Article

"We Owe It to Those Who Shall Come After Us": Considering the Role of Social Work Education in Disrupting Carceral Complicity

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Abstract: Reflecting upon Mary Richmond's early call for formalized social work training to address the historical struggles of the field, this analysis examines how American social work education has addressed the paradoxes of help and harm present in the field for more than a century. We examine how, under the guise of benevolence and care, social work has exerted social control and contributed to gendered criminalization. We use the term carceral complicity to extend the concept of carceral social work, illustrating how carceral complicity has contributed to women's criminalization through the embedding, enacting, and invisibilizing of carceral logics in social work. In addition to describing how carceral complicity has been addressed in social work education, we illustrate the gendered nature of carceral complicity, highlighting how women have historically and contemporarily been positioned as both the proprietors and the recipients of carceral complicity. In line with recent scholarship, we suggest that through a transformative approach to social work education we may disrupt carceral complicity and support liberatory futures.

Keywords: social work education; social services; criminalized women; carceral logics; carcerality; anti-carceral social work

"The question. . .is how to get educated young men and women to make a life vocation of charity organization work. We must educate them. Through these twenty years our charity organization societies have stood for trained service in charity. We are thoroughly committed to that, in theory at least. But it is not enough to create a demand for trained service. Having created the demand (and I think we may claim that our share in its creation has been considerable), we should strive to supply it. Moreover, we owe it to those who shall come after us that they shall be spared the groping and blundering by which we have acquired our own stock of experience" (Richmond 1898, pp. 181–82).

1. Introduction

It has been over a century since social worker Mary Richmond's call for schools of applied philanthropy, which resulted in the first formalized social work education programs in the United States (Richmond 1898). Schools in New York, Boston, and Chicago grappled with how to establish and distill social work's epistemologies, professional function, and alignment with larger social issues within the context of formalized education (Shoemaker 1998). However, social work education remains a site of struggle in reconciling the spectrum of what constitutes social problems, appropriate responses, and, as such, what it means to practice social work (Bhuyan et al. 2017; Cherry et al. 2021; Gatenio Gabel and Mapp 2020; Macias 2015). Part of this reconciliation has entailed a critical reflection on the paradoxes of help and harm underlying facets of social work epistemologies and practices, specifically considering how social work has leveraged its historical position as a helping profession to exert social control.

Recent scholarship has placed renewed emphasis on this historical and contemporary paradox of help and harm in social work (e.g., Kim 2018; Leotti 2022; Wali 2023), even

describing how social workers can serve to perpetuate criminalization in what Jacobs et al. 2021 call "carceral social work". Carceral social work describes how social work employed "two interlocking components—the deployment of tactics, within social work, dependent on the same White supremacist and coercive foundations as policing, as well as direct partnership with law enforcement itself" (Jacobs et al. 2021, p. 39). We use the term "carceral complicity" to extend Jacobs et al.'s 2021 concept of carceral social work, highlighting how this process occurs through practices of embedding, enacting, and invisibilizing carceral logics in social work. Although we acknowledge that carceral complicity impacts individuals across the gender spectrum, the current analysis builds upon previous work highlighting how women have historically and contemporarily been positioned as both the proprietors and the recipients of the process of carceral complicity (Abramovitz 1999; Abrams and Curran 2004; Leotti 2021; Mehrotra et al. 2016). However, it remains unclear how elements of this carceral complicity have been integrated into, or challenged by, formalized social work education.

It is vital to underscore that social work as a practice has been embodied by communities since the colonization of the country and importation of slave labor. Efforts such as mutual aid and harm reduction, practices rooted in collective liberation, have been practiced by minoritized communities, particularly Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other communities of color, by transwomen, by other members of the LGBTQ+ and disability communities, and by drug users (Hassan 2022; Spade 2020). Communities who have been ostracized, criminalized, and marginalized have been meeting their own needs by practicing social work. However, as we are interested in formalized social work education as a site for disrupting carceral complicity, we are concerned with the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) of social work, which represents a typology of social work that is shaped by relational dynamics of power, objective logics, and a struggle for truth and knowledge. Considering that nearly 57,000 baccalaureate students and over 83,600 master's students were enrolled in American social work programs in 2022–2023 (CSWE 2024), it is imperative to examine and contextualize how social work programs in the United States address how we, as social workers, have historically and contemporarily participated in processes of carceral complicity.

