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“Roses have thorns for a reason”: The promises and perils of critical youth participatory research with system-impacted girls of Color

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Abstract

Scholarship on girlhood—especially for girls of Color—is often relegated to studying risk and emphasizing individual deficits over humanizing girls and centering their voices. This approach to generating scholarship renders oppressive systems and processes invisible from inquiry and unaddressed by practice, with particularly insidious consequences for youth in the legal system. Critical youth participatory action research (YPAR) is acknowledged as an antidote to these conceptualizations because it resists deficit-oriented narratives circling systems-impacted youth by inviting them to the knowledge-generating table. In this paper, we present an empirical analysis of the promises and perils that emerged as we conducted a year-long critical YPAR project alongside five system-impacted girls of Color. Our thematic analysis of process notes (30 meetings, 120 h) documents the stories posited by girls, in a democratized space, about the injustices of interconnected institutions, and unearths a complicated tension for both youth and adult coresearchers around the promises and perils of engaging in YPAR within the academy. These findings underscore the importance of using intersectional, collaborative research to challenge perceptions around how we legitimize knowledge. We describe lessons learned in conducting YPAR in academic settings and highlight recommendations to grow youth–adult partnerships within oppressive systems to share power.

Keywords

gender; girls; intersectionality; juvenile legal/justice system; liberation psychology; youth/adolescence; YPAR

INTRODUCTION

Participatory action research (PAR) was originated and touted by Black feminist and indigenous scholars as an indispensable approach to understanding and addressing social issues. Recent sociopolitical tides have influenced funders, academic researchers, and

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

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state and federal systems to engage in participatory scholarship with more frequency and urgency (Fox et al., 2010; Guerrero et al., 2013). Young people are often included in this participatory vision, especially when their experiences are rendered invisible or unworthy of inquiry by oppressive systems (Torre et al., 2012).

Critical youth participatory action research (YPAR) is an epistemology, or theory of knowing, that uproots the logic of traditional academic research. Namely, that existing power hierarchies between researcher and “researched” are necessary; that the history of science and research institutions are irrelevant or neutral; and that objective aims protect scientific findings from being used in service of oppression or domination. Critical YPAR may be an antidote to these imperial logics because it aims to build democratic and collective knowledge, recognize power and oppressive structures, and engage in ethical problem solving to counterbalance traditional research approaches and the narratives they generate (Fine et al., 2003; Lewin, 1951; Martín-Baró & Martín-Baró, 1994). The intentional and reflective practice of critical YPAR brings together partial knowledge from traditionally credentialed university-based researchers and from those directly impacted by systemic inequity, often towards transformative action positioned to spotlight and dismantle oppressive structures (Fine & Torre, 2021). As such, critical YPAR leverages a multitude of research methodologies to generate and legitimize what we know about social problems, how we come to this knowledge, and through whose lens we understand their emergence, evolution, and transformation (Aldana et al., 2021; Teixeira et al., 2021).

University (or campus)–community partnerships represent a popular vehicle through which YPAR projects are implemented, especially when legitimizing the knowledge of marginalized youth is a primary goal. In fact, such partnerships are increasingly required for competitive funding, serve the “public good” goals of universities, are the bedrock of engagement and training opportunities for undergraduate and graduate student trainees, and can open doors to launch and sustain partnerships that position universities toward a public science agenda with transformative aims (Sarason, 1981). Despite the implied importance of the university as a setting in this partnership, scholarship rarely holds a mirror to the academy as an institution with its own particular set of norms and logics that may or may not be aligned with critical YPAR. Increased demand and implementation of YPAR via university-centered partnerships require a direct interrogation of the promises and perils of engaging in YPAR within academic spaces; where YPAR requires and centers the dismantling of oppressive structures, while the academy may instantiate oppression in so far as it operates through the logic of coloniality. Moreover, we argue that the academy is an important context of interrogation because it sets epistemological norms and can uphold myths around researcher objectivity and neutrality (Aldana & Richards-Schuster, 2021; Bertrand, et al., 2017; Bowleg, 2008), and provides a blueprint that defines the scope and limits of inquiry by legitimizing certain voices and ways of knowing over others.

We focus on YPAR with *systems-impacted girls* of Color* (henceforth girls), a term we use inclusively to include cis, trans, and gender nonconforming (GNC) youth who identify with one or more racial and ethnic identities oppressed by carceral systems— Black, Latina, and Indigenous—and who are processed through the female side of the juvenile legal system. These girls experience the broken logics undergirding multiple social institutions. Critical

logical paradoxes include all youth are promised the right to a free public education, yet Black, Latine, and Indigenous girls are disproportionately stripped of this right (Morris, 2016). Once in the juvenile legal system, stakeholders, practitioners, and researchers alike consistently designate 90% + of girls as trauma survivors who were victims of invalidating and unsafe contexts (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013). Yet, the system does not allow youth to be both victims and offenders, so survivors are labeled offenders to justify the ability of the court to (over)step in to protect youth who cannot protect themselves (e.g., as part of *parens patriae*; Rendleman, 1971). Further, the tools of the courts rely on compliance over humanization; respectability over dignity; and blame narratives over agency (Jumarali et al., 2019).

In this paper, we share the themes that emerged from a year-long YPAR project in collaboration with system-impacted girls. We use systematic observational methods to document this experience dynamically and with attention to process. Our overarching goal was to shift the research gaze from those that have traditionally been subjects of research, toward the oppressive structures surrounding them and, in so doing, cocreate counternarratives about systems-impacted girls in direct dialogue with systems-impacted girls. As our YPAR project unfolded, we encountered challenges and opportunities rooted in the logic of the academic setting in which our project was implemented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participatory research has increased over the last 20 years, and recent reviews identify patterns within the literature (e.g., Ozer et al., 2020), including cautions about the “unfulfilled promises of PAR” alongside best practices for conducting critical YPAR. These range from advice on actively resisting paternalism and sharing power (Aldana & Richards-Schuster, 2021), exercises on how to build teams and approach conflict with humility (Fine & Torre, 2021), considerations of researcher responsibilities (Banales et al., in press), and strategies to link lived and local knowledge to the macrostructures that produce oppression (Cahill, 2006; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). An additional characteristic of this scholarship is the focus *on* YPAR’s impact on young people rather than the structures in which YPAR emerges (Anyon et al., 2018). For example, youth outcomes described by YPAR literature focus on cues of leadership and agency generated from qualitative content. While important, reliance on the impact of PAR on youth runs the unintended risk of promoting “moral goodness” for academics but may shift PAR into an intervention *on* young people instead of a collaboration *with youth* to subject systems to the research gaze (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Despite its central role in myriad PAR projects, an examination of the structure and function of the academy in facilitating (or obstructing) the goals of critical YPAR is notably absent from this literature.

