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# Gender on the Run: Wanted Latinas in a Southern California Barrio

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**Abstract**

Recent research on systems of social control has demonstrated how African American men who live in segregated neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by their legal standing, especially in their attempts to avoid imprisonment when "on the run." However, missing from this analysis is the inclusion of how the intersection of race, class, gender, and other identities shape our understanding of being "on the run." Building on work in this area, we focus on the unique and understudied experiences that young Latinas face while attempting to avoid rearrests and recidivism within a working-class Latina/o barrio.

**Keywords**

ethnicity, ethnographic research, female criminality, Latinas, juvenile justice, race

This article explores the unique and understudied experiences of young Latinas "on the run" within a working-class Latina/o barrio in southern California—a complex process of avoiding detection, rearrest, and additional confinement. Using 2 years of ethnographic research and over 50 in-depth semistructured interviews with young court-involved Latinas, we find these young women continuously negotiate the continually expanding criminal justice system with risks of victimization and encounters with violence on the streets. Moreover, this research speaks to how formal systems of social control, such as the justice system, impact community, family, and work arrangements negatively, thus creating new risks and challenges for Latinas in the United States.

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The practice of "going on the run" is part of the fugitive and law enforcement lexicon that describes how both men and women attempt to avoid detection, to evade and resist authorities, and to avoid the punishment by the court and subsequent incarceration (Goffman, 2009). Increasingly affected by community and family disruption, young Latinas, especially those "on the run," face gendered and racialized struggles while on the street as well as the criminalization that comes along with the expansion of the criminal justice system and zero-tolerance school policies (Davis, 2003; Díaz-Cotto, 2006; Morín, 2013; Olgin, 2010; Schaffner, 2008). However, mainstream criminological thought often lacks an inclusive understanding about surveillance and incarceration experiences from young Latinas' perspectives. Most feminist scholarship and research on young women of color often overlooks Latinas in particular (e.g., Díaz-Cotto, 2006). This article remedies such paucity and adds to our understanding of how the criminal justice system affects communities of color. It also challenges the Black–White binary often found in academic literature by highlighting the gendered, socioeconomic, and racialized challenges young Latinas experience when attempting to avoid arrest and subsequent incarceration. In doing so, the article provides insight about a group that is popularly imagined unidimensionally as "bad girls" who behave "badly" and whose actions are often divorced from larger discussions of inequality.

This article describes the experiences of Latinas on the run in a small Latino barrio in southern California. We show how interlocking structures motivate and prompt these young women to evade contact with the very institutions and cultural forces that shape their constrained options. Drawing on 2 years of ethnographic research, we respond to the following questions: First, how do legal entanglements in their community affect young Latinas on the run? Second, how are these young people's lives affected by the structural arrangements, institutions, and social barriers they confront? Last, how do young Latina women describe the strategies and negotiations they make while they run? As we discuss in the following sections, Latinas on the run must negotiate a unique set of challenges, which are inextricably tied to their race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as the legacy of marginalization within their neighborhood.

## Intersecting Identities and Criminalization

Interlocking structural arrangements are salient within the criminal justice system and often operate in keeping men and women of color in subordinated and marginalized positions (Alexander, 2010; Ocen, 2013). Several significant works have recently illustrated the ways systems of surveillance and social control are racialized, gendered, and heteronormative. For example, Miller's (2008) analysis of 75 urban Black adolescents (45 boys and 30 girls) with delinquent track records from various poor and crime-ridden neighborhoods in St. Louis, Missouri, showed how such youth experience frequent heightened and routinized gendered violence. Revealing that girls are harassed and experienced unreported sexual violence by men, Miller found that neighborhood violence was interwoven with class, gender, and racial oppression. Furthermore, the community was not responsive to girls'

struggles, and schools did not take gendered violence seriously, with girls often blamed for their own victimization.

In his influential work, Victor Rios (2011) discusses the often-criminalized lives of Black and Latino male youth in Oakland, California. Rios' work highlights how masculinity instilled in young men reproduce a hypermasculine outcome to earn respect from community peers who often deny them such dignity. The young adults were often hypercriminalized by what Rios calls the Youth Control Complex, an interlocking web of social institutions (the police, schools, the community for example) that systematically treats everyday marginalized youth behavior as deviant. Altogether, his work addresses gender performativity among Latino men and their experiences with such scrutiny.

Indeed, Goffman also illustrates similar processes in her ethnographic study of young Black men in inner city Philadelphia and how they deal with police, the courts, and the probation and parole departments. Goffman (2014) argues that for these young men, their "illegal or semi-illegal status instills an overwhelming fear of being arrested" (p. 340). This fear comes along with being suspicious of close friends and family in addition to avoiding institutions, places, and locations where they once turned to for support. The consequence "is a complex interactive system in which ghetto residents become caught in constraining legal entanglements" (Goffman, 2009, p. 340).

Brewer and Heitzeg (2008) argue that to understand systemic oppression within the criminal justice system and the prison industrial complex, scholars must take on an intersectional analysis that incorporates "Black and third world people, working-class people, older people, women, gay/lesbians, and physically challenged people" (p. 641). Understanding Latinas' experiences on the run requires such an intersectional approach that not only underscores girls' identities, interactions, and negotiations, but also interrogates the effects of different institutions and the ways in which they interlock to shape Latinas' experiences "on the run." Intersectional experiences have been outlined by feminist researchers focusing on both Latina/Chicana experiences (Anzaldúa, 2012; Moraga, 2015) and more broadly on women of color (Collins, 1993, 2000; Lorde, 1984; Ocen, 2013; Potter, 2015). An intersectional framework provides "an account for the multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Collins, 1993, p. 1245). Importantly, intersectionality scholars do not universalize experiences as representative of any one identity category; instead, intersectional scholars outline a forceful set of interlocking cultural and social forces that shape a group of experiences without conflating or homogenizing them (Crenshaw, 1991) and also without dispensing of the individual dimension (Collins, 1993). Indeed, research embracing Chicana Feminist epistemologies often highlights the voices of young Latinas and provides an account on how their worlds are constructed in an effort to underscore the constrained nature of individual agency and make visible the impact of interlocking structural oppressions in devaluing their voices (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Najera-Ramirez, & Zavella, 2003).

