



# IMAGINING ABOLITIONIST SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

05/21/26 PRESENTATION

DEVON MOULTON, ELLAROSE BIANCA, & SARAH  
LAUFENBERG

# INTRODUCTIONS



**Devon Moulton**  
he/him • 2nd year MSW  
Student, SSSW (CO)

*Relational Harm and Trauma*



**Ellarose Bianca**  
she/they • 1st year MSW  
Student, SSSW (Clinical)

*Sexuality & Gender*



**Sarah Laufenberg**  
she/they • 1st year MSW  
Student, SSSW (CO)

*Decarceration & Forensic  
Social Work*

# VALUES

- Respect
- Openness
- Willingness to be curious
- Creating space
- Honor your body
- Moving towards the “horizon of abolition” (Mariame Kaba)



# WHAT WE WILL COVER

**1**

- Introductions
- Overview
- Value-setting

**2**

- Overview of Abolition & the Prison Industrial Complex

**3**

- Abol & SW – Tools & Examples
- Abolition Working Group @SSSW

**4**

- Time for Questions, Feedback, & Discussion

# ABOLITION AND THE CARCERAL SYSTEM

“Abolition is about abolishing the conditions under which prison became the solution to problems, rather than abolishing the buildings we call prisons.”

— Ruth Wilson Gilmore

“Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.”

— Angela Y. Davis

# PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

## Nearly 2 million people

In our federal and state prisons, local jails, and juvenile correctional facilities in 2026

## Disproportionately Impacts

Racial and ethnic minorities at every level including policing, sentencing, incarceration, and state violence

## 43% of people

Incarcerated report a history of one or more mental health issues

## 68% of men

With felony convictions report early childhood victimization of either physical or sexual abuse, or neglect

## Up to 95% of women

Incarcerated have experienced domestic or sexual violence at some point in their lives

