

'Orange is the New Black' author talks women in prison

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Piper Kerman speaks on the uptown campus about women in the prison system.
(Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Piper Kerman, known for her memoir *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, visited Tulane University Thursday to speak about women's experiences in the prison system.

"Women are 6 to 7 percent of any correctional system, and systemically, there's an understandable yet unfortunate tendency to focus on the 93 percent," said Kerman. "Women and girls in confinement are the most neglected of all prisoners because they are occupying a system and a setting which is designed by men, for men."

Kerman described her work with the Women's Prison Association (WPA), an organization that provides incarcerated, recently released and at-risk women with mentoring services, temporary housing and job training. Many of the women WPA serves are mothers.

"When it is a mother who is lost to prison or jail, the effect on the family is seismic," said Kerman. "Children are five times more likely to go to foster care if their mother is in prison versus if their father is in prison."

Children of incarcerated parents are often left behind, and it is the responsibility of the justice system to provide better support for those children while their parents are away, she said.

Kerman emphasized the importance of vocational, spiritual and educational prison programs in improving rates of in-prison violence and re-incarceration.

"I always think about the institution that made me who I am, which is a women's college," said Kerman. "And then I think about another institution that made me who I am, which is a women's prison. We invest a lot of money in both kinds of institutions. I think that more interface between those two institutions is incredibly beneficial and important."

The event was sponsored by the [Newcomb College Institute](#).

Samah Ahmed is a junior majoring in public health at Tulane University.

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