We begin our analysis by contextualizing the term carceral complicity, discussing how it is informed by concepts such as carceral logics (Coyle and Nagel 2021), carcerality (Richie 2021, p. 41), and carceral social work (Jacobs et al. 2021). In contextualizing carceral complicity, we describe the tenets of this process (i.e., the embedding, enacting, and invisibilizing of carceral logics), as well as how carceral complicity has disproportionately been enacted by and impacted women. We describe how carceral complicity has interacted with ideologies such as neoliberalism to shape social work education. This article focuses exclusively on social work education in the United States, which is reflective of the authors' distinct educational experiences, although it is important to note that several international scholars have written about tensions in ideologies and practices in social work education (Flynn 2021; Macias 2015; Smith et al. 2024). Following this contextualization, we then explore the distinct mechanisms by which the process of carceral complicity operates— embedding, enacting, and invisibilizing—in the context of social work education. Finally, we end with a discussion of futures in social work education beyond carceral complicity, exploring potential avenues for social work educational programs to engage classroom curriculums, practicums, and pedagogical practices through anti-carceral and critical lenses.

2. Contextualizing Carceral Complicity

Although scholarship in past decades addressed processes of women's criminalization (Arnold 1990; Balfour and Comack 2014; Cahn 1999; Kennedy 2008), recent scholarship has placed a renewed emphasis on criminalization, and the specific ways in which social work has contributed to criminalization processes (Ben-Moshe 2020; Jacobs et al. 2021; Kim 2018; Leotti 2022; Leotti et al. 2022; Lewis 2022; Wali 2023). Through mechanisms of surveillance, assessment, and correction of individual behavior, and collusion with the formal criminal

legal system, social work historically and contemporarily embodies elements of carcerality, or "all things punishment" (Richie 2021, p. 41). Carcerality as a concept acknowledges that institutions or institutional actors not typically seen as related to jails or prisons ultimately contribute to criminalization and the larger "web of carceral control" (Leotti 2021, p. 303). Carcerality in social work can be noted in social work in which logics of social control have allowed social workers to define and respond to problems (Jacobs et al. 2021). Carceral logics, which center concepts of control, punishment, and criminalization to maintain social order and address social issues, underlie the carceral dynamics that are present in social work (Brown and Schept 2017; Coyle and Nagel 2021). Throughout social work's history, these carceral logics have unduly impacted the criminalization of women— namely Asian, Black, Indigenous, and Latina women— through systems of individual and family surveillance, practices of forced removal, and responses to domestic violence, among others (BlackDeer 2023; Kim 2018; Mehrotra et al. 2016; Park 2011; Richie 2012; Roberts 2022; Roberts 1997; Terweil 2020). Carceral logics are rooted in White, colonial structures and have morphed over time to reflect changes in hegemonic sociocultural practices which no longer allow for overt racialized social control (Anthony and Stanley 2023). For example, while the United States has moved away from the forced removal of Indigenous children, American Indian and Alaskan Native children are still drastically overrepresented in family policing statistics, including child welfare investigations, substantiations, and child removal (National Indian Child Welfare Association 2021).

The connection of carceral logics and colonial structures has implications not only for who is controlled socially and how, but also who is positioned to exert control. Throughout social work history, women have also been situated as the primary arbiters of social work. An early social work education program, the Boston School, echoed dominant notions of social work as a "natural extension of the interest of the woman in her own home..." (Woods 1905, p. 99). As noted by Harvard President Charles Eliot, "many men were not temperamentally well suited to work with the 'defectives...'", but instead the "normal human being", reflecting ideologies of both the feminized nature of social work and the criminalized nature of social work's clientele (Boston School for Social Workers 1906). In this way, social work education created a framework in which women were simultaneously positioned as the subjects enacting, and the objects impacted by, carceral logics in social work practice. An early example of this is the "friendly visiting", program in social work, which positioned upper-middle class White women to visit the homes of women in poverty to offer advice on how to improve their social conditions (Abramovitz 1999, p. 152). However, it is imperative to recognize the racialization of this framework, with White women having typically been positioned to diagnose social problems, while women of color have been disproportionately positioned on the receiving end of diagnoses. At the same time, social work education has typically centered the histories of White social workers, such as Jane Addams or Edith Abbott, over Ida B. Wells-Barnett or Mary Church Terrell (Chapman and Withers 2019; Lasch-Quinn 2017).

