



Contemporary Justice Review

Issues in Criminal, Social, and Restorative Justice

ISSN: 1028-2580 (Print) 1477-2248 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gcjr20>

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To cite this article: Elizabeth Whalley & Colleen Hackett (2017): Carceral feminisms: the abolitionist project and undoing dominant feminisms, Contemporary Justice Review, DOI: [10.1080/10282580.2017.1383762](https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2017.1383762)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2017.1383762>



Published online: 05 Oct 2017.



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Carceral feminisms: the abolitionist project and undoing dominant feminisms

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ABSTRACT

In this article we explore the intersections between white liberal feminisms and the carceral state, particularly within nonprofit agencies. We find a strong collusion between 'dominating feminisms' and the carceral state, through funding structures and the belief that the legal system can provide protection to victimized women. We use evidence from our own research on rape crisis centers and gender-responsive programming for criminalized women, respectively, to investigate how some nonprofit agencies further threaten the safety, stability, and self-determination of women of color, queer women, transgendered clients, economically disadvantaged women, and disabled women. As a result, when white liberal feminists seek to intervene in the criminal legal system, we often see reform efforts that directly strengthen institutions that perpetuate economic exploitation, colonialist notions of progress, and white supremacy. We conclude our article with an exploration of some guiding principles within *noncarceral* antiviolence organizations that espouse a liberatory feminist framework.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 August 2016
Accepted 5 September 2017

KEYWORDS

Feminist theory; prison abolition; critical prison studies; feminist criminology; critical criminology; antiviolence movement

Introduction

Although criticisms of the penal system have been circulating among marginalized communities for several decades, the US is now witnessing a peculiar historical moment in which bipartisan political alliances and white publics are adopting similar critical assessments. Popular critiques often place the blame for the overreliance on incarceration on conservative law-and-order politics and overt white animus towards 'dangerous' racialized others, such as the Reagan-era crack-cocaine laws and their attendant moral panics. Many in the academic and activist communities are celebrating this shift in rhetoric, viewing it as an opportunity to enact substantive change in penal policy. Yet we wish to add to the growing analysis that points to the complicity of *liberal* political agendas in grossly expanding the prison system in the US (Beckett & Murakawa, 2012; Murakawa, 2014; Schept, 2015). In this article, we explore the ways in which carcerality, as a system and a set of logics that are deeply entrenched in gendered racial frameworks, is mobilized by and expanded through liberal feminist discourses.

In particular, we explore the role that hegemonic and dominating feminisms play in emboldening carceral systems of racialized social control as a way to combat gendered violence and to soften the effects of the prison system on women's lives. We define 'dominating feminisms' as a version of feminism that seeks to leverage formal institutional powers – including the carceral state – vis-à-vis a white supremacist state order with the hope of securing equality between (cis-gendered) men and women. This articulation of feminism catapulted the issues of sexual and gender violence into cultural discourse during the 'second wave' of feminism during the 1960s through the '80s. Many feminists of this era contested the idea that sexual and gendered violence were private and individual matters, positioning such behaviors instead as public and political issues. As a result, mainstream and largely white feminist organizations, such as the National Organization for Women, arose to address such issues and to reform institutions that enabled and perpetuated patriarchal violence. In appealing to the state for greater access to legal rights and more protection, mainstream feminist organizations continue to believe that a successful intervention to patriarchal violence for 'all' (white and cis-) women can be secured through legislation, greater police presence, and a general expansion of penal power. It is both the failure of these organizations to interrogate their own use of structures of oppression as well as their complicity in state practices of oppression that render their feminisms 'dominating' – as opposed to liberating. While such a conceptualization encompasses many different systems, in this article we use the examples of rape crisis centers (RCCs) and gender-responsive programming for criminalized women as organizations that outwardly purport to acknowledge the role of interlocking oppressions while covertly advancing mainstream, white feminist agendas.

After defining and problematizing dominant feminisms, state protectionism, and the growth of the carceral state, we focus our analysis on three points. First, we point to the role of legislation and continued rhetorics in anti-rape organizations and scholarship in maintaining implicit preference for white, middle-class, heterosexual cis-women populations (Bumiller, 2008; Corrigan, 2013; Matthews, 2005; Stringer, 2014). By aligning with the victimology of the criminal within the criminal legal system, anti-rape organizations uphold the need for carceral control to disrupt gendered violence. Second, we discuss the ways in which 'gender-responsive programming' for criminalized women (Bloom, Owen, Covington, & Raeder, 2002), despite its benevolent intentions, renders certain marginalized populations as 'dysfunctional' and legitimates the function of the penal system to intervene in welfarist concerns (Heiner & Tyson, 2017; Musto, 2016). Third, we focus on the importance of community in fighting for liberation from white supremacist heteropatriarchal social orders and the carceral state. In expanding collective notions of 'safety,' we consider more liberatory feminist options in the efforts to deal with heteropatriarchy and the interpersonal and state violences that arise from structures of domination.