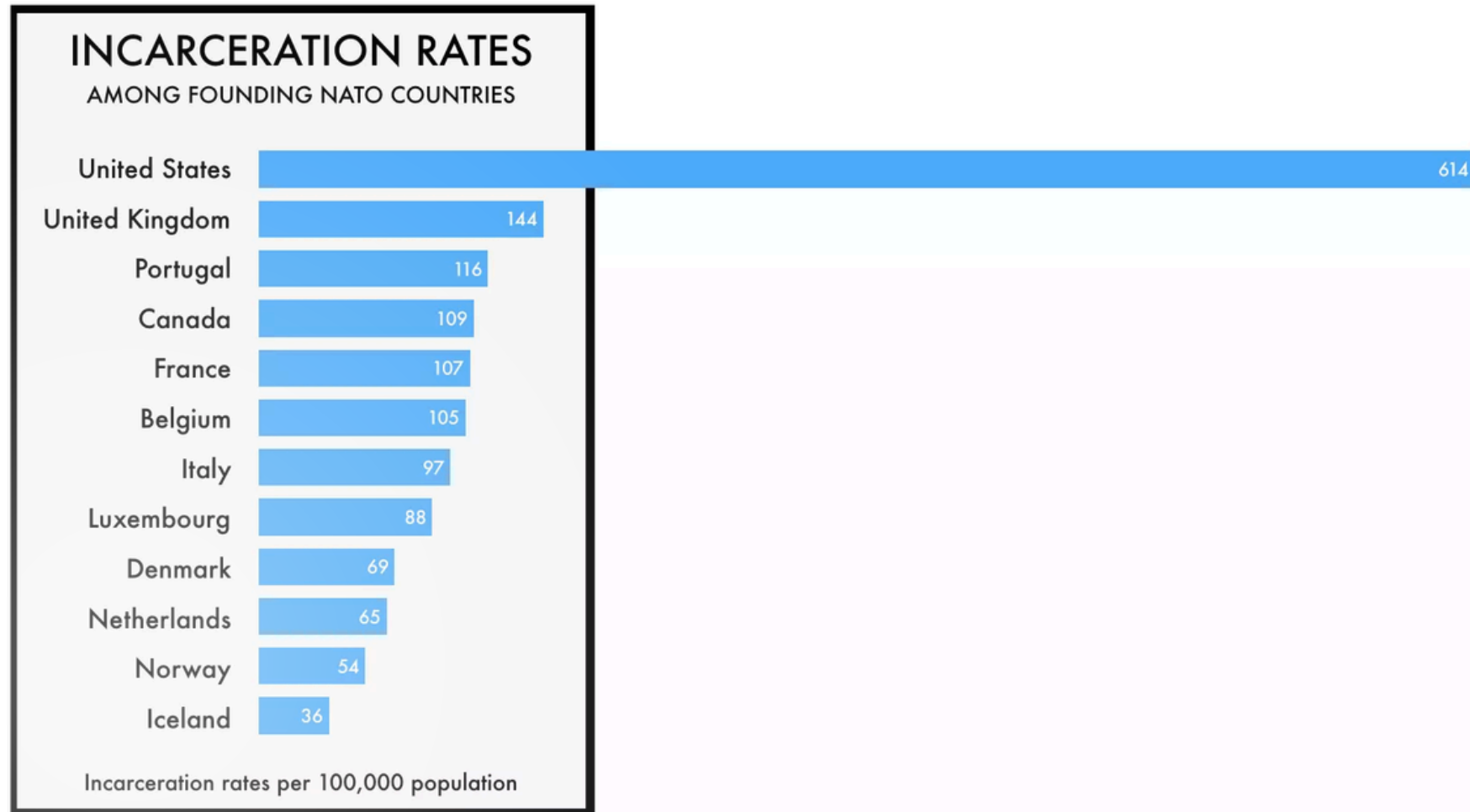
## 75% of people

who were victims of violent crimes stated they would rather see accountability in the form of restorative justice, community service, and mental health treatment, instead of incarceration



# Comparison

## Global comparisons



Source: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2024.html>

## Incarcerated people suffer disproportionately with serious mental illnesses compared to the overall U.S. population

Specific mental health problems reported by people in state prisons in 2016 compared to the U.S. adult population in 2016

### PEOPLE WHO SUFFERED FROM **SERIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS** IN THE PAST 30 DAYS

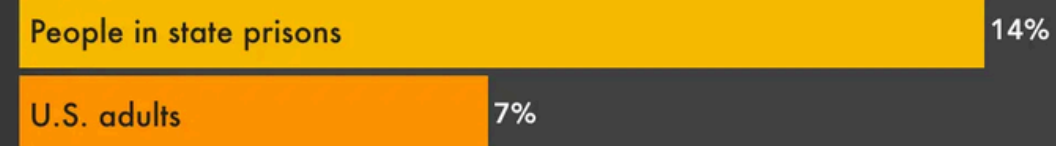


### PEOPLE WHO WERE **EVER DIAGNOSED WITH...**

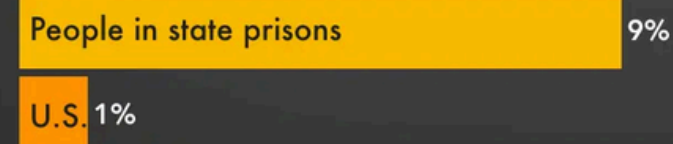
#### **BIPOLAR DISORDER**



#### **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)**



#### **SCHIZOPHRENIA OR OTHER PSYCHOTIC DISORDER**



**PRISON**  
POLICY INITIATIVE

Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics' *Survey of Prison Inmates 2016* data analyzed by the Prison Policy Initiative; Olsson et al. (2019); Treatment Advocacy Center (2017); National Institute of Mental Health. For a detailed source list, see [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/spi\\_2016\\_mental\\_health\\_comparison.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/spi_2016_mental_health_comparison.html)

# **THE TRAUMA OF THE SYSTEM**

**66% of people in federal prisons reported not receiving  
mental health care since being incarcerated**

**Critical lack of resources for rehabilitation services,  
mental health treatment, and educational programs**

**89% to 97% of people who are incarcerated report exposure to  
new potentially traumatic experiences**

**In 2023, 62% of people released from prison were rearrested  
within three years, and 39% were reincarcerated**

# HOW THIS SHOWS UP IN OUR WORK

Education



School to Prison Pipeline



Allocation of Resources



Documentation



The Criminalization of Poverty



Who has Access




Serving Minority Populations



Mandated Reporting





"imagining a future  
*without policing* is not  
the same as a future  
without *police*"

MARIAME KABA, ABOLITION AND SOCIAL WORK.

# RESISTING “SOFT POLICING”

- “The carceral state calls social workers to soft policing, and it’s a difficult call to ignore”
- **soft policing:** surveillance, hostile regulation, & incarceration done by an official who is not a cop
- social work → may act as a kinder, gentler police force or to ameliorate police
  - regulatory & control functions
  - can make policing seem more palatable or prevent us from imagining abolitionist possibilities



# REIMAGINING: ABOLITIONIST SW

- individuals have the ability to care for themselves & others
- mutual care, with equitable access to & abundance of resources
  - without coercion or state surveillance
  - standing with & accompaniment vs. standing over people or between them and resources
- admitting that social workers & mental health infrastructure can cause harm

