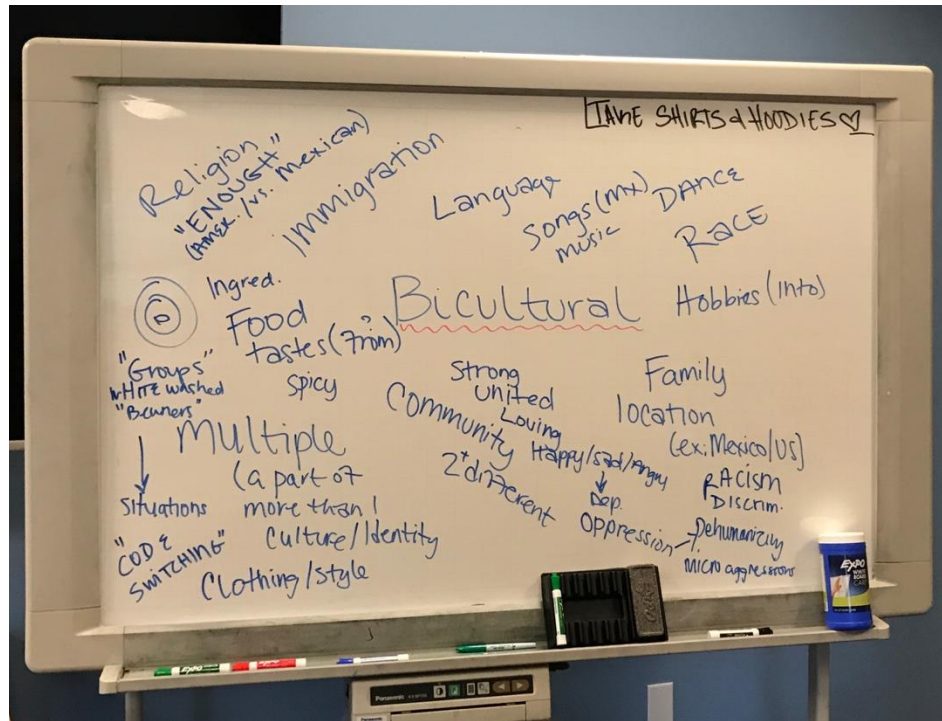


Becoming *Enough*: An ethnographic study of bicultural Latinx individuals in Boulder County and the GENESISTER program



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Introduction - A Question of Cultural Identity

Basically White

As a student of cultural anthropology, I have often considered my own cultural heritage and how I fit into the world as someone who is the great grand-daughter of Mexican immigrants but who possesses none of the qualities of someone who could truly be defined as Mexican-American or Latina. People who know me know that I do not speak Spanish, I don't have very dark skin, my mother is White, my father is basically White, and the way I was raised has almost nothing to do with Mexican culture. This family name has come to be the only piece of cultural identity that I feel I have, my last name being Martinez. Having this name has led many people I meet to ask why I am a "Martinez" yet don't possess any of the qualities associated with that ethnicity? All of this has caused me to question more and more what my own cultural identity is and why it is that Mexico can be in my blood, yet I am so far from Mexican.

My grandfather's parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico City and Veracruz, and raised their six children in Commerce City, Colorado. In that place, their immigrant experiences were written with struggle, constantly having to work hard to provide what they could for their family and to embody the "American dream" to the best of their abilities. My grandfather, who passed before I was old enough to get to know him, grew up living through the experiences of his Mexican immigrant parents but also was taught that the best way for him to exist within the United States would be to learn English and to become what they thought of as "American." While serving as a U.S. citizen during World War II, my grandfather met my German grandmother who then immigrated to the U.S. shortly after. There they raised my father and his three brothers, all of whom possessed entirely different experiences than either of their parents.

Contrary to my bilingual grandfather and my grandmother who had to learn to speak Spanish in addition to German and English, my father and his brothers never learned another language fluently besides English. After asking my father and my uncles as to why they never learned Spanish or identified more with their Mexican culture, I was told that their father and mother did not want them to speak another language other than English, because English is what is spoken in America. By the time my own parents had me and my three sisters, there was little to no Mexican culture, language, or values left for us to be raised with, leaving us with a constant desire to know and understand more about where we are from.

Although I possess different heritage from my German grandmother and also my mother's Danish side of the family, to me there has always been something significant about my Mexican identity that I feel the need to know more about. I believe that the immigration experiences of my Mexican great-grandparents in the early 20th century were very different than those of my grandmother's years later, possibly because Mexicans in the United States represent a more distinguishable population than other European immigrants, making the process of coming to be in a White-majority country more difficult. This "marked" state of being for Mexican individuals in the U.S. is one aspect of this identity that I wanted to look into further.

Looking now at my own privileged life I understand that the experiences of my father's immigrant parents and grandparents are what provided me with the opportunities that I have, but I still wonder why there is such a strong cultural disconnect between my generation and the ones before me. How is it that other third-generation Mexicans still possess their language, culture, and resilience yet I wasn't given that opportunity? How can I still identify with my name and my Mexican heritage if I have never felt any of the experiences of the immigrants who paved the way for me to be here? Why were my grandparents able to successfully assimilate their children into dominant U.S. culture, yet others are not? Am I *truly* a Latinx individual if I don't speak the

language, look the part, or identify with Mexican experiences but because my distant family is from that country?

I constantly think about questions like these. Despite my confusion, I have always felt a strong connection to Latinx communities, and I have felt the desire to be closer to them and to be accepted by them. Because of this longing to understand more about Latinx culture and identity, when I first heard about GENESISTER, the program on which this research is based, I was instantly drawn to the work and services that they provide for their Latinx youth participants. This program is primarily a pregnancy prevention program with the Boulder County Public Health department that provides additional support services for Latinx youth and their families to help them navigate the complicated world they live in. Despite not being intended to serve only Latinx youth, this demographic makes up the majority of the program participants and has led it to evolve into something much more than just sexual health education. GENESISTER's bicultural, bilingual, Latinx staff work together to provide program services that center around cultivating cultural identity and Latinx heritage.

After being introduced to GENESISTER's Program Coordinator, Maya Sol, through a program evaluation I conducted in my Practicing Anthropology course, I immediately became fascinated with Maya Sol's explanation of the struggles that the Latinx youth participants in the program face, and it made me think about the experiences of my own family members. So, with my own social positioning and cultural heritage in mind, I sought to learn more about what it means to be a Latinx person living in a predominantly non-Latinx community and how people manage to balance their Latinx roots with their newfound ties to American culture. Inspired by the GENESISTER staff and youth, I decided to focus on these people's cultural experiences and how a unique program like GENESISTER has impacted them. I wondered if, had my Mexican family been offered support from a program like this, maybe they wouldn't have been stripped of their language and culture, and maybe I would possess those qualities today.

