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Becoming Neoliberal Subjects: Power and Resistance in a School-Based Mentorship Program

for Latino Boys

by

Michael Singh

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender, and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Zeus Leonardo, Chair  
Professor Kris D. Gutiérrez  
Professor Juana María Rodríguez

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Abstract

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A growing number of school districts are seeking to remedy the high dropout rates and achievement gap experienced by Latino boys through Latino male mentorship programs. Indicative of neoliberal shifts in urban education, these programs often involve public-private partnerships and represent a new ideological blending of Latinx community interests and corporate philanthropic goals. This dissertation asks: How is Latino masculinity framed and constructed in the neoliberal era of urban education? To answer this question, I conducted an ethnographic case study of Latino Male Success (LMS; pseudonym), a Latino male mentorship program run by a non-profit organization servicing 10 middle and high schools in an urban school district in California. Data collection for this study consisted of two years of ethnographic research including 40 interviews, document and curriculum analysis, and over 500 hours of classroom observations.

Three main findings emerged from this study. First, dependence on philanthropy and the need to cater to wealthy donors resulted in a cultural deficit framing of Latino male mentorship in the program's mission and curriculum. This approach obscured structural racism and centered the boys' behavior as the primary source of underachievement by implicitly or explicitly positing them as disinterested in school, potentially violent, and in need of cultural change. Second, LMS day-to-day lessons and activities deprioritized a critical race and gender consciousness and cultivated an ideal Latino masculinity characterized by the neoliberal values of meritocratic individualism, benevolent hetero-patriarchy, and smart consumerism. Third, mentors and students also resisted the neoliberal logics that framed LMS. Select mentors taught extra-curricular and politically charged lessons centering racism and collective struggle, while students engaged in small moments of subversion enacted through repudiations of respectability, collective hopes, and loving, queer moments.

By integrating critical and intersectional theories of race, gender, sexuality into my analysis, this research provides a timely addition to the literature on educational empowerment programs for boys and men of color. In contrast to scholarship that prioritizes an analysis of school punishment and pushout, my work reveals the profound impact educational empowerment projects have on influencing Latino male identity and learning experiences. My findings demonstrate the ways

problematic racial and gender politics remain prevalent in these programs despite a rhetoric of racial uplift. Through tracing the intersectional racial politics of neoliberalism guiding Latino Male Success, this work sheds new light on the ways educational philanthropic foundations and non-profits shape racial formation in U.S. schools.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to the Research

#### *The gala*

On a warm fall evening I attended a fundraiser held at a local country club. Under a large white tent sitting on the edge of the golf course, glasses clinked, wine was poured, and people were having a good time. The host of this gala was Pueblo Unido, a large community development corporation in the west coast city of Bahía. All proceeds of the night's fundraiser would go towards Latino Male Success (LMS), Pueblo Unido's Latino male mentorship program which partners with 10 middle and high schools in Bahía Unified School District (BUSD). Surveying the room, I was struck by the racial and gender makeup of the crowd. Although diverse, it was clear that most of the attendees at tonight's gala were esteemed men of color from the regional community. As I later learned, many had taken, or were given the day off from work to play golf, mingle, give-back, and donate on behalf of themselves, or the variety of real estate firms, investment companies, and local tech corporations that they represent. The mayor was also in attendance as well as a handful of former NFL players from the local football team. They smiled and shook hands with an awestruck group of young Latino men in matching polo shirts who stood stiffly next to art work and photos of the boys whom they mentored.

These young Latino men, whom I refer to as *the mentors*, range in age from 23 to 30. I greeted them, said hello and gave everyone the customary LMS handshake that I had learned two months earlier when I began my research with the organization. I paused to chat with Iván and Antonio, two LMS mentors whom I had begun shadowing and volunteering with twice a week at their school sites. A third mentor I shadowed, Mr. Javier, was not in attendance. "He's 'sick,'" said Mr. Iván with a smile and a shrug. Mr. Javier had expressed strong discomfort and concern for the up-scale fundraising gala, leading many of the mentors to assume he had chosen to opt out of the gala altogether.

Generating resources through fundraisers, grants, and professional partnerships is a fact of life for those in the non-profit world. For the mentors, this was no different. Fundraising events were often held in places far away from the depleted urban ghettos where they worked with their students. These spaces were geographically just several miles away from one another, but worlds apart. This evening's gala would be one of many fundraisers I attended during my time conducting research with Latino Male Success, however tonight was perhaps the most extravagant. The mentors had noticed this too. Although they were partial hosts of the affair, many struggled to mingle with the donors despite the encouragement they received from their supervisors. Most mentors came from working-class, immigrant families and some, being just one or two years out of college, struggled to connect with the Latinx and Black elites of their region who now populated the banquet tent. Many had not realized this elite class existed and were genuinely surprised at the wealth of Black and brown professionals, some of whom had donated up to \$10,000 for tonight's gala. Other, more seasoned mentors mixed and mingled with ease, laughing with potential employers of the future.

At the table where I was seated I made conversation with my neighbors. My fellow attendees lamented their inability to escape work for golf, and upon hearing that I had never played, urged me to learn the sport. We continued to exchange pleasantries. They applauded my accomplishments as a doctoral student at UC Berkeley and I inquired into their professions. One donor, a Black man who looked to be in his mid 40's, was in property development (primarily

market rate housing). Another man, who mentioned he was also a fellow Latino male graduate of UC Berkeley (class of '76), owned his own electrical business. Both businessmen praised my academic work, which I vaguely categorized as interested in social justice work with Latino boys. They were embarrassed with the little time they had to “give back” to the community. “But when Gerald calls with events like this, I always attend,” stated the more senior Latino man as he gestured towards the CEO of Pueblo Unido. “Plus, they’re a lot of fun,” added another person at the table, raising his wine glass and initiating a toast from the others. This sequence of interactions encouraged Mr. Antonio to come to our table and offer more wine. Many accepted. “I’m pretty heavy handed with my pours,” joked Antonio as he passed by my table and offered wine to guests. “I know the auction is coming up!” he added. We all laughed.

Sprinkled across the dinner tables were numbered bid-cards to hold up during the live auction. Prizes included sports tickets, wine baskets, and a weekend brunch with the mayor. It had been requested by Pueblo Unido headquarters, and uneasily approved by the mentors, that some of the grand prizes be coupled with artwork made by the boys. This would give the items an extra sentimental boost. As I scanned the auction items, a particularly beautiful papier mâché mask caught my eye. I recognized the mask from the *mascara* project. Mr. Antonio had explained the project to me in his classroom several weeks earlier. Boys painted both sides of the mask; the outside representing what they choose to show to the world and the inside representing emotions and feelings they kept hidden. This anonymous boys’ mask now sat atop a pair of open-destination Southwest Airline tickets.

As the ceremony began, Gerald Espinoza, the CEO of Pueblo Unido and Master of Ceremonies for the night, took the microphone. He was a skilled and charismatic speaker, working the crowd of majority men while keeping the night focused and centered on funding the boys. Some men showed strong signs of intoxication, yelling, letting loose periodic *gritos* [traditional shouts of excitement], and talking back to Espinoza’s speech, playfully. The announcement of the winning group of golfers, referred to by the term *four-some*, sparked laughter and homophobic jests from the businessmen. However, Espinoza brought the crowd back. Tonight was about empowering the boys.

After offering a heartfelt story of his father’s journey from Mexico to Bahía, Espinoza passed the microphone over to the past and present program directors of Latino Male Success. They also offered stories of violence and trauma, but always ending with hope and opportunity. Before the auction began and the party resumed, the microphone was passed to city councilman Rodríguez. Greatly respected in both the city as well as the predominantly Latinx district he represented, Rodríguez spoke passionately to the now silent audience. As he addressed the crowd, his words called upon the collective imagination of the successful businessmen in the room, and in particular the Latino men, as we constructed a narrative around the problems facing Latino boys (perhaps our former selves) and the pathway to success. “We all know who these boys are and they’re not bad kids. I know them better than most, you see, I never shy away from saying I am from Bahía, and I’m proud of it.” This gave way to a small applause and a few cheers. “I know what it’s like to grow up on the Northside. I was a little knucklehead myself, a *travieso* [troublemaker] who needed a big brother to knock me on the head sometimes and keep me on the right path... These mentors here,” proclaimed the councilman, pointing to the mentors who lined the walls of the banquet tent, “they are changing lives.”

As the ballroom of businessmen, politicians, educational administrators, and educators applauded and began reaching for their checkbooks, we all took part in a now common form of racial justice intervention: public-private support for mentoring boys and young men of color in

schools<sup>1</sup>. While the notion of mentorship and fraternal support is not a new invention, the past several decades have seen an explosion of private-sector educational programs targeting boys and young men of color through the support of a male mentor. These programs span a wide range of educational settings including K-12 school-day programs, after-school programs, undergraduate university programs, and mentoring programs at the graduate and professional level. On the national stage, this trend's exemplar is former President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Alliance.

My Brother's Keeper (MBK) was a 2014 White House initiative which sought to create opportunities and improve life outcomes for boys and men of color. A central component of MBK was the establishment of male of color networks and mentoring programs which sought to uplift boys and young men of color through fraternal guidance and support. Following its presidential establishment, the program transitioned into the private sector, becoming a primary initiative of the Obama Foundation. A connecting thread that unites all these programs, from elementary classrooms to doctoral programs, is the notion that boys and men of color struggle in educational settings and experience a large academic achievement gap. It is believed that these educational hardships will be lessened by the guidance of a role model and mentor who has experienced success and social mobility.

However, despite the seemingly simple and commonsensical logic to this assumption, the present research reveals the ways this recent wave of male of color mentorship programs exists within a complicated and often contradictory era of urban school reform called *neoliberal multiculturalism*. In this era, wrought with old and new racial discourses surrounding Latino masculinity, political struggle and the right for public education is abandoned as a viable institution for racial justice. Instead, the private sector's promise of innovation and competition has become a new arena where equality will be earned (Spence, 2016). In the coming pages I examine the ways neoliberal multiculturalism serves as a defining logic and discourse that permeates the rationale and goals of Latino Male Success. Through this process a new and unique form of Latino male subjectivity is constructed. As the city councilman proclaimed at the gala, Latino Male Success and its mentors serve as a force of empowerment and inclusion to (some) Latino boys in Bahía. To an extent, my data in this study reveals this to be true. For many of these boys the insertion of a Latino male mentor, a contracted expert from the private sector, had a positive impact on their grades and academic performance in school. For others there was little improvement, or even a declining academic performance. However, this dissertation's primary focus is not what makes Latino male mentoring programs successful. Latino boys, like all students, respond positively to caring educators, rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum, and a safe and well-resourced learning and living environment. Instead, this study explores the ways contemporary racial discourse inform how success is understood for programs targeting Latino boys and asks how Latino male subjectivity is constructed in the era of neoliberal multiculturalism.

Throughout this study I found neoliberal discourse functioning as a form of governmentality in Latino Male Success. The notion of governmentality describes the ways a

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<sup>1</sup> While this study focuses specifically on Latino men and boys, a larger push to address boys of color more broadly has greatly informed the creation of this program. I understand the literature's use of "boys of color" to encapsulate students who are marginalized in the education system due to their gender and racial identities. This category typically includes Black, Latino, Native American, and Southeast Asian boys. While I use the category boys of color when drawing from the literature, I would like to note that despite the commonalities of these groups, I am cautious not to assume a homogenized educational experience.

unique knowledge of race and Latino maleness permeated the mentorship program. This established forms of self-governance as the boys and mentors employed neoliberal multicultural language to understand themselves and the struggles facing Latino boys. In this framing, understanding *who* the target of Latino male mentoring is not just descriptive, but it is also productive as new forms of Latino male subjectivity are formed (Youdell, 2011). Through my ethnographic case study of Latino Male Success, I analyze the ways the perceived deficits of Latino masculinity are covertly dictated by a *neoliberal multicultural imaginary*. My research demonstrates the ways Latino Male Success and its funders take a cultural deficit approach to Latino male mentorship by centering the boys' attitudes and behavior as the primary source of underachievement. This framing of the problem obscures structural racism and reifies stereotypes of Latino boys by implicitly or explicitly constructing them as lazy, violent, hetero-patriarchally deficient, and in need of cultural change. However, just as popular racial stereotypes discursively construct the image of the "bad boy" ("bad hombres" to President Trump), affirmative discourse surrounding the goals and potential for Latino male mentoring assembles an idealized Latino masculinity. In this study, I describe the ways a neoliberal Latino manhood was discursively constructed, animated, and at times resisted in Latino Male Success. This figure of the neoliberal "good boy" was a solution to the "bad boy," the former categorized by his entrepreneurialism, human capital, and productive hetero-patriarchal capacity.

### *Neoliberal economics, education, and governmentality*

Since the early 1970's, neoliberalism has firmly established itself as the preeminent economic and social theory of our time. At the level of economy and structure, neoliberalism puts forth the notion that economies and human beings work most efficiently when released from governmental regulation and oversight (Friedman, 2002; Hayek, 1996). Neoliberalism is an extreme form of free-market capitalism and has become ubiquitous at a global scale (Harvey, 2007). In the United States, neoliberalism seeks to dismantle the Keynesian welfare state that emerged following the Great Depression. It seeks to privatize public goods and services and free government from social welfare programs based on the assumption that competition breeds motivated, efficient and productive societies. Lipman (2013) describes the complex nature of neoliberalism as an assemblage of "economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere" (p. 6). At both the global and local levels, neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatization have devastated billions of the world's most economically vulnerable populations as welfare programs and public assets are dismantled. Under neoliberalism wealth inequalities are exacerbated as markets are left free and open, facilitating massive accumulations of concentrating wealth at the "top 1%" of the population.

In education, neoliberalism has greatly weakened the notion of "public" in public education and altered how schools function in U.S. society (Apple, 2006; Lipman, 2011; Weiner & Compton, 2008). Like other aspects of the public sector, neoliberalism has ignited a wave of privatization among public school systems in an attempt to create competition and promote managerial governance. This neoliberal wave of school reform has received bipartisan effort with both mainstream political parties supporting the increased privatization of public education. The creation of charter schools and school voucher systems are two popular and concrete

examples of neoliberalism impacting the education system in the United States (Andres, 1995; Chubb & Moe, 2011). For example, charter schools are publicly funded, but independently operated schools functioning under the logic that outside competition to local neighborhood public schools will spark competition and innovation. School leaders are appointed by executive boards (as opposed to locally elected school boards) who frequently represent some of the county's most wealthy corporate elites. The most influential philanthropists responsible for the rapid expansion of charter schools in the United States include the Walton family (heirs to the Walmart fortune), Don and Doris Fischer (founders of the Gap), Bill and Melinda Gates (Microsoft), Eli and Edythe Broad (The Broad Foundation), and Reed Hastings (founder of Netflix). Despite the individual success of some charter schools, research shows little difference in academic growth and achievement between traditional public schools and charter schools (Buras & Apple, 2005). Furthermore, the market pressure to provide measurable returns to venture philanthropists has led to wide spread allegations among charter schools of grade inflations, selective student enrollment, the expulsion of low performing students, and the exclusion of students with special needs (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002; Welner, 2013).

Beyond the structural and material realities of neoliberal economics, neoliberalism is also a value-system and rationality set to govern the ways human beings relate to one another as well as how they understand themselves (Ball, 2012; Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Although state policies have powerful material roles to play in facilitating the neoliberalization of society (e.g., deregulation, selling of public assets, providing a military and police force dedicated to protecting private goods and securing markets), neoliberalism also functions as a form of *governmentality*. Stemming from the political thought of Michel Foucault, the term *governmentality*, described by Foucault as the “art of government,” seeks to settle a paradox existing in Western liberal governments. Liberalism maintains the sovereignty and freedom of individuals, yet governments also require those individuals' behavior to be managed and regulated (Foucault, 2011). Foucault puts forth the notion of *governmentality* as a new understanding of power, where populations are not simply governed by top-down policies and laws, but rather through knowledge and social norms. In this sense, power manifests itself in positive forms, inducing knowledge through discourse that becomes internalized by populations and which guide their behavior (Dean, 2009). Thus, *governmentality* describes the regulation of the subject through technologies of self-discipline directed by horizontal and affirmative forms of power and discourse.

Neoliberal *governmentality* refers to the creation of the social conditions that inspire and necessitate neoliberal subjectivity; the true embodiment of the human as *homo economicus*. Under neoliberal *governmentality*, the subject is defined by its moral responsibility to act through economic self-interest and market principles that override other ethical or moral values. The neoliberal subject is defined by its entrepreneurial spirit and willfully assumes market principles in all aspects of their life with the goal of amassing the most “human capital” as possible. Under neoliberal *governmentality* the individual subject is assumed to be free and equal. Inequalities among individuals are seen as logical outcomes of free-market competition, which exist in every realm of human life. They are natural as opposed to social, and neoliberalism accounts for people's movement in and out of wealth. Intervening in this state of affairs may worsen this condition by creating social inequality through ineffective, even “democratic,” interventions. As Wendy Brown (2015) states,

[N]eoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with human themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized. (p. 10)

In the realm of education, charter schools and voucher programs construct students and parents as consumers within a marketplace of schooling options. The now popular notion of “school choice” charges parents and students with the task of navigating unequal and competing schools in order to select the one that will maximize the student’s human capital and future earning potential. Once in school, today’s neoliberal student-subject functions as an entrepreneur of self. In contrast to theories of curriculum which posit schools as arenas of self-discovery, critical thinking, or exposure to foundational human thought, schooling has now become an endless checklist of resume skills and activities to be checked off on college applications. Students are pushed to be efficient with their time and energy, participating in aspects of school that directly invest in their human capital (Buras & Apple, 2005).

For students of color in the United States, neoliberal education marks a unique and complicated moment in a country where racism and white supremacy have changed forms but remain constant within the social system, including schools. Although neoliberal policies, both inside and outside of education, have particularly endangered people of color (at times targeting them specifically), it must also be stated that traditional public schooling has reproduced rather than ended racial inequalities in the United States. As a result and in search of solutions, this situation has contributed to supporting and proliferating neoliberal forms of education by communities of color (Dávila, 2004; Pedroni & Apple, 2005; Spence, 2016). In this vision of racial justice education, inequalities will be undone by introducing diversity into the market place as students are empowered to expand freely their human capital and compete in a free and racially diverse market-place. Neoliberal logics have even permeated traditionally subversive spaces of learning for students of color, such as ethnic studies classrooms (R. A. Ferguson, 2012), where the ability to speak about diversity is now seen as a marketable skill for students entering the private sector. In a fitting example, and following settlement of a race-based lawsuit, the Coke Company has become a diversity leader in the industry, with the Coke Brothers becoming the public face of corporate multiculturalism. In this dissertation I explore the recent neoliberal turn in Latinx educational politics. Keeping in mind the notion of neoliberal governmentality, I examine the ways neoliberal rationalities converge with an ever-evolving racial discourse in the United States to construct unique and particular forms of intersectional, racialized subjectivity among Latino men and boys.

### *Race in the United States: From white supremacy to neoliberal multiculturalism*

Although racism and white supremacy have been key organizing principles of the United States since its inception, racism is a discourse constantly in flux (Hall, 1996). This has allowed racism to survive and thrive through various historical and social shifts in United States history. As time passes and social norms change, so do forms of racial knowledge. The ability to establish itself as rational and legitimate in a given era is what has made racism so insidious and durable. Racial inequalities maintain their legitimacy as new racial discourse is created to justify these inequalities across time and space. This is not to say that racism is ever completely

accepted in any given moment, but, like any other hegemony, racial discourse is able to mediate resistance or transform itself when needed (Omi & Winant, 2014).

Nikhil Singh offers an understanding of racialization that posits race as a value-making discourse independent from essentialist notions of a white/not white binary. He states:

[W]e need to recognize the technology of race as something more than skin color or biophysical essence, but precisely as those historic repertoires and cultural and signifying systems that stigmatize and depreciate one form of humanity [to the point of death] for the purpose of another's health, development, safety, profit or pleasure. (Singh, 2005, p. 223)

This flexible definition is useful in tracing the changing nature of race across what critical race theorists refer to as "racial breaks" in U.S. and world history (Winant, 2002). Through these racial breaks, one notion of race loses its hegemonic status and gives way to a new racial common sense.

From its establishment until the 1940's, explicit forms of white supremacy functioned as an accepted and dominant form of racial discourse in the United States. During this period the color line was clearly demarcated and upheld by U.S. law and state policy. However, following the second world war, white supremacy began to lose its legitimacy in the United States and around the globe. Winant (2002) argues that the wide spread condemnation of Nazism and the Jewish Holocaust that followed World War II began to mount political power as the terrors of white supremacy were exposed as a blatant contradiction among the allied powers and particularly in the United States. Anti-racism activists seized this moment. In the United States a civil rights movement began in the South, which condemned Jim Crow segregation and the continued acceptance of stark, racial prejudice and policy around the country. Outside of the United States anticolonial movements took hold around the globe, exposing the contradictions of colonial governments, politicizing race, and demanding an end to white supremacy as a world order (Winant, 2002).

Furthermore, an escalating Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union further made race a topic of great importance as Soviet propaganda sought to highlight racial violence in the United States and other nation-states as a natural consequence of capitalist governments. Winant (2002) describes this moment as a "racial break," stating the post-World War II period represents a moment in which these contradictory sociopolitical forces combined to "discredit and finally undo the old world racial system" (p. 141). Melamed (2006, 2011) provides a genealogy of hegemonic racial discourses in the United States that took hold in the aftermath of the post-World War II racial break. While this dissertation explores the framework of neoliberal multiculturalism as the best way to understand Latino male subject formation in *Latino Male Success*, it is worth briefly outlining Melamed's analysis of the trajectory of race discourse following the post-World War II racial break.

## **Racial liberalism**

By the 1940's racial liberalism began to displace white supremacy as the dominant racial discourse in the United States. Racial liberalism challenged the notion of innate, biological differences among humans and sought to promote anti-racism through formal inclusion of people



of color into the United States' liberal democracy. Although this transition was not immediate, the Civil Rights Movement began to take hold, pushing the United States to redefine itself as a nation formally against racism. While many still believed (and continue to believe) in the existence of explicit forms of white supremacy, the rise of racial liberalism re-signified overt forms of racism such as slavery, segregation, formal discrimination, and racial lynching/murder as unamerican (Melamed, 2011).

Like any form of racial discourse, racial liberalism preserved and legitimated racial inequalities. This was done, in part, by defining the way in which racial justice would be achieved. As opposed to reparations or a dismantling of racial capitalism in the United States and around the globe (see Marable, 1999; Robinson, 2000), racial liberalism posited anti-racism as the inclusion of people of color as full and protected citizens in the capitalist liberal democracy of the United States. This extension of civil rights, integration, and legal equality for African Americans and other people of color was premised on the notion that racial minorities would become equals to whites when given the full benefits of citizenship. When this did not occur, racial liberalism offered cultural explanations as to why racial minorities were not experiencing freedom as true Americans since they were now legally treated as such. This cultural inclusion of people of color into American identity came with new, muddled lines of racial inclusion and exclusion. As Melamed states,

Racial liberalism's model of race as culture normed by an idealized American national culture also made it possible to ascribe stigma to segments of African American society without the act of ascription appearing to be an act of racial power. Instead, it appeared as fair, expected, and right. It did so by differentiating between "healthy" African American cultural formations (those aligned with idealized American cultural norms and nationalist sentiment) and "pathological" ones. Racial liberalism then explained black cultural "pathology" to be both the effect of racism (that is, cultural maladaptation to social prejudice) and the cause of black inequality, in effect deploying liberal antiracism to renew racial stigma and to disavow structural racism. (2006, p. 8)

Racial liberalism served as a new and legitimate racial discourse in the United States through which U.S. capitalism was able to continue to hyper-extract surplus value from people of color (at home and around the world) while still culturally constructing itself as a nation formally against racism.

### **Liberal multiculturalism**

The legal victories of the civil rights era would immediately demonstrate their inability to resolve racial inequality in the United States as Black people and other racial minorities continued to live in informally segregated and impoverished neighborhoods in the United States. Radical anti-racist movements in the late 1960's and 1970's (embodied by the American Indian Movement, Asian American Movement, Black Power Movement, Chicano Movement) emerged to challenge the continued racism terrorizing communities of color. To manage this radical racial upheaval, U.S. racial discourse absorbed a culture of multiculturalism. While these radical anti-racist movements challenged core tenets of the capitalist U.S. state (including the validity of its very existence atop stolen land), liberal multiculturalism sought to include racial diversity into

the meaning of Americanism.<sup>2</sup> If racial liberalism reconstructed white supremacy as unamerican, liberal multiculturalism sought to construct the United States as an explicitly multicultural and diverse, liberal nation-state.

Like racial liberalism, as a racial discourse liberal multiculturalism re-constituted how the United States understood and addressed racial inequality. This sparked a desire for diversity within the country as means to realize fully its democratic potential. People of color enjoyed higher levels of representation in the mainstream media. There was a desire for diverse and authentic representations of people of color in television, literature, music, and school curriculum at a national scale. This was also a moment in which explicit and public forms of anti-racism became taboo and viewed as potentially “racist” or even “reverse-racist” in a country where racism had thought to have been defeated. As Melamed (2011) states,

Liberal multiculturalism socialized whites to see themselves as good antiracists by virtue of their antiracist feeling and desire for diversity, even as whites continued to accrue unearned benefits from material and social arrangements that favored them. At the same time, the cultural pluralism as the base of liberal-multicultural orders made any rebalancing of the free market or individual rights toward more even racial outcomes appear as an affront against basic fairness. (p. 37)

Liberal multiculturalism set the conditions for colorblind racism to flourish (see Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Although I describe neoliberal multiculturalism as the dominant contemporary racial discourse in the following sub-section, liberal multicultural tenets and values continue to circulate and manifest in today’s racial landscape.

### **Neoliberal multiculturalism**

Beginning in the 2000’s and into the present, neoliberal multiculturalism is the third and most recent phase of race-liberal hegemony. Like the liberal race discourse before it, neoliberal multiculturalism is firmly in opposition to traditional notions of white supremacy. However unlike the previous two, neoliberal multiculturalism’s main concern is not to promote racial equality by including racial minorities under the protection of the U.S. liberal democracy. Instead, neoliberal multiculturalism promotes the idea that racial equality is found under a fair and inclusive free market that extends beyond the borders of the nation-state. Under neoliberal multiculturalism, the states primary role is to facilitate a free market multiculturalism to be championed by the private sector and led by business elites (Melamed, 2011).

Just as racial liberalism and liberal multiculturalism managed the racial contradictions of U.S. capitalism by formally extending civil rights to all racial minorities, neoliberal multiculturalism offers the notion of free competition and entrepreneurialism as a fair and unprejudiced system through which racial equality is achieved. The multicultural rhetoric of

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note the rise of multiculturalism has a long and contested history. This is particularly true regarding schooling and curriculum in the United States. I am critical of what is referred to as liberal multiculturalism however, it should be stated that multiculturalism initially emerged as a radical challenge to Eurocentrism in U.S. textbooks and curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2016; Nieto, 1999). Although it is safe to say multiculturalism was victorious in the culture wars of the 1990’s (Symcox, 2001), multicultural education has come to signify a variety of racial politics (Leonardo, 2013b). This includes what Buras (2008) refers to as “Rightist Multiculturalism.”

neoliberalism masks the fact that neoliberalism is still a form of racial capitalism and justifies the extreme poverty and early deaths of the racial subjects it creates. As Melamed (2006) states,

[M]ulticulturalism portrays neoliberal policy as the key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity. Neoliberal policy engenders new racial subjects, as it creates and distinguishes between newly privileged and stigmatized collectivities, yet multiculturalism codes the wealth, mobility, and political power of neoliberalism's beneficiaries to be the just desserts of "multicultural world citizens," while representing those [whom] neoliberalism dispossesses to be handicapped by their own "monoculturalism" or other historic-cultural deficiencies. (p. 1)

For students of color in the United States, neoliberal multiculturalism is both a discourse that informs how schooling systems seek to ameliorate racial inequalities and a form of governmentality whereby deserving multicultural subjects who thrive in the competitive free market are juxtaposed to those whose cultural pathologies contribute to their inability or unwillingness to compete in the multicultural market. Like other racial discourses before it, neoliberal multiculturalism, which includes the law in addition to economics, legitimates the [racial] dispossession it creates by appearing race-neutral and in support of diversity (Leonardo & Tran, 2013).

### *Neoliberal governmentality and racial justice*

This brief genealogy of evolving racial discourses in the United States demonstrates the flexibility of U.S. race and racism. Although white supremacy is an economic and political system that has unwaveringly benefited those people racialized as white, while devaluing and exploiting to the point of death those people racialized as not white (and particularly those racialized as Black), *as a racial discourse* white supremacy lost its dominance during the post-World War II racial break (López, 1996; Winant, 2002). By tracing the new racial discourses of racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and finally neoliberal multiculturalism, we understand two important aspects of race and racism. First, as new racial discourses emerge, newly accepted and disguised forms of race-making occur to legitimize racial dispossession, violence, and social death. Second, in constructing a new discourse that defines what counts as race and racism, hegemonic racial discourses also control what counts as valid and useful forms of racial justice work. Both points are key for this study in analyzing how the problem of race was understood in Latino Male Success, as well as the imagined proper intervention to promote racial equality for Latino boys.

The notion of governmentality is useful in understanding how neoliberal multiculturalism, as a form of knowledge and rationality, produces new racial subjects as it constructs a discourse surrounding the problems and solutions these groups face. As Spence (2013) states, under neoliberal governmentality the racial problems of people of color "have been taken outside of the realm of the political by rendering them *technical* and *actionable*" through market principles (p. 140; italics in original). In education, the fact that students of color continue to experience a massive achievement gap and pushout rates (i.e., racism) becomes a matter of incentivizing student and school competition through testing and marketable skill-building programs. Within communities of color, neoliberal multiculturalism's hegemonic status obscures

the political and structural nature of racism, and instead calls for market logics and inclusion into an existing system of inequality, rather than political struggle (Dumas, 2013; Pedroni & Apple, 2005). In many cases, neoliberal discourse even adopts the rhetoric of past eras of anti-racist struggle, marketing charter schools and school voucher systems as a freedom struggle for African Americans to choose one's school (Leonardo, 2007; J. T. Scott, 2013).

### *Neoliberal governmentality and the boy of color crisis*

The notion of a crisis is a key justification for the privatization of public goods in hopes that the market's efficiency and competition will yield the best answer to the crisis (Klein, 2008). Although boys of color (and all people of color) have constantly been marginalized and seen as threats throughout U.S. history, in the last several decades male youth of color have come to be understood as a national crisis. As microcosms of society, schools have both perpetuated as well as created the notion that boys of color, and particularly Black and Latino males, are disinterested in education, violent, and socially deviant (A. A. Ferguson, 2001; Lopez, 2002; Malagon, 2010; Noguera, 2009; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2011; Nolan, 2011; Rios, 2011, 2017). As neoliberal economic policies cut government services and social welfare programs in the 1970's and henceforth, California state prisons (policing and prisons being public services still heavily funded by the state) have overflowed with Black and Latino men (Gilmore, 2007). This began the age of the "bad boy," the "super predator," and the "bad hombre." All these labels are racially coded, yet are legitimate and acceptable under the racial discourses of liberal multiculturalism and neoliberal multiculturalism, which accept and empower the legible type of multicultural subject.

Closely following the beginning of the age of mass incarceration, private-sector community and educational programs seeking to intervene in the youth crisis proliferate (D. Rodríguez, 2017). Kwon (2013) argues that nonprofit youth organizations charged with "improving the life chances of 'at-risk' youth of color" are "directly linked to the modern state and the reconfiguration of civil society as a technology of neoliberal citizenship" (p. 9). For boys of color, and Latino boys in particular, this dissertation is interested in how this affirmative neoliberal governmentality, which functions as an intersectional racial discourse, governs and constructs Latino boys amidst this crisis of boys of color. In the past decades the crisis of boys of color has led to the creation of an astounding number of educational programs targeting boys and young men of color in hopes of saving them from lives of social deviancy. By operating under neoliberal multicultural logics, youth of color empowerment is defined by the ability of youth to shed cultural pathologies and maximize their human capital to compete in a global, multicultural market.