In our examination into the complicity of feminist nonprofit agencies in expanding the reach of the carceral state, we borrow a conceptualization of the 'shadow state' from Wolch (1990). The shadow state is mechanized through the increasing role of governmentally controlled nonprofit agencies in administering direct social services cut by the neoliberal deregulation of capitalism (see also Beckett & Murakawa, 2012). Within the shadow state, dominant feminist organizations do not only serve the state, but also come to resemble the capitalist heteropatriarchies within it. Building from Wolch's concept in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, the INCITE! organization (2007) outlined the existence of the 'non-profit industrial complex' (NPIC), which Dylan Rodríguez defined as 'a set of symbiotic relationships that link

together political and financial technologies of State and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political discourse' (2007, pp. 21–22). INCITE! critiqued the NPIC as a trillion-dollar industry that performs the work of the state by keeping forms of inequality in place (Rodriguez 2007). The organization points to the proliferation of neoliberal capitalism as linked to the rise of the NPIC. The financial instability of neoliberal capitalism pushes dominating feminisms further into reliance on state structures. By latently supporting these agencies, the US government secures oversight and decision-making authority over organizations that might otherwise be oriented towards social justice aims and pacifies the communities that are most affected by federal cuts. In their discussion of how the US progressive movement's agenda misdirects SJ movements, Lethabo King and Osayande (2007, p. 81) characterized social justice (SJ) organizations within the NPIC as such:

... many white-led social justice non-profits proclaim, in everything from their mission statements to their funding proposals, that they are committed to improving the social and economic conditions of the oppressed communities in which they operate. But alongside these proclamations exists a persisting hierarchy and circulation of capital within the social justice movement.

RCCs and gender-responsive reentry programs are within this shadow state NPIC. While making claims to identifying with SJ work, the organizations are representative of government-backed services that are regulated by both grant requirements and their affiliation with the courts and mental health systems.

Dominating feminisms believe in the neutral force of the legal system to meaningfully redress social problems and gender inequalities (Schneider, 1986). Using these logics, popular movements and mainstream (white) feminist organizations have pushed to leverage state power in order to achieve their political aims. Neoliberal cuts to social services have pushed mainstream feminist organizations into dependent relationships on state funding and state solutions, which at once adheres to and displaces the responsibility for state violences (INCITE!, 2007). Divorced from an analysis of colonization, state repression, and other forms of state-sponsored violence, dominating feminisms believe in the promise of democratic rights vis-à-vis the legal system. Yet, the notion that the US legal system can provide freedom, equality, and protection for all frequently elides past and present examples of *legalized* heteropatriarchal racism. A calculus of human worth has been – and still is – encoded into US law that sorts and ranks people based on their closeness to or distance from the 'desirable' citizenship status of white or white-assimilating, heterosexual and gender-conforming, middle- or upper-class, and employable (Jung, 2011). The US's use of segregation laws targeting racialized bodies, sodomy laws regulating 'deviant' or 'queer' sexualities, bathroom policies that demonize transgendered individuals, and the forced sterilization of incarcerated women, to name just a few examples, demonstrate the tendency for the legal system to encode a hierarchical ordering of bodies, targeting those at the bottom of the social ranks for surveillance, exclusion, and/or violence (Cacho, 2012).

As an advanced liberal democratic nation, the US legal system is supposedly predicated on the personhood and moral equivalence among its citizens, yet access to state protection is differentially assigned based on citizenship status, gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexuality, and physical ability. Moreover, as political philosopher Charles W. Mills observes, the legal presumption of moral egalitarianism 'conceals the dominant role of one subset of humans (white males) in the shaping of the modern world; and the accompanying denial of equal moral status to the majority of the population in the resulting modern sociopolitical order' (2011, p. 37). Liberalism, therefore, is often a façade that masks material and power

differentials between groups by rhetorically promoting 'equal rights,' yet does little to unearth and remedy structural inequities. Both liberal and conservative forces produce and maintain asymmetrical power relations between differentially situated groups; yet the liberal call for 'fairness' often accelerates the powers of the punishing state to capture more bodies instead of scaling back or offering protection through different means (Murakawa, 2014, p. 15). Relatedly, Spade (2013) addresses how the 'discrimination principle' within much of civil rights legislation fails to address the structural violences enacted by the state, particularly those of white supremacy. The state is unable to provide equal protection and non-discrimination to those within its borders because the state *itself* enshrines white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and transmisogyny into its legal codes – a structure that operates through nonconsensual imposition, coercion, and at many times, brute force. Although there is some amount of discussion among mainstream feminists about the ways in which US socio-legal systems were built by and for white heteronormative men, they continue to push for superficial reforms of state power with the belief that eventually, equality will trickle from the top down.

Dominating feminisms are inattentive to the ways in which heterowhiteness is encoded into law; therefore, these 'feminist' frameworks fail to consider the myriad ways that power and oppression operate on and through differentially situated women (Aziz, 1992). Due to the ahistorical understanding of the state and the ways it reinforces gendered-racial disempowerment, dominating feminists continue to trust in the state to offer protection to those vulnerable to patriarchal violence. Those who adhere to such a power-evasive frame appeal to the criminal legal system to intervene in violence against (cis-) women by implementing and/or enhancing penalties against 'perpetrators.' The carceral turn in feminism, particularly on issues related to patriarchal violence, has coincided with and reflected the neoliberal state apparatuses that govern racialized and poor bodies through crime (Bumiller, 2008; Simon, 2006). Bernstein notes in her conceptualization of carceral feminism, as it relates to anti-trafficking movements and laws that, 'Rather than pursuing materially redistributive strategies, the versions of feminism that have survived and thrived are those that deploy the mutually reinforcing sexual and carceral strategies that a reconfigured neoliberal state is likely to support' (2012, p. 254). Carcerality is a constituting logic within US society, as well as beyond its borders, and is problematically accelerated through and legitimated feminist organizations within the shadow state, leading to an amplification in policing and penalty. The cries for enhanced protections for battered, victimized women often exercise an over-reliance on outsourcing safety to the criminal legal system, constituting a type of 'carceral protectionism' that blends punishment with 'care' for survivors and victims (Musto, 2013, 2016).

