

research article

Disrupting the carceral narrative of gender-based and sexual violence

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This discussion seeks to critically explore the white, colonial narrative of gender-based and sexual violence that has justified and facilitated increased carceral power in responding to the social issue. In particular, I aim to emphasise the ways in which carcerality obscures the complex histories and dynamics of gender-based and sexual violence in order to individualise and privatise the problem. To demonstrate these dynamics, I will analyse: (1) the characterisation of perpetrators of gender-based and sexual violence as violent 'Others'; (2) the centring of white women's narratives in justifying increases to carceral power and implementing criminalising policies; (3) the extension of the carceral gaze through social work service provision; and (4) the fallacies of postfeminism facilitated by carceral logics. This discussion will conclude with exploring the possibilities of abolitionist social work and anti-carceral feminism in challenging the white narrative and creating space for partial histories to emerge.

Key words gender-based violence • sexual violence • domestic violence • carceral • anti-carceral • abolition

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Introduction

When considering social work's role in imagining *the end of history*, we must begin by acknowledging the ways in which social work has operated historically and contemporarily as an agent of state violence. Here, *the end of history* – the theme of this special issue – refers to the white, colonial historical narratives of modernistic progress that frame freedom as a destination that we, societally, have reached, which comes at the direct expense of social justice-related pursuits telling alternative histories (Moellendorf, 1992; Purtschert, 2010; Tibeau, 2011). In particular, social work has conformed to this colonial, carceral historical narrative by positioning its partnerships with, and allegiances to, the state as sufficient and effective in addressing social issues. Through this process, partial and hidden histories of marginalisation and violence at the hands of the state continue to be erased and subverted in order to protect the carceral system and social work's efforts to uphold and carry out its actions. For example, rather than addressing the root causes of gender-based and sexual violence

(GBSV), which lie in what hooks (2000) aptly names white, colonial, capitalist, imperialist cisheteropatriarchy, white liberal feminism and its associated social work practices have focused on individualised interventions that are removed from the structural causes of violence. Social work is, then, deeply implicated in framing *the end of history* as an end to many social problems, where the profession has acted as a deeply individualised, bureaucratic affair aiming to address societal deviants, rather than the radical practice that it often claims to be (Bergen and Abji, 2020; Gregory, 2021; Jacobs et al, 2021). This reality has evoked a collective call for radical change that actively engages with and addresses the falsified *end of history* to uncover and centre contested and contrary narratives.

This discussion aims to explore the history of carceral responses to gender-based violence interventions as it intersects with police involvement and social work's associated role. Specifically, I discuss the ways in which carceral logics have reinforced images of the violent 'Other' to justify the surveillance, arrest and charging of those who perpetrate GBSV. I argue that the white feminist movement of the 1970s/80s focused on reactive approaches to GBSV, rather than prevention-based approaches, thus reifying its relationship with, and reliance on, the carceral state. I then discuss the partial history upholding white, neoliberal feminism in the anti-violence movement and how 'postfeminism' has become a central motif reflecting the 'end of history', or the 'end' of the need for a feminist anti-violence movement. This discussion also draws upon reflections from abolitionist activists to understand how social work must address and confront its history of being inherently linked to policing and its specific implications on anti-violence work. While engaging with these works and reflections, I conclude this review with a (re)imagination of social work's responses to GBSV, which should be predicated on an intentional shift away from these carceral practices.

Context

Responses to GBSV have historically been led by representatives of the carceral state. In particular, police are often framed as the first point of contact for those who have experienced GBSV, and incarceration is generally deemed the most effective solution to control perpetrators and prevent recidivism, particularly for those who are not white, able-bodied and wealthy (Department of Justice, 2014; Stone-Mediatores, 2019; Cochran et al, 2021; Zgoba and Mitchell, 2021). White, liberal feminist advocacy efforts that sought to strengthen laws against GBSV – what Bernstein (2007) dubbed 'carceral feminism' – resulted in increases to concentrated power within the carceral state, such as the provision of mandated services often delivered by social workers, advancements in civil legislation for survivors and the continued enforcement of charging policies (Sartin et al, 2006; Augusta-Scott et al, 2017).

However, despite popular claims that pro-prosecution and 'tough on crime' stances taken up by the government have had positive impacts on preventing GBSV, sexual and domestic violence continue to be pervasive social problems. Although perpetrators are charged at an allegedly higher rate (Cochran et al, 2021), cases are often dismissed before or during any court proceedings, with many survivors feeling unsafe while being subjected to invasive and punitive legal proceedings (Law, 2014; Thuma, 2019).