Three overarching questions guide my writing. First, what are the experiences of Latinx youth within a school system, and what forms of discrimination or oppression do they potentially face due to their culture, language, and ethnicity? Second, what does it mean to identify as bicultural, and how do bicultural people themselves define the word? I explore this question by focusing on how a Latinx individual living in a non-Latinx majority community develops their own sense of identity amidst various forces of marginalization. Finally, I specifically examine the services of the GENESISTER program. What role does this program play in the development of a Latinx, bicultural, bilingual youth's identity? Specifically, what exactly is it that GENESISTER does for bicultural youth and how do these services extend past pregnancy prevention to focus on cultivating cultural identity?

Boulder County ended up being an interesting yet unusual research setting due to the economic, ethnic, and cultural makeup of the area. The majority of this county is represented by White affluent individuals and the area is known for having little diversity. Specifically, within the city of Boulder where many of my participants reside, this city is known as one of the most expensive places to live in the state which leads to a greater gap between the families and youth of lower socioeconomic status in this study and the rest of the population. In this county, people who identify as "Hispanic" or "Latino" are a minority population, only making-up 13.9% of the population¹ ("U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Boulder County, Colorado" 2018). Throughout my data collection, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, multiple participants brought up the complexities of living in the Boulder County area as a minority individual. This setting is just

¹ I include this statistic with an understanding that many individuals in the Latinx community do not report back to census collections due to fear of deportation. In general, the politics behind census collection processes are complicated and often leave minority populations such as the Latinx community to be left out or inaccurately counted. However, this is still included to demonstrate the large difference between representations of Latinx and non-Latinx individuals in Boulder County.

one piece of the context in which the GENESISTER program exists and makes for part of the intricacies of a bicultural identity.

Methodologies

To address these research questions, I utilize various ethnographic methods to collect primary research data as well as other secondary sources to support my own claims. My original plan for data collection included conducting a focus group with GENESISTER youth, individual interviews with GENESISTER youth, group interviews with the parents of GENESISTER youth, individual interviews with GENESISTER staff, participant-observation, and analysis of GENESISTER client case-files. Due to various limitations that I will discuss in the Conclusion, I ended up conducting one 2-hour long focus group with the GENESISTER youth as well as individual hour-long individual interviews with all five of the GENESISTER staff members.

Due to the previous work I did with the GENESISTER program through Practicing Anthropology, I began my research process with a general understanding of the GENESISTER program and its services. During this course I was introduced to GENESISTER with a team of five other students to conduct an evaluation of the program and to provide the Program Coordinator with a final written report outlining our findings. To do this we conducted one focus group with the GENESISTER youth as well as approximately ten phone interviews with past GENESISTER graduates. Although I did not directly use any of the data I collected during this course in my thesis, this understanding was the basis on which I was able to start drafting my research questions and my plans for new data collection. This initial work also allowed me to develop connections with the GENESISTER Program Coordinator which gave me access into their community in order to conduct this research.

The work I conducted for this course also allowed me to initially establish my presence as a recognizable person to the GENESISTER youth prior to the focus group. Despite not having

as much time as I would have liked to conduct participant-observation before the focus group, the youth participants were still open and willing to talk to me and answer the questions I had planned. I structured the focus group to consist of two different brainstorming activities that encouraged the youth to think about what it means to possess a bicultural identity, how they have acted as cultural brokers in their own lives, and also what the role of the GENESISTER program has been within that. This semi-structured discussion asked the youth specific questions that they answered in both small-groups and together as one large group. During this discussion the Program Coordinator and one other Youth Specialist were also present to participate in the discussion and help youth think about how the questions applied to them.

The semi-formal interviews I conducted individually with each staff member consisted of questions that were similar to those asked during the focus group but were created for adult participants. Questions I asked had to do with participants' own "bicultural stories," meaning where they and their families are from, what it was like growing up as a bilingual Latinx individual, and how they transitioned through different phases of identification with their biculturalism throughout their lives. Besides just personal questions surrounding biculturalism and cultural brokerage, I also asked the staff members a lot about their jobs at GENESISTER and what kind of work they do on a day-to-day basis. Many of my questions were directed towards obtaining information about what the staff see the impact of their work to be on the lives of their clients and what their goals are for the program. Although I came into these interviews with a set of questions, I found that many of our conversations would diverge from the formal interview topics in a very compelling way.

To approach my research as a whole, I borrow from many of the practices associated with community-based participatory action, engaged, and applied anthropological methods. These approaches to research focus on maintaining a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants and seek to produce results that are beneficial to everyone involved and can

be used to potentially take social action. Specifically, a researcher practicing these forms of anthropology values the knowledge and experience of the communities they are studying and desires to conduct research *with* them rather than *on* them (Minkler 2004). Other researchers utilizing methods such as these focus on engaging in reciprocity with the communities they research, a process through which equal relationships are established and just as much focus is on giving back to the community as is on obtaining information from the community (Maiter et al. 2008).

Although it was not possible for me to fully achieve all of the practices associated with community-based participatory action research due to the time and resources available to complete this thesis, it was important for me to make sure my own research methodologies mirrored these practices as much as possible. The biggest way I could ensure a collaborative relationship with GENESISTER was to involve the Program Coordinator, Maya Sol, in all aspects of the creation of my research plan. Maya Sol reviewed and approved all of the documents I created for my IRB proposal prior to their submission, including interview guides, consents scripts and translations. I hope that my findings can be used by GENESISTER to gain additional funding and support for their programming.

In addition, by writing this my goal is to share the stories of my participants in a way that promotes understanding among readers, demonstrating the struggles that these participants experience day to day. To engage in a reciprocal relationship with my participants I wrote this thesis in a way that highlights their voices first and adds my analysis second. As a researcher, I place the highest value on the willingness of these individuals to speak with me about difficult and emotional topics, and I gratefully acknowledge the role that they play in this process.

Thesis Summary

This thesis contains three chapters. In Chapter One, *Educational Oppression: Navigating a Hostile World As a Bicultural Youth*, I outline some of the experiences that Latinx, bicultural, and bilingual youth have throughout their schooling and I point out the ways that school systems have not necessarily set them up for success. I intentionally focus here on the experiences that youth have within schools because it is within this institution that much of their development and growth occurs. Because much of what GENESISTER's services provide is related to academic support, it also made sense to focus on how Latinx youth experience issues related to discrimination, oppression, and racism within school systems specifically. In this chapter I address the questions of what are the experiences of a Latinx youth within a school system that is majority non-Latinx? What are the different ways in which my participants have experienced various forms of racism, oppression, and discrimination based on the fact that they are Latinx and how does previous literature confirm or deny this?