Yet, as Victoria Law observes of dominant feminist frameworks, 'This stance does not acknowledge that police are often purveyors of violence and that prisons are always sites of violence' (2014). Because of the lack of historicizing and problematizing the state and its role in upholding heterowhiteness, dominating feminisms mobilize penal interventions to protect some women at the expense of many women. Using the prison system and other methods of formalized social control to gain protection from the state mobilizes additional violences in marginalized women's lives. Carceral feminisms deploy narrow definitions of violence that focus on private abuses committed against (cis-) women within heterosexual relationships or among family members (Price, 2012), omitting the violences committed by immigration raids and detention centers, policing of poor communities of color, and johns

who buy or trade sex from cis- and transwomen. Police and prisons perpetuate hazardous, racialized violence against women of color, queer women, transwomen, and economically disadvantaged women (INCITE!, 2006).

In appealing to the carceral state, mainstream liberal feminists claimed – and continue to claim – to represent all women, while including only the voices of elite white women (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010). These (mis)representations work to exclude many women, most often women of color, women with low socioeconomic statuses, Indigenous women, and transwomen (Crenshaw, 1993; Davis, 1981; Deer, 2015). This brand of feminism often flattens difference and articulates a politics of ‘sameness’ in which all (cis-) women are subjected to patriarchal violence in similar ways (Price, 2012). This political craftwork is for the sake of promoting a unified message, yet it evades a power-conscious analysis. Rhetorically framing a social movement and agenda in a way that addresses similarities may be strategic at times, yet dominating feminisms dilute critiques of patriarchy and ignore the interlocking effects of race, sexuality, gender non-conformance, class, indigeneity, legal status, and ability. As a result, mainstream feminist groups and organizations often drown out the more radical tendencies of liberation-based and women-of-color feminist groups, arguing that race or class frameworks might ‘detract’ from ending gendered violence. By relying on imprisonment to solve social problems instead of learning from social movements (Gilmore, 2007), dominating feminisms work to expand the carceral state through a white liberal frame that ignores an analysis of power and oppression. We will explore two ways in which the feminist arm of the state mobilizes penal power: sexual assault response and gender-responsive programming. We conclude this paper with discussing social movement -based interventions to address heteropatriarchal and white supremacist systems of domination in an attempt to undo the damage done by the carceral state and dominating feminisms.

Sexual assault responses and rape crisis centers

Dominating feminisms’ normative treatment of sexual violence hinges ‘legitimate’ victim status to engagement within state institutions. As a result, mainstream feminist academics and anti-rape organizations reinforce the existence of these power structures and view retributive punishment as the solution to sexual violence, mandating the need for the prison industrial complex. Taken together, the treatment of sexual violence by dominating feminisms fails to examine the root causes of such abuse and effectively supports the criminal legal system’s exploitation of rape tropes to justify mass incarceration.

Rape crisis centers (RCCs) were first established during the second wave of feminism as explicitly feminist grassroots organizations, and are seen as representative of the mainstream anti-rape movement (Enke, 2007; Gornick, Burt, & Pittman, 1985; Maier, 2008). The first RCCs rejected anti-feminist notions of bureaucracy and hierarchy in favor of community and collectivity, and were notably in opposition to the police and legal systems that had historically mistreated and abandoned victims (Byington, Martin, DiNitto, & Sharon Maxwell, 1991; Maier, 2011). This anti-authoritarian stance radically shifted in the decades following, and mainstream anti-rape activism is now closely aligned with the criminal legal system and carceral logics. Increasing neoliberalization severely reduced funding to anti-rape services in the 1990s and 2000s, and after the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, available funding was tied to evidence-based governmental grants and associations with state-affiliated institutions (Bumiller, 2008). In the face of such state dependency, RCCs began

trading-off their anti-establishment missions in favor of financial stability, using bureaucratic status markers to establish their legitimacy with state-endorsed systems they rely upon (Martin, 2005).

In addition to situation of RCCs within the aforementioned NPIC, we view the matrix of systems that respond to sexual assault (hospitals, law enforcement, and court systems) as a *sexual assault response complex*. In order to display legitimacy and productivity for funders, RCCs have moved away from alternative healing, education, and prevention in favor of increasing provision to formal institutions within this complex. For example, in 1995 virtually all RCCs in the US listed a locally run crisis hotline among their services (Campbell, Baker, & Mazurek, 1998). Over three years of ethnographic field research over four years at a US rape crisis center in the Western United States, the first author observed the 24/7 volunteer hotline become outsourced to a national response line in order to allow the center to focus exclusively on response to police and hospital calls. In the brief explanation to staff and volunteers, the center's leadership emphasized the importance of a dependent relationship with the police and district attorney over the need for a localized response to victims.