Furthermore, anti-carceral feminists have pointed to the ways in which these increases to surveillance, policing, arrest and charging – which allegedly aim to control and suppress perpetrators of GBSV – disproportionately target and incarcerate Black,

Indigenous and racialised persons, including racialised survivors (Law, 2014; Kim, 2018; Taylor, 2018; Thuma, 2019; Davis, 2020; Kim, 2020). Anti-carceral feminism, which is led by women of colour in resistance to state violence, has served to challenge carceral feminist advocacy upholding the criminal justice system, point to the ways in which state violence is a form of GBSV and imagine new ways of addressing violence that do not rely on punishment (Davis, 2020; hooks, 2000; Kim, 2020; Kaba, 2021; Duhaney, 2022). As Desmond Cole (2020) aptly stated in his ScholarStrike Canada webinar, carceral responses to GBSV intentionally obscure and disguise the ways in which police commit GBSV against both survivors and perpetrators, thus perpetuating the issue by characterising carceral interventions as appropriate responses to intimate partner violence. Recent examples in mainstream news coverage alone have exposed the harm caused by police involvement in violence interventions, with local police services dismissing sexual assault cases as ‘unfounded’ at alarming rates (see, for example, Craggs, 2018; The Canadian Press, 2018; Hislop, 2020) and deploying excessive force against racialised persons at a disproportionate rate (Malone et al, 2020; Defund HPS, 2021).

This surveillance and control extend beyond the confines of physical carceral systems, such as police, law, prosecution, courts, probation and parole, to allied professions that carry out and facilitate carcerality. In particular, social work is implicated as a historically carceral profession, where the traditional ‘friendly neighbourhood visiting social worker’ would assess deservingness, independence and normalcy among people in marginalised communities seeking supports (Gregory, 2021). While it is often treated as a thing of the past, social work continues to extend legacies of coloniality, racism, violence, eugenics and policing through partnering and collaborating with the carceral state in various initiatives (Richie and Martensen, 2020; Jacobs et al, 2021; Leotti, 2021). Within the context of GBSV, research locating flaws within carceral responses have attempted to evaluate court-mandated ‘batterer-interventions’ (Sartin et al, 2006: 431), often carried out by social workers. Further, there has been exploration of access to affordable legal supports, ‘justice’ for survivors and police, legal and system reform to offer more ‘training’ around responding accordingly to GBSV. However, fulsome critiques of social work’s specific role as an agent of the carceral system have not sufficiently grappled with the ways in which these responses disproportionately impact marginalised persons and, subsequently, perpetuate the issue of GBSV (Kim, 2018; Leotti, 2021; Jacobs et al, 2021).

Characterising the violent ‘Other’

When considering the dominant white narrative of GBSV, it is important to note the ways in which it has intentionally pathologised perpetrators as violent ‘Others’ (Foucault, 1977; Ahmed, 2013; Gottzén, 2013; Taylor, 2019). Carceral logics rely upon the individualisation of social problems to protect the white, capitalist cisheteropatriarchal social structures that facilitate GBSV and to reinforce the control of the state in addressing this violence (hooks, 2004; Bumiller, 2008; Taylor, 2019). Incarceration serves several intersecting functions: to isolate, alienate, control, suppress and remove the violent ‘Other’ from the ‘safe’ community; to (re)allocate power and legitimise state interventions as valid and effective; and to dissolve community responsibility and accountability for preventing GBSV (Foucault, 1977; Ahmed, 2013; Taylor, 2019; Jacobs et al, 2021).

In his works, Foucault (1977) continually asserts that the carceral system fails to rehabilitate prisoners and reduces criminal acts to those that are independent of social context. Abolitionist writers have added that the system, in actuality, is working as it was intended to by disguising the punishment and isolation of marginalised persons as an alleged form of rehabilitation and necessary social control (Maynard, 2017; Kaba, 2021; Davis et al, 2022). As Taylor (2019: 123) describes in her analysis: 'Foucault argues that taking an unruly population of occasional lawbreakers and turning them into recidivist, pathologized offenders, has depoliticized crime. Put otherwise, the rationale behind prisons has made crime a psychiatric and sociological issue, rather than a political issue.' In the process of constructing criminality as an individualised, pathological concern, the state exercises disciplinary power; to avoid deviant labels, people learn to both police themselves and police others, thus framing the carceral state as efficient in separating those deemed 'deviant' from those deemed 'normal' and extending its powers beyond the physical confines of prisons (Foucault, 1977; Taylor, 2019).