For example, Bermúdez, Stinson, Zak-Hunter, and Abrams (2011) apply an intersectional framework in exploring the lived experiences of 20 single mothers of

Mexican origin. Although these single mothers of Mexican origin expressed a clear preference to parent without their children's father, they were not a homogeneous group. Often expressing nuanced and distinct set of experiences, they differed in terms of "race, socioeconomic status, power, sexuality, immigration status, language issues, family structure, relational status, power dynamics, and geographical location (urban, immigrant-non-immigrant)" (p. 639). Importantly, Bermúdez et al. cautioned against essentializing the experiences and qualities of Latino families. Similarly, Thing (2010) examined gay identity formation by exploring the lives of 24 Mexican gay immigrant men in the United States and Mexico by applying a transnational intersectional framework. Thing found that Mexican gay identity is composed of a hybrid of intersections between social class, geography, migration, and sexuality that "transcend[s] national borders" (p. 827). In both studies, an intersectional analysis and its nuanced understanding of power brought out a set of distinct, but not homogeneous, experiences that required a deeper contextualization of their individual life experiences relative to the multiple structures and institutions of social control that shaped their conditions.

## California Juvenile Probation and El Valle Detention Center

In California, the juvenile justice system is intended to rehabilitate youthful offenders through the use of community-based corrections and secure confinement (California Legislative Office [CLO], 2007). After minors are arrested, law enforcement agents take them to juvenile halls, which are managed by county probation departments. Youth placed in secure detention by the probation department may then be referred to adult court by the district attorney or be placed on formal probation, informal probation, house arrest, group housing, or a combination of these options upon their release.

County probation departments supervise 97%[1] of all juveniles in the California criminal justice system. To give a sense of the scale of the number of young people under discussion, 222,512 underage individuals were arrested in California in 2005, roughly the size of a medium city (CLO, 2007). After arrest, 87% of these young people were referred to local probation departments, with the vast majority of these arrested juveniles eventually ending up on some type of community supervision (Rios, 2011). Given that people on probation/parole, including youth, can be stopped, searched, and drug tested by any law enforcement agents at any time without their consent (see Alexander, 2010), many of these juveniles end up rearrested, many times for violating the requirements of their probation (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013).

Once youth are on formal probation, they must fulfill various demands to avoid a return to secure detention. For example, they are required to meet with their probation officer regularly. During these visits, they are frequently drug tested, with positive results earning detention. Youth on probation are also required to keep a passing grade point average, avoid excessive school absences, and keep to a curfew established by their probation officer. Some youth on probation are also prohibited from spending time in certain parts of the city or with particular individuals. Still other youth on

probation are prevented from interacting with or wearing clothing associated with gangs. These so-called "gang restrictions" are typically doled out to Latino/a youth (Lopez & Aguado, 2016; Rios, 2011). Finally, youth are restricted from committing new crimes or having any further contact with criminal justice agents. Engaging in any restricted behavior results in a probation violation, which means that the youth is rearrested and taken to a detention center by the assigned probation officer. For the youth in this study, it means returning to El Valle Detention Center.

The county where El Valle[2] is located is situated 40 miles outside of Los Angeles, California. The history of this barrio is similar to that of many Latino communities in southern California. When under the control of the Mexican government, this community was used largely for agriculture and to raise cattle (Almaguer, 2009; Glenn, 2004). During this time, there was a large landed Mexican aristocracy that controlled the region (Almaguer, 2009; Glenn, 2004). After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, when large parts of the southwest came under the control of the U.S. government, this community continued to be an agricultural town (Almaguer, 2009). After this transition, a large encroachment of White settlers began to systematically disfranchise Latinos to take over these fertile lands. Similarly, White Americans began establishing their dominance, seized political power, and isolated Latinos into unwanted and underresourced parts of the city, often with the support of local authorities (Almaguer, 2009; Glenn, 2004). During the 1940s and 1960s, a large population of Latinos and newly arrived Mexicans revitalized the community and were able to recover some of their economic power (Almaguer, 2009; Calavita, 1992; Glenn, 2004). However, in the era of neoliberal economic policies and the subsequent end of well-paid factory work, El Valle became a challenging place to live.

The drop in well-paid jobs, the increase in heroin and methamphetamine trafficking and addiction, the rise in mass policing and incarceration, and the peak in gang violence in southern California further hurt the community in the 1980s. This coupled with the continued *de facto* and *de jure* discrimination of Latinos in the city completely devastated El Valle. These events left a ballooning gang and drug problem with no resources to address these issues along with an expanding California prison system that seemed to envelope whole families and neighborhoods. Today, in a county of 200,000 individuals with three-quarters Latino, El Valle's residents are majority migrant workers, are working poor, or live below the poverty line. This historical and economic context is extremely important for the youth in our study; it directly shapes the experiences of young women on the run, as it engenders the specific conditions of racialized and classist structures through which they lived gendered lives.