It is worth mentioning once more how former president, now philanthropist, Barack Obama's My Brother's Keeper Alliance serves as an exemplar of neoliberal governmentality (Dumas, 2016b). Despite its initial start as a White House initiative in 2014, MBK was not funded by the federal government and did absolutely nothing to alter the structures of the public schooling system in the United States. Instead, as a White House initiative and later under the Obama Foundation, MBK turns to some of the private sector's largest corporations and educational foundations to fund local programs competing for grants to further their work with boys and men of color. Dumas (2016) argues that at its core, MBK relies on "representations of Black males and Black poor communities as in crisis" and in need of private-sector intervention

to “eradicate deficiencies of character and provide psychological uplift for those willing to overcome the damage inflicted on them largely as a result of their failure to adapt to shifts in the global economy” (p. 96). However, regarding governmentality, MBK represents a neoliberal turn in Black (as well as Latinx politics) in which “technical, entrepreneurial interventions replace political organization as the imagined solution to the social and economic inequities” experienced by racial minorities in the United States (Dumas, 2016, p. 96). Under neoliberal governmentality the problems of boys of color are seen not as a result of free-market capitalism, but instead their own individual deficiencies which will be solved through entrepreneurialism and the market itself.

The hyper-focus on the perceived cultural deficiencies of particularly *boys* of color indicates the intersectional nature of neoliberal multiculturalism (see Hong, 2015). Intersectional feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw (2014) has been an outspoken critic of My Brother’s Keeper and similar programs targeting boys and men of color as a form of racial uplift. In this framing, communities of color will be uplifted collectively by the mending of the individual cultural deficiencies of men of color who may finally perform normative patriarchal roles in nuclear families and their communities. In this dissertation, neoliberal multiculturalism is understood as an intersectional racial discourse, engendering not just racial subjects, but in the case of Latino men and boys, a proper form of Latino male identity that intersects with notions of race, gender, and sexuality.

### *Intent of study*

The goal of this study is to examine Latino male subject formation in the mentorship program Latino Male Success. The recent upsurge of educational programs targeting boys and young men of color represents a key moment in which a slew of intersectional discourses has built and adapted a new understanding of Latino boys in the present neoliberal era. As an ethnographic case study of a Latino male mentorship program partnered with an urban school district, my research with Latino Male Success allows me to examine one such program in great detail. This includes situating Latino Male Success within this larger wave of boy of color empowerment, as well as examining the unique and day-to-day conditions of Latino Male Success that make it distinct. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. How does neoliberal multicultural discourse frame/construct Latino male subjectivity in Latino Male Success?
2. How is an intersectional Latino male subjectivity animated by LMS programming?
3. In what way, if any, are neoliberal multicultural subjectivities disrupted through alternative framings of Latinx education and/or Latino masculinity within LMS?

### *Chapter Overview*

In chapter two, I review the relevant literatures for the study of Latino male identity in schools. Although a variety of studies using multiple conceptual framework are reviewed, I close

the chapter with those works interested in the way neoliberalism influences the intersectional construction of boy of color identity in urban schools. This is a small but growing literature that has focused primarily on policy and is often an offshoot of the study of Black masculinity. In chapter three, I introduce Latino Male Success as a strong case study for examining the construction of Latino male identity in the era of neoliberal multiculturalism. This is primarily because LMS is a My Brother's Keeper affiliate, operated by a Latinx non-profit organization, and functions during the school day in public schools. This public-private partnership is used to manage the crisis of Latino boys in Bahía's struggling urban school district.

In chapter four, I examine the parallel ascendance of both the prison and non-profit industrial complex as two ways neoliberalism has sought to manage the crisis of boys and young men of color. While the image of the "bad boy" serves to legitimize the rising incarceration rates among Black and Latino males, it also informs the image of the "good boy" who is the imagined beneficiary of boy of color programming. In this chapter, I analyze the discourse of philanthropists and administrators involved with Latino Male Success, as well as program curricula, documents and mission statements. This analysis demonstrates the ways Latino Male Success takes a cultural deficit approach to mentorship by centering its efforts on changing the imagined cultural deficiencies of Latino boyhood. This logic unwittingly blames the imagined bad Latino boy and performatively constructs the empowered good boy as a Latino male embodiment of neoliberal multicultural values.

Chapter five draws primarily from ethnographic fieldnotes to examine the everyday activities of Latino Male Success in the three classrooms I observed regularly. Through these observations, as well as in-depth interviews with mentors and students, I examine the ways neoliberal values projected onto the mentors and boys were animated in the classroom. While neoliberal values are embodied through a variety of forms and performances, I identify three identity values cultivated in Latino Male Success and learned by the students. They are (1) meritocratic individualism, (2) smart consumerism/market orientation, and (3) benevolent hetero-patriarchy.

Chapter six of this dissertation presents data on moments of resistance. In the first half of the chapter I explore the cases of two LMS mentors who sought to resist what they perceived as the "conservative" politics of their non-profit organization, Pueblo Unido. This was done through actively subverting the neoliberal identity of the "good role model" as well as enacting critical teaching that centered structural racism, collective struggle, and gender justice. In the second half of the chapter I focus on the actions of the students who at times resisted neoliberal subjecthood through refusing to adhere to the respectability politics of LMS and a desire for critical race lessons. Despite this resistance, chapter seven demonstrates the uphill battle against neoliberalism, particularly in boy of color programming. In this conclusion chapter I offer policy and practice recommendations for those seeking to support intersectional racial justice education in marginalized communities.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

The topic of boys and young men of color in the educational literature is far from monolithic. A variety of scholars, disciplines, and conceptual framings have contributed to a diverse set of research goals, conclusions, and ethical commitments. I begin this literature review with an overview of those studies interested in schooling as a gendered project. Here, an emphasis will be given to the ways the social construction of masculinity is cultivated in the classroom and on the playground. This is followed with a synopsis of the substantial body of literature on the educational achievement and well-being of boys of color. Of particular interest is the documentation of the hardships and violence faced by boys of color in schools, as well as the possible solutions offered by educational researchers in addressing the needs of this population. I proceed with an in-depth look at one proposed remedy popular among policy makers: the introduction of more male of color educators in the classroom and after school. Present in this work are both the benefits to having male of color educators as well as complications surrounding masculine teacher identity practices. I close my literature review by highlighting a small but growing body of work that is critical of male of color education programming. These works cite the ways the conversation surrounding boys of color has often been complicit with neoliberal and hetero-patriarchal framings of urban schooling.

#### *Creating masculinity in schools*

Schools are key locations in which gendered identity is understood and constructed. Scholars of gender and sexuality in the field of education have produced a large body of research documenting the ways schools, as state institutions, serve as sites of socialization into the gender binary system, as well as locations in which heteronormative gendered subjectivity is (re)created and maintained (Chambers, Tincknell, & Loon, 2004; Francis & Skelton, 2001; Martino, 2000; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Pascoe, 2011; Swain, 2000, 2003). These works problematize essentialist notions of gender identity, and call for educational researchers to move away from seeing gender as innate and biological, but rather a social process that one “does” and performs (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Such approaches of study often draw from the work of gender theorist Judith Butler (1993, 2006) to describe subject formation as discursive process in which language and understanding speaks the subject into existence. On the process of performing gender, Butler (2004) states:

If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another. (p. 1)

This conceptualization of gender underscores not just the socially constructed existence of gender, but also the fluid and unstable practice of performing gender. This process is always in flux and being done and redone. As the research suggests, the school serves as a social sphere in which dominant notions of identity are achieved, practiced and normalized. This is often

accomplished through subtle, every-day peer to peer interactions as well as practices such as bullying, which result in more obvious policing of identity (Chambers et al., 2004; Macintosh, 2007; Pascoe, 2005)

A popular example of this literature is C. J Pascoe's (2005) critically acclaimed article and later book, *Dude, You're a Fag*. In this year-long ethnography at a California high school, Pascoe draws on queer and poststructuralist theories of gender to uncover the ways adolescent masculinity is discursively constructed through the "fag discourse." In her findings, she discusses the ways in which the fag is not a fixed emasculated identity, but something that is created and recreated through language and joking among the boys at her research site. In the study fag talk and fag imitations regulate discourse surrounding proper masculinity, pushing boys to discipline themselves and each other during social interactions with one another. "Any boy can temporarily become a fag in a given social space or interaction" (p. 330). Examples of this could be caring too much about your clothing, showing concern for another boy, or not working hard enough during sport practices. As Pascoe argues, being a fag has less to do with sexual orientation and more to do with the performance of an improper masculinity. Following Butler, Pascoe notes that interactional gender is accomplished by creating the "constitutive outside," namely the fag. The habitual and interactive repudiation of this subject identity builds and rebuilds the parameters of acceptable masculinity (cf. Connell, 2005).

In a comparable 2.5-year ethnography at a middle school, Mora (2013) employs conceptual framings of gender to understand the ways adolescent Latino boys co-construct identity. His data indicate that the performative nature of abjection to homosexuality, wherein boys used language and their bodies to habitually delineate proper masculinity through enacting "compulsory heterosexuality" (p.347). Mora finds this consistent with other studies of masculinity, however adds that the boys in his study often blended Latinx culturally masculine signifiers with U.S. based hegemonic masculinity to create a masculinity specific to racialized Latino males in the United States. In this sense the boys' gender imaginaries were situated "within the constraints of their lived reality" as U.S. born Latino males "residing in low-income neighbourhoods," and took aspects of hegemonic masculinity and employed it to respond to their marginal status (Mora, 2013, p.353).

While Pascoe and Mora's studies emphasize the role peer to peer interaction plays in constructing dominant forms of masculinities among boys, gender scholars in education have increasingly turned a critical lens to the ways dominant forms of masculinity are regulated and maintained through teachers as agents of institutional socialization, as well as the perceived "lack" of more male teachers. Furthermore, public debate has ignited concern for the "feminization of schooling" as a popular reason to explain why male students do not hold the dominant status in education that they once did. Skelton (2002) documents this process among student teachers in the United Kingdom. Her study includes 210 student teacher responses to a survey/questionnaire, as well as 36 follow-up phone interviews. An analysis of the data reveals a consistent feminization of the primary school environment and an implicit and explicit need to re-masculinize education. The respondents (92 women and 118 men) make clear that the gender of teachers is of sizable concern, underscoring a need to engage with the gendered aspects of school organization, curriculum, and pedagogy. However, Skelton finds gender here is being seen through conventional gender stereotypes with little critical awareness of gender as a social construction. Follow up interviews with study participants demonstrate a conceptualization of primary schools as problematically feminine and in need of masculine enhancement.



Skelton's (2002) study, among others (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Skelton, 2009), demonstrates the ways male teachers have often been imagined as implicated, at least in part, in the solution of struggling males in the feminized space of schools. Studies critical of dominant forms of masculinity challenge this call for more male teachers as implicated in reproducing hegemonic forms of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the unstable and ever-changing performance of an idealized masculinity that promotes the dominant social position of men while subordinating the positionality of women and non-binary people (Connell, 2005). Schools serve as one of the first sites that boys begin to understand and practice masculine performances. Boys learn, or are disciplined into understanding and existing in structural and cultural scenarios that privilege specific masculinity at the detriment of other gender-identity expressions and practices (Martino, 2000; Mora, 2012; Pascoe, 2011).

Martino and Frank (2006) begin to fill a gap in this literature by exploring the ways male teachers can function as systems of surveillance for proper masculinity. As they state, "little research in the field of teacher education has addressed the specific impact of gendered subjectivities on male teachers' pedagogical practices" (p. 17). Drawing from Foucault and Butler, the researchers pay particular attention to "an analysis of modes of subjectification" and a focus on the formation of gendered attributes and capacities to provide them with "an interpretative focus on the performative and normative dimensions of enacting masculinities in male teachers' lives at school" (p. 19). Through in-depth interviews with 2 male teachers, Martino and Frank find subtle and explicit ways the teachers in their study reify confining notions of heterosexual masculinity through attempting to "reach" their boys and become accepted. This was particularly salient among interviews with a primary school art teacher who felt his subject was at odds with his male students' identities. To counter-act this, the teacher implemented sports into his lesson plans, as well as hypermasculine subject themes in an attempt to masculinize art for his boys. Through intentionally infusing masculine attributes to his pedagogical practice, this teacher's classroom discursively maintained and policing traditional gender characteristics. The researchers call for further research into the complex ways hegemonic heterosexual masculinities "dictate, limit and constrain both men and boys in schools" through inhibiting their "pedagogical practices and willingness to embrace a broader repertoire of skills and capacities" (Martino & Frank, 2006, p. 29). Martino reiterates this point in further research, calling for a much needed engagement with the "contradictory relations surrounding the negotiation of masculinities" among male teachers, and a critical engagement with the ways certain forms of masculinity are normalized in the classroom (Martino, 2008, p. 600).

The preceding literature does well to highlight the discursive nature of gender and the ways interactions among teachers and peers serve to create and reproduce gender. However, most of this literature lacks a critical analysis of race. In many instances, race is left out of the scope of the study altogether. When race is mentioned, it is often treated as an added discourse which shades gender, rather than an identity which is socio-historically grounded in schools. This study enters this conversation through drawing on similar conceptual frameworks interested in gender and sexuality, while emphasizing the way calls for more male teachers of color draw on racist and patriarchal imaginations of Latino boys in the United States.

### *Who are boys of color?*

Presently, the field of education has taken a strong interest in Latino boys, Black boys and the broader grouping of “boys of color.” This increasingly popular category “boys of color” has been ambiguously used in educational policy and academic literature, and at times encompasses a variety of populations. For instance at the policy, former President Barack Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) Initiative, town hall meetings and affiliated programs address Black, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Latino boys, making the category generally include any racial/ethnic group that is not white in the United States (The White House, 2016). In other instances, studies on the educational achievement of specifically Black and Latino boys use the category boys of color synonymous with the coupling Black and Latino when reviewing the literature (Harper & Associates, 2014).

Although this study focuses specifically on Latino men and boys, it is evident that a larger push to address boys of color more broadly (and Black males more specifically) has greatly informed the educational environment in which my specific case study enters. Caution will be taken not to conflate the experiences of Black and Latino boys (as well as Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander) as unequivocally the same. In part, this blending of literatures is done due to the lack of research looking specifically at Latino boys. In addition, this use of the literature is done because research on Black boys and boys of color frequently informs the way Latino boys are understood and addressed in schools. Intentionally blending these groups has been used by experts in the past, who note that “the plight of Latino males tends to mirror that of Black males” both inside and outside of schools (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014, p. 2).

In other instances, researchers have made a case to focus on anti-blackness, seeing it as the primary racist ideology informing boy of color initiatives. This is the case for Dumas (2016) in studying the My Brother’s Keeper initiative. He states,

Importantly, even as MBK is intended to be inclusive of all boys and young men of color, I contend that the imagination of the problem is decidedly and specifically Black. My focus on blackness here is not intended to render these other groups of color invisible; rather my analysis proceeds with the understanding that it is the deployment of blackness that most heavily informs the racial neoliberal logics of MBK. (p. 96-7)

Dumas raises a provocative point. While this review of the literature finds studies on Black males, Latino males, and boys of color relevant to provide context to this study, in later chapters I engage with the particularity of anti-black racism in the neoliberal multicultural context of my research. This is particularly relevant in the school district of my study where there are two separate mentorship programs for Black and Latino boys.

### *The status and cultural construction of boys of color*

Studies looking at the educational achievement of boys of color emphasize their academic marginalization in schools (Fergus et al., 2014; Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006; Lopez, 2002; Noguera, 2003). Research demonstrates that on most metrics of academic achievement and educational success, Black and Latino boys are consistently separate

from other groups at the bottom (Harper & Associates, 2014; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Schott, 2010). This stark contrast exists in urban, suburban, and rural districts throughout the United States (Noguera, 2012). In many cities in the United States, high school graduation rates for Black and Latino boys are consistently under 50 percent, with few having the qualifications to apply to a four year university (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Schott, 2010). Black and Latino boys have disproportionately high suspension and expulsion rates, are more likely to be excluded from honors and Advanced Placement courses, and among comparable middle-class whites, middle-class Black and Latino boys fall well behind in grade points average and standardized test scores (Noguera, 2012).

Educational researchers have offered an array of factors contributing to the underachievement of boys of color. Among these include the notion that boys in general are socialized to care less about school as they are pushed by social norms to act strong, uninterested, and independent (Pollack & Pipher, 1999). For boys of color, race intersects the notion of male bravado, which some have argued creates academic success as a form of acting white (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004). Others argue for an emphasis on structural factors, citing the segregation of specifically minority students with low socioeconomic standing (Orfield, 2001). Schools where students of color attend are heavily under-resourced, neglected, and lack the appropriate amount of campus staff (Saenz, 2010).

For those interested in the ways racial meaning is inscribed and (re)created, a cultural studies approach to race scholarship and the conversation of boys of color has been significant. Within the cultural politics of race, racial categories are made real through discursive representation, rather than assumed physical traits and biological determinants (Hall, 1997). Dumas (2010) quotes Hall at length to describe the importance of contextualizing the signifier “Black” when articulating a Black cultural politics in education:

The essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference....The moment the signifier “black” is torn from its historical, cultural and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we...fix that signifier outside of history, outside of change, outside of political intervention. (Hall, 1992, p.29-30, as cited in Dumas, 2010, p. 409-10)

In this manner, a cultural studies approach to race scholarship reveals the great importance of representation, and the constant struggle for liberatory racial signification in a racially unequal society. Within cultural studies there is an acknowledgement that white dominance of the apparatuses of racial representation is inherently connected to the control of the means of production as well as the means of representation. This leads Leonardo (2013) to remind us that the cultural politics of race relations in education “signifies the totalizing effect of racism,” that is, a cultural struggle with material consequences (p. 114).

As Howard, Flennaugh, and Terry (2012) argue, “disturbingly absent from the political economy analysis of schooling is the racialized ideological constructions which foster negative beliefs about Blacks in general, and Black males in particular” (p. 89). Brown (2011) explores the origins of Black male pathological representations in schools, finding that four recursive conceptual narratives have been assigned to Black males which affect the ways this population is (mis)treated and represented in current educational narratives. These four themes are: absent and wandering, impotent and powerless, soulful and adaptive, and endangered and in crisis (also see Howard, 2013). Similarly, Latino males have often been represented as a monolithic group, often

defined by their perceived allegiance to a machista cultural attitude and chauvinism. As Hurtado and Sinha (2016) contend, Latino males have been widely ignored from the academic literature, and are frequently denied complex subjecthood, “cast either as victims or victimizers, with little attention to the space in between” (p. 12).

Among scholars interested in the present disenfranchisement of boys of color, studies document the lived experiences of particularly Black and Latino boys as influenced by existing racist representations, further contributing to the construction of race and resulting in racial marginalization through excessive amounts of discipline, exclusion, and material and emotional neglect. These studies have primarily been ethnographic, and highlight the ways cultural pathologies assigned to boys of color result in interpersonal and structural violence on school campuses (Dance, 2002; Lopez, 2002; Nolan, 2011; Rios, 2011, 2017).

Canonical in this literature is Ferguson’s (2001) book *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of Black masculinity*. In this ethnography of a Southern California elementary school Ferguson follows 20 African American fifth and sixth grade boys. With the information given to her by school personal, she categorizes the boys into two camps based on their academic standing: the Troublemakers and the Schoolboys. Troublemakers were Black boys who at the young age of 10 and 11 had already been labeled “unsalvageable” or “jail bound.” However as Ferguson immerses herself in the field, she finds that Troublemakers were frequently pushed to the brink of tantrums by over-surveillance, punishment, and constant suspicion of wrongdoing. Furthermore, after several months of observations, she also notes that despite being academically high-achieving, Schoolboys too were in persistent danger of being read through racist imaginations of Black men. This made them vulnerable to harsh punishments for small offenses, putting their position of good academic standing in constant jeopardy. Overall her study finds that “institutional norms and procedures” are used to “maintain a racial order.” These norms are often founded in popular “images and racial myths” of Black masculinity which frame how schools see Black male children, further contributing to their marginalization and punishment (p. 19). Ferguson’s work, among others (see MacLeod, 2008), advance the work of foundational critical ethnographers like Willis (1981) by complicating class analysis with racial and gendered critique.

In a comparable study, Malagon (2010) finds a similar process among Latino high school males in a qualitative case study of a California continuation high school. Malagon employs a diverse array of “race frameworks” (see Leonardo, 2013), including Critical Race Theory (CRT), Chicana feminist epistemology, and theories of colonization to analyze her site observations and 11 oral histories with 11 Latino male students. The study finds Latino boys’ marginality as largely stemming from dominant readings of the Latino male body as lazy and threatening (also see Cacho, 2007). This resulted in what the boys found to be stereotyping and unfair discipline. Furthermore, even when teachers sought to connect curriculum to the lives of students in the study, the boys still found racist cultural representations at the foundation of their teacher’s pedagogy. As one student states, ““Man I don’t want to read old White man books OR books about gangsters, what’s up with these teachers that think just coz I’m a guy and I’m Mexican I’m a gangster?”” (Malagon, 2010, p.72). By supporting preexisting social scripts assigned to these boys, teachers projected identities such as “bad kid” and “gangster” on students, making the Latino male body “physical and discursive sites marked within colonial...meaning-making process” that serve to reproduce their marginal status (p.73).

In *Hopeful girls, troubled boys: Race and gender disparity in urban education*, Nancy Lopez’s (2002) ethnographic study compares and contrasts the experiences of boys and girls of

Caribbean decent growing up in New York City. Lopez offers the term “racegender experiences” to differentiate between the racialized experiences across gender. Her findings suggest a double standard experienced by the students in her study, particularly in the areas of school policies and discipline. This double standard led security guards and teachers to be more aggressive with the boys, often giving them stronger punishments than their female counterparts and putting them at risk to fall further behind in their academics. Outside of school, Lopez found differential treatment in the family as well. Girls in the study were often assigned more household responsibilities and not allowed out at night. This had the consequence of keeping them out of trouble, teaching them work responsibilities, and plugging them into service-oriented career pathways. These lessons were left unlearned by the boys in the study. In the face of American racism, this study, among others (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), emphasizes a need to focus particularly in boys of color in creating educational interventions.

### *Male teachers of color: Benefits and critiques*

In proposing solutions to aid in the academic marginalization of boys of color, policy work has called for an increase in the amount of male educators of color in schools to serve as teachers, role models, and mentors to struggling boys in search of positivity and hope (Harper & Associates, 2014; Odih, 2002; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Vilson, 2015). Harper (2015) argues that research on boys of color has been overwhelmingly negative, highlighting a difficult and bleak struggle in schools. The addition of successful and caring men of color on campus, as well as increasing the amount of literature that highlights the successes of boys and men of color can serve to counter deficit narratives assigned to boys of color and begin to normalize the possibility of success. Similarly, in a popular article on the declining numbers of Latino men in higher education Saenz & Ponjuan (2009) make a call to “successful” Latino men to serve as role models and mentors to struggling Latino boys to create a culture of possibility and hope. They state,

The leadership of successful Latino male adults is needed to make a difference in the lives of Latino males. Successful Latino males in the private sector, in education, and in the local community need to reach back and support the next generation of Latino males. We believe that Latino male leaders can be the most powerful image for young Latinos to embrace as role models. It is the responsibility of the Latino male leadership to recognize that they need to “pay it forward” for the Latino youth so that they can begin to believe that their future is not limited by their perception but rather by the encouragement and positive role model behaviors of their Latino male mentors (p.84).

In this vision of relief for struggling Latino boys, the authors speak to a diverse community, broadening our understanding of mentor and educator to exist both inside and outside of traditional public education. This expansion of mentorship to potential mentorship and support in the “private sector” and “local community” will be touched up later in this literature review.

Looking at teachers in particular, research focused on the experiences and pedagogical techniques of male teachers of color has primarily been conducted with Black men. Lynn (2006b) uses the qualitative method of portraiture to construct a vivid snapshot of three Black

men teaching in South Central Los Angeles. His research finds Black male teachers playing a critical role in the success of failing Black male students by employing culturally relevant pedagogy that demonstrated a deep understanding through personal experience of the barriers facing their students. Some students perceived these teachers as “otherfathers,” who were able to provide a “combination of tough love, discipline, and caring” which “proved to be a winning combination” for students (p. 2517). Key to their success was a understanding of “street culture” (see Dance, 2002) which led them to understand cultural practices frequently deemed deviant and punishable by other teachers.

In a large study looking at seven “single-sex schools” for Black or Black and Latino males, Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2014) find that similarly schools focusing on the educational achievement sought to recruit men of color educators. The reasoning behind the creation of single-sexed school for specifically Black and Latino boys was to create a culture of comradery and success among boys and men. Several teachers in their study mention this as a way to “counter the presence of negative male role models” in the communities that their students come from, who “lack a strong work ethic, engage in criminal activity...and do not hold respectable jobs” (p. 33). This notion of the role model was important to nearly all schools participating in their study. The researchers state,

It is noteworthy that all but one of the principals at these schools was a Black male, and all of the schools made it clear that they went out of their way to recruit Black and Latino males as teachers and counselors. Equally important, each of the schools found ways to invite professional Black and Latino men to their schools as guest speakers to introduce their students to role models they believed would exert a positive influence on their students. (p. 42).

Despite seeing success in some of the schools participating in the study, the researchers were unable to conclude that single-sex schools were an effective model of intervention. By the end of the study some schools were forced to close by the district due to low graduation rates, while other schools could perhaps be seen as unremarkable regarding normative academic achievement markers. Despite a lack of measurable success, all-male schools provide unique environments where cultural and political economic forces shape identity for boys of color (Oeur, 2018).

Bristol (2017) complicates the conversation surrounding Black male teachers. In looking at the experiences of Black men in the teaching profession in traditional public schools, he finds a consistent lack of support and isolation felt by Black male teachers at their school sites. This was particularly prominent for teachers who were the sole Black male teacher on campus. These “loners” were more likely to feel racial and gender isolation, and contemplating leaving their school. Furthermore Black male teachers in nearly all school settings described feeling undervalued, ignored, and at times even feared by their fellow faculty, leading many to feel unhappy and disillusioned by the teaching profession. In other cases, Black male teachers report feeling overly used as disciplinarians for Black boys in trouble. Brockenbrough (2015) contextualizes this treatment within a racial climate that frequently valorizes “the authoritative Black male patriarch in American society,” further perpetuating confining notions of Black masculinity (p. 500). Participants in his study consistently conveyed feelings of overuse, stereotyping, and a constant push to meet the expectations of being a “firm” Black man in the lives of unruly boys. This framing of Black male teachers perpetuates the problematic narrative that Black boys and boys of color do not experience academic success because they simply lack

a strong father figure at home to keep them out of trouble and teach restraint (Brockenbrough, 2015).

This complication of the image of the male teacher of color is a recent but growing conversation. Brown (2012) highlights the need to “trouble commonsense perspectives on Black male teachers” by acknowledging the complicated nature of identity and the array of identity practices performed by Black men (p. 310). In a study with Black male teacher candidates, Woodson and Pabon (2016) argue for the necessity to create room for diverse expression of racial, gendered, and sexual identities among Black men in the teaching profession. Through interviews with Black men entering the teaching force, they find that “heteropatriarchal assumptions” regarding Black men and boys in teacher-recruitment initiatives result in the assumption that “the racial identity, gendered identity, and sex category of an individual who is Black and male are naturally cohesive, and result in certain ways of thinking, doing, and being in the social world” (p.58). This assumption about Black male identity can result in discouraging Black men who are gay, transgender, or gender queer from entering the teaching profession. As one of their research participants states, “If cisgender male identity is what Black males need in role models, then I am not an appropriate mentor or teacher. Everyone seems to want a Black male teacher, but they really want a Black cisgender male teacher...” (p. 57).

In a comparable study with Latino male teacher candidates, Lara and Fránquiz (2015) similarly find the need for social justice teaching programs to create space for Latino men to grow and expand confining notions of masculinity in the classroom. As they state, “Regulatory pressures shape the space for authoring...identities” and habitually seek to reify essentialist notions of Latino manhood (p. 223). The researchers note that one way to aid in the disruption of confining identity practices is the introduction of curriculum to facilitate critical dialogues about diverse expressions of gender and sexual identities among men and boys. In the case of this study, elementary children’s literature that displayed non-traditional gender occupations in the workplace was used to spark dialogue among students and teachers about the social construction of gendered occupations and the importance of disrupting essentialist notions of gender performance.

### *Neoliberal framings: Boys of color in need of role models*

In conversation with gendered concerns in the recruitment and retention of male of color educators has been a critique of the ways these “solutions” often propagate neoliberal framings of urban education (Baldrige, 2014, 2017; Crenshaw, 2014; Dumas, 2013, 2016b). As critical theorists in education remind us, schools and educational programs are always already shaped by wider economic, political, and social contexts (Apple, 2004). Far from neutral, the manifestations of schooling practices, curricula, and programming reflect a dominant politics, which serves to dictate the ways the subjects of educational policy are managed, monitored, and in fact created. Schooling and educational programs are both shaped and limited by the predominant discourse of the time, making educational knowledge and action fundamentally political, even if the politics is masked in the commonsensical language of the hegemonic discourse. Presently neoliberalism is the hegemonic ideology and discourse of education.

This dissertation understands neoliberalism as the most recent form of capitalism that has dominated global economic systems since the early 1970’s. As an economic ideology, neoliberalism is founded on the assumption that to reach the highest levels of social good, all

human action and societal structuring must adhere to market logics (Friedman, 2002). Neoliberalism demands government deregulation of natural market processes and advocates for a radical shrinking in government itself. This has led to the dismantling of social welfare programs, the privatization of public goods, and the growth of wealth inequality (Harvey, 2007). In the field of education, neoliberalism's privatizing desire and withdrawal from public education has become prioritized among policy makers, re-directing education reform efforts to the private and non-profit sector. Lipman (2011) describes neoliberalism as an assemblage of "economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere" (p.6).

In regards to race and racism, the multicultural rhetoric of neoliberalism conceals the centrality of race in capitalism's economic and social structures. This is done through managing to problem of race by promoting increased liberty and economic opportunities through market created choice and productivity (Goldberg, 2008). However this enhanced choice, liberty, and private sector simulation comes with a retreat from public investment and social serve, further weakening already economically disposed communities of color. Melamed (2006) refers to this process as neoliberal multiculturalism. Here, diversity is celebrated and appears to be "in harmony with some version of antiracist goals" while simultaneously promoting a concealed racist discourse that propagates racial inequality and violence (p.1). This results in the conditional acceptance of deserving multicultural individuals or groups at the detriment of the larger racialized populations who become pathologized as lazy and marked as deserving their lack of wealth and resources.

In her article simply titled "Neoliberalism," published in the inaugural issue of the journal *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Grace Kyungwon Hong (2015) opens with the now famous 1965 policy brief "The Negro Family: A Case for National Action," more commonly known as "The Moynihan Report." For Hong, this scathing criticism of what is depicted as the crumbling Black, urban family, represents a shift from the widely repressive Jim Crow order, towards a form of racial control also characterized by affirmative and productive biopower (see Foucault, 2010). Through seeing the problems of Black poverty as a result of problematic gender and sexual practices, this populous became a group to be incorporated through help and care. Similarly, scholars such as Lisa Dugan (2004) and Lisa Lowe (1996) have documented they ways economic restructuring has often been facilitated through cultural discourses surrounding racial, sexual and gendered deviancy. As Patricia Hill Collins (2008) reminds us, perhaps no image is more infamous in this regard than the controlling image of the welfare queen. This narrative of a single Black mother living in extravagance through government checks was employed by Ronald Reagan to mount white opposition to social welfare programs. The image of the welfare queen shows a "crisis" of Black motherhood as well as the Black family's overall perceived failure to adhere to heteropatriarchal norms. In this dissertation I will demonstrate that similar logics inform the perceived crisis of Latino masculinity as a crisis of heteropatriarchal failure.

The pervasiveness of neoliberal school reform presents a critical task for educational researchers to understand the ideological underpinnings that circumscribe the intervention of boy of color programming, particularly within communities of color. As scholars have argued, while neoliberalism has often been thought of as a violent economic strategy inflicted onto communities of color, we must also take note of the ways neoliberal scripts can serve to rewrite and re-signify popular social justice education slogans and goals among communities of color (J. T. Scott, 2013). For example, in a study looking at school reform in Milwaukee, Pedroni and



Apple (2005) examine a seemingly odd coalition built between school voucher advocates and the educationally disenfranchised Black community. The researchers conclude that while voucher programs have been extensively documented as an ineffective solution in changing the educational outcomes for students of color (Carnoy, 2001), a combination of “insurgent conservative educational discourses” and a sense of “social emergency” led the local Black community groups to support neoliberal policy as a means to educational achievement (Pedroni & Apple, 2005, p. 2069).

While Apple and Pedroni note the troubled circumstances that reformers find themselves, caught between the rise of neoliberalism and the historical failure of public education to uplift communities of color, other researchers have found self-interest and staunch belief in the market as leading elites within communities of color to help facilitate this transition (Dávila, 2004; Melamed, 2006). Spence (2016) finds the rise of Black elites into the realm of neoliberal school reform and venture philanthropy as counter-productive to the goals of Black educational freedom. This neoliberal turn in communities of color has served to inject individualist and consumerist understandings of education to those communities most vulnerable to the withdrawal of welfare and public service. This has served to blame individual students and families for academic failures and deviated from collective struggles around structural schooling injustices in the United States (Spence, 2016).

