RESPONSE

Responding to and Dismantling Carceral Systems: Learning from Experiential Knowledge, Organizing and Community
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The intersection of homelessness and criminalization is a critical point to understand and act on injustice. I am grateful for the collection of works presented in this issue – each offering thoughtful and nuanced calls for urgent action. Each contribution embodies an essential perspective on systems of criminalization, highlighting the simultaneous invisibility, hyper-surveillance, disconnection, and violence that individuals are burdened with (Sylvestre & Bellot, 2014) as they try to survive carceral systems with deep roots in ideologies of colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy (Chartrand & Rougier, 2022). The authors draw from experience, practice, theory, and organizing to highlight the need to build new systems of care, providing important reminders that harm, surveillance, and punishment do not only happen within prisons or at singular moments in individuals' lives. Each author echoes broader moves in literature on homelessness and punishment – highlighting punitive measures in social systems outside of prisons (education, housing supports, social assistance, etc.) to show how disproportionate punishment, precarity, and surveillance is an intergenerational and life-long experience for many (Nichols & Malenfant, 2023; Nichols et al., 2023). They highlight an important strategy for survival in the face of institutions grounded in capitalist, neoliberal, white supremacist, colonial value systems: community. Peers, community members, family, loved ones, and even strangers, as mentioned throughout this issue, may make up integral supports in the face of "the systems that battle us" (Dreddz & Jackson, 2024, p. 34) – systems that both fail to serve and actively harm.

Carceral systems, as demonstrated by the authors here, are anything but neutral. They are deeply normed to punish certain individuals and groups, creating and perpetuating cycles of homelessness and blame. This edition demonstrates that the cycle of homelessness and punishment is a systemic failure across the globe. Current responses internationally reflect a neoliberal individualization of behaviours that are deemed criminal (Blondeau, 2023), as well as individual blame for both "bad" behaviour and homelessness. The lie of individual fault for homelessness and criminalization may

suggest (to some) that incarceration is the fault of people behaving badly, and that the prison industrial complex and carceral system actually work to enhance community well-being and safety. Individuals, communities, advocates, and researchers demonstrate that this is not true on any level as the authors outline here, not in purported "rehabilitation" (e.g. O'Rourke et al., 2024), nor in protecting people from violence (McNab, 2024). Services that exist are not only out of sync with the needs of people, but are actively harming many to maintain systems that privilege the few. Capitalism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism are key organizing factors, each deeply critiqued by many authors in this issue.

Ignorance about the everyday realities of prisoners and people without a home may also mean that those who are not directly impacted think they are free from responsibility to change the system. A combination of the pervasiveness of criminalization and penality (Dej & Spencer, 2024; Herring et al., 2020) coupled with individualizing narratives of fault, may lead those who wish to act to address the injustices in housing, criminal legal systems, and other systems to feel the current situation is too overwhelming for one person to change. Individualizing narratives, which blame people for their own homelessness and precarity, also shift the responsibility for changing the system away from the collective. These narratives and logics are difficult to understand, "know", and navigate (Henry, 2024). I have both experienced and witnessed the inconsistent logic of when someone's circumstances are deemed "bad" enough to act or bad enough to punish. Social services, including homelessness services, as they exist within capitalist, neoliberal societies, have been critiqued for mobilizing only when things reach a moment of crisis (e.g. Gaetz & Dej, 2017). This issue demonstrates that there is a fine line between demonstrating sufficient need to receive (often, inadequate) services and being labelled at fault or "too bad", and necessitating punishment. In a reality where many services mirror the same punitive logics as incarceration, this means many are constantly seen by the system as at fault, as "bad seeds" (Dreddz & Jackson, 2024). As many authors point out, being deemed worthy of punishment, in the legal system and in schools, housing services or in public space, is deeply connected to who you are – particularly as it relates to class and race (Coyle & Schept, 2017). As Dreddz and Jackson (2024) highlight in this issue, individuals with access to wealth do not navigate the same harm or punishment, making clear both the lack of justice in the "justice" system,

as well as demonstrating that some relationships – especially relationships to (social) capital and wealth – are accepted forms of support for some. Invisibility, mentioned throughout this edited collection, extends to the "bad" behaviour of those who are wealthy enough or have the right connections, to circumvent criminalizing responses.

The narratives of people who have or are navigating homelessness and (or) incarceration are often seen as a powerful tool of advocacy and action. Stories provide an entry-point through which to engage those who may not understand the harm, ineffectiveness or everyday realities of people. And they are. However, as highlighted in this issue, listening to stories must not be where allyship/collaboration stops. It is not enough to include those with lived experience of homelessness and incarceration at the very tables that are organizing their criminalization. Narratives, when heard with respect and a willingness to act, can be an important tool to mobilize (Nelson, 2020). Led by experiential knowledge and evidence (Michel, 2024), we can dispel the assumptions many hold about the effectiveness of the criminal legal system and the deservedness of punitive measures. We can shift responses to precarity to be grounded in the actual needs of communities and people. I am not someone with lived experience of incarceration, though I have experienced homelessness. I have witnessed – and experienced – how access to resources, including access to a strong community, can provide stability, and ways to escape the cycles of precarity and criminalization that are examined in this issue. As mentioned by many authors, experiences can illuminate systemic failures, but they can also show complexity, possibility, privilege, and connection. Most importantly, lived experiences compel us to ground our work in rejecting the inevitability that systems must be carceral, must cause harm, and must disconnect people from communities, land, and joy. As many authors here suggest, experiences can push us to work for different and more just futures because we know how significantly the current systems fail most people.

Finally, I wish to highlight a key theme in the perspectives shared here – the importance of agency, connection, and relationships. Many authors demonstrate the destabilizing effects of criminalizing logics which are purported to "rehabilitate", particularly when they extend to people's relationships with those who support them. Authors here highlight that calls to mobilize community to address carceral harm hold potential for strong networks of care and responsibility for one another. Often, calls for

dismantling the current carceral system are met with an assumption that this must mean a lack of accountability for anyone. However, as authors share, there is work being done to imagine "a fulsome social safety net" (Dreddz & Jackson, 2024) grounded in care, responding to one another's needs and wellbeing. Building from the existing work of collectives, who are keeping each other as well as possible in the current system, provides us with lessons and a strong base for action. Our efforts to build new futures together can draw on the existing labour of people with lived experience of homelessness, incarceration, and criminalization – as Michel says (2024), "we are already making this work". Mutual aid and solidarity – understanding that our stability and joy are deeply interconnected with one another's, is a point to rally around throughout this issue, where authors push us to question: How can we learn from our experiences in systems of harm to foster action? What can we learn from complexity and experiences of joy in the face of violent systems? How can responses to precarity be structured in deep community and care? Without romanticizing the difficult work ahead of us, the authors in this issue share generously, providing us with tangible points to start our collective work to imagine, act and build new systems of care.

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