## El Valle Juvenile Detention Facility and Legacy Community School

This study is based on research conducted at two locations. The first is El Valle Juvenile Detention Center. This newer Juvenile Detention Facility was built on 50 acres in the last 20 years and can hold upward of 400 youths. Young people in this

detention center are segregated by sex. Approximately 90% of the youth in this facility are boys, amounting to 40 young women housed in the facility daily. The girls reside in one unit and are segregated from the boys. The girls' unit is divided into "House One" and "House Two." House One holds juveniles who have not been adjudicated or who will be in the facility fewer than 30 days. House Two houses all other girls. Each cell in the facility can hold up to four people. The unit is connected to a recreational yard and central communal space called a "day room" where the girls eat and interact with each other. Most of the youth incarcerated here are Latinas and were arrested for nonviolent drug-related offenses.

The second field site is Legacy Community Day School (Legacy). Initially the first author planned to focus the research solely on El Valle Juvenile Detention Center. However, during fieldwork, he met an educational administrator who connected him with the school. Shortly after visiting Legacy, the first author discovered multidimensional economic and administrative ties between the school and El Valle. He also noticed that the same youth who attended Legacy were often incarcerated at El Valle. Accordingly, he expanded the study to incorporate Legacy. This school serves Grades 6 through 12 and is less than 5 miles from El Valle. The number of students served by Legacy usually hovers around 150 even though its capacity is for 300 students. For most students, this is their final stop in California public schools. Students also go to Legacy when they are expelled from other schools for violent offenses. Like El Valle, Legacy schools have more Latino students and more students who are working class or poor in comparison with other continuation schools (at Legacy, 80% of students are Latino and at least 66% are classified by school officials as "socioeconomically disadvantaged"). Additionally, Legacy contains more students struggling academically—92% of the students here are not proficient in math or English and 15% have been diagnosed with a learning disability. Legacy offers no advanced placement courses and no student has ever met the requirements to enter any of the 4-year California public universities. At some point, a large portion of students at Legacy had contact with the juvenile justice system either in the form of secure detention or with a criminal justice agent in their communities. In Legacy, unlike other schools, there is a steady flow of incoming and outgoing youth from El Valle Juvenile Detention Center. Even if students are not on formal (court-mandated) probation when enrolling at Legacy, it is school policy to put them in contact with a probation agent. This school almost exclusively enrolls students who have been previously incarcerated at El Valle or similar juvenile detention facilities. This milieu creates additional scrutiny for its youth beyond any required by law or as part of a rehabilitation process.

## Method

Over 24 months, the first author conducted ethnographic research at El Valle juvenile detention center and Legacy Alternative school. This investigation began through volunteer work in the educational program found inside of the detention center. During this time, the first author served as a tutor for young women in this detention center and later volunteered at Legacy in the same role, eventually securing permission to

conduct research in these facilities. Doing fieldwork as a researcher and educational volunteer at El Valle Juvenile Detention Center (2009-2011) and at Legacy Community School (2010-2011), the first author conducted participant observation for approximately 2 years and gathered 500 pages of single-spaced notes before conducting interviews or collecting additional data. This allowed Flores to restructure the initial research design to address the issues that appeared most at both field sites, notably the violence that exists at every stage of young women's lives and their negative experiences in the community. Once the first author reached the "saturation point"[3] using field notes, he began conducting interviews. During the participant observation stage, the significance of young women's experiences on the run emerged.

After collecting this preliminary data, 44 in-depth semistructured interviews with 33 different incarcerated girls were completed. The first author conducted all preliminary interviews inside of secure detention. He also conducted focus groups and individual follow-up interviews at Legacy. Each formal interview lasted between 1 to 3 hours, with most lasting about an hour and a half, and were conducted inside an empty soundproof interview room that teachers, counselors, and probation officers use to meet with incarcerated youth. The University institutional review board approved all research in this study, and we received consents/assents by the interviewees, their parents, and/or guardians.

Field notes and interviews were transcribed verbatim. *Dedoose*, a qualitative data analysis software package, was used to code these documents. The researcher paid special attention to how youth in these settings discussed their experiences at home, school, detention, and in the community school. Our analysis included a thorough examination of "negative cases" or alternative explanations. When we were confronted with a negative case, we addressed it in the text or incorporated it into the larger analysis. Looking for alternative explanations in this research ultimately strengthened our findings. This method of analyzing ethnographic data follows the process described in Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995).

The phrase "on the run" or a discussion about being on the run appeared 56 different times during the coding process. This phrase emerged in field notes on 22 occasions and in interviews 34 times. In total, 17 different girls mentioned being on the run out of the 33 included in the study (see Table 1 for demographic information). Importantly these data also inform a larger book project (see Flores, 2016) that focused on the experiences of Latinas at home, detention, and school. The larger study did not explicitly ask about "on the run" experiences, but found that this theme was a large part of young women's narratives, appearing and reappearing organically during the data collection process. The 17 young people who discussed being on the run all described resonant themes with only slight variations. In other words, of the young people included in this study, 17 young women discussed being on the run and had strikingly similar experiences.[4]

## A Brief Note on Reflexivity

Being reflexive and considering one's own identity and experiences is a key aspect of the research process (Finlay, 2002; Jones, 2010; Rios, 2011; Zavella, 1993). Reflexivity

