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YOUTH IN THE CITY OF INMATES: RACE, GENDER, AND CARCERAL SEEPAGE

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by

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ABSTRACT

YOUTH IN THE CITY OF INMATES: RACE, GENDER, AND CARCERAL SEEPAGE

Uriel Serrano

Los Angeles has been heralded as the city of inmates and prison capital of the world. In this study, I used mixed qualitative methods to explore the ideas and experiences of Black and Latinx young men in what I refer to as carceral Los Angeles. *Carceral Los Angeles* recognizes criminalization, confinement, and punishment as central to the making of the city. These carceral logics expand beyond prisons, jails, and detention centers. Informed by the carceral history of Los Angeles, this study was guided by questions such as: (a) What does it feel like to be a young person of color criminalized in the city of inmates? and (b) How does criminalization shape gender ideologies and gendered practices? I found Black and Latinx young men are constantly experiencing and witnessing criminalization across contexts and institutions. Their experiences revealed an overlapping ensemble of institutions and social actors were implicated in their criminalization not because they are committing a crime, but because by their very existence they are assumed to be criminal. With these experiences beginning as early as 6 years old, I show how racialized emotions (e.g., fear, paranoia) in a context of criminalization are described and understood by the young men. I argue racialized emotions are a central process through which the carceral state materializes.

I also revealed that criminalization and hostility across contexts produces gendered enclosures that shape the young men's gender ideologies and practices. Gendered enclosures bring attention to how policy, punitive practices, and discourse serve as formal and informal means to impose white patriarchal heteronormative ideals that confine the expressions and behaviors of Black and Latinx boys and young men. I argue gendered enclosures foreclose vulnerability, emotional expressions, and the opportunity to process experiences with criminalization and violence. Thus, a second set of questions also guided this study: (a) Where do Black and Latinx boys and young men find spaces to heal from criminalization?; (b) How, and to what extent, do the organizational practices in community-based educational spaces shape the gender ideologies of young men?; and (c) What strategies are Black and Latinx young men adopting in their efforts to combat the carceral state?

Based on participation observations with Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition (BSS)—a coalition of nine community-based organizations across Los Angeles County engaged in abolitionist activism and political education—I found community-based educational spaces function as a homeplace (hooks 1990) that mediates gendered enclosures at the interpersonal level because being part of a homeplace provides alternative understandings of manhood via relational practices, political education, and healing programming. Thus, I argue the young men's participation in BSS programming, including healing practices, buffers gendered enclosures. To illustrate this buffer, I honed in on BSS programming and the practices of youth workers to illuminate the ways the young men extend their understandings of gender

and sexuality by their participation. Lastly, I demonstrate how intersectional thinking and an abolition ethos informs the young men's visions of social transformation, coalition building, and relational practices. Particularly, how their intersectional thinking attends to relational practices that pose a challenge to carceral logics of abandonment, criminalization, and disposability. Based on these findings, I use water seepage as an organizing metaphor to argue the carceral backdrop the young men navigate can be understood as *carceral seepage*. Carceral seepage attends to the intensity, scale, and consequential nature of the carceral state on the lives of Black and Latinx youth.

DEDICATION

For my sisters and brother, Arely, Anibal, and Yessi. For my parents, Nacho and Irma. This dissertation is also yours. Gracias por darme alas para volar!

For BSS youth and youth workers.

For the Jungles. For South Central.

For all the young people who been criminalized.

For all the young people taken away from us.

For all the young people who dare to dream otherwise.

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South Central Los Angeles is and will always be home. My parents, Irma Garcia and Ignacio Serrano made “The Jungles” their home in the late 1980s. My appreciation for South Central, its history, and its complexities are due to their migration to Los Angeles from Durango, Mexico. I want to recognize that South Central, the neighborhood that raised me, is built on the stolen land of the Tongva people. I am eternally grateful to be a guest on the land that has given me so much.

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day I got a text from Anibal telling me he was about to get down and might get jumped. I ran out of 6th period and found him in the PE field. No hands were thrown that day, but I share that story to say that I was ready to get down then, now, and I will always run out of 6th period for you. Thank you for being one of my north stars, for having my back, believing in me, and always knowing what to do or say. *Mas que un hermano eres un brother (haha)!* To my sister, Yessi, thank you for everything you do for my brother, our family, and me. You are one of the best things to have happened to our family. Thank you for being one of my most biggest sources of motivation, support, and a role model. Your dedication to improving the lives of young people constantly reminds me that a better world is possible and that the relational is just as important as the structural. You three have seen every struggle, achievement, and failure and supported and loved me through it all. ILY! And, of course, a special shout-out to my Duke. His unconditional love and insistence that we go on a walk as soon as the sun began to settle were just what I needed as I wrote this dissertation. Everyone needs a Duke and Canela (my fur niece!) in their life.

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As a famous 1995 proverb goes, "South Central does it like nobody does."

-Uriel Serrano

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION:
YOUTH IN THE CITY OF INMATES

> *In Los Angeles today, many rebels are hard at work dismantling the nation's penal core. . . . What will come of their fierce and dedicated labors, no one knows. Their rebellions are stories still being written on the streets of the city.*
>
> —Kelly Lytle Hernández

> *To be sure Los Angeles is not paradise, much as the sight of lilies and roses might lead one at first to believe. The color line is there and sharply drawn.*
>
> —W.E.B. Du Bois[1]

My most important sociological lessons did not come from a book, article, or lecture. They came from growing up in South Central Los Angeles as the son of Mexican immigrants. They came from being born in a neighborhood I have lovingly known as *The Jungles*. They came from coming of age on the corner of Stevely and Gibraltar, the intersections where I had my first fight, learned how to parallel park, and witnessed both violence and placemaking.

As a boy, I recall relatives screaming, "aganchese! ay viene la policia."[2] Sometimes, it was a joke to get my cousins, brother, and me to behave. Other times, it was shouted out of fear from my loved ones who drive "con la licensia de dios."[3] I was also a 6-year-old boy when the police murdered my uncle. I have written sections of this dissertation in coffee shops that did not exist in the neighborhood where he once walked and attempted to raise his son. The neighborhood blocks that once held

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[1] Du Bois, W. E. B. (1913). Colored California. *Crisis*, *6*, 182–183.
[2] *Get down. The police are coming.*
[3] *With god's license.*

memories of my family, cousins, and friends have been replaced by brunch destinations, new apartment complexes, and, most recently, white families.

I have the privilege of hearing stories from my cousins who attended the same schools as I did 1–2 decades prior. My cousins and other relatives recall growing up in what has been documented as a time of racial struggle and tension-filled encounters among South Central's Black and Latinx residents. Their experiences suggest that what is often omitted are stories about interracial community formation, organized abandonment, changing demographics, and a commitment to South Central. Indeed, South Central is home and relational community formation is part of its history (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor 2021; Rosas 2019).

My brother and I have often used humor to cope with the many times we fit a profile or how anxious we still feel when we interact with police officers in South Central. Although we joke to cope with these larger systems of inequality, we know our experiences are a reflection of the social consequences of racialized, class-based, and gendered inequalities that persist in South Central. We can look at our elementary, middle, and high school class pictures and identify who is or has been incarcerated or pushed out of school. We have lost friends and peers to multiple forms of violence.

During my 1st year in graduate school, my 16-year-old sister and her peers launched a campaign to end random searches in the same high school and school district from which I graduated. About 2 years later, while I was attending a meeting of the Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition (BSS)—a coalition of nine community-based

organizations across Los Angeles County engaged in abolitionist activism and political education—she was robbed at gunpoint. I left the meeting and picked her up blocks from where she and others laid the groundwork for what has now become a formidable youth force demanding the dismantling of the Los Angeles School Police Department. Her insistence that complex structural issues are to blame for that traumatizing morning guided me. Indeed, South Central is a complex place, and I find beauty and openings for social transformation in that complexity.

I completed this study, *Youth in the City of Inmates*, in the same neighborhood my family and I have continued to call home. Months before I returned to this home, the murder of Nipsey Hustle reverberated across South Central Los Angeles and beyond. On my walks, I have run into murals honoring his legacy, including murals in honor of Kobe Bryant and Selena. Although sirens, the heavy presence of police cars, and the ghetto bird are often background noise during my walks, these murals are a powerful reminder that South Central is also a site of art, beauty, and resistance. *Youth in The City of Inmates* is a product of those lessons, experiences, and tensions I have held near. My experiences, and experiences of my siblings, cousins, and friends, are not at the center of this project. Nonetheless, I draw on these experiences to understand the intersections of race, gender, youth, the carceral state, and resistance in Los Angeles.

Dissertation Background

In early 2020, I arrived at the Youth Justice Coalition's (YJC) Chuco's Justice Center, where BSS was holding a meeting. What should have been a 10- to 15-minute

drive down Slauson Avenue to Central Boulevard felt like a 40-minute drive because of the afternoon traffic. That afternoon, my L.A. traffic music playlist included norteñas, rap, banda, hip-hop, R&B, and oldies. When I arrived at Chuco's, I noticed a few startled youth and youth workers standing outside. From the corner of my eye, I saw a police car behind me. I parked and noticed this same police car circling the block continuously. Emilio, a staff member at YJC and BSS youth worker, had been approached by the police while waiting for youth to arrive for our meeting. This encounter became a topic of conversation as we waited for the meeting to begin.

Once inside Chuco's, I learned Emilio let the police officers know the center was a "cop-free zone." The Chuco's Justice Center is YJC's youth and community space, its resource center, its FREE L.A. High School (i.e., a continuation school for youth who have been pushed out of school), a place for organizing, and a cultural center. The center was named after Jesse "Chuco" Becerra, a youth organizer who was killed in 2005. YJC has had a long history in Los Angeles of challenging the carceral state and supporting people most impacted by criminalization and incarceration (Hernández 2017). Perhaps what is most insidious about this incident is that the space that sheltered us from the purview of the police officers was a repurposed juvenile justice center. With the building of Metro rail lines that cut through the heart of South Central—or its many hearts—YJC relocated into the former Los Angeles County Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center. Remnants of the carceral facility that remained online described it as "an office of the legal system that

handles youths who have broken the law."[4] What remained in the room where we had our meeting that afternoon were court stands where young people's futures were decided. Yet, the art, graffiti, paint, posters, people, and sense of community at Chuco's created a homeplace amid these carceral hauntings (hooks 1990). I share the details from this afternoon because, in many ways, they are reflective of the city of inmates, or as I refer to it, *carceral Los Angeles* (Hernández 2017; Gilmore 2007).

Carceral Los Angeles

In "Colored California," a 1913 article published in *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about his visit to Los Angeles. People of color in Los Angeles, he wrote, "are without doubt the most beautifully housed group of colored people in the United States. They are full of push and energy and are used to working together" (193). Despite his admiration of Los Angeles as a promise land for Black people and the increasing number of residents of color (Hunt and Ramón 2010), Du Bois argued that "the color line is there and sharply drawn" (Du Bois 1913; 194). In some ways, Du Bois predicted Los Angeles, specifically South Central, would become a popular destination for Black migrants from across the country. As of the 21st century, Los Angeles attracts immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and other places, and the shifting demographics Du Bois observed have still been in motion. For example, Latinx South Central residents went from composing 45.6% of the South Central

[4]https://www.countyoffice.org/los-angeles-county-kenyon-juvenile-justice-los-angeles-ca-622/

population in 1990 to 62.3% in 2009.[5] Black residents went from making up 48.5% of South Central residents to 32.1% during that same period. As Rosas (2019) documented, these demographic shifts have had an impact on interactions between Black and Latinx residents. Against the backdrop of structural changes, racial discrimination, policing and surveillance, and the decline of the welfare state, a multitude of relationships, interactions, and social contexts have emerged.

The color line Du Bois described in 1913 is also a carceral one. As Hernández (2017) documented, larger protests erupted in April of 1927 after police officers murderer Samuel Faulkner, a young Black man. The protests were fueled by his death and the already excessive presence of criminalization of Los Angeles's Black residents. As the Black community and their movements grew in Los Angeles, so did the city's carceral regime (Sojoyner 2013). Los Angeles has historically been a hub for police violence, criminalization, detention, and incarceration (Felker-Kantor 2018; Sojoyner 2016). Through its history, Los Angeles has incarcerated more people than any other city in the United States, which has incarcerated more people than any other nation (Lytle Hernández 2017). Hernández suggested: "In both size and scope, the project of human caging in Los Angeles is massive. . . . Los Angeles, the City of Angels, is, in fact, the City of Inmates, the carceral capital of the world." (2017: 1).

I refer to Los Angeles as *carceral Los Angeles* to recognize how criminalization, confinement, and punishment have been central to the making of the

[5]USC PERE, "Changing Demographics of South LA," https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/SLA_COCO_Demographics_web.pdf

city. In fact, carcerality is also part and parcel with the history and making of California. As Gilmore wrote in *Golden Gulag*, the expansion of carceral institutions in California is not about physical buildings, or prison buildings "over there" (2007: 242); rather, it is about a set of relationships and logics that produce "state sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore, 2002, p. 261). Thus, my use of carceral Los Angeles throughout this dissertation recognizes the expansion of carceral logics and practices beyond prisons, jails, and detention centers (Gilmore 2007; Murch 2015: Gurusami 2019; Cardenas 2021; Shange 2019; Shabazz 2015; Tillman 2022).

In schools in predominantly low-income communities of color, the carceral state constitutes a set of relationships, social arrangements, and structures fostering racialized and gendered criminalization via punitive practices, policy, and curriculum (Ochoa 2013: Shedd 2015; Sojoyner 2016; Cabral 2022). As Lee (2016) wrote, by the time Black men in South Central reach their 20s, they have already witnessed or experienced multiple traumatic forms of violence, including police violence in and out of schools. Neighborhoods in Los Angeles County, including South Central, are also sites of liberation struggles, racial formation, and social transformation (Vargas 2006). Yet, the media and popular culture often portray South Central as a war zone patrolled by Black and Latinx gangs. Sociologists and other academics have advanced these racial scripts through their culture of poverty theories (Rosas 2019). What these theories, narratives, and headlines omit is how Black and Latinx residents have a diversity of experiences that are not always rooted in tension and violence.

Sociologist Martinez (2016) noted Black and Latinx South Central residents are distrustful of law enforcement, turning to alternative forms of governance to respond to violence and tensions among youth and gangs. These experiences include a robust and supportive community organizing culture and the presence of community-based educational spaces (Baldridge 2019). Thus, I do not suggest Black and Latinx youth are not suffering from entrenched violence; rather, this study aimed to explore how vibrant youth activism and community-based educational spaces are also part of the narrative of the city.

In California, community-based educational spaces, including youth organizing groups, emerged in response to racist and xenophobic attacks on low-income communities of color in the late 20th century (HoSang 2010). Young people responded to systemic violence by leading campaigns and creating organizations to address the structural inequality (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 2006; Warren 2021; Warren and Goodman 2018). With an investment in addressing inequality, the community-based educational spaces that emerged distinguished themselves from other youth civic spaces (Ginwright and James 2002; Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah 2012). In these spaces, young people conduct and participate in participatory action research, decision making, and propose solutions to structural issues (Serrano et al. 2022). Moreover, they develop a range of civic capacities, facilitate events, plan direct actions, and engage politicians (Bloemraad and Terriquez 2016; Terriquez 2015; Terriquez 2017). The longer young people participate in these groups, the more their respective organizations have an impact on them (Terriquez and Serrano 2018).

Youth organizing groups in California have also been found to promote critical consciousness and a structural analysis of social issues (Kwon 2008; Lin 2020; Watts and Flanagan 2007; Clay 2012). Youth organizations are increasingly engaging in healing practices—such as healing circles, cultural practices, meditation and wellness activities, and support groups—in response to individual and collective trauma (Ginwright 2015; Lee 2014; Terriquez and Serrano 2018).

Although not an exhaustive overview of community-based educational spaces, I highlight key features to provide insight into youth organizing groups in Los Angeles and to position them as part of the social organization of the city. To tell a contemporary story of youth and community-based educational spaces in carceral Los Angeles, I discuss the scholarship guiding my thinking and examination of the carceral state and its relationship to young people in the next section.

Guiding Frameworks

Youth in the City of Inmates links personal biographies with larger historical processes informed by racial capitalism, heteronormativity, and racialized gendered criminalization. Specifically, the experiences of Black and Latinx youth at the center of this project reveal multiple interconnected inequalities that reflect multilevel processes of criminalization and resistance. To make sense of this topic, I approached this project in consultation with several texts that guided my thinking and understanding of the carceral. Particularly, these texts informed my understanding that the carceral state; its expansion; and the logics of criminalization, confinement, punishment, abandonment, and disposability have been central to the making and

functioning of the United States (Buck 2021; Davis 2003; Gilmore 2007; Hinton and Cook 2021; LeBrón 2019; Muhammad 2010; Sojoyner 2021; Suddler 2019; Wang 2018).

Defining the Carceral

The *carceral*, a term famously used by Foucault (Foucault 1995), refers to that which is related to jails or prisons. More precisely, it refers to the expansion of carceral logics beyond prisons, jails, and detention centers. As Foucault stated, "We have seen that, in penal justice, the prison transformed the punitive procedure into a penitentiary technique; the carceral archipelago transported this technique form the penal institution to the entire social body" (298).[6] Thus, the carceral state is not only about negative and deadly encounters or physical confinement, but it is also a set of relationships, social arrangements, and structures that can be located in schools, universities, the retreat of the welfare state, the fortification of the border, and other ongoing projects of racialized and gendered criminalization and surveillance (Baker and Marchevsky 2019; Baker 2021; Roberts 2021; Benjamin 2019; Browne 2015; Harvey, Gupta-Kagan, and Church 2021; Maldonado-Fabela 2022). Therefore, it disrupts conceptions of the prison, police, and criminalization as institutions and social processes just about crime and punishment.

[6]Foucault defines the carceral archipelago as a "series of institutions" that go "beyond the frontier of criminal law" (1995: 297).

Racializing Carceral Power

A burgeoning field of carceral studies has emerged that includes scholars who study race in a carceral context. These studies include understanding how the relationship between race and carcerality impacts Black and Latinx individuals and their communities. For example, Browne (2015) and Muhammad (2010) asserted the carceral is not only about punishment, but is also about surveillance and the historical social construction of Black criminality. Respectively, Browne (2016) and Muchammad (2016) made connections between anti-Black racism, criminalization, and technologies of surveillance that stemmed from transatlantic slavery, a long history of policing Black lives, and the regulation of Blackness. The social construction of Black criminality and technologies of surveillance connected to anti-Blackness continue "marking marginalized individuals as non-subjects to the state through coercive benevolence" (Tillman 2022: 1).

Geographer Shabazz (2016) demonstrated the carceral state is built into the environment in material, spatial, and ideological ways. Shabazz's (2016) attention to the historical, institutional, social, and spatial production of carcerality in Chicago demonstrated policing, surveillance, and "architectures of confinement" were used to "spatialize Blackness" (2016: 1). Shabazz asserted the spatializing of Blackness via architectures of confinement shapes Black gender ideologies and identity development. Similarly, Wang (2018) argued confinement and the political economy of the carceral state—or carceral capitalism—is "intimately tied to constructing urban Black Americans trapped in zones of concentrated poverty" (84).

One of the central features of the carceral state is to structure everyday life. Drawing on an ethnography of a juvenile detention facility, a continuation high school, and a reentry center, Patrick Lopez Aguado (2018) argued one of the "insidious outcomes of circling so many people" across carceral institutions is the establishment of the prison as a "socializing institution in the community" (198).[7] The resulting impact is *prisonization* rooted in controlling individuals based on assumptions about race, gang affiliations, neighborhood ties, and criminality. In a study of the rise of punitive governance in Puerto Rico, Lebrón (2019) found technologies of punishment (e.g., incarceration, policing, state-sanctioned violence) condition Puerto Ricans to associate poverty, Blackness, and spatial location with criminality. Furthermore, practices of criminalization have come to shape how Puerto Rican's understand life and death via criminality and unequal distribution of resources that reinforce and normalize inequality. Although Puerto Ricans resist and challenge carceral logics every day, Lebrón (2019) demonstrated responding to resistance, social movements, and community control is part and parcel with the carceral state (Sojoyner 2013; Berger 2014).

Race, Youth, and the Carceral

Historians of the carceral state have shown the relationship between the carceral state and youth is not new. For example, Suddler (2019) demonstrated the

[7]Other prison and juvenile detention center ethnographies that inform my thinking are Sabina E. Vaught's (2017) *Compulsory,* Jerry Flores' (2016) *Caught Up,* and Subini Annamma's (2018) *The Pedagogy of Pathologization*.

practices and policies that criminalize Black youth in New York extend as far back as the early 1900s. Specifically, Suddler asserted the juvenile justice system and adjacent institutions contributed to "racialized constructions of youth criminality" (2019: 5). Similarly, Felker-Kantor (2018) explained the historical underpinnings of the current state of youth criminalization, including the expansion of the carceral state in the second half of the 20th century. With the Los Angeles Police Department front and center, Felker-Kantor (2018) demonstrated how racism drove the increase and intensity of policing in Los Angeles County. The policing of Black and Brown youth also increased in more systemic ways with new technologies of social control and surveillance (e.g., gang injunctions, gang databases, Los Angeles Police Department task forces, militarized police), including the formation of the Los Angeles School Police Department in the 1980s (Felker-Kantor 2018A; Felker-Kantor 2018B). Felker-Kantor contended these complex and punitive practices, including their expansion into schools, intensified the criminalization of Black and Latinx children and youth by encouraging their punishment (Felker-Kantor 2018A; Felker-Kantor 2018B).

The expansion of the carceral state in Los Angeles "made the juvenile justice system present in the daily lives of Black and Latino kids" (Felker-Kantor 2018B: 493). However, as Sojoyner (2016) contended, this history is part of a larger history of "the reactive tendencies of the U.S. nation-state" to Black life. In an ethnography of a high school in Los Angles, Sojoyner (2016) connected the historical with the

contemporary to propose that the relationship between schools and the carceral state is perhaps best understood as an *educational enclosure.* Sojoyner stated:

> Enclosure most readily signifies a physical barrier such as wall, a fence, or anything that is meant to limit the freedom of movement. Yet, enclosures also refer to the unseen forces that are just as powerful as the physical manifestation. In this sense, enclosure is representative of social mechanisms that construct notions of race, gender, class, and sexuality; and just as important as the imposition of the physical and unseen, enclosure embodies the removal/withdrawal/denial of services and programs that are key to the stability and long-term well-being of communities. (2016: xiii)

Sojoyner argued *educational enclosures* manifested themselves as ideological enclosures, punitive enclosures, cultural enclosures, and gendered enclosures in the high school he studied. Importantly, the educational enclosures model is a direct response the school-to-prison-pipeline metaphor and its inability to capture the full extent to which Black youth's criminalization extends beyond the physical enclosure of prisons.

Several other ethnographers have also developed useful tools to describe the omnipresent nature of the carceral state in the lives of Black and Latinx youth. Although not explicitly focused on questions of the carceral, Ochoa (2013) conceptualized *academic profiling* to describe how school administrators, teachers, and other staff use tactics similar to police profiling to sort students and track them into different pathways. Ochoa argued academic profiling "teaches students their place" and has "significant implications for their life trajectories and community relations" (2013: 2-3). Building on the work of Ochoa and others, Cabral (2022) demonstrated carceral logics extend into educational language learning. Particularly, Cabral argued that "larger carceral organizing logics of exclusion, disposability, and

containment at the structural and institutional level" produce English language learner categories that function as a form of *linguistic confinement* (Cabral 2022: 15). Said differently, schools use practices and policies "surrounding language designations to educationally trap, sort, and perpetuate historical forms of disposability, dispossession, and exclusion experienced" (Cabral 2022: 2).

Shedd (2015) argued the navigating of a *universal carceral apparatus* shapes how Black and Latinx youth come to see themselves and the world around them. The universal carceral apparatus describes a systematic infrastructure that intertwines school discipline, safety, policing, and place. Shedd (2015) contended the universal carceral apparatus is present in and out of school, shaping how youth perceive safety and justice. Moreover, it teaches them how to surveil themselves and others. In a study of Black and Latinx high school aged young men in Oakland, Rios (2011) found something similar. Rios (2011) described how surveillance, punishment, and hypercriminalization are deeply embedded in the lives of the young men. Thus, Rios argued young people of color are navigating a youth control complex, or "a system in which schools, police, probation officers . . . and other institutions" criminalize their everyday behaviors and practices as risky and deviant. The youth control complex is the "combined effect of a web of institutions" that use material and symbolic means to "collectively punish, stigmatize, monitor, and criminalize young people" (Rios 2011: 40). Being caught up in the youth control complex shapes how Black and Latino boys construct meaning about themselves; their understandings of manhood; and their opportunities, aspirations, and obstacles.