In regards to boys and young men of color, Dumas (2016) highlights the ways former President Obama’s 2014 My Brother’s Keeper initiative serves as an example of neoliberal governmentality propagated by Black leadership, noting that ways the initiative makes an ideological argument for “government retreat from racial redress” and a turn to educational solutions found in the private and community sectors. With no funds for the program being provided by the federal government<sup>3</sup>, the White House initiative called on communities of color to join the MBK Community Challenge and make interventions in the lives of boys of color. As Dumas states,

My critique here is that these arguably beneficial programs are being advanced within a neoliberal project intended to undermine more fundamental change by locating problems within (the bodies of) Black boys and young men rather than in the social and economic order (Anyon, 2005, 2014; Crenshaw, 2014). MBK initiatives are proffered not as public investments in the public good, but as private-sector technical solutions to the perceived cultural problems of a specific group.

The result of programs like MBK, as well as the larger ideological shift to neoliberal understandings of the problems faced by boys of color, have led to the over idealization of male teachers of color (Martino, 2015; Phillips & Nava, 2011), particularly in relation to neoliberal, deficit framings and the idea that male of color can serve as “corrective representations” of proper and productive masculinities (Singh, 2018).

Continuing this indictment of neoliberal framing of youth of color, Baldrige (2017), drawing from a qualitative study working with after-school programs for Black youth, asserts,

Black youth in low-income settings are framed as ‘broken’ and in need of ‘fixing.’ Black male educators are then positioned as their ‘heroes’ and ‘saviors.’ This positioning of

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<sup>3</sup> Funding for the initiative was raised through the private sector and philanthropic organizations, who agreed to raise US\$200 million over 5 years (Dumas, 2016).

Black males as heroes and the discourse that follow are indicative of the larger political context of neoliberal education reform, which rests on white paternalism (p. 781).

This savior attitude was widely (although not unanimously) resented and resisted by youth workers of color in her study who viewed executives and corporate funders as problematically placing individuals, and in particular Black men, as the face of youth outreach programs. This was frequently done as a business strategy to attract donors and further philanthropic investment in the program. However, as Baldrige and many of her participants note, reliance on “superhero narratives removes the focus from youth and from the structural conditions that shape the lives of youth” (p.791). As I will argue, this turn to successful men of color as mentors and role models also serves to reify deficit understandings of boys, creating an idealized masculinity that is upwardly mobile, heteronormative, and merit-based.

While not denying the benefits of culturally relevant pedagogy for boys and young men of color (A. L. Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011), this dissertation is concerned with the narratives assigned to boys (A. L. Brown & Donnor, 2011), the ways neoliberal logics have influenced communities of color, and the ways we understand and frame our educational problems and solutions as cultural and individual. Indeed at a global scale, neoliberalism has reformulated the role of teacher as practitioner who must individually take on the responsibility of class outcomes amidst diminishing school funding and structural support (Done & Murphy, 2016). For men of color, this has meant pressures to become the disciplinarians of boys of color as a means to produce academic success. Bristol (2015) contends that policy initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Black male teachers have insidiously placed the burden of achieving educational equity on Black men themselves, while excluding “the provision of an educational system, writ large, with the tools to ensure the success of Black boys” (p. 57).

It is amidst this neoliberal turn in boy of color education that my study enters. The proposed research contributes to the aforementioned literature by providing new data to explore both the ways Latino male educators (re)construct dominant gender subjectivities, as well as the cultural politics of Latino male educators and its cultural political economic implications (see Sum & Jessop, 2013). The conceptual framing of this project directs my research to explore how a neoliberal understanding of the problems facing Latino boys serves to create an idealized, neoliberal Latino male subjectivity to be lived and promoted through Latino male mentorship. An intersectional approach will inform the analysis of this study. Pushing beyond previous studies on boys of color, intersectionality as a framework (see Crenshaw, 1991) will not be limited to simply acknowledging that Latino boys sit at the intersection of race and gender, but rather serve to help interrogate the ways neoliberal ideologies in urban education attach themselves to preexisting systems of oppression, weaving new and complex amalgamations of desirable subjecthood among research participants.

### CHAPTER 3 Research Methods

#### *Qualitative inquiry, researcher positionality, and ethnographic ethics*

This dissertation is designed as an ethnographic case study of the mentorship program Latino Male Success (LMS). LMS is a school-based mentorship program for Latino boys and function at 10 middle and high schools at Bahía Unified School District (BUSD) in Bahía, California. Although this project has adapted and transformed since its proposal, the goal of documenting and studying the cultural forces that frame and dictate the day-to-day practices of Latino male mentorship has remained constant. This focus of study makes ethnography a well-fitted research methodology for the project. Simply stated, ethnography is the detailed study of people and culture within a given social environment. As a research method, ethnography is characterized by its diverse techniques of qualitative data collection, prolonged time in the field, and orientation towards description and interpretation of cultural phenomena (Schram, 2005). As LeCompte and Schensul (1999) state, “Ethnography generates or builds theories of cultures—or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave—that are situated in local time and space” (p. 8). Ethnography stresses the socially constructed nature of reality and a detailed and rigorous analysis of how these realities are generated. Having worked (and been positioned) as a Latino male mentor in formal and informal education settings all my adult life, this dissertation allowed me to bring a slew of qualitative research tools to further explore the increasing turn to male mentorship in urban education. Conducting ethnographic research over the span of a year gave me the opportunity to adapt my research questions, test hypothesis, and uncover new framings of how to understand the act of Latino male mentorship, as well as the discourses that informed my case study’s program goals and day-to-day practices in the classroom.

While ethnographic research delves deep into a cultural phenomenon unique to its research site, “cultural theories generated in one ethnography provide the basis for hypotheses, hunches, observed patterns, or interpretations to be explored and developed in the same and other, similar settings” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 8). With this in mind, an ethnographic case study design allotted me extended time to trace the cultural influences that were enacted upon and through the work of mentorship in Latino Male Success, with the hope of having my research speak to other programs with similar goals and circumstances. My research builds an understanding of the processes through which these cultural influences (later to be identified as neoliberal discourse) construct the ways research participants make sense of their roles as both students and educators, as well as racial and gendered subjects within Latino Male Success. I argue that these findings offer insight and hypotheses for the cultural workings of male of color mentorship programs in similar settings around the country within this era of neoliberal school reform. This is not to claim scientifically generalizable knowledge, but rather a level of representativeness that this case study model provides (Maxwell, 2013).

While an ethnographic case study approach was well suited for this project, qualitative research, and specifically ethnography, comes with its own unique variety of biases, limits, and problematics. This is the case with all research. In qualitative research, data are always given meaning through the theoretical lenses through which they are analyzed. By the end of this project, I had gathered a substantial amount of data in the form of hundreds of pages of observational fieldnotes, many hours of interview transcripts, newspaper articles, program

documents, reports, and media clips. My own biases, both intentional and subconscious, informed the way data were collected, what counted as valuable data, and how data were analyzed. Despite a strong ethical commitment to honor and bring to the fore the voices and stories of my research participants, the power of interpretation and representation was ultimately mine. This was a point of ethical contention for me. As indigenous scholars reiterate, ethnography, as well as research practices in general, have historically left indigenous and disenfranchised groups powerless as spectacles of study (Smith, 2012). Despite my unwavering commitment to have my research analyze and disrupt oppressive discourses that permeate urban education, this contradiction and tension is something I have continued to grapple with through data collection, analysis, and report-back.

Furthermore, my positionality as a researcher who has been both a Latino male student as well as a Latino male mentor for high school students positioned me as someone similar to the population of my study. Among the mentors of Latino Male Success, I was indistinguishable at school sites, and was often assumed as a visiting mentor by school staff. I built close relationships with mentors and bonded over similar life circumstances and interests that are common among young, college-educated Latino men who work with youth. Nonetheless my role as researcher and privileged university agent should not just be acknowledged, but also scrutinized. I follow Villenas (1996) in resisting the glorification of one's insider access in the research of marginalized communities, and instead critically reflect on what my research seeks to uncover and for whom? In social justice research the answer to this question is often all too simplistically stated, *research should benefit the community*. However communities are not monolithic entities, but rather composed of many intersecting populations, politics, and power dynamics.

My research strives to be boldly critical without being dismissively reductionist. Stated differently, in the coming chapters I seek to trace neoliberal power in this ethnography without simply labeling individual agents of this power within the binary of bad or good, neoliberal or not neoliberal. Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) state that the *critical* in critical qualitative research pushes researchers to attend to “issues of power and justice” and the ways “the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (p. 288)” (also see Willis, 1981). This attention to power and its reproduction or disruption led to me to at times criticize Latino Male Success, as well as disagree with individual participants in the ways I interpreted data. This difference in analysis was isolated, and generally my process of report-back and contribution to Latino Male Success was highly positive. For those who had reservations regarding my interpretations, much of this disagreement was surrounding the boundaries and (re)construction of Latino masculinity, as well as the proper way (or critical need) to document and assess what this dissertation deems toxic masculinity, and its interconnectedness to neoliberal capitalism, heteronormativity, patriarchy, racism, and transphobia.

To be a “social justice” researcher that has fundamental and empirical disagreements with individual research participants was difficult. I sought to bridge these differences through extended research report backs and offerings of encrypted data to support my conclusions. Furthermore, ruminations on what it means to be a “worthy witness” (Winn & Ubiles, 2011) led me to on one hand refuse to center damaged (Tuck, 2009) and simplistic representations of the confining Latino male machista archetype (see Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). On the other hand, I also strove to witness and honor those that had been excluded or silenced, and thus invisibilized or

erased. Despite my main research site being an all cis-male (and frequently assumed heterosexual) space, I sought out other(ed) voices and was intentional in gathering the thoughts and criticisms of women, transgender folks, and queer folks that were present at school sites. I also strove to listen to the silences of youth whose identities or physical bodies may have been excluded from Latino Male Success. This meant reflecting on inaudible queer voices that would remain closeted and unknown throughout the study. It also meant carving space in this study for non-cisgender students whose exclusion from Latino Male Success speaks volumes to the story of Latino male mentorship. This story is their story as well. This commitment, as well as the recursive nature of ethnography, demanded constant reassessment and revision while in the field and during data analysis. My final research questions for this dissertation are as follows.

### *Research Questions*

1. How does neoliberal multicultural discourse frame/construct Latino male identity in schools?
2. How is an intersectional Latino male subjectivity animated in boy of color programming?
3. In what way, if any, are neoliberal multicultural identities disrupted through alternative framings of Latinx education and/or Latino masculinity?

### *Research Site: The Latino Male Success program*

Latino Male Success is a school-based mentorship program located in the middle or large sized city of Bahía, California. To protect the privacy of my research participants, pseudonyms have been used for the name of the city, the program, as well as all participants. Like many cities in urban regions, Bahía is racially and ethnically diverse, and has a large, low-income Black and Latinx community. The majority of the Latinx population is of Mexican or Central American descent. Also like many cities in urban regions, Bahía is presently undergoing the process of renovating its previously deteriorated urban infrastructure to attract capital and investment. This revitalization has primarily benefited (and facilitated) the recent influx of middle and high income residents, overly represented by whites. The boom of local industries and reinvestment in the city has sparked rapid gentrification. U.S. Census data for Bahía reports a steady decline of particularly Black residents since the early 2000's, and a recent explosion of new, higher income whites. Despite the massive accumulations of capital in Bahía, as well as neighboring cities in the urban region, Bahía's public schools (still serving a predominately non-white student population) have remained impoverished and in severe debt.

Latino Male Success was created and presently managed by the organization *Pueblo Unido*. Pueblo Unido is a local non-profit 501(c)(3), community development corporation whose mission is to improve the quality of life of Bahía residents, with a focus on its predominantly Latinx neighborhoods. Latino Male Success is a relatively small representation of Pueblo Unido's overall efforts in the community, whose work spans into job training, community cultural events, housing development, and microfinance. Although under the jurisdiction of Pueblo Unido, Latino Male Success receives a small portion of its budget from Bahía Unified

School District (BUSD) and is frequently portrayed in the media as a district program. The program was established in 2010 through a partnership between Pueblo Unido and BUSD. When it was founded the program originally served just four schools, however in recent years it has expanded to 10 middle and high schools, serving students ages 12-19 years old.

Like Bahía itself, BUSD is a mid or large sized school district serving a diverse student body. The designated schools that Latino Male Success operates in were chosen for both their low performance as well as high numbers of Latinx students. This led to nearly all Latino Male Success schools being located on the northside of Bahía which houses large numbers of Latinx families. All schools partnering with Latino Male Success were BUSD public schools with Latinx populations spanning from 32% to 71% of the student body. The four high schools served by the mentorship program had an overall student population range of 850-1,750 students, and the six middle schools 250-550 students.

The program employs 10 mentors, each assigned to a single classroom at each school site, with class sizes ranging from 15 to 30 students. There they run a period-long class during the regular school day as either an advisory course or Chicano Studies class. There was no uniformed student admittance process across Latino Male Success, and each class composition varied by school site. All classrooms had a variety of students ranging in grade level as well as academic achievement. It was common to have both high achieving and low achieving students, with grade point averages at times ranging from 4.0 to below a 1.0. Generally, student recruitment would be done through both teacher referral as well as students' genuine interest in the opportunity to get mentorship and participate in an all Latino male space. In some school sites class size was low due to competition with other elective courses. In other cases, there was a long waitlist because of lack of space in the class.

The duties of the mentors were at times unclear (as will be discuss in my findings chapters), however beyond facilitating their class period mentors maintained contact with parents (sometimes doing home visits), did individual check-ins with students on a regular basis, and advocated for their students among teachers and administration in academic and disciplinary hearings. Many mentors also held study halls and pulled students out of class for individual tutoring sessions before important exams. The most important and highly valued duty among the mentors was to build genuine connections with the boys and serve as a positive Latino male role model in the academic and social lives of their students.

### *The mentors*

During the span of the study 12 mentors were employed by Latino Male Success. Two mentors willfully left the organization during the middle of the school year and were replaced with two newly hired mentors. Mentor ages ranged from 23 to 30 years old and all but one of the mentors held a bachelor's degrees. All mentors self-identified as Latino men. The following table displays the demographic information of all mentors who participated in interviews for this study.

**Table 1. Demographic summary of mentors**

Participant	Age	School type	Ethnic Origin	Years in Program
Javier*	30	Middle School	Salvadoran/Mexican	5
Nicolás	24	Middle School	Mexican	>1
Samuel	28	Middle School	Salvadoran	3
Oscar	24	Middle School	Mexican	2
Alex	24	Middle School	Mexican	1
Antonio*	29	Middle School	Mexican/Salvadoran/Cuban	4
Sergio*	23	High School	Mexican	1
Samuel	26	High School	Mexican	2
Iván*	28	High School	Mexican	5
Agustín	23	High School	Mexican	>1
Mauricio	26	High School	Mexican	3

\*Mentors who were shadowed during the school year

*Data collection: Media*

Primary forms of data collection for this ethnographic case study were participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and media and document analysis. I began by compiling media data that gave me a strong sense of how the program was understood among Pueblo Unido and Latino Male Success. Examples of these data included Pueblo Unido web pages, Latino Male Success mission statements, program literature, as well as the memorandum of understanding document that formally outlines the relationship between the Pueblo Unido and Bahía Unified School District (BUSD). I also sought out media data that helped me understand the way the program was understood in the public eye. This led me to compile several articles on the program published by some of the region’s largest newspapers, a variety of social media documents posted by BUSD social media pages, individual school websites that mentioned Latino Male Success, and a local nightly news clip that praised the work done by the mentors in Bahía schools. Publication dates for these documents were as early as 2011 and as recent as 2018.

*Data collection: Participant observations*

Initial contact with the program was made in January of 2017. I had surveyed several organizations working with boys and young men of color and found that Latino Male Success was a strong fit for my research and was open to working with me. My official fieldwork began in the summer of 2017 by attending Latino Male Success staff meetings as mentors began preparing for the school year.<sup>4</sup> In my first meeting with the mentors the program director allowed me to introduce myself and explain my interest in studying Latino male mentorship. After sharing a bit about myself and how I came to my research topic the group asked a few questions but in general expressed strong interest in my research and openness to having me around. As a young Latino male educator myself, the mentors and I shared many commonalities. Furthermore, there was a culture of fraternity in the workspace, and many mentors seemed genuinely interested in supporting a fellow Latino man in pursuit of a graduate degree. I started attending the weekly summer staff meetings and eventually began inquiring if mentors would be open to allowing me to shadow them in their classrooms once the school year began. I had hoped to shadow one middle school and one high school mentor, however three mentors were interested in having me in their classroom. The program director informed me that all three were veteran mentors local to Bahía and that in his mind all three would represent a strong and expansive look at LMS mentorship. After meeting with the mentors and comparing each school site’s schedule, it was decided that I would shadow all three.

The three mentors whose classrooms I initially began observing are Mr. Javier, Mr. Antonio, and Mr. Iván. School site visits occurred for two years. I began in August of 2017 during the beginning of the school year and continued until the end of the academic year in May 2019. In April of 2018, during the end of the first school year, Mr. Antonio left LMS for another job. Mr. Sergio was hired and was observed for the remainder of the study. During the second year of observations Mr. Iván’s classroom was not formally observed due to time constraints. The following chart illustrates the time spent with each mentor in each site.

**Table 2. Participant observation information**

Participant	School type	Time observed
Mr. Javier	Middle School A	Two school years
Mr. Iván	High School A	One school year
Mr. Antonio	Middle School B	Eight months
Mr. Sergio	Middle School B	One school year and two months

<sup>4</sup> While preliminary data had been gathered, this study’s human subjects research protocol did not get institutional review board (IRB) approval until July of 2017. This project was classified as non-exempt of review, however because it represented no more than minimal risk to human subjects, it required sub-committee approval rather than full IRB review.



I generally visited each classroom at least twice a week during the mentor's Latino Male Success period. It was also common for me to attend additional school-day or after-school activities at each school site. One mentor held an after-school homework hall which I attended on a weekly basis. Another mentor helped run a Raza Club at his school which I periodically attended as well. During my initial observations my role was generally a discussion and activity participant as well as a tutor. As the months passed mentors asked me to have a bigger role in their classroom. This meant at times taking over some lessons (although this did not happen on a regular basis) or being utilized as another adult to facilitate smaller groupwork or athletic activities.

At these three school sites I built strong relationships with the Latino Male Success students. On my first visit to each site, and then again at the beginning of the following school year, I explained to them that I was a student-researcher from UC Berkeley and spoke a bit about my story coming to graduate school. The boys appeared to generally understand that I was not school staff or a Latino Male Success employee and that would not get them into trouble unless necessary. For example, if a mentor left the room for a moment, students felt free to quickly take out their phone or do other activities against the rules noting, "Michael won't tell." In moments of extreme disorganization or when playfighting among boys was beginning to be too rough, I was able to use my "teacher voice" to keep the peace if it was appropriate to do so. This only occurred on a handful of occasions. Although I attempted to maintain this relationship as best I could, months of being in the classroom eventually positioned me as an adult educator, and many boys saw me as a second mentor. In one instance the high school mentor I observed need to unexpectedly miss class. Rather than call for a last-minute substitute, he asked me to fill in for his period which I was able to do with little problem.

Beyond being a classroom observer, my role as ethnographer was varied. Green (2013) likens the process of participant observation as a lively and flexible game of double-dutch, a processes that requires researchers to play with the time, rhythm, and change as they become incorporated into community spaces and build organic relationship with students. During my time with students I negotiated my role based on the needs of the mentor as well as the evolving relationships I was forming with the boys. On the academic side of things, I taught the occasional lesson, provided in-class tutoring support, and was available for after-school tutoring at the middle schools on a weekly basis. This established me as an adult willing to provide dedicated academic support, and boys frequently expressed their appreciation for the extra help. I would always remind them that they were helping me with my work as well. Outside of academics, prolonged time in the field led to organic relationships to form in a variety of ways. I enjoyed getting to know boys through both class discussions as well as informal side conversations that would inevitably occur on a daily basis. I was also a highly sought-after team member during Friday athletic activities and built early relationships and comradery through athletics.<sup>5</sup> Regularly scheduled athletic activities only took place in the middle school sites. A month into each school year of the study I learned all roughly 50 boys' names that were in the classrooms I observed. Many boys felt comfortable asking for my phone number (a common practice among mentors in Latino Male Success) for any future help if they needed me. Others were comfortable asking for a ride home if it was late, to which I always replied yes. Many of the boys played organized sports and I was frequently invited to attend soccer games where I cheered on student-athletes and mingled with other Latino Male Success students and their friends and family in the

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<sup>5</sup> In many ways the ability to connect with boys over athletic activities can reify confining notions of desirable masculinity and I reflect further on this point in chapter 5 (also see Swain, 2000).

stands. Developing close relationship with the students was one of the most personally rewarding aspects of participant observations and I continue to maintain contact with many of the boys as well as mentors today.

Beyond direct participant observations at the three school sites with mentors and students, I also sought to immerse myself in the atmosphere in which Latino Male Success was imbedded. This led me to Pueblo Unido events both directly connected to Latino Male Success, such as fundraisers, as well as community events sponsored by Pueblo Unido to familiarize myself with their other projects. Through this study I also frequented Bahía Unified School District events that seemed relevant to Latino Male Success. These events included several district board meetings as well as district-led forums on topics ranging from Latinx community engagement to Black male empowerment in BUSD.

While in the field my inscription process consisted of taking constant head notes as well as jottings if I was sure my quick note taking would not disrupt the activity at hand. Jottings (see Peltó & Peltó, 1978) were my first step in transferring head notes to fieldnotes. Jottings were taken on my phone, in a notebook that I frequently carried, or on loose worksheet paper that might have been present in the classroom. If the field visit's events appeared to be particularly relevant to my research I would take elongated scratch notes in my car directly after my visit. These varied forms of notetaking would be used to generate fieldnotes that I typed up on a laptop later that day, or later in the week. As LeCompte and Schensul (2012) note, writing down notes "inevitably is done at least to some degree through the lens of the ethnographer" (p. 32-3). This implies not just a level of researcher bias, but also a degree of preliminary analysis performed when selecting what to document as well as how it is described. In this way fieldnotes should not be considered raw data, but rather "semi-cooked" data that would later be more fully analyzed. By the end of the project I had compiled several hundred pages of fieldnotes from approximately 300 site visits across the two middle schools and high school. This amounted to well over 500 hours in Latino Male Success classrooms. In addition to this 20 fieldnotes document outsidés events, fundraisers, office visits, and district events that I attended.

#### *Data collection: Interviews*

I conducted formal interviews with 11 of the 12 mentors that worked at Latino Male Success during my time in the field, as well as the program director, two former mentors, and several Pueblo Unido staff. An additional oral-history interview was conducted with the three mentors being shadowed to build a richer understanding of their life stories and how they came to their work as a mentor. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations including school sites, coffee shops, and the Pueblo Unido office. All formal interviews were audio recorded and required an Institutional Review Board (IRB) form signature. Interviews with adults lasted from 45 minutes to two hours.

In mentor interviews I worked through four-phase clustering of interview questions. A visual representation of this interview pattern can be found in Figure 1. The first area began with an overview of the personal background of each mentor and their journey to working with Latino Male Success. This transitioned into their own personal assessment of the problems facing the boys of Bahía and their own philosophy on the goals and values of Latino male mentorship. This was followed by asking them to then construct how they perceived the values, goals, and mission of Latino Male Success, as well as the various actors contributing to the program. For some

mentors there was little difference between these two conceptualizations. For others, this led to generative differentiations as mentors elaborated on, or revised previous statements, working to map out how and why they thought there were differences in the values and goals of Latino male mentorship. The fourth and final cluster of questions was regarding their practice and how they carried out the variety of values in their everyday lives. Despite having this four-phase interview plan, I sought to keep my interviews flexible and did not hesitate to let mentors bring up points that differed from my four areas. At the end of each interview I also asked if mentors had other points they would like to bring up, or state what they felt might be most important for a study on Latino male mentorship. A copy of my mentor interview protocol can be found in Appendix 1.

**Figure 1. Four-phase interview process for mentors**



I also conducted 20 student interviews. The majority were students in the high school classroom I observed, however several middle school students and one Latino Male Success alumni were also interviewed. Student interviews generally lasted 20-40 minutes and were conducted in private rooms at the school sites. Interviewing youth presented a separate set of challenges than interviews with the adults in this study. Hill (2005) identifies three core differences in interviewing children: discrepancy in verbal competence, unequal power relationships, and larger vulnerability. All three of these issues were taken into account in going about this portion of data collection. Upon beginning my first interviews with students I found that despite having built a very comfortable and lighthearted relationship with many of the boys, they were often stiff and nervous during this one-on-one assessment-like situation. Beginning student interviews with joking conversation or asking about things in their life like sports or music helped begin the conversation. I also reminded students of the confidentiality of the interview, and established through example the appropriateness to use colloquial language in both English and Spanish that helped make the atmosphere more comfortable. I also found that informal interviews were useful and particularly conversations on car rides home were especially insightful. Although some issues with youth interviews are impossible to overcome, such as the inherent vulnerability of youth within a structure that disadvantages them politically and socially, I also found that youth were highly articulate and sophisticated in their interviews. I push back against the notion that youth do not have high levels of verbal competence (within a reasonable age), but rather researchers must find new settings and structures to allow youth to express their wisdom.

Similar to the mentors, I employed a four-phase interview scheme in student interviews, demonstrated in Figure 2. I began interviews by asking students to describe the first time they heard of Latino Male Success and what led to the decision to join the program. Who was involved in this decision and what hopes did they have entering the program? Next, I asked if they could in their own words describe the purpose and practice of Latino Male Success and if it

was what they, their parents, and their peers expected it to be. This was followed by a series of questions getting at the boys' analysis of the problems facing Latino boys in Bahía and how it related to the mission of Latino Male Success. Lastly, I asked the boys to describe their future plans and goals after their K-12 education, and if Latino Male Success had influenced these goals.

**Figure 2: Four-phase interview process for students**



Outside of the Pueblo Unido staff and students, I sought out formal interviews that could speak to my preliminary findings as well as the overall state of education in Bahía and its region. At the school level this included interviews with several teachers and administrators. Generally, these interviewees were identified because they worked closely with the program, worked closely with boys who were in the program, or seemed to have an interest in contributing their understanding of Latino Male Success. Because these interviews were limited, I sought to prioritize conducting interviews with Latinx community voices that have been historically excluded from the discourse on Latino masculinity. This included queer Latino men, trans Latino men, and Latinas. Outside of the individual schools, I also sought out BUSD administrators for formal interviews. For example, the director of Latinx Community Engagement at the school district provided valuable understanding in the ways the district felt Latino Male Success fit within their larger vision in supporting the Latinx community. Beyond these formal interviews I conducted countless conversational interviews with student both affiliated and nonaffiliated with the program, school staff including teachers, janitors, principals, and security guards.

### *Data analysis*

A qualitative research software was used to organize and code fieldnotes, media clips, and interview transcripts. An initial round of descriptive coding began immediately for available public documents and mentor interviews, and fieldnotes were coded roughly every two to four weeks. Descriptive codes were loosely guided by a Cultural Studies conceptual framework in my research proposal and documented common practices and physical attributes associated with the reproduction of race and gender in male of color spaces. Examples of the descriptive codes generated include: male friendship, laughter, athletic activity, punishment, misogyny, bullying, clothing acknowledgment, love of job, critique of job. Consistent with ethnographic methods, analysis was a cyclical and recursive process as I tested out emerging themes (LeCompte & Schensul, 2012). Following reflections on the previously mentioned fundraiser gala, and triangulating this with several mentors' reiterated disdain for the business and money-catering

culture of their organization, I began a theoretical sampling of neoliberal criticism as a useful conceptual model.

Examples of value-based codes included neoliberal institutional partnerships (NIP), market-orientation, neoliberal racial logic (NRL), individualist attitude, funder appeasement, and productivity. Codes like neoliberal racial logic served as parent codes, such as NRL-meritocracy, NRL-gender deficiency, NRL-sexual deviancy, NRL-racial pathology. This classification of value-based coding aided me in identifying the ways neoliberal shifts in education not only informed the partnership that created the program itself, but also the ways neoliberal logics, coupled with preexisting racial, gender, sexual discourses surrounding Latino masculinity, framed the “problem” of Latino boys at the administrative and public level. These codes were also useful in identifying the ways this knowledge and understanding of Latino men and boys was lived, embraced, or resisted in the classroom among mentors and boys on the day to day.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reformulating racial justice in education

On August 7 of 2017, I visited the Pueblo Unido headquarters to meet the Latino Male Success staff for the first time. On a warm summer morning I drove to the commercial area of the Mariposa District, commonly known as the business center of North Bahía. There, the dirty but vibrant streets are lined with an assortment of taquerías, community service providers, athletic stores, and small groceries displaying colorful fruits and selling jugos verdes out of side windows. Large pickup trucks pass by the corner blaring brass-filled banda music from northern Mexico, their rear windows displaying tributes to their owner's home states, such as Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Jalisco. On the sidewalks Black and Latinx professionals intermixed with morning shoppers, many of whom are recent arrivals from Central America. Some of the young mothers wear colorful Mayan blouses and speak indigenous languages like K'iche' and Mam to their small children, who steady themselves by holding on to bare manikins standing outside discount fashion shops. As I walked around the corner I smiled at a Salvadorian woman preparing a portable griddle and ice chest filled with masa for pupusas. "Regresa a la hora de almuerzo [come back at lunch time]!" she called to me. I agreed.

The Pueblo Unido office stands several buildings down from one of the main intersections of the district. The organization's logo, emblazoned with its name and a large Mayan pyramid, marks the front of the building. Entering through a small garden corridor into the main office lobby I was met by a slightly overzealous security guard. He was an older Black man dressed in casual security garb, and he insisted I wait to push the elevator button until he could confirm that I had an appointment upstairs at the Pueblo Unido office. My serious look showed my surprise at the strict security practices taken to enter the small office building, and the security guard apologized, "Sorry about this, I just gotta make sure to keep my job, you know what I mean?" "I do," I replied, also apologetically, "I completely understand." After confirming my appointment over the phone, I was permitted to take the stairs to the second floor where Pueblo Unido had their office space.

The office was open and vibrant, with warm colors and an assortment of desks and individual glass offices. There was a smattering of cultural art on the walls, the majority being posters from past events and papier-mâché calaveras from Bahía's annual Dia de los Muertos celebration. The office's major art piece was a beautiful mural in the central convening space, overlooking a communal break area. I recognized this artwork from the Pueblo Unido website, a timeline mural commemorating the long history of Pueblo Unido's efforts in supporting the Latinx community of Bahía. The mural begins in the mid-1960's under the title *The Latino Civil Rights Movement* and marks the establishment of Pueblo Unido (then a grassroots organization under a slightly different name) as part of this movement. The founding year is surrounded by a collage of brown fists, angry-looking demonstrators, and slogans reading "CHICANO POWER!" As the mural progresses we see fewer images of political critique, and more representations of professionalism and development. By the time the mural reaches the end of the 1960's, we see the time mark "Incorporated as Non-profit Community Dev. Corp. [Development Corporation] 501(c)(3)." In the mid-1970's three dollar-signs are featured next to a Ford Foundation arrow to indicate a substantial funding stream. As the years progress the artwork highlights key partnerships with large corporations and massive banks such as Wells Fargo and JP Morgan Chase. By 2010 a picture of a group of well-dressed Latino boys marks the beginning of Latino

Male Success. The mural culminates with a celebration of the now massive non-profit's cumulative "100-million dollar investment" in "community assets." Of these investments, most notable was the organization of a housing and commercial development project in North Bahía. Although the project seeks to open affordable housing units in the Mariposa District, the project continues to spark controversy and serves as a signifier of the ongoing gentrification of the neighborhood for many housing rights activists in Bahía.

I open this chapter with my first visit to the Pueblo Unido headquarters to describe both the physical community context wherein Pueblo Unido is located as well as the historical contexts and transitions that the once grassroots organization, now 501(c)(3) non-profit community development corporation occupies. In many ways the mural serves as an ideological illustration of the gradual shift from Chicano Movement era politics to Pueblo Unido's current business orientation. Under the shadow of a beautiful quetzal soaring above the mural, neoliberalism, perhaps like all hegemonic discourses, enjoys a level of anonymity by hiding and ruling in plain sight. Masked in colors and imagery meant to signal Mesoamerican authenticity, we see a gradual transition to a new value system and politics permeating Pueblo Unido. If an earlier era of Latinx activism was characterized by criticism of structural inequalities in the U.S., calls for a redistribution of wealth, and at times the abolition of the racist, capitalist, nation-state itself (Munoz, 2007), Pueblo Unido now looks to support the Latinx community and its neighborhood through market inclusion and human capital investment in individuals. This has included job training workshops, micro-finance lending, the active development of neighborhood real-estate for commercial use and bringing in large corporate and state sponsors interested in investing in community development, particularly North Bahía.