True to its intention in inviting the participation of marginalized youth, YPAR has been consistently practiced with young people experiencing structural oppressions (e.g., LGBTQ youth of Color) (Aldana et al., 2021; Frost et al., 2019; Stoudt et al., 2019). However, a key group of youth—system-impacted adolescent girls—have been more rarely engaged despite their experience of intersectional (race, gender, sexual orientation, class) and institutional (concentrated poverty, school push out, child welfare involvement) oppression

(Morris, 2016; Schaffner, 2006; Sherman & Balck, 2015). Recent scholarship implicates educational contexts as key contributors to girls' involvement in carceral systems (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016). Despite an increase in the number of scholars who seek to understand how girls' intersecting identities impact their criminalization, there is a need to shift this gaze from the individual identities of girls who are system involved (and the subsequent consumption of stories), to the intersecting and oppressive systems that drive the institutional criminalization of girls of Color (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013; Singh et al., 2021). The academy, as one institution which is responsible and revered for the generation of knowledge about girls, represents a system that is ripe for interrogation as a setting in which YPAR can be engaged, for better or for worse.

Despite being relatively absent from the YPAR literature, we contend that system-impacted girls are needed partners for systems-change endeavors. As individuals who navigate complex and oppressive systems, girls have cultivated sharp imaginations and critical strategies—much like the “thorns” of roses—for resisting that are critical for YPAR but often viewed as maladaptive within the literature. As they have come to know the world through experiencing multisystem failures, they are well-equipped to meet critical YPAR's ability to excavate and advance structural solutions to such failures. Even when system-impacted girls employ a person-centered lens or invoke individual blame attributions to analyze the world and broader social issues (Anderson et al., 2021), critical YPAR can bridge partial knowledge (Javdani et al., 2017) and generate “just research in contentious times” (Fine, 2018). This promise is exemplified by two recent examples that center the experiences of system-impacted girls using participatory approaches. In one, incarcerated girls' recommendations to change the detention center they are confined in are advanced through an advisory board (Reed et al., 2021). These recommendations focus on accessing basic resources and support that a system designed for boys was not built to foster. In the second, participatory interviewing is used by a youth-led organization (the Young Women's Freedom Center) to uncover the oppressive pathways that bring girls into system-contact (e.g., survival crimes, over-policing), and to recommend structural solutions to disrupt them (e.g., decriminalizing technical violations) (see ywfc.org).

PRESENT STUDY

Despite YPAR's “just” potential, academic institutions have a longstanding history reifying and justifying the very systems and injustices they seek to address (L. T. Smith, 2013). In this paper, we describe, reflect on, and examine a critical YPAR project engaged with system-impacted girls of Color within a research-intensive university setting. We use the tools of the academy—of research, of systematic observation—to delineate and reflect on this critical YPAR experience to lay the logic of the academy bare. Specifically, we examine ourselves as an extension of the academy (insiders) and strive to understand the promises and perils of conducting critical YPAR in academic spaces, and to describe the paradoxes, tensions, and structural barriers (both within the academy and the legal system) faced by the YPAR collective. As such, this paper describes the structural challenges faced by the critical YPAR team in being able to facilitate transformative change, documents how the team navigated some of these challenges, and advances structural recommendations for university-based YPAR.

ROSEBUDS VISIONARY SCIENTISTS PARTICIPANTS, DESIGN, AND STRUCTURE

The YPAR project described in this paper, called the ROSEbuds Visionary Scientist Project (RVSP), was launched in partnership with the CUNY Public Science Project as both an ethical and an analytic response to the larger randomized control trial it was situated within (Javdani et al., 2017). This larger study, called ROSES (Resilience, Opportunity, Safety, Education, and Strength), experimentally evaluated a community-based advocacy program for system-impacted girls through a university–community partnership (for full details see Javdani, 2021; Javdani & Allen, 2016). Girls were eligible for ROSES if they were between the ages of 11 and 17 and had current or past involvement in the legal system (juvenile justice, child welfare, family courts, police contact). Among the 253 girls enrolled in ROSES (mean age 14 years), all self-identified as youth of Color (45% Latina, 42% Black) and 78% were living in urban poverty (Javdani, 2021). RVSP used participatory epistemology (Fine et al., 2003; Javdani et al., 2017; Torre et al., 2012) to invite girls enrolled in ROSES as coresearchers on a team striving to decolonize research and researcher training to study the impact of ROSES (Singh et al., 2018).

Researcher positionalities

A total of five young women, all people of Color, participated as youth coresearchers on the RVSP. Two were mothers and all had previously experienced legal-system involvement/police contact (an experience shared by half of the seven adult coresearchers). Adult, university coresearchers each arrived at RVSP with a collection of lived experiences as racialized, immigrant-origin, women of Color (first, second, and last author) and White (third author) women committed to research advancing structural solutions to social injustices. All authors had also engaged with youth directly through the larger ROSES program, one through facilitating direct service advocacy, two through community-based data collection, and one in both roles.

We recognize that for most of us (first, second, and last author) our entry, accumulated privilege and legitimacy in the academy juxtaposed with our shared experiences of oppression positions us simultaneously as insider/outside in academia. We see our presence in the academy as the result of a long history of others who embodied similar intersections and negotiated the tensions of being at the borderlands of belonging (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bowleg, 2008). Some of our past work has resisted the myth of researcher and methods neutrality (the researcher as the apolitical academic insider), and we endeavored to create RVSP as a way to negotiate ethical paradoxes inherent in community-based, experimental research (Javdani et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2018). During meetings we routinely discussed our individual and institutional positionalities as part of the process of cultivating a collective critical consciousness. Central to our collective reflection were the connections drawn from the personal to the professional to the political. For the first author, this involved integrating her multiple intersecting identities as a Black, immigrant woman, and doctoral student, with her professional role as lead ROSES advocacy supervisor. Before her current positionality of accumulated educational privilege, she had, as a young person, lived experience of pervasive police surveillance, insecure housing, community violence in

disenfranchised neighborhoods, and poverty; the same experiences shared by the girls whose interventions she supervised. However, as a lead interventionist on ROSES and a doctoral fellow, she experienced respect and authority as she met with key people in girls' lives (probation officers, parents, and educators); a stark contrast to her experience with adults in these same roles when she was an adolescent. This seat positions her at the borderlands of legitimacy and continued race- and gender-oppression, and pushes her to cultivate spaces of transformative practice, research, and action.