The universal carceral apparatus (i.e., youth control complex) does not just come to be. Shange (2019) demonstrated the relationship between the carceral state, youth, and schools is always in flux. Shange's ethnography of a progressive-leaning high school in San Francisco revealed that social reform and attempts to address inequality, including the school-to-prison-pipeline, often perpetuate anti-Black racism through discursive and material processes. Shange referred to this process as *carceral progressivism*. Shange's conceptualization of carceral progressivism is important because it allows for an understanding of how the carceral state is cemented in schools and the everyday lives of young people of color, especially true for Black youth. Shange (2019) revealed "discursive narratives" and "material gains of redistributive social movements are cannibalized and repurposed as rationales for dispossession" (15). As such, carceral progressivism accounts for how institutional agents further entrench the carceral state by calling on it despite a recognition of systemic racism in the carceral state. Thus, schools act as sites of racialization that continuously reproduce the relationship between youth and the carceral state "through their collusion with anti-Black logics of captivity and disposability" (p. 157).

I have mined the aforementioned texts for conceptual tools that guided and informed *Youth in the City of Inmates*. I did so at the expanse of providing an exhaustive review of the contributions of each of these texts. Nonetheless, the concepts discussed in this section render visible historical and contemporary social forces that produce social actors in a context of dispossession, criminalization, and enclosures. In other words, they take seriously how carceral logics are embedded in

and produce lived experiences. Altogether, the concepts demonstrate how the carceral states functions as a structure the shapes various aspects of society, including a range of social institutions and relationships. Viewing the carceral state in that regard, and in their own way, each text centers a history and analysis of the carceral state—its tensions, social processes, logics, and mechanisms—that exposes the anti-Black, gendered, and racial capitalist order that it reproduces and maintains. I position *Youth in the City of Inmates* as part of this growing landscape of studies attempting to make sense of how youth experience the carceral state. I also expand on the ideas presented in this section via my examination of racialized emotions and gendered enclosures in carceral Los Angeles.

The texts discussed here also recognize that Black and Latinx communities have a long history of fugitivity, abolition, collective action, and resistance as a path and practice against the carceral state. For example, Shange charted an *abolitionist anthropology* that grapples with the "anti-Black state" and how "Black people and [their] accomplices work within, against, and beyond the state in the service of collective liberation" (Shange, 2019: 10). Lebrón (2019) found several forms of resistance in Puerto Rico challenge carceral logics. For example, Puerto Ricans turn to social media to shift ideas of violence and death as an acceptable form of punishment. Among those challenging the carceral state in Puerto Rico are community-based organizations that are rooted in creating alternative visions of justice that move away from punitive governance. Sojoyner (2016) demonstrated Black youth use music, visual art, and other forms of cultural expressions in a context

of Black cultural enclosures in schools. To continue in this tradition, and expand this work, I turn to community-based educational spaces and their role in challenging the carceral social order omnipresent in the lives of Black and Latinx boys and young men.[8]

Research Questions

Carceral Los Angeles—specifically South Central—was an ideal environment in which to study the forces shaping Black and Latinx young men's contemporary experiences for several reasons. First, as of 2010, the majority of South Central residents (i.e., 64%) were Latinx, and nearly 32% were Black (2010 Census). These statistics make South Central one of the few locations in Los Angeles County where Black and Latinx youth come of age together. Second, South Central is a neighborhood whose residents (including its youth) are particularly haunted by larger social forces such as ramifications of the war on drugs; a long history of violence; and punitive gang practices, along with the surveillance that came with it (Felker-Kantor 2018). However, carceral Los Angeles has been, and has continued to be, a site of resistance, placemaking, and power building for its Black and Latinx residents (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor 2021; Hunt and Ramón 2010; Magaña 2021; Martinez 2016; Pulido 2006; Rosas 2019; Turner 2021). Thus, the social organization and history of Los Angeles and its neighborhoods merits a deeper examination, one that

[8] *Latinx* is a gender neutral descriptor that challenges binary gendering of Latina/o.

considers the subjectivities and lived experiences of Black and Latinx young people coming of age.

Social scientists have acknowledged that the social and historical context of neighborhoods shape how young men of color view themselves, how they view the world around them, and how it shapes their gendered practices (Anderson 2000; Jones 2018; Lee 2016; Rendón 2019; Rios 2009, 2011; Shedd 2015; Vargas 2016). Yet, studies often focus on their gendered character flaws, debate their college readiness, or locate their crisis at the individual level (Méndez 2016; Huerta 2015; Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Exploring questions of gender, race, emotions, resistance, vulnerability, and the carceral state is a pathway out of these narratives. Thus, I focused on the social forces that shape the lives of Black and Latinx young men, how they interpret these forces, and the political struggles they encounter as members of a larger social world.

Youth in the City of Inmates sought to tell the stories of young people of color experiencing the brunt of this nation's carceral system. Specifically, it sought to tell the stories of the social processes that shape their racialized emotions and gender ideologies.[9] Rejecting inequality and criminalization as their only social reality, I also accounted for how young people engage and respond to criminalization and police violence across contexts, including in community-based educational spaces. Community-based educational spaces have been documented as key sites of

[9]I define racialized emotions in Chapter 3. Gender ideologies are defined in Chapter 4.

politicization in which young people develop a collective consciousness (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 2006). Lin 2018; Ginwright 2010). Yet, little is known about how community-based educational spaces leverage their programming to mediate the consequences of the carceral state.

Informed by the carceral history of Los Angeles, the scholarship I discuss in this chapter and subsequent chapters of *Youth in the City of Inmates* was guided by questions such as: (a) What are Black and Latinx young men's racialized and gendered experiences in Los Angeles?; (b) What does it feel like to be a young person of color criminalized in the city of inmates?; (c) How does criminalization shape gender ideologies and gendered practices?; (d) Where do Black and Latinx boys and young men find spaces to heal from criminalization?; (e) How, and to what extent, do the organizational practices in community-based educational spaces shape the gender ideologies of young men?; and (f) What strategies are Black and Latinx young men adopting in their efforts to combat the carceral state? To address these questions, I conducted a multiyear and mixed qualitative study of Black and Latinx young men who participated in organizing with the BSS Coalition. The findings revealed the relationship between the carceral state and young people has been treacherous and impacts young men at multiple levels. To make sense of what I have witnessed, I developed the term carceral seepage.

Carceral Seepage

In an era marked by expanding and shifting carceral dynamics, I leveraged water seepage as an organizing metaphor to develop carceral seepage. Like water

seepage, carceral seepage at times can be sudden, slow, hidden, visible, cumulative, and destructive. By taking into account the intensity, scale, and temporality of the carceral state, I argue carceral seepage emerges from structural, ideological, psychological, and interactional carceral dynamics that are constantly in motion in the lives of Black and Latinx youth in Los Angeles. In addition, carceral seepage describes the racialized and gendered consequences of the carceral state and recognizes how social actors (e.g., in schools, neighborhoods) and racialized organizations (e.g., schools, school boards, mental health institutions) do carceral work and entrench carceral logics.

I position carceral seepage as part of the landscape trying to account for the carceral state and its sometimes invisible consequences, including its ever-present nature in institutional contexts and local histories. Thus, carceral seepage is about locating what people are often not trained to view—carceral process that are out of sight—in conversation with the overt. As I further discuss in the conclusion chapter, carceral seepage describes the backdrop that informs the experiences of Black and Latinx BSS youth, including young people's feelings about the ever-present carceral state. Furthermore, carceral seepage is anchored in the work of scholars who recognize the carceral state is rooted in anti-Black and colonial logics linked to historical processes of racial capitalism.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter 2, I describe my methodological approach, including early work and my research timeline. As I discuss in this chapter 2, the findings presented in

Youth in the City of Inmates comes from about 5 years of ethnographic observations, including 3 years of participant observations with BSS and fieldwork in Los Angeles. In addition, I conducted 40 semistructured interviews and five focus groups with over 40 Black and Latinx young men (i.e., BSS youth) and youth workers. Lastly, I also drew from a digital archive I curated with over 235 documents. I conclude Chapter 2 by offering reflections on my research praxis and my involvement with BSS.

In Chapter 3, I examine the racialized emotions produced in a context of criminalization. Specifically, I demonstrate how criminalization begins before the young men are teenagers and continues into their teenage and young adult lives. I found experiencing and witnessing criminalization is constant and omnipresent for the young men. I describe how their bodies, behaviors, loved ones, and most intimate spaces are criminalized in structurally similar but divergent ways via age, race, gender, and perceived legal status. Their experiences reveal that an overlapping ensemble of institutions and social actors are implicated in their criminalization not because they are committing a crime, but because they are assumed to be criminal by their very existence. Thus, I show how racialized emotions (e.g., fear, paranoia) are described and understood by the young men and argue they are a central process through which the carceral state materializes.

Although Chapter 3 focuses on racialized emotions fashioned by the carceral state, Chapter 4 turns to the gendered implications of criminalization. Interviews with the young men revealed criminalization and hostility across context produce gendered enclosures that shape their gender ideologies and practices. Gendered enclosures

bring attention to how policy, punitive practices, and discourse serve as formal and informal means to impose white patriarchal heteronormative ideals that confine the expressions and behaviors of Black and Latinx boys and young men. I extend this idea by demonstrating that hostile school contexts, criminalization, and—at times—the family, function as formal and informal gender enclosures that produce gender ideologies rooted in a patriarchal heteronormative formulation of manhood. I argue gendered enclosures foreclose vulnerability, emotional expressions, and the opportunity to process experiences with criminalization and violence. In this chapter, I also describe how the young men's participation in BSS programming and healing practices buffer gendered enclosures. To illustrate this idea, I hone in on BSS programming and the practices of youth workers to illuminate the ways the young men extend their understandings of gender and sexuality by their participation in BSS. Thus, I argue BSS functions as a homeplace (hooks 1990) that mediates gendered enclosures at the interpersonal level; being part of a homeplace provides alternative understandings of manhood via relational practices, political education, and healing programming.

Chapter 5 centers the activism and related ideas of BSS young men. Particularly, I examine how intersectional thinking informs their understandings of the carceral state and how to mobilize against it. I begin by giving an overview of how the young men describe intersectionality and its analytical utility to examine social issues. Then, I demonstrate how intersectional thinking and an abolition ethos informs their visions of social transformation, coalition building, and relational

practices. I argue these young social actors and their intersectional thinking offer contributions to the understanding of intersectionality as a racial politic. Particularly, I describe how their intersectional thinking centers age as a social location and attends to relational practices that pose a challenge to carceral logics of abandonment and disposability. Altogether, I demonstrate how adolescent youth activists forge an abolitionist front to the carceral state by deploying intersectional thinking. In Chapter 6 (i.e., the conclusion), I once again turn to an ethnographic vignette—a water ceremony—to bring together the previous chapters and discuss my theoretical argument (i.e., carceral seepage) in more detail.

CHAPTER 2:
METHODOLOGIC APPROACH

It's the, City of Angels and constant danger
South Central L.A., can't get no stranger
Full of drama like a soap opera, on the curb
Watchin' the ghetto bird helicopters, I observe

—Tupac Shakur, *To Live and Die in L.A.*

The following chapters begin with vignettes that trace the experiences and ideas of Black and Latinx boys and young men. I also start with those vignettes to signal that research is a fluid and dynamic process and experience. Initially, I intended to develop a dissertation solely exploring young men's social movement participation and resistance. In healing circles and other moments, it became evident that the carceral state seeps into the everyday lives of Black and Latinx youth in Los Angeles. This seepage shapes their experiences, practices, social arrangements, emotions, and activism. What I heard and witnessed and my hunger for work on South Central Los Angeles brought me to the questions guiding and chapters contained in this dissertation (see Chapter 1).

Upon reflecting on those moments of vulnerability, I quickly realized that, to explore the resistance of Black and Latinx young people in Los Angeles, I needed to account for their experiences with carceral seepage across contexts. To do so, I used a multimethod approach that interfaced several sources of data: (a) participant observations and fieldwork in Los Angeles, (b) semistructured and unstructured interviews, (c) focus groups, and (d) a content analysis of a digital archive I curated. In the following sections, I discuss each data type in greater detail and close by

offering reflections on my relationship to research; praxis; and the Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition (BSS).

Early Work and Research Timeline

I began this project in 2016 when I started my PhD program in sociology at University of California, Santa Cruz. That year, as a research assistant for Veronica Terriquez, I began observing community-based educational spaces across California to examine how young men of color participated and how their participation supported their personal growth and well-being. For 2 years, I built relationships with youth workers across the state of California, interviewed and surveyed young people, and attended multiple events. During this time, I began to change the course of my research to explore the relationship between youth, the carceral state, and community-based educational spaces. In 2018, I joined BSS as a research associate, having already established a connection with BSS youth workers and youth. As of June 2021, I totaled 42 months of participant observations.

From early 2018 to late 2019, I traveled back and forth between Santa Cruz and Los Angeles to conduct participant observations and support the youth participatory action research projects at BSS. In addition, I assisted with their political advocacy and contributed to training and other programming efforts. I conducted preliminary in-depth interviews and focus groups with BSS youth during this time. In the fall of 2019, I moved back home to South Central Los Angeles to conduct the bulk of participant observations and interviews. That fall, I was also affiliated with the sociology department at University of California, Los Angeles under the

mentorship of Vilma Ortiz, who provided a source of mentorship and an opportunity to discuss preliminary findings.

Participant Observation and Ethnographic Field Work in Carceral Los Angeles

Participant observations helped me capture youth interactions in various contexts and provide insight into the organizational and social contexts that shape their experiences and activism, including how the carceral state is constructed, experienced, contested, and resisted in the everyday. Participant observations with BSS allowed me to capture organizational dynamics, programming, interactions between individuals inside and outside of the coalition, and how youth activists interacted with adults and others. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020, some participant observations shifted to virtual sessions. Sites of participant observations included, but were not limited to: committee meetings, programming planning meetings, work meetings, retreats, healing circles, youth convenings, check ins with youth, and discussions about how to support young people during the pandemic. With BSS, I have also attended car rallies, protests, and other events addressing prison conditions and school policing in Los Angeles County. I also attended community events, staff meetings, and meetings with partner organizations when possible. Given my participation, in some cases, I gave BSS youth and youth workers rides to and from events, grabbed tacos after a meeting, and met up to work with them at coffee shops.

In addition, I conducted ethnographic observations in carceral Los Angeles. Specifically, I conducted observations in South Central Los Angeles, the Los Angeles

Unified School District's board meetings, and Los Angeles Police Department commission meetings held online. These observations provided keen insights into the spaces and context BSS young men navigate (e.g., schools, bus stops, parks, shopping centers). Observing these spaces was vital to capturing how youth transition to adulthood against the backdrop of carcerality, gentrification in South Central, and other forms of violence. The observations also gave me insight into the carceral logics that shape and reshape the relationship between schools and the carceral state. Said differently, ethnographic observations contextualized the spatial aspects of South Central, carceral power, and other dynamics that shape and produce gender and racial ideologies.

The Organizational Site

The protest wave in the summer of 2020 bolstered local grassroots organizing efforts to defund police departments and challenge punitive practices (Tat 2020). In cities across the country, including Los Angeles, youth of color successfully advocated for the defunding of school police departments. BSS—founded in the early 2010s by activists from grassroots community organizations—was one of several organizations involved in movements to address the relationship between youth, schools, and the carceral state. BSS is a coalition of nine organizations across Los Angeles County, including South Central Los Angeles, Boyle Heights, and Long Beach.[10] The issues the organizations engage in include immigration and refugee

[10] In 2018, one of the 10 BSS organizations left the coalition after shifting its focus from youth organizing to parent organizing.

justice; gender and queer justice; housing and gentrification; education, economic, and racial justice; and prison abolition. For example, one organization was created to empower young Southeast Asian women and later engaged young men in programming and coalition building around race, class, and gender justice. Three organizations—Inner City Struggle, Community Coalition, and Khmer Girls in Action—are the mainstays of the coalition. As of 2022, BSS coalition members remain active in ongoing efforts to defund the Los Angeles School Police Department and to ensure community and youth participation in Los Angeles Unified School District decision-making processes.

Each organization had four to eight active BSS youth members during this study. In addition, BSS had a full-time coalition manager, an administrative assistant, a youth programs assistant, a youth campaign coordinator, and 10 youth fellows at the time of the study. I refer to BSS staff and fellows as youth workers. Baldrige (2019) defined youth workers as people who mentor, guide, and teach youth in a variety of spaces, including grassroots youth groups, afterschool community-based programs, schools, and youth detention centers. Each organization appoints one youth worker to serve as its BSS lead. Youth workers' responsibilities also include safely transporting youth to and from meetings, rallies, and other local and state mobilizing efforts. Many of the youth workers were active participants of the undocumented immigrant youth movement, played key roles in the formation of the Movement for Black Lives, or have participated and lead campaigns—ranging in issues from ethnic studies to queer and trans justice—in the University of California and California State University

systems. The youth workers and BSS youth members vary in age—early 20s to 40s for youth workers and late teens for BSS youth members—gender, race, and sexuality.

BSS meetings occurred in various settings, including the facilities of partner organizations, parks, and—on rare occasions—on college campuses in Los Angeles County. Three different types of meetings took place in the course of a month. In these meetings, agendas varied but typically included workshops around gender, sexuality, masculinity, research, political education, and campaign strategizing and planning. At the core of BSS programming were 2- to 3-hour youth convenings that took place the 1st or 2nd Saturday of the month. There were also meetings every other week where participants were divided into internal committees (i.e., organizing and campaigns, action research) and external committees (i.e., statewide policy and movement building, media and communications, allies and community outreach). Each of these five committees included youth workers and four to six youth. Lastly, the BSS coalition typically held 3-day-long retreats twice a year where the young men participated in campaign building, workshops on gender and racial justice, healing circles, and more. I used pseudonyms for staff and youth but used the real name of BSS because the organization is the only coalition for boys and young men of color in Los Angeles, making it challenging to ensure anonymity.

Interviews and Focus Groups

I conducted interviews and focus groups between September 2018 and January 2021. I conducted interviews with two groups: (a) Black and Latinx youth

and (b) BSS youth workers. Black youth included young men who had two Black parents or young men of mixed background with one Black parent. This group included Black parents who were immigrants from Africa or Latin America. BSS youth I interviewed included young men whose participation in the organization ranged from 6 months to several years. Most of the BSS youth I interviewed were high school students at the time. Some were enrolled in local community colleges or were transitioning to 4-year universities. Youth workers tended to have higher education backgrounds—from community college to graduate education.

Each semistructured interview and focus group lasted between 45 to 120 minutes. Interviews took place in person or on Zoom, and I asked open-ended questions. The questions ranged in topic, but I primarily asked youth and youth workers about their schooling, police, and community experiences; their personal trajectories into activism and community-based educational spaces; their visions of social justice and youth justice; their coalition-building efforts and social movement participation; their perspectives on BSS organizational practices, gender ideologies, and personal well-being; and what they saw as pressing challenges facing Black and Latinx youth in Los Angeles. With consent, I recorded interviews and took notes to provide texture and contexts to the later discussion. Lastly, I also documented informal, unstructured interviews. These interviews took place during bus rides, car rides, and before or after an event. Altogether, I conducted 40 semistructured interviews and five focus groups with over 40 youth and youth workers.

Data Analysis

The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate coding using Dedoose, an online data management and analysis platform. Using Dedoose, I systematically analyzed each interview and focus group transcript by using the platform's parent code and child code feature. With parent codes, I took a theory-driven, inductive approach to identify recurring themes and address the research questions. Once initial themes (i.e., parent codes) emerged, I took a data-driven coding approach with child codes to be as descriptive as possible with experiences and ideas, and to facilitate an examination across participants (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006).

With my ethnographic observations, I first digitized my field notes and participant observations before uploading them to Dedoose. I often took notes on my laptop, notebook, or the Notes app on my iPhone during meetings. When possible, I volunteered to be the notetaker during meetings and digitized any notes I took. Additionally, I recorded audio memos on my way home after events, meetings, and protests. I transcribed audio memos as soon as possible at home or at a local coffee shop, where I developed my jottings into detailed field notes. Once that process was completed, I uploaded them to Dedoose and also used parent codes and child codes. For example, parent codes from participant observations with BSS captured initial themes, ideas, and issues. Then, I used child codes to organize my descriptive observations and themes based on different programming (e.g., healing practices, political education, healing work), practices (i.e., among youth, between youth and

youth workers, and that of youth workers), and other organizational dynamics. In other instances, like school board meetings, parent codes allowed me to document prevailing attitudes about Black and Latinx youth, and child codes captured the particularities of those attitudes. Over time, I complemented my coding with analytic memos that linked my ethnographic observations with interview findings and relevant scholarship. Memos were also central in the eventual development of carceral seepage (see Chapter 6).

Digital Archive

During the study, I curated a digital archive that had about 235 documents. Documents included BSS meeting minutes, agendas, and other related documents that I have used to identify the coalition's central themes, practices, and framings. These documents also contained details on the coalition's past members, campaign victories, and shifting mission and development. My digital archive also included reports, media articles, blogs, and public social media posts that provided context to BSS campaigns; public responses to them; and how school boards, police, and others respond to calls to defund school police. In this digital archive, I also included rap songs, poems, digitized posters, and art where youth share their visions of social transformation and express their demands.

Reflections on Research Praxis

> *I believe that when we are in relationship with each other, we influence each other. What matters to me, as the unit of interest, is relationships*.
>
> —Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*

Researchers from universities and foundations have entered BSS spaces to observe and document. The young people have jokingly referred to them as *colonizers* because they collect data, leave, and never return. When they spend extended time with BSS and their partner organizations, they rarely participate in activities—like soul trains at the beginning of a meeting—or fold any chairs. Witnessing researchers enter the space, leave once they had enough data, and my commitment to South Central shaped my relationship to research in a few ways. First, and as Veronica Terriquez shared when I began my project, "people needed this work yesterday." This sense of urgency is an important reminder that much is at stake with youth of color. As such, I do not make claims of neutrality and objectivity in this scholarship. This project and my involvement in BSS included profoundly personal and political goals. In actively working toward these goals, I have participated in demonstrations with BSS, developed a youth participatory action research project, facilitated workshops, and copublished with BSS youth and youth workers. For example, the youth participatory action research project allowed me to leverage my resources and access to grants, data analysis software, and existing networks to be in community with BSS youth as they developed their project (Serrano et al., 2022).

In an interview with Eve Ewing, educator and organizer Kaba (2012) described her work as one of developing and strengthening relationships. At the core of this statement is the idea that knowledge is built through collective struggle and connections to people. Given the nature of this project, I have constantly experienced moments that invite me to reflect on this notion, and I embrace them. For example, I

met a young man from California's Central Valley during a weeklong retreat where I collected my first set of participant observations. He ran out of the bus on the last day to say goodbye. After a hug, he asked me if I was going to be a professor who always showed up in a suit and tie. I laughed, looked at him, and responded with a resounding "Hell nah!" He replied, "Let me know where you end up so I can go there." At that moment, my political, professional, and personal life all came together. This entanglement was central to my work, and in the worst of circumstances, was also informed by grief. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, BSS youth and youth workers have shared extremely intimate details about their lives. With that sharing comes ethical and political responsibilities that informed my research and commitment to improving youth's material conditions and well-being in Los Angeles County.

CHAPTER 3. FEELING CARCERALITY: YOUTH CRIMINALIZATION AND RACIALIZED EMOTIONS IN THE CITY OF INMATES

After many hours in the Los Angeles traffic, we finally arrived at our camp site in the Big Bear Mountains for the Brothers, Sons, Selves (BSS) 2019 fall retreat. I dropped off my bags in my bunk bed and returned to the common area that connected all our rooms. With some of the BSS young men now attending college, the fall retreat provided an opportunity to introduce new members to the coalition. Josh, a BSS youth worker at the time, suggested we take some time to do introductions before we began the Mario Kart tournament or went to bed. We sat in a circle and the young men began to introduced themselves. I noticed that, after a few introductions, statements repeatedly began with "of course." One young man shared, "Of course my dad is incarcerated." Another shared, "Of course my dad is not in the picture." Another young man on the other side of the circle exclaimed, "Of course my cousins and I grew up without our dads." As introductions and discussions unfolded, it became obvious to me that "of course" was the precursor for incarceration, deportation, and the manifestation of the carceral state in the lives of these young men of color.