I argue that the various forms of educational oppression that exist throughout many school systems create a hostile environment for bicultural, bilingual, and Latinx youth to learn in, suppressing their ability to maintain a true sense of cultural identity. As a result, many Latinx youth develop a bicultural identity in order to maintain a balance between their Latinx culture, language, and values and those that they need in order to succeed in mainstream America. Although I cannot speak to the experiences of all Latinx youth and all of the factors that contribute to the educational success of an individual, I draw conclusions based on my own data as well as literature from previous studies on this topic.

In Chapter Two, *What Does it Mean to be Bicultural?*, I discuss five main components of biculturalism that I identified throughout my data collection. Here I draw conclusions based on my findings in Chapter One and demonstrate how many aspects of a person's bicultural identity are a result of the problems they face due to issues such as discrimination, oppression, and

racism. The five categories or components of biculturalism that I discuss are the role of place, language, appearance, kinship and community, and the act of cultural brokering. The goal of this chapter is to share some of the experiences and stories of the participants in this study and to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which a bicultural individual conceptualizes their own identity.

The guiding research questions for this chapter focus on my participants' conceptualization of the term *bicultural* and ask what does it mean to possess this identification? More specifically, what is a bicultural person and what are the different ways that this identity is embodied within the lives of my subjects? Although all individuals develop differently based on their lived experiences, I found there to be similar trends among the participants in this study and their awareness of their own positionality. Each participant brought up each of those five categories in one way or another throughout our discussions, but each of them seemed to discuss it in a unique way, demonstrating that despite sharing similar struggles to one another, all of the participants developed through these struggles in their own way. With a stronger understanding of what it means to be a bicultural individual in Boulder County, I then transition into Chapter Three, where I discuss the GENESISTER program's role in the lives of the youth participants as well as their families.

Chapter Three, *Tools in the Toolbox: GENESISTER's Programming*, focuses solely on the services that this program provides as well as how it came to be that way in the first place. The guiding question for this chapter asks what role does GENESISTER play in the formation of a bicultural identity in the lives of their youth participants? How is it that this youth development program supports Latinx youth in Boulder County and does it successfully fill in the gaps created by school systems? In other words, how does GENESISTER create a positive experience in the life of a Latinx youth who may or may not be able to find positive experiences in other areas of their life? By providing youth with relevant education, hope, resources, and community

engagement GENESISTER successfully empowers youth and their families. GENESISTER's model of empowerment combats the deficit models of thinking that are often used in youth development and education efforts and works instead to take the qualities youth already possess and turn that into something they can capitalize off of. This chapter closes with an explanation of the multigenerational approach that GENESISTER takes and how their services also target the parents and family members of youth in order to extend the impact of what they provide.

Throughout the final chapter I also highlight how oftentimes the language that GENESISTER staff members use to describe their services and the results they seek to provide for youth sound as though they are in line with neoliberal discourses surrounding individual success and self-responsibility. However, I argue that in practice this is not the case. Positing that society is best advanced through the self-maximization of individuals, neoliberal discourses focus on peoples' freedom of choice and action, meaning that an individual's well-being is entirely dependent on the decisions they themselves make (Harvey 2007). GENESISTER staff often use language and discourse that seem to support notions of empowerment-as-self-responsibility, but I argue that this use of language is a conscious act of cultural brokerage itself. Specifically, GENESISTER staff understand that in order to receive funding and support for their program, they must exhibit these ideals as they are representative of the majority culture and values in the U.S. In actuality, the GENESISTER program yields a holistic understanding of how to support youth that is embedded in mutual understanding, community, and support for others—a far cry from the individualism characterizing neoliberal projects.

Through this process GENESISTER staff are able to make connections between their program services and the outside world in a way that will best support their youth. This type of connection came up often throughout my discussions with the staff, demonstrating how the acts of a bicultural individual operate on many different levels and are ultimately a strategy for functioning within a space that is not always conducive to a person's own culture and values.

GENESISTER's programming provides Latinx youth with the tools and knowledge necessary to be able to maintain a balance between their Latinx selves and their mainstream American selves in a healthy and positive way, transforming their negative experiences associated with discrimination and oppression into something to be used for positive development.

Terminology and Application

I use the term Latinx throughout this study to describe the ethnicity of my participants as well as other individuals that I will refer to that fit into this category. In the words of Villenas, Godinez, Bernal, and Elenes, "While we walk on bridges built before us, and those that are continuously constructed in the very process of 'walking,' this building involves old, new, and hybrid language as we move across the rivers of our bicultural realities" (Delgado Bernal 2006, 6). In this statement these authors are acknowledging the many other terms that people of Latin American descent use to describe themselves such as Latina/o, Mexicana/o, Chicana/o, Mestiza/o, or Hispanic among others. Many individuals use different terms to describe themselves depending on factors such as where they are from, where they currently live, or even political contexts. While being conscious of the variety of terms used by these individuals to describe themselves, I choose to use the term Latinx because it is inclusive to individuals with roots in any Spanish-speaking country and also to any gender identification. As explained by the GENESISTER Program Coordinator herself:

It's accurate to say Latinx, and that most of the families [from the program] are from Mexican descent. We don't want to perpetuate the erasure of other Latin American countries which is why Latinx is inclusive and I'd say that's the strongest identity within our program and staff. We are not moving to make the Spanish language non-binary, rather addressing the spectrum of identities specifically within the U.S. due to its political nature.

When I use the term "non-Latinx" I am referring to anyone who does not identify as Latinx and who also happens to represent the majority population within Boulder County. The

majority ethnic identification of people residing in Boulder, Colorado is “White,” but I avoid using this term because I do not know exactly how everyone (either my participants or the non-Latinx individuals I mention) identifies. It is possible that individuals in this study feel that they are just as “White” as they are Latinx or even that the individuals I may categorize as “White” may have roots in other ethnicities that people may be unaware of. Either way, I distinguish between groups of people by the terms Latinx and non-Latinx in order to be as inclusive as possible and make the least amount of generalizations about individuals whose identifications I may not know².

It is also important for me to comment on the application of this research and what it means for other individuals outside of my group of participants. Specifically, I note that this ethnographic study is not intended to produce replicable results that can be generalized to the same groups of people elsewhere. Rather, my goal is to provide readers with a snapshot of the experiences of a specific group of people within a specific time and place. I also draw from previous academic research that holds similar findings. I note this not to undermine the validity or importance of my claims, but rather to show how the scope of this research is only intended to include my participants and their experiences. My hope for this research is that the stories of my participants will illuminate the ways in which Latinx individuals living in a non-Latinx majority community develop and maintain a sense of cultural identity even within a context of structural marginalization. More so, I explain how the community organization in question is capable of skillfully utilizing their own cultural brokerage skills to help Latinx youth maximize the benefits

² As will unfold throughout the rest of this thesis, many different races and ethnicities exist in the Latinx community and within the GENESISTER program itself. Intra-group variation within these communities matters greatly and contributes to the different experiences of each individual. While using the term Latinx as strategy for including as wide of a population of Spanish-speaking individuals with roots in various Latin American countries, I still acknowledge the role of variance in race and ethnicity in my analysis and writing.

of their cultural backgrounds as a cultural minority, strengthening not only the identity of their participants but also enhancing the overall well-being of the community in which they reside.