**Table 1.** Demographic Information.

| Name | Age | Race/ Ethnicity | Number of times previously incarcerated | Age first incarcerated |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Denise | 17 | Latina | 5 | 14 |
| Anita | 15 | Asian | 2 | 14 |
| Diana | 17 | Latina | 6 | 14 |
| Aracely | 19 | Latina | 19 | 13 |
| Ray | 17 | Latina | Information unavailable | 14 |
| Alexis | 14 | Latina | 7 | 12 |
| Payasa | 17 | Latina | 19 | 13 |
| Jackie | 15 | Latina | 4 | 14 |
| Rasta | 15 | White | 6 | 13 |
| Mari | 15 | Latina | 5 | 14 |
| Mariana | 16 | Latina | 2 | 14 |
| Feliz | 17 | Latina | 5 | 16 |
| Sandra | 15 | Latina | 8 | 13 |
| Virginia | 16 | Latina | 1 | 13 |
| Amber | 18 | Latina | 2 | 18 |
| Martha | 17 | Latina | Information unavailable | Information unavailable |
| Maribel | 18 | Latina | Information unavailable | 15 |

allows scholars to connect their experiences of oppression and privilege to the research process. Our research team shares a background of ethnographic training and a commitment as prison abolitionists. Ochoa Camacho identifies closely with the intense pressures placed on young Latina women with respect to gender, race, and sexuality, but draws from her experiences as a member of a community with a different set of racial and cultural dynamics and her own variable but relatively privileged socioeconomic experiences. We recognize that we are not all Latinas, but the two men on the research team identify as allies and feminist Chicano scholars. In our analysis of the experiences of young Latinas "on the run," we strive to represent Latina voices and ways of knowing by always bearing in mind the powerful nature of privilege in our intersectional experiences. We are also cognizant of the carceral experiences of Latinas; although the third author experienced incarceration during his young adult years, the first and second authors have never been confined. Aside from this, all authors have experienced the pains of living in highly segregated, resource deprived, and hypersurveilled Latino neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color similar to the one at the focus of this research. We attempt to represent the stories of these 17 young Latinas with an unwavering commitment to their voices.

## Latinas on the Run

In Goffman's (2009, 2014) research, most of her participants went on the run for minor infractions, such as delinquent court fines, failure to appear in court, or probation or

parole violations. These minor infractions lead to warrants for young men's arrest. Similarly, most of the young women in this study went on the run for minor infractions. Unlike the people in Goffman's study, all of these young women were on probation. Thus, any actual (or even perceived) infraction could lead to law enforcement detection, detainment, and future arrest. This was exacerbated by the fact that these young women could be arrested for status offenses (such as truancy or curfew violation) given their juvenile probation status. Most of the reasons for going on the run were the same in both studies: to avoid arrest and subsequent incarceration. Even if going on the run was a relatively straightforward response to the immediate threat of incarceration, the decision-making process involved in going on the run was complex.

The young women in the study engaged in a complex decision-making process before deciding to go on the run. Like Goffman's (2014) subjects, young women in this study developed a set of strategies where they avoided routines, developed a hyperawareness of the police, and avoided anywhere they might interact with law enforcement agents. These strategies also involved being prepared to run from police immediately and in any situation. They often participated in a complex cost-benefit analysis before actually leaving. Within a series of minutes or seconds, these young people must engage in a process whereby they ask themselves if enduring the multiple challenges of being on the run is "better" than returning to secure confinement.

This is the first step our participants took in going on the run. During an interview, 14-year-old Alexis described how she decided to go on the run:

> Um, we were blazin' it [smoking marijuana] and I took the best hit ever and then I turn around and Mr. Paul [principal] is right there. I had the smoke in my mouth and I was like fuck. And then . . . I quickly gave . . . the piece [pipe] and the lighter to my friend and then I look[ed] at Mr. Paul who was just standing there and that's when he said, "I think these girls are smoking dope." Then I couldn't hold it in any longer and then I just started coughing and a bunch of smoke came out and I was like, "Oh my God." I had just walked away. I was like, "Ok, I'm not a part of this. Maybe you didn't see me." And then, um, he took my homegirls and they were walking and then one of them still had my piece and my lighter and she's like, "Here Alexis," right in front of his face. So then he brought me along and then I was like, "I'm gonna book it [run away] right now guys. I can't get locked up." I always think I'm gonna come back in here for some reason and I don't want to. So then I was like, "I'm gonna book it right now. Anybody down?" And then Linda's like, "I'll book it with you. I'll book it with you." We ran and we were under this tunnel for like 5 hours . . .

Instead of getting caught and being sent to detention, Alexis ran and hid under a freeway underpass for 5 hours. She proceeded to stay out on the run for several months. Alexis made this very serious decision within seconds of being confronted by the principal of her previous school.

Likewise, this excerpt begins to show the complexity of deciding to go on the run. Martha, a 17-year-old, third-generation Latina, faced a similar dilemma. Having a conversation with Martha in Legacy's larger courtyard, the first author collected this field note:

> A Latina probation officer walked into the courtyard and approached Martha. The officer was dressed in black army fatigues and wore a utility belt that holds pepper spray, handcuffs, and other tools. Her dark glasses obscured her eyes. She asked Martha if she was ready to test. Martha replied, "I can't. I just went." The probation officer looks at her, and asked, "When can you go?" Martha replied, "I am not sure. I just went," and the officer walked away and said nothing . . . When the officer left, Martha walked up to me and said, "Fuck. I'm going to get locked up. I smoked weed and did some coke yesterday. I smoke hella shit too (meth). I'm a get busted. I'm fucked! What should I do?"