*KABA AND RICHIE, NO MORE POLICE.*

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. anti-carceral
2. anti-oppression
3. anti-capitalism
4. decolonization
5. deprofessionalization
6. centering systems, not people as the problem
7. solidarity, not charity
8. building life-affirming institutions & relationships
9. self-determination & autonomy
10. nonpunitive approaches to harm & abuse

*NAASW, ABOLITION & SOCIAL WORK.*

# WHAT ARE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES WE CAN LOOK TO?

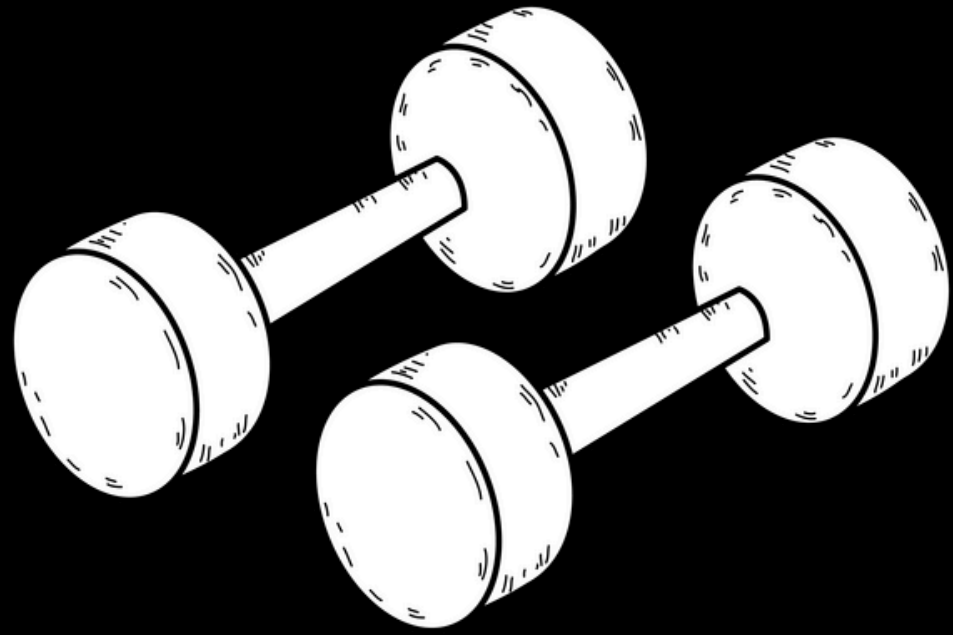
Slowness -

Trust & safety -

Rupture & repair -

Partnership/ mutual learning -

*CURRENT PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT ABOLITIONIST FUTURES.*



# BUILDING & FLEXING ABOLITIONIST 'MUSCLE'

**"The power of literacy to make us fit for struggle should be exercised like a muscle, not waved around like a membership card."**