Carceral complicity extends the notion of carceral social work by disentangling the process by which carceral logics are perpetuated in social work, with the concept of complicity identifying "our past and present responsibility for our part in injustice and provides a moral imperative to address these responsibilities" (Pease 2023, p. 226). We suggest that carceral complicity is accomplished through mechanisms of embedding, enacting, and invisibilizing carceral logics in social work. The embedding of carceral logics in social work can be noted in the early and contemporary epistemologies of social work. Epistemologies ask us "What *is* knowledge? *What* can we know? *How* do we know? And what are the means by which we demonstrate this knowledge *as* knowledge to others" (Hothersall 2016, p. 4). Examining how carceral complicity is accomplished through the embedding of carceral logics requires us to reconcile how notions of what it means to define, identify, and communicate social work have been rooted in the tendrils of carceral logics. The enacting of carceral logics in social work also contributes to the process of carceral complicity, as the ontology of social work, or "what kind of thing social work is" (Smith et al. 2024, p. 2), is

imbued with carceral logics such as surveillance, assessment of character, and deploying punishment. As the embedding and enacting of carceral logics meld to create a social work that seems to be swimming in carceral logics, which underpin both forms of knowledge and everyday practice, the final mechanism of invisibilizing becomes imperative for carceral complicity to be successful. It is through this invisibilization, which some have referenced as "violent benevolence", or "the cover of kindness", that carceral logics become taken for granted and normalized as both ways of thinking and ways of doing (Chapman and Withers 2019; Margolin 1997). As formalized social work education in the United States serves as a nexus for the episteme-ontological formations of social work—training tens of thousands of social workers each year—we see social work education as a critical point in the examination and disruption of carceral complicity.

3. Evolutions of Carceral Complicity in Social Work Education

One of the first social work educational programs, the Summer School of Philanthropy, explicitly linked the function of social work education to the carceral state, with the creators citing that they were striving for a program that would "Raise the standard of qualification and of usefulness throughout the entire field of charitable work. . .the country at large. . . from which specialists in the various forms of charitable and correctional work could be entered successfully upon their respective careers" (Social Welfare History Project 2018). Social work education thus focused not only on defining social problems, but also on shaping viable "solutions", to correct individual behavior with specific forms of knowledge. Early attempts at establishing a cohesive set of standards across social work programs took the form of membership organizations, such as the Association of Professional Schools, which established a baseline curriculum and held that "education as a socialization process which eliminated personal idiosyncrasies, prejudices, or habits detrimental to professional efficiency" in pursuit of "attributes compatible with the values of the fraternity" (Lubove 1965, p. 152).

Attempts at standardizing social work education programs also had direct implications for the evolution of carceral complicity in defining the "profession" of social work, namely in functionality and partnerships. Described by many gender and social work scholars as a form of "maternalist foundation" in the profession, early professional social work embraced a set of "ideologies, practices, and state-building strategies" that shaped social provision and policy (Abrams and Curran 2004, p. 434). Social workers were educated in the practices of both determining the social purity and assessing the potential rehabilitation of individuals, primarily women. These determinations and assessments, practiced predominantly by women, entailed assessing the capability and worthiness of investing in changing the ideologies and behaviors of women and girls deemed socially deviant, as well as eligibility for government services or other forms of social aid. Breckinridge and Abbott, two prominent pioneers of the social work profession, describe social workers as having the power to determine which conditions resulted from "misfortune, and which are the outcome of degraded and immoral living" (Breckinridge and Abbott 1912, p. 19).

As social work education has been subject to changes, such as the push towards professionalization, social work education has also been subject to changes in overarching social, economic, and cultural phenomena. Perhaps one of the strongest examples of these phenomena, which continue to shape American life and social work education, is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism refers broadly to the "loose and shifting signifier", that is both a "mode of reason" and set of practices centered on relentless economization in all forms of life (Brown 2015, p. 21). Beginning in the 1980s, neoliberalism has had a significant impact on social work, reifying the need for professional training, law regulation, and standardized procedures, and the individualization of social problems in lieu of structural accountability (Clarke 2022; Mehrotra et al. 2016, p. 154). Macias, although speaking from a Canadian context, describes how neoliberalism has overarchingly transcended the "politico-economic" sphere and serves as an "onto-epistemological project that shapes social environments, social policies, state institutions, and the subject that is captured and