As a research associate with BSS—a community-based organization serving boys, young men, and masculine-identifying youth of color in Los Angeles—constantly hearing similar stories, I became interested in examining how young people *feel* the carceral state. Particularly, I was interested in their experiences with criminalization and the racialized emotions these experiences produce. As the

sociology of racialized emotions suggests, emotions are shaped by social structures and racial domination (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Woody 2021). Racialized emotions posits that emotions are not only about individual feelings, but are also group based, relational, and have sociohistorical underpinnings (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Tichavakunda 2021; Woody 2021). As a conceptual tool, racialized emotions are "a window into the ways social structures shape lived experiences" (Woody 2021: 1). Thus, racialized emotions are a useful tool to examine how the carceral state—including criminalization—is felt by racialized young people.

For young people of color—particularly Black, Latinx, and Native youth—schools, their neighborhoods, and other social institutions are sites of criminalization (Abrams, Mizel, and Barnert 2021; Rios 2011, 2017; Shange 2019; Shedd 2015; Suddler 2020; Lopez 2003). For example, Black and Latinx children and youth encounter a configuration of punitive institutions that treat their everyday behaviors, language, and bodies as criminal via gendered, racialized, and classed practices and policies (Basile, York, and Black 2019; Cabral 2022; Carter Andrews et al. 2019). Shedd (2015) proposed the navigating of what she described as a *universal carceral apparatus* shapes how Black and Latinx youth come to see themselves and the world around them. Despite national discussions and efforts to address the school-to-prison-pipeline, the racialized emotions of young people have received little attention in sociological scholarship. In this chapter, I examine racialized emotions produced in a context of and criminalization in Los Angeles, arguably considered the prison capital of the United States (Felker-Kantor 2018; Hernandez 2017; Jimerson, Burns, &

VanDerHeyden, 2016; Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018a; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017; Zirkel, 2011).

One of the questions for this study included: What does it feel like to be a young person of color criminalized in the prison capital of the nation? To answer this question, I drew on 26 interviews and five focus groups with Black and Latinx youth. I also drew on field work in Los Angeles County and a digital archive I curated. The majority of youth were high school students at the time of the interview. Given their involvement with BSS, most had access to discussions and political education on policing and criminalization in Los Angeles County. Nonetheless, these young people revealed the centrality of racialized emotions in the study of the carceral state. Particularly, their experiences identified the social mechanisms and logics that make criminalization a social reality for Black and Latinx youth.

The youth I interviewed revealed they constantly experienced fear *and* witnessed criminalization. These experiences began before they were teenagers and continue into their teenage and young adult lives, shaping how they internalize, respond, or contest the carceral state and its logics. Their bodies, behaviors, loved ones, and most intimate spaces are criminalized in structurally similar but divergent ways via age, race, gender, and perceived legal status. Ultimately, I show how racialized emotions are described and understood by young people and argue they are a central process through which the carceral state operates. Attending to the racialized emotions produced by criminalization allows for more expansive understandings of the harms.

Racialized emotions do not stem from one individual encounter or a single identifiable source (Woody 2022). The racialized emotions I describe teach not only about the impact criminalization has on young people, but also reveal the interactions, mechanism, logics, and institutions that criminalize them. I argue the racialized emotions described in this chapter are fashioned via macro- and meso-level carceral systems and logics, which shape the young men's experiences with criminalization. Articulated in this way, the carceral state takes form through interactional, organizational, and ideological processes that are constantly in motion and seep into the various social institutions and contexts young people of color navigate. As I found, witnessing and experiencing criminalization, including the assumption of criminality and fear of being criminalized, was constant and everywhere for the young boys.

Racialized emotions as framework to examine youth criminalization is important because it allows scholars to examine how the universal carceral apparatus materializes in the emotions of racialized young people. I found schools, police, and mental health institutions constantly criminalize Black and Latinx boys for their everyday behaviors not because they are committing a crime, but because adults assume them to be criminal by their very existence. It is not only their behaviors that are seen as threating and criminal, but also their racialized bodies and families. In examining how youth are both victims and witnesses of criminalization, I also saw how an overlapping ensemble of institutions and systems were implicated in the criminalization of youth of color. In revealing complex processes of criminalization at

the individual, interpersonal, and structural level that shape racialized emotions, this chapter expands theories of youth criminalization.

Chapter Background

The City of Inmates

Los Angeles, or "the City of Inmates, the carceral capital of the world" (Lytle Hernández 2017: 1), is a suitable place to study criminalization, youth, and racialized emotions. It has been well documented that the carceral state is part and parcel with the making of Los Angeles. In other words, Los Angeles is a hub for police violence, criminalization, detention, and incarceration (Felker-Kantor 2018; Hernandez 2017; Hunt and Ramón 2010; Stuart 2016; Muniz 2014: Lytle Hernández 2014). If arrested in Los Angeles, individuals had a 25% to 40% chance of ending up in the Los Angeles County jail system as of 2021 (Los Angeles Almanac 2021).

At the time of the study, Los Angeles had incarcerated more people than any other city in the United States, which incarcerated more people than any other nation (Lytle Hernández 2017). Indeed, this carceral history affects Black and Latinx youth. For example, from 2018 to 2020, 15 per 1,000 Latinx students in Los Angeles County were suspended (California Department of Education, 2021). During the same time period, 49 per 1,000 Black students in Los Angeles County were suspended (California Department of Education, 2021). When accounting for all school districts in California, the rates of suspensions increased to 79 per 1,000 Black students and 30 per 1,000 Latinx students (California Department of Education, 2021). In terms of arrests, Black and Latino men, both juvenile and adult, were arrested at a substantially

higher rate than women, but the arrests of Black and Latina women were on the rise (Lofstrom, Martin, and Hayes 2021). However, the data collection practices in carceral institutions are fraught and paint an incomplete picture (Diaz et al. 2020). Nonetheless, "in both size and scope, the project of human caging in Los Angeles is massive" (Lytle Hernández 2017: 1) and the logics of criminalization, confinement, and punishment central to prisons extend outside their physical walls (Gilmore 2007; Murch 2015; Gurusami 2019; Cardenas 2021; Shange 2019; Shabazz 2015; Tillman 2022: Sojoyner 2013).

Historians and social scientists have documented the long history of youth criminalization and punishment in Los Angeles via the war on drugs, deportation, school policing, and gang profiling (Felker-Kantor 2018). In schools in predominantly low-income communities of color, the carceral state constitutes a set of relationships, social arrangements, and structures that foster racialized and gendered criminalization in the hallways via punitive practices, policy, and curriculum (Ochoa 2013: Shedd 2015; Sojoyner 2016; Cabral 2022). This presence of carcerality can be partially attributed to the adoption of prison-like practices and zero-tolerance policies in schools. However, schools are only one site where the carceral state has seeped. Emerging scholarship examining the far reach of the carceral state has shown how social welfare institutions, including ones serving young people, have adapted carceral practices and rely heavily on policing (Harvey, Gupta-Kagan, Church 2021).

When describing policing in his neighborhood, one youth shared that it reminded him "of those National Geographic wild things where it's like, lions are stalking their prey. And it's like this big-ass lion, they're just creeping around the grass." This sociohistorical context provides the backdrop to the "of course" circle with which I opened the chapter. This chapter addresses Los Angeles' carceral history by asking: What are Black and Latinx young men's contemporary experiences with criminalization? Examining the racialized emotions and lived experiences of Black and Latinx youth in Los Angeles revealed criminalization happens constantly and everywhere, and that Black and Latinx children and youth are experiencing and witnessing criminalization. Thus, racialized emotions are central to how Black and Latinx children and youth experience criminalization and the city's universal carceral apparatus.

Youth Criminalization and Racialized Emotions

Historians, sociologists, education, and carceral studies scholars have posited that criminalization is foundational to the organization of the United States (Basile et al. 2019; Brown and Schept 2017; Davis 2003; Foucault 1995; Gilmore 2007; Hinton and Cook 2021; Muhammad 2010; Tillman 2022). Existing conceptualizations of criminalization have defined it as legal, material, and symbolic processes through which individuals, groups of people, and their behaviors are deemed deviant, delinquent, or criminal (Medina Falzone 2021; Rios 2011, 2017). Criminalization can serve to construct individuals as "good citizens and productive and law-abiding community members" (Thai 2022: 1187). The former includes incarceration, police

harassment, surveillance, and racial profiling. However, criminalization has regularly been conceptualized in relationship to deviant behavior or to individuals who have committed an offense.[11]

Many studies on youth criminalization have taken place in schools, and an increase in police presence, surveillance, and punitive practices and policies has led to an upsurge in criminalization, punishment, and the pushing out of youth of color (Kupchik 2010; Rios and Galicia 2014; Million Dollars Hood Project 2018). For example, Shedd's (2015) ethnographic account of Black and Latinx youth attending public high schools in Chicago revealed that public schools attended by Black and Latinx youth are more likely to resemble prison facilities. This finding aligns with other researchers who have argued criminalization is disproportionally experienced in schools that predominantly serve Black and Latinx youth. Arguably, Black and Latinx youth experience what Rios (2011) described as hypercriminalization—"the process by which an individual's everyday behaviors and styles become ubiquitously treated as deviant, risky, threatening, or criminal, across social contexts" (2011: xiv). Thus, frequent contact with police and criminalization shapes how Black and Latinx youth come to see themselves and the world around them, including their practices (Shedd 2015; Rendón, Aldana, Hom 2020; Ferguson 2001). Youth criminalization also reveals how poverty, space, gender, and sexuality are criminalized (Ramey 2018). For example, in California, youth experiencing homelessness are suspended

[11] Delinquency and crime are racialized, gendered, and classed social constructs that change across space, time, and social location.

more often than their peers with housing (Bishop, Camargo Gonzalez, and Rivera 2020). Queer and gender nonconforming youth are often subjected to criminalization and punishment in attempts to enforce heteronormativity, regulate gender expression, and police sexuality (Robinson 2020; Warren 2021). Other intersecting identities, like dis/ability, make children and youth of color more susceptible to criminalization. Thus, youth criminalization cannot be reduced to punitive policies and practices that address deviant behavior in schools. Arguably, across contexts, criminalization renders young people of color vulnerable to harm, exploitation, and, as Morris argued, "under the worst circumstances, death" (2018: 2). I demonstrate how the negative effects of criminalization are not mutually exclusive to violent encounters with police because the youth can experience it daily vis-à-vis loved ones and peers.

Controlling images fueled by anti-Blackness and racism reify carceral logics and criminalization of youth of color and other racialized groups (Shaver 2020; Gonzalez and Portillos 2007; Farmer 2010; Muniz 2014; Chavez 2013; Molina 2014; Suddler 2020). With whiteness is "understood as civilizable and a potential liberal subject—to our contemporary moment" (Tillman 2022: 9), racialized individuals and groups experiencing criminalization, including Black and Latinx youth, are imagined as threats and are "always and already scrutinized under systems of surveillance" (Meiners, 2007, p. 14) across contexts regardless of their behavior. I found young men are criminalized constantly and across contexts because, by their very existence, they are presumed to be criminals and perceived as a threat. In light of this perception, lingering questions remain about how these aspects are felt and the

racialized emotions produced when Black and Latinx children and youth are "simultaneously construed and constructed as dangerous, uneducable public enemies" (Meiners, 2007, p. 7).

Emotions have always been central to sociology and the scholarship on youth criminalization. Even when not explicitly articulated as racialized emotions, sociologists have asked, "How does it feel to be a problem?" (Du Bois [1903] 1994): 1). Previous studies have demonstrated everyday experiences with racism and racialization are internalized and they inflict emotional harm (Ferguson 2001; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2009; Sue 2010; Franklin 2016; Serrano 2020). For example, power dynamics in racialized organizations require people of color to engage in racialized and gender emotional labor and management (Evan and Moore (2015). In social movement literature, researchers have found there is an interplay between emotions, movement participation, and collective action (Robnett 2004). Tichavakunda (2021) applied racialized emotions to examine the experiences of Black students at historically white institutions of higher education. The experiences of Black students at this campus revealed that "one does not always feel like a problem" (Tichavakunda 2021: 16) and that Black joy is also cultivated and found in white spaces.

As it pertains to studies on youth, race, gender, and criminalization, several scholars have alluded to emotional responses, trauma, and healing (Ferguson 2001; Ginwright 2010; Shedd 2015). For example, studies have shown Black and Latina girls navigating criminalization and the criminal justice system experience emotional

destress while navigating and evading punitive structures (Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Ray 2022). In schools, Black children's emotional expressions are often seen as punishable challenges to authority and power (Ferguson 2001). Ferguson (2001:199) described the interplay between racialized emotions, youth, and power as constitutive of "emotional ingredients—fear, anger, resentment, hurt feelings—that lie just under the surface and seethe into the open when race as a feature of social division enters the discussion." Thus, racialized emotions are contextualized in the larger social and political context and structures from which they exist and arise (Bonilla-Silva 2019; Woody 2021).

I contribute to the body of literature on youth criminalization by addressing the intersection of racialized emotions and the carceral state. Bonilla-Silva's (2019) presidential address called on sociologists to take racialized emotions seriously. I respond to this call by demonstrating how the omnipresent nature of the carceral state and criminalization manifests in the emotions of Black and Latinx boys in the city of inmates. Their experiences demonstrate how the carceral seeps into their everyday lives across contexts and institutions.

Feeling Carcerality

I use carcerality, criminalization, policing, the carceral state, and the universal carceral apparatus interchangeably because I understand the carceral state and its expansion as central to the making of the United States. Said differently, I recognize youth criminalization, and ultimately the carceral state, as an ableist regime of social control and organized abandonment rooted in anti-Blackness and colonial logics of

punishment, enclosure, confinement, exclusion, dispossession, and abandonment that are linked to historical processes of racial capitalism (Battle and Serrano 2022; Brown and Schept 2017; Browne 2015; Cabral 2022; Gilmore 2007; Giroux 2003; LeBrón 2019; Ochoa 2013; Shabazz 2015; Shange 2019; Sojoyner 2016; Tillman 2022; Wang 2018). Viewed in that regard, youth criminalization affects individuals and groups in distinct but structurally similar ways.

Helpful in this endeavor is the work of sociologists who have theorized the relationship between criminalization, youth, and schools. For example, Shedd (2015) conceptualized systemic infrastructures that intertwine school discipline, safety, and policing as a universal carceral apparatus. Rios suggested (2011: xiv) young people of color navigate a youth control complex, or "a system in which schools, police, probation officers . . . and other institutions" criminalize their everyday behaviors and practices as risky and deviant. I demonstrate how the boys and young men described their experiences through emotions because the carceral state and criminalization permeates their lives at multiple levels (e.g., structural, interactional, psychological) simultaneously (Woody 2021: 2). Yet, contrary to prior studies that have suggested criminalization is a process connected to student deviance, school conflict, or disrespect of authority (Simon 2007; Hirschfield 2008; Rios 2011), I understand youth criminalization as more than just a function of arrest, discipline, punishment, and the enforcement of punitive laws and policies. As the sections to follow demonstrate, youth criminalization is a process intertwined with gendered racialization, anti-Blackness, and antiqueerness (Hernandez 2017; Suddler 2020;

Tillman 2022). For the purpose of understanding how young people feel criminalization, this chapter was also informed by Woody's (2021) concept of ambient racism. Ambient racism considers how racism and whiteness are "'baked into' the culture, built environment, and daily interactions" that materialize in racialized emotions (Woody 2021: 2). In this chapter, I account for how the universal carceral apparatus (Shedd 2015) and criminalization are baked into multiple contexts through physical, ideological, and symbolic processes that come alive in the emotional realities of youth.

As a conceptual tool, racialized emotions allowed me demonstrate how historical and contemporary contexts—including linking the carceral state to schools to young people—produces collective suffering and violence (LeBrón 2019; Lopez-Aguado 2018; Stovall 2018). Aligned with research that has shown an array of institutions have adopted the logics of the carceral state and its punitive techniques, I demonstrate how these logics are entrenched at multiple levels and across the many contexts and institutions youth navigate. Perhaps most importantly, I call attention to how racialized emotions unearth the insidious nature of the carceral state, its far reach, and how it continues to be reembedded in the social fabric of the United States, including in cities like Los Angeles. In the next section, I draw on interviews, focus groups, and field notes from Black and Latinx young men to highlight the constant criminalization they experience and witness across contexts and describe the racialized emotions criminalization produces.

Witnessing Criminalization and Adultification

When I asked KiSean, an 18-year-old Black young man, about his first interactions with police, he quickly rebutted and proclaimed, "I wouldn't say I was interacting with, but I seen it." Many of the young men I interviewed discussed witnessing criminalization as early as 7 years old, which was the case for KiSean. During a drive back home from visiting his incarcerated brother, KiSean woke up to the police pulling over his mom. He recalled his mom eventually fainted and was taken to a hospital after failed attempts to prove they had done nothing wrong. KiSean described this experience as his first exposure to criminalization; arguably, this was not his first exposure to the carceral state given his brother was already experiencing incarceration. KiSean shared he did not understand what was going on or why his mom was not coming home because he was "7, and when you a little kid, you don't know how to react to stuff. You don't know how to understand stuff, you feel me?"

Later in the interview, KiSean returned to this moment frequently and often used Breonna Taylor as a lens to describe its lasting impacts, including the feelings that come with remembering his mom could have been murdered by the police. Sadly, days after our interview, KiSean's brother was murdered by the police while riding a bike in broad daylight. Proponents of slow violence have argued that "police killings are relatively rare events, and most Black and Latinx youth do not live near those shootings" (Kramer and Remster 2022). This statement is not the reality of KiSean and other young men I interviewed; arguably, it is also not the reality of

Black youth across the country because Black death at the hands of the police is routinely shared on social media (Boyd 2020).

Without much details about why the police stopped KiSean's mother, or murdered his 29-year-old brother, I could only speculate about anti-Black racial profiling. Speculating was something the young men did themselves during our conversations given the circumstances of their criminalization and that of their loved ones. DJ was 18 and Latino at the time I formally interviewed him. He recalled being in fifth grade when his family was in a minivan driving back to Los Angeles from a family vacation in Texas. His uncle was driving when they were suddenly pulled over by the police. The police officer approached them with his gun drawn and pointed it at them, yelling, "Get out of the car! Put your hands up!" DJ recalled his uncle getting dragged off to the side of the road, handcuffed, and searched at gun point. During our discussion, he constantly assured me that his uncle was calm. Guns were also pointed at DJ and his family as a police officer searched their minivan. DJ recalled:

> He was calm, and he just walks backwards towards the police. The police handcuffs him, drags him over to the shoulder, the shoulder of the road, and it was in this field. He throws my uncle down, and his face is down in the ground, and he's going through his pockets while the gun is still pointed at his head. Gets his wallet, goes back to his car. He's there for a couple of minutes, and then he comes back out with his gun still drawn, walks towards the van, and then he pulls open the door of the van. He sweeps through the entire car with his gun drawn. He had just pointed the gun at all of us, and we were all freaking out. After that, the cover story was, "Oh, I stopped you for a speeding ticket." He didn't give us a speeding ticket. We knew what it was. He was just trying to see if we were citizens. He was just checking for our citizenship status.

DJ and KiSean's initial exposure to criminalization was violent, traumatizing, and the result of anti-immigrant and anti-Black sentiments that view Black and Latinx people

as threats (Chavez 2013; Molina 2014). KiSean was 7 years old and DJ was 10 or 11 years old when these experiences took place.

For some of the young men, this age also marked the beginning of adultification in their experiences with criminalization (Goff et al. 2014; Dow 2016; Dumas and Nelson 2016). In Los Angeles, this idea was especially true for the young men, who often shared "fitting a profile" of an adult. At 16 years old, Cardo, who identified as Afro-Latino, shared experiencing criminalization via racial profiling. These experiences had been ongoing and started when he was 10 years old. He shared:

> I'm leaving a friend's house and then, just walking into my mom's car and then, as I get into the car, I see a bunch of police cars pulling up. I was wondering like, dang, what's happening? I know they aren't here for us or anything like that. A bunch of lights pointing to our car and supposedly they were assuming I was somebody in the area. I matched the profile of a 6-foot, 200-pound Black man. At the time, I was like 5-foot max or something like that, or I was like 4-foot something. I don't even think there was a race description, so just assuming that the race was African American as well, it was like racial profiling.

As Cardo shared this experience, he assured me these experiences had only increased as he got older. Cardo shared:

> [I could be] with friends who have cars, just walking down the street, and cops pulling up assuming me and my friend group are doing something, when we're doing nothing. I don't know, being somewhat harassed when I'm doing everything in my legal rights, you know?

Young people of color, especially Black youth, are often assumed to be criminals or potentially committing a crime in the future. For Zae, racial profiling led to his arrest for suspected robbery after a football game. During his 3-day detention, his home was invaded and he was kept from speaking or seeing his family. I found that, by their

very existence, the young men were perceived as dangerous and deviant (Dumas and Nelson 2016). Yet, with death and physical violence at the hands of police being routinely shared on social media, Cardo minimized his experiences as "Not anything too bad. Not like police brutality." However, these experiences are also harmful and traumatizing.

Sociologists have conceptualized the psychological and physical harms of policing and criminalization as slow violence (Kramer and Remster 2022). However, the constant criminalization the young men experienced and witnessed across contexts is not adequately captured by the phrase slow violence. At times, the violence might be slow if these experiences are dispersed, unseen, and gradually accumulate. Yet, as the racialized emotions produced by the carceral state reveal, the scale or impact of these experiences are not captured by the word slow. However, proponents of the slow violence concept are right in suggesting the harms of policing and criminalization extend to witnessing the criminalization of a peer, family member, and an individual's own community (Kramer and Remster 2022).

Criminalization Across Institutions

Schools are a site of criminalization for Black and Latinx youth (Cabral 2022; Meiners 2011; Ochoa 2013; Rios 2011, 2017; Shange 2019; Shedd 2015; Sojoyner 2016). In addition to being criminalized while walking, getting into their cars, or witnessing the criminalization of loved ones, the young men in the study shared they attended schools that "make some kids feel like they are prisoners." Martin, a 16-year-old, Black youth, shared, "The fact that we have a whole bunch of gates around

the school makes some kids feel like they are prisoners." Martin went on to share that, at his high school, where he had been kicked out of class, "there is a security guard watching the back gate, the sides, the front, and they have police officers on campus with like, actual batons and stuff." In other words, their schools resembled prisons because they had high fences, random searches were prevalent, and security and police officers were regularly stationed on campus.

Some of the young men also shared being arrested or pushed out of their high schools because school police, suspensions, and expulsion were the go-to tools for discipline. Using the library as a lens, 19-year-old Blacc recalled the ever-present nature of the carceral state during his time at a high school that he transferred to, saying:

> Barely a small little library. The library that's in there, they use it for detention and stuff like that. I didn't think they cared about my needs. It was openly policed and all that. Police, actually, soon as I got there, oh yeah, they welcomed me there. It was like, "Oh, we know about you. We know who you is. We already know how you going to turn out." They already trying to picture me as a gang member, as a criminal, or something like that, and I'm barely just starting at the school trying to change my grade, do you feel me?

Blacc arrived at this high school with the hopes of improving his grades and making up credits from 10th grade. Instead, he was met with a campus climate where he felt constantly surveilled and criminalized, sharing:

> [Myself and other youth] felt like we couldn't do nothing. Couldn't mind our own selves. We couldn't walk around and feel as if we not going to get, "Oh, put your hands up, get against the wall," you know? "Let's see your pockets." We always got to worry about, oh yeah, who's watching us? Because one of the times after lunch, they was watching us. We just got our lunch. We were just going to go sit down. Next thing you know, all you hear was, "Oh, get the police, get the police."

During our conversation, Blacc questioned why he was constantly the target of these searchers where he and his friends were put against the school walls and searched by staff and police. Blacc's assertiveness conveyed with certainty that "They ain't find nothing. Not a single thing." However, it was his follow-up remarks that summed up the role of criminalization in his school. He shared:

> You're always being subjected to something. You're always getting expelled. You're always getting suspended; you're always going through all this. You always got to worry about something, and then they don't even got the right resources to benefit you and help.

Blacc was eventually pushed out of this school. These accumulative experiences had taken their toll and he argued his peers needed to be taken out of those spaces, saying, "[So,] they ain't got to worry about their head all the time. Just spaces where we're comfortable. We can be ourselves; we can fluctuate how we feel, you know? No joke, man." BSS youth often testified in school board meetings and protests that teachers and staff also engaged in surveillance and random searchers. In other words, the schools they attended often facilitated a school climate rooted in dispossession, punishment, and surveillance.