Chapter One - Educational Oppression: Navigating a Hostile World as a Latinx Youth

I think about how it must feel for a youth of low income who speaks Spanish primarily or almost exclusively at home and speaks English almost exclusively at school, sitting next to a classmate whose parents are both computer engineers or whatever, making lots of money, living up in a really nice beautiful mansion. Those parents probably hired cleaning people and those people are probably that youth's parents, so it's a full circle of connection in a really weird way.

-Lourdes

I begin this thesis by outlining some of the experiences of participants in this study as well as other Latinx individuals throughout the United States. Specifically, why are the participants in this study living at a “disadvantage”? What are the various factors in the life of a bicultural Latinx youth that make it more difficult for them to lead a happy and successful life? What are the main issues facing Latinx youth today? What are the impacts of these issues on their well-being? I focus specifically on the forms of educational oppression that many bicultural, bilingual, Latinx youth experience every day and how this influences their general sense of well-being. By answering these questions, I hope to provide an understanding of the ways in which the lives and everyday experiences of Latinx youth in Boulder County are unique from those of other individuals in the community. This chapter will inform later discussions of what it means to possess a bicultural identity and also the role of GENESISTER as a youth development program that seeks to combat these problems.

Youth spend a significant amount of their time within the walls of a school. On average, a K-12 student in the state of Colorado will spend approximately 7 hours a day in school for 171 days a year (“Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)” 2007) which is almost 14% of their time in one year spent at school. There, youth develop relationships with friends, start to figure out their interests, and learn who they are and what they want to be. For many individuals a good education is understood as the pathway towards success, the alleviation of poverty, better health,

economic growth, political freedom and more. A positive and quality educational experience can make all the difference for a young person and determine where the rest of their lives will go.

However, it is not always the case that everyone has a positive educational experience, and we know that this can lead to many other issues in a person's life. Less optimal performance in school for Latinx youth is a multidimensional problem that has a number of root causes. By analyzing the forces of educational oppression that influence Latinx youth one can begin to understand how their bicultural identities are in part a result of the strategies they must use to navigate the world. Although my focus for this chapter is on the forms of oppression that this youth population faces within school systems, this approach applies to larger systems of oppression and discrimination at play in the lives of Latinx populations beyond Boulder County everywhere.

I am not trying to generalize by saying that *all* Latinx individuals have experienced the forms of educational oppression that I will be discussing below, but based on my own data as well as data from secondary research, these problems affect a vast majority of Latinx people in the U.S. I argue that many school systems within the U.S. create a hostile learning environment for Latinx youth where it is impossible for them to maintain an authentic identity while also receiving a quality education. Through the policies, ideologies, and approaches to learning that school systems take, Latinx youth are placed in a position where they must uphold a balance between their Latinx roots and dominant U.S. culture in order to feel accepted by those around them.

Intersectionality

In order to understand the plight of Latinx youth in navigating school systems, I take an intersectional approach that focuses on the multiple compounding ways Latinx youth are placed at a greater disadvantage than their non-Latinx counterparts. A concept coined by Kimberlé

Williams Crenshaw, *intersectionality*, argues that various forms of discrimination and inequality affecting ethnic minorities cannot be studied in isolation, but must be recognized as intertwined and dependent upon one another. As an emerging field of study, intersectionality focuses on how knowledge can be produced with the intent of mobilizing social justice movements and understanding the ways various groups of people live differently (Dill and Zambrana 2009). Specifically, scholars using an intersectional approach focus on disparities related to race, ethnicity, gender, and class to understand a person's social positioning.

Crenshaw's work looks specifically at the intersection of race and gender, pointing to the ways different categories of identity play off of one another to create unique experiences for people who face inequality, oppression, and discrimination (Crenshaw 1991). In fact, various forms of inequality can be deepened when scholars study categories of identity in isolation rather than in collaboration with one another, therefore it is important to avoid compartmentalization. Crenshaw argues that in theorizing identity and positionality, it is equally important to consider other factors of identity besides just race, and to also focus on intra-group variability to see identity as a spectrum. Taking this perspective, I think of the participants in this study not simply as Latinx youth who face educational inequality based on their ethnicity, but rather as individuals who each possess unique experiences and identity characteristics that contribute towards their positionality.

As a bicultural person, and in this case also a minority within a specific place, one is forced to constantly be aware of the facets of their identity that contribute to their own positionality. This means that for a Latinx person who is already placed at a disadvantage due to their race or skin color, any other factors that might also contribute to this disadvantage are heightened in their impact. For example, many of the Latinx participants in this study are also female, LGBTQ, come from families of low socio-economic status, siblings or daughters of teen mothers, hold extra familial responsibilities, and more. Being bicultural one is not just a part of

two different cultural communities, but they are also subject to a greater risk based on the fact that any other trials or hardships that they endure are compounded at a higher rate to create a more challenging life.

This theoretical approach is also similar to those taken by other scholars of Latinx youth within educational systems. Sonya Alemán's work also utilizes intersectional analysis in order to understand how Latinx youth navigate various systems of privilege and oppression, arguing that "delineating these inequalities along the single dimension of race" (Alemán 2018, 178) would be a pitfall within Latinx studies. Rather, Alemán calls for an analysis of the intersecting layers of identity politics and power relations that impact the subjectivities of Latinx individuals. Just as I do in the present study, Alemán researches educational sites in order to understand the forms of inequality facing Latinx students, acknowledging that they serve as a microcosm of larger systems of power and social positioning (Alemán 2018). In line with some of my findings that will be discussed later, Alemán's review of intersectional research found that scholars taking this approach tended to focus on the various coping strategies of Latinx students, institutional practices, policies, or school curricula, and larger structures and power hierarchies. The goal with this approach is to look at the intersection of various factors such as these and how they work together to either help or hinder a Latinx youth's own positionality (Alemán 2018).

Scholars who practice intersectional analysis understand that this approach is a work-in-progress meaning that the multiple categories used to analyze a group of people's lived experiences are constantly evolving and changing from person to person (Carbado et al. 2013). Therefore, my research is necessarily particular and focuses on the experiences of the individuals in this study at specific moments in time. As mentioned, my intention is to provide just a snapshot of their lives while placing their experiences within a cultural and historical context. Doing this, I am able to draw larger conclusions about their lives based on my own evidence as

well as evidence from previous scholarship. The observations and analysis in this chapter are about the experiences and struggles of *many* Latinx youth within school systems, but not all.