As the first author paused to think about her options, Martha generated the same worried look and replied, "Should I go on the run?" First author said, "You can leave but I think it is a bad idea. You are in the middle of nowhere and there is nowhere to go. You will probably get caught." Martha looked down at her shoes and said,

> I'm so fucked. And I just got this stupid tattoo on my chest. I was drunk when I got it and it looks stupid. I can't wear any shirts anymore. I want to have it removed. I'm get in trouble for that. What should I do?

Martha lifted her sweater to show the undecipherable cursive writing on the middle of her chest. She told the first author the phrase spelled out the name of a local gang she is associated with in her community. She also told the first author her probation term has a gang restriction that forbids her from associating with gangs or wearing gang paraphernalia. Her new tattoo will no doubt earn her another probation violation. Her eyes began to fill with tears as she stared at the floor. She said, "Thanks for listening. I am going to walk for a while," and she began walking around the courtyard, joining several students who did the same.

Martha was able to delay her drug test, but it was inevitable that she would have to test soon. Given the drugs she took over the weekend, the test would likely be positive. She was left with a serious dilemma: Do I leave and face several days, weeks, or months on the run, or do I test and go back to El Valle? Martha, unlike Alexis, decided to stay and face the consequences of testing positive. Her decision was not simple and entailed a tremendous amount of psychological and emotional stress.

These excerpts demonstrate the intricate and difficult decision-making processes these youths must engage in when deciding to go on the run. They are even more compelling when we consider the young ages of these two women, the short time frame to contemplate their choices, and the very real consequences of going on the run. Largely, many young women in this study decided to go on the run after weighing the odds of receiving a probation violation: before taking a drug test they felt would result in a "positive" result or leaving after a fight in the community, a disagreement with a group home staff member or other youth in their group home. After fighting with one's parents or being asked to leave by their guardians, young people in this study went on the run.

## Getting Kicked Out

Young women in our study often reported being kicked out of their homes for violating gendered and culturally specific norms of behavior in the eyes of their

guardians and this often led to their decision to leave. Girls who stayed out late, had premarital sex, violated heteronormative expectations, or used drugs and alcohol commonly found themselves in trouble at home. Diana, for example, initially started getting in trouble in the eighth grade. At five foot five and about 120 pounds, she looks innocuous and quiet from a distance. When she speaks it is immediately apparent this was a misguided impression: She has a loud booming voice and an energetic personality. When I asked her about her experience, she responded, "I started dating . . . and my mom did not approve cause I was with a girl. And my mom she doesn't go to church or nothing, she is not religious. She just didn't condone it." As Diana continued dating her girlfriend, this created tension between her and her mother. Ironically, her mother runs a group home for girls and she used her insider knowledge of the placement and criminal justice system to punish Diana or to have her locked up. For example, she kicked Diana out of the house and then told law enforcement officials that she ran away. Eventually, Diana decided that going on the run was preferable to going home, fighting with her mom, and getting subsequently arrested.

The young women in this project were also kicked out of their homes for experimenting with drugs, occasionally their parents treating them as "throwaways." Fifteen-year-old Mari said, "I ended up getting high on meth and spent one night away from my house. And I was afraid to go back because I did not want to get locked up. [Now] My mom does not want me back." Similarly, other young women would go on the run after fighting with their parents about dating, becoming pregnant at an early age, sneaking out at night, running away for short periods, or expressing their sexuality in overt ways. Conservative Latino cultural ideals can command that young women should remain chaste until marriage, be submissive, and show deference to authority figures (Dietrich, 1998; Garcia, 2012). Garcia (2012) poignantly addresses how these ideals of Latina femininity are stereotypical, outdated, and erroneous. Still, some young girls continue to be held to these standards at home. The experiences of Diana and other young women demonstrate how young Latina women are kicked out or pushed to run away by their parents for violating gendered and culturally specific expectations for young Latinas. Getting kicked out or deciding to leave is often tied to the guardians' perceptions that the young woman in question violated "appropriate" behavior norms for Latina women instead of any actual harm or injury caused by their behavior.

After leaving home, most young women could not return easily and were forced to avoid institutions like home, group homes, community centers, and school. Due to their involvement with the juvenile justice system and their probation status, youth in this study were often issued a probation violation and a warrant upon leaving their homes. This meant that returning to the previously mentioned institutions would most often lead to an arrest and subsequent incarceration. Similar to men on the run (Goffman, 2014), these young women systematically devised strategies of avoidance. For example, 17-year-old Payasa said, "I can honestly say I haven't been to school since I was in eighth grade . . . [because] I was, um, always on the run." Similarly, 15-year-old Jackie discusses avoiding school in the following field note:

> Jackie says she has been out [on the run] for 3 months and another girl says she's [on the run] for 6 months. Someone asked Jackie what school she went to when she was on the "outs" [in the community] and she replied, "I didn't go to school. I was on the run. I'm not going to get caught up at school." Young women like Jackie avoid educational institutions because of their close linkages and collaborations with the criminal justice system.

Although the youth in our study were aware they would face arrest, some attempted to return temporarily for survival reasons: clothes, food, hygiene supplies, or a hot shower. For the most part, returning to these institutions did not go well. Diana discusses her experiences returning home after being on the run:

> I came back . . . [after] I was kicked out and I said [to my mom], "Oh, I came back . . . I wanna stay home again. I'm a take a shower." And then she put her hand up like "No!" and I said, "What are you doing. I'm 'a get in my room." And she is like "that's not your room, no more." I was like, "I need to get my clothes and stuff" and then she was just like, "No!" and I kinda pushed her hand away and she pushed me back and we fought. [She called the police and I was arrested]. And in the report it says that she was afraid . . .

Her attempt to return home for fulfillment of her basic needs created conflict with her family and resulted in her mother calling the police. Diana made a calculated risk in the face of limited options to deal with this conflict with her mother.