In this chapter I provide evidence that shows the ways the gradual re-branding of Latinx politics to adhere to neoliberal values of capital accumulation and investment is central to how Pueblo Unido and its financial backers envision and construct their educational intervention with Latino boys. As the subject of this new ideological intervention, Latino identity is drained of radical political meaning developed in earlier political movements, and instead is discursively constructed through the neoliberal and dualist language of the "good boy" and "bad boy." In this framing, I examine the discursive work of neoliberal "goodness" in education (see Broderick & Leonardo, 2016) in creating good Latino boys, who are marked by their entrepreneurialism, merit, and conventional hetero-patriarchalism, and the socially deviant "bad boy."

I begin with a brief history of what I describe as the disciplining of the radical youth identities that emerged during the mass student movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's. In its aftermath, the 1980's would be marked with widespread racial fear of juvenile crime led by the image of the racialized bad boy, which helped to usher in an era of mass policing and punishment of youth of color that continues to this day (Alexander, 2012; Rios, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016). While this period marks the rise of hyper-containment and physical repression of youth of color, and particularly Black and Latino boys, parallel to California's incarceration and policing boom has been an expansion of non-profit organizations that use similar logics to respond to and manage the imagined threat of violent, problematic youth of color (INCITE!, 2017; Kwon, 2013). It is in this social and material landscape in which this study emerges. In this chapter I trace the affirmative aspects of power and extend the notion of governmentality (Foucault, 2010) to analyze the ways a language of neoliberal empowerment seeks to reconstruct new racial subjects in Latino Male Success.

This chapter draws exclusively from data collected outside of my participant observations in classrooms and school sites to focus on the performativity of the language surrounding the

notion of the “bad boy” as well as the “good boy,” which was to be modeled by Latino male role models. My data demonstrate the way these logics often presume racial, gender, and sexual deficits in Latino boys, both reifying racist stereotypes and constructing an idealized Latino masculinity that is traditionally hetero-patriarchal, entrepreneurial and economically productive.

*Managing racial subjects: Punishing ‘bad boys’ and empowering ‘good boys’*

The late 1960’s marked a militant upheaval at a global scale as Third World and indigenous peoples sought to radically challenge the colonial capitalist world system (Blackwell, 2011; Rosales & Rosales, 1997; Takaki, 2008). In the United States, California was at the forefront of this movement as students, youth, and young adults of all genders used schools and educational spaces to incite resistance to racism and settler colonialism. In Los Angeles the 1968 East LA Walkouts (also known as the Chicano Blowouts) saw thousands of high school students walk out of East and South Los Angeles schools to protest the conditions and pushout rates of Chicana/Latina students in the district (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Haney López, 2004). Later that year, under the banner of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), Black, Native American, Latina, and Asian American students at San Francisco State University (and later UC Berkeley) mounted what was among the longest, most militant student strikes in U.S. history. Student strikers demanded the creation of Third World colleges that taught a curriculum that centered anti-racism and the liberation of U.S. Third World peoples (Okiihiro, 2016). In 1969 indigenous and allied community members, many being ethnic studies students in the Bay Area universities, launched a 19-month reclamation of Alcatraz island in the name of indigenous repatriation of land in the US settler-state (Shiekh, 1999). And in 1966 Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, two Merritt College students in Oakland, founded the Black Panther Party. Within several years the organization would have chapters throughout the country and around the world (Bloom & Martin Jr, 2016).

These largely youth and young adult-led movements rejected the liberal racial politics of past eras, and instead constructed new, subversive political identities. For youth of color, newly formed or redefined identities such as Black, Indian, Asian American, and Chicano emerged as political identities that challenged the limitations of inclusionary racial politics, and instead demanded community autonomy, reparations, and a world radically different from the United States’ white supremacist-capitalist system (Okiihiro, 2016). These identities were cultivated in grassroots efforts and popular education spaces in direct opposition to private corporations and the state.

Repression of these youth-led movements would be swift and violent. At UC Berkeley, then California governor Ronald Reagan declared a state of extreme emergency in February of 1969 and deployed National Guard troops to drive student protesters off campus (Shiekh, 1999). At UCLA the on-campus murder of students and Black Panther Party members John Huggins and Bunchy Carter (in no small way incited by FBI intervention) would gravely disrupt the Black Student Union’s political organizing for years to come (Bloom & Martin Jr, 2016, p. 218-20). At a nation-wide level, state reaction to the movements of the 1960’s was the invention, refinement, and systematic deployment of new and repressive policing technologies to manage these growing movements. The now infamous Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) run by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) under J. Edgar Hoover stands as one of the most prominent examples of undeclared warfare on anti-racist liberation movements.



COINTELPRO was used to surveille, discredit, and infiltrate domestic political organizations that challenged the white supremacist, settler-colonial state. COINTELPRO's abuses of state power, unwavering use of strategic and deadly force, and development of complex forms of surveillance were not unique or episodic. As Dylan Rodríguez (2017) states, far from surprising, "Hoover's venerated racist-state strategy simply reflected the imperative of white civil society's impulse towards *self-preservation*" (p. 25; italics in original). COINTELPRO's violent repression represented an emerging era of policing and control sparked by white fears of radical, anti-racist politics in the United States (D. Rodríguez, 2017).

In the aftermath of the late 1960's and early 1970's mass-movements, state power and control undertook a massive restructuring of the ways difference, particularly racial difference, was managed and suppressed. This restructuring would have profound impacts on proceeding generations of youth of color, and particularly boys of color, as the state managed what was framed as problematic populations. Key to this management has been the role of policing and imprisonment (Alexander, 2012) as well as youth empowerment and care (Kwon, 2013). Although this dissertation focuses on empowerment and care, it is relevant to outline the rise of the era of punishment.

Scholars and activists have offered the notion of the *prison industrial complex* (PIC) to better understand the punishment process in the United States and especially the role racism and neoliberalism play in the recent prison boom (A. Y. Davis, 2000). The notion of the PIC pushes against the popular belief that recent increases in incarceration rates and prisoner populations correlate with increases in individual acts of crime. Instead, the PIC points out that the proliferation of prisons and prisoners are intimately linked to larger political economic structures and racial/economic ideologies. As Davis and Shaylor (2001) contend,

Indeed, vast numbers of corporations with global markets rely on prisons as an important source of profit and thus have acquired clandestine stakes in the continued expansion of the prison system. Because the overwhelming majority of U.S. prisoners are from racially marginalized communities, corporate stakes in an expanding apparatus of punishment necessarily rely on and promote old as well as new structures of racism (p. 2).

The prison industrial complex is a material structure supported by racial discourse and a socially constructed need for policing and punishment (Gilmore, 2002). Central to the perceived need of mass amounts of policing and punishment has been fear and contempt for boys and young men of color (Kwon, 2013; Nolan, 2011; Rios, 2011).

Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) puts forth a political economic analysis of the prison boom in California. For Gilmore, the waning economic prosperity of the post-WWII economy coupled with rejuvenated white fears of communities of color helped to facilitate the rise of early Reaganism and neoliberal governance in California. This era of politics used (as well as created) white imaginations of urban people of color as violent, lazy, and uninterested in participating in the American workforce (Gilmore, 2002). Old racial tropes were recycled to justify the imagined social ills of urban cities and their unwarranted and undeserving need of public support (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007). The gendered and racially charged image of the "welfare queen" propagated the notion that communities of color (and particularly Black women) misused "large" government welfare checks to live lavish lifestyles, draining the pockets of hardworking white Americans (Collins, 2008). These racial imaginations were key in justifying and garnering cuts to resources spent on public support, and facilitating new, deregulated economic policies that

catered to business elites.<sup>6</sup> However, if the popularized image of the welfare queen was used to justify large decreases in public social service, fears of Black and Latino men and boys would make use of this surplus in government capacity to help transition much of the state's efforts from social welfare programs to efforts to police and punish young men of color.

Policing and imprisonment are massive apparatuses of control for Black and Latino men. California's prisoner population grew nearly 500 percent between 1982 and 2000. Two-thirds of prisoners are Black or Latinx, with an extremely high concentration of them from Los Angeles and other newly deindustrialized urban centers such as Long Beach, Oakland, and San Francisco (Gilmore, 2007). As Gilmore argues, political officials capitalized on racial hate and fear to posit prisons as a catch-all solution to the social and economic problems facing the state. During a time of new economic downturn, the state-created barrios and ghettos of California's cities (see Rothstein, 2017) became, in the minds of many voters, places of extreme violence, lawlessness, and areas in which hordes of remorseless young men in gangs committed brutal crime with little consequence. This cultural vilification of urban youth of color was heavily aided by the media and led to their criminalization and imprisonment of Black and Latino men and boys (Males, 1996). This cultural fear of young men of color continues today (Rios, 2017).

In the political arena, state legislators from both dominant political parties competed for the title "tough on crime" candidate, showing their "concern" for public safety by helping to create new laws, resulting in new crimes for prosecution. In 1984 the California legislature commissioned the State Task Force on Youth Gang Violence which would eventually result in the 1988 Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention (STEP) Act. Among many notable outcomes, the STEP Act mandated local law enforcement to identify gang members and submit their names to a state-wide data base, as well as enhance prison sentences for gang related crime (Gilmore, 2007). In 2000, 12 years after the STEP Act, voters overwhelmingly passed California Proposition 21 (Treatment of Juvenile Offenders). As a result, the law heavily increased gang surveillance, mandated enhanced prison time for gang related crimes, and prevented probation departments from using discretion when incarcerating or releasing juveniles who had been arrested for a variety of specific infractions. Prop 21 also freed prosecutors to file charges against youth as young as 14 years old in adult court for a range of serious offenses. The 1980's marked the beginning of an era in which youth of color were widely vilified, scapegoated, and considered public threats. As Gilmore (2007) states, "Politicians of all races and ethnicities merged gang membership, drug use, and habitual criminal activity into a single social scourge, which was then used to explain everything from unruly youth to inner-city homicides to the need for more prisons to isolate wrongdoers" (p. 109). This social scourge became a high-priority problem to be addressed and managed (Kwon, 2013).

The rise of punitive control in the era also entered schools. In 1983 Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) partnered to create the program Drug Abuse Resistance Education, more commonly known as D.A.R.E. Basing its headquarters in Inglewood, California, DARE was quickly implemented nation-wide. The program brought police officers to schools to preach of the dangers of drug use and gang

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<sup>6</sup> California's Proposition 13 would be detrimental to California schools and disproportionately affect schools serving children of color. Proposition 13 was passed in 1978. It was a prominent feature of the "taxpayer revolt" and drastically limited property taxes in the state. Its passage highlights the intersection of school funding, recourses, and racism in California (see Leonardo & Grubb, 2013).

membership<sup>7</sup> (Sojoyner, 2016). It became commonsensical that schools in areas suspected of having gang activity should have multiple campus police officers and in many cases use metal detectors on students entering school (Nolan, 2011). Furthermore, Sojoyner (2016) connects white demands of harsher truancy policies in Southern California to LAUSD's student busing practices with white fears of truant Black and Latinx students roaming the suburbs. The STEP Act made it easier to create legal amendments that disproportionately affected Black and Latinx students, now making truancy a criminal act having legal consequences for parents and students.

While this wave of laws, policies, and programs sought to address the imagined threat of boys of color through punishment and control, a similar apparatus of care and empowerment was also forming to help manage this population. Running parallel to the massive increase in state punishment of youth of color is an expanding infrastructure of youth intervention programs largely run by non-profit organizations. In this dissertation, I describe how the racist discourse of the "bad boy" produced by policing and punishment is complimented and supported by the discourse of the "good boy" produced by neoliberal educational interventions and programs of empowerment. Both discourses perform a complementary function in the era of neoliberal multiculturalism. In this framing, good neoliberal multicultural subjects (those defined by their entrepreneurialism, individualism, and capacity to maximize human capital and earning potential) are positioned as antithetical to the socially deviant bad racial subject.

Dylan Rodriguez (2017) draws a direct correlation between the rise of the prison industrial complex (PIC) and what is now commonly known as the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC). He argues that while the PIC violently represses dissent in impoverished, racially segregated communities, the NPIC manages and dictates the boundaries of dissent by integrating community resistance into the state apparatus. He defines the NPIC as

the set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political intercourse, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movement, since about the mid-1970s. (D. Rodríguez, 2017, p. 20-21)

While foundations and white philanthropy have long been a part of the U.S. educational landscape (see Watkins, 2001), the last several decades have seen foundations pouring large amounts of their money and political/moral values into educational research, charter school expansion, and educational non-profits working with youth during and after school (J. Scott, 2009).

Despite an often passionate and uplifting message promoted by programs addressing "at risk" youth, it is important to question uncritical acceptance of youth support systems and interrogate the values and politics embedded in their operation. These programs are often led by both white and non-white leadership, and target youth of color in hopes of saving them from the perceived prevalence of violence, drugs, underaged sex, and gang activity that run amok in their

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<sup>7</sup> In 2001 my California elementary school enrolled me and my classmates in the DARE program. My DARE police officer was Officer Beale. He impressed us with his motorcycle and warned us of the fast approaching time when we would be asked to do drugs and join a gang. Students confessed to knowing older cousins and family members that were in gangs and did drugs. We were also asked to sign a pledge stating we vowed to remain drug free and not join a gang for the rest of our lives. DARE culminated in a closing essay contest. My essay won and I proudly read it out loud at a school assembly. In juxtaposition to my fellow Latino male classmates who were already considered "at-risk" for gang involvement and drug use, my good grades and validation in the DARE program served to construct me as a "good boy."

communities. In her book *Uncivil Youth*, Soo Ah Kwon (2013) writes that “although social justice-oriented nonprofit organizations and the foundations that support them may be not for profit, they are nevertheless subject to capitalism’s logics and the neoliberal state’s art of governance,” even as they function through a language of racial uplift and resistance (p. 5). For Kwon, the non-profitization of youth activism and empowerment functions as a technology of neoliberal governance (see Foucault, 2010), positing youth as a population to be invested in, cared for, and empowered to accept the conditions and limits of neoliberal citizenship. Although it is worth noting many non-profits operate under what might be considered a white savior complex, this project’s concern is the ways communities of color also function within the non-profit structure as a means to respond to and protect our youth from the perceived risks of the streets, *allowing* them to lead *productive* and happy lives. As I narrate in this chapter, the prevailing discourse surrounding the problems and threats of Latino boys serves to guide the image of empowerment for Latino Male Success, often juxtaposing the image of deviant, bad boy of color with the image of the neoliberal, good boy ideal.

### *Deviant, but potentially productive*

Seated on a comfortable chair in a two-sided glass conference room at the Pueblo Unido headquarters, Gerald Espinoza, Chief Executive Officer of Pueblo Unido met with me for an interview. I had been looking forward to this meeting for months, Gerald being both the CEO of the organization and one of the last administrator interviews I had planned to conduct. Although I had scheduled past meetings with him through Consuelo, his secretary, she called to push back our meeting several times to accommodate his busy schedule. We now sat across from each other exchanging pleasantries, and I was genuinely thankful for this coveted interview with the CEO. He was dressed in nice business attire and although I wore a button-down, long sleeve shirt, I regretted my decision to wear jeans instead of slacks.

Our interview opened with ease as Gerald signed my Institutional Review Board release form required by UC Berkeley without much of a glance or interest in hearing the well-rehearsed spiel I had given to all my interviewees. “Oh yes, no problem,” he stated casually, “we can go ahead and begin.” Gerald spoke with a friendly smile and exuded confidence, and I understood why multiple research participants had described his personality as politician-like. Some had described this quality with a positive connotation, others with a negative. The interview started with his understanding of the background of the program along with the broad problems Latino Male Success hoped to accomplish. He says,

I was not quite here at the time, but I think the school district had started the Black Males Rising program and Martha Fuentes, the CEO of Pueblo Unido at the time, knew that they would want to do something focused on Latino boys as well...and that could be us. Part of it was I think in her opinion, when you look out into the community the biggest issues in Bahía were always around young Black men and brown boys, right? Those are the biggest issues, right? It was violence, it was gangs, you know, education, all of that,

all the biggest problems out there were these young Black and brown kids...Pueblo Unido had to do something...we had to help.<sup>8</sup>

From the beginning, this interview taps into the preexisting discourse of boys of color as violent threats. This discourse was especially prevalent for the Black and Latino young men and boys of Bahía, and Espinoza used the common “knowledge” of a violent past in the city to underscore the need to manage this threat for the community’s good. However, despite having a friendly relationship with Bahía Police Department, Pueblo Unido was not in the business of policing and incarcerating youth. Instead, Pueblo Unido’s goal was to manage the threat of violence, crime, and gangs not with removal, but through empowerment, investing in the noble cause of what their primary guiding curriculum deemed, “character development.” As our interview continued, Gerald reiterated the word that largely characterizes neoliberal urban education in our current era: “It’s an investment,” he stated, “and people are recognizing that.” He named several large corporations and philanthropic foundations contributing to the program and lamented a few of California’s tech giants who had failed to produce the same amount of funds for Latino Male Success as they had done for other similar initiatives such as Bahía’s Black Males Rising program. He adds, “They’re really missing out, and I tell them that...they need to get in on this...we are on the front lines here.” This rhetoric, often flowing through thousands of programs who cater to corporate philanthropy and foundations, characterized the boys of Latino Male Success as deviant but potentially productive, that is, ripe for investment. While the booming prison industrial complex sought to remove and incarcerate boys and young men of color, Pueblo Unido joined the many non-profits and youth empowerment programs to manage this problem through care and empowerment.

Scholars of neoliberalism have noted that the notion of crisis often justifies the need for private sector intervention (Klein, 2008). Through the promise of innovation and expertise, Latino Male Success was able to secure a partnership with Bahía Unified School District under a renewing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Under the agreement, BUSD would offer a very small amount of funds to support LMS, but more importantly offer space in public school campus as well as access to the students themselves during the school day. In the MOU the need for this agreement is based on the growing number of Latinx students in the district (although Bahía has had a large Latinx population for many decades), the need to support this population in a culturally relevant way (and Pueblo Unido’s expertise in doing so), as well as the perceived success of the district’s existing Black Males Rising program. Among the primary services stated in the MOU are “male-oriented wellness,” “workforce development,” and “character development.”

### *Staying on the right path: Neoliberal management of racial deficits*

By analyzing Pueblo Unido’s web pages, media clips, interviews with administrators, Latino Male Success founding documents, fundraiser events, and curriculum, I found that the problem of Latino boys was discursively constructed primarily as their own individualized cultural deficiencies, pathological behaviors, and potential fate of succumbing to the violence

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<sup>8</sup> In this direct quotation, it is worth taking note that the CEO differentiates between Black **men** and Latino **boys**. This differentiation speaks to the continued imagination of Black men in perpetual crisis, hindering the ability to perceive Black boys as children (Dumas & Nelson, 2016).

and crime that was so prevalent in North Bahía. These problems were framed through culture of poverty-type arguments (see Lewis, 2011) which focuses on the cultural behavior of individuals, and paid little attention to the political and structural issues which contribute to racial inequalities. This positioning of the boys as a deficit to be corrected is a common framework in neoliberal education, often to be addressed by social justice oriented non-profits interested in reducing inequality (Baldrige, 2014). As Melamed (2011) makes clear, the stakes are very high when it comes to “controlling what counts as a race matter, an antiracist goal, or a truism about racial difference,” noting the subtle ways white supremacist capitalism is able to maintain itself even while seemingly addressing racial inequality (p.11). For this study, neoliberal multicultural discourse permeated the goals and image of Latino male empowerment, promoting an individualist agenda as a way to address problems experienced by racialized communities, and implicitly or explicitly justifying racial inequality by differentiating between the tempered, productive, and deserving, and those who were not.

In the entirety of all administrator interviews and official mission statements of Latino Male Success, race or racism was never mentioned. Instead, popular in Latino Male Success administrator interviews, fundraisers, and program documents was what I coded as the *right path* discourse. Based on document analysis and interviews with administrators and funders, I define right path discourse as the neoliberal language of individualized responsibility and possibility for “at risk” youth who, if properly self-disciplined and un-tempted by cultural vices, may become productive investments and exemplify the American dream. In the era of neoliberalism, one steadily increases their human capital and earning potential as they follow the right path. In this sense, the right path in education is not necessarily a path to critical race consciousness (perhaps unlike the educational goals of the 60’s and 70’s grassroots community groups), but rather an accumulation of resumé building skills and accomplishments that maximize the student’s competitiveness on the job market and capacity to earn. The right path discourse obfuscates structural racism and systematic racial inequality in US schools (past and present), and instead promotes the notion that there is a clear avenue to educational success for youth. Frequently when mass numbers of students of color are systematically pushed out of schools the problem is individualized (see Fine, 1991), faulting the student who becomes disinterested in academics, perhaps experimenting with drugs, ditching school, and all-around diverging from the imagined right path to success. Through this framing of the problems facing Latino boys, the Latino male mentor/role model becomes an obvious and popular solution for directing boys, giving them a clear example to follow on the pathway to success (M. V. Singh, 2018). For example, the program director of Latino Male Success, states:

I think our biggest goal here is to keep boys on the right path...show them they have options. Bahía is a rough place for a Latino male. Drugs, violence, gangs, you know how it is, especially in the North. People don’t get out. Our boys...they don’t get exposed to anything else, they don’t know there’s more out there for them, other options...college, success, a career...that’s where our mentors come in.

Here, the program director caringly states what LMS mentors can give to the boys: a clear vision of success outside of the chaos of their own community. While this statement is rooted in genuine care and concern for the boys, it also does the discursive work of articulating an idealized Latino manhood by naming the devalued and perverse characteristics that make up the bad boy. This failed Latino male identity is characterized by cultural stagnation, perceived self-

inflicted violence and the [perhaps rightful] social death experienced by individuals in gangs. Realizing the multiple “options” at hand and making the correct choice could lead the boys out of North Bahía and into professional success and a productive identity.

I highlight this quote not to criticize the program director (whose passion and commitment to the boys was always apparent to me), but to demonstrate one of countless ways LMS and Pueblo Unido leadership constructed and perpetuated the right path discourse as the guiding function of their work with youth. In this interview we understand the boys as holding potential beyond their socially and economically stagnant community. This community, whose culture of poverty and violence threatened to engulf the boys, now represented a maze to be navigated and, in the end, escaped. Key to aiding in the growth of the boys’ human capital were the mentors, a group of college-educated Latino men who, in-line with neoliberal shifts in urban education, were outside technicians (perhaps experts) brought into public schools to help solve the district’s cultural problems with Latino boys through character development, guidance, mentorship, and modelling an idealized Latino masculinity.

This narrative was particularly useful for fundraising efforts as the boys of Latino Male Success became humanized and valued by donors through their potential to earn and produce. I return here to the fieldnote excerpt that opened this dissertation as a Latino city councilman of a North Bahía district contributes to this discourse as a way to raise support among a ballroom of philanthropists.

We all *know* who these boys are and they’re not bad kids... I *know* them better than most, you see, I never shy away from saying I am from Bahía, and I’m proud of it [crowd applause] .... I *know* what it’s like to grow up on the Northside. I was a little knucklehead myself, a travieso who needed a big brother to knock me on the head sometimes and keep me on the right path... (emphasis added).

Here we see the councilman validate the humanity of the boys of Bahía by making a claim to their potential productivity, with the councilman as an example. In this way the philanthropists were able to participate in the neoliberal multicultural practice of problem-solving racial inequality by investing in at-risk Latino boys. These were not the bad kids we have heard of and fear, but rather worthy investments in an effort to contribute to diversity and social justice. Invisible in this narrative was the exclusion of low-income communities of color from the massive accumulations of wealth in the region gained by many funders and developers present at the gala. This process had ignited rapid gentrification in Bahía as well as other surrounding cities and had a profound impact on the boys in their families. However in this framing, it is the boys’ own cultural limitation and lack of self-restraint that is the barrier standing in the way of their own success. This was seen as an individual, rather than structural, problem, and would be remedied by the mentors who now stood around the fundraising floor. Within this neoliberal solution, the mentors would serve as role models to compound the worth of the boys. As the assistant program director states in one of the region’s prominent newspapers several years before the beginning of this study, Latino Male Success understands Latino boys as “resources” that “are not to be wasted.”

*The performativity of the bad boy and the good role model*

Problematic friends and delinquent community members were often the first issues mentioned as factors that threatened to knock Latino boys off the right path. Hanging out with “the wrong crowd” was repeatedly cited as a detriment to the boys’ success. This error in association could lead to drugs, skipped classes, bad attitudes, gang activity and fights. In one of several Latino Male Success fundraisers I attended, I was struck by the comments of a Latina BUSD board member who represented the Mariposa District, an area which encompassed several Latino Male Success schools. Speaking in front of a large crowd, she turned to the mentors and addressed them directly:

You all, the mentors of Latino Male Success, you are key in this struggle, college-educated young Latino men. Talk to the boys and they will listen to you, you are them, tell them not to make the same mistakes you made, teach them, show them...help them to not fall in with the wrong crowd...help them follow your path.

I had heard a version of this advice from this school board member a year earlier at a public forum on Latinx education in Bahía. I spoke with her after the event and upon hearing about my then future aspirations to study Latino male mentorship she told me of the value in college-educated young Latino men like myself talking to young boys about our paths to success. This could help them avoid making the same mistakes we had made. In both encounters with this school board member, I was struck by her use of the phrase “avoid making the same mistakes.”

In the context of fundraising, the narrative of a once delinquent youth turned productive man who has returned to the community, is a common one. However, having conducted in-depth interviews with all the mentors, I knew that with the exception of one or two cases, the mentors of Latino Male Success, like myself, had made few serious errors in their academic careers, earned strong to stellar grades in high school, and had gone on to a four-year university<sup>9</sup>. Several mentors had attended some of California’s most prestigious universities such UCLA and UC Berkeley straight out of high school, with others excelling at other University of California and California State University campuses.

However, as I scanned the crowd the comment appeared natural and fitting to the topic of Latino male mentorship. Most of the crowd was serious and nodding their heads in agreement and support. Who better to keep boys from falling in with the wrong crowd than successful young men who had nearly fallen into the wrong crowd themselves? In a similar study with Black youth workers, Baldrige (2017) highlights the desires of funders and philanthropists to support financially the “charismatic Black male leader.” These leaders are asked to sell their own personal stories “marked by damage and struggle,” as a means to secure funding for their organization (p. 792). Within this neoliberal system of funding, the boys of color savior narratives continue to maintain the racist notion of damage and deviancy on the population,

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<sup>9</sup> Although I use the language of “mistake” here to note the incorrect assumption made by the school board member, I also want to problematize its use. This framing of the problem individualizes racial inequality to “mistakes” made by youth. However as research continues to demonstrate, seemingly individual mistakes are caused by larger structural issues, thus making the strongest factors contributing to missed classes results of poverty, lack of access to transportation, lack of access to mental health services, and feelings of racial biases in school (Kozol, 2012; Noguera, 2009; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2011).



upholding the imagined out of control life of reckless boys and men of color who populated the “bad boys” or “wrong crowd.”

Throughout this study I often wondered who were these boys, and why it was so important that the mentors should work so hard to help their students avoid this crowd? Why were these “bad boys” constantly talked about and so discursively dominant in the context of Latino male mentorship, when their bodies were physically absent from the program? On one level of analysis, the simple answer to this question is that these boys were in fact not absent from the program, at least not entirely. It is true that some youth experience decisive individual acts of punishment and exclusion, such as arrest, incarceration, or school expulsion, which results in their removal from school and thus their ineligibility in a program like Latino Male Success. However, for many Latino boys, the difference between being on the right path and the wrong path was not as simple as many administrators and funders made it out to be. Although a small percentage of Latino Male Success students seemed obviously on the path to academic success (indicated by high Grade Point Averages and Advanced Placement classes), many boys fell outside of this right path-wrong path binary. Many of the students were seen as both, occupying the role of the bad boy in one classroom and the good boy in another. For others, they exhibited none of the unruly behavior that seemed to categorize the bad boy, yet still found themselves unlikely to graduate from high school.<sup>10</sup>

During my time in the field I never encountered what might be considered this quintessential, violent urban youth whose image had sparked fear and scorn for decades.<sup>11</sup> Yet the bad boy discourse had created a fear of becoming part of the wrong crowd, constructing a threat that would in many ways call for its discursive opposite as a remedy. This dynamic created space for the performative notion of the good Latino male role model. As Butler (1990) reminds us, linguistic constructions produce our daily lived realities through small and large speech acts that we participate in every day. Butler (1990) writes, “The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene” (p. 272). Through the repeated praise of mentors as an ideal role model for Latino boys, preexisting discourses regarding the problematics of Latino boyhood were reified, and a new, or what I call *neoliberal Latino masculinity* was constantly present, spoken about, understood, and embodied. This is not to say that any one individual mentor empirically lived the perfect neoliberal life (indeed this life would be in perpetual redefinition), but that the constant discourse surrounding the importance of the role model built and rebuilt the neoliberal values contributing to this role model. The boys’ voices were also actively displayed as speaking this language. In flyers and other program literature advertising the benefits and triumphs of the program, Pueblo Unido highlights quotes from some of the boys expressing this sentiment.<sup>12</sup> One boy simply states, “I just wanted to get out of trouble.” As another says, “I decided to join this program because it was going to help me be a better person.” For Latino boys, this “better person” was already known and understood through the language and values assigned to good Latino males, frequently in

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<sup>10</sup> This experience of staying out of trouble and putting forth honest academic effort only to not see academic results was a common experience among the boys that will be touched on in later chapters.

<sup>11</sup> During this study I did encounter and, in some cases, befriend students who were interested in joining gangs or who had been suspended for fighting on multiple occasions. These children were similar to their peers. They were complex individuals who desired a supportive and rigorous learning environment in school.

<sup>12</sup> These quotes were gathered from Pueblo Unido documents. The students quoted in this literature were from previous years and are separate from the in-person interviews that I collected. My interview data is shared in chapters five and six.

juxtaposition of who and what was bad known to be bad. The better person was often embodied through the discursive construction of the ideal role model: the mentor.

In response to an interview question regarding role modelling, the program director clearly lays out some of the valued characteristics of Latino masculinity. He contributes the following thoughts to the performative nature of the role model:

Yeah, our mentors are definitely role models, and I think that's huge for our boys. You know, they grow up without having positive role models, dudes slingin' [selling drugs] and not doing anything with their lives.... Or like no dad at home, right? And so now here's this guy, went to college, wears good clothes, takes care of his family in some of our cases. It feels good for our boys to be around a real man you know? Someone who takes care of business.

In verbalizing an idealized Latino manhood to be embodied by the mentors, the program director first addresses the perceived problematics of Latino male identity before articulating a reformed manhood conducive to the values of neoliberalism. Here a *real man* is an individual who is meritocratic and takes care of business, no matter what. Moreover, he is allotted value through his college degree and respectable clothing, two attributes increasing his ability to accumulate capital in the formal and legal economy. Beyond the juxtaposition of the violent and unproductive male of color with the virtuous neoliberal Latino man, embedded in this quote is a direct gesture to the ways neoliberal solutions to racial deviancies intersect with heteronormativity and patriarchy.

### *Queer of color criticisms of the Latino male role model*

In a key word essay on “Neoliberalism,” Grace Kyungwon Hong opens with what she admits is a seemingly unlikely place to start: the 1965 policy brief “The Negro Family: A Case for National Action.” More commonly known as the Moynihan Report, the now widely cited document was authored by sociologist and U.S. Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Moynihan was tasked with the job of analyzing Black poverty in the United States for the Democratic administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson. In his now infamous report, Moynihan identifies the roots of Black poverty as located in the cultural disfunction of the Black family, which he found to be abundantly headed by single-mother households and in disarray. The introduction of the report reads:

The fundamental problem...is that of family structure. The evidence—not final, but powerfully persuasive—is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling. A middle-class group has managed to save itself, but for the vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated working class the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated...So long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself. (Cited in Hong, 2015, p. 57).

