'I've grown fearful of any rustle behind me': defining anticipating discriminatory violence *as* violence

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Abstract
Marginalised people fear and expect violence, often daily. This prompts us to ask, is anticipating violence a violence in and of itself? Asking and answering this question extends the feminist, critical race, violence and trauma studies project of broadening traditional understandings of violence to name ignored forms of violence as violence (e.g. epistemic or representational violence). Ultimately, we argue that anticipating discriminatory violence *is* violence in and of itself. To do so, first we contest the common assumption that violence is intentional. The idea that violence needs to be intentional is a long-held myth that functions to deny various forms of violence. Second, we challenge the idea that violence requires a clear perpetrator. Systems of oppression and discriminatory ideologies enact violence, but there often is no clear perpetrator. When we are preoccupied with claiming that violence involves an intentional actor, we neglect to attend to the ways in which oppressive ideologies and systems structure marginalised people's daily lives and experiences of (anticipating) violence. Living under the Western capitalist cisheteropatriarchal regime renders the 'everyday' a site of trauma and violence. This framework for reconceptualising what 'counts' as violence creates space to move beyond violence in its most traditional forms: the punch, the slur. Anticipating violence is the logical consequence of living under systems of oppression.

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When a group of marginalised people collectively anticipate violence, it is clear violence has already happened and is happening all around us: we posit that our conceptualisation of anticipating violence as violence is not intended to validate all forms of anticipated violence.

Keywords

Anticipated violence, defining violence, systemic violence, trauma, violence

Introduction

Racialised trans non-binary poet, performer and author Alok Vaid-Menon writes that 'I still cannot go outside without being afraid for my safety' (2020: 16). In a similar vein, Vivek Shraya (2018), who is a trans woman of colour, scholar, musician and artist, wrote an entire book titled *I'm Afraid of Men* about how she is afraid of the violence men may or will enact. She recounts many instances when she fears men: walking down the street, travelling on public transportation and so on: 'I've grown fearful of any rustle behind me', Shraya (2018: 5) writes. Shraya also explains:

If I open Twitter or Facebook […] I brace myself for news reports of violence against women and gender non-confirming people, whether it's a story about another trans woman of colour who has been murdered, or the missing and murdered Indigenous women, or sexual assault. As important as it is to make these incidents visible by reporting them, sensationalizing and digesting these stories is also a form of social control, a reminder that I need to be afraid and to try and be as invisible as possible. (2018: 2–3)

It is perhaps uncontroversial to state that marginalised people fear and expect violence, often daily. This prompts us to ask if anticipating discriminatory violence – being 'fearful of any rustle behind me' (Shraya, 2018: 5) – is violence in and of itself. Building on the work of the trauma studies scholars, feminist and critical race studies scholars and scholars who study violence, we argue that anticipating discriminatory violence *is* violence in and of itself. Jack Halberstam writes that 'the threat is in the anticipation' (1993: 199): living under institutionalised forms of discrimination causes marginalised people to fear more overt forms of violence (e.g. the slur, the attack).

We begin by contesting two commonly held assumptions about violence that are reproduced in some scholarly works (e.g. Hamby, [2017]), and by organisations (e.g. World Health Organization, [2024]). First, we question the idea that violence is or must be intentional. The idea that violence needs to be intentional is a long-held myth that functions to deny various forms violence and to absolve people who have enacted violence. Combating the idea that violence needs to be intentional, the phrase 'intent doesn't equal impact' has gained traction (Utt, 2013). Second, we challenge the idea that violence requires a clear perpetrator. Systems of oppression and discriminatory ideologies are violent and enact violence, but there often is no clear perpetrator. When one is preoccupied with claiming that violence involves an intentional actor, one neglects to attend to the ways that oppressive ideologies, systems and discourses structure

culturally devalued people's daily lives and experiences of (anticipating) violence. This line of argumentation is in part a response to psychiatric theories of trauma and violence, such as those of Dominick LaCapra (1994) and Cathy Caruth (1995), that rely heavily on isolated events to locate the source of a subject's injury. Recent work from feminist, trauma, decolonial and critical disability studies argues that violence, or the threat of violence, is bound up in the everyday lives of minoritarian subjects. Living under the current Western, white supremacist, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal, ableist, interphobic, sanist regime renders the 'everyday' as a site of trauma and violence. We are interested in turning towards the intimate and unspoken yet quotidian dimensions of violence to render systemic oppression more visible and to denaturalise the demonisation of marginalised people. This framework for reconceptualising what 'counts' as violence creates space to move beyond violence in its most traditional forms (e.g. attack or assault).

