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The Lady Behind the Mask and Other Writing

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The Lady Behind the Mask and Other Writing

Cover Page Footnote
This article is from an earlier iteration of Diálogo which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

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Behind this mask there is a pretty li'l lady. 
I will not, I can not tell a lie. 

But behind another mask 
There is an undercover lover, hoping. 

Behind the main mask is 
a mother of four, 
which she will do anything for. 
Living a single mother, 
a mother of four 
would sometimes 
be poor. 
With that mask 
I can put up with a daily task. 

Wishful thinking to forget 
about my past. 
Living it like a movie cast, 
between drinking and smoking. 
Who was playing the part? 
Now I feel it’s time for me to depart. 

I wear my mask 
through thick and thin. 
Praying to make it to the end. 
And without my mask 
I won’t be able to 
live up to my daily task. 

Looking into a photograph, I see 
a little girl with spiral sandy blonde hair 
as she paused by a pond with her hands on her hip 
picking her curls. 

My name is Michelle Lopez, a middle aged Mexican from 
San Diego, California. I am 32 years of age. I have had my ups and 
downs in life. Until my incarceration where it all went down on 
March 13, 2000. I was arrested for drug trafficking and got 
sentenced to eight years in prison. 

At the beginning of my incarceration I was booked into Cook County jail where I started taking poetry class, which I wasn’t too 
sure about at the beginning. But along down the road I loved it. 
Why?

Well, because it taught me who I was. And how I felt about myself. 
And what I put my family through. Which was through a lot of 
shit!! Excuse the language. Like they all say, you learn from your 
mistakes. Which I have. 

I’d like to say expressing your feelings or anybody’s feelings in 
poetry to me was wonderful. 

I’d like to send a message to all the Latina women out there not to 
take life for granted. Enjoy it. If you have children, love them and 
be the best role model to them. 

Thanks. 
—Michelle Lopez
The following are just some of many statistics:

Young: 75% are between the ages of 25 and 34
Low Income: 50% lived below the poverty line and were unemployed when arrested
Women of Color: African-American women are 8 times more likely to receive jail sentences than European-American women. In California, the state with the largest population of women in prison, 46% are African American and 30% are Latina.
Mothers: 78% are mothers of dependent children
Non Violent Offenders: 75% for non-violent offenses
Survivors of domestic or sexual abusive intimate relationships
Victims of Substance Abuse: 90% have a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse.
The main reason for the high increase in imprisonment of women is the ‘war on drugs’
Mentally ill: Due to insufficient mental health services in the community, massive incarceration of drug addicted women, the stresses of incarceration including sexual abuse by guards.

The number of prisoners with histories of drug abuse is growing but the proportion of prisoners receiving treatment declined from 40% in 1991 to 18% in 1997

Incarcerated women in U.S. prisons often suffer punishment far in excess of their state imposed sentence. At the hands of correctional officers they face widespread sexual abuse ranging from unauthorized body frisks to rape.

Thirteen states offer no legal protections for women against sexual molestation and abuse: The following states have no law: Alabama; Kentucky; Minnesota; Oregon; Utah; Vermont; Wisconsin. The following states have enacted laws since March 4, 1999: Massachusetts; Montana; Nebraska; Virginia; Washington; West Virginia—Amnesty International

An African American woman is eight times more likely than a European American woman to be imprisoned; Latina women experience nearly four times the rates of incarceration as European American women.—National Law Journal, November 2, 1998.

Jurors in the U.S. were polled as to what factors would make them most biased against a defendant, and perceived sexual orientation was chosen as the most likely personal characteristic to bias a juror against a defendant, three times greater than race. -National Law Journal, November 2, 1998.

In the past decade:

In the past decade, the female prison population has grown by 202%, the male by 112%. [1]
There are 17 times more men than women in prison. [3]
73% of women in prison are under 30 years of age. [2]
66% of women in prison were unemployed before incarceration.[2]
92% of women in prison had less than a $10,000 yearly income.[2]
58% of women in prison have less than a 12th grade education.[2]
54% of women in prison are women of color.[2]