Taking into account the affirmative and biopolitical attributes of neoliberal power, Hong (2015) locates the Moynihan Report as beginning a new wave of neoliberal governance through the ways it constitutes Black communities as requiring help and care, particularly in merging racial

pathologies with perceived gender and sexual deviancies. Noting the failure to maintain proper hetero-patriarchal family structures, the invitation to respectability (along the lines of race, gender and sexuality) serves to regulate and punish those populations existing outside of the conditioning power of neoliberalism. As Hong states, respectability in this context is increasingly defined by “the attainment of monogamous couplehood, normative reproductivity, and consumerist subjectivity” that serves to determine “those who are worthy of capital investment and thus protected and those who are not and thus precarious” (p. 60).<sup>13</sup>

Although the Moynihan Report directly addresses Black communities in the United States, it more broadly speaks to the concern for the problematic gender and sexual practices of racialized communities in urban centers<sup>14</sup>. Drawing from the body of work known as queer of color critique (see Ferguson, 2003; R. T. Rodríguez, 2009), Cacho (2007) extends this line of criticism by arguing that for Latino men and boys, racial neoliberal systems of value posit the perceived inability to perform proper heteronormative and patriarchal lifestyles as a racial deficit found in Latino masculinity. For Latino men, the image of the macho serves as a confining cultural image that categorizes Latino men and boys as hypersexual, chauvinistic womanizers, and drunkards, who are overbearing, violent, and frequently a toxic and failed-patriarch whose behavior is at the detriment of his nuclear family. Addressing this problem, Cacho (2007) argues that neoliberalism asks Latino boys to “perform masculinity” in ways to “redeem, reform, or counter” racial deviancy frequently assigned to Latino men (p.184).

For Latino Male Success, cultivating the idealized and productive Latino masculinity was implicitly or explicitly heterosexual and a responsible patriarch of their future families and communities. This was framed as a dire need for the larger Latinx community by several participants in the study. In my interview with the Pueblo Unido CEO, he states “[S]ome of these boys are about to be young fathers. I mean, think about that. That’s why character development is huge to us.” Beyond this quotation, concern for heteronormative, nuclear family values was a running theme in Latino Male Success, and throughout the study differing or queer family arrangements were never discussed, mentioned, or perceived as possible. This targeted idealization of the family is what Kimberlé Crenshaw refers to as a “patriarchy enhancement” solution. An outspoken critic of President Obama’s MBK initiative, Crenshaw argues that MBK and similar male mentorship programs frame the source of the problem “because the men are not appropriately socialized to be the kind of men who are responsible for families and for communities” and identifies this way of seeing racial inequality as solely in terms of “patriarchal absences” (The girls Obama forgot, 2014). Beyond erasing the needs and racial struggles faced by Latina students, this patriarchy enhancement discourse served to devalue queer and trans masculinities as insignificant in a neoliberal multicultural solution that assigned importance to the traditional nuclear family.

Towards the end of my interview with the program director of Latino Male Success, I asked about queer students in the program and how they fit within the greater mission. For a split second, the director looked puzzled. Then, after a pause he stated, “We don’t have any LGBTQ

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<sup>13</sup> While the notion of racial respectability politics precedes the rise of neoliberalism, the neoliberal turn exploits the notion of respectability to justify further government retreat from social welfare and the need for market-based incentivization.

<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it can be argued that antiblackness is a defining force in urban education (see Dumas, 2016). With this in mind this, it is crucial to analyze the ways Latinx students’ education is influenced by their proximity to blackness as well as at times their attempts to distance themselves from blackness. This point will be discussed further in this dissertation.

students, and if we do, I don't really know... about that perspective." He paused, again in deep thought, and offered an anecdote.

We've had a student who was a female but kind of like queer...or... They [the school] were saying that she could be part of our group, but the way the mentor approached it was like, "Well the kid is going to go through a lot of changes that I won't be able to help with. Or I won't be able to like kind of like have an idea what that change is, because I've never dealt with that." So in that instance...the understanding with the student, the administration, and us was that it would be best served if she was not part of the circle.... I think it would be tougher for that youth to be helped because she would feel isolated... We would not know how to serve that youth.

This passage shows how the boundaries of proper Latino masculinity are established through exclusion and disregard. At the administrative level, homophobia did not exist through explicit anti-gay rhetoric in the mission of the program, but rather through a disinterest in queer identity and an absence of targeted support for queer Latinx students. Furthermore, in the later account we hear of a student interested in a gendered space not assigned to them at birth and his denied entry into the program. Latino Male Success's reaction shows us the trans exclusion and the upholding and protection of male mentorship. The denial of a trans student's entry is presented as beyond the scope and abilities of the program, further revealing a confining and circumscribed manhood valued by the Latino Male Success and its mission. Queer or non-cis-male students were mentioned nowhere in the founding documents, curriculum, or Latino Male Success website. Here, exclusion and the disciplining of identity was accomplished by creating an affirmative discourse around an idealized Latino masculinity to be cultivated and nourished in a program for Latino male empowerment. While explicit transphobic rhetoric is not used to justify the exclusion of the student, LMS's narrow definition on boyhood supported in the program served to reject non-cisgender students by discursively constructing them as outside the values and mission of the program.

#### *A curriculum to develop character: Creating good boys*

Among the variety of complementary media and culture objects that discursively construct an idealized Latino male subject, the official curriculum of Latino Male Success held a significant amount of weight. Each LMS mentor was provided a six-week curriculum to teach during the school year. Although mentors had considerable amount of flexibility to make their own lesson plans throughout the year, the curriculum was a defining aspect of the program and greatly contributed to the ethos of the organization. The curriculum, which I call *Muchachos Virtuosos*, came from a network of Latino male partners whose goal was to promote a healthy and noble Latino manhood. Although this subsection does not analyze the employment of this curriculum (see chapter five), I analyze the ways utilizing a curriculum specifically defined as "character development" is indicative of the ways neoliberal interventions in urban education discursively construct the intersectional deficits of boys of color. Stated differently, the necessity of a character development curriculum is supported by the image of the bad boy. This curriculum promotes the development of a traditional hetero-patriarchal manhood for boys of color and

propagates the notion that a failed masculinity is central to the disenfranchisement of boys and men of color.

Although on most days mentors created their own lessons, the Muchachos Virtuosos curriculum was central to the overall program values and vision of Latino Male Success. In fact, on several occasions while in the field I documented school staff mistakenly referring to the mentorship program as Muchachos Virtuosos (the name of the curriculum), rather than Latino Male Success (the official name of the program). Muchachos Virtuosos was composed of many individual lessons that supported the four core values of the curriculum, indicative of the program's central mission statement. These values were posted on every LMS classroom wall, on the back of all sweatshirts, and by mandatory, memorized by all boys in the program. It was taught that living one's life by these cuatro valores [four values] was the extension of a noble and honorable life. These guiding principles were widely respected by all the mentors, the majority of whom extensively references the four values as key in their own teaching practices and life journey. The four values are:

1. Keep your word
2. Don't bring harm to others
3. Take responsibility for your actions
4. Be a positive example to others

In chapters five and six of this study, I delve into the ways this curriculum was taught, learned, or resisted among students and mentors. However, here I would like to linger on the ways these values and the notion of *character development* itself discursively constructs the imagined problems and solutions of Latino male education. For Bettina Love (2019), the notion of character development is decidedly anti-black (see Dumas, 2016) and indicative of the private sector's "obsession" with testing and measuring "the character of dark and poor children" in an effort to package and sell a beating-the-odds product (Love, 2019, p.76). As Love states, this type of educational "*Hunger Games* propaganda leads educators to believe that the key to 'success' for dark children lies in improving their grit and zest 'levels'" (p. 73). This focus on the character of children of color reconstructs their identities from being the recipients of extreme racial violence in schools to instead embodying untapped potential in need of accessing their hidden grit (see Duckworth, 2016).

When I first encountered the four values of Latino Male Success, I had very little opinion on their merits. On first look, it made sense that a human life should generally follow the four values promoted by the program. It is reasonable to assume that most educators believe that learning social and emotional skills in school can help students in whatever future endeavors they define as success. However, as my time in Latino Male Success continued, I became deeply aware of the ways these values reified the image and potential threat of the bad boy. In many ways, the language of deficit that was used by administrators, donors, and in the mission of Latino Male Success is embodied in the four values and the notion that struggling Latino boys will improve academically by learning to be better human beings. When employed as an educational intervention for Latino boys, the first two values validate racist stereotypes about Latino boys. The first does this by inserting a need to cultivate honesty based on the assumption that Latino boys

are dishonest and untrustworthy. The second value, “Do not bring harm to others” posits Latino boys as violent and harmful. Although the values of these core tenets are not innately problematic, a lack of political or structural referent at best gave them little meaning, and at worst normalized the notion that Latino boys needed to develop a virtuous character that was presumably absent. For Latino boys, being the target population of a program founded in character development served to reaffirm their positionality as deviant, yet potentially productive racial subjects.

### *Conclusion: Bad and good hombres*

During a presidential debate in October of 2016, then candidate Donald Trump used the memorable phrase “bad hombres” to describe what he considered the mass amounts of violent Latino men living in the United States without legal status. By characterizing undocumented Latino men as murderous and sexually violent, Trump tapped into preexisting racial fears of Latino men and called for the bolstering of one of the most powerful branches of the prison industrial complex, Immigrant Customs Enforcement (ICE). Like years past, images of tattooed and ruthless Latino male youth functioned to spark fear in white (and increasingly not white) Americans, imagining these now international gang members pouring across the southern border from Mexico and Central America (Santa Ana, 2002). These violent men and teens were coming through illegal channels to traffic drugs, spill their drug war on U.S. streets, and show little remorse for the rape and murders they commit. In Trump’s words, “[W]e have some bad hombres here, and we’re going to get them out.”

In this chapter I tried to show the performative relationship between the perceived bad and good Latino boy. Although racial fears of men and boys of color, and particularly Black men, have always been a central part of white supremacy in the United States (A. L. Brown, 2011), I identify the rise of hyper-policing and the prison industrial complex in the late 1970’s as a key moment for the image of boys and men of color. This moment began the cultural construction of the deviant radical of color, the gangster, the super predator, and the present-day bad hombre have justified the policing and punishment of boys of color inside and outside of schools. However, running parallel to the rise of the prison industrial complex is the non-profit industrial complex develops, both byproducts of the neoliberal era, both bent on managing and controlling difference. Although the PIC and policing represent physical repression and violence, non-profit youth programming represents a more covert form of repression, or what Foucault (2010) refers to as biopolitics. Responding to the image of problematic youth of color, youth programs control, manage, and frame the ways through which young people are “empowered” to lead successful and happy lives (Kwon, 2013). In the case of Latino Male Success, the threat of having Latino boys grow up to embody the popular image of the violent urban Latino male serves as a guiding force in the ways the mentorship program and many of its supporters understand its goal and mission.

This performative relationship between good and bad hombres was central to the ways Latino Male Success understood its existence and value to the Bahía community. On one hand, this relationship vilifies the “wrong crowd” as hopeless, violent, uncomplicated individuals whose life choices eventually led to academic failure. On the other, good hombres, the type of Latino manhood cultivated by Latino Male Success through “character development,” were largely defined by neoliberal values. Although the term “good hombres,” has not been explicitly

used by President Trump, I use it here to illustrate the ways racist stereotypes and images can dedicate the manner whereby people of color re-define our own identities to respond to what we are not. This serves to limit our boundaries of expression by confining our language of self-definition to the rationalities and vocabularies that circumscribe the hegemonic qualities of a good racial subject.<sup>15</sup>

For the program, success is categorized by the boys' self-investment in their future earning potential, indicated by their merit-driven academic success, respectability, and self-discipline. Success was also intertwined with the notion of fulfilling the patriarchal order of a productive, hetero-nuclear family. Here, the boys were imagined to be straight and cis-gender, training for a life as a family man and financial provider of their family and community. Both of these instances represent a neoliberal multicultural intervention in racial inequality. If past eras of Latinx education sought to radically challenge white supremacy in the U.S. structure through subversive education and activism, the era of neoliberal multiculturalism addresses the problem of race as remedied through preparedness for market inclusion and human capital investment. In Latino Male Success, Latino male mentors are outside technicians who enter schools to make cultural interventions with Latino boys. In this chapter, I have focused solely on the ways these interventions were framed from the administrative level, positioning the program to challenge racial pathological behavior, which for Latino boys included a lack of academic self-discipline and the inability to achieve proper and respectable hetero-patriarchal values. In the following chapters, I draw primarily from ethnographic fieldnotes and interviews with mentors and boys to explore the ways neoliberal discourse surrounding the problems and solutions of Latino boys became both animated as well as challenged in the classroom among the boys and mentors on the everyday level.

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<sup>15</sup> In this example, the straight forward response might be: The majority of Latino men are not murders and rapists. They are in fact productive members of the United States who pay taxes, take care of their families, and embody what it means to be an American.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Living and embodying neoliberal identities

#### *Sell your story*

Mr. Antonio's middle school group of LMS students chatted amongst themselves in a circle as they prepared paints for an art activity. On days like today, the classroom was run in a casual manner, and boys were permitted to talk freely while playing music from the large speakers behind Mr. Antonio's desk. The majority of music time was dedicated to hip hop and the boys enjoyed impressing one another with their song choices, mixing an array of top 40 hits with local underground rappers. Boys showed off their knowledge of the songs by mouthing or singing the unedited and explicit lyrics, posturing and staring down one another in a playful manner. Although hip hop was the classroom's most popular genre, the boys enjoyed incorporating Mexican banda music and corridos as well. This led to abrupt artist transitions unique to this demographic of students, causing Mr. Antonio and me to pause, make eye contact with each other, and smile.

Today the task was to begin painting the papier-mâché mascaras [masks] the boys had created the previous week. The mascara project entailed having boys paint both the front and back side of their papier-mâché masks. The mascara's front symbolizes aspects about the students that people already know, or that they choose to let people see. The backside represents the emotions and feelings they choose to keep private. The mascara project's goal is to allow the boys to reflect on what aspects of themselves they present to the world, and what feelings and emotions they keep hidden. The project eventually culminates in an oral presentation of the mascara to the rest of the class.

Once the paints were set-up and the activity underway, several of the eighth-grade boys struggled with deciding how to begin designing the front of the mask. "Mr. Antonio, I don't know what to paint..." lamented Anthony, as he flipped his paintbrush into the air. "Bruh, just paint some Bahía shit," suggested Kevin as he held up his work. The mascara was painted in a local sports team's colors, whose regalia helped to define the region's identity. On the forehead Kevin had inscribed in graffiti-style lettering The Plat (short for the plateau), the area of Bahía where we were currently, popularly known as one of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods. He held up his mascara and there was a murmur of approval. "Yeah, that's saucy," replied Anthony, while nodding in agreement.

"Good Kevin, that's a real good idea," announced Mr. Antonio who walked up to the front of the classroom and prepared for an impromptu lesson. "It reminds me of something I wanted to share with you all. The other night at a fundraiser, guess how much some of those masks sold for. Go on...guess," he added. There was a pause with no reply. Mr. Antonio let the silence linger as he smiled and looked around the classroom: "100, 200, even 500 dollars." This statement was met by a chorus of exclamations of surprise shouted by the boys. Some shook their head in disbelief, assuming Mr. Antonio was exaggerating the cost. "No? Don't believe me? Ask Michael, he was there too." "It's true," I replied, nodding my head and following Mr. Antonio's lead, "But there were more than just masks that came with that cost."

It was true. The week before, Mr. Antonio and I had attended a fundraiser for Latino Male Success. Many of the LMS mentors were awed by the wealth of some attendees, most of whom were Black and Latinx business people. Top levels of sponsorship at the fundraiser



included the Gold level (\$10,000) and Silver level (\$5,000). There were also options of an individual or team donation to play golf (\$150-\$900), a \$50 single dinner ticket (my humble contribution to attend the event), and a live, no-limit auction. During the auction banquet, attendees raised numbered paper cards to indicate an increased bid to the auctioneer Gerald Espinoza, CEO of Pueblo Unido. Some of these prizes included a student's mascara from the previous year, which was enclosed in a small display case. The masks were colorful and featured a wide range of cultural images and personal symbols painted by the boys. Several weeks earlier I had attended the staff meeting where the mentors decided to include the mascaras from the auction. Claire, an energetic white woman from the Pueblo Unido central office spearheaded the fundraiser and encouraged the addition as a great accent to the auction items. Although a small handful of the mentors were noticeably uneasy about including such a personal item made by the students, the majority had approved and the decision had been made.

"Something you're going to need to learn how to do is sell your story," continued Mr. Antonio, "It's worth something; people love to hear it." He looked around at some of the boys' work and said, "Like Álvaro, if you draw a Salvadorian flag or something like that." Álvaro looked down at his mask and pondered the idea. He had made the long journey from El Salvador just a few years back. Although there were no blues or whites to symbolize the flag of his birth country, there was quite a bit of yellow on his mask. I suspected it was inspired by the song "Yellow," by the rock band Coldplay, whom he had recently seen live in concert. Many of the other students had laughed at the thought of him, a Latino boy living in The Plat, going to a Coldplay concert but he did not seem to mind. Another boy, Jesús, raised his mascara, displaying a near complete Mexican flag. "Nice Jesús," responded Mr. Antonio. "Like I've told you, I got into college with very low grades. I was wildin as a youngster. But because I grew up in Bahía, like, people know Bahía as a crazy place, they recognize it. Just having that name is valuable. You got to know how to work that to your benefit." The message seemed to get across to the boys who laughed and joked about it as they continued to paint.

Mr. Antonio had previously talked about the ability to work one's story into a profitable and beneficial commodity, frequently using himself as an example. Although not from The Plat, he grew up in a similar neighborhood of Bahía and had shared his background with his students on many occasions. He had done drugs at an early age, gotten many visible tattoos, had several trips to the juvenile hall, and was expelled from his first high school. Towards the end of high school, he managed to bring up his grades a bit and then attended a local state university. While he had struggled in college, he was able to finish his degree and was successful in getting social service related jobs including the one he currently held with Latino Male Success. In my interview with Mr. Antonio I asked him more about the idea of "selling your story." He clarifies,

I mean it's a sad reality but it's true, you know. Like, you got to know people love to hear that stuff... For example, I'm planning on applying to graduate school [for a Master's in Social Work] and I did not do good in college, you know, academic probation, all of that. But I know I'm a Latino male and I am from Bahía. I can talk to people from the hood, they need me... I'm not worried, I'll get in... Same with the mask thing. The boys need to know that story is worth something.

As the interview continued, I asked more about the values he sought to convey through the use of his own story growing up. "Don't get me wrong, I use it to connect with the boys, show them if I

can do it they can,” he stated sincerely. This was without a doubt true in my own perception. Mr. Antonio deeply cared about his students. He added,

But I also want to show them that Latino males are in high demand. We are valuable. They can use their stories, that’s what has worked out for me. I know my value, they [the employers] need me. I don’t take it to the political level like Javi [Mr. Javier, another LMS mentor known to be politically active]. No. We are different, and that’s fine. I don’t get mad about Pueblo Unido and Gerald either, like selling the masks, they need to bring in that money. I just want to get my money too.

For Mr. Antonio the bottom line to his work, as well the departing message he hoped to leave with his students, was how to get and keep money.

Today, neoliberalism is globally ubiquitous. Although commonly known as an economic policy, this dominance spreads beyond the opening of markets and the privatization of public services and has further come to alter our basic understanding of humanity and selfhood. Neoliberalism “transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic” (Brown, 2015, p. 10). It manifests not just as an economic structure, but rather a logic about what it means to be human. It is the economization of anything and everything. This includes the economization of one’s biography and lived experiences, which become commodified and translatable to capital gain (for both individuals as well as the programs servicing individuals). This phenomenon promotes human development as both maximizing earning potential and investing in human capital, but also serves to create the human as capital. As Brown (2015) points out, the era of neoliberalism has pushed humanity far beyond Adam Smith’s imagination of the human being guided by a natural urge to truck, barter, and exchange. Instead, humanity has become constructed and governed as human capital, “tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive position” and bent on enhancing its monetary and nonmonetary portfolio (Brown, 2015, p. 10). However despite its pervasiveness, neoliberalism is not a unified formation, but a multiplicity of discourses constantly in flux. Human self-investment and the construction of human as capital take different forms in relation to the positionality of the subject.

For the students of Latino Male Success, the ongoing process of becoming subjects is uniquely tailored to the cultural and intersectional politics of race in urban schooling in the age of neoliberalism. Consistent with educational research concerned with the neoliberal structuring of urban education (see Lipman, 2011), LMS fits the structural profile of a neoliberal school program. It functioned in public schools during the school day but was managed by an organization independent of the democratically elected district and was in frequent communication with corporate philanthropists interested in funding its services for measurable returns. These services would only reach a small handful of the population targeted in the district and will not likely reach the most vulnerable students. However, beyond the neoliberal structuring of LMS, this chapter explores the everyday practices and processes that facilitated a hyper-individualist understanding of Latinx education among the students of Latino Male Success. This process involved naturalizing meritocratic understandings of educational inequality, promoting a consumerist mindset to schooling, and cultivating a Latino manhood defined by productivity and accountability. In sum, this chapter seeks to answer, How is the logic

and process of neoliberal-becoming learned and practiced in Latino Male Success among mentors and boys?

In chapter four I overviewed a brief history of youth control in California since the 1970's, describing, in part, the rise of the non-profit industrial complex (similar to the prison industrial complex) which served to manage youth resistance and subversion through a discourse of protection and care. I then used Pueblo Unido and Latino Male Success as an example, exploring the ways program documents, media, administrators, and fundraising efforts construct a neoliberal narrative of the barriers facing Latino boys, framing the empowerment they need (and are given) to lead happy and productive lives. In this chapter, I draw from ethnographic fieldnotes and interviews to explore the ways this empowerment was learned and lived out daily among mentors and students. This notion of freedom broke from past eras of critical race consciousness or grassroots youth activism as forms of empowerment and instead frames empowerment in the language of economic value and the potential to accumulate wealth. As the opening story of this chapter demonstrates, even one's lived experience of social disinvestment and racial discrimination is subject to commodification and translation into a form of economic value or worth.<sup>16</sup> This process of neoliberal value learning was messy, ununiformed, and in many cases contested. While neoliberal values are embodied in a variety of forms and performances, I identified three identity values cultivated in the program and learned by Latino boys. They are (1) meritocratic individualism, (2) smart consumerism/market orientation, and (3) benevolent hetero-patriarchy.

#### *Normalizing meritocracy and individualism: Tough-love and no-excuses*

The everyday practices of each classroom varied among the school sites of Latino Male Success however, a consistent emphasis in all classrooms was to align the cultural identity of Latino men and boys with the values of self-discipline, accountability, and individualized merit. Under neoliberalism, schooling functions as a place where students work to build their individual capacity to accumulate skills and honors that will be traded later for wealth when they become adults (Apple, 2006). Within this framework, the long process of schooling is used to accrue resume lines and entrepreneurial abilities that will improve the individual's ability to succeed in a competitive market place (Spence, 2016). It was commonplace in the three LMS classes I observed to start each week (or multiple times in a week) with a verbal check-in about students' grades. Here, mentors would go down their roster list and report in front of the class what they presently knew about each student's grade standings. This information usually came from the school's grading system, but also from the individual updates that LMS mentors sought out from teachers. Comments to the students varied depending on the day, mentor, or student. Although there were plenty of instances of encouragement and concern for students with exceptionally low grades, a meritocratic orientation to grades was used to understand grade disparities and fluctuation. If students' grades were high, it was implicitly or explicitly framed as the result of

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<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that experiences of marginalization do not have value or worth. Tara Yosso's (2005) notion of community cultural wealth illustrates this point. While culture of poverty-oriented arguments in education have framed the cultural knowledge of communities of color as having little to contribute to academic success, Yosso finds that experiences of marginalization can create cultural wealth, such as aspirational capital and resistant capital. It is important to note that in challenging neoliberal multiculturalism, these "wealths" should not be equated to literal capital (thus reifying a capitalist system rooted in value, exchange, and inequality), but be understood only by their ability to disrupt hierarchal notions of wealth and capital.

effort and talent. Students with low grades were viewed as having not yet earned higher grades. This practice served to individualize academic achievement and connect grade levels to work ethic. As the third foundational value of LMS states, “accountability” was a key characteristic taught by the program. Students need to take responsibility for grades and find ways to improve if they were to succeed.

Mr. Iván was a mentor who clearly exemplified this attitude. He was known as one of the stricter mentors and was clear that he did not want excuses from his students. The following fieldnote excerpt displays a strong, yet by no means isolated, reaction to poor academic progress among his students during a morning check-in.

Today I observed Mr. Iván having another strong disciplinary interaction. This time it was with Alan and occurred during grade check-ins. As in most days, the period began with Mr. Iván going over the class grades individually. The students sat in silence while he went down the list, stating each student’s name, GPA, and if there were any points of concern. As Mr. Iván arrived to Alan’s name, he stated, “And next we have Alan who...is turned around...again.” He said this sharply, making Alan jump and turn around in his seat quickly. Although Alan had been smiling and whispering something to Pedro, he now looked nervous and concerned. Mr. Iván continued, “You know I talked to Ms. Jenkins and she said you haven’t been putting in the effort since we had our talk.” “I have though,” rebutted Alan, “like I haven’t been late this week at all. What day did you talk to her?” “Look Alan, I’m just tired of this shit. You always have something to say, some little excuse, but every time I look at you, you aren’t even looking forward.” Mr. Iván had begun raising his voice and the class was silent. “And don’t look at your friend, he’s not tanking English. God, it’s like you’re not hearing me. When you get your grades I hope you know whose fault it is. I’m going to bring you a mirror, so you can see whose fault.”

Mr. Iván’s rant would continue and lasted much longer than I expected, leaving a sense of awkwardness in the room that lingered until the end of the period.

This fieldnote excerpt speaks to the tough-love attitude often expected and exemplified by men of color who work with boys of color. At times this attitude can result in a “winning combination” of “tough love, discipline, and caring” to help students succeed in school (Lynn, 2006, p. 2517). However in other instances, tough love serves as a simple correction of attitude which can frame the boys as their own worst enemy, individualizing success or failure (M. V. Singh, 2018). In the case of the above excerpt, Mr. Iván’s public anger and reference to a mirror obscures the social context in which learning happens, and instead reinforces the notion that individual student effort is the primary determinant of educational success.<sup>17</sup>

For Mr. Iván, the ability to enact tough-love and discipline was an important aspect of mentorship among Latino men and their male students. The ability to be self-disciplined was a quality Mr. Iván felt many of the Latino boys in his class lacked, and he regularly employed tasks to help with this need. For example, twice a week he ran the 50-minute period as a silent study hall. Silence was a concept that was meant to be literal, and a small whisper or giggle

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that Mr. Iván’s classroom was without a critical perspective on racial inequality. I observed several lessons in which students learned about racially driven processes that affected their lives. For example, the students watched a documentary *South of the Border*, directed by Oliver Stone, outlining United States intervention in Latin America, resulting in hardship and forced migration. However, when the conversation turned to academics, race and racism was overshadowed by individual work ethic, attitudes, and achievement.

threatened to lead to Mr. Iván's swift reprimand. It was common for students to finish homework early or begin study hall with no homework. At these times students were expected to draw or read. When I pointed out to Mr. Iván that several students regularly did not have homework, he mentioned that the practice of being silent was probably a worthwhile task in itself. This perceived lack of restraint among his students at times frustrated him but reminded him of the importance of his role as mentor. In his interview, Mr. Iván explains:

It's that tough love, it's really important. My coach in high school gave me that tough love. I'll tell them, I love you guys. I do this [enact strong discipline] because I care. Everything I do is because I want you to progress. I'm gonna get on your ass until you start doing it. If not me, then who else? It's how my parents were with me, that's how I see it. And I know I'm a perfectionist. I can be humble and nice, but also strict and firm... and... yeah, I can lose my cool sometimes.

During my time in Mr. Iván's classroom I witnessed him lose his temper on many occasions. This could include shouting, cursing, and at times banning a student from his classroom for a full week. On several occasions I witnessed students (primarily ninth graders) tear up after a particularly strong verbal disciplining. Despite these common outbursts, Mr. Iván's toughness was complimented by a sincere love he frequently conveyed in classroom. For example, he put in extra hours, gave students rides to school, stayed late if a student sought extra help, and referred fondly to the students as "his boys" or "his guys." Students recognized and appreciated this genuine care and concern. For many students, LMS was one of the few spaces on campus where they felt an adult truly cared about them. However, this also led many boys to struggle to make sense of this mixture of love and punishment they received in Latino Male Success.

Seven of the eleven high school students I interviewed from Mr. Iván's classroom expressed a very strong dislike for Mr. Iván's quick temper and emphasis on discipline. This ranged from well thought-out criticism to one student passionately stating he would like to leave Latino Male Success because of Mr. Iván's attitude. However, with the exception of this particularly disgruntled student (and I suspect there might have been one or two more with a similar belief who were not interviewed), the majority of the students who provided strong criticism of Mr. Iván went out of their way to reiterate that they genuinely liked him and felt a strong connection with him as their mentor. As one student assured me, "[B]ut he's not a bad teacher or anything, it's just the yelling sometimes... We're cool [with one another] though." Another mentioned, "I know he cares a lot about us... he really cares about us." One student went on, nearly taking back his criticisms about discipline in the classroom after hearing himself speak his complaints out loud: "But I was fucking up all last year though so, yeah, I guess it's both. I gotta take care of myself... do better... I'm not trying to make an excuse or anything." Here we see a student re-direct his criticism of discipline in the program mid-response during the interview question and decide to take responsibility of his perceived academic shortcomings, and the punishment he received because of it. The interview question to which he responded was: Are there criticisms you have of LMS or changes you would like to see in the program? Throughout my interviews, many students in LMS were comfortable complaining about individual, non-LMS teachers without remorse, and in some cases described profound disdain for individual teachers at their school. However, the culture of camaraderie and brotherly support in LMS made it difficult to complain about Mr. Iván's harsh disciplinary attitude. Instead, this culture of tough-love functioned to help boys embrace the lessons learned in the program,

pushing them to take ownership of their own grades. This individualization of success propagated a culture of a no-excuses work ethic in the program as a solution to the troubles facing Latino boys.

Interviews with students revealed that the boys of LMS viewed work ethic and a lack of self-restraint as the primary determinants affecting Latino male achievement at their school and in the program. In response to an interview question - Why do you think some students in the program do not improve their academic performance after joining the program?" - students' responses included, "it's just laziness," "some of them just want to be funny," and "they don't take responsibility for their actions... not like a real man." Behind the veil of an anonymous interview, some of the higher performing students cautiously took it upon themselves to single out individual students, although the interview question did not ask for individual examples of students from the program. Gonzalo, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader in LMB states:

For example, there's Bryan, and it's like bro why do you come if you're just going to mess around all the time? It's so annoying. Like, he just wants to wear his headphones and is not interested in doing better. And if you don't want to be here cool, but just go, so someone else can be here who wants to be here. That's not fair for someone who might be able to benefit from these resources, you know?<sup>18</sup>

During interviews it was common for high performing students to express annoyance with peers they deemed uninterested in turning around their grades. However, I was struck by the responses of low performing students who earnestly took responsibility for their low grades. As Giovanni, a student with a grade point average below a 2.0, told me during our interview, "It's because they don't do the work. Simple as that. That's why I'm failing. I was just being lazy, you know, slacking off, but I'm changing that." I worked with Giovanni throughout the year, tutoring during study hall and often sitting next to him in LMS. Following this interview, Giovanni began turning in homework more frequently and putting more effort into studying for exams. This resulted in some minor grade improvements. However much to his dismay, there were several old assignments he was not permitted to complete. In addition to this, Giovanni's writing skills were not strong. The extra time and effort he put into written assignments did not yield large improvements. He ended the academic year with a GPA below a 2.5. This was well under his initial aspirations.

LMS student grades varied, spanning the range of the grade point average scale. During my time in the field I saw students with low and high grades improve, stay the same, or fall. Although Latino Male Success boasted impressive success rates on their website, I was suspicious (to say the least) that they indeed lived up to the numbers they reported. In LMS I encountered high school students who struggled with writing complete sentences or doing basic math, such as single-digit multiplication. At the end of the year they continued to struggle with these tasks. Whether their grades improved or not, LMS students learned that one should *always* take responsibility for their grades and actions. As one student told me, "A big part of being a man is keeping your palabra [word]. Like, if you say you're going to do better in school, and then you don't make it happen, well, that's on you. It starts and ends with you."

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<sup>18</sup> Bryan was not interviewed in this study. He would leave the program before the end of the semester.

### *Normalizing meritocracy and individualism: Competition and rewards*

Beyond the promotion of a cultural attitude of individual responsibility and work ethic, Latino Male Success had a reward structure that reinforced an ethos of merit-based competition and individual success. The reward system provided \$50 American Express gift cards to the highest achieving students. A \$25 gift card was awarded to the most improved at the end of the marking period as well. Achieving at the highest level was measured according to grade point average and most improved was awarded at the mentor's discretion. This practice of monetary earnings for high grades was wholeheartedly loved by many of the boys, particularly the ones with the highest grades. Although the reward criteria and date of award (the end of the grade period) were straightforward and simple, the boys in all three of my field sites constantly asked questions about the gift cards to their mentor throughout the year. When would the money be handed out? Was the GPA ranking up to date? What if a teacher submitted their grades late? Did the local corner store accept American Express, and if not, would the mentor bring them cash in exchange for the gift card?