Turning towards the *anticipation* of discriminatory violence invites us to see violence for marginalised populations as a 'structural underpinning of life itself' (Matthies-Boon, 2018: 160). Anticipating violence is the logical consequence of insidious violence, insidious trauma and living under systems of oppression that devalue people. When a group of marginalised people collectively anticipate violence – for example, women/girls expecting violence from men/boys; 2SLGBTQI + people expecting violence from cisheterosexual people; racialised people expecting violence from white people; colonised people expecting violence from colonists – it is clear that violence has already happened. The very act of anticipating discriminatory violence reveals that violence is happening all around us and in the most innocuous ways. Broadening the definition of violence in this way offers significant benefits in that it allows for the recognition of forms of violence that are often overlooked or dismissed because they do not conform to conventional understandings of what violence is. Traditional definitions tend to focus on clear acts of physical harm, leaving out the more subtle, yet nevertheless damaging, ways that violence manifests in everyday life. By acknowledging that violence can occur through the seemingly innocuous, minute actions, ideologies and discourses, we can better address the full spectrum of harm experienced by marginalised communities. This expanded definition allows for the recognition and validation of experiences that are often dismissed because they do not 'fit' into the traditional categories of violence: for example, the chronic stress and psychological toll that result from constant exposure to racial slurs, gender discrimination or the fear of potential physical violence are forms of harm that have profound impacts on individuals' health. Moreover, expanding conceptions of what violence is in this way can help marginalised people who anticipate violence feel less alone in their anxiety or fear. We are broadening understandings of violence given that certain forms of violence are not recognised as such due to inequitable power relations and intersecting forms of systemic oppression.

We propose that violence does not require a clear intentional 'actor', and a clear 'event' need not have taken place. Rather, violence can (and does) occur via the seemingly innocuous and minute actions and discourses found in society and culture. It is a spectre that haunts and re-traumatises individuals. Using a combination of intersectional feminist and queer critiques of violence and oppressive structures, along with a consideration for the micropolitics of everyday life, we consider the ways in which marginalised

people anticipate and navigate the milieu of violence and fear in society, one that re/produces the hum of violence. This haunting hum is what it means to anticipate discriminatory violence and the mere anticipation of said violence is a form of violence that attempts to keep people acting in accordance with the Western, white supremacist, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal, ableist, interphobic, sanist social schema. To borrow from Shraya, a culture in which minoritarian subjects anticipate violence is 'a form of social control, a reminder that I need to be […] as invisible as possible' (2018: 3). Or in Halberstam's Foucauldian articulation, anticipating discriminatory violence prompts people to 'discipline the self' (1993: 190) to prevent being subjected to more traditional modes of violence such as physical violence. This constellation of theoretical frameworks that we use as a lens for our analysis, or 'plug in', informs our methodology. In an attempt to work against conventional qualitative methods, Alecia Youngblood Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei (2013) conceptualise 'plugging in' as a research process that considers multiple elements as sites of analysis. For them, doing qualitative research is a process built upon multiple encounters with not only a singular data set but also with 'ideas, fragments, theory, selves, sensations' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013: 262). Our method of analysis thus 'thinks with theory' of feminist, anti-racist and queer critiques of violence.

Defining (discriminatory) violence

Violence is tricky to define, in part because it relies on a perceived expert to tell us the 'truth' of violence: what violence looks like, how it manifests and what the consequences of violence are. The 'truth' around violence is that it is bound up with cultural capital, privilege and status. As a regime of knowledge that requires legibility and boundary making (what *is* and *is not* violence), violence is at its core a manifestation of power. It is power that can be weaponised and exerted physically, financially, verbally, ideologically, culturally and so on. The denial of violence is also a form of violence. If legibility of violence is a precursor and requirement for its existence, then knowledge of violence (its definition, what it looks, what it feels like) becomes integral to understanding the ways in which violence is carried out or denied. Michel Foucault argued that academies and governments in the early nineteenth century endeavoured to 'organise a global, quantifiable, knowledge of morbid phenomena' (1980: 167). While Foucault discussed health and sickness in this context, violence is, too, a 'morbid phenomena' often quantified into statistics of perpetrator and victim, outcomes and consequences. The quantifiable knowledge of which Foucault was so deeply critical is useful for helping scholars think about the troubles of trying to quantify violence because it relegates the more subtle trans/actions of violence as mute. For example, when a trans woman of colour like Shraya walks down the street fearing physical violence, does that anticipation not mean she is swimming in dangerous, violent waters, even if the physical assault never comes? We argue yes.

Typically, violence often brings into the imagination something physical or tangible: a punch, a stabbing, a (mass) shooting. This understanding of violence, however, lacks nuance. Sherry Hamby notes that there are many problems with how violence is typically understood (i.e. as mainly physical) because sexual violence and bullying often are not

taken as seriously because they 'do not map onto prototypical exemplars' (2017: 167). Adding to Hamby's examples, one can also consider how symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990), representational violence (hooks, 1996), medical and 'curative violence' (Kim, 2017), violence against animals (Madeline, 2000), the violence of austerity (Cooper and Whyte, 2017), (corporate) environmental violence (Ducre, 2018; Belser 2020), epistemological violence (Namaste, 2009; Dotson, 2011) and the violence of hostile architecture (see: Annan 2021) are not usually taken as seriously because they deviate from prototypical exemplars. As this extensive literature demonstrates, scholars and activists have long sought to counter the idea that violence is just physical. However, many people suggest it is, hence why scholars keep insisting that violence is not strictly physical.