These notions of disciplinary power and the construction of the abnormal criminal are especially relevant when considering the dominant history underscoring popular frames of 'the perpetrator'. As Foucault (1977) describes, the dichotomisation between 'normal' and 'abnormal' individuals thus determines who, where and how a person is to operate within society. Those labelled as 'abnormal' are incarcerated, alienated and isolated from society under the claim that these actions will keep society safer. Those who are constructed as 'normal' are granted a kind of freedom and mobility that evades the abnormal; however, they are subject to a parallel panoptic gaze that facilitates the internalisation of surveillance and the externalisation of the disciplinary surveillance of others (Foucault, 1977). Abolitionist writers, in particular, have discussed the ways in which whiteness is the state's ascribed 'normal' standard, reinforced by centuries of colonialism, imperialism, indentureship and militarism, liberally framed and diluted as 'discovery' and 'progress', which then constructs non-white and non-dominant identities as the 'abnormal' subject(s) of the carceral state (Ahmed, 2013; Joseph, 2015; Gregory, 2021; Jacobs et al, 2021; Kaba, 2021). Thobani's (2007) writings on 'exalted subjects' centre the experience of racialised and migrant peoples as being uniquely positioned as a violent 'Other' via crafting fear-mongering narratives of who is to be feared and (re-)enforcing anti-Black, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant racism.

These processes are further entrenched by the carceral state's cultivation of the image of the violent 'Othered' perpetrator of GBSV, which often relies upon popular myths that characterise them as deviant, pathological strangers and monsters lurking around the outskirts of the community and preying upon 'innocent', usually white, women (Ahmed, 2013; Taylor, 2019; Levine and Meiners, 2020). There have been several documented examples of how the state depicts these perpetrators through 'The Brute Caricature', for example, anti-violence campaigns have utilised images of a Black man's hand over a white woman's mouth to depict sexual violence and trafficking (Pilgrim, 2012; Nerys, 2018). These intersections between carceral constructions of abnormality, criminality, violence, the Other and disciplinary power subsequently depict social problems like GBSV as individual and specific to a dominant white narrative of history (Pilgrim, 2012; Ahmed, 2013; Taylor, 2019).

Racialised writers have highlighted the inextricable link between state violence and GBSV, particularly in white men's perpetration of violence against Black, Indigenous and racialised communities (hooks, 2000; INCITE!, 2016; Reclaiming Power and

Place, 2019). The obfuscation of individual and state-perpetrated violence by white cisheteropatriarchal systems and figures against marginalised communities is also situated within a broader history of the expansion of the prison–industrial complex, whereby Black, Indigenous and racialised peoples are subjected to the pervasive carceral gaze (Maynard, 2017; Cole, 2020). Here, labelling the racialised ‘Other’ as ‘bad’ and violent perpetrators seeks to free the ‘normal’ community from accountability for complex socio-political histories of violence, including the state for (re-)perpetrating this violence through carceral practices (Bumiller, 2008; Ahmed, 2013; Levine and Meiners, 2020). While the dominant historical narrative of GBSV centres whiteness, contested histories of anti-carceral feminist organising urge us to consider the oppressive functions of the white, colonial, imperialist, cisheteropatriarchal, carceral state and challenge its claims to be in the best interest of community safety (hooks, 2004; Joseph, 2015; Kim, 2018; Davis et al, 2022).

It is also important to apply intersectional analyses to the construction of perpetrators of GBSV in order to recognise their relationship with intergenerational trauma stemming from white, colonial, capitalist, imperialist cisheteropatriarchy (Crenshaw, 1990; hooks, 2004). In particular, men are subjects of this system, and while they benefit from it materially and socially, they also experience its violence. hooks (2004: 22) explores the violence that men are subjected to within cisheteropatriarchy; as she aptly notes, ‘[t]o indoctrinate boys into the rules of patriarchy, we force them to feel pain and to deny their feelings’. Crenshaw (1990) expands on this analysis by exploring the ways in which masculinity is temporal, contextual and specific to identity, where Black men, for example, are victims of white, colonial state violence via the carceral state. In the process of being subjected to and shaped by the cisheteropatriarchal gaze, men might perpetrate and perpetuate violence in their intimate partner and familial relationships (Crenshaw, 1990; hooks, 2004).