Even when not experiencing criminalization themselves, the high presence of police and punitive practices meant participants were also constantly witnessing violence via criminalization. Ricardo, who had just graduated high school at the time of our interview, remembered:

> Seeing this one time, there was this girl, I don't know exactly what she did. But all I remember seeing was her screaming on the ground, while the police officer had her arms around her back and putting handcuffs on her, I think. All I remember seeing and hearing is, "You're hurting me. You're hurting me." I don't think the cop cared.

Similarly, Andres recounted:

> I've mostly seen students like, with really bad behavioral problems be dealt with police and stuff. Like the stuff that I have seen, you know what I mean? I have not seen students that have behavioral issues talk to counselors. I've not heard of someone that is going through something like, "Oh, I talked to this counselor." I do know people that go through stuff or I go through stuff. I've never heard, "Oh, this is the counselor or therapist that you can talk to that the school works with."

Andres, Blacc, and Martin all alluded to a school climate where punishment was something young people experience and witness. As they have all described, the carceral state seeps into their interactions on campus, the architecture of the school—including the library—and their views on schooling and youth.

Schools, however, are one of several institutions that rely on the carceral state to criminalize, punish, and surveil young men. As a 16-year-old trans, Latino, young man, JV had struggled with anxiety and depression since middle school. In numerous occasions, JV had shared schools are places where his gender identity is challenged and questioned. As a result, he had become familiar with mental health institutions and their carceral practices. One afternoon, the police arrived to do a wellness check on him. They were returning to follow up from a previous visit where JV refused to speak to the police as protest for misgendering him and deadnaming him multiple times.[12] A few days later, they returned because JV's grandmother feared JV was using substances and called the police. JV shared he was going through a "bad

[12]Transgender people may decide not to use their birth or legal name and instead choose a name that aligns with their identity. When someone uses their old name, this is referred to as deadnaming.

moment" and needed his therapy team, not the police. When the police arrived, they entered JV's room and noticed new posters and stickers, including a "bunch of queer stickers." Some posters were bought with money he had earned working his first part-time job, and others were gifts. As JV recalled, that afternoon the police officer entered JV's room and noticed. "Where do you get your money from?" one police officer asked.

Despite JV sharing he had earned his money, the police assumed the worst and continued to interrogate him. Upset by these assumptions, JV attempted to get up from the bench he was sitting on when one police officer pushed him down. JV shared, "They did not respect my pronouns or name. Two cops got physical with me. I had my ankle sprained, both my wrists were bruised, and I was put in the cop car." Aware that juvenile detention was a possibility for him, JV shared, "They wanted to take me to juvie, but I was like, 'fuck that. I'm not going.'" Proud of his act of resistance, JV enthusiastically shared, "I pissed in his car. And then from there, he put me on a 51/50 hold."

A 51/50, or a 5585 for minors, is a Welfare and Institutions Code that allows psychiatric hospitals to involuntarily detain a person experiencing a mental health crisis for up to 72 hours or longer after evaluation.[13] With a sense of relief, JV shared this hold was "way better than being in the system." However, the two systems JV passingly perceived as separate are intertangled and rely on one another. Nonetheless,

[13]https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=WIC&sectionNum=5150

JV peeing in the car must be read as an indictment of the structural implementation of carceral logics across institutions. A year earlier, JV's neighbor was shot 3 times after the police were called while he was having a schizophrenic episode. The reliance on agents of the carceral state for wellness checks or mental health related crises is one example of how the carceral seeps beyond overtly punitive institutions. As a result, criminalization in the form of policing in schools, the assumption of criminality, and the spill over of the carceral state was a constant and omnipresent experience for the young men.

The young men's early accounts of criminalization also revealed they began experiencing and witnessing criminalization across contexts as children. Importantly, KiSean, DJ, and Cardo's experiences revealed the relationship between anti-Blackness and anti-immigrant sentiments, including adultification. For many of the young men, criminalization was experienced via the criminalization of their behaviors, their bodies, and their families. Moreover, JV's account revealed schools are just one of many hostile contexts young people of color navigate (Ray 2022). In the following section, I demonstrate these experiences, and the navigation of criminalization and potential of being criminalized, produce racialized emotions, including fear, paranoia, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Paranoia, Fear, and PTSD

Racialized emotions are integral to how the young men described their experiences with criminalization and to understanding the implications of the carceral state. The omnipresent nature of criminalization contributes to the range of racialized

emotions described by the young men. Moreover, these racialized emotions are fashioned through experiences with criminalization that are sometimes slow, hidden, and accumulative. Other times, these experiences are visible, destructive, and sudden. Nonetheless, they emerge from structural, ideological, and interactional racial and carceral dynamics that are constantly in motion in the lives of Black and Latinx youth in Los Angeles. For example, criminalization produces racialized emotions tied to paranoia, fear, and trauma.

Like other young men, 16-year-old Andres, a Latino youth, described his criminalization as constant and everywhere, saying:

> I don't trust the police. I've been pulled over lots of times. For wearing a hat one time, I mean, you know like they come up with their excuses. But I was wearing a hat one time, and I know I got pulled over because of that. And I was wearing a hoodie one time, and I got pulled over because of that. I got my hair cut real short one time and I got pulled over because of that, too. I wasn't driving, I don't have my license yet. Thank God! I've gotten pulled over, like, "Man, your mustache, you look older" or "Yeah, we were just looking." One time I got pulled over and the guy asked me, "Were you born here?"

At age 16, Andres had experienced criminalization so routinely that he thanked god for not having a license yet. Andres alluded to how his body, behaviors, and clothing, including his grooming choices, were deemed as threats. For Black and Latinx Los Angeles residents, this might not come as surprise because different cloths, hairstyles, and behaviors render someone legible for gang database (Youth Justice Coalition 2012; Muniz 2015). As such, constant criminalization—including witnessing it—reminds the young men of their constant vulnerability to state violence, authority, and incarceration.

These fears and experiences are expressed and felt by Andres and other young men via racialized emotions. As collective products expressed and felt by most members of a racial group (Woody 2021), racialized emotions are one way the criminalization materializes in the lives of youth. For Andres, these emotions took the form of PTSD and paranoia. Andres shared:

> I've heard of the term PTSD and all this stuff. I don't know if I have that, but sometimes, and I'm not saying that I'm always paranoid and looking out, but I've like gotten way better at like, "Oh, that's a cop." Just like my peripheral vision. Like when someone else is driving, I don't even have to be driving. "Oh, that's a cop right there." Or when I hear some shit, like, it can be a song, it can be something on the radio, if it sounds like a siren, like fuck! Like, this happened this morning and yeah, I don't know, it's kinda hard to describe.

For Andres, hearing sirens and seeing police officers are triggers that can happen at any time. He shared, "Even at school, too. I always feel some type of tension when a cop walks past me." And school was not a place he turned to for counseling and a therapist because, as he shared, students with problems are dealt with by the police. Without any prompt on criminalization, Andres shared these experiences after being asked to describe what it was like growing up in his community. From his vantage point, he shared, "That's my community, that's what's out there, that's what I've been experiencing." For Andres and other young men who are the children of immigrants, racialized emotions are complicated by navigating illegality every day (Negrón-Gonzales 2013). In fact, a few weeks prior to our interview, Andres' mother was deported.

Eddie, who had recently turned 15 when I talked to him, shared similar experiences to that of Andres:

> Eddie: I see lots of police just circling the neighborhood. I at least see like, three to four a day. Whenever I would go out, it's like, I would always see at least, like, a police car. Sometimes, there would be police standing at the bus stops or they would just be circling near our school. If there's supposedly something suspicious, then it's like they would be circling around the school. I would just see them a lot.
>
> Uriel: How does that make you feel? To see police officers that often?
>
> Eddie: Kind of makes me feel unsafe because sometimes I get nervous because, from what I've seen on the news, they attack a lot for no reason. So, it's like, whenever I act too nervous whenever I'm around a police car, I tell myself, "Don't look suspicious or else that could be one of the reasons to cuff you or something." So, whenever I'm walking to like, my aunt, and I see a police car near my aunt's house, I tell myself, "Don't look suspicious, don't act strange. Just act normal like you would normally do."
>
> Uriel: What makes them think that you look suspicious?
>
> Eddie: I guess walking weird. It looks like if you're walking as if you have something on you. You have a hoodie and you're just looking, making sure nobody's following you or something.

Eddie's fear for his safety became a reality a few weeks after our conversation. Eddie and his 19-year-old sister were walking home with a foldable shopping cart full of groceries and sleeping bags for their cousins. As they turned the corner, police officers took a look at their cart and stopped when they saw Eddie. After asking Eddie to stop, a police officer asked, "What do you have?" After responding, "Oh, I just have some sleeping bags," Eddie was prompted to open the bags and prove they were indeed sleeping bags. Turner (2021) described omnipresence of criminalization as the normalcy of carcerality in the city of inmates. In a study of Black boys, Turner (2021: 66) found there is a nonchalant "everydayness of carceral tools and logics" enacted on Black youth in Los Angeles. Similarly, I found the normalcy of the carceral state is also experienced by Latinx youth to varying degrees.

This normalcy also fashions fear, nervousness, and paranoia for Andres and Eddie. As collective experiences, racialized emotions produced by criminalization impacted 16-year-old Manny and his parents. For Manny, growing up in Los Angeles meant being paranoid. He shared:

> I can't really go out and do too much stuff because [my parents] are always worried that a police officer might come or something. Michael left real quick. And it got to the point where it was like in any situation, or anywhere, was like, I was always thinking something was going to go wrong. A very pessimistic person. So, it's like, policing, it has had an impact on my health, mental health, to the point where, like, I couldn't, I couldn't trust myself, and I couldn't trust things going on around me.

Manny continued and shared, during the stay-at-home orders of the COVID-19 global pandemic, he worked on figuring out how improve his mental health while in safety of his room because "it felt like the safest place in the most stress." This fear of being criminalized, and under the worst circumstances, murdered by the police, is ever looming for Manny and his family. He shared:

> The system doesn't like Black kids. Like my parents, they saw how big I was, and they saw how my face and my body doesn't reflect my age. My parents have always worried that a police officer, or some random white lady, is gonna like look at me and just scream that I did something wrong, or I might get shot by the police.

In this instance, Manny was alluding to a history of white women fearing for their lives becoming carceral agents in the process (see Mimi Kim [2018] on carceral feminism). Moreover, his assertion that the "system doesn't like Black kids" alludes to the nature of Black youth suffering in the United States (Dumas 2014). For Manny, "That's the cause and root of paranoia." Andres, Eddie, and Manny described how frequent, invasive police encounters, and the fear of criminalization materialized in

their emotions. Paranoia, fear, or, as Andres would suggest, PTSD is usually driven by negative emotions, such as negative racialized emotions.

The racialized emotions produced by criminalization play a central role in positioning Black and Latinx boys and young men as a problem. Like other young men I interviewed, 18-year-old J-Rebel had also "fit a profile," including while on his way to and from school (Shedd 2015). Intrigued, I asked J-Rebel how he thought Black boys and young men are perceived in South Central. He responded, "I would say they're definitely perceived as criminals in the making." In the follow up to this statement, J-Rebel shared, "The darker you get, the more darker your shade of your skin, the more you're perceived to be a criminal or a threat to others." He further complicated this notion by bringing in immigration and sharing that some youth are always imagined as outsiders. Said differently, negative racialized emotions produced by the carceral state connect back to one of W.E.B. Du Bois's central questions on the Black experience in the United States: How does it feel to be a problem? (Du Bois 1994).

J-Rebel powerfully alluded to the ways macrodynamics, mesodynamics, and microdynamics materialize in racialized emotions, sharing:

> We usually, impactfully, have to go through racial discrimination, which leads to the reality of police brutality. Law enforcement has already been set up like, if you are from a certain status, you're treated as a basically nobody. That is like using white power. Police discriminations leads to a lot of people, youth, to feel like if they are not worth nothing, which leads to self-hate.

J-Rebel's powerful analysis of criminalization hints at how criminalization as a tool of social control is organized around various domains: structural, hegemonic, and

interpersonal, including racialized emotions like self-hate and feeling like a nobody. Like other boys, J-Rebel suggested racialized emotions do not necessarily arise from one negative encounter with police, criminalization, or being caught up in a school-to-prison-pipeline; rather, they arise from the totality of the carceral state across contexts. An attention to emotions extends previous work on youth criminalization by showing how the racialized emotions described in this section are not limited to schools, police, or one set of interactional dynamics; instead, they derive from seeping carceral systems and logics.

Chapter Summary

In many arenas, the relationship between the carceral state, schools, and young people is viewed through the ubiquitous metaphor of the school-to-prison-pipeline. The pipeline metaphor argues school suspensions and expulsions connected to zero-tolerance policies fall disproportionally on Black, Latinx, and Native youth (Heitzeg 2009; McCarter 2017). However, the pipeline metaphor often positions schools and the carceral state as unintentionally overlapping systems of punishment. Researchers and community organizations have troubled this metaphor for its failure to capture historical processes of criminalization and the far-reaching nature of the carceral state (Annamma 2018; Sojoyner 2016). The lived experiences of the young people I presented in this chapter support this claim. In examining how the carceral state materializes in the racialized emotions of Black and Latinx youth, I found criminalization is something they witness and experience early and constantly, and carcerality is omnipresent across contexts and institutions.

In this chapter, I demonstrated criminalization is sometimes something the young men witnessed as children via the policing of their families and loved ones. I also showed, as children, their bodies began to be adultified via processes of racialization and gang profiling. In other words, fitting a profile becomes a regular occurrence, especially true for Black boys, as the young men continue to grow. By the time they enter schools that resemble carceral facilities (Shedd 2015), the young men have already witnessed and experienced constant criminalization. In some cases, they have had loved ones incarcerated or deported, and in the worst of circumstances, murdered by the police. Their experiences also reveal how the carceral state's anti-Black, racist, and heteronormative logics of punishment have been adapted by institutions not necessarily deemed punitive. In other words, youth criminalization is animated by forces that operate simultaneously such as race, gender, and age, but that are not reducible to punishment only.

In this chapter, I also analyzed the intersection of emotions, youth, and the carceral state. Racialized emotions are central to revealing micro and macro dimensions of the carceral state, including the emotional toll of omnipresent criminalization on children and youth. Although it is known that criminalization leads to school suspensions and punishment, carcerality also diffuses into the racialized emotions of children and youth, including their paranoias, thoughts, anxieties, and behaviors. The emotional toll of the carceral state on youth like JV reveals youth criminalization is sometimes a cumulative process and connected to specific events. Thus, racialized emotions produced by criminalization further reveal the power and

far-reaching nature of the carceral state. As JV shared during his interview, "we want justice because we want to heal."

JV's statement came shortly after the summer of 2020, where police brutality in Los Angeles and nationwide led to the defunding of the Los Angeles School Police Department (Tat 2020). The findings presented in this chapter should encourage researchers and practitioners to examine how the logics of criminalization seep, and how this seeping produces experiences that are distinct at times but structurally similar. Thus, an attention to the racialized emotions produced by the carceral state should deter practitioners and researchers from committing the same mistake as the discussions and programming that emerged to address the school-to-prison pipeline: that youth criminalization is about fixing the punishment of a few misbehaving bad apples, or that a pipeline is the only site of institutional gendered racial criminalization. Thus, calls to defund school police informed by an abolitionist ethos become a necessary step in the journey of youth justice.

With omnipresent and constant criminalization as the backdrop, including racialized emotions produced by these experiences, I further this discussion in the next chapter and also turn to BSS programming. Particularly, I describe the programming and practices that challenge binary and heteronormative logics central to the carceral state. To do so, I first demonstrate how policing, schools, and, at times, their neighborhoods and families, are sites where heteronormative logics and gender binaries are reinforced. With JV's assertion that youth "want justice because we want to heal" in mind, I describe schools and other carceral contexts as sites of hostility

and suffering. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the young men often described programming on gender, sexuality, and healing as some of their favorite aspects of youth organizing. I leaned into this idea to examine BSS's varying approaches, programming, and political education and discuss their implications for Black and Latinx boys and young men.

CHAPTER 4:
GENDERED ENCLOSURES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF HOMEPLACES

> *All the mentors gave us so much love, that they made us give love to each other. And now, we trust each other with our lives to be able to do things.*
>
> —Brandon[14]

> *Every single person we got close to as a family. And that is the kinda shit that people say is impossible. And we did it!*
>
> —Maurice

> *Everyone has their own ideas; everyone was so open. I am not used to environments like that.*
>
> –JV

Brandon, Maurice, and JV offered these reflective statements at the end of retreats where healing and political education were the focus. These retreats took place in cabins or other places across the state of California where the youth were surrounded by trees, lakes, and, depending on the time of the year, a bit of snow in the mornings. Youth interested in media and film were often invited to take part in documenting the retreats by capturing pictures, recording their youth peers reflecting on their time there, sharing posts on social media, and, in some cases, creating memorabilia for all the participants. JV, Maurice, and Brandon all shared their experiences during one those recordings.

Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition (BSS) boys and young men have participated in weekend retreats that are exclusive for BSS, and, prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, in weeklong events that brought together youth from across California. As

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[14]Rest in Power Brandon. In *Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators* (2021), Emily Borg, Rossa Socco, CaseyAnn Carbonell, and Lupe Renteria Salome wrote a letter to Brandon. I share their words in memory of him: "Across space, time, life, and death, we carry your light."

I had come to learn in the 6 years prior to the study, these retreats were often the first time the young men got to travel outside of their neighborhood or town. The goal during these retreats was to engage boys and young men of color in healing work and political education. The retreats also provided a perfect opportunity to recruit and invite new members into youth organizing. For participants who had been involved with BSS or other organizations, these retreats were an opportunity to cement relationships, foster new ones, and deepen their coalitional work. JV, Brandon, and Maurice's reflections alluded to one of the central themes I cover in this chapter: programming and contexts that affirm Black and Latinx boys and young men and challenge gender ideologies.[15]

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how criminalization is omnipresent for Black and Latinx boys and young men in Los Angeles. They experience and witness criminalization early, constantly, and across contexts and institutions. These experiences produce racialized emotions like fear, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and paranoia. To highlight the gendered implications of the carceral state, this chapter is guided by the following research questions: (a) What are the gendered consequences of criminalization?; (b) What are the different approaches to political education and programming?; and (c) What implications do these approaches have in mediating the gendered consequences of criminalization?

[15]Gender ideologies are "normative understandings of what it means to be a 'good' or 'real' man or woman, boy, or girl" (Jones 2018: 5).

To answer these questions, I draw on participant observations, interviews, and focus groups with BSS youth and youth workers. My findings align with what I have observed during my time as a youth worker in Los Angeles during the decade prior to the study: schools and interactions with adults are often a site of hostility for youth of color (Ray 2022). Thus, in this chapter, I show how criminalization and hostility produce gendered enclosures that shape the gender ideologies of Black and Latinx boys and young men in Los Angeles. Gendered enclosures bring attention to how policy, punitive practices, and discourse serve as formal and informal means to frame race, sexuality, and gender via carceral social constructs (Sojoyner 2016: 123). At the core of gender enclosures are the imposition of white patriarchal heteronormative ideals that confine the expressions and behaviors of Black and Latinx boys and young men (Blume Oeur 2018; Ferguson 2001; López 2003; Shabazz 2015; Sojoyner 2016). I found school contexts, criminalization, and, at times, the family, produce gender enclosures rooted in a patriarchal heteronormative formulation of masculinity.

Although gendered enclosures were reality for the young men, I also found their participation in BSS programming and practices provided openings to buffer gendered enclosures produced in a context of criminalization and hostility. To illustrate this point, I honed in on several BSS organized retreats to illuminate the ways the young men extended their understandings of gender and sexuality by their participation in BSS. As such, I use my participation observations to highlight organizational dynamics, programming, and relational practices that buffer gendered enclosures. I coupled my observations with interviews and discussions with the young

men that further demonstrated how gender ideologies and gendered expectations are defined, extended, and challenged. Drawing on my findings, I argue that BSS functions as a homeplace (hooks 1990) that mediates gendered enclosures at the interpersonal level. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of relevant literature on schools, criminalization, gender, and community-based educational spaces.

Chapter Background

Hostile Institutions and Gendered Enclosures

Despite the liberatory potential of education, for Black, Latinx, and Native youth, schools are often an apparatus of assimilation, criminalization, cultural violence, and erasure (Ferguson 2001; López 2003; Ladson-Billings 2014; Dumas 2014; Sojoyner 2016; Martinez-Cola 2020). Given the gendered racial violence that Black and immigrant girls of color experience, Ray described schools as hostile institutions. My understanding of schools as hostile institutions is informed by Ray's insights, including the historical role of schools in enforcing colonial and carceral logics (Ray 2022; Shedd 2015; Sojoyner 2016). Ray demonstrated how hostile institutions are places where Black girlhood is constructed as undisciplined and unsuited for learning. Thus, schools are locations of gender production and the entrenchment of white supremacist–capitalist patriarchy (Ray 2022; Musto 2019; hooks 1995). Hostility is also a useful tool to describe the environment produced by the relationship between youth, schools, and the carceral state. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, criminalization is something the young men experience and

witness. Thus, I understand criminalization as a process that produces hostility because it is not just students impacted by punitive practices (i.e., expulsion, suspension, and detention) that experience the brunt of the carceral state in schools. Young people who do not conform to gender binaries or whose gender expressions challenge heteronormative ideals are also met with hostility via surveillance and criminalization (Robinson 2020; Vázquez 2020; Cruz 2011).

Race and gender intersect in complex ways in and out of schools, shaping the experiences of Black and Latinx children and youth (Morris, Conteh, and Harris-Perry 2018). As it pertains to boys, racialized gendered punishment produce good/bad and gifted/troubled social identities (Ferguson 2001). Ferguson (2001) argued schools are instrumental in the negative construction and maintenance of Black masculinity as criminal. Similarly, in a study of 2nd-generation Dominican, West Indian, and Haitian high school students, Lopez (2003) argued the differential treatment of young men of color in schools, work, and other public spaces creates disparate "race–gender outlooks" for social mobility and education. Moreover, Lopez found the "racial stigmatization" of men of color is rooted in the perception of them as thugs and criminals. This perception impedes the young men's education, pushing them to assert their "masculinity through work, dating, and distancing themselves from home life" (2001; 114) instead.

More recently, Blume Oeur (2018) documented how two all-boys schools cultivated different kinds of young Black men and intraracial divisions among them. Blume Oeur demonstrated how efforts to address the crisis of Black men in education

through notions of racial uplift and a politics of respectability are entangled with the reigning neoliberal order (164). Blume Oeur mapped out how neoliberal governmentality and market fundamentalism on two campuses shaped Black young men's "character, sensibilities, and habits within institutions driven by the commonsense market imperative of standardization, accountability, innovation, entrepreneurialism, and competition" (166). For example, Blume Oeur demonstrated that different discourses—distractions, teenage pregnancy, competition, motivation—crystalize notions of race, gender, and sexuality for the students. Furthermore, Blume Oeur demonstrated teaching practices and school spirit construct a disciplined brotherhood that is "constrained by the very neoliberal context from which the schools emerged" (2018: 23). Ultimately, these practices promote interracial divides by socializing the young Black men at both campuses to distinguish themselves from other, more marginalized Black men.

Researchers have also shown that interactions with the carceral state and criminalization constitute masculinity-making processes for Black and Latino young men. For example, Reich found young men in juvenile detention centers found themselves in a paradox: they are at once institutionally powerless and cultural symbols of masculinity (2010: 16). Drawing on data collected in a juvenile prison in Rhode Island, Reich found that poor, young men of color are forced to participate in "masculinity games" in which different conceptions of masculinity are constructed (2010: 22). Focusing on the everyday activities and interactions of Black and Latino young men in Oakland, Rios (2009; 2011) found masculinity making happens

through the everyday criminalization and labeling of Black and Latino young men. That is, at each moment or interaction with the punitive practices of a given society, masculinity is being constructed or modified. Rios argued these interactions produce a hypermasculinity—both gendered and racialized—forcing Black and Latino young men into certain notions of manhood. Moreover, Rios argued that, as a result, the Black and Latino young men reproduce the very gendered dynamics that oppress them and hurt them.