Let us consider some examples. Sexual violence is normalised; it is often not taken seriously in our sexist, racist, patriarchal, rape culture because, in part, it is typically enacted against girls and women by men. When women and girls testify to experiencing sexual violence, they are presumed to be hyperbolic or they are charged with 'asking for it' (Greene and Day, 2020; Mastrontoni, 2021). And, given the intersection of sexism, racism and colonialism, racialised girls and women have been and remain disproportionately targeted, subjected to sexual violence and not believed when they share their experiences. For instance, given the racist stereotype of the Jezebel figure – a 'sensual, animalistic creature […] there for the taking' (Hamad, 2020: 23) – sexual violence against Black women was not and is not acknowledged as violence by many. Indeed, Black women are often construed as 'unrapeable' (Cooper, 2014: 154), the assumption being that 'black womxn are unable to withhold consent' (Helman, 2018: 11). As articulated by Darius Bost, the legacy of anti-Blackness marks Black people as 'socially dead' and their suffering as 'normative and unremarkable' (2018: 14). We can also consider the fact that, in Canada, many white settler colonisers (past and present) did not (or do not) classify the genocidal kidnapping and institutionalisation of Indigenous children in Residential Schools as violent; doing so was understood and narrated as a noble mission to 'civilise' (Woolford, 2015; Woods, 2016). Indigenous community members, activists and scholars have been speaking of the racist, sexist, queerphobic and linguistic violence and trauma of the residential schooling system for decades – the sexual and physical abuse, forced labour and so on – but said traumatic violence has only been recently acknowledged by the state (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

These examples, and there are countless others, beg the question: who historically and now has the authority to define violence and claim that this or that is or is not violent? Evidently, historically and contemporarily, people with culturally valued characteristics or ways of being (e.g. white settler coloniser, Christian, European/Western, heterosexual, cisgender, endosex,[1] able-bodied, able-minded, wealthy, formally educated) have the power to define violence and can and do use that power not simply to deny violence but also to continue to perpetuate it. Our point here, in part, echoes Maria Root's (1992) analysis of trauma. Rendering an experience traumatic or making a traumatic experience intelligible as such is a 'subjective' decision (Root, 1992: 229–265). The declarative work of labelling an experience traumatic – or violent – is made through a

set of culturally accepted, predetermined criteria that does not, and often purposefully does not, account for all trauma or violence. Indigenous scholars and activists have long pointed out that conventional or 'mainstream' disputes over what is or is not violent have been and remain 'constrained in their conceptualizations of violence (notably missing are references to racist violence and state violence' (Cunneen and Tauri, 2018: 350). When Indigenous communities, as well as other oppressed communities, name and point to the violence they are subjected to and fear, they are usually met with constrained definitions that maintain the oppressive status quo. So while scholars and activists offer broader understandings of violence, scholars and activists are still fighting against these constrained definitions in a cultural climate with increased fascist, racist, sexist and queerphobic ideologies.

Given the usual narrow definition of violence as physical and the oppressive power relations involved in who has the authority to deem something violent or not, Hamby as well as organisations and governments aim to offer a more 'comprehensive definition of violence' (2017: 167). According to Hamby, a 'precise definition of violence requires four elements. Violence is behavior that is (a) intentional, (b) unwanted, (c) nonessential, and (d) harmful' (2017: 168). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2024) also attempts to offer a more complete definition. Quoting the *World Report on Violence and Health* (WRVH), the WHO (2024) defines violence as 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation'. The WHO (2024; emphasis in original) continues:

> this typology distinguished four modes in which violence may be inflicted: physical; sexual; and psychological attack; and deprivation. It further divides the general definition of violence into three sub-types according to the victim-perpetrator relationship. **Self-directed violence** refers to violence in which the perpetrator and the victim are the same individual and is subdivided into *self-abuse* and *suicide*. **Interpersonal violence** refers to violence between individuals [...] **Collective violence** refers to violence committed by larger groups of individuals and can be subdivided into social, political and economic violence.

We can imagine why more expansive definitions of violence, like those offered by Hamby and the WHO, are incredibly useful. They function to broaden the criteria of what is understood as violent to render legible forms of violence that are often not recognised as such. That said, definitions like the two offered above are contestable and contested. Indeed, things get tricky when 'harms' are 'not visible to the naked eye', and there can be issues with figuring out the difference between intent and motivation (Hamby, 2017: 168). Likewise, the WHO (2024) notes that the definition it outlines is 'not uniformly accepted'. Two of the commonly held assumptions about violence that we contest are that violence is intentional and that it requires a very clear perpetrator.