A brief history of carceral interventions to address GBSV

Prior to the 1980s, GBSV was widely conceptualised as a private matter that did not warrant intervention from the state (McMahon and Pence, 2003; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Lehrner and Allen, 2009). The social mobilisation that arose in the form of the battered women’s movement rewrote this public narrative, as many women advocated for increased protection and support for those experiencing intimate partner, sexual and familial violence (Bush, 1992; McMahon and Pence, 2003; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Hirschel et al, 2007). In the late 1980s through to the mid-1990s, Canadian law began introducing mandatory arrest policies in cases of domestic violence, where police are directed to lay criminal charges when they have probable cause to believe that assault occurred (Bush, 1992; McMahon and Pence, 2003; Hirschel et al, 2007). Simultaneously, during this period, specialised domestic violence courts also emerged to specifically address the prevalence of intimate partner violence and offer avenues for ‘justice’ to victims (Koshan, 2018).

The criminalisation of domestic violence perpetuated the process of pathologising individuals and families by locating the source of strain as inherent dysfunction within ‘problem people’ (Bush, 1992: 599). When families are then perceived as problematic factions existing outside of the societal majority, social mobilisation around the issue decreases, as the issue is conceptualised as a private matter affecting specific individuals that differ from the masses. Here, the carceral logic that isolates individual perpetrators

as being a threat to the greater community simultaneously relies upon victim-blaming narratives that position women and gender-diverse people as being responsible for preventing victimisation (Law, 2014; Thuma, 2019; Brockbank and Greene, 2022). In a parallel approach, survivors' experiences have then historically been conceptualised as individual issues, which then isolates survivors, particularly those who are not white women, from their own communities (Davis, 2011; Sankofa, 2015; Phipps, 2021).

However, it is also important to note that Black, Indigenous and racialised peoples living in the colonial state of Canada have long, contested and erased histories of being surveilled, policed, arrested, charged and incarcerated, despite the state's refusal to document or attend to these histories (Maynard, 2017; Thuma, 2019; Cole, 2020). In particular, there were several laws put in place, specifically related to human trafficking, that disproportionately and intentionally targeted racialised men in consensual relationships with white women (Pliley, 2014; Phipps, 2016; Lam, 2018; Loftus, 2020). For example, the US Mann Act 1910, also known as the 'White-Slave Traffic Act', resulted in the arrest, prosecution and incarceration of many racialised men travelling to and from Canada, among other countries, with white women partners under the guise of preventing human trafficking (Weiner, 2008; Pliley, 2014; Loftus, 2020). Similar laws around sex trafficking have continued to develop in Canada, where many sex-worker organisers have condemned the government's covert attempts to expand the carceral control of sex workers, many of whom are racialised, through increasing police powers to investigate and arrest anyone suspected of human trafficking (Lam, 2018).

Within feminist advocacy efforts to increase protections from the state around GBSV, carcerality emerged as a leading proponent of white women's appeals to the government (Bumiller, 2008; Phipps, 2016; Terwiel, 2020; Phipps, 2021). Bernstein (2007) originally coined the term 'carceral feminism', which sought to critique the ways in which white women led calls to criminalise sex trafficking and strengthen anti-rape laws (Phipps, 2016; 2021; Kim, 2018; Terwiel, 2020; Brockbank and Greene, 2022). Anti-carceral feminist thinkers expanding on Bernstein's (2007) work locate neoliberalism and neoconservatism as central to these carceral approaches to: (1) perpetuate the pathologised images of the violent stranger perpetrating GBSV; and (2) centre palatable narratives in advocacy efforts to justify the allocation of increased power to the carceral state (Phipps, 2016; Terwiel, 2020). While much of this work was touted as inherently feminist and liberating at the time, partnerships with the carceral state to carry out these alleged protections have been extensively critiqued by abolitionist writers for their tangible and severe implications for survivors of GBSV and sex workers, particularly for those who are racialised (Bernstein, 2007; Phipps, 2016; 2021; Sweet, 2016; Kim, 2018; Thuma, 2019; Terwiel, 2020; Richie and Martensen, 2020; Brockbank and Greene, 2022).