lives within these environments, policies and institutions" (Macias 2015, p. 253). The impacts of neoliberalism on social work education have been widely described and provide a crucial context for how neoliberalism has exacerbated practices of carceral complicity in social work, namely through reifying the need for professional training, law regulation, and standardized procedures, the individualization of social problems in lieu of structural accountability, and the depoliticization of social work (Brady et al. 2019; Cherry et al. 2021; Clarke 2022; Garrett 2010; Hanesworth 2017; Mehrotra et al. 2016; Pease and Nipperess 2016; Reisch 2013; Stanley 2020). At first glance, professionalization, regulation, standardization, and even depoliticization may not seem like conduits for the enactment of carceral logics. However, neoliberalism also reinforces a "new punitiveness", which, in addition to increased incarceration, also relies on "quasi-prisons", or spaces that are highly supervised, although they are not formally tied to the criminal legal system (Garrett 2010, p. 347), where the "annexing non-state actors as crime control functions become institutionalized into everyday practices" (Kim 2020, p. 253). This new punitiveness, compounded with depoliticization, can create tensions between what is considered a "values-based profession" concerned with issues of social justice and the realities of professionalization, regulation, and the standardization of carceral logics.

A clear example of this in American social work can be noted in the welfare system, namely, the 1996 shift to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) under the Personal Work Responsibility and Reconciliation Act (PROWRA). Although women, particularly poor women, have been targets of social work's surveillance, intervention, and criminalization for over a century, shifts under TANF highlight how neoliberalism institutionalized carceral practices, particularly those related to discretion, surveillance, and monitoring of the worker. As Hagen (1999) notes, the objectives of TANF were not radically different from those in former welfare provision, but, rather, changed the conditions under which welfare agencies operated. Under TANF, the "transformative moral work" aimed at reforming welfare recipients took on new dimensions (Hasenfeld 1992). The shift in the functions of caseworkers from "people processing" to "people changing" (Hasenfeld 2010, p. 153) can be noted in the increased levels of surveillance of clients by welfare caseworkers and the increase in their discretion in determining client eligibility sanctioning. Additionally, under TANF, caseworkers themselves became subject to monitoring. It is not that neoliberalism created the conditions for carceral complicity; rather, neoliberalism shapes the conditions that make carceral complicity possible. Therefore, processes of embedding, enacting, and invisibilizing in carceral logics must be considered throughout social work history.

3.1. Embedding

The embedding of carceral logics in social work points to how social work has conceptualized what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge can be gained, and how knowledge is taught. Namely, the embedding of carceral logics in social work has allowed social work to define social problems, as well as which responses are appropriate and how to conceptualize the success of these responses. Social work is often framed by a linear intellectual genealogy predominantly influenced by Eurocentric epistemologies, racial sciences, and White female social reformers (Gray et al. 2016; Gregory 2021; Clarke 2022). Early foundations of knowledge in social work prioritized White European, positivist forms of knowledge that centered evidence-based practice and evidence-informed practice (Gregory 2021). These systems of knowledge privileged a White-centered expert-based epistemology that suppressed non-White sources of knowledge (Dotson 2015). In turn, this produced a view that social work knowledge could be neutral, even though social work has often been mobilized by the state to enforce policies that are not neutral or apolitical (Smith 2021). However, to understand how this process of embedding develops in social work, we must look to the roles of gender, class, and religion.

In the 19th century, the notion of "true womanhood" (Freedman 1984) defined appropriate femininity through a White, heterosexual, and privileged class lens (Battle 2016).

The discourse of true womanhood claimed women's true nature as "pure, selfless, asexual, and submissive" (Abrams and Curran 2000; Rafter 1983; Leotti 2022). Consequently, true womanhood became a way to police sex and gender, creating avenues for women who did not conform to or uphold "true womanhood" to be viewed as deviant, and these women were often met with punishment (Rafter 2017). This also had interesting implications for how women social workers performed "true womanhood". Institutionally recognized early leaders in social work were White women, such as Jane Addams, Grace Abbott, and Julia Lathrop, who were able to attain power within social work based on the assertion that White "women were uniquely qualified as natural nurturers to be caretakers and decision makers for vulnerable people" (Abrams and Curran 2004; Greubel 2019). Eugenicist theories were also used during this time to justify social work intervention, creating a relationship between deviance and low IQ. Eugenics also called for the confinement and sterilization of women deemed "feebleminded" (Bruinius 2007; Largent 2008; Leotti 2022). In social work, this manifested in racialized ideologies of purity, gender, and policing. Richmond, Addams, and Abbott adopted the language, methods, and public policy solutions of eugenics (Kennedy 2008; Leotti 2022). These Progressive Era social workers were also key figures in developing and implementing reformatories for "delinquent women", which operated as jails under the guise of social support (Harrell 2023). Although White women were deemed capable of reformation, non-White women and poor women were viewed as beyond redemption and often met with punishment (Leotti 2022). However, the contributions of these influential social workers continue to be traditionally taught as unproblematic, even though they were complicit in upholding racialized and gendered carceral logics of surveillance, the shaping of deviance, and the centering of whiteness as normative.