Un/intentional violence with no clear actor

The idea that violence needs to be intentional is a long-held myth that functions to deny various forms of violence and to absolve people who have enacted violence. Let us consider microaggressions. Microaggressions include 'the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether *intentional or unintentional*, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, and sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group' (Derald Wing, cited in Johnson and Johnson, 2019: 2; emphasis ours). Kevin L. Nadal and colleagues offer various examples: the comment 'that's so gay'; 'commenting that a woman is "too pretty to be a lesbian"'; and when 'LGBTQ people are told that their perceptions of discrimination are unfounded or nonsensical' (2016: 489–490). Writing specifically about racist microaggressions, Hesam Farahani, Arghavan Nepton and Monnica T. Williams (2023) as well as Monnica T. Williams (2021) note that racist microaggressions are often believed to be unintentional, but they are nevertheless recognised as a form of racism and racism is violent. To be clear, there is sound evidence that people *intentionally* enact microaggressions to exert power and control (Williams, 2021; Farahani et al., 2023). In fact, the idea that all or even most microaggressions are unintentional is a dangerous myth that functions to deny violence and to absolve any wrongdoing from the perpetrator.

Some discriminatory violence (e.g. microaggressions) is unintentional, but that does not mean that it is not violent. Combatting the idea that violence needs to be intentional, the phrase 'intent doesn't equal impact' has been popularised. Describing the importance of this expression, Jamie Utt (2013; emphasis in original) notes that when someone says something that is discriminatory:

> we hear it over and over again: 'I never meant any harm…' 'It was never my intent…' 'I am not a racist…' 'I am not a homophobe…' 'I'm not a sexist…' I cannot tell you how often I've seen people attempt to deflect criticism about their oppressive language or actions by making the conversation about their intent. At what point does the '*intent*' conversation stop mattering so that we can step back and look at **impact**? After all, in the end, **what does the intent of our action really matter if our actions have the impact of furthering the marginalization or oppression of those around us**?

Claiming that violence needs to be about intent moves the focus away from the person who was harmed: '**making the conversation about intent is inherently a privileged action** […] It ensures that you and your identity (and intent) stay at the center of any conversation and action while the impact of your action or words on those around you is marginalized' (Utt, 2013; emphasis in original). If someone said 'that's so gay' to describe something unpleasant and does not mean to perpetuate homophobia, it does not logically follow that the gay person who heard this statement is not hurt. Not only that, but when individuals hear the word 'gay' used negatively people's prejudice against gay people can intensify (Nicolas and Skinner, 2012), possibly promoting more discriminatory violence. While there is sound evidence that people purposely enact microaggressions, there are

also some instances when people do not mean to be violent via reproducing discriminatory discourses or narratives. Either way, one does not need to intend to enact discriminatory violence to enact discriminatory violence. As a result, we resist the common belief that violence must be intentional.

We are also unconvinced that violence must have a clear perpetrator or, as articulated by Hamby, that 'violence is behaviour' (2017: 167–168). The idea that violence always has an identifiable actor in a singular event doing the violence assumes that one can narrate how subjects achieve their 'ruination' (Stevens, 2011: 171). This reliance on events or spectacles to locate the source of a subject's injury, or what Vivienne Matthies-Boon dubs an attachment to 'eventism' (2018: 160), colours much of trauma studies' disciplinary history. Subscriptions to eventism, or event-based models of trauma (or violence), harken back to works like LaCapra (1994) and Caruth (1995) which hyper-emphasise traumas produced by singular events done to individual people *by* individual people. Susannah Radstone (2007) underscores the Eurocentric biases that underpin mainstream conceptualisations of trauma, arguing that those who are considered 'other' in the West are not given the same agency to claim experiences as traumatic or violent. This event-based model of trauma, and its attendant Eurocentrism, circumscribes structural oppressions, such as racism and colonialism, to be recognised as forms of trauma and violence. Within this framework, trauma is conjugated as an abnormally intense event with a finite beginning and end and an identifiable perpetrator, rather than the backdrop of marginalised people's lives. If one maintains that violence needs to have a clear discernible actor and needs to be enacted in an unambiguous moment, one neglects to acknowledge the violence of systems of oppression – 'the law is violence', as Rinaldo Walcott asserts (cited in Simpson et al., 2018: 87). Moreover, the culture of discriminatory violence and anticipated violence that marginalised subjects wade through every day is disavowed. When the violence of systems of oppression is ignored or not classified as violent as such, the traumatic consequences that people live with under these systems remain obscured, denied.