Youth and adult coresearcher collective

Youth coresearchers were eligible for the YPAR project if they had been randomly assigned to the ROSES advocacy intervention (so they could draw from these experiences to evaluate ROSES), had completed the research component of the study so they would not be considered research participants, and expressed interest and ability to participate in YPAR group meetings. Before RVSP's launch, ~100 girls met eligibility criteria, and were informed about RVSP by the advocacy team. About 12 girls expressed a strong interest in YPAR and 5 youth coresearchers were formally recruited into the project, each of whom had already worked with a ROSES advocate for 110–200 h. The other seven girls were not able to participate in YPAR due to structural barriers and time demands. Our goal was to leverage and expand the humanizing relationships built with young people through ROSES advocacy and invite them to the knowledge-generating table of the academy (see Javdani et al., 2017).

A total of seven adult women and one man comprised the university-based research team, and were invited based on a sustained commitment to ROSES, an abolition-based value stance, and capacity to dedicate flexible time to the project. Adult coresearchers supported curriculum design, implementation, and facilitation of meetings. RVSP convened between September 2018 and May 2019, with an average of three adult coresearchers present with one dedicated to observation.

Infrastructure and curriculum

Adult coresearchers took a number of steps to democratize the research process and reduce systemic barriers that could arise as a result of hosting this project within a research-intensive university. This involved procuring funding for a biweekly youth stipend (~\$200–\$300) for 10 h of participation, transportation costs, food, space, technology, and security permissions.

Before the launch of the RVSP, the adult researchers held several meetings to understand and outline processes and activities to structure weekly YPAR meetings. Our aims were to provide enough structure to build a collective identity as a research team and foster engagement, provide scaffolding and content knowledge to foster the ability to engage in secondary analysis on ROSES data, while also providing adequate flexibility to foster youth agency around democratically chosen goals and ideas. Informed by recommendations from other critical YPAR projects (Cahill, 2006; L. Smith et al., 2018), we drafted semistructured weekly agendas aimed at facilitating and generating initial conversations to codevelop RVSP goals, and share first- and second-hand knowledge of what it means to be girls/women of Color at the nexus of interlocking, oppressive structures as well as our collective motivations

for joining RVSP. Each week's agenda was intended to respond to and build on the prior week, reflecting an iterative and cogenerative group process beginning with check-ins (highs and lows, reading of each researcher's personal reflections/journals), followed by emergent group activities, and wrap-up. Each session began with meal sharing, playing with children (often), and informal conversations and check-ins. Following this, adult coresearchers shared ideas for the day's agenda and activities with young people and invited their proposed changes or additions. These activities included building group rapport, collective review and debate of the measures used in the ROSES study with aspiration to identify girls' emerging research questions, and discussion of current scientific knowledge around system-impacted girls. Activities had the explicit goal of developing a shared critical reflection and action agenda to understand and challenge inequities in the legal system.

RVSP process document, observational record, and thematic coding

The first author created an observation-based documentation protocol to systematically record the RVSP collective's process and content situated within a research-intensive university. This document was our endeavor to not only document the week's activity but to also capture and reflect on the structural facilitators and barriers that emerged throughout our efforts to heal and push back against power hierarchies inside and outside the university setting. We viewed the observational tool as a living document which continually grew and refined itself; increasing in the nuance of the information collected and adhering to a radical epistemology that negotiated the analysis, production, and selection of knowledge (Fine et al., 2003; Sandwick et al., 2018). Although the RVSP process document was generated before the official start of the project and always completed by adult coresearchers, youth coresearchers were invited to support weekly documentation of the YPAR process through journaling and note taking. All youth coresearchers participated in note-taking and voluntarily shared their reflections during weekly research meetings. These verbal reflections were documented in themes as part of our process and became a critical way to include girls' thoughts and reflections systematically without access to their private journals.

The RVSP process document was completed each session by an adult coresearcher (first and third authors) who systematically described the content and processes of each meeting, provided their situated reflections, and documented processes across three domains. These categories sought to capture a variety of different processes and ideas across multiple levels of analysis. The first is the *Individual level*. This category documented the individual comments and actions of coresearchers, focusing on what girls said, how they navigated the space and responded to the content for that day, and the observable emotions shared and nonverbally expressed by youth and adults. Included here were "markers of engagement" with attention to power differences reinforced by the university setting, such as verbal participation (i.e., specific questions and comments raised by youth), nonverbal expressions (i.e., journaling, writing, creative drawing), and individual logistical challenges to engagement such as leaving homework at home. The second category is the *Interpersonal/Group level*. Here, we recorded how the coresearchers collaborated and managed interpersonal opportunities or tensions during group meetings (e.g., when coresearchers agreed or disagreed). This category captured our attempts to reduce hierarchical differences and encourage mutual leadership and participation. We

also noted group effort towards childcare, and ruptures due to traditional knowledge transference. The last category of analysis is the *Setting level*. This category captured critical reflections about the broader social settings in which the work of RVSP is located, including opportunities to leverage the partnership between RVSP, the academy, and the broader community. We also documented barriers and challenges accessing the university space and resources to counter deficit-oriented frameworks that view engagement as an individual character trait. Process notes also included researcher reflections documenting power negotiations inside and outside of the YPAR meetings, key turning points, and cogenerated content knowledge about system-impacted communities. In total, the RVSP met for approximately 30 weeks for about 120 h. Approximately 5 of the 30 meeting weeks did not produce process notes (e.g., initial meeting; watching documentaries). Data for this paper therefore include 25 observations encompassing 75 pages of text.

Coding of the YPAR process documents followed an iterative, open, thematic coding approach led by the first and third authors (Gibbs, 2007) and guided by the aforementioned domains of observation. In the initial review of the available RVSP notes, all adult coresearchers aimed to understand and document the common threads of each category, such as the processes “in the room” as the team worked together, the ways in which the positionalities of youth and adult coresearchers shaped each meeting, and the structural facilitators and barriers to implementing the goals generated by YPAR. Specifically, the first author systematically coded the first 3 weeks of RVSP process notes and generated the initial codes. We then established a common understanding and implementation of the codes for all remaining process documents and met consistently to reconcile differences. This process was utilized until high (above 95%) inter-rater reliability was reached between the first and third authors, which were audited by the last author, in keeping with consensual qualitative methods (Hill, 2012). Upon completing the coding for all YPAR process documents, all adult coresearchers met to discuss these codes and generated two overarching themes and eight subthemes around the promises and perils of engaging in YPAR with system-impacted girls in academic spaces.