Jackie, Diana, and Payasa all discussed a key component of being on the run. For young people with a probation violation and an arrest warrant, returning to places like home and school was not an option. Jackie and Payasa discuss how they avoided school to avoid being "caught up" or arrested for attempting to attend class. Indeed, Diana's excerpt demonstrates the dangers of attempting to return home after being on the run. Simply returning home for a shower and clothes resulted in a fight with her mother, a probation violation, a new criminal charge, and a return to El Valle.

While these excerpts focus on avoiding school and home, the young people in this research also used the same rationale for avoiding any institutions where there was the potential of encountering a law enforcement agent or an adult who might call the authorities. Payasa, for example, had been arrested 19 times and most of these arrests were related to her being on the run. Given this, Payasa and other girls like her avoided multiple institutions like school, group homes, and community centers for fear of arrest. Even so, they missed out on potentially positive services and support. Given these circumstances, young Latina women often stayed on the run for extended periods and were exposed to multiple (and constant) forms of gendered violence.

## Negotiating the Streets

Once young women went on the run, they were forced to make a slew of difficult choices related to finding shelter. Finding somewhere to stay was by far one of the most dangerous activities to negotiate for young women while on the run. Finding shelter presented various barriers and exposed these young women to physical,

psychological, and sexual violence. This part of being on the run also included the constant negotiation of their relationships with men and the threat of being sexually assaulted, which is commonplace for young women when contrasted to the experiences of young men. For most young women, the first step to finding somewhere to stay was getting a ride. Getting a ride for these young women was important, but difficult.

Given the general urban sprawl that is found in southern California, mass transit was often inaccessible for the young women in this study. Thus, they depended on partners, former romantic partners, friends, or acquaintances to pick them up after leaving their place of residence. Having a fast and semidependable ride made the difference between being arrested or avoiding the authorities. While youth often depended on these individuals to help pick them up, these acquaintances were usually unreliable or did not have access to their own transportation. The girls in our study reported waiting hours for a ride, having their partners steal a car to pick them up, or being told, "No, I won't pick you up." Given the general unreliability of people in their lives and their lack of family ties, the young women often attempted to randomly find a ride. This often included flagging down cars often driven by men.

Sandra, a 15-year-old, third-generation Latina, discussed the process of getting a ride below:

> I ran away with my homegirl [friend] and we ran onto the freeway. She was wearing nice clothes so she was trying to get a ride [waving her arms] . . . so we finally got a ride [to another city] from him and she told the guy "if you take us home we will give you weed" and she gave him a sack of weed and her number [in case] she needed another ride.

For young women like Sandra, the simple act of finding a ride to a friend's house or to another city can be complicated. Young women who could not find a ride were often forced to choose between staying somewhere unsafe, facing the threat of sexual assault, getting arrested, or attempting to flag random cars. They often targeted cars driven by men and attempted to use their sexuality to negotiate a ride. Sandra and her friend made the extreme choice of jumping on a busy interstate freeway to find a ride to a city 40 miles away. The promise of marijuana and alcohol satisfied the person who gave them a ride. However, young women also exchanged various forms of sexual contact or the promise of sex to acquire transportation.

In these examples, we can begin to see how gender, a historically segregated Latino community with little resources, and constant police surveillance interact to structure the experiences of young Latinas on the run in distinct and more challenging ways compared with those of young men. Moreover, the experiences of these Latina women differ from other delinquent girls, whose structural locations vary and whose communities may have better transportation, infrastructure, and resources, such as community centers, shelters, and outreach agencies. Getting a ride also exposed young women to potential sexual violence. Once youth relocated to somewhere safe from detection by authorities, they then had the difficult task of finding somewhere to stay. Most of the young people in this study attempted to stay with friends, distant family members, or

a romantic partner. Initially, staying with friends worked well. Girls found a safe haven and were able to reduce their potential contacts with the criminal justice system by staying indoors. While these arrangements worked initially, they did not last long. Often, the young women in this study started drinking and consuming drugs in excess. This led to fights with their friends or partners and an increasingly chaotic living situation. Substance abuse and "partying" attracted older men with questionable motives to girls' new homes. Substance abuse also contributed to increasingly abusive treatment from romantic partners. This dynamic provoked fear and anxiety for girls about their vulnerability to sexual assault or being coerced into an unwanted relationship. For example, 18-year-old Maribel describes staying with a friend while on the run:

> I was like 15 and a half. I was living with my friend Alex. We had our own studio pretty much because her mom was the manager [of an apartment complex], so her mom wouldn't care if we had parties every night. And she [Alex] met this guys that lived across the way from us. He was like 30 something years old, and they started dating, and he moved in with us, and he introduced us to meth. And we were just sitting like in the apartment there and he wouldn't let us go anywhere, he wouldn't let us like talk to anybody. He just had us trapped in there and like you know controlled us with drugs and stuff. I kinda freaked out cause I realized what was happening and I just left. I didn't know where to go. I was homeless . . . I was homeless. My mom didn't want me back either.

The process that Maribel describes is a common one for young women on the run. Sandra provides another instance of the challenges of staying with friends. She, like other youth in the study, began staying with a friend (and former romantic partner) as well as his mother.

Sandra started dating her friend again and began a regular sexual relationship. At first things worked well, but then they started smoking methamphetamine and marijuana. Her partner also started using heroin. She recounts one vivid incident with her partner:

> Well, I went to [my] friend's house for a while, but he's like worse than [I expected]. He was like, "Here is sack [of meth] smoke. Smoke your life away." He's all smoked out too . . . all heroined out, he was just gone. [And I wanted to go] but . . . he's like, "You can't leave, you can't leave!" And I was like, "Ok, yes I can." He's like, "No, no, you can't!" And then he's like, "If you leave just watch what happens."