As discussed previously, pro-charging policies have stemmed from carceral feminist efforts to take GBSV seriously via strengthening legal responses. Mandatory and dual arrest policies in instances of intimate partner violence have been enforced in Canada since the 1980s and continue to be in use. Research has indicated that dual arrest policies have resulted in a stark uptick in arrests (Department of Justice, 2014). Racialised women and women of a lower socio-economic status are at greatest risk of being apprehended under 'dual arrest' practices, where both intimate partners are arrested under the suspicion of assault (McMahon and Pence, 2003; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Hirschel et al, 2007). Additionally, marginalised women are more likely

to be re-victimised in cases where the police either do not remove the perpetrator from the home or lay charges against the perpetrator without consideration of the safety of the victim in the long term (McMahon and Pence, 2003; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). When statistics about high arrest numbers and increased reports to the police are presented, they appear to deliberately invalidate the perceived relevance of modern feminist anti-violence movements, as GBSV is here conceptualised as: (1) a personal matter affecting pathologised, criminalised bodies outside of the 'normal' community; (2) an issue in specific contexts and neighbourhoods, thus further alienating marginalised communities; and (3) an issue that is being sufficiently addressed and redressed through police involvement and the incarceration of the violent perpetrator. Here, we begin to see *the end of history* embedded within discourses on GBSV: that we have progressed past the need for feminist movements.

Feminist anti-violence movements and the challenges of 'postfeminism'

Lehrner and Allen (2009: 668) discuss how the history of the mainstream feminist movement to end GBSV originated with white women, thus shaping 'exclusive practices and narrow analyses' that many advocates believe 'have never been resolved and continue to fester'. The movement has systemically excluded women outside of the dominant group by catering to white, middle-class women's perceived needs, including carceral responses to GBSV and corporate-model social service provision (McMahon and Pence, 2003; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Lehrner and Allen, 2009). With these shifts, only certain women's perspectives and voices are being recognised and heard. Moreover, as service provision is often informed by the white, middle-class experience, it infrequently reflects 'the diversity of women's lives and circumstances' (McMahon and Pence, 2003: 56) and suggests that GBSV affects everyone equally, thus essentialising the complex nature of the issue (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Davis, 2011). As many women outside of the white, middle-class norms do not feel represented in policy or practice developments, they often do not identify themselves within the feminist movement (McMahon and Pence, 2003; Grey, 2004). The universalisation of a white woman's condition, where the one-dimensional image of an oppressive patriarchy is of central focus in 'whitestream' feminism, fails to account for the entirety of the white, colonial, imperialist, cisheteropatriarchal, carceral state and the ways in which it facilitates specific experiences for different women and gender-diverse people (Grey, 2004; hooks, 2004; Davis, 2011; Sheehy and Nayak, 2020; Kendall, 2021).

Simultaneously, women representing the dominant identity may also reject feminist labels within the movement, as they feel their needs have been met through the institutionalised practices (McMahon and Pence, 2003; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; Lehrner and Allen, 2009). Kendall's (2021) reflections on hood feminism highlight and reject the 'whitestream' narrative of feminism that Grey (2004) also identifies, with particular attention to the ways in which conceptualisations of 'equality' have aimed to serve white women's interests in attaining the same rights and positionings of white men. Conversely, Sheehy and Nayak (2020: 270) quote the Combahee River Collective to discuss how Black feminists are 'made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism'. In this process, tensions within the feminist movement – and fundamentally different experiences along the axes of race and class – have been historically softened in favour

of more liberal ideas of equality, agency and choice. When many white middle- and upper-class women feel that they have achieved a sense of social and gender equality due to maintaining political, social and financial ‘rights’, many disengage from feminist movements, as they view them as simply not applying to them, regardless of the ways in which marginalised women continue to experience violence (Gamble, 2004; hooks, 2004; Davis, 2011; Frazier, 2021; Phipps, 2021).

We can look to a recent mainstream example of modern feminist movements to understand how the universalisation of a white woman’s condition has impacted non-white women engaged in anti-violence work. In 2017, the ‘#MeToo’ movement gained international recognition when several women celebrities publicly named those who had perpetrated sexual violence against them (Phipps, 2021; Me Too, no date). The hashtag trended across various social media platforms, and stories were published in high-profile news outlets, with many incorrectly attributing the origins of the movement to white women celebrities (Phipps, 2021). In reality, the ‘Me Too’ movement began with Black feminist Tarana Burke in 2006 and specifically aimed to document and elevate the voices and experiences of women of colour (Me Too, no date). What began as a movement seeking to draw attention to racialised women’s experiences of violence was then co-opted in 2017 to name rape culture in the entertainment industry; those who were featured at the forefront of the (re-)emergence of the movement were predominantly white, able-bodied women (Phipps, 2021). Moreover, the goals of the movement began to shift; recognition of women’s experiences was replaced by calls to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. Here, carcerality became a central motif of the movement, where the arrest, charging, prosecution, sentencing and incarceration of perpetrators were widely celebrated as a form of justice and accountability. Abolitionist feminists cautioned against reliance on the carceral system to bring justice to survivors; however, their critiques were often eclipsed by the central white narratives communicated in media (Cole, 2020; Davis, 2020; Phipps, 2021).