The Historical and Social Context of Educational Oppression

Richard Valencia defines school failure as the persistent, pervasive, and disproportionately low academic achievement of Latinx students compared to their non-Latinx peers (Valencia 2011). Although there has been increasing educational success among Latinx youth, there are still significant educational gaps between youth of color and their white counterparts. So, questions remain of how this problem originated and why it lives on today despite various attempts to combat the problem. Borrowing from Mark Chesler's theories of racism, three ways to see evidence of educational oppression are through institutional processes, personal attitudes or cultural values, and the effects or outcomes for Latinx students (Chesler 1976). Chesler applies these three categories to issues of racism generally, but they can also be applied specifically to the experiences of Latinx youth in their schooling environments, demonstrating how school environments can mirror the outside world as a whole.

Historically, Latinx youth have been set up for different educational experiences based on assumptions made by non-Latinx school officials about what they need and how they will learn best. Latinx school failure can be traced back to school segregation movements that took place in the decades following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Although this treaty was officially titled the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Limits, and Settlement between the United States of America and the Republic of Mexico, it also functioned to immediately establish all Mexican people living in the United States as a conquered people, who then became subject to normative systems of racism and oppression. The Treaty is one of the largest systemic forces upon which the lower educational achievements of Latinx youth rests, and as a result

many other systems of power continued down the path of racial isolation, discrimination, and inequality.

Originally in the years following the Treaty and its initial impacts there were few school institutions available for Latinx students, and so a push was made to change this. As time went on access to education increased greatly for this population, however institutionalized racism and discrimination had already been established. At the same time that these forms of discrimination existed within political and educational institutions, people's own beliefs and ideas about Latinx populations in the United States were also being negatively influenced. As a result, schools in the Southwest were increasingly segregated, isolating Latinx students into inferior schools that were underfunded, staffed with underqualified teachers, and directly led to low academic achievement (Valencia 2011). This segregation took place from the 1930s to the 1970s, and although schools are no longer formally segregated, the impacts of these historical policies are still found within school systems today.

Many of these segregated school facilities were not built to handle the large numbers of students who used them. Compared to the student-to-teacher ratio in most non-Latinx schools, on average there were 10 more students per teacher (Valencia 2011). Many school buildings had limited classroom space, not enough rest rooms for all of the students, and lacked other academic resources such as lunchrooms, playgrounds, sports equipment and books. Valencia found that there was a strong correlation between school segregation and the academic achievement of students of color, where these students almost always exhibited lower test scores, graduation rates, and college matriculation rates (Valencia 2011). Valencia also notes that in addition to having a negative academic impact on children of color, segregated schools also diminished the opportunity for non-Latinx children and ethnically diverse children to interact socially. This lack of cross-ethnic interaction leads to an increase in ethnic stereotypes and prejudice that participants in this study still experience today.

Numerous court cases have taken place that have addressed desegregation and equal educational opportunity for Latinx students. A close analysis of these cases exceeds the scope of this thesis, but it is important to note that the battle for a quality education for all Latinx students has been going on for many years and began with institutionalized school segregation and exists contemporarily in various forms. One major form of educational inequality that many Latinx youth face today, specifically within Boulder County, is language suppression and cultural exclusion, whether through formal school processes or informal beliefs and values by those who hold power over a child's education. These forms of inequality can range in severity, from something as drastic as Americanization programs intended to strip Latinx youth of their culture and language in order to assimilate into dominant U.S. culture, to enrolling Latinx youth in ESL courses that are intended to support their learning but end up having consequences for their identity development.

Specifically, Latinx students are not only expected to learn challenging course content in a language that they may not be confident in, but they also experience language suppression and the inability to speak their native language in school settings. As research shows, language is an important factor in identity formation and a person's ability to express themselves and develop as an individual. Much of Norma Mendoza-Denton's work points out this importance, demonstrating how language is a "means for casting an identity" (Mendoza-Denton 2008, 2.:177). Despite the studies that show how bilingual education and development is beneficial to any youth's development as well as promotes high academic achievement (Izquierdo 2011), Spanish language suppression persists and common language ideologies in the United States argue that only English should be spoken in this country. In fact, many Spanish-speaking students find themselves placed into isolated learning environments where they are taught to believe that the language they speak other than English is detrimental to their success in school.

Maya Sol, the GENESISTER Program Coordinator and one of the staff members that I interviewed for this study, told me that one of the first experiences she had that made her realize that she was different from the other students in her school was related to language, specifically the fact that she spoke Spanish and also English. Describing her school experiences in the United States, Maya Sol told me:

I was enrolled in different classes and academic support classes without my mother's consent or knowledge. And so some of those were like ESL back in the day, English as a Second Language, which in that time the format was combined with students who had learning disabilities. And so I really believed at an early age that speaking Spanish was a disability of mine, as a deficit and something that I was really embarrassed about.

Unfortunately, pathologization of the Spanish language is not an experience unique to Maya Sol, and other participants in this study went through similar struggles. Many debates exist about the best way for a bilingual student, no matter what their proficiencies are with either language, to receive the best possible education. In many states there are growing populations of students who are English language learners (ELLs) who possess various levels of English proficiency skills and need additional classes to get them to the level that they need to succeed in school (Izquierdo 2011). Despite the existence of this difficult problem, there is certainly evidence that shows how detrimental it can be for a youth's education and development to be subject to improper support when it comes to their language development.

Maya Sol told me that the Spanish-speaking youth in Boulder County are sometimes told to stop speaking Spanish in hallways, classrooms, lunchrooms, and other locations within the school. Non-Spanish-speaking individuals in the United States tend to assume that when others speak a different language, they are using it to talk negatively about those around them. This is a reason why Latinx students aren't allowed to use the language that they are most comfortable expressing themselves in, and this can have devastating impacts on their own identity and sense of self-worth. Here, a teacher or staff member's own personal ideologies surrounding language use dictate whether or not a student is able to express themselves through the Spanish language,

further suppressing their identity development. The power to determine how an ELL will be educated and developed rests in the hands of school officials, teachers, and staff, showing just how much control school institutions have over a Latinx individual's subjectivity.

Besides language suppression, it is also difficult for Latinx youth to feel connected to their cultural heritage when any curricula surrounding various aspects of Latinx history and culture is left out entirely (Valencia 2011). School programming regularly takes on the belief that in the United States students should be limited to only speaking English and learning about normative Euro-American culture, history, and practices. A multicultural education has the potential to benefit all students, not just those who are multicultural themselves, yet this does not seem to be understood by many school systems today. As a result, many bicultural and bilingual students go through their education never being given the opportunity to learn about the people, places, and events that relate to them, lessening their opportunities to strengthen their cultural identity.