Stuart et al. (2017) mapped out the ways in which Black youth perform masculinity in Chicago in the context of criminalization. In particular, they found Black men tend to avoid policing and criminalization through a strategic embodied masculine performance: the Black young men attempt to communicate emotional sensitivity, vulnerability, and so on. This strategic masculine performance is accomplished by both embodied strategies (e.g., backpacks, glasses) and heterosexual relationship displays (e.g., the use of feminine Black women as protection). The authors noted these strategies are shaped by patriarchal and heteronormative racialized and gendered ideologies, given that the more feminine the Black woman, the more protection from policing she offers. Although these studies are generative because they highlight the gendered practices that emerge from interactions with the police, and the carceral state more broadly, scholarship outside of sociology has theorized the context from which these gendered dynamics emerge. In other words, their micro-level analysis of the racialized and gendered consequence of criminalization is grounded in a structural analysis of the carceral state.

Shabazz (2016) called attention to the historical, institutional, social, and spatial production of Black masculinity in Chicago during the 20th century. Shabazz argued policing, surveillance, and architectures of confinement were used to "spatialize Blackness" and produced racialized and gendered consequences for Black men (2016: 1). In complicating the study of masculinity by considering the racialization of space and the carceral state, Shabazz showed how urban landscapes and their structuring, including the figurative and literal borders carcerality produces, served as a mechanism to control and police Black masculinity. For example, the use of kitchenettes—cramped living spaces that Black migrants were forced to live in—in early 20th century Chicago segregated poor Black communities into spaces that denied them individual privacy (Shabazz 2016: 33). This form of containment enclosed Black identity and masculinity, and Black people reacted to these confined quarters with anger, hostility, and a resolve to leave such living arrangements. Thus, Shabazz suggested the entanglement of carceral power, space, and gender identity formation in Chicago infused the performance of Black masculinity with tension, violence, and exploitation (2016: 54).

Shabazz's analysis of the second half of the 20th century also revealed how the growing prison industrial complex and the rise of gangs in Chicago impacted Black masculinity. Black men in Chicago became entrapped in the criminal justice system as the century progressed. Their movement in and out of prisons from the 1970s to the 1990s, Shabazz argued, "prisonized gendered performances" via carceral circularity (i.e., movement in and out of prisons; 2016: 78). Sojoyner (2016) took a

similar approach in an examination of Black masculinity in a Los Angeles high school.

Sojoyner's (2016) ethnography of a public high school in Los Angeles revealed the process by which Black masculinity is constructed and enclosed. Sojoyner coupled an interrogation of public policy with an ethnographic account to reveal how "policy formation becomes wed to gender construction" (2016: 115). Sojoyner revealed that heteronormative bourgeois notions are asserted in policies and practices that contrast deviant Black masculinity to upwardly mobile masculine subjects. These processes—which he called "gendered enclosures"—have had serious implications for Black Los Angeles. As Sojoyner demonstrated, gendered enclosures in Black Los Angeles have historically persisted and continue to blame societal failures on individuals and portray the Black community as criminal. In summary, Sojoyner's gendered enclosure model brings attention to controlling images that construct Blackness as criminal via policy and punitive practices (Hill Collins 2009; Sojoyner 2016). At the core of gender enclosures is the imposition of white patriarchal heteronormative ideals that confine the expressions and behaviors of Black and Latinx boys and young men (Sojoyner 2016).

Shabazz and Sojoyner's interrogation of Black masculinity uncovers how the historical expansion of carceral power and white patriarchal heteronormative ideals inform gendered enclosures. Moreover, they demonstrated these social forces transform Black masculinity in ways that are harmful to Black men and women. Recent studies have shown community organizations can play a rule in buffering

these gendered enclosures produced by the carceral state (Flores 2014; Jones 2018). Jones's (2018) study of the Fillmore in San Francisco highlighted how certain Black men and community organizations provide an alternative understanding of manhood. These Black men in neighborhood organization are often protectors, providers, street mentors, and social fathers that serve as buffers and bridges between young Black men with street and criminal histories and social institutions. Jones argued, when investing in emotional and relational caregiving, Black men challenge and extend understandings of Black masculinity (2018; 141). Building on the work of Jones, Shabazz, and Sojoyner, in this chapter, I also examine the role of community-based educational spaces in buffering the racialized and gendered impacts of criminalization on BSS boys and young men.

Community-Based Educational Spaces as Homeplaces

Despite community-based educational spaces being connected to the neoliberal apparatus of the nonprofit world (Baldridge 2019, 2020), youth organizing groups have been found to be places where young people of color learn about inequality, history, and their identities through political education (Clay 2012; Ginwright 2010; Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 2006). For example, in an ethnography of a community-based educational space in New York City, Salas Pujols (2021) found Afro-Latina girls learn to embrace their Black identity through curriculum and pedagogy that affirms the racial identities of all Black girls. Along similar lines, in a study of community-based educational spaces in California, Terriquez (2015) found youth organizations can equip low-income youth of color

with basic civic skills, develop their political consciousness, and provide them roadmaps for political action. Therefore, she argued that "activist groups can function as intensive training grounds for members' future political participation" (224). In another article on these organizing groups, Terriquez (2017) demonstrated that Latinx youth, including those who are undocumented, benefit from these programs as well.

Building on this work, Lin (2020) found youth organizing groups encourage the development of group consciousness among Asian American youth in particular, saying, "Youth organizing groups reframe participants' personal experiences by challenging dominant narratives such as colourblindness, contextualizing personal histories, and transforming shame into system blame. Such processes encourage activist group consciousness expressions as politicized cultural recuperation and race and class critiques" (8). Lin argued the general population, or Asian American people not involved in community-based organizations, are less likely to develop the same group consciousness. Furthermore, Lin found Asian American youth organizers engage in a politicized cultural recuperation that interrogates the twin forces of colonialism and capitalism in their lived experience. Youth organizing groups challenge dominant racial tropes and "bridge gaps between racial positioning, experiences, identities and ideologies," and these practices are critical for the development of youth group consciousness (15).

Community-based educational spaces have also been found to be spaces where Black youth acquire healing strategies that further politized them. For example, Ginwright (2010) introduced the notion of *radical healing* to describe a process that

operates at the individual, community, and society level to foster political action, hope, and healing for Black youth. Making an important intervention in the study and practice of youth organizing, Ginwright argued, for Black youth affected by and combatting systemic injustice, activism must be accompanied by radical healing. Healing, both individual and collective, is a political act in and of itself for Black youth (56). For Ginwright, radical healing is rooted in community life and practices of love, hope, and goodness, and it builds the capacity of young people to promote social change. Ginwright argued four aspects of Black life promote radical healing: caring relationships, community, consciousness, and culture (10). In practice, radical healing translates to providing support for traumatized Black youth, cultivating political identities that foster a healthy racial identity, and supplying the tools and political education to effect social change (2010: 23).

Attention to community-based educational spaces has shown that responses to violence by adhering to "the code of the street" or engaging in criminal behavior (Anderson 1999; Sullivan 1989) are but one social reality for youth of color. Although community-based educational spaces vary in focus and programming, with some curtailing and governing the efforts of youth of color (Clay and Turner 2021; Kwon 2013), others are uniquely positioned to function as homeplaces for Black and Latinx youth (Baldridge 2019).

hooks (1990) used theorized homeplaces to describe the sites where Black women resisted white supremacist domination. As hooks wrote, homeplaces are where "Black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the

wounds inflicted by racist domination" (1990, 42). Homeplaces underscore what hooks (1990) described as a community of resistance, love, nurturing, affirmation, healing, and recovery that goes beyond providing services. I build on hook's theorization to describe BSS as a community-based educational space that is not simply about providing services. For Black and Latinx youth who grow up witnessing and experiencing criminalization, homeplaces are about sustaining a community of resistance, love, affirmation, nurturing young people, healing, and recovery.

For BSS youth who are navigating the carceral state and its gendered consequences, homeplaces foster a sense of family and fugitivity. In other words, homeplaces are spaces where BSS youth can exist away from the purview of the carceral state. As such, homeplaces provide an alternative to racist and anti-Black hostile institutions that Black and Latinx youth navigate (Ray 2021). This alternative includes curriculum that values critical consciousness and disrupting inequality over standardized testing (Ginwright 2010; Ochoa 2013). For Black and Latinx youth, critical consciousness serves as a powerful tool to develop their agency, including critiquing and organizing against the carceral state (Turner 2021). When carefully done, community-based educational spaces are also better positioned to foster positive relationships among youth and between adults and youth (Serrano et al. 2021; Medina et al. 2020; Clay 2012; Clay and Turner 2021; Salas Pujols 2020).

Considering the racialized and gendered consequences of the carceral state, I argue BSS functions as a homeplace where Black and Latinx boys and young men find affirming relational practices and extend their understandings of gender through

their participation in BSS. Said differently, I show how BSS as a homeplace buffers gendered enclosures at the interpersonal level in ways that public schools often fail to do so.

Gendered Enclosures

The participant observations that prompted me to ask questions about the relationship between young people and the carceral state began at the 2017 Sons and Brothers Camp. During healing circles and collective conversations, it was evident the carceral state had impacted most, if not all, the youth I had come to know in the 6 years prior to the study. Carceral experiences ranged from the deportation of a loved one, incarceration, police brutality, racial profiling, and criminalization in schools and neighborhood. Other times, the young men shared adults often assume them to be criminals, or assume their behaviors are perceived to be an indication of potential criminal futures.

In the previous chapter, I opened with a discussion of the "of course" circle that unfolded during a BSS retreat. During the same night, a discussion took place among the young men in attendance. The young men were standing in a circle that was quickly losing its roundness with the excitement of the conversation. I sat a few feet away while taking part of a Mario Kart race on a Nintendo Switch. Despite clinging to my remote control and trying to stay focused, I could not help but overhear the discussion taking place. The topic was what it means to be a man and masculinity. It was a conversation that unfolded after a brief check-in activity where two youth workers encouraged the young men to think about "where they got their

understandings of masculinity" and how that understanding informed their ideas of mental health. This impromptu conversation involving many of the young men in attendance indicated many complex dynamics shape gender ideologies.

Some of the young men shared schools were a site where their gendered socialization took place and learned about their position in society (Shedd 2015; Musto 2019; Ferguson 2001; Blume Oeur 2018). Others discussed neighborhood dynamics like inequality and police and gang violence (Rios 2009; Young 2021). Some young men questioned if the ever-increasing cost of rent shaped their gendered expectations, such as having to step into a provider role because a parent had been deported or incarcerated. Others discussed having to support parents who were struggling to keep up with the rising cost of rent driven by gentrification. What struck me during this conversation was an almost collective agreement that their mothers, family, and culture also influenced their understandings of gender ideologies. By this time, I had given up on winning the Nintendo game and they had my attention. I noticed their reflections about their mothers or mother-like figures in their lives were riddled with tension. On the one hand, these women represented strength, perseverance, and unconditional love. Yet, they were also the enforcers of phrases and ideas such as "real men don't cry." Said differently, their families and loved ones often encouraged patriarchal heteronormative ideals that enclosed gendered expressions and behaviors that deviated from those ideals.

This discussion among the young men and the "of course" circle provides insight into two forms of gendered enclosures. The "of course" circle, for example,

shows how the carceral state sometimes ravages the families and loved ones of the young men. Zae, who introduced himself during the "of course" circle, shared he and his cousins had grown up without their fathers. His father and two uncles had all been deported and not been able to return. Emerging studies have shown there is a negotiation of gendered expectations, norms, and ideals when a family is impacted by the carceral state, including deportation (Baker 2021; Baker and Marchevsky 2019; Ojeda, Magana, Burgos and Vargas-Ojeda 2020). Sociologists have also argued high rates of incarcerated Black men have reshaped the Black family since the 1970s (Wilson 2012A, 2012B, 2011; Anderson 2000; Young 2021). Although the extent of the gendered repercussions of deportation and incarceration are beyond the scope of this chapter, I position these social arrangements as a form of gendered enclosure to signal to the potential gendered consequences on Black and Latinx boys and young men and their families because of family separation due to incarceration and deportation.

The second insight came from the young men's discussion of their mothers and families. Households are one of several places where gender ideologies informed by heteronormative patriarchal ideals are constructed. Early on in life, the young men are taught to not show any emotion, cry, or express themselves outside of the confines of gendered expectations for men. This expectation meant gender ideologies were learned through informal lessons about manhood. Emiliano described these lessons as what "the culture is like" in what he refers to as a traditional home. Indeed, the home

can be a place where, as Emiliano argued, “It’s really hard to unravel that and like, really decolonize mindsets.”

Gendered enclosures are further complicated by policing and criminalization outside the home. Emiliano continued and shared, “it’s also like school doesn’t really foster that type of environment because it always challenges every time we do something.” In other words, for Emiliano, schools are not a place where gender ideologies and gendered expectations are challenged. In fact, he described schools as “highly conservative” because they are places where students are punished when not adhering to gender binaries and heteronormative expressions. Although Emiliano would have liked to see more “radical” discussions around gender and sexuality in schools, at the time of the study, he viewed the existing state of schooling as “unlocked potential.” This potential is kept locked via informal gendered enclosures at home and formal gendered enclosures in schools.

The unlocked potential of schools as it pertains to discussions on gender and sexuality was often a point of conversation during meetings. One afternoon, I asked Ax why he believed programming and curriculum on gender and sexuality was important. My question was prompted by the fact that we had both participated in a weekend-long political education workshop where discussions of gender and sexuality were centered. Ax shared:

> Ax: I think is very important because I see how that does affect a lot of men at a young age. So, I feel like it was, it was a good way to get away from everything and just be like, open minded. Like learn how, you know, being the stereotype of a typical guy is supposed to act and just realizing that it’s not. You can be yourself, like over there everybody was their self, you know,

> like being around and getting to know each other so like, that was a good way to forget everything.
>
> Uriel: Is school a space where that also happens?
>
> Ax: School? Well, um, not really. I don't think a lot of people know the pronouns or gender identities.

I asked Ax if discussions on gender and sexuality were ever included in the curriculum and he answered with a resounding "No, definitely not." Sojoyner argued gendered enclosures "adhere to specific racialized, class-specific, gendered norms" (2016: 124). Ax alluded to the gender enclosures in curriculum that ignore gender and sexuality and foreclose any structurally understanding of these issues. Moreover, understanding Ax's assertation with that of Emiliano demonstrates gendered enclosures indeed impose confines on gender expressions. Gendered enclosures for the young men are further complicated by constant criminalization by police.

One afternoon, over Zoom, J-Rebel jokingly shared he likes when he hears people say "Fuck 12." What preceded this remark was J-Rebel recounting being stopped by the police on his way to school. He shared:

> The funniest thing is that I was walking, I was dressed up for a presentation I had to do for BSS or [the Social Justice Learning Institute]. I was literally in slacks, a button-up shirt, some dress shoes, and I walked into school with a folder and my backpack, and the police literally pulled me aside, was like, "What are you doing? Where are you going? We are looking for a man. Have you seen a teenage boy?" And at this point, I'm like, "Huh? I'm very confused. It sounds like you're trying to say that I'm that person, but I'm not that person." They were saying that they had gotten a disturbance call that a young man in his 20s had broken into a house. I think at that time, I was probably 5'2". I'm like, "Do I even look like a 20-something year old?"

As I described in the previous chapter, adultification and constantly fitting a profile was a commonly shared experience among the Black and Latinx boys and young

men. As such, I asked J-Rebel how these experiences made him feel. J-Rebel let out a huff and said these interactions made him "irritated as fuck." Our discussion revealed this irritation was informed by the fact that these interactions were often hostile, and, in the worst of circumstances, deadly for Black, young men. Said differently, the outcome is never predictable. J-Rebel stated, "We don't know what is in the minds of a police officer at that time, or what they're going to do. Sometimes it can be extremely scary and also extremely annoying."

I proceeded to ask J-Rebel how these interactions shaped his ideas of gender and masculinity. Instead of focusing on his own experience, J-Rebel provided a broader account of how constant criminalization and racial profiling inform gender ideologies for youth, sharing:

> Police officers are definitely trying to scare or demasculinize men of color. When Black and Brown youth sees that, they may have no choice but to bow down, because they don't want to come off as being aggressive or seen as being aggressive, so then they have to demasculinize themselves so they're able to actually go home at the end of the day.

Although J-Rebel improperly used the word "demasculinize," what he was alluding to is how experiencing criminalization means constantly being embarrassed, ridiculed, and disrespected by police officers and adults. In an attempt to make sense of this idea, J-Rebel shared he thought criminalization is happening because youth, especially Black youth, are "perceived as criminals in the making."

Cas described a similar experience as someone constantly "pull[ing] your neck" and "pull[ing] your card." Enthusiastic about my questions, Cas would sometimes preface his long responses by saying, "I am going to get philosophical."

His smile would warn me that he had been thinking about the themes of my questions for a minute. My assessment of his enthusiasm is perhaps true because he has been witnessing and experiencing criminalization in his schools most of his teenage life. In the various schools he had attended, Cas navigated the constant harassment of school police. In the streets, racial profiling and being "uncomfortably questioned by the police" was a common experience. Like the young men in the previous chapter, Cas shared his first experience with criminalization was not an encounter of his own, but was one of "proximity to the police." He remembered his mom being pulled over but not coming home, sharing, "I think she did end up getting taken in. I ended up somehow at my grandma's house that night."

Although Cas had never been detained or arrested, he shared how these experiences can impact Black young men in Los Angeles, saying:

> It's not a fun feeling for somebody to pull your neck, to pull your card like that. And so, if your interactions with the police, if that's how you're checked, just if that's how somebody checking you regularly, right? If you are pressed by the police regularly, if that's how folks are, and that's how you're interacting with them, then I'm sure that that does shape how you're viewing masculinity, right? If you see the police as the pillars of protection, and these pillars of protection are coming up to you with a hand on their gun or their gun drawn, talking about some, "Hey, where were you? Where were you last night?" That might alter your perspective of masculinity or toughness or protection to be, "Oh, where was you last night?" with your hand on your gun.

Making sense of what Cas described via gendered enclosures helps to understand the impacts of criminalization and policing beyond confinement and punitive outcomes. As Cas and J-Rebel alluded, constantly experiencing criminalization and interacting with carceral agents constructs gender (Rios 2009). Thus, understandings of gender are produced in a context of harassment, violence, and racialized emotions (see

Chapter 3). At the core of Sojoyner's gendered enclosure model are "formal (that is, governmental) and informal (that is, philanthropic) policy mandates and recommendations as a means to control and redirect the framing of issues pertaining to race, gender, and sexuality" (2016: 123).

My observations, and the observations of Cas, Ax, J-Rebel, Zae, and Emiliano, alluded to school curriculum, criminalization, racial profiling (i.e., formal enclosures), and sometimes the family (i.e., informal enclosures) as gendered enclosures that confine gendered expression and a structural understanding of gender and sexuality. Gendered enclosures have implications for gender ideologies and how the young men come to see themselves. For example, Martin shared that "the fact that we have a whole bunch of gates around the school makes some kids feel like they are prisoners." Through these formal and informal gendered enclosures, Black and Latinx boys and young men learn about gender ideologies and gendered expectations informed by heteronormative ideals. As I had come to learn during the 6 years prior to the study, community-based educational spaces have the potential to buffer and trouble gendered enclosures.

Buffering Gendered Enclosures at BSS

In this section, I analyze how BSS's position as a homeplace buffered gendered enclosures at the interpersonal level. Specifically, I illuminate the ways the young men extended their understandings of gender and sexuality by their participation in BSS. Thus, I highlight the BSS organizational dynamics, programming, and existing relational practices that play a critical role in troubling

gendered enclosures. Weaved into each section are the young men's perceptions of this work. Although I present the findings in separate sections, they inform one another and, at times, depend on each other.

Defining Gender and Sexuality

I met Alex in 2017 at a statewide retreat that brought young people together from all over the state of California. Alex was there as member of the Gender and Sexualities Alliance Network and BSS. At first, Alex was timid and did not participate as much; however, I could see them processing and taking in all the information during workshops, healing circles, and other activities. As I learned through our discussions during our 7 days together, Alex had reservations about attending a summer retreat where the majority of the attendants were cisgender men. Alex, a trans young man, had some hesitations about the content of workshops and the interactions that might come about during camp. Slowly but surely, I saw Alex interact more and their participation increased.

The following year, the same timid high school student I met was leading a workshop on gender and sexuality at spring retreat organized by BSS. Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, these retreats happened in the spring and fall. The retreats often served several purposes. If they took place in the fall, they were the perfect opportunity to introduce new youth members to the coalition and current campaigns. Overall, the retreats were guided by programming that centered healing, discussions around gender and related issues and topics, community building, and

campaign building. As Blacc shared, the retreats were often the first time the young men got to travel outside of their neighborhoods. He stated:

> You got to understand, a lot of Black and Brown youths have never been out of the community. A lot of them have dreams of going to just little spaces, and to be able to just chill, kick it with people that they know that they comfortable around.

Throughout the years I conducted this study, I have asked the young men to describe their favorite workshops and BSS programming. Every young man has shared that retreats and workshops on gender, sexuality, and masculinity are among their favorite activities. My follow-up questions typically included some version of: "Did/do you have spaces in school where you could have those conversations?" Alluding to gendered enclosures in curriculum and schooling practices, and how BSS was the only place he discussed gendered and sexuality, one young man asked, "Where else would we get this?" I often heard similar comments—"They don't talk like that at school" or a resounding "Not at all"—during workshops or interviews with the young men. For example, Cas looked at me with a smirk that told me that I was asking a question I already knew the answer to. Said differently, with schools often being hostile institutions that criminalize and punish young people of color, there were few spaces that offered the young men an opportunity to discuss gender, sexuality, and masculinity free of judgement. For some of the young men, these workshops were the first time they got to define these concepts and learned about practices that promote queer and trans inclusivity. The following content is an example of the type of workshop that buffered gendered enclosures.

With over 30 young men in attendance, Alex stood in front of the common space with other youth facilitators and youth workers. The walls of the space we met in were adorned by four flags the youth had brought with them. From left to right were the Bi Pride Flag, the Pan Sexual Pride Flag, the Rainbow Flag, and the Transgender Pride Flag. The flags remained up for the entirety of the retreat. Alex and their facilitation crew began the workshop with stretches and movements that included "stomping out oppression." As described by Alex and other youth facilitators, the goal for the workshop was to explore healthy identities for boys and young men of color. They defined healthy identities as ones that took a close look at gender, sexuality, and masculinity, including their relationship to white supremacy, patriarchy, and inequality.

On the front of the room stood two large pieces of paper—one labeled "Masculinity, what do you know?" and the other labeled "Femininity, what do you know?" After a moment to jot down their responses on post-it notes, the young men walked up and posted their responses. For masculinity, the rainbow of post-it notes had statements like "showing no emotions," "meat eater," "no pain." For femininity, the post-it notes read "soft," "emotional," among other things. What followed was a discussion of gender binaries and how binaries are strict and restricting. In other words, the discussion focused on how gender binaries created rigid understands of manhood, including narrow ways to be a man or a woman. This discussion also presented an opportunity to introduce concepts like gender nonconforming and gender binary. As the presentation continued, Alex and the other youth facilitators

invited the BSS youth to reflect on their own gender identity and what has informed that identity through a gender identity picture. The young men were all given a piece of paper with a figure in the middle that was shaped like a gingerbread cookie. Around the image were lines that connected to sections where the youth could write a response to questions like: What have you heard about masculinity? What are expectations of men? What are expectations of women? How does your culture and community shape your definition?

In workshops like the type led by Alex, BSS young men often defined gender and other terms for the first time. These discussions and activities made them increasingly aware of gender, sexuality, and their relationship to inequality and power, including how their own sexual and gender identities and gender ideologies shaped their experiences and that of others in their communities. During workshops, the young men were also invited to ask questions and openly share when they were confused, curious, or wanted more context or information on a topic. These workshops also provided an opportunity to bring in a gender and sexuality lens to the discussion on youth criminalization. For example, during the workshop led by Alex and others, the young men had an opportunity to discuss how queer and gender nonconforming youth were impacted by the carceral state. Brian found this discussion to be one of the most memorable aspects of the retreat.

On the first day of the retreat, I met 15-year-old Brian from Boyle Heights. During our drive to camp, Brian set next to me and I had a chance to introduce myself and chat with him. He was invited to the retreat by one of the youth workers that

same week and had little to no experience with BSS. Brian shared he had negative interactions with the police but left out the details. At the time, Brian was enrolled in continuation school and it was his 1st week with one of the organizations that made up BSS. During the car ride, I avoided probing questions because it was Brian's first time in the mountains and he was car sick. Whenever I saw him sitting alone, I joined him, checked in with him, and made sure to encourage him to participate. One afternoon, I walked with Brian to the archery station and had a chance to ask him what he had enjoyed so far. He shared he was trying to change his life around, even at just 15 years old, and some adults in the spaces he was navigating did not understand that. As our conversation continued, I had a chance to also ask what was something new he had learned. He said he learned more about youth criminalization in schools and how it impacted LGBTQ+ youth. Brian shared the programming on gender, sexuality, and masculinity got him to reflect on how he thought of himself, how others perceived him, and how girls and queer youth experience criminalization.