Following the decline of the popularity of the ‘Me Too’ movement, an emerging discourse of ‘postfeminism’ entered societal consciousness, with many seeming to believe that the successful prosecution of Harvey Weinstein and the social alienation of other prominent men who had been accused was the end of an era (Phipps, 2021). The social reckoning accompanying the movement gradually dissipated from news cycles, which, in many cases, was replaced by headlines questioning if ‘Me Too’ had become a ‘witch-hunt’ that targeted (white) men (Lanius, 2019; Phillips and Chagnon, 2020). As feminism has faced ongoing resistance in the form of ‘men’s rights’ movements, it has continued to be a contested term that many women reject on the basis of believing we have achieved gender equality and/or hoping to distance themselves from ‘man-hating’ labels (Grande, 2003; Gotell and Dutton, 2016). The decline of the modern feminist anti-violence movement reflects the white, colonial narrative underscoring GBSV, where many white women appeared to abandon the movement after it had lost its popularity, despite the realities of marginalised women and gender-diverse people’s experiences of violence (Phipps, 2021).

In these dynamics, *the end of history* emerges, where discourses of postfeminism – which here refers to beliefs that gender equality has been successfully obtained and that we have progressed past the need for feminism – perpetuate the individualisation of GBSV (Hall and Rodriguez, 2003; Gamble, 2004; Banet-Weiser et al, 2020; Frazier, 2021). In the dilution of anti-violence efforts, including de-gendering, depoliticising

and deradicalising structural analyses of white, colonial, imperialist cisheteropatriarchy, the dominant narrative of the pathological, violent Other committing violence in specific contexts is centred and carceral responses are deemed sufficient in addressing these issues (Smith, 2008; Beres et al, 2009; Levine and Meiners, 2020). In particular, white women's narratives are used to inform anti-violence laws and practices, which further alienates marginalised women and gender-diverse people from mainstream anti-violence efforts (Phipps, 2021).

This narrative intentionally obscures partial histories that challenge the carceral state as perpetrating mass violence against racialised, disabled, poor, queer, trans and criminalised communities (Maynard, 2017; Kim, 2018). The fallacies of postfeminism serve to dismiss GBSV as an individualised issue, with the historical roots of white feminist movements hailed as a liberatory thing of the past. In this process, feminism is framed as a redundancy and the feminist fight to end violence is dismissed as a movement marking the end of this white, colonial history. Despite these realities, it is important to note that marginalised women have largely rejected fallacies of *the end of history* via their ongoing work to redress violence against Black, Indigenous and racialised women, including the reports on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Peoples (MMIWG2S), Red Dress Day, Say Her Name and the femicide in Canada report, among many other local, national and international examples (Crenshaw et al, 2015; Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019; Wanuskewin, 2021; Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 2021).

Carcerality and social work

Conceptualisations of carcerality have extended beyond the confines of the police, prisons and law to allied professions delivering and carrying out the surveillance and punishment of the state, such as social workers (Lawston and Meiners, 2014; Sweet, 2016; Kim, 2018; Bergen and Abji, 2020; Richie and Martensen, 2020; Leotti, 2021; Sandbeck, 2012). As social work undertakes a role as an agent and extension of the carceral state, GBSV then becomes an issue where individuals who are deemed responsible for violence are treated, rehabilitated and controlled in mandated social service programming. Here, social work services and responses to GBSV that are linked to the carceral state become deeply individualised and removed from the alleged structural orientations of the profession (Sweet, 2016; Richie and Martensen, 2020).