Besides lacking language and cultural support, schools also lack teachers and staff that are bilingual and bicultural, which leaves Latinx students in a space where they have no adult mentors or advisors with whom they can relate. Within the Boulder Valley School District, only 163 out of 1,824 teachers are Latinx as compared to 1,598 who are "White." In the St. Vrain School District, 96 out of 1,865 teachers are Latinx and 1,744 are "White" ("School/District Staff Statistics | CDE" 2018). Lack of shared experience between teachers and students leads to a sense of disconnect and poor interactions between bicultural youth and their educators (Valencia 2011). The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1973 Mexican American Education Study report found that there are large differences in the quality and quantity of interactions between non-Latinx students and teachers and Latinx students and teachers. This can arguably be attributed in part to the fact that non-Latinx students are able to identify more with their non-Latinx teachers,

which makes communication and interaction easier for them (“Teachers and Students: Report V: Mexican American Education Study, 1973.” 1973).

Institutionally, Latinx educators are simply not represented within schools, but the other issue is that the non-Latinx educators who are present still lack cultural understanding or knowledge of how to work with Latinx youth. Limited cultural similarity and understanding between non-Latinx teachers and their students can cultivate a space where people hold negative stereotypes against one another. Evidence shows that many non-Latinx school teachers and staff hold judgements against their Latinx students, saying that they are irresponsible, unmotivated, lack initiative, and are not as capable. These personal assumptions and feelings held by many teachers throughout school systems do not go unfelt by Latinx students. GENESISTER staff member Daniella told me that many of the youth she works with complain of negative teacher interactions, and oftentimes experience situations where they don’t know how to react or respond. As Daniella said:

In some classes maybe the teacher is overtly not confident in the Mexican or Latinx youth. So they always go up to them and are like “Are you sure you guys don’t need help? Maybe I can sit down and help you out” where it’s like this savioristic approach. You know this volunteerism aspect of like “I’m going to dedicate my time because I don’t think you have this, I’m going to keep asking you 100 times just to really make sure.” So you have that pitying nature, or on the opposite end they are ignored. I had a student that says she kept on raising her hand the whole time but the teacher always went to the white students and she ended up getting a D on that report because she wasn’t given any help. And so you get those two natures of like teachers having pity or teachers having this “Why am I going to try you’re going to fail anyways” attitude.

These sorts of microaggressions were identified during my data collection by the staff I interviewed and also by the youth themselves in the focus group. For many of the youth it is difficult to explain the ways teachers treat them or make them feel, but they ultimately understand that there is a difference in the treatment they receive versus the non-Latinx students. These interactions can lead to conflict between Latinx students and their teachers, where students get in trouble more often and are not as comfortable in their learning environments.

This lack of bicultural and bilingual staff in schools also impacts the parents of Latinx youth. Many bicultural youth, and especially those in this study, have parents who speak little to no English which makes it difficult for them to access school resources to support their children academically. Without teachers or school translators who can speak their language, parents are unable to communicate with school staff about the state of their child's educational affairs. As a result, many Latinx youth end up having to translate in parent-teacher meetings, a responsibility that should never be left to a child. According to the GENESISTER staff, when students are left to translate important information to their parents, details are often omitted and parents are not fully informed of what is going on. In fact, Yanina, a Parent Specialist at GENESISTER, informed me that both Niwot and Longmont High School just recently hired a bilingual staff member for the first time in years. Previously, parents of Latinx youth had to schedule an appointment with the school district liaisons to come translate their conversations with teachers, an appointment that would take so long to schedule, the reason for the parent-teacher meeting would have already passed. All of these factors make it very difficult for parents of Latinx children to be fully involved in their child's education, while students with English-speaking parents have this privilege that sets them up for greater odds of success in school.

In summary, access to school staff who can support and connect with students, communicate regularly with parents, and act as role models and provide guidance for youth and families is a large contributor towards higher academic achievement (Zambrana and Zoppi 2002). Without the proper support and assistance, Latinx youth and their families are left to navigate the school systems alone and must go without valuable resources that other students receive as a given.

Another aspect of the educational inequality that many Latinx youth face is an unfair punitive system. GENESISTER staff say that their Latinx youth seem to be punished to a greater degree at their schools, and also that the forms of punishment they receive are ineffective and

ultimately worsen their disadvantage. As Maya Sol put it, “schools continue to perpetuate deficit narratives through their implicit bias and through their punitive processes of suspension and things like that.” The youth that GENESISTER serves experience higher rates of suspension and punishment for issues such as poor grades, tardies and absences, and as mentioned above, conflicts with teachers. Latinx students, and more generally youth of color, have been known to exhibit higher rates of school discipline. Around 2003, attention was drawn towards the “school-to-prison pipeline” problem in Colorado where students of color were receiving such high rates of harsh discipline that it was leading to an increase of youth being placed in juvenile detention centers (Lewis 2019).

Padres & Jóvenes Unidos, a multi-issue organization working for educational equity started to publish an annual *Colorado School Discipline Report Card*, to track rates of school discipline for students of color. Padres & Jóvenes Unidos’ last report card in 2016 still found that students of color are 3.1 times as likely as “White” students to be suspended or expelled (“Publications – Padres & Jóvenes Unidos” 2016). The in-depth findings from these reports point out the disparities between the treatment of students of color versus “White” students, and how the punishments they receive are not effective for behavior reform and continue to perpetuate educational inequality. Findings from reports such as these mirror the experiences of the Latinx youth in this study, as explained to me by the youth themselves and also the GENESISTER staff members.

In the GENESISTER staff’s understanding of why Latinx youth are often punished more frequently than their non-Latinx peers, it has to do with stereotypes, microaggressions, and discrimination but also with the additional layers of adversity and social positioning. Many of the youth that GENESISTER serves come from families of low socioeconomic status, increasing the amount of stress they experience in their day-to-day lives. Lower socioeconomic status combined with Latinx cultural values surrounding familial responsibility increase the obligations

of these young people compared to affluent non-Latinx youth. These additional duties include caring for younger family members, working to bring in a second income, or completing other chores and tasks that parents may need assistance with. One example Maya Sol shared with me is as follows:

One of our young women she actually takes the bus to leave her two younger siblings at daycare then elementary school. Then she gets to high school and so she always is on the bus and arrives I think five minutes late to her first period. Because of that she has 73 unexcused tardies that then lead to a truancy. And so it just continues to cycle this unsupportive and unrealistic expectation for our youth ... Its puts down another layer of a burden where they're not able to catch up and their morale goes down.