The practice of giving cash incentives for good grades was recently made popular by MacArthur Fellowship recipient Roland Fryer, a Black economist at Harvard University intimately involved in urban education reform. Fryer serves as faculty director of Harvard's Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs) that partners with some of the country's largest school districts including New York City Department of Education, Chicago Public Schools, and the District of Columbia Public Schools. Funded in part by a \$6 million grant from the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation (Denne, 2008), EdLabs conducted experiment-based research to test the effects of monetary incentives on student academic performance. In addition to giving kids money for good grades, Fryer's trials also tried a cellphone-based program whereby high performing students would earn a cellphone (equipped with academic applications) and additional minutes for high grades. Critics of this practice include Black political scientist Lester Spence (2016), who argues that Fryer's design is rooted in "neoliberal ideas about human capital and innovation," which alters how communities of color understand and address the racial achievement gap in schools (p. 95). This framing of the problem posits students of color, and particularly Black children, as simply under-incentivized to succeed in education in comparison to their white counterparts (Spence, 2016).<sup>19</sup>

Among LMS mentors there was a general sense of approval of this practice, and most believed the monetary competition helped to raise students' grades. In their interviews all mentors appreciated the opportunity to give some of their students some extra cash, and as a collective group, the mentors defended the merits of this cash incentive when Pueblo Unido budget cuts threatened to decrease the amount of money they could award each year. As Mr. Samuel, a middle school mentor who was not observed in my study, states, "The boys love it. It's really good if I got a few guys who have really high GPA's because then there's some drama like, who is going to get it!?" Despite the fact that many boys thoroughly enjoy the competition, the practice served to normalize the idea that the program's purpose was to help students increase their GPA as a means to directly translate learning into capital. This proved to be true

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<sup>19</sup> This orientation of the problem draws from the controversial "acting white" thesis in educational debates, the notion that students of color do not do strive to succeed in school in part because they see academic success as synonymous with acting white and will be shamed by their peers. This argument has consistently been challenged by studies that find that students of color have strong aspirations to success in school similar to white students (see Carter, 2006; O'Connor, 1997).

among the boys of Latino Male Success, who equated high grades with high earning potential and professional success. The following fieldnote comes from Mr. Antonio's class the day a gift card was awarded.

Mr. Antonio quieted down the class. This was easier than normal because it was clear the gift card would be awarded today. "And of course, the 50 dollars this marking period goes to Luis, let's give it up for him." The students applauded; some more enthusiastically than others. Mr. Antonio turned to Anthony who was not clapping. "It looks like Anthony's a little salty because he's not getting that cash money," Mr. Antonio joked goodheartedly. "Naw he mad cuz he knows he gonna be working for me!" interjected Luis. Then, while giving the boy next to him a handshake, Luis added, "flippin burgers and shit." The class erupted in laughter. This was not the first time the class had referenced working as a fry cook (particularly at a fast-food restaurant) as the epitome of an undesirable job. "You want to work for Luis? No? I suggest you get to work Anthony" chimed in Mr. Antonio, joining in the joke. Anthony responded, "Yeah, yeah, I know, I know."

In this fieldnote we see the boys connect the monetary prize attached to highest GPA with potentially future socio-economic hierarchies among themselves. Differences in wealth, just as with differences in grades, appear to be based on individualized merit and work ethic. In this way, hard work and high grades became naturally equated to the notion of *deservingness*. If one worked hard they deserved the monetary prize over others. This rationale presents the boys with a highly decontextualized understanding of academic and wealth inequality in the United States; a place where racial and economic privilege (as oppose to individual merit) frequently determine one's academic achievement and potential to accumulate wealth. Furthermore, in this fieldnote we also see potential economic power (as academic achievement) equated to masculine dominance held by employers over workers. Displays of potential economic power as masculine power were frequent among the boys, particularly in relationship to the cash grade competition. If one's grade differentiated them above the rest, this was not just an economic achievement, but a masculine achievement as well.

While the practice of grade competition for monetary reward provided an affirmative lesson in meritocracy, competition and deservingness, the loss of privileges provided a similar lesson for the lowest performing students. This was a dual lesson on those who deserved reward and those who did not. Students who did not meet the 2.5 GPA requirement were excluded from several activities and fieldtrips conducted by Latino Male Success. This form of punishment included the denial of the coveted program t-shirt,<sup>20</sup> the inability to attend program-wide fieldtrips, as well as loss of other opportunities throughout the year. From my perspective, the harshest punishment was exclusion from attending the program-wide fieldtrip to a local sports complex called Xtreme Sports. For this event, students from all 10 school sites were permitted to miss the majority of the school day to enjoy an afternoon of sports and food with their fellow LMS students from across North Bahía.

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<sup>20</sup> This shirt was only given to boys who were overall a success in the program and signaled the embodiment of the "real man" LMS sought to create. Having this shirt was also a privilege at the two middle schools I observed because both campuses allowed LMS students to break dress code on Fridays in order to wear their program t-shirts. This was a privilege highly valued by the boys.



This practice served to normalize meritocracy as common sense and depoliticize as well as obfuscate the social factors that led to the educational disenfranchisement of Latino boys in Bahía. As one high achieving boy stated, “My best friend...he can’t go on the fieldtrip to Xtreme Sports. And yeah, I’m sad, but I’ll be happy because – then he has a mindset, ‘All right. I will challenge myself to pass my limit.’” Despite the obvious incentive for this boy to improve his grades, I worried for his friend, a student named Moisés whom I frequently tutored or talked with when he was not in the mood for homework. From our conversations I knew Moisés was frustrated with his home life. His mother was a single parent who worked two jobs. When she was home, much of her time was dedicated to caring for his younger siblings. With a rent increase set to take place in January, he knew there was a strong likelihood that his family would decide to move to a near-by city with his aunt’s family. “I don’t care that I can’t go to Xtreme Sports,” Moisés abruptly stated to me several days before the fieldtrip. This statement was not in the context of an interview but interjected during a causal conversation we were having about the local basketball team. “Yeah, I can’t make it either,” I replied, shrugging to appear uninterested in the fieldtrip. However, truth be told, even I was disappointed I could not attend.

Although monetary incentives for good grades continue to be used in schools to varying degrees, there is still little research that shows it has a statistically significant effect on academic achievement. In an article published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Fryer (2011) describes a series of experiments in over 200 schools across the cities of Dallas, New York, and Chicago. The experiments were designed to understand the impact of financial incentives on student achievement. Students in Dallas were paid to read books, students in New York were rewarded for their performance on interim assessments, and in Chicago, students were paid for classroom grades. As the study reports, “the impact of financial incentives on student achievement is statistically 0, in each city” (Fryer, 2011, p. 1755). It is added that, due to “a lack of power,” it cannot be ruled out that “the possibility of effect sizes that would have positive returns on investment. The only statistically significant effect is on English-speaking students in Dallas” (Fryer, 2011, p. 1755).

Although quantitative data in the aforementioned study conclude that students who received the “treatment” (the potential to receive money) did not statistically outperform students who did not receive the treatment, qualitative data are able to tell stories of individual successes, failures, and what I argue are the perpetuation of neoliberal rationalities that became naturalized as common sense in programs such as Latino Male Success. In the following extended interview excerpt from a middle school mentor who was not observed, Mr. Alex elaborates on how the cash and fieldtrip incentives work in his group.

**Mr. Alex:** I like the incentive. It definitely keeps them [the students] moving. Some of them become part of LMS because of that. That’s like one of the things that grabs your attention, ‘oh, money for good grade? I’m down for it.’ But, at least for this marking period, marking period three, there is only one student that had a 3.0. Their overall GPA just keeps dropping and dropping. So sometimes it’s good to reward those that did work, but like you wish that everyone was on the same page. But yes, if they have a 2.5 GPA or higher they can go to Xtreme Sports or the college trip we got going. I know of the Xtreme Sports trip we recently had – it was only five of my guys of about 13. I was bummed out, but it’s about practicing what you preach, keep your word. It’s a 2.5 GPA or higher. Like, if you have a 2.49, I’ll probably consider, but if it’s a 2.4 or 2.3, I’m sorry, man. You were well aware that you were supposed to get 2.5.

**Michael:** Do you feel like the lesson is learned?

**Mr. Alex:** Yes. Even they check themselves... I remember there was a kid that had a 2.35 or something like that. It was higher than others and he's like, come on, Mr. Alex do you think I could go? And I'm like, come on, man. I wish you could go, but rules are rules. I said what I said and he's like, 'You know what? Yes, you're right, Mr. Alex, nothing's given to you in this world for free, you have to earn it, you have to work, you have to work for rewards and stuff.' And I was like, exactly man you took the words right out of my mouth, you're well aware of – like there are consequences. And if you do good, there are rewards as well.

In this interview we hear of a large number of students in Mr. Alex's group consistently unable to meet the GPA requirement to attend fieldtrips. However, we also hear of an ideal success in the eyes of the mentor. A student who narrowly misses the GPA requirement accepts the exclusion and learns a valuable lesson. I observed this neoliberal lesson of meritocratic individualism learned over and over again throughout my time at Latino Male Success. This practice served to normalize the notion that academic success equates to deserved rewards, while failure was an individual choice that did not deserve praise or resources. At times this lesson was learned without much fanfare, as in the story above. At other times this lesson was learned through tears. The following fieldnote comes from Mr. Antonio's middle school classroom the day a surprise reward was given.

Today Mr. Antonio made an unexpected announcement: the local NBA team had reached out and offered to gift each Latino Male Success classroom several passes to an upcoming basketball game against LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers. This caused a murmur of excitement among the boys. Some squirmed in their seats; their eyes wide open, almost unable to believe the news. However, this moment of excitement was followed by a quiet groan from Diego who was seated next to me. Diego was known to be a huge fan of the local basketball team, and I turned to him in surprise. He whispered to me, "I won't be able to go, watch!" A few seconds later Mr. Antonio asked which students might be interested in attending. Diego reluctantly put his hand up. "Put your hand down Diego, you can't expect to have three Fs and go to this game." Diego's eyes began to water as he put his hand down. He whispered to me again, this time angrily, tears slowly running down his face, "What about the people with bad grades? Don't we deserve to get fun things too sometimes?"

The day this fieldnote was written, Mr. Antonio approached the visibly upset Diego after class. He apologized for being so direct with his quick ruling that Diego would not be in the running to attend the basketball game. He then calmly explained to Diego that based on his GPA, he had been left with little options. Diego accepted the fairness of his exclusion and Mr. Antonio and Diego's strong bond and closeness remained intact. Diego's grades would not improve that year.

*Entrepreneurial subjects: Choice, smart consumerism, and market orientation*

Like many urban school districts competing with charter schools, BUSD had several public schools at risk of closure due to underattendance. Two of these schools were predominantly Latinx high schools located on the northside. Both had a reputation of being among the “bad” high schools in the city, and both had Latino Male Success programs. On a brisk winter evening, Esperanza Nuño, the BUSD director of Latinx Community Affairs, held an open meeting in the cafeteria of one of these high schools to discuss the findings of a recent study on the status of Latinx students in the district. Nuño’s position as director of Latinx Community Affairs was brand new to BUSD. She was tasked with engaging the Latinx community of Bahía and finding new ways the district could support Latinx students and families.

The meeting was held on a weekday evening, and despite the cold weather, felt warm and casual. A potluck was setup on a row of desks near the entrance of the cafeteria. The food included several trays of enchiladas, beans, and rice provided by the district, as well as various contributions from families, including flan, arroz con leche, and fresh fruit. Before the guests had arrived, Nuño had burned sage to cleanse the space, which had left a lingering earthy smell. Once most of the attendees had arrived and served themselves the meeting was called to order. Nuño opened by declaring a solidarity with the indigenous people of Bahía and situated their meeting in a long legacy of Latinx resistance to what she named “colonial oppression.” From my interview with Nuño I knew that this framing of the problem facing Latinx students as stemming from colonial racial oppression was extremely important to her work with the district. For her, the current issues facing Latinx families were just the latest iteration of colonialism enacted against the Latinx community. During the beginning of the meeting Nuño and her co-presenters began by acknowledging some of the primary issues that they had heard coming from the Latinx community. These issues included low graduation rates, low college admission rates, high suspension rates, and a looming threat of school closures. Following this acknowledgement, the data collected and organized by the office’s study on the status of Latinx students was presented. The educational hardships experienced by Latinx students in Bahía were alarming, however not surprising to the group of families, educators, and community members.

Following the presentation of the data, participants were asked to split into breakout sessions and discuss some of the topics introduced by the presentation. I saw several men of color that I recognized as low-level district administrators. They were sitting at the circle on Latinx teacher retention, and I joined them. The group was a mixture of teachers, administrators, and parents. A Latinx teacher in the circle lead the discussion and emphasized the importance of having Latinx teachers in the lives of Latinx students. There was a chorus of agreement. However as the conversation continued, several teachers in the group mentioned other concerns. One Latina teacher passionately stated that at her school (the school hosting the meeting), there were large numbers of Latinx teachers, yet they were under threat of closure. This threat of being shut down was a primary concern at her school, which was nearly 70 percent Latinx and 99 percent students of color. Despite having high numbers of diverse teachers and what she categorized as a committed staff, her school was consistently seen as one of the bad schools in the district. It had held this reputation for decades. “Everyone thinks these schools are terrible, but look at us here, this is community, we love this school,” added a mother in the group. A second teacher complained of new charter schools in the area “poaching” select students from the northside. An administrator added in, “And it’s not just the charters, we need to figure out

how to stop BUSD staff from badmouthing these schools, they're turning all the kids to Sierra, but the whole damn district can't go there." Sierra High School was commonly known as one of the best public high schools in Bahía. There was no LMS group at Sierra. The meeting ended with report-backs, goals, and the formation of a circle where the attendees offered their thoughts and hopes for moving forward. Among the issues mentioned, the possible closure of several public schools were strong concerns, however Nuño admitted there was little power her office had in influencing those decisions. The meeting was closed with a clap of unity. The remaining members of the meeting were almost exclusively women.

The notion of school choice is a market-oriented, consumer-based approach to education that seeks to offer families educational options for their child. In the neoliberal era, the right to choose has increasingly become synonymous with American freedom and democracy. However, under neoliberalism, this version of democracy is seen as the freedom to own and consume within a free-market society. In education, this means freedom from state regulation and the option to choose one's school, favoring liberty over equality (Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). Although the notion of school choice has been offered as a solution the persistent racial achievement gap, research shows that this promise has "usually gone unfulfilled" for Latinx families as well as other marginalized groups (Morales, Trujillo, & Kissell, 2016, p. 13; also see Buras and Apple, 2005).

The "empowerment" of students and families to "self-advocate" and "choose" the best school options was common practice in Latino Male Success. This made what I call *smart consumerism* a pivotal quality to instill in Latino men and boys. I define smart consumerism as the development of an orientation to schooling that treats education as a marketplace where consumerist values will lead to maximum returns (human capital) for Latino boys. Under smart consumerism, the ability to appraise and choose educational options (better than other students and families) is posited as a way to diminish the racial achievement gap and give Latinx students and families fair access to an equal market. In their interviews, mentors made it clear that their role in the lives of boys was, in part, to help students and families take advantages of all options available to them. This included seeking alternative options beyond traditional public education.

For middle school mentors in particular, the ability to help divert their students from the two "bad" high schools mentioned earlier was key. As one middle school mentor states in his interview:

**Mentor:** I have a friend that works at Northside Urban Charter, so I have a strong relationship with them. A few of my students have gone there and done well so they tell me, "Keep sending them our way and we'll see what we can do."

**Michael:** And Adams? [the local high school down the street which was frequently seen as a rough high school]

**Mentor:** For real, the school is crazy. But the ones that have to go, I just tell them find Eduardo [the LMS mentor there]

**Michael:** Eduardo doesn't mind you diverting students away from Adams?

**Mentor:** No no, he knows how that school is...and he wants the best for the boys.

At the end of this interview we hear the phrase “best for the boys” function as best for individual boys, particularly in the Latino Male Success program. This is stated with little awareness (or perhaps concern) for district-wide efforts to improve the lives of all Latinx students in the district. Following my first year of data collection for this study, Latino Male Success would pull out of Adams High School, leaving it without an LMS program.

In a different instance during my participant observations Mr. Antonio invited representatives from the local Catholic high school, Saint Luke’s, to speak to his eighth-grade students. St. Luke’s had several scholarships and was looking to recruit Latinx students from North Bahía. The boys welcomed the guest-speaker with special focus and attention. Following the presentation, the boys were gifted Saint Luke’s rubber bracelets that they proudly wore for several weeks after the visit. Although many of the boys seemed intrigued at the thought of attending a school outside of their norm, many expressed concerns about the prospect of attending a private school. Several boys spoke about the imagined discipline of private school life while others lamented the possibility of being separated from friends whom they had attended their local community schools since kindergarten. Mr. Antonio reminded them that they were not required to apply, but that they should know they have options. “At the end of the day you got to do what’s best for you,” he reminded them, pointing at individual students as he spoke. “If it’s a hard school, good. That’s good for you.” This led to a small debate as students imagined life at both high schools. “I am just saying you guys got to learn to advocate for yourselves, pick the best high school you can. If you have to go to Adams, fine. But look into your options first.”

Although my study did not measure the high school attendance patterns of LMS students against other BUSD students, it was clear to me that in the two middle school groups I observed there was an overrepresentation of students who ended up avoiding Adams High School, even though Adams was down the street from both schools and considered the local neighborhood high school. Furthermore, within the two LMS middle school classrooms it appeared that the highest performing students were the most successful in finding other options. In my final year with Mr. Sergio, eight of his nine eighth graders would not be attending Adams High School in the upcoming school year. The only student who would be attending Adams High School was David, a quiet and frequently bullied student whose GPA had remained in “last place” in the classroom for the full school year.

In an informal interview with Vicente, the highest academic achieving eighth-grader in Mr. Javier’s middle school group, I asked if he would be attending Adams High School in the following year. “Hell no,” he said with emphasis, “I’ll be at Northside Urban Charter.” Although Adams High School and Northside Urban Charter both shared a campus and served north Bahia, Vicente clearly saw a difference in the schools. “I don’t have to go to Adams because I got good grades,” he stated confidently. Although urban charter schools have frequently come under attack for selecting the highest performing students of color and recreating new lines of racial divides (see Bell, 2009; Buras & Apple, 2005; Davis, 2014), I cannot confirm that this was the case for Northside Urban Charter. However, Vicente believed that he would attend Northside Urban Charter and not Adams High School because he had done so well in middle school. “Are you worried about your friends who are going to Adams?” I asked. “Naw, they’ll be fine, they just need to work harder, not mess around. Stay away from the drama.”

### *Benevolent hetero-patriarchy*

In chapter four I demonstrated the ways neoliberalism as an economic framework intersects with race, gender, and sexuality in particular forms. Hong (2015) cites the Moynihan Report as being a key indication of the ways neoliberalism, as a discourse interested in addressing the economic deficits in racialized communities, is entangled with notions of deviant gender and sexual identities and the perceived inability of impoverished communities of color to embody proper and productive hetero-patriarchal nuclear family structures. Cacho (2007) argues that intersectional neoliberal systems of value propagate a racial deficit perspective of Latino masculinity that is in part defined by its inability to embody proper heteronormative and patriarchal practices and norms. In this way, neoliberal logics ask Latino men and boys to deny deviant and abrasive forms of masculinity, frequently described under the catch-all label of “machismo,” and instead embark on a self-actualization journey ending in a sanitized and benevolent form of hetero-patriarchy.

As Cacho (2007) notes, benevolent hetero-patriarchy is a fundamental quality of neoliberal masculinity, and a particular point of emphasis for Latino men and boys who are pushed to “redeem” their racial deficits through the embodiment of clean and productive hetero-patriarchal values. Neoliberal engagements with Latino masculinity often position the problem of machismo through symptoms of unabashed sexual promiscuity, domestic violence, alcoholism, and financial recklessness (Mirande, 1997). These qualities are framed as by-product of a wounded masculine ego, leading Latino men to disrupt nuclear familial arrangements with their toxic machista behaviors. Benevolent hetero-patriarchy is a reformed masculinity in which a process of healing and self-actualization removes the barriers of machismo from Latino men’s lives, who are then able to embody their “true selves.” However, as critical gender scholars from Butler onward remind us, there can be no absence of gendered ideology in one’s “true self.” Instead bodies are always already read through preexist gendered scripts and language (Butler, 2006). Legal studies scholar and theorist of intersectionality, Kimberley Crenshaw (2014) argues that programs of racial uplift targeting boys and men of color frame the problem of race as a problem of patriarchal absences. In this vein, masculine healing opens the path to a true self still assumed (or disciplined) to fulfill hetero-patriarchal roles in a more economically productive nuclear family.<sup>21</sup> bell hooks (2004) laments the frequent disinterest in men’s movement politics in actively and intentionally dismantling the cultural and structural foundations of hetero-patriarchy. The continued focus on self-actualization and emotional healing is often treated as the wound of toxic masculinity that exists seemingly outside of social hierarchies. As hooks notes, this lack of situating context can serve to obfuscate or depoliticize the struggle to end sexism and sexist oppression.

As one might reasonably predict, Latino Male Success openly stood against the notion of sexism. In interviews, from the CEO of Pueblo Unido to the middle school students, all expressed that “respecting women” was a strong value of the type of masculinity cultivated in the program. Two of LMS’s goals were “healthy families” and “character development,” both being areas the program felt overlapped with an agenda against sexism and machismo in the Latinx community. Mentors held several activities and discussions surrounding domestic violence, respect for the women in their lives, and reflections on machismo in their family. While

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<sup>21</sup> In addition to valuing the traditional heterosexual family arrangements, Duggan (2002) reminds us that neoliberalism has a sexual politics which incorporates homosexual practices that maintain core neoliberal values, such as the seemingly universal desire for unrestricted economic expansion and democratic liberty.

the level of sophistication in these workshops varied considerably, what was perhaps most striking was that discussions on the broad notion of “sexism” which rarely, if ever, deviated from the topic of family and heterosexual relationships (with the exception of one mentor, Mr. Javi, who will be mentioned in greater detail in chapter six).

In an interview, one high school mentor states, “Sexism is a problem...a big problem that men need to address.... A good man, for me, is humble, responsible, and honorable...not a *mujeriego* [womanizer], you know? Be faithful to your wife...never hit her.” As another mentor states, “We’re building strong but respectful men.” A version of this statement was repeated by most mentors and boys when asked how sexism related to the program’s vision of manhood. The majority of mentors were in heterosexual romantic relationships during the time of my study, and many mentioned that sharing their own chivalrous attitude in their relationship aided in their ability to function as a good role model for his students.

In classroom discussions, boys were habitually asked to unpack *machismo* in their own family, frequently referencing fathers’ or uncles’ infidelities, alcoholism, or absences. These sharing circles were emotional and intimate. As a grateful observer and participant in these sharing circles, I want to underscore the power of sharing, and the warmth I felt while connecting with mentors and students. Out of respect for the space, I have decided not to share any individual story or fieldnote excerpt from our time in these intimate discussions. However, in the spirit of furthering the discussion on Latino men and boys, it must be stated that while the space allowed the boys to construct a masculinity that was open to male tenderness and the ability to show emotion, the narrow definition of anti-sexism in this activity had the unintended consequence of equating an anti-sexist politics with the aspiration of performing a non-abusive, hetero-patriarchal figure in one’s family. The ability to cry as well as utilize other forms of emotional expression has often been a goal in the construction of healthy masculinities (hooks, 2004). This was the case for Latino Male Success. In interviews, mentors often emphasized the ability to show vulnerability, fear, and even cry as goals they had for their students. The ability to express emotion is important for human beings and should be emphasized. However, without added criticism of hegemonic gender relations, male empowerment became the empowerment of men to healthily and more benevolently fit within existing social, gender, and sexual structures. Following hooks (2004) and other feminists of color, critical gender education for boys and men must push beyond emotional healing and extend to a pedagogy that is explicit in its intent to dismantle hetero-patriarchal structures and ending misogyny.

This narrow and at times restricting version of gender justice in Latino Male Success left space open for misogynistic and homophobic language, which was commonplace with many boys and two of the three mentors I observed. One mentor continually used derogative terms when referencing women’s anatomy, such as “titties” and “pussy,” with the boys throughout the school year, while another tolerated and at times used homophobic language to joke with the boys as well as to discipline them. Although fieldnotes document many examples of problematic gender and sexual politics practiced by LMS mentors with students, I am choosing to keep these fieldnote excerpts unpublished.<sup>22</sup> However, an unchecked culture of patriarchy, misogyny and

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<sup>22</sup> Across racial and ethnic lines, male teachers of all backgrounds have continuously failed to stop the perpetuation of a masculine culture characterized by misogyny and homophobia in their classrooms (Martino, 2008; Martino & Frank, 2006). This continues to be true across racial difference in the era of neoliberalism and its unique iterations of toxic masculinity (Cornwall, Karioris, & Lindisfarne, 2016). In order to avoid reifying racist stereotypes about Latino men, as well as to respect the trust my research participants granted me during my time in the field, I will keep these stories private. As Tuck (2009) reminds educational researchers, the academy is not owed (yet thrives off of) continued stories of damage and brokenness within communities of color.

loose conceptualizations of anti-sexism created space for the boys to maintain these forms of masculine expression in LMS. Many boys mentioned that part of being able to “be themselves” in LMS was the ability to make comments and jokes about women and sex that they were prohibited from making in front of other teachers. While it is paramount to allow all children to speak about and explore sexuality, overtly misogynistic jokes were commonplace and frequently unaddressed or problematized by LMS mentors. This resulted in boys defining an honorable man as a person who could simply perform the role of a benevolent, hetero-patriarchal figure in a traditional household.

In interviews with the boys regarding sexism and machismo, all consistently reiterated the values of marital fidelity, an opposition to domestic violence, and the mantra of “a real man takes care of his family.” When I followed up by posing some of the contradictory behavior performed by their peers and mentor, citing common misogynistic language and jokes, many stated that they perceived everyday misogyny as not necessarily important, or secondary, to what makes a man honorable. As one boy stated, “Yeah yeah, that’s true but...well like I wouldn’t be saying that stuff when I’m like a dad, and like have a family and stuff...married.” Through the boy’s response we see the notion of anti-sexism become conditioned through a hetero-patriarchal value system. Here common (and broad) tropes of “respect for women” used in all male spaces, are limited to a benevolent patriarchal attitude to heterosexual family arrangements and reproduction. In many cases, this sentiment allowed both the boys and mentors to claim their work as anti-sexist and anti-machista while still allowing misogynistic and homophobic language to be used in the classroom.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter examined the everyday experiences of Latino boys during their Latino Male Success programming. Through interviews and ethnographic data, we see the lived process of being Latino boys, but also a *becoming* of future Latino men (see Uprichard, 2008). As the previous chapter demonstrates, funders, administrators, and the overall LMS mission saw itself as an “investment” for the future. This investment framed the perceived problems of Latino boys and constructed neoliberal hopes for their future as respectable and productive men. My data offer three identity values cultivated in the program and learned in the classroom. These identity values were (1) meritocratic individualism, (2) smart consumerism/market orientation, and (3) benevolent hetero-patriarchy.

The majority of LMS students (and mentors) embraced these identities as a commonsensical process of becoming a good man. The desire to strive towards a better Latino manhood was a process they had intentionally undertaken by joining Latino Male Success. Although many of the lessons and values learned in LMS were portrayed as quintessential, and at times ancient values of Latino masculinity, these values were adapted to fit a construction of Latino manhood that would be competitive in the contemporary neoliberal world market. As the opening story of this chapter demonstrates, even one’s own story and biography could be made marketable to help increasing human capital and give one a competitive edge in a future marketplace.

The construction of a valuable Latino manhood intersected with conventional heterosexual and patriarchal ideologies. This implicitly or explicitly framed the most ideal Latino



man to be one that could fill the perceived hetero-patriarchal deficits of the Latinx community. This involved not just being a hardworking and entrepreneurial man, but also one that used these skills to satisfy his role as a provider for a nuclear family. The process of teaching and molding potentially deviant boys to be neoliberal men frequently displaced and devalued those that could not live up to this narrow definition of manhood. These devaluations were learned among the boys themselves (as hierarchies emerged among the students), but also served to marginalize students not present in the program. Those that did not earn good grades, make smart choices, or aspire to the life of an honorable family man were outside the pathway to Latino manhood that Latino Male Success had constructed. This ideal was strongly desired and aspired to by the majority of LMS mentors and students. The ability to be an *hombre de palabra* [a man of his word] and live a life of value and meaning was a lifelong goal.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Resisting neoliberal multiculturalism

#### *Introduction*

The notion of neoliberal governmentality reminds us that beyond an economic structure, neoliberalism is a form of governance embedded in the belief that the market is better than the state in distributing resources and managing human life. Although governments and social structures have come to adhere to this logic, neoliberal sovereignty maintains that neoliberal calculations have come to “govern biopolitical life” and “organize forms of humanity” (Melamed, 2011, p. 39). Under neoliberal multiculturalism, the problem of race becomes solvable through market inclusion and investment. However Melamed continues, masked in words like diversity and empowerment, neoliberal multiculturalism has “disguised the reality that neoliberalism remains a form of racial capitalism” that continues to exacerbate inequality (p. 42). In the preceding chapters I have provided description and evidence for what I have called *the neoliberalization of Latino men and boys*. This has included a brief historical context in which Latino men and boys became a population both to be feared and cared for under neoliberal multiculturalism, as well as an in-depth analysis of the framing and day-to-day happenings of the Latino Male Success mentorship program. Through this process I have described the ways in which Latino male subject formation has been largely defined through a neoliberal multicultural vocabulary and value system.

I emphasize that in this process subject formation is always an ongoing and never complete or totalizing process. While neoliberal multiculturalism (intertwined with discourses of race, gender and sexuality) remains the hegemonic discourse defining and constructing subjectivity in Latino Male Success, subjectification is a fluid and ongoing creation among competing discourses vying for recognition and dominance. Given the instability of identity, women of color feminists have long acknowledged in-betweenness as a viable site of political struggle (Collins, 2008; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). In educational research, Chicana/Latina/Latinx thinkers have cultivated this hybrid perspective, what many refer to as mestiza consciousness, as an approach to educational research and learning that traverses the present world in search of new worlds to come (Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). This framing of the subject breaks from essentialized notions of being and instead treats subjectivity as a fluid and ambiguous space in which resistance can be cultivated and imagined. This engagement with subjectivity is a key terrain in which neoliberal multiculturalism can be challenged and dismantled. As Ball and Olmedo (2013) state, due to the “extent that neoliberal governmentalities have become increasingly focused upon the production of subjectivity, it is logical that we think about subjectivity as a site of struggle and resistance” (p. 85).

In this chapter, I focus on the ways subversive negotiations of subjectivity found in Latino Male Success serve as forms of resistance to the neoliberal multicultural framing of Latino men and boys. These forms of resistance were enacted by both the mentors as well as the students, and manifest in subtle as well as explicit forms. I begin with an examination of interviews conducted with Mr. Agustín, a 23-year-old mentor finishing his first semester working at LMS. Although a deficit framing of Latino boys frequently positioned the mentors as saviors of struggling Latino boys, Mr. Agustín’s interviews reveal a conscious rejection of a “good” role model-figure for a critical educator identity. Next, I draw from interview and

ethnographic data collected with Mr. Javier, whose everyday practices resisted neoliberal multicultural logics found in LMS. In reviewing data collected among mentors involved in this study, it was clear Mr. Agustín and Mr. Javier were two mentors who consistently adopted an intentional stance against the neoliberal politics of Pueblo Unido and resisted the hailing of the “good male role model” discourse.<sup>23</sup> I end with a look into the ways students resisted neoliberal logics and subjectivities perpetuated by the program. While this occurred in several forms, I focus on an instance in which LMS boys resisted lesson plans seeking to validate and legitimate police violence against communities of color.

*“I try not to be a ‘good’ example”: Negotiating neoliberal identities and deficits*

Central to neoliberal multicultural interventions in education is the notion that there is a racial problem that must be resolved through competitive innovation and technical expertise as means to enhance and support diversity. Baldrige (2017) argues that within this framework, youth of color frequently become pathologized and positioned as the origin of their own shortcomings through at-risk behavior and cultural deficits. Without denying the serious consequences stemming from questionable decisions or behaviors of some Latinx youth, this dissertation’s evidence points to discourses and social conditions that complicate an otherwise individualistic framing of the challenges Latinx students face. Narratives of damage and risk posit youth workers, and particularly men of color, as educational saviors who arrive in schools as expert boy-technicians with the task of fixing the broken students no one else was able to reach. As Baldrige states, “This positioning of Black males as heroes and the discourse that follow are indicative of the larger political context of neoliberal education reform,” which frequently rest on notions of “paternalism” that deny youth humanity and agency (p. 781).