From the interview with Sandra, it was not clear if her partner initially coerced her into the relationship. When she attempted to leave, her partner refused to let her go and threatened physical violence. This was exacerbated by this man's status: He was older and a well-connected drug dealer in the community. Given her warrant and status on the run, Sandra could not reach out to law enforcement for help without being taken into custody.

Youth often attempted to stay with female friends (often other young women) because they felt this would provide a relatively safe place and reduce their likelihood

of experiencing sexual violence. Despite this, similar issues related to drug use; attraction of older, abusive men to the home; and the potential for sexual victimization still occurred. Given this, young woman sometimes chose to stay and temporarily exchange sex for drugs and shelter. Most of them eventually tired of the arrangement fled and attempted to live on the streets. While young women attempted to avoid this pattern and these situations by moving to different friends' houses, the outcome was usually the same. Sandra, like Maribel, eventually left and attempted to negotiate the streets of El Valle.

## Living on the Streets

For the most part, living on the streets was the last option for young women on the run, as it exposed them to multiple forms of gendered interpersonal violence. When on the streets, they slept under bridges, at bus stops, in abandoned buildings, or simply walked all night. Other young people found a family member who would let them live in a shed, storage room, or in a hidden area at their places of employment. These acquaintances allowed them to temporarily use their spaces, but they did not provide food, clothing, or any type of economic support. Simultaneously, young women noted how their drug consumption increased and getting drugs became the focal point of their lives. Living on the streets with no money often led young women to participate in petty theft, trade sex for drugs or money, or sell drugs. All 17 youth mentioned the fear of being sexually assaulted as a constant part of their realities on the run. The fear of sexual assault on the street is a unique gendered nuance of our participants' experiences and their attempts to avoid arrest.

A small number of young women were pushed or recruited into sex work. Amber, age 18, initially went on the run when her mother kicked her out of the house. She describes how she decided to participate in sex work:

> Amber: Cuando me corrieron de la house [when they kicked me out of the house] . . . desde allí [since then] I got my own little job. I became independent . . .
> I: What did you do?
> Amber: Let me ask you. Tú que harías en la calle? Como Chicana? Cuando no tienes comida? [What would you do on the streets? Being a Chicana? When you don't have food?] Let's say you have an interview. You can go to the interview and see if they might hire you? . . . Or are you going to go to the homie that says "I can help you make $2,000 right now."? You take the 2,000 because it's a sure thing . . . I would say gracias a dios [thank God] after every job (sex work) I did because it would give me food and a room to stay in. But sometimes I am not sure if He [God] will forgive me for some of the things I did . . . porque I could not do them sober . . .

Amber provides a very detailed description of her decision to participate in survival sex when on the run, which were typical negotiations for such young women in our study. Survival sex has been used to describe the behavior of women who exchange

sex for money, drugs, or shelter as a means of daily survival (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013). She poignantly discusses how the possibility of an interview for a formal job is unrealistic when faced with her immediate material needs. From her point of view, participating in sex work was one of only a few ways to become independent and self-sufficient.

Young women on the run also face the possibility of being forced into sex work. As 15-year-old Rasta, kidnapped and trafficked, commented about her experiences,

> I started selling dope and I met this . . . older guy . . . I smoked with him like an idiot and I was too high and we went to his motel room . . . I didn't even know I was locked up till [I woke up] like 5 days later. I had bruises up and down on me, had scabs on my head from being hit with brass knuckles . . . I was like in a bathroom for 6 weeks straight. I couldn't sleep. I was too fucken high to do anything. They [pimp] shot me up [with heroin] and wanted to prostitute me on the streets of the city. For 3 months, I wasn't a person anymore.

Rasta provides an extreme example of the gendered dangers of being on the run. It is important to note that Rasta is not Latina, although she is similarly situated. Her low socioeconomic status, outstanding warrants (carceral status), and the fact that she lived in El Valle meant that she faced some of the same legal, socioeconomic, and gender-specific challenges as Latinas in trying to avoid arrest. Rasta is one of only a handful of young women in our study to be forced into sex work. However, the commercial sexual exploitation of girls and young women is a burgeoning problem within the United States, often disproportionately affecting girls of color (Bergquist, 2015; Kotrla, 2010; Rafferty, 2016).

On average, the young women in this study were on the run between 1 and 6 months before turning themselves into authorities. Young women in this study eventually turned themselves in instead of enduring the multiple gender, socioeconomic and racialized challenges of being on the run, as well as the constant emotional stress and fear related to their strategies, negotiations, and victimization experiences. A smaller number of young people were caught and arrested in the community for minor offenses like petty theft, breaking, and entering or were picked up for soliciting or returning home. Even smaller numbers were arrested for fighting. While initially these young people went on the run to avoid being arrested, they often realized that being detained was substantially "easier" than enduring the run.

Additionally, many of these young women discussed wanting to "move on" and start "new lives"; they often could not. With a warrant they could not pass a background check for employment in the formal sector, nor could they enroll in community college or secure safe housing. Girls in the study could not secure a state identification card. In other words, they cannot work in the formal sector because of their criminal histories and probation status, and they cannot go home (or to a group home) because of this same status. Paradoxically, their negotiation of this dilemma and their choice to go on the run and avoid the justice system all but guaranteed their arrest and continued involvement with this institution.