Maurice Stevens (2011) notes that part of this reliance on events or spectacles in trauma studies as necessary registers for violence is that it helps to locate the source of a subject's injury or explain how one became hurt or 'broken'. This imperative to story a subject's 'broken' embodiment is bolstered by the assumption that they previously occupied an 'uncorrupted, clean, and proper subjectivity' (Stevens, 2011: 171). In a somewhat discretely feminist critique, Stevens (2011) argues that requiring a subject to enact violence precludes white supremacy, systemic racism and other forms of systemic oppression to be registered under the rubric of 'trauma' and 'violence'. Brown reflects our point: the traumatic – or violent – impacts of seemingly invisible oppression may not always be obvious, but they nevertheless 'do violence to the soul and spirit' and body (1991: 119–113). Similarly, Jennifer L. Fluri and Amy Piedalue describe 'entrenched inequalities' as 'insidious violence' (2017: 537). Various scholars mobilise expressions like insidious violence or 'insidious trauma' (Root, 1992; Westengard, 2019), or describe violence and trauma as insidious (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). These expressions function to name and render visible the consequences of institutionalised forms of violent discrimination. Root (1992), among other feminist scholars (Brown, 1991), began thinking

about the concept of 'insidious trauma' in the 1990s. Root argues that institutionalised forms of harm can produce symptoms similar to PTSD. Root's thinking effectively harnessed clinical symptomatology to affirm the significant impacts of systemic discrimination. And yet, as Janani KS and Manali Karmakar note, 'discussions on insidious trauma are sparse' and have 'received little academic attention' (2023: 384).

The state renders permissible (and often invisible) forms of discriminatory violence that (1) result in people fearing more overt forms of violence and (2) result in accumulating trauma, stress, harm and/or body-mind disabilities. Insidious trauma and violence are indirect – there is no one clear person who enacts harm – and they fundamentally mould one's sense of worth and one's sense of safety. 'Insidious trauma', Root articulates, 'is usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because of characteristics intrinsic to their identity are different from what is valued by those in power' (1992: 240). KS and Karmakar explain 'that the frequency with which insidious traumas are experienced shatters a sense of safety and security in the world of the traumatised and causes a constant sense of hypervigilance through an "activation of survival behaviours" ([Root 1992] p.241)' (2023: 386). The very anticipation of more prototypical examples of discriminatory violence (e.g. assault) reveals that violence is already happening. Given the discussion above, one can surmise why 'discussions on insidious trauma', or insidious violence, 'are sparse' (KS and Karmakar, 2023: 384). Insidious trauma and violence run counter to dominant, Western, white-centric, cishetero-centric understandings of trauma and violence. Additionally, given that there is no clear perpetrator, it is often difficult for some people to recognise that violence has occurred or is occurring. Consequently, the identification of violence is glossed over and the micropolitics of power and oppression remain unchecked. If we recognise that systems, ideologies and discourses can be oppressive and violent and we recognise that a system, ideology or discourse is not one, clear, identifiable actor, we must agree that violence does not need a clear culprit. These insidious harms, traumas or experiences of violence are everyday experiences of (anticipating) violence. 'The state', 'the government', 'the discourse' or 'the ideology' are elusive and, therefore, the ability to identify violence remains elusive. Anticipating more traditional forms of discriminatory violence – harassment, murder, assault, denial of rights – reveals that violence is happening. There need not be a clear incident or an intentional identifiable actor.

'Everyday violence'

Laura S. Brown's (1991) analyses of trauma can help illustrate our point. Brown contests the then-definition of trauma in the DSM. The DSM defined trauma as 'an event that is outside the range of human experience' (Brown, 1991: 119). Brown argues that this understanding of trauma and violence presents trauma and violence as *always and already* spectacular and catastrophic. For Brown, this public and diagnostic understanding of trauma and the presumed violence that preceded or came with trauma ignores the fact that trauma is a normative, everyday event for women living in a sexist society and structure. And, we can add the normative, everyday event for people impacted by all intersecting forms of oppression: racism, colonialism, queerphobia, ableism, interphobia

and so on. That is, the 'normal human experience' (Brown, 1991: 123) and the events that supposedly fall under this experience presuppose a privileged, white, middle-class, cishet, able-bodied, able-minded, endosex human experience. Brown compels us to acknowledge that violence – and perhaps subsequent trauma – is an everyday occurrence for oppressed peoples. The focus on spectacular and catastrophic violent or traumatic events functions to ignore the violence that is/was purposefully embedded in systems of oppression.

The turn to the interpersonal, yet quotidian dimensions of violence is notable across feminist trauma thinking, decolonial scholarship and the field of critical disability studies. Bonnie Burstow (2003), for example, moved away from psychiatry as a conceptual framework for trauma to turn towards the structural underpinnings of trauma and violence. Burstow asserts that using diagnostic categories to make violence intelligible portrays trauma as an individual problem, rather than a systemic one. Such psychiatric frameworks for trauma construct the world as universally 'benign and safe' (Burstow, 2003: 1298), grossly ignoring the omnipresence of systemic oppression for marginalised people. Similarly, Mythili Rajiva (2014: 138) argues that girls hold 'an embodied awareness' of violence and victimisation that is simultaneously shaped by discourses of fear and risk that police and restrict girls' subjectivity, and the very real existence of violence against girls. These normative experiences of violence that tether girls and others to an always at-risk subject position imbue subjects with a constant fear of and vigilance for overt forms of violence. To understand the profoundly violent nature of this constant anticipation, one must understand this persistent anticipation of violence *as* violence. In a similar vein, Desmond Cole writes that Black people's 'safety depends on us [Black people] anticipating racial violence' (2020: 11). What makes the violence of anticipated violence – or the everyness of fearing violence – hard to articulate or recognise is that there is no clear wound. 'How do you express pain', validate pain or recognise pain, 'when you can't even locate the wound' (Vaid-Menon 2020: 13)? We hope that recognising anticipating discriminatory violence *as* violence in and of itself helps us locate this wound in a more concrete manner.