Similar to Baldrige’s study, the Latino Male Success mentors were frequently positioned as the rescuers of troubled Latino boys in the eyes of funders, community members and school staff. Although a humble group, this position as savior exerted a strong influence in the ways the mentors themselves perpetuated a neoliberal discourse of damage and deficit. In making this claim, I offer brief examples of this framing as evidence. However, it should be underscored that the majority of evidence I share in this chapter is meant to demonstrate the ways select mentors resisted this discourse, rather than perpetuated it. It is worth restating that this study is uninterested in placing blame or critique on individual educators or their worldviews. Instead, I provide these data as examples of the neoliberal shift in Latinx politics over several decades, which undergirds LMS’s mission and influences the cultural work of mentors.

In responding to questions about the problems facing their students as well as strategies they employed to ameliorate these challenges, many mentors consistently brought up cultural explanations and individual deficits. At times this was directed at home life. For example, mentors spoke of undisciplined parenting, a lack of a firm father figure, and a culture of “no consequences” which allowed boys to develop problematic tendencies. More popular responses

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<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that all other mentors actively imposed the neoliberalization of Latino male identity; although many mentors did. For the rest, interview data and observations document a resistant attitude towards what participants saw as the corporate culture of Pueblo Unido or the school district. However this resistant attitude rarely translated into constructing alternative identities for students or teaching strategies that built a critical awareness of what I broadly categorize as neoliberal multiculturalism. Some of the mentors who were the most critical of Pueblo Unido management were also the one’s who passionately stood by individualist attitudes and work ethic. This passion was driven by a genuine love and care for the wellbeing of their students.

centered on the boys' attitudes, which made the character-development curriculum and their embodied "good" example so important. As one mentor states, "I think the mentors serve as a kind of guide...or big brother...in a journey to becoming a man of honor and respect... [and] accountability." While many mentors identified racism (broadly stated) as affecting their students' academic outcomes, they frequently saw their role in this process as guide into the doctrine of the cuatro valores (see chapter four) and a healthy life. As one mentor states, "I'm a mentor, that's what I do, I mentor boys. I want them to realize who they really are...hombres de palabra [men of their word/honor]."

As stated earlier in this dissertation, the human qualities of the cuatro valores express commonly held, universalist values. The four values are 1) Keep your word, 2) Don't bring harm to others, 3) Take responsibility for your actions, and 4) Be a positive example to others. While few would challenge the merits of living a life that embodied these values, their status as the defining principles of an educational intervention for struggling Latino boys reified the notion that Latino boys lack these values. This frames the problems of Latino boys as cultural shortcomings located within their own culture and community (a problem not experienced by white, middle- and upper-class boys who are implicitly assumed to be virtuous, focused, and deserving of the academic success they enjoy as a demographic). In LMS, mentors' sustained connection to the four values posited them as role models and exemplars of accountability, self-discipline, honor, and constraint. This emphasis on the mentor's ability to role model what I have called "corrective representations" (M. V. Singh, 2018) of Latino masculinity was stated over and over again by mentors when understanding their role in creating success for students. Corrective representations are defined as the "discursive creation of the ideal male of color teacher subject" who is placed in relation "the imagined deficits in the boys of color he is delegated to control and discipline" (M. V. Singh, 2018, p. 291). Because these respectability politics were dressed in culturally relevant language, this emphasis on boys' cultural deficits frequently seemed commonsensical and a natural solution for struggling Latino boys. Despite this normalization, two mentors in particular describe strong discomfort with the cuatro valores and sought out alternative articulations of themselves and their role with youth. In this chapter I quote them extensively to bring out the ways they saw their role in LMS and sought to resist.

In the following interview excerpt, Mr. Agustín, a 23-year-old mentor in his first year with LMS describes his apprehension to supporting fully the cuatro valores and the respectability politics of the program which he was supposed to embody for the boys.

**Mr. Agustín:** Those values [pause] I am still, I'm still working through them. The most interesting one I thought was the keeping your word part. That whole focus on integrity, I thought was pretty interesting.

**Michael:** Can you say more? What do you mean by interesting?

**Mr. Agustín:** Interesting, well, I thought it because - it was interesting because... like that whole - accountability part was pretty interesting. I think it's a mixed feeling kind of thing. I recognize the importance of holding these youth accountable and teaching responsibility, but it also seems to tread along the line of personal responsibility, pull yourself up by your bootstrap ideology that has been particularly harmful to impoverished communities [and] especially communities of color where you can teach them to be responsible or to take responsibility for their actions but it's hard to pull

yourself up by your bootstraps if you have all these structural barriers that are preventing you from succeeding.

**Michael:** How do you feel LMS falls within the American dream, pull yourself up by the bootstraps ideology?

**Mr. Agustín:** It seems we are, how can I say this, it seems we're presenting that this American dream does exist. You just have to finish high school, go to a college or go - if you don't go to college there's all these other viable options and you have all these internship programs that we partner with. We seem to be communicating to these students that you can - like however you say it, escape from the Bahía and the hood, which, for some students would be a mark of success. So it seems we're communicating to them that it is possible and that we're just here for extra support for you to get you on that path but I think - and that's one of the struggles that I found working with the program is that even though we're presented with a viable option, I think, it ignores... or maybe we're not being completely honest with them.

Here we see Mr. Agustín grapple with his positioning as a role model of values that do not necessarily align with his own. His nuanced criticism pushes beyond the commonsensically progressive goal of Latino men helping Latino boys succeed. By identifying a “bootstraps” mentality in the program, a discourse he relates to problematic racial politics in the United States, Mr. Agustín complicates the notion that building respectable Latino men is necessarily the best form of racial justice work when, in his response, “material inequality” and “poverty” were the largest factors impacting Latino boys in Bahía.

During our interview Mr. Agustín expressed enjoyment in being able to reflect on the mission of LMS and his role within the organization as a Latino male mentor. A proud sociology major in his undergraduate studies, he skillfully utilized a Marxist and critical race studies vocabulary to analyze nonprofits, corporate greed, and racial inequality in what he characterized as “post-industrial capitalism.” As Mr. Agustín lamented, Pueblo Unido’s interest in having the boys visit a local office of a new partner, JP Morgan Chase, I asked him how he understood himself and his role within the program.

**Mr. Agustín:** Oh that’s a tough one [laughter]. Like I said, I was a sociology major, I'm familiar with Marx, familiar with all these critiques of capitalism and now that I am working a non-profit, it’s like you don't think you're working for capitalism because it’s like I'm not a banker...[I am not] working for the private sector. But there's this weird relationship to the work that I'm doing. It's like I may not be accumulating capital in like the investment banking sense but I'm still kind of, it's not really doing much to help those people who we think we're helping. I think that's the problem of non-profits in general.

**Michael:** How do you reconcile that in your work?

**Mr. Agustín:** Yeah, I think it goes back to re-imagining a different world and allowing students to also do that. We live in a time, especially with like the Trump presidency, where it can feel like we're just pretty much screwed. I need to be someone who shows

the students something different, a new way to imagine themselves and also a new way of imagining the world and the city of Bahía. That's what I need to be for them. Through this interview, Mr. Agustín demonstrates his hopes of disrupting the neoliberal status quo. For him this disruption was absent in the mission of his program which he saw as complicitous with racial inequality. By constructing his identity and role in the program as ambivalent in upholding LMS's respectability politics and bootstraps ideology, he seeks to create space for his students to re-imagine themselves and their city. This re-imagining did not include the clean-cut path to the American dream, but one with eyes wide open. Despite this intention, creating space for alternative worlds was difficult when he was positioned as an ideal embodiment of the current world. Mr. Agustín had also grown up in North Bahía and despite facing adversity, had graduated from one of California's elite universities. In college he excelled, had little trouble finding a decent job after graduating (as an LMS mentor), and was in a strong position to pursue graduate school. "I try not to be a good example...like *that* [emphasis on that]" states Mr. Agustín. For example, instead of teaching a traditional financial literacy workshop that a fellow mentor recommended, Mr. Agustín altered the curriculum to speak on income inequality and housing segregation. "This system is unfair...I don't want them to see me as someone who 'made it,'" he states, "that's not the point.... [to perpetuate the narrative] 'I can do it, so can you.'"

Beyond seeking to distance his identity as mentor from American dream and work-ethic narratives, Mr. Agustín's identity as the only openly queer mentor also served as embodied resistance to dominant notions of neoliberal Latino masculinity. Although Mr. Agustín appreciated LMS's official stance against sexism, homophobia, and machismo, he described the need for large improvements in bringing these goals to fruition.

I feel there's a lot of room for improvement in this area because if we operate from a belief that it's important for these Latino students to have Latino male role models that they look up to, you can't ignore that most of those Latino mentors are also...well, unless I have this wrong. . . I'm the only gay one here. Aside from providing a Latino male mentor, it seems infused in that we are also providing a cis-gender male mentor, a straight cis-gender male mentor. So even though it may not be our intention to reproduce those power structures of male domination, of straight domination, it feels unintentional. It feels like those are also being reproduced, while trying to disturb the more racial domination that is pervasive in society.

Mr. Agustín identified his identity as a queer Latino man as a disruptive element in the culture of LMS that normalized heterosexuality and at times homophobia. "So, yes, I guess the benefit of being the only queer one is that I do get to do that...disrupt the whole straight Latino male narrative and bringing in more queer voices." Although Mr. Agustín selflessly categorizes his identity and queer politics as a benefit and gift he was able to give to Latino Male Success, this came at the cost of his own energies. As a new mentor Mr. Agustín talked of struggling to manage his classroom during his initial weeks of working at LMS. He attributed much of this difficulty to his performance of non-dominant Latino masculinity, which conflicted with his students' expectations of the program. Although participant observations were not conducted at Mr. Agustín's school site, my data reveal a clear lack of effort in LMS to disrupt a culture of heteronormativity and homophobia, which was prevalent in the organization. Homophobic language and jokes among the students were common in two of the three classrooms I observed.

In one middle school classroom, homophobic jokes were used on a near daily basis. In other instances, I observed LMS mentors use homophobic language in a disciplinary manner to control classroom voice levels. These actions all served to normalize the notion that real Latino men were heterosexual and were, in part, defined by their distance from homosexuality (see Mora, 2013). To counter this discourse, Mr. Agustín describes his queer performance and pedagogy as part of an intentional disruption of Latino male subjectivity defined by hetero-patriarchal and capitalist rhetoric. This was a strong departure from the popular male role model archetype embodied by most LMS mentors.

### *The case of Mr. Javier*

Mr. Javier sat in the front of the classroom, staring out at his students who were seated in a large horseshoe shape facing him. He had a somber look on his face. Before class began, he had informed me that Pueblo Unido would be limiting the amount of buses for the LMS reward-fieldtrip coming up. He had been asked to bring 10 of his highest achieving students, regardless of how many had been able to hit the 2.5 GPA requirement to attend the trip. He was now tasked with explaining this process to them. After a long sigh, he addressed his group of students. “Before we get into what I got planned, we need to have a conversation about the Xtreme Sports trip coming up next week. It looks like I am only supposed to take about 10 students.” The 20+ students in the group looked around at one another. There were a few groans. “I think that’s fucked up,” continued Mr. Javier. “And I am going to try to see if I can make some big exceptions, but as of now, even if you hit the 2.5 GPA requirement, that might not matter.”

This announcement caused some stir among the students, but it was minimal. The students rarely interrupted Mr. Javier during announcements. “I think this is a good time to remind you that I’m proud of you,” he continued. “I am proud of each and every one of you. If I haven’t made it clear with you all I will make it clear now, I don’t agree with the grade cutoffs for this fieldtrip.” Mr. Javier had made this point very clear to me in an interview, however, I had also noted at least three times he expressed this belief to his students during my classroom observations. “Of course, if you are completely behind and really need to be in school to catch up then yeah, I might recommend you don’t miss a day of school if something important is going to happen. But I want to make sure you know that if you have a 0.0 GPA, that doesn’t mean I think any less of you. I don’t value a human being by their GPA. That’s not who I am. Even if that’s what they are telling us.”

Mr. Javier looked around at the faces of his students. Many were silent. “I’ll put it like this,” he stated, still hoping to make sure his point stuck with them. “If my abuelita made a good ass dinner but I had a 4.0 and my cousin had a 2.0, she wouldn’t say ‘oh you get this chile relleno for dinner Javi, and you pendejo, eat that sandwich.’” The boys let out a few chuckles at the use of the word *pendejo*. “Maybe she would do that if my cousin wasn’t helping the family around the house, or like doing his chorus, showing respect, but for stuff that’s out of our control sometimes, nah, she wouldn’t say you don’t deserve this food. And that’s the same way I think about the grades. Do you all get what I am trying to say?” The students nodded.

In this fieldnote Mr. Javier takes a strong and explicit stance against an LMS practice that reinforces the notions of meritocracy, individualism, and competition among his students. Similar to Mr. Agustín, Mr. Javier was an outlier in many respects. Although friendly with his fellow mentors, Mr. Javier took a decidedly political approach to his work and was uninterested

in hiding it. For the most part, co-workers respected this quality, and Mr. Javier was commonly known as “the political one.” This title was generally used in a neutral way, however I documented several times when it was used with both a positive and negative connotation. Although the youthful Mr. Agustín (who was fast becoming known as another “political” mentor) had identified his time as a sociology major as a key moment of political awakening, Mr. Javier was the sole LMS mentor without a college degree. He had enjoyed taking Chicana studies courses at a regional state college, however Mr. Javier identified his experiences as a youth involved in grassroots community organizing as the origin of his critical awareness. As he states, “I feel like I definitely did learn some good stuff in college, but I think my political consciousness kind of came from high school. Like some teachers...but most everything came from [political] organizing in the community...grassroots youth organizing.”

Mr. Javier was one of the four LMS mentors I observed, and I spent a substantial amount of time with him during the two years of this study. Upon my first visit to his classroom, it had been immediately apparent that he would be a unique case among the LMS mentors. For example, his classroom walls did not include any the LMS posters that Pueblo Unido provided. These official posters were common in most LMS classrooms and conveyed broad, ambiguous phrases of cultural empowerment such as “healing from within” and “la cultura cura” [culture is healing]. Instead, Mr. Javier’s walls were lined with political zines, pictures of the boys in front of cultural murals, and posters reading “Abolish borders,” “Black Lives Matter,” “Chicanos against imperial wars,” and “Bahía against gentrification.” One small banner in the room reads “If capital can cross borders, so can we.” This poster speaks directly against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), popularly referenced as a neoliberal trade policy that has increased wealth inequality in particularly Mexico. Mr. Javier also kept a small bookshelf in the corner which the boys were allowed to rummage through and borrow books if they wished. The collection included a mix of Black, Latinx, and Native radical readings. A worn copy of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* sat clearly visible, which was one of Mr. Javier’s favorite books.

Despite a cheery and passionate disposition in his classroom, during interviews and private conversations Mr. Javier expressed exhaustion and frustration with what he described as a “savior complex” and conservative politics promoted by Pueblo Unido. This discontentment with his organization at times gave him feelings of guilt. In Mr. Javier’s mind, the organization promoted an aesthetically revolutionary face, but a politics that represented a racially unjust status quo.

**Mr. Javier:** It’s a façade that we live under... like, we’re an organization that comes out of 60’s, we have this history, blah, blah, blah. This actually gives us an advantage beyond like, conservative organizations, where we could use that [radical history] to do conservative stuff but still put this face on. Like, we’re going to make this nice pamphlet of the community and throw a pyramid on it...and this is how we are supposed to function, like, a buffer between the community and the corporate world, manipulating but with a different face...

**Michael:** Do you ever feel manipulated in your work?



**Mr. Javier:** Of course, I would be lying [if I said I didn't]. No matter how “revolutionary” [uses air quotes] I try to make my work...I know, non-profits like this...how I'm used.

This distrust of non-profits was a consistent theme in Mr. Javier's criticism of Pueblo Unido. As a youth in what he described as “radical grassroots organizing,” Mr. Javier had learned about what he himself referred to as the non-profit industrial complex (see INCITE!, 2017). For Mr. Javier, non-profits did not have the community's best interest in mind and instead were used to pacify resistance from systematic oppression.

**Mr. Javier:** It's not their goal and whether it's written or not, non-profits were designed by the system itself to placate the movement, if you want it to be real, like people were ready to give their lives for a revolution and that's something that is not even in the picture anymore because we have these non-profits...it came at a cost and the cost was that we understood that we can have a piece of the pie as long as we keep our mouth shut and I think that's the dynamic that exists even if people don't want to say it. I have no problem saying it, but if you need to be like a politician, keep yourself in the middle...it goes unsaid... this is how non-profits work. It's like a company and they keep us in our place.

**Michael:** Can you describe how you see Latino Male Success being influenced by these goals?

**Mr. Javier:** I mean it *is* the goal [emphasis on 'is']. They don't want little free thinking revolutionaries running around...They want a real corporate looking business kid [pretends to tighten a necktie and scrunches up face in an exaggerated manner]...that's why they want to take kids to JP Morgan so they can learn how to be a part of this system. And so that corporation can give to Pueblo Unido. They won't explicitly say it but I mean we are taking the kids to JP Morgan, how much more explicit do you need to get?

**Michael:** How do you see the ideal student that Pueblo Unido envisions? You said a bit, but can you say more?

**Mr. Javier:** Yeah, I mean Pueblo Unido wants a “successful” [uses air quotes] young man that's wholesome, like, American wholesome. Real cookie cutter. American wholesome but you are also still connected to your [Latinx] culture.

In his interviews as well as in many private conversations Mr. Javier articulated (and in some ways led me to) neoliberal multiculturalism. This mixture of staunch capitalism and traditional American ideals of wholesome patriarchs blended (and literally translated) into Latinx cultural signifiers. This is what worried Mr. Javier the most about Pueblo Unido and his work in LMS. When asked why he stayed working for an organization that he described as having conservative values that conflicted with his political beliefs, he simply stated, “I want to work with youth.” In the changing landscape of urban education, it had become increasingly difficult to secure jobs (or join movements) working with youth, which matched Mr. Javier's values. He imagined past eras

of Bahía where he might be involved in more radical political education work rather than the non-profit industrial complex.

### *Critical education to counter neoliberal multiculturalism*

Although Mr. Javier was well aware of his conflicting political beliefs with Pueblo Undio, the flexibility and lack of close supervision in the sparsely managed mentorship program allowed him to teach what he wanted and how he wanted. This belief in critical education is one form of resistance that Mr. Javier sought to employ on a day to day basis. A foundational principle in critical education is that teaching is a cultural practice that can serve to counter or perpetuate dominant modes of being (Giroux, 1988). Although schooling itself is a process of social and cultural reproduction in which marginalized groups learn to naturalize and participate in their marginalization (Willis, 1981), radical teaching may serve to disrupt hegemonic discourses and spark critical awareness and dissent (Freire, 2000). As this dissertation uncovers, Latino Male Success serves as a program that normalizes a neoliberal multicultural ideology amidst a larger neoliberal context in urban education. By this, I mean that while neoliberalism has been dominant as an economic structure in the past several decades, neoliberal multiculturalist programs like LMS are key in contributing to the reinforcement and normalization of neoliberal multiculturalism as a hegemonic discourse and worldview. What critical pedagogy provides us then, is a break from economic deterministic understandings of schooling, and instead turns towards hope that political education can lead to alternative worlds, identities, and futures.

Mr. Javier was committed to critical teaching and in his five years of working as a Latino Male Success mentor had never had a problem with censorship.

**Mr. Javier:** No one really tells me anything so teaching with freedom keeps me here. If I couldn't do that, I would be somewhere else.

**Michael:** And your teaching contrasts with how you see the values of the organization?

**Mr. Javier:** Hell yeah. But, it's like sometimes stuff sounds the same, like people don't realize what I'm saying is different... it all sounds fluffy social justice to them. That gives me an in though. We are kind of like the little viruses in the matrix, you know what I'm saying? Hopefully we can taint it. And with the short amount of time we have on this planet, hopefully we can give our truth.

On a near daily basis, Mr. Javier brought political lessons absent from the other two classrooms I observed. He went out of his way to connect school problems to decidedly political problems, such as the historical ghettoization of North Bahía and the unfair wealth gap between the boys' families and the new, more white and wealthy residents of Bahía. He did not shy away from words like racism and colonialism, and he encouraged boys to name and analyze racist practices that they felt they experienced in school. He taught lessons on the intersectional gender wage gap and the rise of Chicana feminism in a response to toxic masculine practices in the Chicano movement. And despite being critical of his school, Mr. Javier was along the most involved in activities on campus, which extended beyond his paid role as Latino Male Success mentor.

For instance, he, along with a Latina teacher, facilitated an all-gender Raza Club during lunch. I attended meetings on several occasions and was invited to participate in their conversations surrounding racism, gentrification, Black and Latinx solidarity, and other dialogues I would characterize as political education. Mr. Javier also had a close relationship with Esperanza Nuño, the BUSD director of Latinx Community Affairs. She had been his mentor, as a youth doing community organizing in North Bahía. When she was able to secure BUSD funds to bring the school's Raza Club to a local university for an event on the history of radical Latinx student-activism on campus, Mr. Javier jumped at the opportunity to bring as many of his LMS students as possible. In announcing this optional fieldtrip to his class, he stated twice for emphasis, "there will be no GPA requirement for this fieldtrip." Several boys who had been excluded from LMS fieldtrips took the opportunity to attend. The next day they were invited to give a report-back to the class.

Chuy and Eric stood up to share their thoughts to the class. Both described the trip as exciting and fun. Mr. Javier asked them to tell us more about what they learned about Chicano history. They talked about seeing posters in a research center, talking to a professor who was Mexican, and hearing about "the movement" and "racism." "And resistance, right?" asked Mr. Javier. They both nodded. "And how long did they say we have been fighting?" he continued. "Um, I think they said, like, for 500 years, no?" the boys responded. Mr. Javier took this opportunity to have a long discussion on colonialism as an ongoing process experienced by both the indigenous groups in the Bahía region as well as Black and Latinx people being displaced by gentrification.

While Mr. Javier frequently brought his own political lessons to class, or at times added his own spin on LMS curriculum, he also saw music as form of political education. A hip-hop artist, Mr. Javier enjoyed sharing his music with his students as a way to share more about his life, his understanding of the world, and social injustice. The use of hip-hop music to engage youth in schools has enjoyed high popularity in recent years (Christopher, 2018; M. L. Hill & Ladson-Billings, 2009; Land & Stovall, 2009; Love, 2012; Low, 2011). However, despite originating from a subversive youth counter-culture, hip-hop curriculum, like all curriculum, can represent a wide array of ideological standpoints and political commitments (Petchauer, 2009). For instance, using hip-hop music to help youth better memorize biology terms is a creative use of hip-hop music, however it does not necessarily fall under critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a method of teaching focused on building a critical analysis of power with the intention of raising critical awareness and enact change to an oppressive system (Freire, 2000; McLaren, 2003).

For Mr. Javier, hip-hop music was a way to construct a political identity located in the social injustices of his environment (see Land & Stovall, 2009; Love, 2012). A dedicated artist who was actively making music during the time of the research, Mr. Javier enjoyed sharing his art with his class, but was hesitant to overly romanticize the use of hip-hop music as an innovative solution to teaching in urban schools. Instead, hip-hop was simply one of many cultural forms he shared with the students as a critical educator. He states,

I love using hip-hop in my class. I know the students like when I share my music, or songs I like...or maybe we watch a music video and talk about it. It's just one of many ways to connect with them because, I mean this is North Bahía, the kids know hip-hop.

For better or worse sometimes...But like, I love hip-hop, it's who I am, it helped me develop my [political] consciousness.... Hopefully for some of them it will be the same.

Mr. Javier made it a point to critique hyper-masculine portrayals of young men of color in the music industry. This challenged student's popular perceptions of hip-hop as well as demonstrated the utility of the musical genre as therapeutic meditation, rather than simply a means to generate wealth. In his own music videos which the students enjoyed watching on YouTube, Mr. Javier often included an array of smiling family members, from children to the elderly, which created an aesthetic open to a variety of identities and emotions.

Despite being intentional in creating an atmosphere of warmth and "familia" in his music, Mr. Javier stressed that his music and his hip-hop lessons were staunchly political. In open dialogues about issues facing their North Bahía community, students appreciated being able to reference past lesson as well as songs they had listened to with Mr. Javier. Some beginning their comments with, "It's like in your song, where you say how all of a sudden you see white people in North Bahía." Topics of gentrification, racial inequality, and police violence were central themes of Mr. Javier's music, and I had seen him confidently spit lyrics on these topics in live performances. These performances had occurred in front of his group of LMS students, at school-wide assemblies at his school site, as well as out of school at local political events, such as a performance at an International Workers Day march in Bahía. Among the themes of the music that he shared with his students, white supremacist terrorism enacted by the police was a central concern. This topic greatly interested the boys, all of whom lived in a heavily policed region of Bahía. In their young lives, they had grown up in the age of widely publicized police murders of Black and Latino men, the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as the rise of Trumpism and calls for more militarized police and border security. Although not representative of the values of Latino Male Success or Pueblo Unido, Mr. Javier believed in the abolition of policing and prison and sought to normalize this value in his music as well as his classroom (see Rodríguez, 2010). Similar to Bettina Love's (2019) use of hip-hop music and teaching to advance educational freedom, Mr. Javier saw his teaching as needing to push past reformist attitudes of what Love refers to as the "educational survival complex" (Love, 2019, p. 29). For Mr. Javier, this meant taking strong stances against a policing system that he believed enacted terror on his students and his community. As the chorus of one of Mr. Javier's song's states, "Self-defense is a must, fuck the police."

### *Neoliberal multiculturalism and racialized policing and punishment*

The normalization of new and expanded forms of racial policing and violence is central to neoliberal multiculturalism. As explicit forms of racial, political and economic white supremacist ideology lost its legitimacy both globally as well as in the United States, contemporary racial ideologies have constructed new racial subjects through legitimated forms of racial violence (Melamed, 2011; N. P. Singh, 2012). Thus far, this dissertation has uncovered the ways Latino Male Success structurally embodied a neoliberal multicultural school intervention and cultivated a neoliberal Latino masculinity among students. Under neoliberal multiculturalism, this new and proper form of racial subjectivity legitimates the dispossession of racial others, constructing some racial subjects as deserving and others as not. As Melamed (2011) argues, in this era of racism, "racialization's trick of displacing and disguising differential

value making within world-ordering systems of difference reifies and ensures a baseline for social possibility and legitimate violence” (p. 12). The perpetuation of newly legitimated racial violence was subtle but common in Latino Male Success classrooms.

Throughout the duration of this study, the boys of Latino Male Success navigated a diverse array of discourse and frameworks which sought to normalize neoliberal multiculturalism. Key to this process is the naturalization and legitimation of the mass incarceration of particularly Black and Latinx people at the hands of militarized police, ICE police, and the prison industry (Gilmore, 2002). Pueblo Unido, like nearly all organizations working with youth, strongly preferred that youth not be incarcerated and saw one of its goals as helping to stop the school-to-prison pipeline. In this sense, of course no Latino Male Success students or staff supported the mass numbers of youth of color entering the carceral system. This was seen as a tragedy. However, as Loïc Wacquant (2009) argues, in the era of neoliberalism, charitable programs (as opposed to social welfare programs) such as LMS function at the symbolic level to uphold the punitive turn of the neoliberal state by legitimating the punishment of subordinated groups. This is accomplished by enacting a “moralizing conception of poverty,” which legitimates punishment and dispossession (p. 42). This is not to say that LMS actively sought to validate the mass incarceration of Black and Latinx people, but that its “primary action” as a non-profit working in public schools in the neoliberal era “is not solidarity, but *compassion*” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 42, italics in original). During my time with LMS, the program renounced the school-to-prison pipeline, but did not include an effort to politicize education regarding the varied components of the carceral system in the United States, or promote youth advocacy to help dismantle what Victor Rios calls the “youth control complex” (Rios, 2011). Instead, LMS shifted focus to altering the boys’ perceived potential to give-in to violent tendencies and crime (what I have labeled the “right path” discourse). For Sojoynor (2016), common understandings of the school-to-prison pipeline framework serves as an ideological enclosure of particularly Black liberatory consciousness by ignoring anti-black structures and policy, and instead connects mass incarceration to student behavior and actions. Rather than asking for second chances, Sojoynor reminds us that youth are the victims of a violent carceral system and that they indeed have reason to be angry (see Meiners, 2007). Seeking penance for “wrongdoing” obscures the real question at hand for Sojoynor, which is “Why have Black people been rounded up into sites of enclosure during the past forty years (both within prison and within their communities)?” (p. 62).

While select mentors, such as Mr. Javier, took it upon themselves to promote the abolition of ICE, police, and prisons, the overall culture of the organization promoted a neoliberal multicultural framing of policing. This put emphasis on the potential for the boys to be virtuous Latino male subjects and sought to distance them from the behavior and wrongdoings of those Black and Latino men who chose a path of violence, crime, and eventually incarceration, social death (see Cacho, 2012), or physical death. In interviews, many mentors understood their role in disrupting (or perhaps normalizing) mass incarceration by teaching students to avoid or suppress violent habits. Two mentors expressed the desire to have a future career as police officers and were particularly enthusiastic about disciplining youth now as a way to help them avoid harsher [and seemingly justified] discipline in the future. A third mentor was interested in becoming a youth probation officer. None of the mentors reported interest in becoming a credentialed teacher. The notion of diversifying the current policing system upholds, rather than disrupts, the violent racialized characteristics of the policing system in the United States by giving it a multicultural face. Although a staunch color-line no longer divides the police and the

policed, an increasingly multicultural police force continues to terrorize deviant racial subjects through intimidation, incarceration, and death (Alexander, 2012; Gilmore, 2007).

As chapter five demonstrates, the overarching culture and practices of Latino Male Success normalized meritocratic and individualist values among the students. This placed the onus of success on the students and validated punishment or removal of boys who seemed to squander the resources of Latino Male Success. While students commonly accepted these formal and informal lessons through a commonsensical lens of the world, there was also resistance. Nowhere was this perhaps more apparent than the topic of policing. This occurred even when masked in neoliberal multiculturalist discourse.<sup>24</sup> While these forms of resistance occurred in a variety of ways, I offer the students' reactions to the film, *End of Watch* (Ayer, 2012), as an example. Because of the film's multicultural cast, juxtaposition of "good" and "bad" people of color, and an underlying anti-immigrant message, it was an ideal film to demonstrate the ways students negotiated neoliberal multicultural values in the program.

### *"I don't feel bad, I hate cops": Student responses to the film, End of Watch*

*End of Watch* was screened in Mr. Sergio's middle school group. Mr. Sergio, a new mentor at the time, had alerted me that he would begin showing the film on Friday instead of taking the students outside for a physical activity. Since his arrival to LMS, Mr. Sergio had expressed concern with the amount of anti-police sentiments and language he heard from his students. Although Mr. Sergio was not one of the three mentors who had expressed aspirations to be a police or probation officer, he felt it his duty as the boys' mentor to cultivate a positive attitude towards police officers. He informed me that in order to give the boys a relatable representation of policing, he decided to show the film *End of Watch*. Because of the film's high volume of action scenes and multicultural cast, he hoped the boys would enjoy and connect with its content.

*End of Watch* is a 2012 film written and directed by popular police movie director David Ayer (also director of *Training Day*). The film stars Michael Peña and Jake Gyllenhaal as Miguel Zavala and Bryan Taylor, two young police officers in the Los Angeles Police Department. The film documents their daily police work as "ghetto cops" in South-Central Los Angeles. The film's setting in South Los Angeles is constructed to signal to the viewer a popularly imagined urban space and is depicted as a crime-ridden, racialized ghetto where the two police officers deal almost exclusively with Black and Latinx populations (see Leonardo & Hunter, 2007). The film pushes gratuitous depictions of self-imposed poverty, documenting nefarious Black gang members, ruthless Mexican cartel drug trafficking, and Black "crack-mothers" neglecting their malnourished infants. Many scenes of Black and Latinx people living miserable lives in what is portrayed as a culture of poverty were difficult to watch. Despite these depictions of atrocious racist tropes of Black and Latinx people, the film also highlights a multicultural depiction of the LAPD. This inclusion pushed beyond simply adding Black and Latinx cast members to the film. Zavala and Taylor's brother-like friendship develops through what is depicted as a genuine inter-

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<sup>24</sup> In the era of the Trump Presidency, the United States saw a return of more classic, white supremacist discourse into the mainstream media. The students, mentors, and staff of Latino Male Success unanimously condemned the hate speech spewed from the office of the president. This is an important point of differentiation. What this section seeks to highlight is not students' resistance to xenophobic, anti-immigrant rhetoric, but to the validation of systems of policing and incarceration upheld by neoliberal multiculturalism.

racial bond. The characters maintain lighthearted banter throughout the movie, frequently joking about one another's ethnic background and cultural stereotypes. Zavala comfortably uses Spanish or Spanglish around Taylor, and even brings Taylor to his sister's *quinceañera* where Taylor is easily accepted and embraced in the traditional Mexican celebration. Actress America Ferrera is also among the close group of police officers in the unit, playing Officer Orozco, a queer Latina from South Los Angeles who challenges monolithic depictions of white-straight-male police officers. Both Peña and Ferrera's characters seem to be from Latinx neighborhoods themselves, and comfortably maintain a Mexican-American cultural identity which blends easily into the melting pot of the LAPD family.