*RUTH WILSON GILMORE*

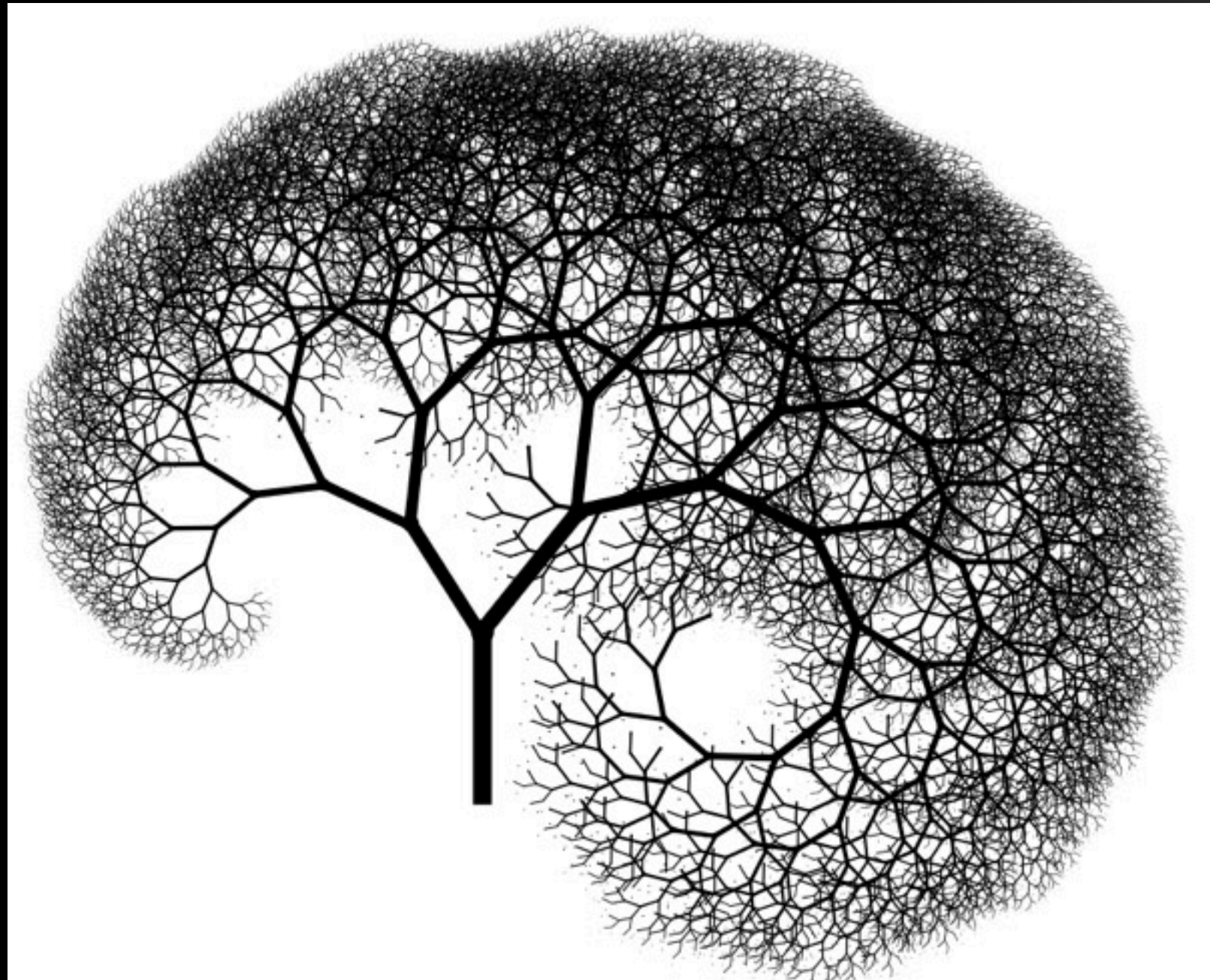
- abolitionist SW practice is about **vision & capacity**:
  - **vision**: collective re-imagining of care work and ways of relating to each other
  - **capacity (& follow-up)**: being in constant practice, being honest about what you can/can't do
- "There are as many answers as there are people in this room"

# PREFIGURATION



- A practice of “mirroring the world we want to create and sustain” (Dean Spade)
- The process is as important as the outcome
  - Grounding our work in simultaneity, even when it feels uncomfortable
- Mutual aid chart

# EMERGENCE & FRACTAL ABOLITION



- Fractals as a central concept of emergent strategy and emergence (adrienne maree brown)
  - What we practice at the small scale sets the pattern(s) for the whole 'system'
- Practicing on a scale that is accessible to everyone (Andrea Ritchie)
  - We begin at the scale of ourselves, ourselves and one another, and our small groups of comrades
- Emergent Strategy
- Fractal Abolition