Social work has been historically linked to the carceral state as a kind of tributary; mandated and individualised treatment programmes founded on carceral logics extend the surveillance, policing and punishment of criminalised people and communities (Bumiller, 2008; Lawston and Meiners, 2014; Sweet, 2016; Richie and Martensen, 2020; Leotti, 2021; Sandbeck, 2012; Jacobs et al, 2021). Many of these services and programmes are funded by carceral systems, thus shaping the scope and approaches of the agency (Ministry of the Attorney General, no date). In particular, services and programmes that seek to rehabilitate or treat service users through constant surveillance and threats of punishment, where the supposed goals are, for example, to support 'clients' in becoming 'self-sufficient' and 'independent', facilitate disciplinary power, as people learn to police themselves. In the case of GBSV, social workers frequently facilitate mandated violence intervention programmes like the Partner Abuse Response (PAR) programme in Canada (Augusta-Scott et al, 2017) that utilise punitive policies to monitor and control service users, such as strict expectations

around attendance, behaviour and payment that participants must fulfil to stay within the conditions of the probation or court order. Those in violation of these policies, regardless of extenuating circumstances, risk being discharged from the programme, reported to the court or probation, and arrested for being in breach of their order. Moreover, these programmes frequently rely on risk-based assessments of service users to determine if the individual is at risk of reoffending, being disruptive in the group and/or dropping out of the programme (Sartin et al, 2006; Gottzén, 2013; Roy et al, 2013; Leotti, 2021).

Beyond mandated violence intervention services, support options for survivors of violence are also often funded by carceral systems. For example, in Canada, violence against women (VAW) services and Victim Quick Response Programs (VQRPs) are fully subsidised by either government or police services, which then defines the scope and ethics of the agency delivering those services (Ministry of the Attorney General, no date). Social workers providing these services may be required to report statistics about service users to governing bodies to sustain their funding, limit their services to ten-session models (or any number of sessions deemed sufficient by the funding body) and abide by ethical standards that require them to report specific concerns to the police (Smith, 2008; Beres et al, 2009; Leotti, 2021). In working closely with carceral systems, social work has been critiqued by survivors for failing to create spaces where Black, Indigenous, racialised, disabled and/or poor women and gender-diverse people feel safe to access these services without fear of police involvement (Sweet, 2016; Rasmussen and James, 2020; Richie and Martensen, 2020; Gregory, 2021; Leotti, 2021).

Anti-carcerality and the possibilities of radical social work

Abolitionist feminists have resisted the white, colonial narrative of GBSV to emphasise how survivors and perpetrators are actively harmed by the carceral state and its interventions (Bumiller, 2008; Kim, 2018; Taylor, 2018; Kim, 2020; Levine and Meiners, 2020; Kaba, 2021; Davis et al, 2022). Anti-carceral movements led by women of colour and survivors of violence aim to identify state violence as another iteration of GBSV, where carceral logics intentionally obscure the violence that the police, law and prisons perpetrate against survivors and criminalised subjects (INCITE!, 2016; Taylor, 2018; Kim, 2020). In the process of deconstructing carceral logics, abolitionist feminists actively work to (re-)politicise the feminist anti-violence movement by centring the lived experiences of racialised survivors and deliberately naming the harm done by carceral practices (Law, 2014; Taylor, 2019; 2018; Kim, 2018; 2020; Thuma, 2019). Foundational thinkers, including Davis (2020), Kaba (2021) and Maynard (2017), among many others, describe abolitionism as a process of rejecting the universalisation of whiteness and carcerality as a standard of 'normalcy', whereby uncritically accepted carceral practices imbued within dominant social institutions must be challenged (Lawston and Meiners, 2014; Kim, 2018; Leotti, 2021). To do so, abolitionist feminists push us to think about: (1) the (re-)traumatisation of survivors in the legal system; (2) the mass incarceration of Black, Indigenous and racialised persons; (3) the harm that happens in prisons and adjacent social services enacting the carceral gaze; and (4) the public fallacy of rehabilitation cloaking the realities of punishment in carceral systems (Law, 2014; Taylor, 2018; Kim, 2020). Instead of reforming the system and (re)allocating power to the carceral state, abolitionists urge us to imagine

alternative approaches to social problems (Law, 2014; Taylor, 2019; 2018; Kim, 2018; Bergen and Abji, 2020; Cole, 2020; Davis, 2020).

It can be difficult to imagine social work having a role in abolitionist efforts when considering its deeply colonial history as an agent and extension of the carceral state. Emerging work from activists has cautioned against the suggestion that social workers could replace police in crisis interventions because it glosses over social work's carceral origins (Rasmussen and James, 2020; Douglas et al, 2021; Jacobs et al, 2021). However, grass-roots social service agencies that social workers operate within could play a significant role in decarceral practices that seek to dismantle collaboration and partnership with the carceral state (Bergen and Abji, 2020; Richie and Martensen, 2020; Jacobs et al, 2021; Leotti, 2021). While this can be deeply challenging work, especially considering the ways in which social work is often funded by the carceral state, it is necessary to uncover the erased histories of GBSV.