These analyses of trauma and violence as ordinary in the lives of marginalised groups open up conceptual space to consider how trauma is rooted in the oppressive tentacles of our Western culture. These insights invoke questioning of how the language of trauma and violence can be used to describe such a vast array of experiences – ones that are at once ordinarily and spectacularly terrifying. To conceptually work with trauma and violence as the foundation to a subject's experience requires what Eric Wertheimer and Monica J. Casper say is an 'intellectual and moral engagement' (2016: 5). If we are to engage in discussions about violence in the lives of marginalised peoples, and evoke the vernacular of violence when doing so, we must situate trauma and violence as a political object whose boundaries are delineated by access to social, cultural and political power. Consequently, we must expand understandings of violence to include not only the everydayness of more traditional forms of violence (e.g. assault) but also the violence of anticipating discriminatory violence.

Each category's relationship to violence is unique and is shaped by the dialectical and material manifestations of racism, ableism, colonialism, cisheterosexism, etc. They are

just as socially constructed as they are concrete and material. While materially different, the workings of such systems of oppression are illuminated when we see them as working in tandem with one another to uniquely inform the experiences of marginalised subjects. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017) affirms, intersectionality allows us to see 'where power comes and collides'. In reflecting on the tumultuous volume of grief and loss in their life, Oji-Cree, Two-Spirit writer Joshua Whitehead laments on what they understand to be 'an absurd fact of Indigenous life', being that it 'hurts to live' (2022: 40). To conclude from Whitehead's (2022) reflection that colonial practices like imperialism and genocide are the only forces that colour their Indigiqueer life would not fully encapsulate Whitehead's (2022) experience. Whitehead goes on to detail a sexual encounter with a man they met on Grindr, where upon exit they left 'crumble[d] and cry[ing] into [their] dirtied scarf' (2022: 10). This intimate recounting begs the reader to see Whitehead (2022) as simultaneously fighting many interacting swords. As an Indigenous person emboldened by queer desire, Whitehead (2022) is made an outsider in the coloniality state of Calgary, where they reside, and the racism, hegemonic masculinity and whiteness within the queer community.

Feminist, Indigenous and anti-racist scholarship, like the works of Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck and Angie Morrill (2013), and Danielle Zoe Rivera (2020), also illustrates that violence is not simply or always an event; violence can be and is also a structure. That structure prompts people to anticipate not only structural violence but also more 'traditional' forms of violence. An oppressively violent structure cultivates an ideological environment that – implicitly or explicitly – condones violence against marginalised communities. As Vaid-Menon explains, '[b]ias and discrimination are not just being endorsed, they are given the green light. This gives many people permission to harass us [racialised, trans, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people] in public' (2020: 15). Moreover, neoliberal capitalism and racism contribute to economic violence through insidious policies and practices that economically disadvantage one group in favour of another. Additionally, collective violence as described by the WHO (2024) includes 'larger groups of individuals', but that can be hard to pin down sometimes. The lack of a definitive actor/perpetrator is what makes describing structural inequality as violence difficult, and it allows these very structures of inequity to remain intact. Living under discriminatory systems every day means that violence has already happened and is already happening, even when there is no clear event or perpetrator.

Living under oppressive systems involves living with the everydayness of fear: anticipating violence. This anticipation looks different for people depending on race, class, sexuality, gender, dis/ability, etc. Such unique experiences of violence can and do intersect with one another. As Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (1986) reminds us, systems of oppression do not function within a vacuum. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2024) would agree, as her work urges us to think of settler colonial violence as hinging on and being further catalysed by other forms of oppression, including white supremacy, patriarchy, rape culture and cisheteronormativity. No structure of power operates to independently disenfranchise a single group of people in a uniform

way. These scholars remind us of the always independent and mutually informative characteristics of systemic oppression.