**SMALL SCALE**



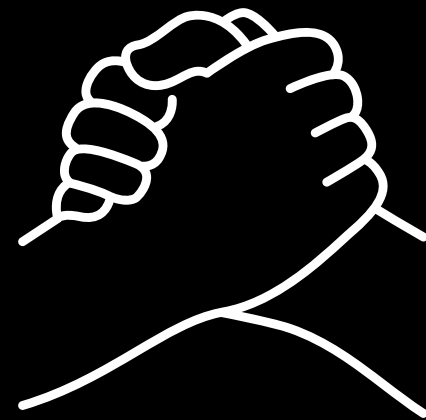
**LARGE SCALE**



# LESSONS FROM OUR ABOLITION WORKING GROUP



Centrality of  
community building



Setting values,  
commitments, &  
vision

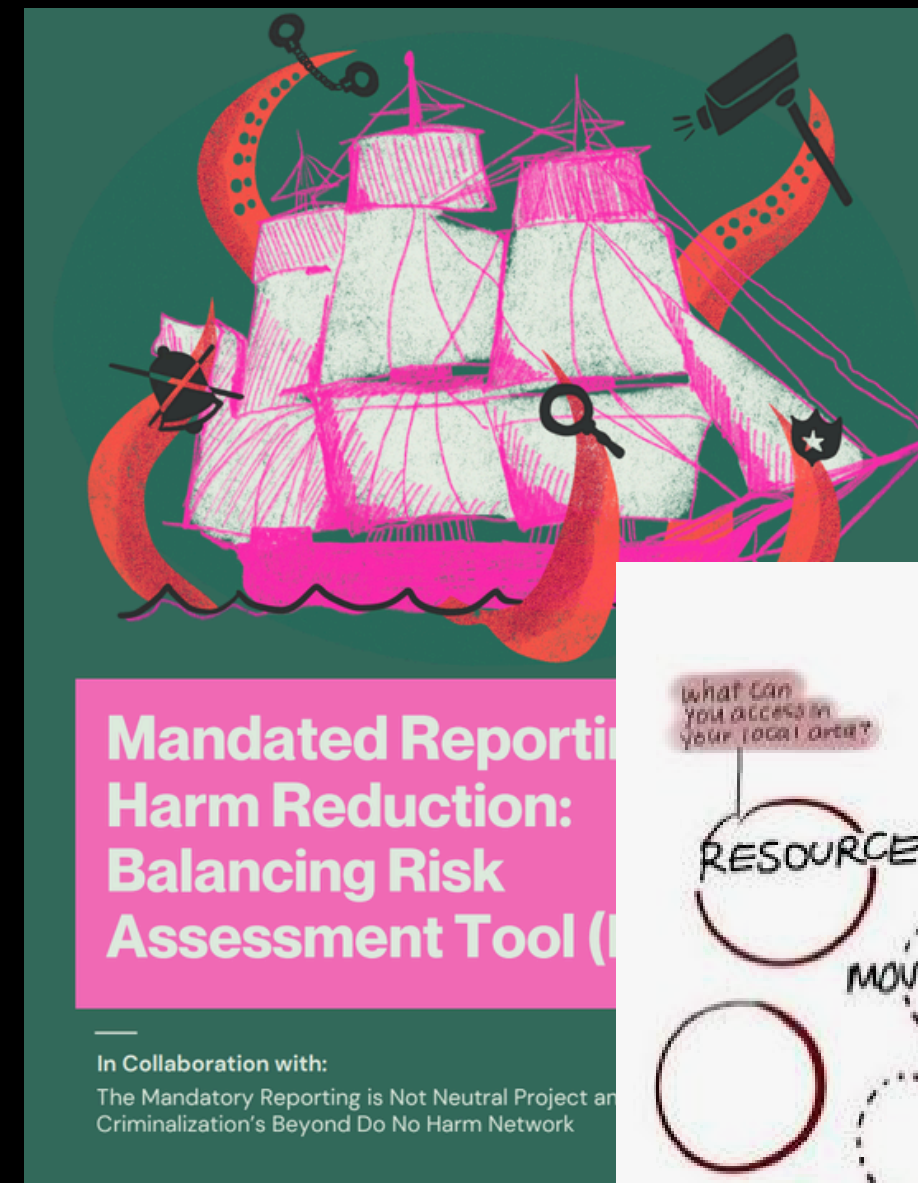


Setting a learning  
+ accountability  
space

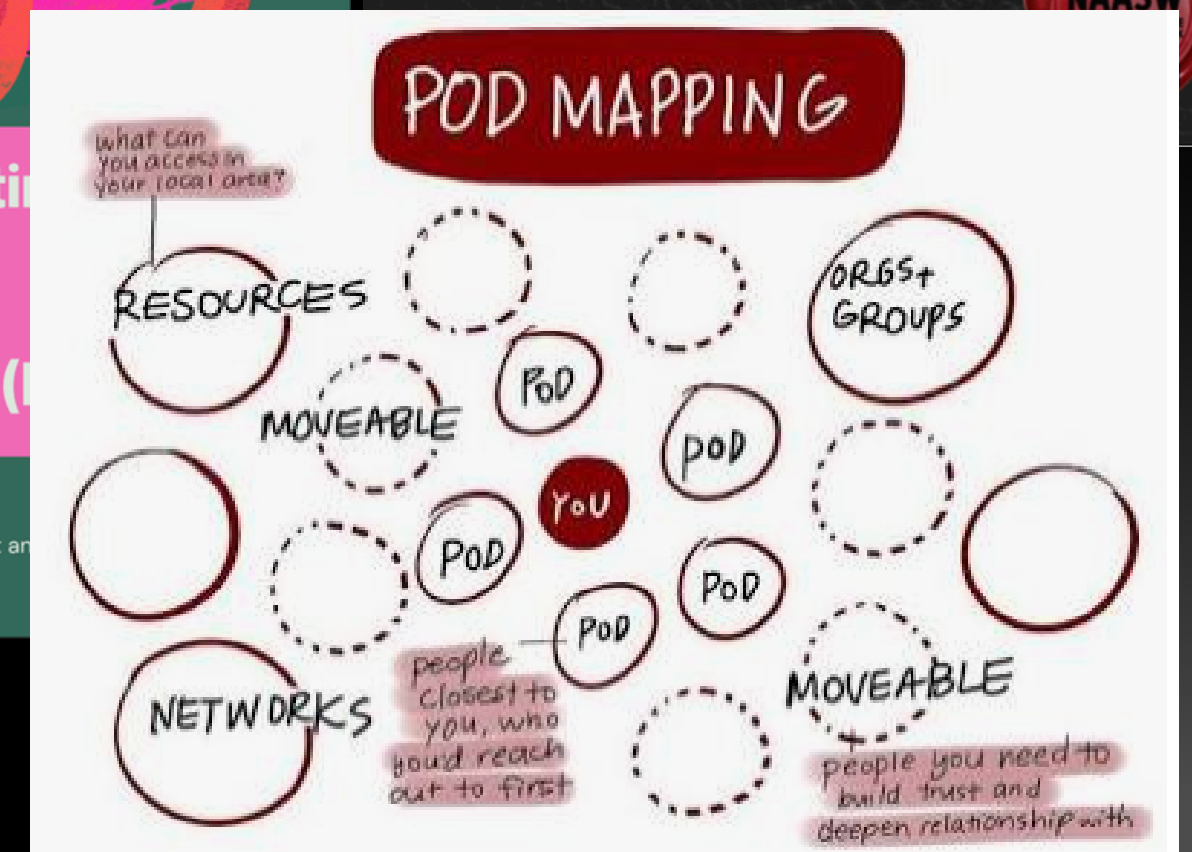
***There are people who want to do this work with you***