Earlier in this article, I argued that many anti-violence services in Canada receive funding from carceral systems; however, it is important to note that many grass-roots primary prevention programmes and survivor-centred services use funding to implement decidedly decarceral work. For example, local sexual assault centres running men's allyship programming have collaborated with the Canadian federal government to imagine services that engage men and boys in violence prevention work before violence happens by reframing it as a community responsibility and challenging binary labels of 'victim' and 'offender' (for example, Male Allies, no date; MentorAction, no date; Claussen, 2017; Brockbank and Greene, 2022). Further, Indigenous-led programmes, including the 'I Am a Kind Man' campaign (Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin, no date) and Warriors Against Violence (no date), have centred restorative and transformative justice practices that call Indigenous men to collectively heal from colonial trauma and challenge GBSV in their communities.

Further, there are many examples of survivor-led and community-based services that resist punitive policies as a tangible example of decarceral social work practice. Specifically, organisations that actively name white, colonial, imperialist, cisheteropatriarchal, carceral violence as a form of GBSV begin to resist the individualised approaches that deradicalise the work (Richie and Martensen, 2020; Jacobs et al, 2021; Leotti, 2021). As a local Canadian example, the Sexual Assault Centre of Hamilton and Area (SACHA) penned a statement of solidarity during nationwide calls to defund the police and pledged to work with survivors independent from the carceral state, such as through not inviting the police to the annual Take Back the Night march (SACHA, 2020). These practices can be enacted on a micro level by respecting and honouring survivors' decisions about whether they want police involvement in any capacity, and on a macro level by leading advocacy efforts that publicly reject carceral partnership and reliance (Law, 2014; Kim, 2018; Thuma, 2019; Kaba, 2021; Leotti, 2021; Davis et al, 2022).

Conversely, abolitionist social work with people criminalised for GBSV must resist enacting the carceral gaze on service users, which includes individualising perspectives of their uses of violence. These practices would involve micro-level interventions, such as refusing to use pathologising terms like 'sex offender', 'abuser' or 'criminal' when working with service users, and rejecting penal practices that limit service users' mobility and access to the service. For example, PAR programmes could adjust their institutional policies and facilitation manuals to remove pathologising language around 'offenders' and refuse to enact practices that restrict service users' access (for example, rules about

discharging service users for being late or being absent). These approaches must be paired with macro-level interventions, for example: seeking to fund and facilitate programmes that prevent violence before it happens; developing programmes and services that acknowledge the over-representation of racialised persons in criminalised populations; and refusing, where possible, to partner with or further the reach of carceral systems (Taylor, 2018; 2019; Levine and Meiners, 2020). Ilea (2018) offers a framework for this kind of work in their exploration of the Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) model that has been used to work with those who have been criminalised for sexual offences, which focuses on providing a range of holistic services to support service users' transition out of the carceral system via providing robust mental health, housing, employment and social supports. In this process, social work could play an active role in deconstructing the image of the violent Other perpetrating GBSV and pushing back against binary labels of 'good/normal' and 'bad/abnormal' that allow the community to alienate perpetrators and dodge accountability for GBSV (Sweet, 2016; Taylor, 2019; Levine and Meiners, 2020; Richie and Martensen, 2020).

Conclusion

Social work's foundation is built upon the white, colonial narrative about GBSV that has: (1) suggested that perpetrators are violent strangers; (2) centred the experiences of white women to justify increases to carceral power over responses to GBSV; (3) obscured the harm done by the carceral state; (4) enabled the fallacy of postfeminism to dissolve interest in feminist anti-violence movements; and (5) extended the carceral gaze through social services. If we imagine *the end of history* as ending with the feminist anti-violence movement, we dismiss and invalidate the ongoing efforts of abolitionist feminism in challenging bigotry within the feminist movement, the carceral responses deployed in GBSV interventions and the continued violence that marginalised women and gender-diverse people experience (Davis, 2011; Maynard, 2017; Cole, 2020; Douglas et al, 2021).

As social work is an architect of white, colonial history and an oppressor of contested histories, it must be held accountable for redressing its role in GBSV and state violence. Embracing the possibilities of abolitionist social work, while also understanding that social work is a colonial profession that may never be absolvable, is a necessary step in defunding, dismantling and abolishing the carceral state. These practices would involve leaning into the discomfort of micro-level anti-carceral actions, while also centring efforts to collapse partnerships with the carceral state on a broader level. Before we can move to solutions about GBSV, we must contend with the ongoing histories of harm that social work remains unaccountable for.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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