

Humans are relational creatures, Lori said. We need connection and belonging. Babies need touch to survive just as much as they need food and shelter. When someone does an anti-social thing (like causing harm to another person), it is a very telling sign that they have been experiencing disconnection. Why put them away from any connection they may have (friends, family, society, communities) and put them in a cage and isolate them? You don't solve a problem with more of the problem.

Four main things that contribute to the likelihood that someone might commit violence are shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and inability to meet economic needs. If you experience one or all of those in your life, you are more likely to commit crimes. Then you are thrown into prison where you experience shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and inability to meet your economic needs. Trying to solve the problem with more of the problem.

America's idea of justice is punishment, But that is not justice. It does not help or change the person who committed the crime. It doesn't change them positively, help the person who was harmed, make the community safer, or decrease crime. It just satisfies our appetite to make another person suffer for what they did. Instead of helping, it creates a vicious cycle of its own. A person experiences trauma which leads to an act, which leads to prison where they are re-traumatized. Then they return to society with a whole host of barriers to success, employment, education, and housing. That in itself is a whole layer of new trauma which puts them in a worse position than when they started.

There is a whole other conversation about people in jail who did not do anything. There is a whole other conversation about corruption, planting of evidence, focus on getting a conviction, pushing to close cases, getting their numbers, which all leads to locking up the wrong person. [Watch The Innocence Files on Netflix]

Why are prisons filled with black and brown bodies? People commit crimes across racial lines at the same rate. Black and white commit the same crimes at almost the same rate. Over policing Black and Brown neighborhoods is the main reason. You will always find something where you are looking for it. Black and Brown people are arrested at higher rates rather than being given a warning or being given help. They are charged with higher crimes, more serious crimes. They have less access to council, because lawyers are insanely expensive. So they are given harsher sentences, even when Blacks and whites commit the same crime. One gets three years and the other gets ten years for the same crime.

We want abolition for everyone. Lori said she wanted abolition for her brother who is white. But said she would be remiss if she did not acknowledge white people who are incarcerated are collateral damage to a system that is really built to harm, extract, control, and exploit Black people. We can't have a conversation about abolition of prisons without discussing racism.

Lori pointed out that abolition is not about closing prisons and everything will be fine. It is about what we build up in its place. It is about community resources for mental illness and addiction treatment. It is about CDC classifying childhood trauma as a public health crisis, and everything that would come with that.

Imagine if the CDC did that, she said. We would get dollars for research which could raise awareness and would get intervention, prevention, and education. The things you could do with that simple move. If we were to change our perspective about what the real problem is, if we addressed systemic racism and poverty as the root causes, which they are, and if we addressed those, what a difference would be made.

In our next Issue we will have Part II of this series of articles. It will be the talk given by Jennifer Lewinski on: The Effects Police and Prison have on Families and Domestic Violence.