Many Latinx youth have parents who work difficult hours that are incompatible with the schedules of their children, meaning individuals like this girl must take on responsibilities that typically belong to a parent. Something as simple as being five minutes late to the first class of the day can quickly add up and lead to additional consequences. This situation is worsened when parent-teacher communication is not possible for Spanish-speaking parents, and there are no adult figures who can explain these circumstances in order to increase teachers' understanding of the difficulties these students face.

Daniella explained that at a previous job where she worked with all non-Latinx affluent youth, she noticed a difference between the type of innovation and drive that those youth possessed versus the Latinx youth she works with now. As she told me:

Our youth are worrying about like "Do I have food on the table? I need to help babysit my mom's kids because she's working at night" or "My dad is working during the day. When am I going to do homework? Actually that is the last thing on my mind because I need to help work." There are a lot of Latino youth focusing too much on the basic necessities that they don't have the capacity to start thinking about innovative ideas and even accepting that they have the power to make a change because right now they're just out there trying to survive.

For many Latinx youth their motivations are centered around what Daniella calls "the basic necessities" whereas youth who do not have the same concerns can focus their attention towards

more academic endeavors. Unfortunately, these types of problems are the reality of the lives of many Latinx youth, adding yet another layer of difficulty onto their educational experiences.

Deficit Thinking and Cultural Capital

Deficit thinking takes multiple forms and affects many school systems, influencing the approach that educators take to try and solve the problems Latinx youth experience. Deficit thinking is a major theory discussed by scholars attempting to understand why Latinx students have lower academic achievement than their non-Latinx peers. In its simplest form, deficit thinking argues that the reason for a student's poor performance in school is due to internal deficiencies such as "limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral behavior" rather than external factors such as economics, politics, and personal ideologies (Valencia 1997, 19:2). Rooted in racism and classism, this perspective to understanding student failure ultimately perpetuates lower academic achievement among students of color.

An educator who takes a deficit approach will hold biases against students of color, viewing them as possessing both cognitive and motivational deficits and blaming them for their own low academic achievement (Valencia 1997). Rather than focusing on Latinx culture, language, values, and beliefs as things that are positive for a person's well-being, deficit thinking views these qualities as detrimental to academic success, and envisions ways to counter them rather than to capitalize off of them. Because of this model, Latinx youth are unable to translate their cultural assets into social capital. Instead, their cultural assets are pathologized and they are forced to learn in an environment where their family resources, cultural values, and language skills go unacknowledged.

With deficit thinking also comes the practice of analyzing Latinx cultural assets within the context of U.S. culture. When school systems are representative of dominant U.S. culture,

they tend to evaluate Latinx assets in a negative light and enact policies and curricula that are incompatible with them, immediately placing Latinx students at a disadvantage (Zambrana and Zoppi 2002). If Latinx youth are understood within the dominant frame of U.S. norms and values, they will never be able to use the assets that they already possess and will be forced to survive by conforming to dominant ideologies. Francisca E. Godinez also points out that we often have a one-dimensional interpretation of what valuable knowledge is, especially as it relates to education and success in life thereafter. Within structures, institutions, and personal belief systems, dominant ideologies about what a person needs to know and have to be successful dismiss the value of cultural knowledge and lead to the discrimination and subordination of cultural minorities (Bernal and Knight 1993). This observation by Godinez explains why deficit thinking exists in school systems and how school officials conceptualize their Latinx students.

Educational inequality has been written into U.S. history. From the beginning, Latinx youth either had no options for education or they were segregated into inadequate and underfunded schools. Combined with political and systemic racism, school policies and curricula have never been set up to benefit bicultural or bilingual youth. Latinx youth today face cultural and linguistic suppression, where they are not given the resources or opportunity to develop their own cultural identity. Staff, teachers, and administrators at schools are unable to connect with their students due to a lack of cultural understanding and are also unable to communicate with parents of Latinx youth, which further diminishes their success as students. Due to additional factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural values, and familial responsibilities, youth are unable to direct all of their time and energy towards school success, rather they are burdened by additional worries about family well-being. Finally, all of these circumstances are worsened by forms of deficit thinking, where the approach that educators take is to think about the lives of

their Latinx youth as detrimental to their educational success rather than as signs of resiliency, strength, and persistence.

In the next chapter I will turn to a discussion of cultural identity. I argue that biculturalism is in part a result of the forces of educational oppression in the lives of Latinx youth, and I demonstrate how a Latinx person works to cultivate their own identity while existing in a space that is not conducive to their culture, language, or experiences.

Chapter Two - What Does It Mean to be Bicultural?

This is who we are. This is what we've been doing all along. –Maya Sol

What does it mean to be a bicultural person and how does someone who identifies in this way define the word and assign it meaning through their own life? This topic is complex, and many factors contribute to the construction of a bicultural identity. At the start of my research, I was searching for a stable and consistent definition of a bicultural identity. Instead, I found the complete opposite in that all of my participants' identities seem to exist on a spectrum. I found that in general the meaning of biculturalism is in a state of constant flux and cannot be applied to all people. In fact, to provide just one static definition of a bicultural person would go against the true nature of the word itself.

In this chapter, I provide evidence to support my claim that a bicultural identity is in part a positive result of the forms of educational oppression that many Latinx youth experience and reveals how resilient this community actually is. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, in the learning environment that schools produce through their policies, educators, curricula, etc. it is often difficult for a Latinx youth to maintain a strong sense of cultural identity. Due to these circumstances Latinx youth end up in a space where their language, culture, values, and experiences are constantly put into question, and they must learn how to adjust in order to succeed. The following analysis will focus on how the Latinx participants in this study conceptualize the concept of bicultural, and how this is lived through their own experiences. The “spectrum” of bicultural identities of the people I spoke with exists because of the varying ways that Latinx individuals respond to their circumstances and how they make sense of the world around them. Most all of the individuals in this study have experienced similar forms of oppression, discrimination, and hardship in their lives due to being Latinx, but all of these lived experiences ended up developing in unique ways.

A bicultural identity and its meaning depends entirely upon the person who possesses it, however there are a few objective components that seem to go into this category. The bicultural participants in this study all tended to be first or second generation immigrants. These people were either born in the U.S. by parents who immigrated here from another country or they were born in another country and brought to the States by their parents at a very young age. All participants currently live in the U.S. and the majority of them have spent most of their time in this country with the exception of one staff member that I interviewed. A GENESISTER program staff member informed me that most of their youth and their families are of Mexican descent. However, two of the program staff are Colombian and Guatemalan, the rest defining as Mexican. In this chapter I do not differentiate as much between staff and youth participants of the GENESISTER program. Instead, they are discussed together, all representing bicultural individuals in Boulder County.