In a similar vein, at the end of the 19th century, the number of charity investigators in the U.S. had tripled, from 1419 in 1882 to 4202 in 1892, as a result of the rise of the public health movement (Margolin 1997). More specifically, public health became a justification for different kinds of inspections, home visiting, monitoring, and registration, often targeting poor people, immigrants, and people of color, who were viewed as unclean, immoral, and in need of being surveilled (Margolin 1997). By the 1890s, "the problem of the poor" was well documented in books and articles to describe the domestic spaces of those that lived in "slums" (Margolin 1997). As a result, perceptions of poor people transformed them into "objects suitable for study and writing, into objects that should be investigated and described by those who could carry out these tasks, the educated and well-to-do" (Margolin 1997, p. 16). Further, visiting the poor became an occupation tied to notions of "a higher calling" that was "divinely motivated", carried out by a group of "noble" women committed to saving those that were "lost" (Margolin 1997). Religion was central to this process, since it provided social work with a justification and a model; social workers became seen as missionaries

> "whose mission is to teach not how to die but how to live, whose business it is to help the head of the family find work, if he desires work, and to inspire or shame him into desiring it, if he does not; to see that children attend school; to give tasteful hints on the preparation of food, the laws of hygiene and the modeling of garments; to help the growing boy or girl to a suitable situation, when the right time comes; to advise as to the expenditure of money". (Margolin 1997, p. 21)

In essence, social workers were and continue to be expected to be embedded in intimate facets of the lives of those deemed unfit to make their own choices. Meanwhile, those impacted by social work have historically been positioned as passive recipients of social work's teachings.

3.2. Enacting

In addition to considering how social work education addresses the embedding of carceral logics, it is imperative to examine how social work education addresses the enactment of carceral logics. How do social work classrooms and field practicums grapple with

the historical and contemporary realities in which facets of "doing" social work contribute to the process of carceral complicity? While social work has experienced a renewed interest in recognizing and addressing carceral logics over the past decade, through initiatives such as the Grand Challenges, the founding of new organizations such as the Network to Advance Abolitionist Social Work, and journals such as Abolitionist Perspectives in Social Work, it is unclear whether and how social work education addresses the historical and contemporary enactment of carceral logics that contribute to carceral complicity. Currently, few MSW programs offer any courses related to the carceral system and criminalization (Copeland et al. 2024), and many of these course offerings have been criticized for presenting carceral systems as "essential systems within society that contribute a needed, benevolent function" (Dettlaff 2024, p. 114). Beyond coursework, the enactment of carceral logics in social work and social work education has unique implications for field practicums, which are required for all students in accredited baccalaureate and master's programs.

The social work field practicum represents an important nexus of the episteme-ontological implications for carceral complicity, and it is "the signature pedagogy for social work and is intended to integrate the theoretical and conceptual knowledge acquired across the curriculum with the practical world of a social work practice setting in the community" (CSWE 2022a). It is in the field practicum that social work students draw upon the epistemological foundations communicated in their classrooms and enact what it means to practice social work. Although there are currently no data to accurately depict the state of field practicum education in the United States (Bogo 2015), it can be surmised that, reflecting social work's positioning to respond to a wide variety of social problems, students face field practicum environments that employ explicitly carceral logics (e.g., placement in a jail, prison, or court, or with law enforcement), and where carceral logics may be harder to discern (e.g., social welfare or social service providers, such as TANF or SNAP, child welfare agencies, treatment facilities), where women are often positioned as the clients. Thus, field practicums present unique opportunities to recognize and interrupt the enactment of carceral logics, assuming that students are provided with opportunities within their social work education to articulate how these logics are embedded in social work and potential mechanisms for disruptions.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the body responsible for the accreditation of social work education programs in the United States, situates its accreditation processes within the National Association for Social Work (NASW)'s Code of Ethics, which includes ethical directives such as the need to "use rights-based, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to understand and critique the profession's history, mission, roles, and responsibilities and recognize historical and current contexts of oppression in shaping institutions and social work", and which incorporates intersectional, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and gender-specific content into program standards (CSWE 2022b, p. 8). However, in practice, there are immense challenges in the operationalization and implementation of standards across programs and issues remain around students' engagement with this content (Bubar et al. 2016; Calderon 2022; Fairfax et al. 2024; Prock et al. 2022; Tillotson et al. 2021; Alvarez et al. 2008). It remains unclear how recent CSWE standards have been implemented and measured across programs, highlighting a critical area for research. Additionally, social work in the classroom is often already more critical than social work in practice, showcasing a disconnect between the social work classroom and field practicum work (Preston et al. 2014). Field practicum training occurs in a depoliticized manner within neoliberal agencies, focusing on individual social service delivery in lieu of macro-level social change (Preston et al. 2014; Bhuyan et al. 2017; Okuda 2023). This often results in limited opportunities for BSW or MSW students to critically engage with carceral complicity in social work, as well as with how to navigate the ideological and values-based tensions social workers often face in their roles. While the social work classroom at least offers students opportunities to critically engage with the complexities of enacting social logics, field practicum standards are primarily concerned with professionalization, competency evaluation, and placement hours (Wiebe 2010)—creating dissonance within social work education itself, as this focus