Given the context of the US private healthcare system, sexual assault response could also be viewed as a sexual assault response *industrial complex*, in that carceral systems profit from violence occurring. In utilizing the healthcare system for rape response, multiple industries profit from the perpetual cycle of sexual violence. During the process of a forensic sexual assault exam at the hospital, victims are disembodied as their bodies are catalogued and transformed into crime scenes, with the forensic collection of evidence prioritized over the desires and boundaries of the victim (Mulla, 2014). Having been instructed not to eat, drink, urinate or bathe before the exam, victims regularly wait for four to six hours in emergency rooms for their exams. Following the exam, victims are regularly sent medical bills with thousands of dollars in charges. While such exams are ultimately paid for by the state or private insurance, this knowledge of deferred payment depends on the impetus of the victim or RCC advocate: if the victim is not informed, they may believe they must pay the bill themselves. Samenna Mulla (2014) drew such a connection in her analysis of sexual assault emergency room responses, finding the economics of healthcare played out between hospital staff, rape crisis advocates, and sexual assault victims, which turned hospital staff into legal arbitrators of the state, determining legitimacy of victims to 'state-sponsored' medical service. In her discussion of how the prison industrial complex permeates culturally, Angela Davis (2016) implicates mass incarceration and health care industry as both linked to the commodification of human services through the destructive force of global capitalism. Sexual assault response is similarly linked to such commodification. Within the sexual assault response complex, the profit margin from pain is enormous.

As Rose Corrigan (2013) discusses in her study of RCC advocates, many RCCs have stopped publicly presenting themselves as feminist organizations in an effort to improve their perception by criminal legal systems. Shana Maier's (2008) analysis of the role of feminism in modern RCCs found that while the majority of RCC directors identified their centers as feminist, they were often hesitant to use the label of feminism due to the possibility of alienating victims, advocates and funding sources. Within the field research at an RCC conducted by the first author, this RCC 'covert' feminist identification was justified by management as promoting greater inclusivity to potential male clients. By making claims to feminism, social justice, and social movements intra-organizationally and with other social justice organizations, RCCs propagate dominating feminisms while serving a historically dominant sex

categorization. Corrigan (2013) described this carceral entanglement as a convergence of conservative and feminist interests, reaffirming the importance of state logics even as feminists were citing such systems as causing and maintaining gender violence. Such a strategy removes the political charge of both RCCs and anti-rape work, rendering the sexual assault response complex to focus entirely on crime management – or, as Nancy Matthews (2005) termed it, ‘managing rape’ rather than preventing it. In her analysis of rape law and feminist activism, Aya Gruber (2009) delineates the progression of the anti-rape movement away from awareness-raising and towards supporting the criminal legal system, describing how ‘the subsequent decades-long entanglement with criminal justice systems have fundamentally re-defined the movement’s internal goals’ (8). By creating a dependent relationship between RCCs and formal reporting systems, the state apparatus gained the dedicated support of their one-time critics, and dominating feminisms aligned their visions with ‘law and order’ ambitions.

Now established as rank-and-file elements of the sexual assault response complex, mainstream feminist organizations promote reporting as the solution to sexual violence, imbuing power into criminal legal institutions. In exposing the ‘invisibility’ of sexual abuse during the second wave, mainstream feminism often fell into infantilizing tropes of victimhood, portraying those who experienced abuse as a person who was broken, traumatized, and in need of care (Chasteen, 2001; Mardorossian, 2014). In their study of perceptions of sexual assault victims in the general population, Gavey and Schmidt (2011) proposed this perception represented a ‘trauma of rape’ discourse: rape was seen as a devastating violation, worse than death, that took public processing to recover from. As this conception of rape entered public consciousness, victim legitimacy became dependent on victim compliance within the protective authority of the criminal legal system.

While RCC advocates are trained to be neutral facilitators while a victim determines if they will report their assault, there remains an implicit pro-institutional preference: during participatory research as a RCC hotline advocate, the first author and fellow advocates were trained to question the rationale of victims who suggested they did not want to report, and were not given similar instructions for victims who showed proactive interest in filing a report. During a later meeting between campus police and rape crisis advocates, an officer discussed the difference between being a victim and a survivor: ‘They’re victims, not survivors, until they go through my process.’ Here, victimhood is positioned as a negative term indicating regression: healing can only come through engaging with carceral systems.

Dominating feminist scholarship on victims who do not engage the criminal legal system subtly perpetuates this glorification of formal reporting. Approximately ten percent of sexual assaults are reported to the police (Fisher et al., 2000). Rather than analyzing how the legal system may not serve victims, dominating feminist scholarship examines how victims can better serve the legal system, often framing victims as being in ‘denial’ (Paul et al., 2013; Weiss, 2011). Those who experience sexual assault are frequently divided by both scholarship and anti-rape organizations into groups of ‘unacknowledged’ and ‘acknowledged’ victims (i.e. Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, & Halvorsen, 2003; Layman, Gidycz, & Lynn, 1996). In Judith Herman’s widely popular book *Trauma and Recovery* (1997), Herman compared the mindset of trauma victims to that of children who, by this logic, are to be cared for by the paternal state. This reinforcement of institutional structures is in lockstep with governmental and bureaucratic perspectives that promote carceral logics.