Like Brian, Jon shared these workshops were "eye opening" and made him "realize that this isn't just a problem facing this one certain type of community. It's widespread throughout a lot of different communities." Jon was suggesting that, in defining terms and concepts, he was beginning to think more broadly about how gender impacts others. Ignacio shared about being asked, "What does it mean to be a man?," which forced him to interrogate what was "toxic" about his understandings of manhood. He stated:

> I remember we asked the question, "What does it mean to be a man?" And then like, how, how that question was just like, getting to us, we answered it,

> and how we answered that was like, "Damn, what does it really mean to be a man?" Some of our answers were kinda like, toxic. They're like, "Oh, you must take care of your family. That's your and only responsibility." And just hearing that, it was like, it was incredible. Like, that, that activity, what does it mean to be a man, it was really helpful.

These workshops, including ones that place concepts in a structural context or add a gender lens to discussions on the carceral state, allowed Ignacio and other young men to grasp the social constructed nature of gender.

Speaking on the value of these workshops, Martin shared, "It made me realize that you can be something on the outside but you can feel a completely different way on the inside." Similarly, these initial conversations included introducing the young men to pronouns and why they are used. As a trans young man, Ax found this introduction important, sharing:

> [It] shows people that we exist, and how to actually respect someone when it comes to pronouns and how they identify. It's important to, you know, respect them cause it feels not good when someone doesn't say the correct pronouns. I also want to be inclusive, inclusive of everyone, and gendered people's identities.

Ax shared just talking about pronouns and inclusive language pens up the possibilities for young men to be supportive, inclusive, and understand other's experiences. For Ax, even when young men were confused but could ask questions, "it feels really good." I believe, for many of the young men, BSS provided an opportunity to define concepts like: pronouns, gender, masculinity, femininity, gender binaries, patriarchy, queer, trans, gender nonconforming, and so on.

In some instances, I have caught glimpses of how this newly acquired understanding of gender and gendered expectations began to shape the young men's

discussion. For example, on the last full day of the retreat, a discussion broke out among some of the young men. One of them shared it was easier for him to talk about his problems with "his girl" and just have fun and kick it with "his boys." Quickly, another young man challenged him to reflect on why he cannot talk to his boys and the "emotional labor" his girlfriend must do to process his feelings. Having overheard the discussion and the use of "emotional labor," one of the youth workers shared that, in social movements like the Civil Rights Movement, women were often doing unrecognized emotional labor (Robnett 1999). The young men listened to each other, listened to their points of view, and changed the topic to music a few minutes later. They were trying to understand why they did not share all their music playlists or music preferences with their "boys." As one young man shared, he loved listening to Alicia Keys and wanted to be able to share this music with other young men.

During interviews, some of the young men also shared being more comfortable with "checking someone" and asking for pronouns. This was perhaps a practice they developed because they were often invited to hold each accountable and do so from a place of love and care during workshops. In fact, BSS youth workers sometimes gave the young men language to practice this accountability at home and in the hood. For example, Andres stated:

> I'm definitely like, more sensitive to like, things that other people say that might offend someone and I'm not afraid to check someone. "You're not supposed to say that" or like, "Hey, is this your pronoun?" And I'm happy when people correct me, you know, because I don't always say the right things all the time.

For Andres, these workshops, the retreats, and BSS provided an opportunity to learn about gender, and also provided space away from contexts that often criminalize the young men and foreclose discussions like this. Carlos shared, "It is just a place you go to get away from everything that we are seeing, and you know, clear our minds a little bit, and that's definitely why some people come out of their shell." In the following section, I discuss how getting away—from the punitive gaze of their schools or carceral Los Angeles—provides opportunities for vulnerability and healing work that also serves as a catalyst to challenging gender ideologies.

Healing and Relational Practices

As I described in the previous chapter, criminalization produces racialized emotions such as paranoia and fear. Constantly witnessing and experiencing criminalization is a traumatic experience. One young man shared during a meeting, saying this trauma is often "swept under the rug." During discussions, healing circles, and focus groups, some young men shared they understood masculinity as something formed out of trauma amid criminalization and anti-Black racism, including "living life like something will always go wrong." In a conversation about mental health, youth asked why they are expected to operate like this. For many of the BSS young men, formal and informal gendered enclosures foreclose any possibilities to heal, be vulnerable, and process criminalization and other experiences with violence. Manny shared this was true for him and his peers. He stated:

> I will never forget. There was someone in my class, and we were going to the gas station or like, 7/11. He was just telling me about how his brother had got killed the day before. And I was looking at him and he was just like it was a normal thing for him. It wasn't the first of his brothers that had got killed. It

> was just crazy because he was calm saying this. I was like, "You good?" And he was like, "Yeah, I'm fine." He was talking about how his mom, she was crying. It wasn't the first one. It was just crazy to me how it became this normal, just standard. It was just crazy, because I know I have a brother and know I wouldn't be normal or be able to go to school if he died or anything. But that was the second brother that died of his. I don't know, it was just baffling, but it was just normal and wasn't. I'll never forget that.

Manny's surprise that death and violence was normal or standard for his friend is arguably informed by his exposure to healing and relational practices in BSS that allow him to be vulnerable and process his experiences. Programming informed by collective healing challenged heteronormative ideals of manhood and gendered expectations. In so doing, they offered the young men an opportunity to express their emotions and process their experiences in a structural context. In those moments of vulnerability, BSS young men related to and learned from one another, built relationships with youth workers and other youth, and extended their understandings of gender ideologies.

Healing programming was often carefully planned and included during BSS meetings or retreats. They were also spontaneous given the nature of police violence in Los Angeles County. On a sunny Sunday in September of 2020, I greeted my brother and his partner as they arrived from Irvine. I shared with them that I was on my way to a healing circle at local park. The healing circle was in response to the police's murder of KiSean's brother. Fires from weeks before kept us from meeting sooner, but with some improvement in the air quality, we finally gathered. When I arrived at the park, somebody shouted, "The movement Tio" to joke about my

huaraches (sandals). I wore them because it was extremely hot that day; however, we found shade under two big trees.

BSS provided lunch for the young men and our time together began with eating and catching up. The tablecloths on the tables were held down with books like *Black Psychology* and *Black and Brown in Los Angeles*. That day, Ale, a youth worker who had returned home after graduating from college, facilitated the discussion and activities. Ale prompted us to stand in a circle standing across from someone. A few days prior, I had attended a small planning meeting where Ale shared:

> We hope to use this activity to help young folks think about their relationship with grief. We hope to ask general questions that allow them to understand their personal experiences with processing their emotions and how they ask for help. We will do the activity in a circle and anytime a question resonates with a young person, they will be asked to step into the circle. As a facilitator, I will ask any young folks if they feel comfortable sharing their experiences with the question.

We ended standing several feet apart from each other in a questionable circle, but Ale began shouting: "Please step in if you have ever felt judged? If you feel like people don't know the real you? Step in if you have ever felt scared? Step in if you have been impacted by toxic masculinity?" After each question, we had a chance to process in silence and look around. Ale continued:

> This next set of questions are a little stronger so please don't feel pressured to participate.
> After each question, just look around.
> Step in if someone has ever told you to "man up."
> Step in if you ever were told not to cry.
> Step in if you have ever felt like you weren't enough.
> Step in if you have ever defended yourself or someone you care about.
> Step into the circle if someone here has made you smile.

> Step into the circle if someone here has supported you.
> Step into the circle if someone here has empowered you.
> Step into the circle if you advocate for racial, gender, economic, environmental, and land justice.
> Step into the circle if you believe we can be free.

Ale closed the activity by sharing he hoped the activity gave the young men opportunity, saying:

> Think about how you feel and how you are taught to feel. We might not always be able to see it, especially when things are hard, but we have so many different emotions, and we also have so many different ways of expressing, and processing, and feeling them. We have to learn to accept them before we can grow with them.

For about 30 minutes, we stepped in, we stepped out, and stepped back in. The youngest among us were two boys under the age of 10. They also joined us as we moved back into the shade to process the activity Ale had just led.

The young men proceeded to share experiences with criminalization, grief, deadnaming, and so on. Although I do not recount the details of those experiences in this section, I share their reflections of what planned and impromptu healing practices meant for them. For example, JV shared he had attempted to process police murders in school but was often dismissed by teachers who claimed, “We don’t know enough of the details.” With emotion in his voice, JV argued teachers never know how close police violence is to them. In other words, “for white teachers, this is just something they see in the news. This is not someone they love or close to home.” As the circle continued, Ale asked us if there were any questions he should have asked. One of the young boys, who might have been 8 or 9 years old at the time, shouted: “One question you didn’t ask is, ‘Have you ever stood up for someone and the trouble falls

on you?'" We all stepped in. This question prompted a conversation about the many times the young men had stood up for someone or something in various contexts and were met with punishment.

The remainder of our time together included activities like meditations and prompts to center our bodies, surroundings, and ancestors. Knowing that my family was visiting, I decided to leave earlier than most people. Ricky asked me why I was leaving and I responded, "I have family visiting," to which he jokingly responded, "Aren't we your family?" Reflecting on Ricky's question, I found BSS does function as a social family for the young men. Thus, notions of manhood are expanded as the young men embrace the emotional and relational aspects present in this homeplace. Reflecting on this idea, Demar shared:

> I feel like the space really does show you that it's okay to be vulnerable because it's like, regardless of if you show it or not, everybody's vulnerable. So, it's like being at peace with, yes, I'm human and I'm vulnerable. I cry, I bleed, really, is like a whole other level of strength. I feel like that's what really a lot of the um, the meetings, retreats, and stuff like that show and provide.

Demar alluded to how BSS mediated gendered enclosures at the interpersonal level. Finding a place in BSS provided alternative understandings of manhood to these young men, who articulated interpersonal identities and racialized emotions amid shifting contexts of police violence.

On a similar note, DJ asserted his participation had given him tools to challenge gendered ideologies that had impacted him and how he expressed himself. DJ shared:

> The gender roles that men have to live with, the type of stereotypes that surround men: not being able to cry, not being able to wear anything feminine, not being able to express emotions. Those are all misconceptions, and that doesn't describe what a man is or what a man should be. We get to decide what type of men we want to be, and we should be able to express ourselves freely in any way we want. Be able to cry whenever we want without having to feel judged. I'm no longer stigmatized by crying. Growing up as a Latino, it was like you have no reason to cry unless you're in extreme pain, and even then, a real man sucks it up. But I learned that it's okay to cry because it's a natural thing, and you shouldn't be ashamed of it. You should embrace it.

This embracement of vulnerability and emotions was something that happened not only in healing programming, but also in other aspects of BSS programming. For example, meetings always began with music and check ins that invited the young men to share how they were feeling, to reflect on their fears, or share what brought them joy. This experience was particularly useful as youth were navigating the racialized repercussions of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Pirtle 2020). Sometimes, the young men were asked to select a color that represented their mood; other times, they engaged in activities like *Rose, Thorn, Bud*. For a rose, the young men shared something that brought them joy recently. For the thorn, they shared something that was bothering them or something they were struggling with that might require support. And lastly, the bud asked them to reflect on something they were excited about. Overall, check ins were an opportunity to discuss school, work, family, self-care, accomplishments, hobbies, emotions, relationships, and much more. In some cases, check ins invited the young men to reflect on a "dream you walked away from and a dream you still have."

With the centering of emotions, vulnerability, and healing being intentionally done at BSS, it comes as no surprise that Emiliano believed that, for Black and Latinx

youth to be free, they needed to experience multiple forms of love. He shared about the importance of healing programming, saying:

> I can say self-love, that's one of the biggest things. It's not just about self-care little things, but it's also accepting identities and parts about you. Yeah, it's just accepting you and accepting others because I feel like when you love yourself, you tend to love other people because you only radiate love and positivity. It sounds cheesy and it sounds like some Buddhist enlightenment saying, but I really, I truly believe that.

In describing the importance of this work, Emiliano was also alluding to the transformative and collective potential of this work. In other words, healing programming and relational practices at BSS became an avenue to affirm one another and heal from the wounds inflicted by the carceral state and gendered enclosures (hooks 1990). As Emiliano asserted, healing programming and relation practices at BSS also informed how the young men saw themselves and their relationship to the world around them. Lorenzo stated these lessons spillover and "a lot of those things we take home back with us and we could choose to implement them into our lives."

Youth Workers as Buffer and Bridges as Buffers and Bridges

Building on the previous sections, in this section, I describe BSS youth workers as *buffers* to gender enclosures and *bridges* that extend gender ideologies. To describe the work Black men do to protect young people from neighborhood and police threats, Jones described these individuals as buffers (Jones 2018). Similarly, bridges are people who connect young people with organizational and institutional resources (Jones 2018). I borrow Jones's concepts to describe how BSS youth workers buffer gendered enclosures by being a bridge to gender ideologies and gendered expressions that trouble heteronormative notions of manhood. Said

differently, the formal practices (i.e., programming) and informal practices (i.e., everyday relational practices) of youth workers opens opportunities to trouble the gender ideologies produced in contexts of gender enclosures. For Ale, Leon, and Majeed, the coalition provided an opportunity to model vulnerability and created a space where they mentored, affirmed, and developed the politicized identities of Black and Latinx boys and young men (Ginwright 2007).

One Saturday morning, we gathered for a discussion of policing in a local and transnational context. To set the tone, Ale reminded the young men, "This is a place where your humanity is affirmed. You are not crazy if you think the police is out of pocket. They are out of pocket by design." Affirming, mentoring, and developing group consciousness was achieved by programming like healing circles, workshops, and organizing, but youth workers were also intentional about their relational practices. For example, during in-person and virtual meetings, Ale often thanked youth for showing up, complimented them, acknowledged their contributions, and expressed his gratitude and love for the young men. Moreover, youth workers were intentional about developing programming and making decisions that were youth led and youth informed. For Manny, these experiences had given him tools to center his well-being:

> Manny: We will have a meeting and before we start, we'll just take a moment to close your eyes and breathe and just reflect on what's going on and just calm ourselves and just things like that.
>
> Uriel: What have you've learned through that process?
>
> Manny: One of the most important things I have learned, I feel, it's just talking to people. Because over the pandemic, I just really been in my head

> and, I don't know, I internalize it. I would reach out to a friend and we'll talk about it and I would just notice how good I would feel afterwards. Just let me get out and knowing that I wasn't the only person that had felt a certain way. Just things like that.

As Manny described, being in a space where youth workers invited him and his peers to be vulnerable and reflect on his well-being had a lasting impact. I found programming informed by collective healing practices and the relational practices of youth workers spilled over into the daily practices of the young men. Specifically, they spilled over among the BSS young men who eventually also expressed their appreciation, support, and love for one another.

It was not uncommon for the young men to part ways saying things like: "Love ya," "Appreciate you," or greet each other with a "You look beautiful today." For Ale, "BSS is a family affair." Reflecting on what witnessing this family affair meant for him, Ax shared:

> BSS is a space where a group of men can meet and actually be pushed, inspired, and believed. It's a space where it is safe and you know you could talk to anybody in there and you will all relate to each other in some ways. Yeah, it's a good space where people actually believe in you regardless of where you come from.

Although Ax alluded to how BSS created a homeplace where the young men were pushed, inspired, and believed, Manny provided context on how this homeplace shaped gender ideologies. Manny shared:

> If someone is taught to just internalize all the pain that they're going through and all the things that are hurting them, at some point, it's not going to stay in there forever. At some point, it's going to explode and something might happen. They won't be able to control it just because they internalized it so much. So, I feel like this toxic image, I feel this is outdated and insensitive image of a man, just keeping everything in is pretty stupid, because everyone's human and everybody needs to release it and heal the stuff. I don't

> know, it's just crazy how someone along the way was like, "Men need to keep everything in." And it's like no, that's stupid.

Participating in programming informed by collective healing approaches, learning about gender, and witnessing male-identifying youth workers who exhibited vulnerability had encouraged Manny to trouble gender ideologies that might hinder his mental health.

Having grown up in similar neighborhoods, and sometimes attending the same schools as the young men, youth workers placed a high value in modeling vulnerability. Majeed shared his thoughts on vulnerability:

> Uriel: Given your time with BSS, what are some of those moments where you are able to see the transformation in BSS young men? What gives them tools to think differently about gender?
>
> Majeed: I think one of the very first insights was just us modeling vulnerability and talking about our stories. That was one of those moments where it's like, this doesn't happen often. By creating a space that we're hoping is a safe space for others, just those who are able to model vulnerability as a means of like, expressing in terms of talking about and thinking about masculinity and the things that we hold on to that might not be the best. I think that is a great way, just holding space and creating community.

In addition to programming that centered gender and sexuality, Majeed was alluding to the relational practices of the BSS youth workers encouraging young men to be vulnerable about their understanding, or lack of understanding, around gender and sexuality. For Majeed, "holding space for vulnerability" and the mental health struggles of the BSS youth was what built connections and open possibilities to continue "thinking about gender and sexuality." Majeed and other youth workers shared modeling vulnerability themselves opened possibilities for queer youth to feel

more welcomed and for all youth to express their gender and sexuality without fear and repercussions.

By modeling vulnerability and encouraging the young men to do the same, youth workers were cementing a group consciousness and community rooted in "holding space for vulnerability." Recalling one specific moment, Leon shared:

> When we were talking about like gender and masculinity, and folks like Josh [the youth worker], were like, really vulnerable. I remember this beautiful shot of KiSean. He was just being so real about his struggle with understanding trans and queer identities. How he felt so guilty about how he would make fun of people back then. He's like, "I'm really trying so hard now to hold this space and I'm thankful for everybody here." He was crying and I started crying.

During interviews, the young men often shared being comfortable with being vulnerable about their experiences and their lack of understanding of queer identities and issues because youth workers modeled vulnerability. Recognizing its transformative potential, Leon believed these practices led to "inclusion and that is what leads to growth."

Leon went on to share that, as a person who identified as queer, this work was what begins to "revolutionize" gender and sexuality. In other words, in defining concepts and learning about their complexity, the young men were developing tools to trouble rigid and binary conceptualizations of gender, masculinity, and sexuality. Instead, and as Leon argued, the young men learned they were "on a spectrum." To this point, he shared, "I think it's great that like, young folks are able to struggle with it in this kind of way, and folks who are not gender nonconforming, queer, trans, LGBTQ are able to have this healthy dialogue about it." For Kev, the recognition of

gender diversity, among other things, made him feel like he belonged in the space. He shared, “We have so many students from so many different high schools, and each one has a different background, different gender, different things like that.”

Leon, like other youth workers, understood these moments as an opportunity to “push a little further.” Pushing a little further in some instances meant bringing in a structural lens around gender and sexuality. Majeed stated why a structural understanding of gender and sexuality lenses was important:

> One of the things that I’ve noticed over the last couple of years, regardless if it’s organizing or youth development or healing spaces that are for men of color, is that all of those things are needed. Racialized oppression against male identified and men of color is extremely prevalent throughout American society. Whether we’re talking about the prison industrial complex, whether we’re talking policing, the disparity is there. But it’s also really insolent right where it’s all about the male identity rather than having the understanding of those that we also share space with within our communities, and specifically, speaking from like, a gender and sexuality lens.

In this portion of our conversation, Majeed was describing how understandings of race often inform discussions and practices that address the criminalization of young men of color. From Majeed’s vantage point, often missing is an intersectional approach that accounts for race alongside gender and sexuality—or, as he stated, “working across gender lines.”

As our conversation continued, Majeed shared how intersectionality was a useful tool for him in developing workshops and discussions that nuanced various relevant issues pertaining BSS’s campaigns and youth. Recalling his approach, Majeed shared:

> I mean for me, intersectionality speaks to the complexities of identities we have in terms of the different ways in which we show up in spaces, how our

> identity impacts how we are treated, and how we navigate those spaces. And if we're talking about marginalization, specifically for how we have to deal with multiple forms of oppression. Whether that be patriarchy. Whether that be like, racial oppression or xenophobia.

As Majeed continued, he alluded to the utility of intersectionality in discussing inequality and demonstrating how experiences differ but are structurally similar. Moreover, he found bringing in intersectionality was a useful tool "in spaces that are for boys and men of color, [because]it allows the spirit of coalition. It allows that bridging." Later, he described this same dynamic as "listening collectively."

Listening collectively was an approach that Majeed encouraged and facilitated in BSS. He not only invited the young men to be vulnerable, but also modeled it along with other youth workers. According to Majeed, "Learning about the self shouldn't be in isolation of those that you also share space with, who are also part of your history." Ale described this concept as "a family affair" and Majeed thought about it as "organizing with love." Building on this idea, I describe BSS as a homeplace where youth workers' formal practices (i.e., programming) and informal practices (i.e., everyday relational practices) open opportunities to trouble heteronormative gender ideologies while affirming and mentoring young men. Majeed powerfully alluded to why his practices are important for Black and Latinx boys and young men, saying, "You need to have knowledge about yourself in order to understand how to navigate the world." For Ale, Leone, and Majeed, this navigation was a collective endeavor. As one youth worker suggested, modeling vulnerability, encouraging others to do the same, and bringing in a feminist approach to healing

"leads into the work of systems. Where we are breaking down, dismantling those systems."

Chapter Summary

> *Taking a Black and Brown group out of the spaces that have a lot of trauma, have a lot of posttraumatic stress with it. Just taking them out of the spaces where they ain't got to worry about over their head all the time. Just spaces where we're comfortable. We can be ourselves; we can fluctuate how we feel, you know? No joke, man.*
>
> —Blacc

For BSS youth who encounter hostile institutions and criminalization constantly, understanding how they shaped gender ideologies is important. To examine the relationship between the carceral state and gender, I highlighted gender enclosures in this chapter. I found school curriculum, criminalization, racial profiling, and, at times, the family, produced formal and informal gendered enclosures that structured the gender ideologies of BSS youth. These gendered enclosures are rooted in patriarchal heteronormative gender ideologies that foreclose vulnerability, emotional expressions, and the opportunity to process experiences with criminalization and violence. As Blacc alluded to, the spaces Black and Latinx boys and young men are in are often sites of trauma, stress, and constantly having to worry. Yet, as Blacc also hinted at, community-based educational spaces like BSS have the potential to function as a homeplace where gendered enclosures are buffered and gender ideologies are extended and challenged. Thus, in this chapter, I also turned to BSS programing and practices to highlight different approaches and their implications in the mediating of the gendered consequences of criminalization.

The late bell hooks (1990) argued:

> We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in the "homeplace," most often created and kept by Black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits.

Black and Latinx boys and young men participating in BSS were provided openings to buffer gender enclosures and heal from the wounds inflicted by the carceral state. In partaking in programming that centered gender and sexuality, engaging in healing practices, and witnessing the vulnerability of youth workers, the young men challenged gender ideologies. Thus, I argue that, in functioning as a homeplace, BSS mediated gendered enclosures at the interpersonal level; being part of a homeplace provided alternative understandings of manhood via relational practices, political education, and healing work. As I have shown in this chapter, youth workers played a central role in maintaining and modeling vulnerability in homeplaces. Moreover, the programming and youth workers provided opportunities to promote critical consciousness around gender and queer issues.

In the following chapter, I center the activism of BSS young men. Particularly, I examine how intersectional thinking informs their understandings of the carceral state and how to mobilize against it. I draw on interviews, focus groups, and participant observations to focus on the young men's work to decriminalize Black and Latinx communities in Los Angeles County. Specifically, I give an overview of how intersectional thinking and an abolition ethos informs their visions of social transformation, coalition building, and relational practices.

CHAPTER 5: BLACK AND LATINX YOUNG MEN'S INTERSECTIONAL THINKING IN CARCERAL LOS ANGELES

So, to me, liberation is just wholesome, complete, intersectional.

—16-year-old Emiliano

Intrigued by Emiliano's insistence that youth liberation must be "wholesome, complete, intersectional," I asked him who he was reading. His slouched body quickly stood up and he joked that I should provide him a reading list. He followed with a smirky statement, saying, "Angela Davis, here I come" after pushing his chair under the table. I often heard BSS youth and youth workers use intersectionality to connect multiple issues, including how these issue connect to their social locations. This conversation with Emiliano, however, prompted me to take seriously the many times I heard youth use intersectionality or invoke ideas of interconnectedness, including in their structural analysis of the carceral state. I also began to ask Black and Latinx boys and young men to share their own understanding of intersectionality. A 16-year-old youth's insistence that liberation is intersectional also encouraged me to take note of how intersectional thinking was centered in programming materials, workshops, discussions, and other activities, even when intersectionality was not explicitly named or used. Most importantly, I began to take seriously "the lure of intersectionality and the analytics' racial politics" from the vantage point of young people (Nash 2019: 138).