on neoliberal values does not "reinforc[e] the more progressive standards of the curriculum overall" (Preston et al. 2014, p. 64). Faculty also face their own neoliberal demands to publish and seek external research funding, creating a situation where "faculty manage these neoliberal tensions by restaging critical perspectives in the classroom and less in the field. We find ourselves becoming complacent with classroom activism, and as such, our activist intentions remain rhetorical rather than enacted" (George et al. 2013, p. 645).

3.3. Invisibilizing

As described above, both the embedding and the enactment of carceral logics have been noted in social work for more than a century. However, ways of embedding and enacting carceral logics have adapted over time to reconcile social work values of social justice and more carceral functions, such as surveillance or the assessment of character. For carceral complicity to be successful, social work must engage in a disconnect between social work's values and functions, in what we discern as an invisibilizing of carceral logics. Through invisibilization, both the embedding and the enacting of carceral logics in social work are obscured and normalized; under the veil of normalcy, it can be difficult to articulate the carceral logics present in social work. This invisibilization has implications for social work education with respect to both the social work student's conceptualization of how to define and respond to social problems and how to define and respond to their own identity as a social worker.

Early social work education leveraged the invisibilization of both gender and carcerality in home visiting, where "Women can go, without offense, where men would not be welcome. She will see a great many things which ought to be considered, but which escape men..." (Thompson 1961, p. 177). In the 1922 Education and Training for Social Work, Tufts writes,

> "although from one point of view woman may be less disposed to disturb the settled order, especially as it relates to family, religion, and the mores and is, therefore, less likely to be a social reformer or revolutionist, nevertheless, since she regards many of our existing institutions, especially of government and industry, as not due to her devising, she often has less of that blind and almost worshipful reverence for them". (Tufts 1923, p. 177)

In this way, women were positioned early in social work to utilize their gender identity to go unnoticed in their observations as they assessed the deviance, delinquency, and salvageability of those whom they visited. Invisibilization has been further exacerbated by neoliberalism, through which the enactment of carceral logics has become embedded in the form of standardized policies and regulations (Macias 2015). A primary example of this has been noted in domestic violence service provision, on the subject of which Mehrotra et al. (2016) describe how the "braid" of neoliberalism, criminalization, and professionalization has shaped social work's response to domestic violence, which disproportionately impacts women (DV). In what began as a movement led primarily by and for women of color, the DV movement became entrenched in government regulation under neoliberalism, while neoliberalism also shaped the individualization and privatization of DV response. A push for professionalization in social work has provided incentives to adopt neoliberal policies, such as "documenting and tracking demands", which shift resources from direct service provision and towards the requirement for specific credentials, which deem who is legitimate to respond DV (Mehrotra et al. 2016, p. 155). Criminalization provides a mechanism to bolster neoliberal ideologies that reinforce the surveillance of clients receiving services, as well as direct collusion with law enforcement. Some authors argue this has "depoliticized DV work", marginalizing social change, increasing the carceral state, and oversimplifying experiences and responses to violence (Mehrotra et al. 2016, p. 156). Although DV in social education has been noted by various scholars, particularly as DV agencies commonly have field practicums for social work students, issues remain in terms of untangling the invisibilization of carceral logics (Crabtree-Nelson et al. 2016; Laing et al. 2013; LeGeros and Borne 2012). As ideologies and practices of surveillance, documentation,

and objective models of intervention are embedded in DV responses, they too are enacted and re-enacted until they are perhaps no longer articulated as an enactment, but rather as just how social work is undertaken.