FINDINGS

The promises of YPAR engaged in the academy with system-impacted girls (Table 1A)

“Keys” to the academy: leveraging institutional legitimacy for care and protection—All youth coresearchers experienced subtle or overt negative messages around belonging within their schools, and association with the university provided academic legitimacy. This legitimacy was accompanied by access: access to a university ID, access to email and library resources, and prescribed narratives of worth. Though the process to obtain university IDs was initiated by adult coresearchers when youth coresearchers agreed to participate in the project, as they did not fit into typical employee or volunteer roles recognized by the university, the process was delayed. As such, before obtaining university IDs, youth coresearchers were questioned by campus security—an implicit signal that they did not belong in the space. As a short-term solution, youth coresearchers had to be escorted by adult coresearchers from the lobby to the RVSP space each week. This not only robbed youth of some of their autonomy but contributed to RVSP sessions starting later than

expected. The long-term solution, obtaining IDs, was initiated by adult coresearchers and endorsed by youth. However, this proved to be a time-consuming bureaucratic process, requiring trips to multiple buildings/offices on campus and frequent clarification of roles (as we had not utilized traditional routes to “involve girls in science” typical of legitimized girls* STEM program).

After obtaining university IDs, youth coresearchers expressed bittersweet excitement. One youth in particular shared an example where, in her community, she utilized her position as a coresearcher to intervene in a police interaction directed toward young people. “M” expressed pride at being able to de-escalate the police contact when she showed her university ID and was treated with dignity when inquiring a person of authority “what’s going on,” M stated, “For someone like me, in that community, to have a [university] ID, people look at you different.” This ID highlighted assumptions of worth and privilege; acting as a shield while highlighting the disregard of police for girls of Color.

The university ID also highlighted the inequitable access to technology and experiential activities for system-impacted youth. University computer labs, where secondary data analysis was conducted, were only accessible (physically and through having sign-in credentials) by having institutional credentials. Additionally, our project was frequently welcomed to off-campus spaces upon learning that RVSP was a university-supported research team; a luxury not afforded to system-impacted youth without institutional or academic legitimacy.

Redefining engagement and sharing responsibility—Adult coresearchers leveraged the flexibility of the higher education setting and our positions of power within it to promote multiple ways of engagement to meet youth needs. Living within a segregated city, one inevitable tension was lateness/not being able to attend sessions by youth coresearchers. Initially, under time and funding pressures, adult coresearchers shifted from collaborators into leadership positions in an effort to curb lateness/absence despite recognizing the impracticality of urban commuting. Commuting to the university site was onerous for youth, particularly during inclement weather and when coming from poorer, more distant neighborhoods where mass transportation is less reliable. Coupled with other responsibilities in their lives, many would arrive after the agreed upon start time or sessions would be canceled. The adult coresearchers noticed their own frustrations and that their initial ideas to address this tension were individually and behaviorally focused. One such solution was to not distribute youth stipends when sessions were canceled to promote accountability and reward attendance. This response risks reinforcing the hierarchies of traditional education settings and the authority of adults (Nygren et al., 2006).

Recognizing how this approach aligned with the oversurveillance of system-impacted girls, we shifted our approach from behaviorally oriented, “progress” focused processes to one of acceptance, kindness, and a shift toward structural solutions. This involved shifting from passively “waiting” for youth to arrive to embracing informal time to connect (e.g., *while waiting, we just chilled, we caught up, were watching music videos*). The group also acknowledged the power differentials inherent in “who gets to be late” while also generating structural solutions like *starting later in the day*. This cultivated a spirit of respect for

others’ time and legitimized invisible demands and barriers. In turn, this allowed for open dialogue acknowledging that traditional academic spaces often require high performativity from youth. Instead, we emphasized that there were many ways to “show up” and the group had the power to define and refine these (e.g., using nonverbal expressions, speaking up without raising hands, journaling about topics whether or not they attended that week, using whatever language they wanted). Later in the project, adult coresearchers proposed more action-oriented meetings and outings in more local-to-youth community settings which resulted in increased on-time attendance. Emphasizing girls’ rights to choose when and how they engaged allowed the collective to bloom over time, and underscored that we are not owed performance or stories from girls who collaborate with us:

...while both [youth co-researchers] were more quiet initially, as more data was [analyzed]... both began to speak more to their experiences/curiosities....they knew to connect to data, and then would support each other/build off each other by adding to the content based on what the other was saying (if A first provided an example connecting life to data, M would speak next carrying forward A’s point, with her own anecdote)—this happened [many times].

As this excerpt shows, while youth coresearchers initially viewed adults as decision-makers, they eventually named their own unique contributions and recognized each other as important to the growth of the collective. This occurred through valuing multiple styles of leadership and power sharing that aligned with each researcher’s strengths, and intentionally praising multiple forms of engagement.

Humanizing mothering as part of—and central to—learning—In both the scholarship and public opinion, young, unwed mothers of Color are viewed through a stigmatizing, deficit-oriented lens (Sherman & Balck, 2015) and are excluded from spaces due to the lack of accommodations. Four of the coresearchers (including two girls) were mothers. We worked to build an environment that made space for childcare and respected mothers’ rights to actively participate. Those who were not mothers would take turns playing with the toddlers to provide rest to the mothers, who were free to come and go to manage their multiple roles.

Every researcher in RVSP had cultivated personal or professional childcare and child development experience. As mothers ourselves (second and last authors), adult coresearchers knew that a democratic forum that upheld the tenants of intersectional, praxis-grounded work demanded that our project held space for and celebrated mothering. The communication that children and childcare duties were “invited in” to the RVSP space served as a connective glue for the group. Observations documented how youth and adults seamlessly rotated between participating in discussions, playing with children, and facilitating logistics (providing meals, obtaining supplies). As our observations emerged, we understood that valuing “mothering” is less about childcare logistics and more a political stance that has deep roots in dismantling all carceral systems, given the threats to mothering that mass incarceration poses directly and through its ripple effects.

Utilizing the flexibility of the academy we legitimized the need for integration of childcare into institutions. RVSP created a shared experience centered around humanizing

“mothering,” which stood in contrast to other spaces where girls convened. Consistent with abolition feminism (Davis et al., 2022), youth linked this nurturing approach to suggest improvements to programming and policy:

M—Girls need better programs that deal with issues that are specific only to girls so that they can relate to each other and make bonds [instead of] deal[ing] with issues in isolation.