In the context of vibrant movements against police repression and anti-Black state violence, criminalization, and immigrant detention, a new generation of youth-led and youth-centered social actors have stepped up (Johnson and Lubin 2017). This

new generation of social actors have developed robust platforms demanding reinvestment in public education, local communities, Black lives and Black futures, and food and economic justice (Gaye Johnson and Lubin 2017). Estimates have suggested 15 to 26 million people participated in the protests following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, with 4 in 10 participants under the age of 30 (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel, 2020). Despite this estimate, in popular discourse and sectors of social movement scholarship, the activism of adolescent-aged youth continues to be treated as spontaneous surges of activity or framed through models that assume adults need to politicize young people (Clay 2012; Earl, Maher, and Elliot 2017). At worst, youth are described as "static in their conditions" or have their radical convictions curtailed by adults (Turner 2018; Clay and Turner 2021). However, young people are not static in their conditions; in some cases, they have embraced intersectionality as a modality drawing on the interconnectedness of race, gender, sexuality, legal status, and power (Terriquez 2015; Ransby 2018).

In U.S. immigrant rights movements, intersectional consciousness has been used by undocumented immigrant youth activists to challenge power dynamics through collective identity mobilization and collective action framing (Terriquez 2015; Terriquez et al. 2018; Escudero 2020). Similarly, in the reproductive justice movement, women of color performed cross-racial work to encourage solidarity, social transformation, and intersectional practices (García 2020; Luna 2017; Zavella 2020). In the Movement for Black Lives, Black activists—often inspired by Black feminist teachings and practices, including intersectionality—have built a movement

centering new modes of leadership and practices (Ransby 2018; Milkman 2017). However, sociologists have yet to fully understand the potential of intersectionality as a racial politic and tool for social change (Hill Collins 2019).

In this chapter, I examine how Black and Latinx young men described intersectionality, how it informed their analysis of the carceral state, and how their intersectional thinking informed their activism and coalition building. With Emiliano's joke about Angela Davis in mind, I also demonstrate how abolition informed the intersectional thinking of the boys and young men. To do so, I focused on Black and Latino young male activists working to decriminalize Black and Latinx communities in Los Angeles County with the Brothers, Sons, Selves (BSS) coalition. BSS is a coalition of nine community-based organizations across Los Angeles County who were working to decriminalize youth and communities of color. With intersectionality intentionally listed as a core value in their efforts for police abolition in and out schools, many BSS youth activists have understood and articulated how their interlocking social locations—including sexual orientation, race, gender, class, legal status, and age—have shaped their experiences. Thus, I argue these young social actors and their intersectional thinking offer contributions to our current understanding of intersectionality as a racial politic (Hill Collins 2017; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016; Nash 2019). Particularly, I argue how their intersectional thinking centers age as a social location and attends to relational practices. In other words, the young men's experiences with the carceral state gave rise to intersectional thinking

that posed a challenge to carceral logics of abandonment and disposability extending beyond prison walls.

In the following sections, I discuss the relevant literature on intersectionality, abolition, and youth activism. I attend to my use of the intersectional thinking as a guiding frame for this chapter. Next, I describe my research design and further introduce the context of the study, including BSS and carceral Los Angeles, and how criminalization, confinement, and punishment are central to the history of Los Angeles. Then, I draw on findings from in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observations to demonstrate how adolescent youth activists forged an abolitionist front to the carceral state by deploying intersectional thinking. I highlight how BSS young men's intersectional thinking rendered legible how youth experienced the carceral state, how they inspired action against it, and how they formed coalitions and built an inclusive and intergenerational movement. I also highlight how BSS young men challenged nonintersectional politics and carceral logics every day. In fighting carceral logics of disposition and abandonment, they invoked a youth abolitionist front exceeding the terms of their own subjugation. In doing so, they rendered visible carceral logics of abandonment and disposability and challenged them through intersectional thinking rooted in an abolitionist ethos. I conclude by discussing the implications of this study for sociological theory and research, social movements, and other efforts to promote the leadership and participation of young people of color.

Chapter Background: Youth and Intersectional Thinking

Research on youth activism has primarily focused on how youth develop their civic and political capacities, forge empowering racial identities, and foster collective consciousness (Taft 2014; Kirshner 2015; Terriquez 2015b; Ginwright 2010). For example, Taft (2012) found progressive and left-leaning girls in five cities—Mexico City, Caracas, Oakland, Vancouver, and Buenos Aires—engaged in social movement strategies (e.g., coalition building, political education, horizontal leadership) rooted in their understanding, negotiation, and redefining of girlhood, youth, and activism. Thus, it has become increasingly evident contemporary youth activism has a new, intersectional flavor separating it from past movements. Although young people who grew up after the Civil Rights Movement worked under "the shadow of previous social movements" (Clay 2012: 7), the social actors in the Movement for Black Lives and the undocumented immigrant youth movement have embraced intersectionality and are more diverse in their leadership and membership (Terriquez 2015a; Terriquez et al. 2018; Milkman 2017; Ransby 2018). Ransby suggested the broader Movement for Black Lives consists of "visionary young Black activists . . . inspired by Black feminist teachings and practice" who are building a movement offering new modes of leadership and activist possibilities (2018: XX). Yet, social movement research has made a "slow turn towards intersectionality" (Luna, Jesudason, and Kim 2020) and how youth activists do intersectionality.

Some research on the reproductive justice movement and antiracist activism has suggested intersectionality is an effective tool to organize across differences

(Lune 2016; Zavella 2016; García 2021; Falcón 2016). For example, Falcón's (2016) analysis of antiracism spaces in the United Nations—in particular, the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa—revealed how intersectional approaches provided opportunities for transnational feminist organizing. In the reproductive justice movement, intersectional practices promote and expand feminist logics, including collective identities rooted in recognizing difference and shared similarities across those differences (Zavella 2016; Luna 2017). In addition, García (2020) demonstrated how staff in a reproductive justice organization *do* intersectionality through contextual, relational, and cultural shift practices. As García suggested, these practices are part of an "ongoing creation of an intersectional sensibility that resists nonintersectional politics to emphasize that doing solidarity and accountability across differences is difficult work" (2021: 455).

Terriquez (2015) referred to similar intersectional approaches in the undocumented student movement as intersectional mobilization. Intersectional mobilization attends to the recognition and activation of queer, undocumented activists' multiple marginalized identities at the movement, organizational, and individual levels (Terriquez 2015). Specifically, it covers how intersectional consciousness catalyzed high levels of social movement participation and intersectional mobilization. Other researchers have also considered the construction of intersectionality as a collective action frame (Terriquez, Brenes, and Lopez 2018; Fisher, Down, and Ray 2017; Fisher, Jasny, and Dow 2018). Scholars have regarded

collective action framing processes as helpful for understanding why individuals might be particularly motivated to engage in social movements (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000). The transferability of specific and powerful collective action frames explains why some young people develop shared scripts that inform, motivate, and guide their political activism (Tarrow 1998; Valocchi 1996; McAdam 1996).

Terriquez et al. demonstrated (2015; 2018) how queer, Latinx youth in the undocumented immigrant youth movement drew on intersectionality to deploy a collective action frame—one that was diagnostic, motivational, and prognostic—to lay bare multiple systems of oppression and revealed how these systems shaped their lives. Thus, intersectionality motivated and guided Latinx undocumented activists' inclusive organizing and coalition-building efforts. Similarly, Escudero (2020) demonstrated how Asian and Latinx undocumented and undocuqueer youth activists used their multiple identities as an asset in their social movement participation. In examining how they used intersectionality as a social movement strategy across contexts, Escudero offered an identity mobilization model to capture the "political activism of groups whose identities and lived experiences have been used as a resource to contest the law's delegitimizing effects" (2020: 9). In other words, the model serves as a framework to explain how undocumented immigrant activists' use of intersectionality recognizes their shared experiences and acknowledges difference via three strategies: (a) a sharing of histories of collective struggle with others, (b) the strategic leveraging of identities and shared experiences, and (c) the mobilizing of

allies across contexts. These studies align with Hill Collins and Bilge's (2016) assertion that intersectionality is both theory and praxis. Therefore, I also build on Hill Collins's (2017) description of intersectionality as "aspirational social justice projects that take form through problem-solving and praxis" (21). This conception of intersectionality allowed me to explore intersectionality as a racial politic and praxis (Nash 2018).

To contribute to the scholarship on intersectionality as something people do, my approach was also informed by a lineage of feminist theories and practices acknowledging the interrelatedness of multiple forms of dominations and oppressions. In other words, I situated the intersectional thinking and practices described in this chapter as ones connected to ideas stretching back to theories of triple oppression, double and multiple jeopardy, imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, and abolition feminism (Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie 2022; hooks 2013; Jones 1988; Lynn 2014). Thus, I also built on Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie's assertion that "abolition is unimaginable without feminism, [and] feminism is unimaginable without abolition," and a dialogue between the two is imperative (2022: 10).

Abolition is not new and has a long history grounded in a Black radical tradition of fugitivity and insurgency, including transformative revolts against chattel slavery (Kelley 2021; Du Bois 1935; Sinha 2016). My understanding of abolition recognizes it is constituted by many overlapping geographies, genealogies, historical movements, practices, political visions, and future planning that necessitate a messy

breakup with the state (Shange 2019; Brown and Schept 2017; Rodríguez 2018; Kaba 2021; Davis, Dent, Meiners 2022; Davis 2005; Berger 2014; Bey 2021). Said differently, abolition is a political project and structural analysis that "involves critique, refusal and rejection of that which you want to abolish" (Gordon 2011: 8). Mariame Kaba (2021: 179) stated abolition is also concerned with developing, transforming, and strengthening relationships. Contemporary abolitionist projects include the abolition of prisons, policing, and surveillance, including the untethering of education from the carceral state (Meiners 2011; Stovall 2018; Serrano, Turner, Regalado, Banuelos 2022: Sabati, Pour-Khorshid, Meiners, and Hernandez 2022; Kaepernick; Turner 2021).

I position BSS Black and Latinx young men as part of what Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie (2022) referred to as an abolition feminist ecosystem. I do so to examine how they do intersectionality and how their intersectional practices converged with abolition. At the core of an abolition feminist ecosystem are collectives, organizations, and coalitions like BSS where abolition theories are feminist and feminist thinking insists on the dismantling of carceral systems (Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie 2022). In the following sections, I show how intersectional thinking informed young men's analysis of the carceral state. I also demonstrate how intersectional thinking, often informed by abolition, drove the relational practices and visions of social transformation of the young male activists.

Intersectional Thinking

The intersectional thinking of the young men evidences an attention to identities and structures of power and domination. For BSS youth like 17-year-old Lorenzo, who was Latinx, intersectionality served as a pair of glasses to see people's social location. Lorenzo shared:

> It's like a pair of glasses, and it's like thinking about things in an intersectionality lens. It's like thinking about a problem and thinking about how it affects different people and their different identity, different parts of themselves. If you think about this one problem, like, "Oh, there's these cracks in the steps that lead up to school," it's like, "Oh, well that sucks, because I don't know, I can't trip or something." But then, if you look at it through a different lens, it's like you could see other people who maybe can't even get upstairs. And it's like, "How are you going to fix that?" Looking at things using intersectionality, you can think about it like all people, not just like yourself.

Lorenzo's metaphor of glasses to look at steps leading up to school highlighted how his intersectional thinking was attuned to understanding how people's experiences can be distinct because of the different, but structurally similar, parts of themselves. In other words, intersectionality often functioned as a pair of glasses (i.e., a frame) to see the social world, allowing Lorenzo and others to develop a comprehensive understanding of social issues and inequality (Terriquez et al. 2018).

This intersectional pair of glasses motivated the young men, including Lorenzo, to reflect on how they do intersectionality. For example, 18-year-old DJ, who was Latinx, described intersectionality as a practice in social justice movements, stating, "Intersectionality in the social justice movement can be: you talk about, you advocate. You're an advocate for a gender, sexuality, also politics or maybe racial discrimination. You're not limiting yourself to one box. You branch out into different

boxes." In this quote, Emiliano began to allude to intersectionality as a reflexive and purposeful process requiring showing up to meetings, rallies, and spaces of dialogue in movements. Or, as he later stated:

> To be intersectional yourself, you have to speak out on issues and see how it dissects within us. So, when you talk about race, also talk about how race is incorporated in these other things; although they are not the same, they are interlocking. They're interlocking systems of dominance, whether it be systems of culture or systems of institutions. And so, it's how you work, but it's also how you present your politics. Understanding there is an issue, but that issue is at the crossroad, is at the intersection of different crossroads. So, recognizing that, though you may not be walking down that path, there's paths along with it. So, recognizing there's different avenues to that problem, try to attack it all or incorporate it 'cause I know sometimes it's hard to attack all issues, but let's at least be intentional.

Later in the interview, Emiliano elaborated on intentionality by suggesting that, to practice intersectionality, "You have to be intentional about who you're working with and who you invite to discussions. You can't pick and choose because then, your campaign is going to look slim and underrepresented. Campaigns needs to felt deeply and widely." Emiliano importantly explained intersectionality includes an analysis of inequality, social transformation, and intersectional organizational practices (Hill Collins 2017, 2019). Lorenzo, DJ, and Emiliano's intersectional thinking signaled how an intersectional ethos can inform the practices, coalition building, and movement participation of many BSS young men.

Intrigued by Emiliano's insistence on intersectionality requiring intentionality, I asked him how he arrived to this understanding. Emiliano shared it was by being "held accountable" by others, mostly women of color, to use intersectionality to "tackle hypocrisy." Paraphrasing Emiliano, intersectionality means to always be

attuned to how systems of power produce distinct, yet structurally similar, experiences, even when others fail to recognize this fact. The example Emiliano gave to further highlight how "intersectionality is also tackling hypocrisy" was a discussion of President Obama's in *My Brother's Keeper* (MBK), a state-sponsored initiative whose purpose was to address the challenges facing young men and boys of color.

Launched in 2014, MBK has been largely critiqued because it has continued to be an effort to address individual barriers informed by a politics of respectability (Singh 2021; Turner, Serrano, Blume Oeur 2022; Dumas 2016). Said differently, MBK recycles anti-Black culture of poverty rhetoric—absent fathers and missing role models—leaving systemic racism intact (Dumas 2015; Mendez 2016). MBK has also been critiqued for reinforcing patriarchy and its neglect of Black girls and as a missed opportunity to address the structural conditions impacting Black girls and other youth of color (Méndez 2016; Crenshaw 2019; Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, and Watson 2016; Cox 2015). Through his intersectional thinking, Emiliano had a similar critique, arguing "women go through different things and they go through the same things we're discussing. It's just, like, different. Their experiences are a little bit different. So, how do we make sure we're covering their experiences?" Emiliano continued and expressed how including Black girls and other girls of color requires "bringing them into the conversation, but making sure solutions are also made with them."

Intersectional thinking like that of Emiliano, DJ, and Lorenzo has prompted the young men to do intersectionality in various context. For example, in 2018, and at

the coalition level, a group of about 30 youth activists and 10 staff felt it necessary to revisit the coalition's vision statement, which was written about 6 years prior. After much dialogue, BSS Coalition members—both youth activists and staff—felt it necessary to center gender and racial justice in schools, social services, and Los Angeles County. In a BSS statement drafted in 2018, one sentence stated, "We must fully eradicate all systems of punishment and redirect funds away from youth criminalization, probation, and incarceration towards community-based organizations/investments that support youth through adolescence and into adulthood." To get them closer to this goal, BSS youth developed a list of milestones for the months and campaigns ahead. One of these guiding milestones centered intersectionality and stated the coalition is committed to "empower male-identifying youth to realize that their lives, issues, and oppressions are interconnected and necessary for collective liberation."

As an active member of BSS, I constantly observed gestures to eradicate all systems of punishment and center collective liberation were almost always informed by an intersectional imperative. In other words, BSS young men activists and their adult allies recognized how criminalization and punishment systemically affected them and multiple members of their communities. Thus, they felt it necessary to build coalitions with movements addressing all systems of punishment and beyond. Even when not explicitly naming intersectionality, the young men's understandings of the carceral state and other social issues—including their practices—evidenced intersectional thinking. Intersectional thinking connected to the carceral state

connects multiple structural issues, both contemporary and historical. For example, 16-year-old Fernando, a Latinx young man, discussed incarceration and prisons, sharing:

> 1 in 9 Black men are gonna go to prison in their lifetime. And then, for Latinos, it's a little less, but you know, it's still like, a pretty significant number. I'm like, "Damn, that's crazy." I guess we're a big part of the population, but when it comes to prisons, we are the majority in prison, and that's not a coincidence, you know? That didn't happen on accident! You know how like, there's a system, and oppression, and I think slavery still exists, like in certain ways and like, in different aspects, it still exists. It's segregation and all that stuff.

Arguably, Fernando's intersectional thinking was informed by his own experiences with the carceral state given his frequent experiences with racial profiling and the deportation of a loved one. As of 2022, intersectionality—alongside youth empowerment and leadership, restorative practices, movement building, and equity and inclusions—remained a core mission, vision, and value for the coalition and youth. Thus, in the next section, I further examine how intersectional thinking allowed young men to develop a complex analysis of an issue affecting them deeply—the carceral state. I also highlight how abolition and intersectionality converged to inform and encourage relational practices (García 2020).

Intersectionality, Abolition, and Relational Practices

Abolitionist traditions have relied on feminist analysis and organizing as a politic and refusal of logics relegating humans and other beings to disposability (Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie 2022). As Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie wrote, abolition feminism—or intersectional and abolitionist ideals—"are by nature in motion and therefore always nuanced in their relationality" (1). BSS young men

activists demonstrated the importance of continuously developing inclusive abolitionist practices informed by intersectionality to shift carceral logics constitutive of racial capitalism that normalize, obscure, and reproduce racism, sexism, and antiqueer and transgender politics (Brown and Schept 2017; Lopez-Aguado 2016; Martensen 2020; Shabazz 2015; Stanley and Smith 2015). For example, Leon, a former BSS youth member turned BSS youth worker in his mid-20s at the time of the interview, spoke about intersectionality and abolition. He stated:

> It's hard to separate them because they're almost one of the same. Intersectionality in the sense that like, the ability to be truly free means to understand all these different intersections. That is abolition. But also, in the sense that intersectionality leads to abolition right. Like, being able to be intersectional with people you don't understand, to be able to understand peoples identities that don't fit with yours is intersectionality, um, but because if that, folks are willing to work towards abolition. It's almost like a gateway, you know? Like, we all actually have experience with police and that's the intersectionality part, right? And so, once we are able to define abolition in the terms of like, how it intersects with your life, then people are able to jump on board. I feel like that's starting to happen. Like, we are having those conversations we could not have in 2010.

By the time I began this project, Leon had already spent several years with BSS and participated in early campaigns to address criminalization and the campus racial climate of schools. In the prior quote, Leon was alluding to several contextual dynamics. First, like Leon, I had also observed that the language of abolition and intersectionality had entered the Los Angeles Unified School District following the protests of the summer of 2020. Prior to that time, any discussion of abolition brought up by youth activists and adult allies was quickly shut down. Moreover, for Leon, abolition and intersectionality were informed by their dialect nature because intersectionality allowed for a nuanced understanding of the carceral state and

abolition called for its destruction. Manny, a 16-year-old Black youth, shared a similar sentiment:

> Intersectionality is just like all the factors that make and leads to someone's experience and everything their life is. Abolition is the act of ending something or just stopping it. I feel like intersectionality is important simply to understand the factors that make someone's life the way it is. A lot of the factors are not even theirs to control. No one can control their race, gender, or social background that they are born into. And abolition is important because there is some things we can't really change that are deeply rooted in evil. They can't be changed. If we try to tweak it as much as we can, we can't! That is why [intersectionality] is important in the defunding police work. A lot of people would say that the "Oh, the police is here to protect us." A lot of times, that is not true.

In challenging assertions that police protect, Manny alluded to movement outcomes going beyond structural developments and including relational practices that challenge nonintersectional carceral logics.

Manny's poignant example of how intersectional and abolitionist ideals converge came in the form of a 2-minute audio text after I interviewed him. During the interview, I asked about his experiences in Los Angeles, his participation in BSS, and his involvement in campaigns to defund school police. Manny had grown up constantly experiencing and witnessing how the carceral state harmed his friends, relatives, and community. Having ended our conversation with a discussion of gender, policing, and its impacts, Manny followed up minutes afterward. Like Manny, DJ, an 18-year-old Latinx young man, drew on abolition to situate and describe his vision of social transformation, particularly one involving youth. Having witnessed DJ speak at rallies, offer testimony, and lead workshops, I asked about this understanding of abolition. He responded:

> DJ: Abolition, in the historical sense or contemporary sense?
>
> Uriel: Both.
>
> DJ: I would say that abolition is one of the best things to ever happen. Historically, abolitionists were against slavery and helped slaves escape to the North, escape to freedom. Contemporary, we're talking about abolish the police, abolish [Immigration Control and Enforcement]. We're talking about getting rid of an oppressive system that has been oppressing people for years, especially the police and [Immigration Control and Enforcement]. The police started as slave-catching groups, and it's crazy how we've kept that ideal the same for 400 years.
>
> Uriel: What does abolition mean for you as a youth? In your everyday life?
>
> DJ: For me, it means that we have a chance to make change for the better, and to have a better future.

To change for the better was both a call for structural change and—as observed through my fieldwork—a recognition the carceral state's relentless nature requires an abolitionist feminist approach that promotes relational practices (García 2021).

Indeed, BSS young men had continuously engaged in practices that centered care, joy, music, dance, love, and healing. In fact, Cas, an 18-year-old Black young man, described his intersectional thinking as one also rooted in love:

> But intersectionality to me just means being rooted in love. It's like being able to identify that there are some issues that unite. You might not be able to see, but if you listen to the things that folks are saying, that their experiences are different to yours, and accept that those are true, you have that basis. And being able to listen to that with honesty and reflect on your own identity, I think that's where intersectionality needs to come from.

These relational ideals informed how Emiliano responded to my prompt to share what youth liberation meant to him and other Black and Latinx youth. He stated:

> I can say self-love, that's one of the biggest things. It's not just about self-care little things, but it's also accepting identities and parts about you, yeah, it's just accepting you and accepting others 'cause I feel like when you love yourself, you tend to love other people because you only radiate love and

> positivity. It sounds cheesy, but I really, I truly believe that. I've noticed a change within myself. Back then, I used to be so angry like, I'll still say it, fuck white people, but when I say it, I'm saying fuck white supremacy. For me, it's still like, I never really get asked these types of questions about liberation because it tends to always talk about well, where are the policies gonna go, where is money gonna go, but—

Emiliano paused, looked around, and smiled back while uttering:

> So, to me, a liberation is just wholesome, complete, intersectional, like it's unified, essentially in a catch, you know. If someone isn't free, then you're not free, you are my other me. There's other small things, but I think that's where the ruling is at, everyone has to be liberated.

He finished his statement with a sense of playfulness, reminding me he wanted a list of books on topics like abolition and intersectionality.

Emiliano's attention to self-love and self-care had been echoed constantly in movements to defund school police following the protests of the summer of 2020. As 18-year-old JV once shared in a focus group, "We want justice because we want to heal." Various young, BSS men activists explained during interviews that constantly witnessing and experiencing police and state-sanctioned, anti-Black violence takes multiple tolls, including psychological harm. During protests and meetings, impromptu talent shows and check ins centering on expressing one's emotions had become one tool youth activists used to shift logics of dispossession toward relational practices that centered an abolitionist ethos (Shange 2019). Ax, a 17-year-old Latinx youth, reminded me during our interview that these spaces are not present in schools where punishment and carceral logics influence pedagogy and relational practices (Cabral 2022).

In fact, intersectional thinking also informs how Black and Latino young men activists and youth of color organize against policing in schools and challenge carceral logics of abandonment and disposability (Brown and Schept 2017; Stanley and Smith 2015). In other words, BSS young men activists drew on their intersectional thinking to locate the carceral state beyond prison walls and police brutality. During meetings or protests, BSS youth's intersectional thinking was often evident when discussing punitive practices in schools. As youth continually proclaimed, the carceral state's agents and institutions need not be present for it to operate. Furthermore, I often witnessed youth share testimonies revealing the racialized and gendered criminalization and policing they experienced in and out of school. Following abolitionist politics, youth coupled their intersectional thinking with slogans scrutinizing the dependence on carceral logics and practices of punishment in the lives of youth of color. During youth-organized protests, common slogans included *counselors not cops*, *social workers not cops*, and *everybody except cops*. These slogans remind society that abolition is a "messy break up with the state" to open possibilities for a new set of relationships (Shange 2019: 4; Davis 2003; Gilmore 2007). Arguably, calls for social workers and counselors are fraught given the carceral logics and practices present in these fields. However, I want to draw attention to how these slogans located the carceral state at multiple levels: the individual and the organization.