Current public discourse of sexual violence exclusively serves the interests of the ruling class and dominating feminisms, maintaining heteropatriarchal structures. Mainstream feminist efforts have propagated political action on the issue of campus sexual assault, as seen in the 'It's On Us' nationwide campaign spearheaded in 2014 by Vice President Joe Biden and the White House. Such action focuses on a class-privileged and predominately white undergraduate population, while rates of sexual assault have been found to be higher amongst non-student females aged 18–24 (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). 'It's On Us' campaign focuses concern exclusively on dominating feminist conceptions of white, class-privileged sexual violence, and further reveals the continued emphasis of rape victims' institutional involvement.

As a result of the collusion between dominating feminisms and the state, the incarceration of individual offenders is framed as the solution to sexual violence. Using colonial logic, state protection is promised as a reward for victim cooperation, when in reality this assimilation does not protect victims, but instead ensures their subjugation within the system (Deer, 2015). Engagement with formal institutions has been found to mistreat victims in ways unique to sexual abuse cases, in what has been termed 'the second rape' (Madigan & Gamble, 1991). During interactions with the police, victims have reported feeling attacked, misunderstood, judged and shamed (Campbell, 2008; Maier, 2008). The mistreatment and distrust of such victims have been found to be judicial attitudes unique to sexual assault cases (Belknap, 2007). In her analysis of rape law reform, legal scholar Aya Gruber (2009) discusses how the public and political association of feminism with gender crime control is at odds with both feminist values and victim advocacy. Gruber describes how criminal law limits victim agency within a coercive criminal system and embodies the same authoritative logic that served as the foundation of systemic male domination of women. By aggrandizing institutional involvement, dominant feminism is complicit in sustaining both the patriarchy and the carceral state.

It is the exceptionality of rapists in public imaginary that establishes the need for the entirety of the prison industrial complex. Throughout the sexual assault response complex, priority and legitimacy are bestowed on assaults that support public fear of the 'dangerous few,' namely violent assault by a stranger. Stranger rape comprises the minority of sexual assaults (8–10%, see Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000), and yet police and legal systems have been found to pursue these cases further (Jordan, 2008). The collective fear of stranger rape is also fostered in the media and legal systems, in what Kristin Bumiller (2008) terms 'expressive justice,' where prosecutors draw attention to high-profile rape cases in order to propagate symbolic messages about victimization risk. Fostering disproportionate public fears of stranger rape allows for the entrenched power structure to maintain their role as protectors and drives support for carceral systems.

By hyper-focusing on the statistical minority of sexual assaults and infantilizing victims, the US body politic have fostered a collective fear large enough to uphold the entire prison system in order to assuage our concern with the 'dangerous few.' Angela Davis (2016) addressed the prison as a cognitive solution that prevents critical analysis: 'the site of a jail or prison is not only material and objective but it's ideological and psychic as well. We internalize this notion of a place to put bad people... Why do men engage in such violent behavior against women? The very existence of the prison forecloses the kinds of discussions that we need in order to image the possibility of eradicating these behaviors' (22).

Despite the best efforts of dominating feminist scholars and organizations to integrate victims into the state apparatus, the rates of sexual assault reporting have decreased in recent years (Daly & Bouhours, 2010). Currently, over 90 percent of sexual assaults remain outside the reach of carceral system. Our collective fear of rape going unaddressed has, in fact, is and always been our reality. The carceral state has failed to reduce sexual violence, and yet dominating feminisms align with institutional power in both scholarship and advocacy, permitting state exploitation of anti-rape messaging to justify mass incarceration.

Gender-responsive programming for criminalized women

In the past four decades, the US has witnessed a dramatic rise in women's arrest and incarceration rates. Between 1980 and 2014, for example, there has been more than a sevenfold increase in women's incarceration rates with a current female population in jails and prisons totaling more than 215,000 (Carson, 2015). Much of this shift in carcerality is attributed to stricter drug laws and the dismantling of the welfare state that disproportionately affects socioeconomically disadvantaged women (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2012; Haney, 2010). The neoliberal reconfiguration of US social policy has resulted in the withdrawal of social safety nets during a simultaneous growth in the criminal legal system (Garland, 2001). This structural regime change has had a tremendous impact on poor women; those living at or below the poverty line, those who are unemployed or underemployed, female-headed households, and those dependent on welfare (Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2014). Without community supports or social services, some women experiencing marginality and poverty engage in criminalized 'survival techniques' such as sex work, drug addiction, and economic or violent 'crimes' (Richie, 1996). The criminalization of such behaviors has resulted in nearly one million women – disproportionately women of Color and impoverished women – under some form of criminal legal supervision (Glaze & Bonczar, 2011). Due to the decline in community supports and the tenuousness of personal finances for criminalized women, probation, jails and prisons have become de facto social service agencies (Kushel, Hahn, Evans, Bangsberg, & Moss, 2005).