Resistance to deficit-focused narratives within popular measures—Given that the initial impetus for creating RVSP was to cogenerate knowledge about the ROSES intervention with girls, the collective examined each measure used for primary data collection in the ROSES study. Youth coresearchers highlighted how stories of girls are compressed, if not inaccurately portrayed, by statistics. Analysis of process notes showed group efforts to consistently move from one-dimensional stories to embracing personal stories as counter-narratives that pushed for nuanced conceptualizations of girls’ behavior. Our girl coresearchers were especially interested in a common type of offense—running away:

A+M focused on [the] *why*... rather than the *behaviors* themselves, for example, running away: Wouldn’t call it running away, but hanging out (without permission)...

The youth coresearchers, having taken these surveys multiple times, noted a discrepancy in the strength-focused ROSES intervention framework with the pathologizing nature of validated measures used in the study. They further note how this could contribute to ill-framed stories about girls. Youth coresearchers also pointed out that surveys were, at times, leading and presumptuous (e.g., a question in a CDC measure asks “when was the first time you smoked” versus the reframe offered by youth: “did you ever smoke”). While researchers may be pulled towards the ease of already validated measures over creating and testing the construct validity of a new survey, this eschews the critical responsibilities we have as insider–outsiders. Although our discussions about the need to highlight the stories that statistics obscure was part of our collective practice, it was the youth coresearchers who consistently troubled how existing measures rested on deficit-oriented assumptions about girls of Color.

Coconstructing a new language to tell stories hidden by academic and legal jargon—Observing YPAR also revealed the lack of common language and the overwhelming use of esoteric terms in the academy. The language utilized in both academic and the legal research and policy intentionally leaves room for interpretation at the peril of youth and their families. An important aspect of the YPAR curriculum is research methods and analysis which are deeply entrenched in academia, and adult coresearchers initially struggled to obtain sample academic and teaching materials that would be accessible to youth. Adult coresearchers initially fell into a trap of not building a shared language around research methodology. Adult coresearchers and measures utilized terms such as “socio-emotional,” “regression,” and “correlation” and the observational document revealed that youth coresearchers rarely asked for clarification of terms. Even with adult coresearchers attempting to gently assess understanding, youth coresearchers would remain quiet; we

recognized this created potential for distancing youth. As such, we shifted to descriptive terms like “link” or “connection”.

Even with this small success, adult coresearchers sought a method more aligned with the radical epistemology of YPAR. We focused on highlighting how youth coresearcher’s natural curiosity engaged them with the tenets of the scientific method. Whenever youth coresearchers engaged in a concept, such as hypothesis testing, adult coresearchers pointed this out, named it, and encouraged youth to use whichever terms were preferable to them. This curricular goal was to introduce youth to the current scholarship and to build a sense of belonging within the academy. This built youth’s confidence to unpack language and terms:

M [youth co-researcher] pulled out homework and asked what...infrastructure [is]
 M states: I had asked dad ...he said it was like bridges or railroads; SS [adult co-researcher] confirmed that’s the infrastructure of a city; other examples [are when] a room has infrastructure, like if there’s light, and how [this] impacts you or the atmosphere in the room...

The increased comfort to question language generated an opportunity to engage with the problem definitions inherent in the dominant literature about system-impacted girls. As youth delved deeper into the measures, they noted the individual blame attributions and person-centered narratives the scholarship left to be shouldered by youth and their families. One example highlights the importance of a simple yet powerful reconceptualization by an adult coresearcher: *“running away” can be contextualized as “hanging out” and not telling mom.*

Additionally, the collective challenged the term “incorrigibility” and its unfettered use with the legal system. The adult and youth coresearchers worked to select language that better captured the intricate dynamics that goes into a girl of Color leaving the home. Previously documented as “running away” we made an agreement to call this action “taking a break.” This new language better-captured girls’ self-determined motivations and also troubled the notion that police or court involvement is a needed or useful response.

Another opportunity arose in our collective ability to challenge the internalized language youth coresearchers used about system-impacted girls. Adult coresearchers attempted to strike a balance between understanding the nuances of labels used by the youth coresearchers while sharing critical reflections about why language matters. This was particularly salient during moments when, for instance, youth coresearcher asked: “how do they get the kids to cooperate? [There] are ghetto-ass kids in there, how do they control them, those that don’t care about anything”

Rather than immediately intervening, adult coresearchers recognized a potential learning opportunity for everyone in the collective. The youth coresearcher followed up with: “M responded—“[because] maybe no one’s ever cared about them before...” contextualizing her previous statement. This made room for reflection on the lack of care provided for system-impacted youth and the multiple negative labels that become internalized. Here, partial knowledge from adult and youth coresearchers merged to lift collective and critical consciousness together.

The over and under response of systems—System-impacted girls are over-monitored by systems of surveillance and punishment, yet these systems do not respect girls’ requests for safety and resources. The deficit-based and inaccurate narratives produced by academic scholarship about system-impacted girls often justify their over-surveillance while increasing the likelihood of negative police contact, mistrust, and collective community trauma (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011). Yet, the context of academic freedom within the university provides an important opportunity to engage and cultivate critical reflection about power.

[Youth co-researchers] Discussed how social media is being used ...as extra surveillance; how it’s used to net-widen and indict many people D [youth co-researcher] said she’s [known by name] by cops ...in her neighborhood ...[and] knows people too who have been indicted because of Facebook

Youth noted that police would “come into our homes when it’s convenient” but would frequently not respond when youth expressed needs for support, safety, or resources. Without care and safety, it is understandable that girls would adapt (grow thorns) to protect themselves. Youth coresearchers readily provided anecdotes of “systems not making girls safe.” One coresearcher wrote about the use of punitive responses out of police purview:

M [youth co-researcher] reads a beautifully written paragraph [stating] how they harass, put people away, ...when they could be [helping]... [responding to] assaults and rape in facilities.

“M” poignantly noted that even when authority figures adhere to their mandate to rehabilitate; youth are frequently brought to facilities that are not only detrimental to their wellbeing but lack the resources to collaborate with youth to identify and address their needs.

M [youth co-researcher]: Police shouldn’t harm girls; other people’s actions towards girls can lead to them breaking down; maybe ...care for them, ask them what they need help with – throwing them in cells and putting them in jails shouldn’t be a way for them to respond to girls”.

These shared experiences underscore how the childhoods of girls of Color are regularly interrupted due to state-sanctioned violence and neglect justified by flawed developmental and criminogenic theories of behavior—including increased policing, school pushout, and family separation (Epstein et al., 2017). This reductive, one-size-fit all approach to youth behavior disregards how entrenched systems place girls in unsafe environments and subsequently characterizes girls’ resilience and survival as delinquent.

