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SUBJECT: MP.8
DATE: 08/07/2011 07:23:35 PM

Mindful Prisoner #8
Us vs. Them
8-7-11

Another common prison dynamic is the division of people into us and them. This boundary marking is prevalent in prisons. You walk into the dining hall and it is clear where whites, blacks and US Latinos and international Latinos should sit. There are divisions within as well.

One boundary most all inmates respect is the guards versus prisoners. If an inmate talks too much to guards the rumor starts to circulate that they are a snitch. Easily the second worst "them" to be labeled (Sex offender or CHOMO is our affectionate title around the compound is the worst). If snitches or SOs were at higher security prisons we would get more than just names called and items stolen from your room. But I am at a low facility so violence is not ignored here as it is at medium or higher prisons.

While violence is not on the table, all sorts of social violence (name calling, verbal assaults) still are prevalent ways of dehumanizing the "them." But from a mindful perspective this actually hurts the person who throws the verbal assaults as well as the recipient. The dehumanizer is harmed by the acts of degrading the dehumanized.

One central effect of reinforcing the boundary is that we see them as separate from us. We lose our connection to ourselves when we deny our interrelationships to each other. Out in the world we can look around at our family and say of course we are related to each other. We are both human beings. Taking care of them is taking care of me. But in prison, we are thrown together with people we would never choose to spend time with. People from all sorts of lives and guilty of all sorts of crimes.

Are they really our brothers? Are they really apart of me?

Yes that is the simple but oh so hard answer.

Look for more on "Us vs. Them"