# TOOLS + RESOURCES

- risk assessment & risk-sharing
- anti-carceral safety planning
- peer supervision & relationship-building
- pod mapping
- reading groups & further learning



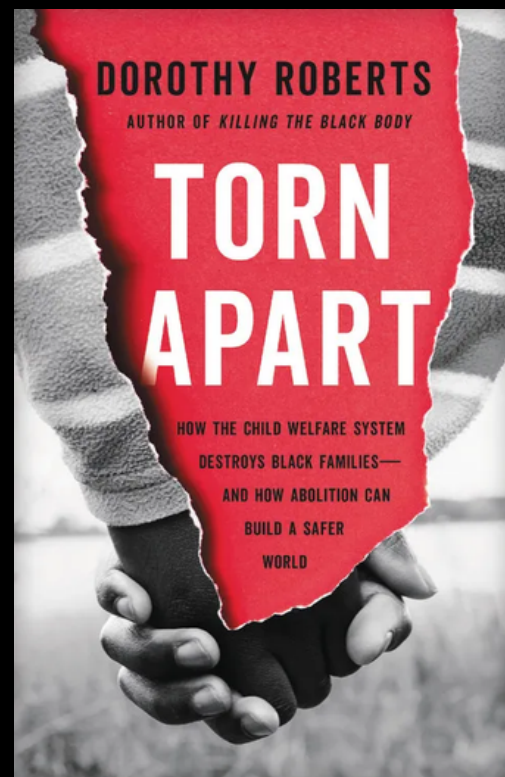
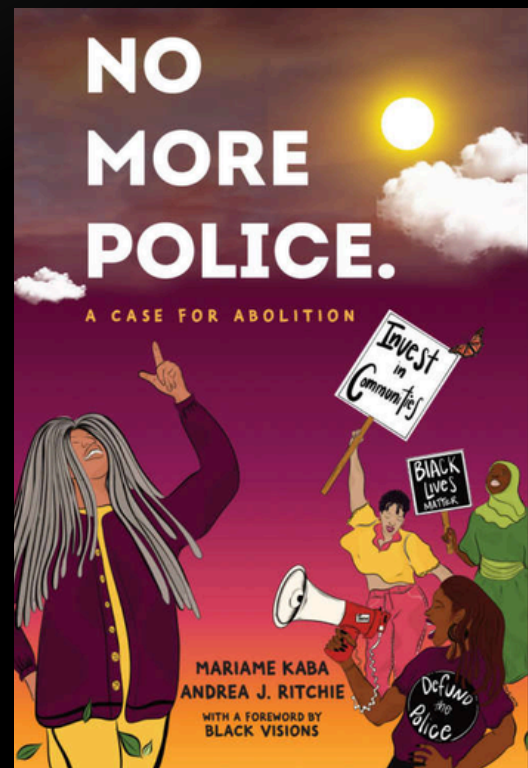
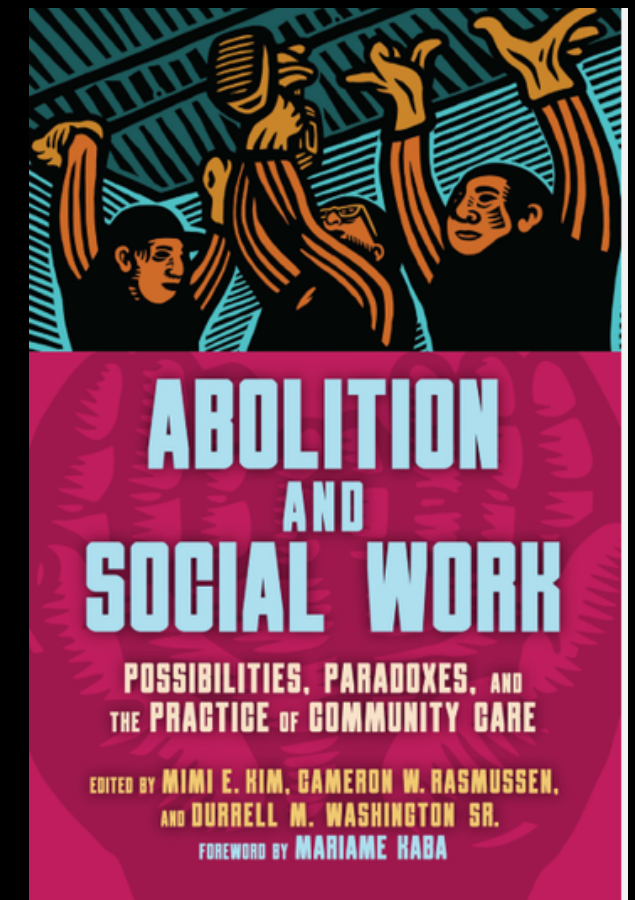
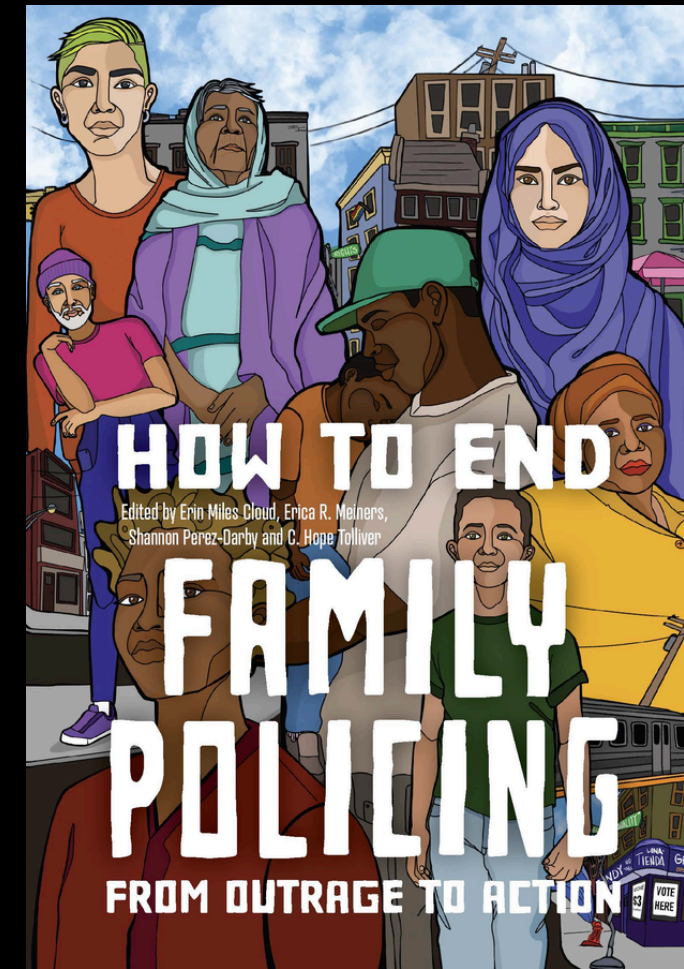
## ABOLITIONIST PEER SUPERVISION GUIDE



WHAT ARE SOME TOOLS YOU MAY ALREADY HAVE?

# GROUPS + READINGS

- Network to Advance Abolition in Social Work
- Mandated Reporters Against Mandated Reporting
- Mandated Reporting Isn't Neutral Project
- Critical Resistance
- Project LETS
- Interrupting Criminalization



NO MORE POLICE. A CASE FOR ABOLITION. MARIAME KABA AND ANDREA J. RITCHIE WITH A FOREWORD BY BLACK VISIONS.

DOROTHY ROBERTS AUTHOR OF KILLING THE BLACK BODY. TORN APART. HOW THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM DESTROYS BLACK FAMILIES—AND HOW ABOLITION CAN BUILD A SAFER WORLD.

EMERGENT STRATEGY. SHAPING CHANGE, CHANGING WORLDS. adrienne maree brown.