YPAR invited and supported alternative definitions of social problems with and about girls with a focus on the response of systems and contexts (e.g., *they probably stole for a reason; no support, no childcare, no money, no job*). This counter-narrative of the legal system destabilizing vulnerable communities while shrugging off its responsibility in creating such conditions is in contrast to its stance as a benevolent parental figure. We identified the revolving door that disproportionate resource distribution creates through social binds for those standing at a nexus of race/gender/class/age.

The perils of engaging in critical YPAR within the academy (Table 1B)

Our observational themes around the promises of YPAR engaged in academic settings demonstrate how researchers can leverage the flexibility and intellectual freedoms of university settings to facilitate processes that support collective critical reflection and problematize systems while humanizing girls. The perils of YPAR within the academy center around the structural barriers in translating these critical reflections into critical actions with the urgency and agency articulated and felt by youth coresearchers. Indeed, our observations consistently demonstrated that the impact of systems on young people motivates the need for an urgent, agentic, and action-oriented vision for supporting others. Yet, the typical means of knowledge dissemination for academics is less bold and often disseminated first to other academic communities before those most impacted. This creative urgency is part of the gift brought to the space by youth coresearchers—their “thorns” are the reason why “roses” can crack open seemingly impenetrable borders.

Navigating tensions between academic pressures and critical responsibility—

Adult coresearchers acknowledged the very act of launching RVSP required articulating goals, funding, and timelines for the project that excluded youth input. This was necessary groundwork if we were to ensure that youth coresearchers were paid for their time and travel. Despite this, the sole mechanism through which we could pay young people—who were neither staff, students, nor research participants—was through what were essentially consulting agreements. Though seemingly benign, this payment infrastructure was intensely burdensome for young people and, moreover, had complicated tax and paperwork implications that could produce negative ripple effects. As such, several of our initial meetings involved completing consultation paperwork together and engaging in education regarding how to declare this pay on tax documentation given that taxes could not be removed before payment, and the responsibility fell on young people to declare their income correctly. This seemingly trivial issue betrays the logic and assumptions behind the academy’s understanding of “expertise” and created nontrivial burdens for young people who immediately experienced a barrier to receiving stipends.

Beyond this, negotiating our collective project goals and expectations became increasingly difficult as we pursued youth-driven ideas. The first project youth engaged in, examining the measures utilized in the ROSES intervention, was a priority that had been set by RVSP’s funding source. As a project with established measures and procedures, it was easy to obtain measures and run analysis for subtopics that youth coresearchers expressed interest in. One product proposed by the adult coresearchers was a presentation at the 2019 Society for Community Research and Action conference. While such products were expected as concrete markers of progress in the adult coresearchers’ academic career, this did not appeal to the urgency experienced by young people. Furthermore, adult coresearchers did not initially understand the nuanced experience of being the object of the dominant gaze. In an effort to empower youth, the academy often holds a romanticized image of youth taking center stage and speaking back to stakeholders in an equitable and action-oriented forum. But this idea did not align with the preferences of youth coresearchers and Gaarder et al. (2004) remind us that the narratives of system-impacted girls are not only regularly discounted but even viewed as tools of manipulation to avoid consequences. While the

adult coresearchers experience both pressure and discrimination due to various facets of our identities, our conferred identities as project coordinators, doctoral students, and principal investigators at a research university are legitimized to stakeholders. Our acceptance and uplifting of our youth coresearchers as equally legitimate experts must still weigh against how system-impacted girls are viewed by society.

In contrast, youth coresearchers prioritized dissemination efforts focused on communicating directly to system-impacted youth and efforts to act on their behalf. For instance, youth connected much more strongly to ideas for letter writing campaigns for Cyntoia Brown and Bresha Meadows; young women incarcerated for fighting back against abusers.

[Youth co-researchers] Vibed with letter writing; talked about Cyntoia Brown and Free Bresha campaigns; watched videos – lots of conversation; D brought up video of girl who was punished for head being down [on a desk] by bodyguard.

While we had viewed it as our moral responsibility to amplify youth voices within the academy in an effort to “talk back” to the literature about girls, youth coresearchers expressed a desire to interact first and foremost with other girls, directly: a natural connection to the purpose of YPAR.

The logic of the imperial academy constricts authentic praxis—System-impacted girls do not typically enter academic spaces with the knowledge of the etiquette, rules, and understanding of the oversight and monitoring structures of the academy. Yet, we invited them to generate ideas for projects that the academy could support. Through examining the ROSES measures and group discussions, youth coresearchers identified a clear goal: promoting girl’s safety especially when they are confined. When asked by SS [adult coresearcher] about their proposals:

M: Would want to go into facilities and speak to girls to hear what is going on; use that as proof....Ask girls how they like being in facilities; have they been hurt...seen their peers getting hurt; do they feel safe walking around or do they stay in bed all day; [are] girls comfortable.

D: builds on this; agrees, wants to interview girls. Ask questions such as: Is it scary to sleep at night there? How does that impact you?

Youth coresearchers were not only engaged but took the lead in pushing the boundaries of what this project on girl’s safety should look like. Youth coresearchers provided critical insight on the development of an interview protocol, practiced interviewing one another, and identified a snowball sampling methodology to identify and talk to incarcerated girls. However, while the adult coresearchers were able to reflect and shift from analyzing data already collected to a project initiated by youth, these efforts were encumbered by institutional pressures framed as “protections for youth” because these ideas were deemed “too risky” and required local and statewide oversight.

The collective recognized the double standard held against youth coresearchers framed as “risk prevention.” Young women were simultaneously framed as a vulnerable population in need of “protection” while being excluded from decision making spaces around—or

penalized for their reactions to—system dynamics in their lives. This liability-centered view of the RVSP youth coresearchers served as a significant limiting factor in supporting a youth-driven research project. Additionally, there were no processes for youth coresearchers to “speak back” to monitoring bodies and argue their assessment of their own ability to conduct this work. Youth’s desire to collect data directly from confined girls *about* system wrongdoing and violations of their safety was simply not possible given IRB and other human subject approval requirements and the ensuing time delays.