Paralleling the gendered expansion of the criminal legal system during the 1980s-2000s, the feminist criminological discipline gained traction, particularly for responding to the invisibilization of women's experiences of incarceration and criminalization (Belknap, 2007). As a result, an increased amount of scholarship is now integrating gendered frameworks into its analysis (although the investigative gaze has been primarily focused on (cis-) women, much to the exclusion of analyzing masculinity or transgendered experiences). This relatively newer branch of criminology interrogates women's criminal pathways, the specific effects of criminalization on women, and, most relevant to this discussion, the ways in which the criminal legal system should respond to women's needs specifically. 'Gender-responsive' programming emerged out of a criticism that masculinist penal interventions, such as imprisonment or post-incarceration supervision, do not appropriately respond to the life histories of criminalized women (Bloom et al., 2002). Gender-responsiveness has been conceptualized as a framework that caters to the specific needs, issues, and realities of women's lives. The associated services address issues such as interpersonal abuses and traumas, relationship troubles, substance abuse, and mental health (Covington, 2002).

Yet, astonishingly absent from this literature is a fundamental questioning of the laws and official state actors that criminalize marginalization and demonize survival strategies.

Proponents of gender-responsiveness instead discuss ways in which carceral systems of control, monitoring, captivity, and surveillance can be transformed to become more like 'helping' institutions for (cis-) women (Bloom et al., 2002). Although feminist criminologists who prescribe gender-responsive programming acknowledge that violence, poverty, patriarchal relations, colonialism and racial discrimination negatively affect criminalized women, there is little analysis on the ways in which prisons and community-based corrections are inherently rooted in these same structures of oppression (Balfour & Comack, 2014). Because of this lacking analytic, the assumption is that the carceral state can be reformed – instead of *eliminated* – to address the realities of criminalized women's lives. For example, Covington and Bloom (2003) propose that correctional institutions adopt a 'culture of treatment' that promotes safety and change for its wards (p. 12), thereby assuming that impoverished and racially marginalized women need to be protected and fixed in the first place. They propose that when implementing gender-responsive programming, correctional facilities should take into account women's trauma and do so by 'adjust[ing] the behavior of counselors, other staff, and the organization to support the individual's coping capacity' (p. 12). Yet delivering counseling services within a correctional setting, no matter how informed it is by women's lived realities, perverts the therapeutic utility of such services because the social environment hinges on the carceral logics of captivity and total control (Sim, 2009). Moreover, we argue that creating 'softer' or 'trauma-informed' prisons or alternatives to incarceration in the US does not undo or remediate the traumatizing, historical injustices and foundational violences that are deeply entrenched in, and intrinsic to, the carceral state (Spade, 2013).

Although many gender-responsive program advocates seem to primarily endorse community-based services over prison, particularly for women convicted of nonviolent and/or drug charges, there is still cause for concern. As Maidment (2006) observes in her research on Canadian so-called 'feminist' penal regimes, 'The "community" is an elusive concept that has been too easily appropriated by the state to engineer support for limited initiatives that fail to grapple with fundamental inequalities in corrections' (18). The decentralization of the carceral state into 'community-based programs' has shifted the power to punish beyond the prison walls. Miller observes that 'the state's capacity to rehabilitate prisoners [*has*] been offloaded onto community-based actors and organizations' which does not yield a radical shift towards social change, but rather a 'reformist strategy occurring in the shadow of mass incarceration' (2014, p. 327). Moreover, modern community-based programs such as therapeutic centers, community centers, and churches work in collaboration with carceral institutions to supervise criminalized women, representing a blend (and devolution) of social welfarist agencies and community corrections (Miller, 2014). These organizations deputize social workers, church volunteers, therapists and/or substance abuse counselors as stewards who track, document, manage, and report on criminalized women to their respective probation or parole officers.

Gender-responsive programs are often tied to carceral mandates, thereby instituting coercive relationships between criminalized women and 'correctional' therapies. Criminalized women who are supervised in the community are frequently mandated to complete therapeutic programs at community-based agencies to receive incentives or as a stipulation of their supervision plans. Carceral institutions mandate therapeutic interventions for criminalized women due to actuarial assessments that reclassify *needs* – such as substance abuse treatment, mental health services, past or ongoing trauma, familial separation – into *risks* to be managed and corrected (Hannah-Moffat, 2010; Hannah-Moffat & Shaw, 2000). The

correctional discourses of 'risk management' invariably produce the necessity for therapeutic intervention(s), a form of governance profoundly shaped and influenced by the psy-complex (psychology, psychiatry, and social work disciplines). Despite failing to change recidivism rates or the outcomes of correctional intervention, therapeutic governance – in the form of cognitive-behavioral therapies and prescription psychotropic medications – continue to prevail in community corrections (Kilty, 2012; Pollack & Kendall, 2005).

These forms of control translate social problems into individualized 'matters of the mind.' This interpretive process was well-observed by the second author during her five-year ethnographic research of a gender-responsive reentry center for criminalized women based in the Rocky Mountains. Her continuous role as a volunteer at the center in addition to her role as researcher allowed for a multi-faceted and 'close' view of the center's daily operations and rehabilitation rhetorics, as well as tangibly helping an underresourced program. Throughout her extensive interviews and observations of caseworker meetings, she documents caseworkers advocating that clients adopt 'better' attitudes in order to overcome their problems – often problems that are rooted in structural oppressions such as a scarcity of felon-friendly jobs for traditionally 'underskilled' women, gentrification and the displacement of poverty, or racial discrimination (Hackett, 2013). Therapeutic or service-oriented agencies are often not equipped to provide tangible opportunities, such as employment, and therefore work to produce *employable* subjects (Miller, 2014) that are deferential, polite, and self-disciplined. The baseline assumption at rehabilitation centers is that criminalized people are in need of cultural training to 'teach' them how to interact with authority figures or social institutions, and therefore become successful citizens. In one excerpt from her field notes of the center's weekly staff meeting, the second author documents a caseworker speaking about how criminalized women's lack of comportment can obstruct their ability to navigate 'helping' institutions. The caseworker, a mid-20s white woman with a baccalaureate in social work, explains a recent incident in which one of her clients – a unemployed, disabled white woman in her early 40s from an impoverished rural community – was kicked out of a shelter:

She just had a lot of bad things in her life and couldn't get past them. Child abuse, prostitution, drugs, in and out of jail, almost murdered by her husband... She had the lowest self-esteem I've seen. And her social skills weren't able to get her through this situation she had at a shelter. We were trying to get her stabilized but something happened with her case manager there. This case manager was reprimanding her for something, and she just blew up on him. She didn't have the skills to just like, just be like, I need to deal with the next five minutes [of being reprimanded], and then go deal with the problem tactfully by going into my room and smashing a pillow or something like that. She could have kept her housing if she was more tactful, but instead he kicked her out.

This passage highlights just one instance in a patterned interactional order at a rehabilitation center in which caseworkers understand clients' 'failed' institutional negotiations as a reflection of poor behavior or interpersonal 'problems.' Instead of interpreting situations like this one as an example of how exclusionary politics and performances of deservingness structure criminalized women's access to diminishing resources and overburdened helping institutions, issues like this one are turned into how clients conduct themselves.

Therapeutic interventions for criminalized people assume there is a pathological source to observable indicators of 'failure,' such as poverty, imprisonment, familial separation, and homelessness (Haney, 2010; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; McCorkel, 2013; McKim, 2008; Sered & Norton-Hawk, 2014). By diminishing the system of social safety nets and expanding the carceral state, the US has produced 'rehabilitation' programs that are not equipped to offer

substantive material support; instead, these agencies work on cultural re/programming for a presumed dysfunctional and 'criminal' population. The second author observed that case-workers regularly lamented clients' cultural displays of opposition, outspokenness, and resistance as evidence of emotional problems or a lacking socialization. Yet, this framework of pathology is problematic because it reifies the notion that criminalized women, particularly Black, Brown, Indigenous, and poor white women, are emotionally unruly and in need of 'correction' (Faith, 2011). Carceral therapeutic interventions attempt to promote deferential attitudes among its clientele; thereby advocating that criminalized women *accommodate* themselves to systems of injustice by changing their mentalities instead of *challenging* the very structures that produce oppression and enact violence.

Liberatory abolitionism

The concluding section of this discussion will address potential solutions that work to dismantle gendered violence, a multifaceted harm experienced by clients at both RCCs and gender-responsive programs for criminalized women. We seek to identify the abolitionist ethics and praxes that work to serve survivors of interpersonal and state violences and that actively engage in deconstructing white supremacist heteropatriarchal social orders and the carceral state. In examining anti-rape and prison abolitionist social movements, we take our cues largely from radical interventions proposed by activist-scholars of color who diverge greatly from and indeed take an oppositional stance to the dominating feminisms that are constitutive of the same state violences that perpetuate a politics of confinement, caging, and population control. These liberatory and interlocking forms of feminism and abolitionism adopt the firm stance that the state – particularly the carceral state – has its roots in domination and control and therefore cannot provide liberation and self-determination that oppressed communities seek. Criminalization, for example, has not curbed the issue of sexual assault or intimate partner violence and has, in fact, only fueled the proliferation of policing and prisons that target communities already vulnerable to state violences.

Many of the abolitionist community-based social movements seeking to end gendered violence have several guiding principles in common. The first shared principle is the belief that working to end sexual violence *outside* of the criminal legal system is both absolutely necessary and desirable. These grassroots organizations additionally (1) decouple their work from the professionalized NPIC; (2) conceptualize violence as a collective phenomena, rather than a private, individual issue, and therefore adopt a multi-pronged intervention; (3) holistically engage with all kinds of survivors, rather than dividing them based on false constructions of deservedness; and (4) imaginatively seek to build a more just world, thereby rendering prisons unthinkable and unnecessary (Deer, 2015; Heiner & Tyson, 2017).

Creative Interventions (CI), a project that provides 'resources for everyday people to end violence,' co-founded by Mimi Kim (2012), avoids the professionalization of the antiviolence movement and instead seeks to build the capacity of the community to intervene in violence. In doing so, interventions remain relevant to, and are determined by, those who are 'closest to the violence.' Kim understands communities impacted by violence as having 'the greatest motivation to end it and the greatest knowledge regarding its dynamics, context, and the elements that might lead to change' (2012, p. 20). Though CI is inspired by existing accountability strategies, instead of imposing models wholesale onto communities, the interventions designed to disrupt violence are initiated by community members and are altered to fit the

unique goals and cultural needs of those who are directly impacted. This collective approach additionally seeks to alter the normative structures of violence by building the community's ability to deal with conflict as well as strengthening cultural norms that disallow violence from happening in the first place.