Anticipating violence is the logical consequence of insidious violence, insidious trauma, the everydayness of violence and trauma and living under systems of oppression. When a group of marginalised people collectively anticipate violence, it is clear that violence has already happened. The very act of anticipating discriminatory violence reveals that violence is happening. Trauma studies scholars' efforts to destabilise the distinction between the pre- and post-traumatised self mirror the efforts of this project to destabilise the perceived temporality of anticipating violence. This project seeks to position the anticipation of violence as one that disturbs chronological time, and, in turn, the chronology of violence. Crip- and disability-informed models of trauma better account for such non-normative temporalities of trauma and violence that we speak to. Angela Carter (2021) puts forward a 'crip theory of trauma' which conjugates trauma as a dynamic mode of being, rather than a fixed state/identity. Since there is not always a singular event of origin for people living under intersecting forms of oppression, trauma is always possible and is therefore always lived *with*. Violence, and the constant anticipation of it, is weaved into the everyday embodiments of marginalised peoples. Carter's conceptualisation of trauma not only collapses the pre-/post-trauma self model but also discards the normative temporal dimensions that delineate when violence begins and ends

'Imagined violence' and (unfounded) anticipated violence

Our understanding of anticipated violence may prompt one to think of Halberstam's (1993: 187) theorisations of 'imagined violence'. Unlike our use of the term 'anticipated violence' which outlines the ways in which oppressed groups anticipate that overt forms of violence will be inflicted on them, Halberstam writes of the ways in which discriminated groups, namely queer people and Black people, imagine enacting violence on their oppressors. Imagining enacting this violence is not only a way that marginalised peoples navigate (anticipating) violence and articulate their pain but is also a way to oppose oppression. Halberstam (1993) offers various examples of imagined violence in the text, but we will just outline one here: the song 'Cop Killer' by Body Count (1992). In the song, Ice-T exclaims:

I'm a cop killer, better you than me

Cop killer, fuck police brutality

Cop killer, I know your family's grieving, fuck 'em

Cop killer, but tonight we get even

[…]

Die, die, die pig, die

Fuck the police

Fuck the police

Fuck the police

Fuck the police

As an example of imagined violence, Ice-T imagines enacting violence (murder) on the cops who are state sanctioned to routinely harm and murder Black people. In Halberstam's words, the rap 'is a violent and rageful intervention into a stymied discussion about police brutality directed at minorities and especially at African-American young men' (1993: 188).

When the song came out, a productive mainstream conversation around the horrors of police brutality and the lived realities of Black people experiencing, anticipating and fearing police brutality did not ensue. Rather, police and politicians – all of whom were overwhelmingly white – misrepresented the song's message about racist police brutality and claimed that the track encouraged Black people to go out and murder police officers (Halberstam, 1993; Osgerby, 2004). Dennis R. Martin, then-President of the National Association of Chiefs of Police, claimed that the song was 'the music of murder' and that it (not racist police brutality) 'inflamed racial tensions' (1993: 159). Under immense political pressure, the song was deleted from the record. Halberstam prompts readers to consider the fact that when privileged and powerful people are depicted as enacting violence on marginalised people – in real, fictional or imagined contexts – it often does not shock people. Yet, when oppressed peoples are depicted or depict themselves as (potentially) enacting violence on privileged people – even imagined violence – it profoundly disrupts the status quo and, therefore, is presented as more dangerous and threatening. In fact, imagined violence, as was the case with 'Cop Killer', seems to be conflated with condoning violence or is understood as violence in and of itself. What is particularly worrisome about many responses to imagined violence is not just the gross misinterpretation of the imagined violence but also the ways that privileged and powerful people weaponise victimhood and erroneously claim that they have a legitimate claim to fear violence from marginalised people.

Halberstam's discussion of imagined violence opens up a space to underscore that our conceptualisation of anticipated violence is not intended to validate all forms of anticipated violence. Our conceptualisation of anticipated violence (as violence) is specifically to name the anticipated discriminatory violence that marginalised subjects experience living lodged within systems of oppression that devalue them, that seek to harm them or that seek to exterminate them. We want to underline this point because privileged and powerful people have and continue to leverage the spectre of anticipated violence to maintain systems of oppression and to keep oppressed groups 'in their place'. Let us return to the unfounded fear that the song 'Cop Killer' was going to inevitably result in Black people murdering cops in droves. So was it reasonable for the militarised police to supposedly anticipate violence from regular Black people who listened to the

song? Of course not. But the song itself was actually not the concern and banning the song was not necessarily the main aim. Rather, 'Cop Killer' was used a political wedge to stoke fears and present Black people as a 'criminalized "underclass," that shadowy, nebulous body responsible for all of America's social ills' (Sieving, 1998: 335). By 1992 when 'Cop Killer' was released, it was old hat to conflate Black music, Black musicians and music associated with Black people with danger to white people and white people's 'civil' way of life. The apparent fear that white cops and white politicians expressed reproduced long-held racist assumptions that Black people are prone to violence and criminality. Ultimately, the song was used to stoke racist fears from white people, to encourage conservative votership and to reinforce the 'need' for militarised police to patrol Black neighbourhoods and disproportionately harm and incarcerate Black people. 'Cop Killer' was a useful tool to fuel unwarranted fears of violence *then*.