Issues of critical reflexivity remain a persistent focus in social work education to interrupt what we describe as the invisibilization of carceral logics. However, scholars have noted that the very process of critical reflection can be another way in which social work "supports the legitimacy of the profession as a whole because, while it encourages critical reflection upon itself, this critical reflection does not extend to interrogation of the premises upon which the profession rests" (Pease 2023, p. 221). While there are assuredly positive aspects of critical reflection, such as the focus on power relations and the position of social work in relation to the state, it is not clear how critical reflection addresses the position of social work beyond the identity of the social worker. As critical reflection encourages social workers to turn their gaze inward, policing the self, and outwards, critiquing larger social structures, there remains a lack of critique of social work itself, including both epistemological and ontological roots and contemporary practices (Pease 2023). However, it is through the very invisibilization of social work's participation in harm through social control and criminalization that the guise of helpful benevolence is perpetuated.

4. Beyond Carceral Complicity: Educating for New Futures

Although carceral complicity has been enacted in social work for over a century, there is hope in the disruption of this process, particularly in social work education. As Mary Richmond suggested, we owe it to future generations of social workers to spare them "the groping and blundering by which we have acquired our own stock of experience" (Richmond 1898, pp. 181–82). Social work scholars have made recommendations to enhance criticality and the interrogation of carceral complicity. Richie and Martensen (2020) call for an anti-carceral feminist social work that integrates feminist abolitionist praxis to disrupt carceral complicity to truly adhere to principles of social justice and liberation, stating that social workers must

> "embrace the philosophy of feminism, especially women of color feminisms, that offers so much guidance on how to do our work. Being led by those most affected, understanding the intersectionality of oppression, resisting participation in structures of oppression as short-term reform compromises, and working at both the micro- and macro-level will surely advance our cause... When feminist social workers are influenced by an understanding of the ways and the reason carcerality has been so prominent in the course of continued oppression, then the path toward a feminist abolition future is possible". (p. 15)

The disruption of carceral logics can take many forms. Dettlaff (2024, p. 114) argues that "[social work] must model [its] commitment to [its] professional values by disallowing student placements in carceral systems", inclusive of child protection services, while George et al. (2013) argue for practicum placements that occur in communities rather than agencies to entirely reimagine how social workers engage with community stakeholders. Wiebe (2010) critiques social work's ability to remain committed to anti-oppressive practice with such rigid professional requirements for field practicum supervision and argues for a wider conceptualization of what "social work" is, while Okuda (2023) focuses on the role of field practicum education directors and practitioners by calling for the decolonization of field practicum education through the engagement of liberatory practices in working with students. The decolonization of field practicum education could look like highlighting ongoing community-based efforts such as mutual aid in social work practicum placements, centering student and field practicum instructor relationships, and creating intentional classroom space to discuss tensions between paradoxes of help and harm that the social work student may be experiencing in their field placement.

Crucially, interrogating carceral complicity requires more than just curriculum or practicum change—it requires social work to transform its approach to pedagogy to help students recognize how carceral logics are embedded, enacted, and invisibilized in so-

cial work. Todić and Christensen (2022) describe the importance of critical (Freire 2000), abolitionist (Davis 2003; Rodríguez 2010), and engaged (hooks 1994) pedagogy, which all center notions of liberation and "use educational processes that strive to reveal and counter individualism, hierarchy, ahistoricism, and power-blindness as ideological legacies of white supremacy and colonialism" (Todić and Christensen 2022, p. 390). Through these pedagogical practices, educators—both in the classroom and in the field practicum— can disrupt carceral complicity by facilitating intersectional learning that presents structural analyses of personal problems, interrogates the historical and contemporary role of social work in social control, and encourages critiques of power dynamics, all with the goal of individual and collective liberation (Todić and Christensen 2022). The tangible practices described by these authors included recognizing the active role of students in their education, deconstructing ideas of suffering, and resisting neoliberal practices in course content and grading. Additionally, this can look like centering care for each other, presenting alternatives to existing carceral systems in education, and sharing risk-taking ideas between students and educators, with a goal of also dismantling hierarchical practices in the classroom. Transformative approaches to pedagogy must simultaneously center abolitionist and reflexive praxis through course material, while also interrupting manifestations of carcerality within educational practices. These approaches ultimately support the alignment of social work values and social work education by creating a learning environment that enhances human well-being, supports self-determination, and pays particular attention to the needs of those who are oppressed (NASW 2021; Todić and Christensen 2022).