Intrigued by the dynamics of the Summer 2020 protests calling for the defunding of the Los Angeles School Police Department (Tat 2020), I asked Cas to

offer some reflections. Enthusiastic about my questions around BSS's intentional use of intersectionality and abolitionist politics, Cas connected my question with his discussion of the Summer 2020 youth protests leading to the 35% budget decrease of the Los Angeles School Police Department. Cas stated:

> It's important to front under intersectionality because at the end of the day, if we just keeping it stack, there is no reason for them to have that much money. And you're not just about to take the budget and just be like, "Yeah, this budget, all the police money that we just took, just put it in the Black student's budget."

Cas continued, explaining "that is how defund the police is perceived by nonpolitically active folks. And that's how it's framed by right-wing people." In other words, people with nonintersectional politics hear "defund the police" and think it is only about budgets. For Cas, the call to "defund the police is about intersectionality." As Cas began to allude to, it is also about imagining new relational practices and social arrangements that come with a defunded carceral institution.

Intrigued by Cas's involvement in the defunding school police efforts, I asked him to share how he understood abolition. He shared:

> I would define abolition as revolution because I believe that it requires a radically different way of even thinking about policing. Right? It requires a radically different way of thinking about public health and safety, not even policing, right? Because I understand abolition as a fight against current society. And instead of having police, first of all, let's just make it so that 911 is not cops. Like, that shouldn't equal cops, or like, I just don't think that our national emergency number should be cops.

Having shared how he understood intersectionality and abolition, I asked Cas if he saw convergence between intersectionality and abolition. He stated:

> Oh yes, absolutely, yeah! The entire point of view of policing, right, was to make a group, a singular group feel uncomfortable and ostracize many groups,

> right? And so, I think that one of the keys, and one of the things that we've got to be very wary of, is the intersectionalities of diverse groups of people when constructing a new system, when creating a revolution. Like now, you got to create an entire framework, an entire social ideology of what society will look like without policing, right? Everybody has to have the same picture in their mind. And if we don't all have the picture in our mind, then it won't work.

Cas and many of the other young men I interviewed drew on intersectional thinking and abolition to inform their practices and demands against the carceral state, both in schools and in their everyday lives. Cas's extensive discussing of intersectionality, abolition, and how the two converged also reveals how abolition serves as a guiding framework in his visions for social transformation.

In *Black Reconstruction* (1935), Du Bois's analysis offered arguments relevant to Cas's discussion of abolition and intersectionality, which is that abolition is always a challenge to institutions that cause harm and premature death and is also a vision for social transformation. These visions sometimes emerged in the most unexpected discussions among the young men. For example, following the death of rapper and actor DMX, a meeting began with remembering him by discussing his appearance in the television series *Fresh Off The Boat*, and a specific episode where DMX is showing off his collection of rare and exotic orchids. In the episode, he was asked if he smoked them, to which DMX responded, "I love them." DMX went on to share that he thought they needed the most expansive soil and lights but realized all they really needed was love and attention. As one young man in attendance shared, in their organizing and politics, "we are asking for time, love, and attention," not just the defunding of school police.

Contextualizing Carcerality: Age as a Social Location

Given the strong abolitionist and intersectional sensibilities of the young men, centering age as a social location allowed them to further contextualize their carceral experiences and how to change them. Emiliano, a 16-year-old Latino youth, described how youth liberation is intersectional, sharing:

> It is about accepting identities and parts about you. Yeah, it is about just accepting you and accepting others because I feel like when you love yourself, you tend to love other people. So, to me, liberation is just wholesome, complete, intersectional, like, it's unified. If someone isn't free, then you're not free.

Emiliano and various BSS young men tied their experiences and visions of social justice to their interlocking identities and each other. Thus, they had an understanding of interconnected systems of oppression and their relationship to their own lived experiences and that of others.

Quite significantly, at BSS meetings, I regularly observed how the young men planned campaigns and rallies and engaged in discussions about their oppression and that of their communities. In some instances, the adult staff provided their perspectives on topics where the youth disagreed or added a more nuanced understanding based on their own social location as youth. For example, one Saturday morning, during a discussion on the probation budget in Los Angeles County, the young men broke out in groups to discuss an investment formula centered on youth. The group I joined was composed of two Black young men, two Latinx young men, an adult staff, and myself. During our discussion, one of the Latinx youth, Jaime, shared his 16-year-old cousin was already on probation. He explained his cousin was

kicked out of school, spent most of his time in the streets, and robbed a liquor store, which led to his arrest. The adult in our group asked Jaime if the decisions his cousin made were good ones. Jaime quickly rebutted the question and asked the adult staff to consider the lack of resources and opportunities in his cousin's school. Jaime explained his cousin's school had drastically cut programs and was underresourced. For Jaime, his cousin's lack of opportunities to explore his passions or become involved during and after school led to his arrest.

Like Jaime, BSS youth encouraged older generations to reflect on Black and Latino young men's social locations as youth, how that shaped their lived experiences in social institutions, and to hold adults accountable to a structural analysis. I regularly observed intersectional thinking often invited adults' allies to reflect on and comprehend the carceral experiences of youth of color, especially Black youth. For example, during a protest planning meeting during the summer of 2020, a long-time Black Lives Matter organizer confessed to a new understanding of how youth of color experience policing in schools. They explained: "When I was in school, we were fighting police in the streets. You are all fighting police in your schools." In other words, the deployment of intersectional thinking by BSS youth introduced complexity into an analysis of the carceral state and promoted what can be considered an intersectional consciousness and politic among adult allies (Terriquez 2015; García 2020).

In an analysis of the Movement for Black Lives, Ransby argued, "We need to forge strong and reinforcing ties between our various communities, organizations and

movement sectors as we work to connect all the strands, to stitch—or weave together—disparate patches of struggle" (2018, 148). Ransby described this stitching and weaving as *political quilting*. BSS young men engaged in intergenerational political quilting by encouraging adults to deploy an analysis that accounted for how the carcerality was experienced across age. In other words, age is a socially constructed category with implications for BSS youth (Suddler 2019). This political quilting, informed by intersectional thinking, is something I observed during meetings, rallies, and the young men's practice as a tool bridging connections between generations, ideologies, and other youth.

Empowered by their multiple identities and an intersectional analysis of the carceral state (Terriquez, Brenes, and Lopez, 2018), BSS young men drew on these experiences to inspire activism and forge intergenerational visions of collective action. J-Rebel, a 19-year-old Black youth, described: "There are many issues that affect the community, and I'm going to try to bring it all down because most of them always connect to one another." Similarly, as I observed during Saturday monthly meetings, BSS young men activists always connected organizing against criminalization to other issues such as homelessness, deportation, and gentrification. The young men's intersectional analysis of interlocking systems of oppression and how they impact them and their peers motivated them to foster connections with other coalitions, individuals, and organizations addressing other issues pertaining to the carceral state.

BSS young men's visions of liberation and social justice and critiques of inequality prompted BSS young men to consider how their present-day activism impacted future generations. Ax, a 17-year-old Latinx young man, shared:

> What about the next generations? I don't want them to live in the same conditions as I am, so it's good to stay here, and you know, actually do activism to work and improve the communities for our younger siblings and future generations to live in a safe, you know, welcoming community.

In centering their younger siblings and future youth's lived experiences, BSS young men activists were motivated to address the policing and criminalization of other youth and children. As such, BSS young men activists also centered long-term visions and strategies that may have impacted their lives and generations to come. One youth wrote on a post-it note during an activity: "I am involved for my parents. I am involved for my Lil bro and sis. I am here for my people."

Intersectional thinking that understands age as a social location also inspired BSS young men activists to recruit others into the movement. For Nathaniel, an 18-year-old Black Latino man, his political quilting was informed by what he had learned, the access he had to movements and organizations mobilizing against the carceral state, and a desire to connect his nonactivist peers to this work and ideas. He stated, "I just see myself as like, a person who will push others to lead. I love leading, I love doing that, but you gotta push others to do." Interestingly, at the time of the interview, Nathaniel was weeks away from going off to college. He shared the name of four young men at his high school who he was mentoring and supporting with the hopes they would organize at the local level.

Chapter Summary

Calls to defund and abolish the police are not new; rather, they are in line with a long-existing Black radical and feminist tradition supported by allied communities. In this chapter, I included Black and Latinx young men in Los Angeles as part of this history and made visible how they envisioned a more just world. To do so, I built on the growing body of work highlighting intersectional mobilization to examine Black and Latino young men's intersectional thinking against the carceral state. As I demonstrated, an intersectional thinking informed by an abolitionist ethos—or an abolition feminism—guides how they organized and contested the carceral state.

The findings from this chapter have several implications. Social movement scholars are increasingly attending to "the multiplicity of iterations, practices, and attempts to *do* intersectionality at the level of social movements" (Luna, Jesudason, and Kim 2020). I found BSS young men activists were attuned to how the carceral state and its logics impacted individuals and the collective. BSS Black and Latinx boys and young men activists used intersectionality to help them examine inequality and social issues. Particularly, intersectionality served as a tool to understand how carceral experiences can be distinct but structurally similar. As one young activist shared, intersectionality is a pair of glasses useful to interrogate how multiple systems of oppression are experienced by youth and how experiences differ.

Empowered by an intersectional analysis, BSS young men articulated an intergenerational and ongoing vision of collective action. Thus, intersectional thinking encouraged them to recruit participants and remain involved in the

movement. Invested in sustaining a powerful continuous movement, BSS young men activists also promoted inclusive organizational and intersectional practices and coalition building. Intersectionality encouraged reflexivity and processes that enabled campaigns deeply for the people. In practice, reflexivity included constantly revisiting the mission, vision, and values of the BSS coalition. I also found BSS young men applied intersectional thinking to pose an abolitionist challenge to carceral logics extending beyond prison walls. For youth like KiSean, abolition meant to stop "investing money on police and then, just investing money on the youth. You know, giving them scholarships, schools, programs, whatever, but just not investing in [police]." Yet, I also found calls to defund and abolish school police were coupled with relational practices that attempted to shift the carceral social order. Particularly, intersectional thinking guided BSS young men activists' everyday relational practices to challenge carceral logics of abandonment and disposability. Aligned with assertions that abolition is also about relationships, they recognized the logics of the carceral state extend beyond prisons and mass incarceration as regimes that perpetuate racial, gender, sexual, and colonial violence (Rodríguez 2018).

Intersectionality centers the voices and experiences of individuals at the margins, particularly women of color; views identities as mutually constitutive and inseparable; and positions identities and experiences in relation to privilege, oppression, and structures of power (Hill Collins 2017; Hancock 2018; May 2015; Crenshaw 1991). In developing my understanding of intersectionality, I was guided by Hancock's (2018) reminder that intersectionality as a praxis is nonlinear, and it is

informed by writers and activists both outside and inside the academy. However, intersectionality, like all theories, is constantly in motion and open to critique. In this chapter, I was interested in building on an understanding of intersectionality as a critical practice in social movements and a tool for social change (Hill Collins 2017; Yuval-Davis 2006; May 2015). In other words, I was interested in exploring intersectionality as a politic young people embrace.

CHAPTER 6:
CARCERAL SEEPAGE

People want justice because they want to heal.

—17-year-old JV

The summer after completing my 1st year in a PhD program, I attended the Sons and Brothers Camp in Northern California. On our 1st full day together, a packed day of activities began at 7 in the morning with a water ceremony. Before camp, youth were invited to bring water from their homes, community, or land. Native youth workers led us through a discussion of water and our relationship to it, including the water the young men brought from home. The youth workers also shared stories about the caretakers of the land we stood on. We gathered in a large circle next to a lake, and as the water ceremony began, it also started to rain. I was puzzled and distracted by what I saw; it was raining on us and only us. We all looked at each other. Some smiled, and others stared back at me, just as confused by what was happening. As the rain continued, youth voluntarily walked up near the lake to pour the water they brought with them. For some, the water they were returning represented their family values, a mother's love, or their local movement for clean water. The water ceremony continued, and the rain intensified. And as if on cue, when the ceremony ended, the rain stopped, and a ray of sunlight shined on us. Throughout the years, I have asked Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition (BSS) youth who were in attendance if they remembered this morning. We always smile, joke, and leave it by saying, "That was a trip!"

As a kind of conclusion, I turn to the water ceremony as an organizing metaphor to present my theoretical argument. Specifically, I leverage the metaphor of seepage—or *carceral seepage*—to think with and beyond carceral matters that are often conceptualized as overt and highly visible.[16] In using seepage as an organizing metaphor, I am indebted to Karida Brown and her seminar on racial capitalism. I engaged King's (2019) *The Black Shoals,* having already read Sharpe's (2016) *In The Wake.* King and Sharpe both used water and oceanic metaphors to theorize Black life, Black politics, and Blackness. King (2019) asserted water metaphors have been used in Black studies to depart from discourses that fail to capture the complexity of Black life. Thus, my use of water as a metaphor is also informed by my realization that the school-to-prison-pipeline, although useful and popular, has its limitations. Specifically, it fails to capture the relationship between the carceral state and youth in and out of school. However, I do find utility in thinking with the water in the pipeline metaphor.

In this section, I propose carceral seepage as a conceptual tool to make sense of the carceral state and its relationship to young people. The way that water seepage works acts as an organizing metaphor for carceral seepage because, at times, the carceral is sudden and destructive; other times, it is slow, cumulative, and experiences start to build up. In some instances, it is in the background, hidden, or in other occasions, it is visible. Thus, carceral seepage is about locating what we are often not

[16] Shoutout to Juan Pedroza because it was in conversations with him—via phone, zoom, feedback—that I first began to use "carceral seepage."

trained to view or out of sight in conversation with the overt. Carceral seepage takes into account the carceral state's scale, intensity, and temporality. Articulated in this way, the carceral state takes form through interactional, structural, and ideological processes that are constantly in motion and seep into the various social institutions and contexts Black and Latinx youth navigate in carceral Los Angeles.

Carceral seepage gives me language to describe how logics of carcerality impact multiple aspects of youths' emotions and lived experiences vis-à-vis their direct criminalization and via the criminalization of loved ones. For example, in Chapter 3, I described how Black and Latinx young men experienced criminalization constantly across contexts and institutions. Their bodies, behaviors, and practices were criminalized not because they were committing a crime or misbehaving, but because they were perceived as threats by their very existence. Importantly, I showed how their experiences with the carceral state started when they were children witnessing the criminalization of their loved ones. In sum, witnessing and experiencing criminalization, including the assumption of criminality and fear of being criminalized, was constant and everywhere for the young boys.

As a conceptual tool, carceral seepage describes the backdrop that informs the experiences of Black and Latinx BSS youth, including young people's feelings about the ever-present carceral state. As I showed in Chapter 3, the young men described their experiences through racialized emotions because the carceral state and criminalization simultaneously permeated their lives at multiple levels. In their work on racialized emotions, Woody (2021: 2) argued racism and whiteness are "'baked

into' the culture, built environment, and daily interactions." Through carceral seepage, I argue the carceral state and its logics are also "baked into" various social institutions, relationships, and contexts Black and Latinx youth navigate. Carceral seepage forms through interactional, structural, ideological, and psychological processes constantly in motion. Carceral seepage contributed to the range of racialized emotions described by the young men (e.g., paranoia, fear, trauma), and gave texture to how the carceral state materialized in the lives of Black and Latinx youth.

Carceral seepage is also helpful to contextualize the gendered enclosures described in Chapter 4 that informed the gender ideologies and practices of Black and Latinx young men. Gendered enclosures produced in a context of carceral seepage are rooted in a patriarchal heteronormative formulation of manhood that forecloses vulnerability, emotional expressions, and the opportunity to heal from the many wounds inflicted by the carceral state, which is carceral seepage at work. Thus, if carceral seepage is the backdrop, the urgency of BSS programming lies in shifting the relational practices and logics central to the carceral state. In Chapter 4, I gave an overview of some of the BSS relational practices, political education, and healing programming that sat in opposition to carceral logics. Carceral seepage can also be used to describe how various social actors (e.g., in schools or neighborhoods) do carceral work. As I demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, schools, mental health institutions, and other social institutions are implicated in the criminalization and surveillance of Black and Latinx youth.

Carceral Seepage as a Work in Progress

You got troubles
I've got 'em too
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you
We stick together and see it through
'Cause you've got a friend in me

—Randy Newman, *Toy Story* (1995)

On September 15, 2020, when youth organizers returned to the Los Angeles Unified School District headquarters to further their demands to defund the Los Angeles School Police Department, they were met by counter protesters. About 20 minutes into the student-led rally, over 30 counter protesters arrived. Among the counter protestors were off-duty school police officers and their allies, with some dressed in military-like clothing or "I Love LASPD" blue shirts. They marched down the street with modified blue line U.S. flags accompanied by the lyrics and tune of Toy Story's "You've Got a Friend in Me." The counter protesters arrived when libations were being poured in memory of 18-year-old Andres Guardado, Breonna Taylor, and the countless others murdered by the police during the spring and summer of 2020. Shortly after, "Black Lives Matter" chants broke out, and the same counter protestor blasting "You've Got a Friend in Me" revved his engine to drown out the collective chants.

"Keep Our Kids Safe" and "Protect Our Kids" were plastered across their cardboard signs in different colors, fonts, and materials. The September 2020 counter protest occurred after countless Black youth organizers and their allies took to various venues to testify that school police officers did not make them feel safe. For weeks, they shared their experiences with random searches and racialized and gendered

police violence. Yet, the exclusion of Black youth from notions of safety and protection connected all the signs and rhetoric of counter protestors. In other words, demands to "protect our kids" or "keep our kids safe" were made in and out of school board meetings through the negotiation of Black youth suffering. This negotiation was fueled by assumptions that Black and Latinx youth were "hardened criminals."

A few days after the protest, a Los Angeles School Police Department officer posted a clip on Twitter where he stated:

> In fact, a lot of these kids that are juveniles, for a lack of a better term, are hardened criminals. That are more than willing to be predators or pray on you, your families, your abuelitas, your tias. They won't think twice!

"Hardened criminals" and "predators," or the super predator narrative, were made famous by the Clintons and others during the 1990s. Although this narrative might be expected from a school police officer, I have heard similar rhetoric used by school board members, parents, academics, and the media. In 2016, community organizers pushed Los Angeles Unified School District to return military-grade weapons, including three grenade launchers, 61 M-16 rifles, and a tank. The acquiring of these weapons was possible because the surveillance of youth in schools is often justified by the assumption that schools attended by low-income, working-class Black and Latinx students are located in "troubled neighborhoods that have more challenges," as one person testified during a school board meeting. Similarly, academics have met presentations where I discuss findings from Chapter 5 with hesitation and doubt. For example, academics have asked me if Black and Latinx boys can be feminists. The answer to that question alludes me because feminism, in my understanding, is a

necessary striving and horizon, not something individuals just are. Yet, in this questioning, I also found indications of an inability to imagine the boys outside of criminality, deviance, and gendered character flaws. This, too, is carceral seepage.

In future work, I plan to develop carceral seepage further to examine the controlling images of Black and Latinx youth. I aspire to examine questions such as: How are youth socially constructed? How are Black and Latinx youth as a population perceived across racialized organizations? How do controlling images seep? What function does this seepage have in a carceral context? What practices of containment are deployed as a result? How do controlling images rob young men of intimacy and innocence? The vignette I presented demonstrates the logics of criminalization extend beyond the walls of prisons, jails, and detention centers as controlling images that seep into all aspects of Black and Latinx youth's social lives, including decisions made about them. The school police officer's invocation of "abuelitas" and "tias" also speaks to the multiracial and intraracial tensions that the carceral state produces. As such, carceral seepage is a living concept still in progress and necessitates a more profound examination to capture its full extent in carceral Los Angeles.

As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated, Black and Latinx youth and BSS youth workers were active participants in challenging the carceral state. For example, in Chapter 4, I discussed how youth workers modeled vulnerability and the role it played in extending the emotional practices of Black and Latinx young men. The practices of youth workers, the healing work, and political education BSS youth workers provided became a type of "wake work," a mode of imagining "otherwise

from what we know," where healing and care are centered (Sharpe 2016: 18-19). The urgency of the work of BSS youth workers and BSS's position in the social organization of carceral Los Angeles lies in understanding carceral seepage as the backdrop. BSS youth also attempted to challenge carceral logics of abandonment and disposability. In Chapter 5, I centered the young men's intersectional thinking and abolitionist ideals. I argued BSS youth activists have forged an abolitionist front to the carceral state by deploying intersectional thinking that informed their relational practices, coalition building, and visions of social transformation.

One chapter cannot fully capture BSS youth's resistance to the carceral state. JV, for example, peed in a cop car to avoid being sent to juvenile detention. Youth sang, danced, and engaged in yoga activities as counter protestors rallied maskless nearby in the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic. During meetings and youth convenings, BSS youth remind each other of their brilliance and beauty. In healing circles, they sometimes sit in silence when words are not enough to capture the damage inflicted by the carceral state. In that collective silence, the young men are also healing and finding ways to relate to each other. JV once shared, "Community has been there for me more than these systems." What these moments allude to is that, despite constant criminalization, Black and Latinx youth are a force the carceral state cannot contain. As such, I return to seepage once more to think about Black and Latinx youth movement work, its limits, and its possibilities in carceral Los Angeles, and particularly how they navigated, escaped, avoided, and resisted the totalizing nature of the carceral state.

Final Reflections

The insidious nature of the carceral state necessitates an approach that is interdisciplinary and sociological to acknowledge "the plurality of places and experiences through the detailed study of local institutional contexts and the different intersections of local histories, power, and agency" (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2020, p. 197; Battle and Serrano 2022). Thus, carceral seepage, and this dissertation, were anchored in the work of Black studies and carceral studies scholars who have recognized the carceral state is rooted in anti-Black and colonial logics of punishment, enclosure, confinement, exclusion, dispossession, and abandonment that are linked to historical processes of racial capitalism (Battle and Serrano 2022; Brown and Schept 2017; Browne 2015; Cabral 2022; Gilmore 2007; LeBrón 2019; Ochoa 2013; Shabazz 2015; Shange 2019; Sojoyner 2016; Tillman 2022; Wang 2018). And as I have shown in this dissertation, resistance is also part of the carceral history of this nation. I position *Youth in the City of Inmates* as part of this landscape, which attempts to account for the carceral state, its consequences, and challenges against it.

Contrary to prior studies that have suggested criminalization is a process connected to student deviance, school conflict, or disrespect of authority (Simon 2007; Hirschfield 2008; Rios 2011), I understand youth criminalization as more than just a function of arrest, discipline, punishment, and the enforcement of punitive laws and policies. In doing so, I offer carceral seepage to understand how criminalization, and ultimately the carceral state, are an ableist regime of social control inextricably intertwined with processes of gendered racialization, anti-Blackness, and

antiqueerness (Hernandez 2017; Suddler 2020; Tillman 2022). Carceral seepage as a conceptual tool links historical and contemporary contexts—including linking schools to prisons to young people—to examine how the carceral state produces racialized emotions and gendered enclosures. Viewed in that way, the carceral state affects individuals and groups in distinct but structurally similar ways. Lastly, carceral seepage allows people to move beyond locating the carceral only in a school-to-prison-pipeline, the penal system, or crime.

Aligned with research that has shown an array of institutions have adopted the logics of the carceral state and its punitive techniques, I have attempted to demonstrate how these logics are entrenched at multiple levels and across the many contexts and institutions youth navigate. With an attention to racialized emotions and gendered enclosures, this dissertation unearthed the sinister nature of the carceral state, its far reach, and how it continued to be reembedded in the social fabric of Los Angeles. I also told a story of community-based educational spaces like BSS and their role in buffering the consequences of the carceral state and constant criminalization. Lastly, I centered the political visions of Black and Latinx boys and young men, youth workers, and their relational practices. I hope practitioners and adults find tools to affirm, support, and join Black and Latinx youth in their healing in those practices. Most importantly, I hope this work leads to a world where young people do not have to evade, resist, and challenge the carceral social order. Instead, I hope it plays a role in building a world where love, support, and affirmations for youth of color are constant and omnipresent.

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