Although RCCs and gender-responsive programs often intend to be accountable to their clients, financial dependency on governmental funding has rendered the organizations accountable to the state. INCITE! Women of Color against Violence, an organization of scholar-activists of color, produces resources and texts that historicize and track genealogies of violence, particularly those perpetrated or ignored by state regimes, in the US and worldwide. For example, in INCITE!'s analysis of the NPIC, Paul Kivel (2007, p. 141) outlined fundamental questions SJ organizations need to ask of themselves: 'How do we know if we are being co-opted...and just providing a service, or if we are truly helping people get together?... the key question we must confront is this: To whom are we accountable?'

By avoiding financial and institutional reliance upon state governmental systems, community-based organizations are able to retain a critique of the state, unlike the relatively recent absorption of restorative justice (RJ) methods into the traditional criminal legal system. Advocates for the use of restorative justice for gendered violence regard RJ as complementary to criminal legal systems, not oppositional, and highlight the importance of having the criminal legal system as a fallback (Joyce-Wojtas & Keenan, 2016; Koss, 2006). In aligning with the functioning of state apparatuses, RJ proponents forgo analysis of the violence in the structure itself, in what Donna Coker (2002) describes as how RJ ignores the state instead of dismantling it, and as such, naturalizes state power. RJ methods often fail victims of sexual violence and women offenders by negating the importance of the gendered contexts that complicate women's lives. By under-theorizing violence against women, methods often fall in line with dominating feminist scholarship – evident in explanations of underreporting and suggestions of individual trauma and sexual violence training (Joyce-Wojtas & Keenan, 2016). In addressing community harm, traditional RJ methods regard the community as an indirect victim of the crime, further individualizing the role of structures and violence. Contrasting this conceptualization, community victim-blaming and rape culture have been found to obstruct attempts at adult sexual violence restorative practices (Bumiller, 2008; Deer, 2015; Ross, 1996).

Community-based social movements, on the other hand, conceptualize violence as a harm that is committed privately and publicly, by loved ones and colonial state forces, and something that is both random as well as concerted and targeted towards entire social groups (Deer, 2015; Price, 2012). In proposing that colonial violence is inherently also sexual violence, Sarah Deer (2015) proposes that feminist and prison abolition work must integrate anticolonial responses into liberatory frameworks. Decarceration could include reducing the stigmatization of sexual offenders, scaling back mandatory arrest policies, discretion in seriousness of sexual offense, and responses entirely outside of the criminal-legal system (Bumiller, 2008; Daly & Bouhours, 2010).

Important to this historical and multifaceted framework of violence is understanding the blurred lines between 'victim' and 'offender' and to understand how the state has a long legacy of sorting populations into those who deserve protection and those who do not (Musto, 2016). *Survived and Punished*, a coalition of organizations and advocates for incarcerated survivors of violence, works on campaign building and advocacy for women and transwomen who are incarcerated – or facing incarceration – for acts of survival and

self-defense against intimate partner or parental violence. This coalition views pro-criminalization stance in addressing violence as creating a 'racial divide between "good victims" and non-victim "criminals"' (2016). In viewing the entanglement of white supremacy and other systems of domination with the criminal legal system, *Survived and Punished* understand the state to perpetuate the violence of *nonrecognition* towards survivors who are Black, transgender, queer, Indigenous, undocumented, disabled, and/or poor by withholding support and advocacy. This coalition additionally charges that the violence of nonrecognition means that 'their experience[s] of violence [are] diminished, distorted, or disappeared, and they are instead seen as criminals who should be punished' (2016). Community-based anti-violence and abolitionist organizations are instead asserting that survivors and perpetrators of violence be understood in their full historical and social contexts. In shifting our understandings of surviving violence and eradicating the notion of deservedness, we become better situated to understand shared and divergent experiences of violence on local and global scales.

Multiple activist-scholars have called for an expansion of intersectionality towards a more collective understanding and specifically stressed the importance of global connections in social movements. Angela Davis (2016) proposes the expansion of overlapping oppression as fundamental to the new activist mission, conceptualizing the 'intersectionality of struggles,' writing: '[i]nitially intersectionality was about bodies and experiences. But now, how do we talk about bringing various social justice struggles together, across national borders?' (19). Kristin Bumiller (2008) also calls for a global movement, that feminists must return to the origins of the grassroots feminist movements, drawing connections with other antioilence movements locally and globally, including racism in crime enforcement and mass incarceration.

Solutions to such overlapping logics as described here will not fit into a singular category or approach. As seen by the flawed logic of anti-rape work and gender-responsive programming, we need to shift our vision from the prison to the systems within the prison industrial complex in order to envision abolition advocacy: incarceration should not be connected to profit, healthcare should not be connected to profit, and social services should not rely on state structures or political trends. Establishing social, racial, and economic justice- including historical accountability and reparations- is imperative to ending heteropatriarchal violence and the carceral state (Bumiller, 2008; Davis, 2016; Deer, 2015), and examining where liberal feminist discourses contribute to these carceral systems of injustice is fundamental, not tangential, to the success of the abolitionist project (Heiner & Tyson, 2017).

Acknowledgements

The research for this manuscript was in part supported by the Center to Advance Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder. The authors would also like to acknowledge *Contemporary Justice Review's* anonymous reviewers for their feedback and helpful support in bringing our ideas and research to print.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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