DISCUSSION

In the tradition of critical scholarship, YPAR is rooted in the moral and scholarly imperative of “nothing about us, without us”; in other words, research produced without the democratic collaboration and active participation of those who are “researched” is epistemically limited and harmful (Fine, 2018; Smith, 2012). The bulk of scholarship on system-impacted girls examines the risk and (more rarely) protective factors associated with system contact and its subsequent health and mental health consequences (Javdani et al., 2011a). Not only are systems themselves a much rarer subject of investigation (Javdani et al., 2011b), but the active participation of system-impacted girls as coresearchers is virtually non-existent. As a team of university researchers who ourselves experience what it means to live at the intersections of multiple, interlocked systems of oppression (race, gender, class, immigration status) but also benefit from accumulated education in the academy, we sought to establish critical YPAR both as an ethical response to a larger project (i.e., ROSES) partnering with oppressive legal systems (Javorka, 2020) and as a scholarly endeavor to cogenerate knowledge with girls of Color who “lived” the ROSES program (see Javdani et al., 2017).

In launching RVSP, we quickly faced a complicated tension around inviting youth into an academic space *despite and because* they have been intergenerationally pushed out and harmed by educational settings. This framing is intimately linked to our own positionalities as both insiders and outsiders in academic spaces, and our critical engagement with how our personal and lived experiences are linked to our professional responses and abilities, which are in turn shaped by and shapers of political social forces. As critical scholars with accumulating privileges, we invoked these positionalities to understand and transform the imperial logics of the academy, creating cracks in the ivory tower. This was enacted by leveraging the power of academic freedom and flexibility to generate knowledge about system-impacted girls with girls at the table, thereby pushing back on the imperial logics of deficit-based narratives produced by the same academic institutions using the tools of academic research. At the same time, the challenges we faced in creating transformative change spurred a need for increased reflexivity and creativity borne from our outsider identities. Often, the solutions involved engagement in mundane, bureaucratic, administrative processes that simply pressed on the university to shift their business as usual model to create opportunities for youth partnership and access. While we grew frustrated at the many hours spent on administrative tasks rather than engaging in critical dialogue as a collective, we argue that these mundane acts are central to the dialogue and critical examples of leveraging power within our roles as academic scholars.

Thus, our findings extend the conversation around YPAR by identifying university-situated YPAR itself as the subject of research. We acknowledge that university-community partnerships that implement YPAR do not represent neutral terrain (particularly for girls of Color) and more can be done to intentionally leverage the promises that academic settings allow while actively resisting the challenges they present (Guerrero & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2011). Our analysis delineates multiple promises of YPAR engaged in university-based academic spaces. Leveraging the resources of the academy, our positions of power within it, and its logic around flexibility and academic freedom, we pursued the wisdom of the phrase “you cannot be a space of learning unless you are also a space of healing” (M. Morris, personal communication, February 25, 2021). For system-impacted girls of Color in particular, this highlights the importance of a practice of care that actively values and accepts different ways of “showing up,” invites girls’ wisdom and rebuttal against the questions and approaches used to study them, “structures in” girls’ childcare needs, and acknowledges and validates the different positions of power occupied by adult and youth coresearchers. We argue that this praxis of care allowed us to keep the multiple systems that had failed our youth coresearchers visible. For example, recognizing how educational spaces have historically devalued girls’ minds and agency, we (adult coresearchers) remained open and vigilant to accepting and encouraging diverse modes of participation, engagement, and action. We worked to create this context of care and communicated our respect for girls’ lived expertise, validating that educational settings may marginalize this knowledge and have traditionally acted as spaces of social control and funnels into carcerality. In our space, we invited different ways of contributing knowledge (verbally, through journals, photographs, group projects, informally, through sharing meals, in playing with children, through jokes, songs, and memes). This mirrored the feminist roots and emerging antiracist goals on which ROSES is founded (e.g., Bybee & Sullivan, 2002; Jumarali et al., 2019).

We observed that this praxis of care was generative and created a more transformative space of engagement. Youth coresearchers did not always bring a critical or ecological lens to their lived experiences and engaged in typical person-centered, individual blame narratives. However, the climate of intellectual freedom embedded within the academy and the privileges granted to adult coresearchers to read deeply and think critically about social and historical power provided a clear path to developing critical consciousness, especially as young people showed a sharp ability to draw from their experiences and define them through a structural lens (Hope et al., 2019).

At the same time, our engagement in YPAR highlights the ever-present structures and logics of the academy in creating power imbalances, and brings into focus the structural constraints organizing both the academic and legal systems. The transformative space of care and healing mobilized young women toward urgent action, but these actions could not be pursued completely or authentically because of the constraints of the academy. As our youth coresearchers named/shared their critical reflections of the multiple, interconnected systems that had failed them (Morris, 2016; Schaffner, 2006), their desire to act centered on reducing harm and connecting with other young people. Concerned with disseminating directly to other youth who were experiencing harm, the proposed products our youth coresearchers valued were rooted in advocacy and urgency. At this moment of action, the logics of academic coloniality which reify who is legitimized with the authority of doing

research and how they are able to do it came into sharp contrast with girls' urgent desires. It was these logics of coloniality that interrupted and imposed constraints on our *response* and *ability* to do critical, liberatory YPAR (Teixeira et al., 2021).

We hope that naming these tensions helps recognize that when we engage in YPAR in academic spaces, we engage with the colonial logic of the academy which rigidly organizes and limits our structures, relationships, and imaginations (e.g., Shpungin et al., 2012). Based on our experiences, we advance considerations for those who wish to engage in critical YPAR, especially in research based academic settings. First, we concur with recommendations that academically based YPAR projects should be convened in community spaces when possible (e.g., where young people live, their neighborhood parks or any other areas they identify) while providing instrumental access to university settings and resources. Having the means to easily travel back and forth for a research project is a privilege and university researchers should budget transportation support, acknowledge the burdens of travel, and embed flexibility in meeting location and timing. Although certainly labor-intensive, we concur with recommendations that advocate for a semistructured, flexible curriculum which relies on youth input to be codeveloped for longer-term projects (Banales et al., in press). This can be built upon initial team and context building activities structured in by the university-based researchers and further codeveloped collaboratively with youth coresearchers as the project advances. This also fosters and promotes "radical inclusion," which seeks to legitimize the experiences of youth experiencing the impacts of oppressive policy (Quijada Cerecer et al., 2013). We also suggest the use of observational measures (implemented by both girls and adult co researchers), collaborative agenda setting alongside the use of internal memos that document the processes of participatory work in real time (Cahill, 2006). These tools allowed us to recognize youth's resistance to traditional academic definitions of participation (e.g., attendance) and their determination to participate on their own terms as being *generative and necessary* to the participatory approach we sought to create (Switzer & Flicker, 2021).