More recently, we see similar weaponised and unwarranted anticipated violence deployed against Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists, protestors and projects to maintain the status quo and keep Black people 'in their place'. The rhetorical strategies used by police officers, various news and social media outlets and those who stand for 'law and order' frame BLM activists as inevitably violent, angry, lawless, dangerous criminals (Leopold and Bell, 2017; Carney and Kelekay, 2022), even while BLM protestors were frequently subjected to violence by the police and right-wing counter-protestors (Chaudhary and Richardson, 2022). This representation functions to (1) draw attention away from the very real violence that police have enacted and continue to enact on Black communities, as well as other racialised and marginalised communities, (2) disavow the legitimate ways that Black people anticipate violence and (3) maintain the violent, racist, colonial status quo via the spectre of unwarranted anticipated violence against white people, police, property and so on.

There is another contemporary unwarranted anticipation of violence that the LGBTQ + community will enact on cishet people. Reproducing the colonial disdain for and desire to stamp out expansive gender, sex and sexuality categories[2] and echoing historical fears that gay men are dangerous in bathrooms and assault children,[3] we see a surge in unwarranted fear that trans women are invading women's bathrooms and will inevitably (sexually) assault cis girls and women. Study (Barnett et al., 2018), after study (Hasenbush et al., 2018), after study (Murchison et al., 2019) concurs that there is no sound evidence that demonstrates that trans people pose any threat to cis people when they use bathroom facilities that align with their genders; rather, cis people *do* pose a threat to trans people in bathrooms (Serano, 2021). Consider one last example of unwarranted anticipated violence. Donald Trump (cited in Wang, 2024) recently stated in the Presidential debate that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio are 'eating the dogs … they're eating the cats' of, so it is implied, the good white community members. This pet-eating trope has long racist roots and has been leveraged against, for example, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Cambodian and Haitian immigrants (Wang, 2024). While the claim that Haitians are eating white people's pets was quickly debunked, it was presented as truth by conservative media and social media. This resulted in 'scared'

white people calling in bomb threats to Springfield, leading to 'two hospitals sent into lockdown, government buildings shut down and local schools evacuated' (Helmore, 2024).

Again, these 'fears' that oppressed and culturally devalued people will be or are innately violent and ought to be feared are unfounded. However, they are legitimised and mobilised to galvanise people to support and institute violent policies and practices. Just like the unwarranted fear that one song has the ability to rouse droves of Black people to murder police en masse, the unwarranted fear that BLM will destroy society through violence, the fear trans women will be violent in bathrooms – and we can name many other examples – the fear that Haitian people are eating white people's pets is *nonsense*. However, these kinds of anticipations of violence have been validated and mobilised to institute discriminatory violent policies and practices that result in marginalised people anticipating systemic violence and experiencing more traditional forms of violence. Over and over again, we see privileged and powerful people use the unfounded threat of potential violence to justify violent policies. And this unfounded fear is indulged, spread as knowledge and taken seriously. Evidently, it is imperative to remain diligent in combating misinformation.

These examples remind us that discomfort with marginalised people for protesting, demanding better or simply existing does not mean that violence is happening or that one should fear violence; there is a difference between discomfort with difference and violence itself. Echoing Sarah Schulman's (2016) point that, as her book is titled, *Conflict Is Not Abuse*, discomfort with or fear of culturally devalued people does not mean that violence is or will happen. However, creating a culture wherein oppressed peoples consistently fear violence and are subjected to overt forms of violence *is* violent. The fear of marginalised people enacting violence is a manifestation of privilege and discomfort and is a powerfully destructive tool to wield. As Schulman writes, 'That the mere fact of the other person's difference is misrepresented as an assault that then justifies our cruelty and relinquishes our responsibility to change' (2016: 21). To reiterate, our conceptualisation of anticipated violence is not intended to validate all forms of anticipated violence. Our understanding of anticipated violence (as violence) is specifically to name the anticipated discriminatory violence that marginalised subjects experience living lodged within systems of oppression. To quote Vaid-Menon again, 'How do you express pain', validate pain or recognise pain 'when you can't even locate the wound' (2020: 13)? We hope that recognising anticipating discriminatory violence *as* violence helps us begin locating this wound.

We must note that, because we are bound by the traditional academic article word count, there are many topics that remain unexplored in this article. Consequently, we pose a couple of lines of inquiry that should be taken up in future research. For readers of *Feminist Theory*, the examples of unfounded anticipations of violence noted above likely seem cut and dried. However, there are likely many instances where the line between founded and unfounded anticipated violence is blurry. How to arbitrate that line, while beyond the scope of this article, ought to be considered. Likewise, (complex) post-traumatic stress disorder may make one anticipate violence constantly and everywhere, even when one need not. Future scholarship should consider these

questions alongside the fact that violence (anticipated or otherwise) is *still* a tricky concept and experience to grapple with.

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Notes

1. Endosex people are people who are not intersex.
2. For literature concerning this colonial disdain, see: Cannon (1998); Lugones (2007); Mitra (2014); Picq (2019).
3. For texts that address these historical fears, see: Stone (2018); Serano (2021).

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