The film enters its central conflict as Zavala and Taylor's bold and rambunctious police work begin to cause trouble for an international Mexican drug cartel. They are warned by ICE police officers, who are depicted as stoic heroes behind the scenes, that they have stumbled into something bigger than themselves, and that they should back off. They are also warned by local Black gang members who have also been terrorized by this Mexican cartel that the cartel is ruthless and has taken notice of their interference in international drug trafficking. The duo refused to backdown and is eventually ambushed by a mixed-gender group of cartel members who receive orders from the other side of the boarder to eliminate the rogue cops. After an intense gunfight and chase through South Los Angeles Zavala is heroically killed while protecting Taylor's limp body. Shortly after, reinforcements arrive and the cartel members, showing no interest in being taken-alive, are killed in a hail of gunfire.

As Mr. Sergio expected, the boys took great pleasure in the action scenes and violence of *End of Watch*. The 109-minute film was viewed over the course of three meetings and was rarely interrupted by talking. Whether attributed to director Roy Ayer's expertise in the genre or the film's high budget and strong cast, the film was entertaining, and the boys were captivated. Following the plot's climax, the film ends with the funeral of Miquel Zavala. An American flag is draped over the coffin of Zavala while another hangs behind Zavala's formal police portrait, which now rests on an altar. The camera rests on Zavala's weeping wife, played by model and actress Natalia Martínez, as she clutches the family's infant child. The camera then rests on the grief-stricken Taylor. As Taylor, who is still recovering from his injuries, limps to the podium and prepares to address the crowd during the final scene of the movie, Oscar, one of the most outspoken eighth graders in the group shouted, "Ah naaaw, this shit is stupid." Felipe chimed in, "Yeah, naww, I'm done with this." Mr. Sergio and I both looked up in surprise. Whereas the students did not shy away from sitting through moments of seriousness or emotion during viewings of past films, it appeared we would not be able to finish this film in silence. "Oscar, don't you feel bad? This is a funeral?" asked Mr. Sergio, annoyed they would not be able to finish the film in peace. "I don't feel bad, I hate cops," replied Oscar. "Plus they were like killing Mexicans and shit, naww." "Yeah and look, with all those cops at one place at the same time, I feel like this would be a good time to rob some stuff," interjected Brian. This led to laughter. The movie would continue to be interrupted for the remaining few minutes.

In a discussion after the film, Mr. Sergio asked his students how they liked the movie. To my surprise, no boys jumped to give it praise. Despite my strong criticism of the film's anti-immigrant messages and glorification of racial policing, I had to admit the film appeared well done and entertaining. I now looked at Mr. Sergio's group of eighth grade boys as they awkwardly avoided commenting on the movie or having a discussion. This was the same group who overwhelmingly approved of diverse, and at times random, movies that had been shown. Examples of the most popular films among the boys that had been viewed that year in their LMS

classroom had been Pixar's *Book of Life*, director Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto*, and the film *Catch Me if You Can*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hanks. Mr. Sergio now struggled to get the boys to comment on *End of Watch*. With time running out, he added, "Well one thing I hope you noticed is how the cops were like brothers even though they were different. That's the type of brotherhood I want you all to build here. That's why the end of the year ceremony [ceremony] is so important to me."

In an interview with Oscar, one of the boys who had so verbally rejected the ending of the film, I decided to ask why the students seemed to dislike the action-packed film.

**Oscar:** It's like, well, it was a good movie, a lot of action and stuff which was good. It was good [emphasis on 'was']. But at the end with the cops, I don't know, I don't really like the cops so it was fun for the action but when you think about it, I don't know, police are bad so, that's why I didn't really like the ending.

**Michael:** Does LMS teach you that police are bad?

**Oscar:** Um, no...well. I feel like no. Like, ah that's a tough one. Mr. S probably likes cops and stuff, and teachers do... some. But then some teachers, like Mr. Javier, you can tell he probably thinks they're against our culture...racist.

**Michael:** Do you think they are?

**Oscar:** Yeah. I do. Not always but yeah, I do... I didn't really like that movie.

Oscar's understanding of the film, as well as the overall class-reaction to *End of Watch*, is representative of the subtle resistances or refusal students enacted when encountering lessons in LMS that they found problematic or contrary to their beliefs and life experiences. In the example of *End of Watch*, Mr. Sergio screened the film in an attempt to counter anti-police attitudes in the boys. Breaking from past eras in which police forces are depicted as exclusively white (or perhaps holding a token officer of color), *End of Watch* showcases a diverse police force. In particular, the Latinx police officers are depicted as full individuals, speaking Spanish, sharing Latinx culture with fellow officers, and having traditionally Mexican families. These good neoliberal multicultural subjects are juxtaposed to the bad ones. South Los Angeles is depicted as a crime ridden and violent ghetto in which the highest threat is Mexican gang members who move easily across an unsecure boarder to terrorize the neighborhood and murder police officers of all colors.

Although this neoliberal multicultural framing of policing shared characteristics and values of Latino Male Success, the boys were decidedly uninterested in praising the film. While the movie was action-packed, it did not feel correct to mourn officer Zavala, despite a shared ethnic identity. Organic development of political critique of policing is a common practice among students (see Dance, 2002; Willis, 1981), however the boys also mentioned their views of policing being informed by select critical educators. Mr. Javier's name was mentioned by Mr. Sergio's students (Mr. Javier had substitute taught the class on many occasions), as well as other teachers who supported Black Lives Matter and taught lesson on the racial history of policing (as I would later learn). One student mentioned viewing the documentary *Thirteenth*, while a high school LMS student (not present for the *End of Watch* screening) even mentioned an ethnic



studies teacher assigning the autobiography of Assata Shakur. When speaking with students about policing, they overwhelmingly reported having negative experiences with police officers, a deep hate for ICE police, and an overall belief that the ways policing and punishment function in the United States was unjust. This critical belief led students to reject the film *End of Watch*, despite its culturally authentic and multicultural cast.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have demonstrated the ways both mentors and students resisted neoliberal multiculturalism in Latino Male Success. In the cases of Mr. Agustín and Mr. Javier, resistance was intentional and overt. In interviews with the mentors, both shared a developed understanding of what they felt was problematic about the practices and values of the program, as well as the ways they sought to reframe the cultural work they did with boys. For Mr. Agustín, Latino Male Success promoted a bootstraps ideology which he identified as concealing structural racism and instead promoting the belief that hard work would lead to economic gains and the American dream. This myth was central to racial capitalism in the United States. For Mr. Javier, Pueblo Unido's "conservative" values influenced the overall goals of Latino Male Success and functioned to quell political youth resistance in North Bahía. In the classroom he challenged these values by bringing in alternative lessons, discrediting LMS policies, and employing a critical pedagogy focused on racial liberation whenever possible.

In uplifting the voices of these two mentors, I do not want to homogenize the remaining LMS staff as simply problematic practitioners complicit with the present era's racist discourse. While a handful of mentors did take a firmly neoliberal multicultural stance to their work, the majority of mentors found themselves as simply dedicated mentors doing what they felt was social justice work. Upon hearing some of my critiques of LMS practices or lesson plans, many mentors expressed concern, embarrassment, and a desire to immediately alter deficit-orientations they had taken towards their students and their families.

Among the students, resistance took place in subtler forms. By this, I mean that there were no organized walkouts against unacceptable curriculum nor formal attempts to change the program. Instead, students found small ways to resist what I have categorized as neoliberal multiculturalism by refusing to buy into lesson plans or participating when they felt a lesson did not align with their values. The students' distaste for pro-multicultural police, anti-immigrant film *End of Watch* serves as a perfect example of this refusal. Although this resistance was brief and unexpanded upon, it marks one of many small and fleeting moments in which students sought to challenge the doctrine of Latino Male Success for more radical racial politics. As future studies document the ways communities embrace and/or combat neoliberal shifts in urban education, I call on this research, including my own, to focus not just on structures, policy, pedagogy, and curriculum, but also on the everyday embodiments of youth resistance.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

#### *The closing ceremonia: Becoming a man*

It was the end of the school year and I found myself once again under a white banquet tent with Latino Male Success.<sup>25</sup> This time it was for the end of the year ceremonia. At the end of each school year the program holds a ceremonia to celebrate the completion of one full year in Latino Male Success. This is meant to honor the hard work the students have done and serves as a “rite of passage” into an “honorable” manhood. The parents and families are invited to attend the ceremony and although the event consists of boys from a variety of grade levels (6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade), I found that the energy of the ceremonia was similar to that of a graduation. Some parents wore work uniforms, having rushed from their place of employment in order to attend. Others wore dress clothing. Many took pictures of their boys, the majority of whom were also dressed in nice clothes. Although some boys seemed uncomfortable in the formal setting, others enjoyed seeing their classmates outside of school and relished the opportunity to take pictures with one another in their fancy attire.

The ceremonia was a quick but joyous event. It lasted roughly two hours and consisted of a buffet-style dinner, brief comments by the Latinos Unidos and Pueblo Unidos leadership, as well as time for the mentor-chosen leaders of each of the 10 groups to say a few words of thanks. Students stood in front of the crowd and offered appreciation to their mentors, the program, and the families for helping to put them on track to becoming a man of honor. One of the boys with whom I had become especially close gave me a personalized acknowledgement in his speech which made me smile. Following the boys’ words was the keynote speaker Ovidilio Vasquez, whose motivational speech was the centerpiece of the event. This speech was allotted the most time of all speakers in the ceremonia and presented a vision of Latino male achievement the boys would hopefully carry with them beyond Latino Male Success.

Ovidilio Vasquez is an entrepreneur and motivational speaker. Born in rural Guatemala, Vasquez came to the United States as a young teen. Although his mother returned to Guatemala shortly after their arrival, Vasquez learned English and excelled in school while working nights. Throughout his productive career, he worked for several of “the world’s largest corporations” including “Tesla, Apple, Salesforce, Uber, and General Motors” (as advertised on the ceremonia flyer). He has also published multiple motivational books. His Amazon book page describes Vasquez as “the epitome of the American dream,” and “the truest definition of a bootstrapper.” His most popular book, *The Parenting Book*, is described as a guide to teach parents to “help their children overcome adversity through an entrepreneur mindset” (Amazon, 2019). The LMS program director now introduced him to the crowd of parents, students, and LMS staff. “Hola familia! ¿Cómo están?” shouted Vasquez.

He was a charismatic speaker, addressing the crowd primarily in Spanish but blending in English to reiterate an important point or to address specifically the students. The keynote began with an interactive activity with the crowd. Vasquez pulled out a crisp 100-dollar bill. After speaking on the importance of perseverance and a winning-mindset, Vasquez asked, “¿Quien lo

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<sup>25</sup> This ethnographic data describes the end of my first school year in the field with Latino Male Success. Although I spent a full second year with the program, this dissertation was filed the week of the second ceremonia. For this reason, no data from the second ceremonia is depicted in this document.

quiere [who wants it]?” and thrust the bill in the air. There was no answer. “¿Quién lo quiere?” repeated Vasquez, this time louder. “Yo,” responded a few voices in the crowd. “¿Quién lo quiere?” shouted Vasquez, this time even louder. “¡Yo!” boomed the response. Vasquez repeated the question several more times as the crowd’s energy began to grow. “¿Quiere que subamos y le quitemos el dinero? [Does he want us to go up and take the money?]” asked a student’s parent. From his oil stained mechanic’s shirt, I could see his name was Martín. “No sé [I’m not sure],” I responded. Finally, a young girl, presumably one of the student’s younger sisters ran up to the stage with the encouragement of her mother and snatched the 100-dollar bill. The crowd cheered. “As you can see, we are not messing around here,” joked Vasquez in English.

The speech continued. Vasquez offered his own life story as motivation to the boys. He came to the US at the age of 14 after growing up in rural Guatemala where he tended to cows and cultivated beans and corn. He spoke no English when he arrived in the U.S. and was left alone to work and go to school. He faced adversity and tragedy, yet this did not stop him from “trabajando por unos de las corporaciones mas grande del mundo [working for some of the largest corporations in the world].” He continued, “So jovenes [young people], if you sometimes use the excuse that my parents are not around and that’s why I can’t make it, just know, if Ovidilio can make it without his father, then I can make it too; if Ovidilio made it without his mother, I can make it too. If he learned English with three girlfriends, I’m going to get six!” This last line sparked laughter in the crowd.<sup>26</sup>

Vasquez’s speech roughly 30 minutes and reiterated themes of individual perseverance, hard work, and a steadfast belief in the American dream narrative. However, beyond the content of the speech, there was a performative element to the keynote meant to signal a physical transformation that an entrepreneurial mindset could ignite. As Vasquez’s speech neared its final minutes, he began slowly unbuttoning his casual shirt, revealing a clean and pressed dress-shirt underneath. While continuing to deliver his motivational message, he retrieved a bag from behind the stage and removed a necktie. He skillfully tied the necktie while maintaining eye contact with the crowd. He then removed a sportscoat from his bag and put it on to finish his business-man ensemble. The transformation was complete.

Vasquez’s personal story was detailed and graphic. He came from rural Guatemala as an undocumented teen. He attended high school during the day and worked nights in factories. He encountered setbacks but made no excuses. He now stood before the crowd, a successful businessman who had worked for some of the world’s largest “corporaciones globales” [global corporations]. The story demonstrated to the boys and families the potential of Latino Male Success to impart to the boys skills that would transfer into a global capitalist economy and transform their lives from poverty to wealth. The crowd cheered.

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<sup>26</sup> The joke referenced an earlier moment in the speech where Vasquez stated that elders had told him that getting an English-speaking girlfriend was a quick way to learn English. Because of Vasquez’s tenacious dedication to learning English, he had sought to have three girlfriends instead. This is a common joke made to heterosexual, Spanish-speaking men who enter the United States with low English skills. The ability to deliver and enhance these culturally relevant jokes made Vasquez a captivating and familiar speaker to many of the families from Central American and Mexico.

## *The power of knowing a population*

The narrated autobiography and performance of Ovidilio Vasquez is particularly important to the story of Latino Male Success because it came during the end of the year ceremony: a rite of passage for the boys in the program. Vasquez's journey to the present outlines the potential journey of the LMS boys. This journey would take them from being disenfranchised racial subjects to multicultural corporate success stories, potentially inspiring others to follow the same path. LMS's choice of Vasquez as the keynote speaker for the ceremony demonstrates not just an alignment of values between Vasquez and LMS, but also an acknowledgment of expertise. Similar to the mentors of LMS, Vasquez was also a young Latino man who embodied possibility and potential. He served as a role model as well as an insider. He *knew* the boys because he was one of them.

This dissertation began with an anecdote from a fundraiser gala for Latino Male Success. The gala occurred just three months into the study and helped catalyze my growing interest in exploring the racial politics of philanthropy, empowerment, and neoliberalism. During my description of the fundraiser I lingered on the comments of a Latino city councilman as he drew upon the imaginations of the donors (primarily fellow men of color) when talking about the boys whom the mentorship program served. As the councilman reminded the audience, "We all know these boys, and they're not bad kids." Throughout my two years with Latino Male Success I had the honor of getting to know dozens of boys in the program as well as the mentors who served them. We built relationships with one another. I was welcomed into their lives and classrooms with open arms and entrusted to write their/our story. As a privileged researcher conducting an ethnographic study, I sought to write this dissertation as a critical glimpse into the world of Latino Male Success. It represents a new way of knowing these boys, young men, and their mentors.

As I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the process of knowing a population, the problems they face, and what defines them as good, bad, or potentially good/bad is decisively political. Knowing a population is infused with new and old discourses of identity, such as race and numerous other intersecting social categories. A perceived Latino male crisis in schools has made Latino boys a popular target for educational interventions. However, my goal in conducting this research was neither to measure the growth of academic success among the students in my study nor to clearly define best practices when working with middle and high school Latino boys. Instead, this dissertation's task has been to explore how the process of Latino male empowerment (re)constructs notions of race, gender, and sexuality among Latino men and boys.

The framework of neoliberal multiculturalism provided a useful lens with which to understand the shifting boundaries of intersectional racial identity in the present moment. This research documents that while Latino Male Success passionately sought to advance Latino male educational success among its students, problematic racial narratives were frequently employed to justify and legitimate inequality among Latino boys within the program as well as in the larger Latinx community. These common tropes of racial deviancy consistently intersected with young Latinos' perceived inability to perform conventional and productive hetero-patriarchal practices within the Latinx community.

Perhaps the most important insight that emerged from this study is the ways neoliberal discourse adopts a culturally relevant quality and enjoys a level of multicultural authenticity. I found Melamed's (2006, 2011) notion neoliberal multiculturalism served as the defining

discourse that framed the goals of Latino Male Success and shaped the identities of the subjects of its educational intervention. However, during my time in the field, I documented the ways this process was not one of repression and overt control of Latino boys, but rather one of affirmation and inclusion. This represents a substantial shift from previous school-based ethnographies of boys of color, which have largely focused on the experiences of punishment and pushout as the primary factors shaping identity (A. A. Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2013; Lopez, 2002; Rios, 2011, 2017). The Foucauldian (1980) retheorization of power was useful to this study. This framing demonstrates that power is not simply negative and repressive but also affirmative and productive. As Roderick Ferguson (2008) reminds us, for Foucault the modern subject “invites power, in part, because of power’s productive qualities” (p. 158-9). The subject is constituted through the discursive nature of power and a desire for self-knowledge. In the case of my study, Latino Male Success is a program established and facilitated by the community development corporation and non-profit, Pueblo Unido. The organization is composed of predominantly Latinx administrators and staff. This brought a level of cultural authenticity to the curriculum and programming. The use of culturally relevant practices such as the blending of Spanish and English, a focus on Latinx history, and an overarching intention to honor and preserve cultural heritage was evident in LMS. However, as my data suggest, Pueblo Unido and Latino Male Success are rooted in the conditions and structures of neoliberalism and in many ways represent a neoliberal shift in Latinx politics. This neoliberal shift had a profound impact on how the problems of Latino boys were understood as well as how the goals and imagined success for Latino boys were articulated.

This framing of subjectivity and power leads me to understand Latino Male Success as a key educational program functioning as one aspect of a larger educational apparatus of neoliberal multicultural governance. Neoliberal governmentality includes the ways that the state partners with the private sector to manage and care for a population. Governmentality is a form of self-governance. Within neoliberal governmentality, the subject is self-defined by hyper-individuation and the desire to embody market-based logics in all aspects of life with the intention of accumulating human capital. The individual becomes an entrepreneur of themselves, each person becoming a corporation or firm (Dean, 2009; Foucault, 2010). Through an examination of the framing and mission of Latino Male Success, as well as an analysis of the day-to-day interactions in the classroom, this dissertation uncovers the ways a neoliberal subjectivity is embodied and practiced among Latino boys in Latino Male Success.

This process of subjectification constituted Latino boys as deviant but potentially productive. Through investment and empowerment, Latino Male Success facilitated the construction of a new Latino boyhood defined by its meritocratic individualism, consumerist mindset, and productive heteropatriarchal qualities. There was also evidence or moments of resistance to neoliberal values, from both mentors and students. While student resistance came from everyday repudiations of respectability and rejections of certain lessons, resistance among two mentors in particular was strategic and overt. However, despite this resistance, it was clear by the end of the study that neoliberal logic was the defining discourse in which the majority of boys, families, and LMS staff understood a productive Latino male identity.

## *Implications for programs: Reevaluating the boy of color conversation*

Shaped by the discourse neoliberal multiculturalism, *Latino Male Success* illustrates the ways our current era of racial capitalism maintains legitimacy while continuing to reproduce stark economic inequality in the United States and around the world. For programs and program directors interested in enacting intersectional racial justice, this research demonstrates the ways the racial discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism manages and constructs racial subjectivities among Latino men and boys. Similar to all hegemonic racial discourses, neoliberal multiculturalism takes hold of common sense by defining the problems of race and racism as well as their viable solutions. The framing of Latino boys as a crisis that needs to be fixed, draws from existing racist tropes about young Latino (and Black) men as unproductive, idle, potentially criminal, violent, and hetero-patriarchally deficient (A. A. Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2013; Rios, 2011).

*Latino Male Success*'s educational intervention sought to construct a new Latino manhood which was defined by a man's ability to epitomize neoliberal values. The problems of race and racism in this narrative are not seen as political and structural problems, but rather cultural and individualistic problems. The version of social justice intervention in this worldview is to provide students with skills and mindsets that will allow them to compete in a fair and diverse capitalist market. In my study, the belief in a neoliberal version of anti-racism legitimated the dispossession of undeserving racial subjects (whom I would instead frame as the victims of racial capitalism) and praised an increasingly multicultural managerial class as deserving examples of a neoliberal multicultural democracy. Based on the empirical findings of this research, the following are three recommendations I offer program directors and policy makers whose work focuses on boys and young men of color.

### **1. Relocate the deficit in your program's mission**

In the neoliberal era, educational interventions are increasingly funded and dictated by venture philanthropy. This type of private sector intervention assumes a problem that can be solved through a calculated and innovative solution (see Scott, 2009). "Returns" to this educational investment are indicated by the visible or measurable changes the solution has created. For boys and men of color, the "problem" to be fixed is frequently posited as a cultural and individual problem with the boys. They are the problem to be fixed. Popular targeted outcomes for programs focusing on boys and men of color include grade increases, decreases in truancy, decreases in disciplinary issues, and a change in self-presentation such as clothing and attire. Although the politics of gaining funding is complicated, the findings of this research encourages educational intervention programs working with boys of color (as well as all disenfranchised groups) to resist neoliberal deficit narratives and instead, relocate the deficit to racial capitalist structures (see Baldrige, 2014). This means refusing to focus on character development, the ways students dress, talk, or spend their money, and instead highlight systems and structures as the source of academic and economic inequality.<sup>27</sup> It is common for even overt

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<sup>27</sup> By making this recommendation I do not mean to suggest that practitioners should never offer help in these areas. Mentoring requires a holistic approach to the students and good mentors should feel comfortable offering honest help when appropriate. However, it is important that the goals of a program are not to fix assumed cultural deficits. For example, mentoring can include giving students honest information about how you budget yourself and strive to make ends meet. However, if a pillar of an organization or a mission is financial literacy, the attention becomes

racial justice programs to see as a primary task in their mission, to help students navigate a system that was not designed for them to succeed. This is noble and important work that can help a small number of students immediately. However, the recent work of Bettina Love (2019) remind us, radical visions of educational freedom emphasize that the ultimate goal is to change the system, rather than simply help more and more students of color navigate it.

## **2. Recursively employ an intersectional evaluation of your program**

Data from this research uncovered the ways a program targeting Latino boys constructed a limited notion of manhood and served to exclude some students from participating. If programs targeting boys of color continue to be a popular form of educational intervention, these programs should actively employ a recursive intersectional evaluation. Intersectionality is the notion that multiple social categories of identity are constantly interacting to create unique experiences for human beings (Crenshaw, 1991). It is important to note that intersectionality is a lens to analyze identity through time and space, and the notion of intersectionality resists additive and essentializing notions of identity. While programs focusing on Latino boys acknowledge that boys (gender) who are Latinx (racial/ethnic) have unique experiences in schools, an intersectional program constantly reevaluates and is open to new intersecting social categories that influence the experience of its students within the cultural and physical structures of schooling. For instance, during my time with LMS I found that queer students were marginalized in the program through a culture and curriculum that normalized and promoted a Latino masculinity that was heterosexual and prepared young people to be the patriarch of a traditional, heterosexual family. In other cases, I found that grade competitions among the boys framed competition as fair and merit based, however students who endured extreme poverty were disadvantaged in this competition. In an instance of overt intersectional exclusion, chapter four highlighted a moment in which a transgender boy was denied entry into the program, revealing the limited scope of the program which sought solely to empower cisgender Latino boys at the expense of non-dominant genders and sexuality. Programs targeting boys of color must actively seek to include social identities beyond (cis)gender and race to support the diverse identities and experiences of Latino boys.

## **3. Intentionally disrupt oppressive systems of patriarchy, homophobia, and heteronormativity**

Qualitative research on programs and initiatives supporting boys and men of color has documented the ways a hetero-patriarchal imagination often guides the turn towards boys and men of color in schools (Brockenbrough, 2012; Martino, 2015; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; M. V. Singh, 2019). This was a finding supported in my study as well. Although recent gender-justice movements have made addressing toxic masculinity a popular point of concern in all-male educational spaces, my findings suggest that this goal was frequently limited to addressing toxic masculinity in heterosexual relationships and nuclear families. Beyond this narrow scope, misogynistic and homophobic language and actions were pervasive in the LMS program. My research documents the need for programs targeting boys and men of color (as well as all men) to being intentional in disrupting oppressive systems of patriarchy and

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teaching student how to not squander their money rather than illuminating and addressing why some communities in our wealthy society suffer from extreme poverty.

heteronormativity. This requires a clear understanding of patriarchy and heteronormativity, how they manifest as cultural and structural phenomena, and what role men might play in helping to dismantle these systems in all aspects of life. This commitment should be central to all programs and policies focused on boys and men of all racial/ethnic backgrounds.

### *Implications for educators*

For educators, my research demonstrates the complicated ways in which Latino male mentors are implicated in (re)constructing Latino male identity among students. It invites Latino male educators, as well as all educators, to critically engage with their role in a larger movement of intersectional racial justice in schools. This research contextualized the actions and lessons taught by individual mentors as supporting neoliberal ideological and structural shifts in urban education. My objective in doing this was not to criticize individual mentors. As my findings suggest, many mentors fulfilled the role their position required of them (for example, enacting tough love). Instead, this research reminds us that our teaching as well as the programs in which we teach are frequently implicated in maintaining relations of power as well as resisting them. For men of color working in schools, it is useful for us to question the racial politics of urban schooling that make our presence in schools so desirable in the first place. Important questions to reflect on are: What are the variety of discourses that make our presence in schools a solution to a problem? Towards what future are we mentoring boys? What values are upheld or obscured when we are positioned as a good role model for boys? What type of justice does our teaching imagine (see Tuck & Yang, 2018)? For teachers committed to intersectional racial justice, this study reminds us that the ways we embody identity can be complicit in advancing racial-deficits or silencing/erasing subaltern identities within the larger category of Latino boys. While it is worth reiterating that the problems of race in schools are *structural*, I offer three points of advice that individual educators may take into account when working in educational settings:

#### **1. Avoid role modeling what your students are “lacking”**

As this research demonstrates, the impetus for Latino male mentorship programs and other initiatives aimed at uplifting boys of color are often rooted in the belief that it is the individual behavior and actions of boys of color that prevents them from succeeding (Baldrige, 2014; Brockenbrough, 2018; Dumas, 2016b). In this framing, the mentor is positioned as embodying and modeling an ideal that helps fill the cultural deficits of the boys. By refusing to be a “good role model...like that,” as Mr. Agustín put it in his interview, educators can resist a deficit framing of their students. The biggest factor preventing boys from living happy and fulfilling lives in their school and in their community is not themselves. While educators are tasked with making important and meaningful relationships with individual students, it is paramount to highlight the political and structural nature of racism in schools and society.

#### **2. Create space for diverse identities and strive to de-center your own identity**

This recommendation is directed at men of color who identify as cisgender, heterosexual, middle class, and hold other dominant social statuses. Although Latino Male Success exhibited strong hetero-patriarchal values that helped to guide its mission, LMS mentors frequently



normalized dominant masculine identities through extra-curricular cultural lessons and performances. For men of color who work with youth, there should be an intentional effort to normalize a variety of social categories and experiences. For heterosexual men of color, this can mean limiting the amount of time you dedicate to sharing stories that showcase your heterosexual identity or limit the amount of time you spend promoting activities that signal heterosexuality. This also means intentionally including queer voices to the curriculum and normalizing the notion that Latinx people embody a variety of identities and enjoy a range of sexual practices and romantic arrangements.

### **3. Show concern for girls and gender non-binary students of color**

Racism tremendously affects people of color across the gender spectrum. However, the recent proliferation of programs targeting specifically boys and men of color has served to erase the struggles of women and gender non-binary students of color (Crenshaw, 2014). To avoid maintaining a “race to the bottom,” educators who work with boys and men of color should make conscientious efforts in their classroom as well as in their school and community, to show concern and actively support women and gender non-binary students and staff. Working with boys of color should not come at the expense of girls and gender non-binary students of color.

#### *Final thoughts*

In my final weeks with Latino Male Success I enjoyed having long, reflective conversations with Mr. Javier about the work of mentoring Latino boys. These were the days after my formal report-back to the organization. Despite my initial worry that my critiques of the program would be met with disapproval, many of the mentors were in fact very open to the feedback. In particular, my feedback on heteronormative practices in the program was undeniable, and many mentors acknowledged this problem and were open to addressing it. This had initially led to a push to develop some new curriculum focused on gender and sexuality, however the momentum had already begun to fade. In part, this was because some mentors had abruptly left Latino Male Success for new jobs. In an effort to save funds, Pueblo Unido had decided not to replace the missing mentors and left their staff depleted at 7 mentors, rather than 10. This resulted in two mentors taking on an extra school site, and one school site being left without an LMS program altogether. This site was Adams High School, popularly known as the roughest public high school in the city. The downsizing of the program had put the new curriculum development on hold and had increased the responsibilities and stress of the mentors who were now working at two sites for almost no extra compensation.

Mr. Javier was one of these mentors. As a veteran of the program, he had been asked to cover a high school site in addition to his middle school site. The experience of entering another mentor’s LMS group at the end of the school year gave Mr. Javier a glimpse into the way other LMS groups operated. This experience, coupled with my recent report-back to the organization, had reminded him of the heterogeneity of the mentor population. He shared,

It was different...really different. I love working with the high schoolers and we get along and all that, but you kind of get to see how another mentor runs his circle. I didn’t

know what to expect but, you can tell we ran our circles differently. There was definitely a very different vision.

Mr. Javier's frustrations also implicated the manner in which his former co-worker had left. In addition to departing before the end of the school year, an act commonly frowned upon by educators and youth workers, the mentor had left Latino Male Success to begin a career as a probation officer. Youth probation officers supervise youth who have been convicted or accused of a crime. While youth probation officers work with teachers and counselors in a child's life, they also work closely with the courts and law enforcement officers, and they are intimately embedded in the larger industry of policing and punishment. While Mr. Javier had known several of his coworkers aspired to be law enforcement officers themselves, he was disheartened to see a co-worker move directly from the role of Latino Male Success mentor to probation officer. "You know my politics...the way I feel about police. I am not down with that move," lamented Mr. Javier. "But it makes sense. And it makes you question, what are we all doing here? What is our role with the boys?" he questioned, reflecting on his own work as an LMS mentor.

As male of color initiatives and programs continue to be established and supported, the purpose of this study is not to pass overarching judgement and condemnation. Instead, I hope this work can help incite critical reflection and change as we continue to work with boys and men of color. Throughout the course of this study I met many educators, mentors, and administrators who worked tirelessly to do what they felt was best for the boys and the program. This was especially true for all the mentors of Latino Male Success. However, despite their commitment to uplifting and empowering their students, the conceptual framework of neoliberal multiculturalism uncovers the problematic and often contradictory politics that can dictate youth intervention programs. While the discursive dominance of neoliberalism was evident, the actions of youth and mentors in my study also remind us that where there is power, there is also resistance. "With all my criticism [of Latino Male Success], I am still here because of my students; past and present," Mr. Javier reminded me on our last interview. A former student had recently contacted him via text message. In the exchange he had thanked Mr. Javier for his years of support. The young man had recently graduated from college. Reflecting on these text messages had made Mr. Javier emotional. With a soft and choked up voice, he continued, "I don't measure my students' success in graduation rates but with just...seeing the human beings they become. Human beings with hearts and...who will fight for a just world. That's why I get excited....That's my hope for the future."

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