Our next set of recommendations focuses on the structures of the academy, funders, and other systems. We contend that the current moment presents an important portal for advocating towards structural change in the knowledge-generation process. Indeed, as more universities and funders name antiracism as central to their efforts in advancing critical solutions to structural injustices, it is incumbent upon university researchers to highlight and uplift the liberatory promise of YPAR given the right structural support. By this we mean pushing the academy to value and support dissemination to venues that matter to youth coresearchers, necessitating creativity in expanding how research-intensive universities understand impact. For example, our youth coresearchers wanted to urgently disseminate to other girls they knew had experienced the same oppressions they had, instead of feeling the press to disseminate via publications and conferences. This is and should be part of the public engagement mandate of universities (Sarason, 1981).

Third, for university-based researchers who work collaboratively with legal systems, we suggest actively naming system-impacted youth as important stakeholders in the research process. Doing so directly implicates the need to highlight how systems that are meant to serve youth must also engage in power sharing with them. Given that both private

foundation and federal funding agencies are naming research as a necessary tool to interrupt structural racism and highlight social and structural determinants of inequity, the moment is replete with the possibility of university-based researchers highlighting critical YPAR as a necessary epistemology to achieve these goals. Lastly, we encourage the academy to establish “on-ramps” for youth who are pushed out of traditional academic contexts. While there are examples of such programs (e.g., STEM pipelines), they are still deeply permeated by the logic of the academy to support skill development in technology and science to promote the “right” young people’s social mobility. Critical engagement with academic settings should not rest on this on-ramp alone, and university structures organizing access, resources, and relationships can shift much more radically to accomplish myriad participatory goals with and for young people.

CONCLUSION

We grappled with an overarching question throughout this project: If we build it, will they come? Our attempts to accommodate for typical YPAR barriers (offset travel costs, cleared multiple and “off hour” meeting times to increase participation access, etc.) were not enough, and this study sought to contextualize our YPAR process by interrogating the broader context of the academy—its promises and perils. There were a number of study limitations including that all data were based on the observations and interpretations of adult coresearchers even though they incorporated young people’s reflections and participation in meetings, and pertained most directly to the content and processes of YPAR meetings without the windows of “in between” meetings. Our findings and recommendations are thus more deeply rooted in adult coresearchers’ understanding of the YPAR process. Still, our study excavates the everyday tensions, logistical challenges, and structural challenges of doing YPAR in a research-intensive university setting by insider–outsiders. We share our experience as university-based researchers who came to YPAR as an ethical response to “prying open...spaces” (Javdani et al., 2017, p. 442) to understand the omnipresent “imperial logics” at the nexus of academic and legal systems—that ultimately proved difficult to surmount. Like “a rose growing from concrete” (Tupac Shakur, 1999), RVSP is our example of the delicate growth that can blossom even in the context of un nourishing soil of systems because we invite and cultivate the thorns—those marginalized ideas, imaginations, and bodies that crack the concrete open.

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Highlights

- Critical YPAR is heralded as a liberatory epistemology for social justice committed research.
- We conducted critical YPAR with system-impacted girls of Color.
- We synthesize the promises and perils of critical YPAR in a research-intensive university setting.
- We name the limits inherent in imperial logics and structures between academia and legal systems.
- Recommendations focus on structural changes at the nexus of academia and other systems.

TABLE 1
Themes generated from systematic observations of the ROSEbuds Visionary Scientist Project (RVSP).

Theme	Quote or observational excerpt	Relevance for system-impacted girls	Link to the promise of the academy
(A) The promises of YPAR engaged within academic settings			
Leveraging institutional legitimacy for care	"For someone like me, in that community, to have a [university] ID, people look at you different"	Girls are excluded from secondary education spaces	YPAR created legitimacy by providing and invitation into or "keys" to academic spaces
Redefining engagement, sharing responsibility	ROSES researchers were about 1.5 h late; spent some time communicating lateness and [identifying] strategies (starting later; communicating bus delays)	Girls are surveilled and punished for "disengagement" from educational settings	YPAR leveraged academic flexibility and freedom to redefine engagement on the groups own terms (e.g., legitimizing lateness, nonparticipation as generative, relocating)
Humanizing mothering as part of and central to learning	SS (a mother) came back from pumping and we updated her ... [on our discussion] about police criminalizing people in need	Girls are directly pushed out of school for becoming mothers	YPAR normalized children's presence and leveraged flexibility of academic spaces to provide toys, food, and legitimize the pre-existing caregiving expertise of everyone
Resistance to deficit-focused narratives in validated measures	A+M focused on *why* girls do certain things, rather than specific behaviors...for example... wouldn't call it running away, [just] hanging out (without permission)...	Girls are narrated to have deficits by mainstream academic research	YPAR cultivated a direct opportunity to counter those deficit narratives within and legitimized by academic institutions that are charged with generating new knowledge
Youth and adults coconstructing a new language to tell stories hidden by academic and legal jargon	M pulled out homework and asked [about] infrastructure... SS (adult coresearcher) [gave] examples of how a room has infrastructure, like if there's light, etc. and how that would impact you or the atmosphere in the room	Girls are socialized to be passive recipients of language and knowledge in schools (told what to know, how to know it)	YPAR intentionally critique the use of "jargon" and validated youth's natural curiosity to narrate the world in their own way; invite youth to "not know," and use this as generative opportunity unpack assumptions of academic knowledge
The over and under response of systems	[Youth coresearchers] Discussed how social media is used to get information about people as extra surveillance; how it's used to net widen and indict many people	Girls are constantly surveilled, yet requests for safety & resources are minimized	YPAR invited and supported alternative definitions of social problems with and about girls with a focus on the response of systems and contexts
(B) The perils of YPAR engaged within academic settings			
Navigating tensions between academic pressures and critical responsibility	[Youth researchers] not interested in [proposal to] make a video of everyone discussing their interpretation [of their findings for an academic conference]	The impact of systems on young people creates an urgent and action oriented vision	In contrast to youth's vision, the typical means of knowledge dissemination for academics is less bold and most rewarded for dissemination to other academic audiences
The logic of the imperial academy constricts authentic praxis	SS: [perhaps] the point of observational measure is [to understand] some things that can only be observed, but cannot be asked [of] kids or staff – [noting consequences of mandated reporting if we ask about sexual abuse]	Girls do not typically enter academic spaces with knowledge of the etiquette, rules, and monitoring structures of the academy	Youths' ideas and visions for critical engagement pushed the boundaries of traditional academic participation. Girls wanted to collect primary data from incarcerated youth about system trauma, a project requiring a multi-year review

Note: Each observation systematically documented attendance of staff, youth, others (e.g., children), the processes emerging for individuals, the RVSP collective, or around the broader setting, and the observers feelings, thoughts, and emerging hypotheses and hunches.

Abbreviation: YPAR, youth participatory action research.