A poignant illustration of transformative pedagogy can be noted in activist and professor Dean Spade's approach to a classroom conversation about climate change (Hayes and Kaba 2023). During this conversation, several students described pain around the topic of climate catastrophe due to the incarceration of loved ones, recognizing that incarcerated people are often deserted by systems during climate crises. Spade utilized this opportunity to engage in a thought exercise, suggesting the following:

> "'What if we just sat down and just imagined the most complex way we can, a plan for breaking people out of prison?' Spade asked students to consider what skills they would need. . .what conditions at the prison might be like, and how the staff might respond. . .Spade encouraged them to be bold in their imaginations. 'How else would that plan ever happen if a lot of people didn't take time to try to dream it and try to imagine it?'" (Hayes and Kaba 2023, p. 35)

In this way, Spade recognized the agency of his students, choosing to attend to and care for the very real concerns communicated by some in the classroom. The class was able to structurally approach how to intercede on an individual level to support those who otherwise risked abandonment, while ultimately centering liberation. We encourage social work educators to reflect on this approach, and consider how to engage transformative pedagogy when working with students.

In engaging critical, abolitionist, and engaged social work pedagogy, social work programs can serve as generative educational spaces that facilitate the development of critical consciousness, while also serving as models for how to engage with clients and communities in anti-carceral ways. Infusing anti-carceral social work, defined as social work that "is life-affirming and supports the health, self-determination, and sustainability of all communities, particularly Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC), and others most oppressed and impacted by state violence" (Jacobs et al. 2021, p. 38), throughout the episteme-ontological content of social work education is fundamental to disrupting carceral complicity. Additionally, social work education can serve as a place for critical interrogation of what can come next. We are constantly on the cusp of new futures, and as brown (2017) describes, "Right now we don't know what's right so much as we know what's wrong, and what we've tried. . .Nothing that has existed so far was the right way for everyone, but there are pieces out there we can begin to imagine together" (p. 57). However, this requires intentional adaptation, "the process of changing while staying in touch with our deeper purpose and longing", and recognizing

the cruciality of interdependence (brown 2017, p. 70). Thus, it is vital to attend to new networks in the field, such as the Network to Advance Abolitionist Social Work, as well as forms of knowledge and practice that have not been centered in American social work, including the multitude of Indigenous perspectives on healing, Black radicalism, disability justice frameworks, harm reduction, and anti-carceral feminism, to meaningfully resist carceral complicity in social work education. Additionally, this intentional adaptation and recognition of interdependence also reinforces a need for social work education in which students feel empowered by educators to participate in generating creative solutions and creating new futures.

Finally, we encourage national bodies in social work, such as NASW and CSWE, to reconcile with social work's historical and contemporary role in carceral complicity. Recent scholarship has advocated for greater accountability from social work's national bodies, including in relationship to collaborating with law enforcement (Hill et al. 2023). In reference to social work's continued collaboration with law enforcement after the murder of George Floyd, the authors of one study note that "It is one thing for the social work profession to claim to value social justice and dignity and worth, but it is quite another thing for the profession to structurally uphold and practice commitment in more than a performative way" (Hill et al. 2023, p. 496). It is imperative for social workers to recognize the power they hold as the producers and writers of and collaborators in carceral logics to understand how we conceive of safety and support as a field. Shall we continue to prioritize assessments, evaluations, diagnostics, treatment plans, safety plans, and so forth to measure a person's ability to be supported, rehabilitated, and treated? How do we conceive of this in relation to values of justice and individual agency? To transform social work, perhaps there must be shifts in interdisciplinary approaches that attend to notions of freedom more than social control. We recognize that freedom was and still is an imaginative concept, one that has transcended time and space; however, it is also within this radical imagination that we can imagine new possibilities in what social work means, as well as begin to repair legacies and contemporary realities of carceral complicity (Crudup et al. 2023; Francis et al. 2023).

5. Conclusions

In naming and contextualizing carceral complicity in social work, we can more directly disrupt carceral complicity in social work education. By examining how carceral logics have been embedded, enacted, and invisibilized in social work, we may challenge these carceral dynamics in the social work curriculum and field practicum. Mary Richmond's call in 1908 remains salient in 2024; we owe it to the social workers who come after us to name and reconcile social work's carceral complicity. As new generations of social workers are inaugurated into social work, a contextual understanding of carceral complicity is imperative not only to identify recurring patterns, but also to make informed decisions regarding policy, practice, and knowledge production. We propose a future of social work education that prioritizes ways of knowing and doing social work outside of historical positivist epistemologies, which embraces recent scholarship around feminist abolitionist practices, and centers the experiences of those most impacted by social work's carceral complicity. We imagine radically new futures beyond carceral complicity and invite other social workers to reflect on what these new futures can look like.

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