relapse*. In both poems the woman yearns for a man who is not present with her. In *The Cicadas*, she yearns for him so much that she almost dreams him into being in the bed beside her. Her desire is so big, though, that it extends to other elements of her world. The cicadas sense her craving for some kind of answer or fulfillment, be it from a man, a life without so many “comings and goings,” or even from therapy (which is not mentioned in the poem, but is always on my mind as a therapist in training). The cicadas think they can fill her up, but they are wrong.

Finally, *House Party* takes a view of womanhood that touches on beauty standards, the male gaze, objectification, motherhood, and friendship between women. The female speaker of *House Party* thinks that her female friend’s beauty is incompatible with happiness; it reminds her of the beauty her mother had before becoming a mother. I personally do not endorse all the views of my poems’ speakers, but in the case of *House Party*, I was trying to get at a real feeling I’ve had that beauty can sometimes be a curse in a patriarchal society. Beauty can sexualize women, making them the object of desire in men’s eyes and the object of jealousy in their female friends’ eyes. Unfortunately, this same society often strips sexualized beauty away from mothers and sees them one-dimensionally, as mothers only. Instead of pitying herself, her friend, and her mother, this speaker displaces her pity onto the creature her friend painted, and sinks into some of the indulgences of youth: parties, alcohol, cigarettes, and naps.

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When you renew your SAW membership this year, please consider becoming a Lifetime Member for a one-time payment of \$150. We appreciate our members and their support!



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**Section for the Advancement of Women (SAW)  
Membership Application for 2022**

To become a member of the Section for the Advancement of Women, complete the form below and mail it to:

Dena Abbott, PhD, Membership Chair  
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