REPORTS ARE NOT SUPPORTS: MANDATORY REPORTING harm reduction. ALL of US. IMPACTS. HARM REDUCTION. POLICY makers. FUNDERS. OUR BEST decisions are NOT made in CRISIS. MANDATORY REPORTING is not NEUTRAL PROJECT & JUST BEGINNINGS collaborative. WE ARE often told... REPORTS are NOT SUPPORT. SHANNON PEREZ-DARBY. mandatoryreportingisnotneutral.com.

# CONTACT US

Silberman School of Social Work  
Abolition Working Group

**Ellarose Bianca • she/they**

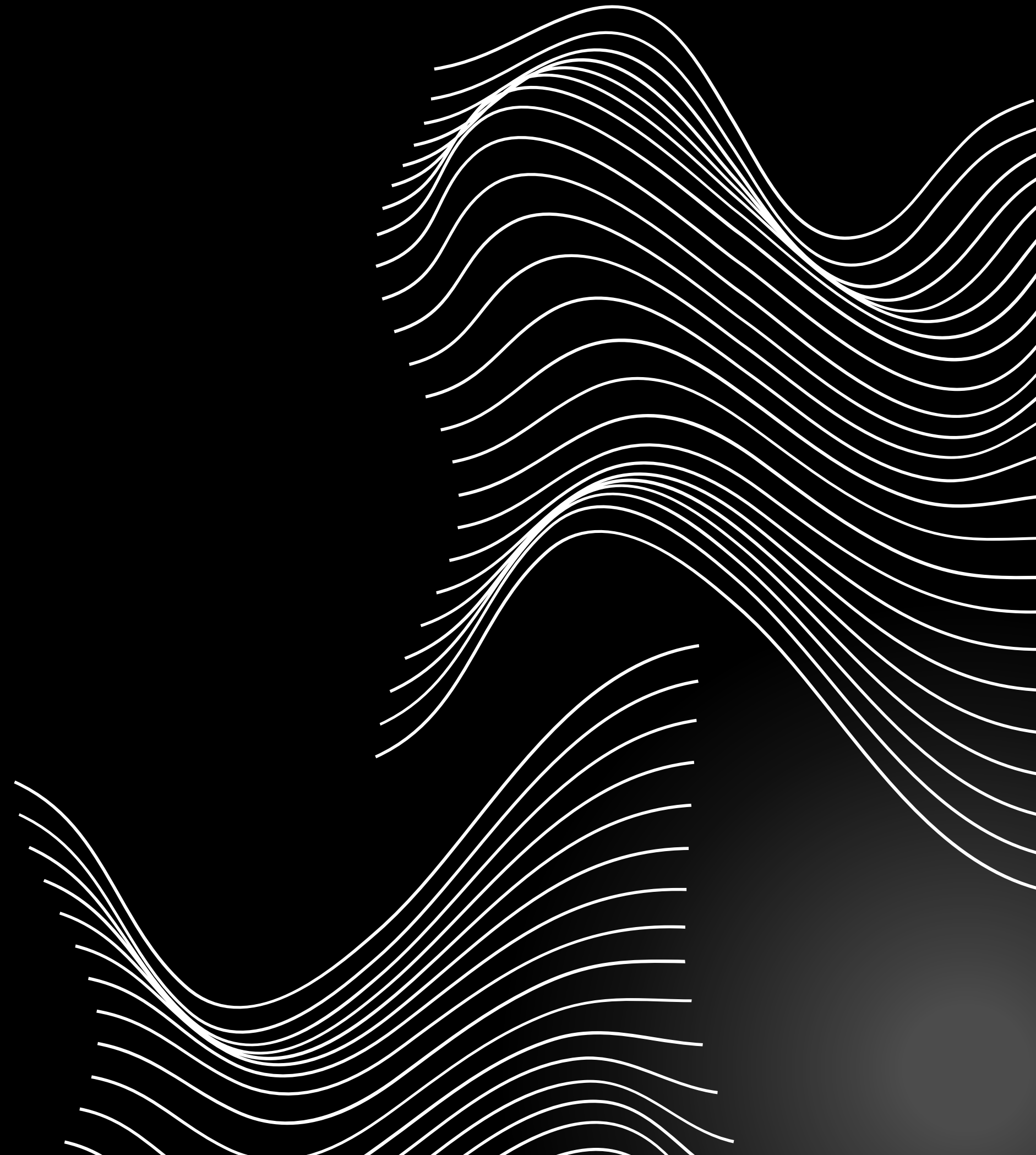
ellarose.bianca13@stu-mail.hunter.cuny.edu

**Sarah Laufenberg • she/they**

sarah.laufenberg91@cuny.edu

**Devon Moulton • he/him**

devon.moulton01@login.cuny.edu





# DEBRIEF & Q+A

THANK YOU!