## Conclusion

In this article, we interrogated how racial, cultural, gender, and neighborhood differences shape the lives of Latinas on the run and the various decision-making and survival strategies they employed. The young women in this study negotiated the ever-expanding "legal entanglements" of being on probation. The recent research on Black men on the run (and the polemical backlash) provided us with the building blocks for understanding how young Latinas experience criminalization in their respective neighborhood. We expanded on Goffman's work by focusing on the unique and understudied experiences of young Latinas who attempted to avoid capture and detention within a working-class Latino barrio in southern California, a community wrought with drug and sex trafficking, economic hardship, and increased police surveillance.

This article highlighted how the experiences of young women on the run are shaped by intersecting structural limitations and opportunities. They were often kicked out of their homes for violating culturally prescribed expectations for Latina women and then encountered multiple gendered challenges when attempting to find transportation after fleeing their homes. Once on the street, they also had to negotiate interpersonal forms of violence while attempting to avoid authorities and to find a safe space to stay. For young women, unlike men, the threat of sexual violence is a commonplace occurrence while on the run. We inform current research in this area by demonstrating how young women engage in a complex cost-benefit analysis before deciding to go on the run. This finding is significant given the young age of these youth and the short window of time they had to make this potentially life-altering decision.

Young Latinas' experiences were shaped by El Valle's lack of resources and its segregated legacy. Their unique standpoint allows us to see how gender, a historically segregated Latino community, and the constant threat police and probation presence made the experiences of Latinas on the run recognizably different from those of men. This article also shows how institutions, like schools and group homes, preemptively punish young people but do not offer a safe alternative to living on the streets. Furthermore, young Latinas who turn themselves in often receive little to no services for their experienced trauma on the run. When young Latinas are finally released from detention, criminal justice authorities regularly return them to the same living situations that pushed them to go on the run in the first place, thus, exacerbating a vicious cycle (Flores, 2016).

Latinas who are on the run engage in contentious resistance aimed at institutions and agents of social control (police and probation officers), who pose threats of continued subjugation, criminalization, and incarceration, particularly of people of color. The young Latinas in our study described a process consisting of a neighborhood and interlocking institutions like family, schools, group homes, and police that punish young people and offer little to no rehabilitative services. Added surveillance makes these young women additionally vulnerable and functionally enables external state forces to readily intervene in their lives more.

This finding is unique compared with other works related to individuals on the run. For example, Goffman (2009, 2014) argues that being a fugitive can serve as an excuse for persons to deny accountability for obligations that may have gone unfulfilled anyway. She also argues that within the context of limited opportunity and hyper surveillance, you have an " . . . interactive system in which ghetto residents become caught in constraining legal entanglements while simultaneously calling on the criminal justice system to achieve a measure of power over one another in their daily lives" (Goffman, 2009, p. 340). For our study, this was not a part of young women's experiences with the juvenile justice system. In other words, the juvenile justice system did not transform their lives, but continued to work against this subaltern community (see Muniz, 2014). Those who are on the run will continue to engage in contentious resistance by fleeing the same institutions that punish them and continue to subjugate, hypercriminalize, and incarcerate people of color, like the Latinas, in our study.

There are a few key limitations in this work. First, we focused on a small group of young women in one specific location. Although significant, this qualitative study is not generalizable to all young women or all Latina women. Further study on intersectional identities with Latina experiences such as transgender, queer, and an analysis that includes migration status would be key. The additional structures connected to these groups are likely to significantly shape the experience and circumstances of being on the run. Specific focus on these might tease out more nuanced distinctions and descriptive data to better understand and address the vulnerabilities and needs of young Latina women "on the run" as a group.

Several policy and practice implications should be considered in response to these findings. Young women need to fulfill their basic needs without the fear of criminal punishment. Having somewhere to stay is extremely important for young women (Dietrich, 1998). This study notes that when they are on the run, circumstances devolve for them quickly. Young women need safe space in the community for emergency shelter and other basic need fulfillment. Given the gendered dangers our participants experience, they should also have access to dependable and free transportation to find and access resources such as shelter, social networks, and support. Finally, an outreach worker who develops contacts with young Latina women on the streets is an ideal resource to direct young women to community resources. Researchers, teachers, parents, and criminal justice practitioners need to find ways to positively intervene in the lives of young women. Collectively, we need to decriminalize survival strategies and mobilize resources for marginalized communities, like El Valle, to be successful.

As we have detailed, young women are often caught in the disciplinary forces of various institutions. Emergency caseworkers should avoid integration strategies to put youth back into the institutions such as school or family that contributed to their instability. The focus of such efforts should be to provide interventions at critical moments such as transitions and provide resources to establish their safe independence when appropriate. Ideally these caseworkers can provide social and legal services for young women during their time on the run to alleviate the immediate crises and move toward stabilizing and accessing support networks while disrupting the cycle of criminalization that can further endanger young women. Young Latina

women need resources to manage the constellation of interlocking pressures on their own terms within their own contexts.

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Jerry Flores is now affiliated with Sociology Department, University of Toronto, Tronto.

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## Notes

1. California uses Youth Authority detention centers to house the other 3% of youth who commit more serious crimes or who did poorly in local detention centers. These Youth Authority centers are directly controlled by the state.
2. This and all names used in this article are pseudonyms. Individual research participants chose their pseudonyms.
3. Saturation point occurs when no new or relevant information emerges. This is characterized by the same patterns of information emerging in your data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).
4. This indicates the veracity and strong internal reliability of our data, but is not a claim to generalize to a broader population of Latinas. This subset might indicate larger patterns for further research.

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