I found that there is a stark contrast between someone who identifies as bicultural and someone who only identifies as Latinx. Just because a Latinx person exists within the United States does not necessarily mean that they are bicultural. In fact, some of the GENESISTER staff that I interviewed shared that they didn't even realize they were bicultural until they moved to Boulder County and lived in spaces where they were part of a limited population of people of color. I found that the degree to which a Latinx person is exposed to American culture, values, and norms will influence the degree to which they identify as bicultural, again demonstrating how this identity can fluctuate depending on a person's own experiences and exists in tension within majority cultural identity. As residents of Boulder County, all of the participants in this study possess bicultural qualities in one way or another due to the fact that they reside in non-Latinx spaces where their own culture is not the primary environment that they live in (i.e. at school, in the workplace, in stores, etc.). This results in the need for these individuals to balance and navigate the two cultural worlds that they find themselves in.

From my interview and focus group data I identified five different categories that came up when participants were asked what it meant to them to be a bicultural person. In every instance of data collection, almost all of these categories were mentioned in one way or another, but usually the ways in which the participants talked about them were different, leading me to understand the dynamic nature of this word. These categories are a) space, place, and origin, b) language, c) appearance, d) kinship and community, and e) cultural brokering.

To create a general frame of reference in understanding the bicultural experiences that will be discussed below, I provide a short but powerful explanation as told to me by one of the GENESISTER youth. During the focus group that I conducted with the GENESISTER youth participants, I asked them to call out words that they associated with “bicultural” and then I wrote these words down on a whiteboard for all to see. During this activity one youth shouted out the word *enough* and instantly all of the others agreed. What the youth meant by this word is that oftentimes as a bicultural person you exist in a place where you are constantly in between identities and are not able to fulfill one or the other in a way that society deems acceptable. Never feeling “enough” of either side of a bicultural identity seemed to be a consensus among the youth during the focus group and also came up during the staff interviews. This word represents a lot of the experiences that bicultural individuals have while trying to navigate the worlds that they exist in as well as the ways that others perceive them. To be bicultural is to be constantly balancing a wide array of identities in order to get along and be successful. This struggle is evident throughout each of the following categories that I have identified and represents a general theme throughout all of my data.

Space, Place, and Origin

When it came to the discussion of what factors go into a bicultural identity, people often brought up the topic of place. My first interview question for GENESISTER staff asked them to

tell me their own cultural story. In every interview the first thing I was told was either the country a person was born in or the country where their parents came from. As interviews progressed it became clear that to a bicultural person, the space and place that one exists in, whether that be in the past, present or future, means everything. To be bicultural means that one is constantly aware of these different spaces and places and one understands how identity fluctuates depending on location. Place can be large-scale, such as country of origin, or small-scale like a classroom or even a doctor's office. Either way, a bicultural person must move in and out of different spaces while simultaneously adjusting their discourse and behavior to exhibit different aspects of their identity as they go.

My interviewees recounted that being bicultural means having ties to another country other than the U.S. and those ties are usually through family and culture. As mentioned, most all of the participants in this study are Mexican but two identified themselves as being born in Colombia and Guatemala. All of the people I interviewed currently live in the U.S. and many consistently travel back and forth between the States and another country to be with family and friends. For many bicultural people, movement between their country of origin and the United States is one of the first experiences that they have with their own biculturalism. In addition, it seems that traveling to a different country is the time when bicultural people become most aware of this identity and their own positionality within that place.

During my interview with Maya Sol she shared that she is first generation born in the U.S. but that her family is from Guadalajara, Mexico. Her parents are psychologists who are politically involved in Mexico through their social justice work, but this led them to need to leave the country for a while and head to the U.S. for safety reasons. One thing led to another and Maya Sol's parents' intended three-month stay in the U.S. turned into a 32-year stay when they became pregnant with her. Growing up, Maya Sol spent much of her time traveling back and forth between Colorado and Guadalajara, specifically spending academic time in the States

and then heading back to Mexico during summer and winter breaks. Maya Sol's bicultural story is very focused on physical space, her awareness of her positionality within each space, and the meaning of each space for her identity.

For Maya Sol, and for many other bicultural people, it is at her home in Mexico where she feels most connected to her Latinx cultural heritage. In this space, she was introduced to the language, values, and familial connections that would guide the rest of her life as well as the way she views her own Latinx identity. The time that Maya Sol spent growing up in the U.S. was for the purpose of receiving an education, and now as an adult she focuses on the work she does for GENESISTER. Her talk about the United States is marked with feelings of resentment towards the experiences she had growing up, in contrast with positive experiences in Mexico where she is comforted by her Mexican culture, language, and family. Although she possesses a strong connection to her cultural roots in Mexico, Maya Sol chooses to spend her time and energy within the United States doing the work that she is passionate about. She has learned how to maintain her bicultural identity within this country despite the negative connotations she holds.

Daniella, a Youth Specialist at GENESISTER, did not always have a clear division between the various geographical spaces in her life and her role and identity within them. In fact, her bicultural identity was not always defined through just her birth country, Colombia, and her country of residence, the United States, but was also shaped by experiences in other countries. Brought to the states at the age of two, Daniella left her birth country and did not return until the age of 10. At this young age Daniella had been distanced from her South American culture and language due to various other factors, and so when she returned to Colombia she immediately felt like somewhat of an outsider. When she turned 15-years old, as a gift for her quinceañera, Daniella was given the opportunity to spend a whole summer in Colombia. Daniella described this short period of her life as the first time where she felt she was able to be immersed in her culture, the culture that she was unable to see or understand back in the United States:

And then in that trip to Colombia is when I think I just reconnected with my culture. Not only learned Spanish but also picked up Colombian-Spanish and really became fluent and just dug deep and understood all the customs. So that was like my first time I remember actually being like yeah I am Latina, I'm Colombian! And like how to re-establish myself back into that.

In Daniella's case, she wasn't able to see her bicultural identity until she spent time in the physical space of Colombia, surrounded by her family, language, and culture. She might never have been able to have these experiences in the United States and so because of her newly found connection to Columbia she identifies completely differently as a bicultural individual than before. In fact, because of this connection to a new place, Daniella's bicultural identity was able to grow and strengthen even more when she came back to the States.

A third example of how a large place, such as a country, can have a lasting impact on someone's bicultural identity came from an interview with another staff member named Natalia, who is also a Youth Specialist at GENESISTER. Natalia was born and raised in Guatemala and did not come to the United States until her college years, seven years ago. Natalia never considered herself bicultural until she started working at GENESISTER and is still working to figure out how she fits within this country. In her job interview with GENESISTER, she was asked whether or not she identifies as bicultural. Her initial response was no, she is simply Guatemalan. After more thinking she has come to the conclusion that she is bicultural, due to the fact that she does have to "straddle two worlds" in her everyday life as a result of living in the United States. There are more angles of Natalia's bicultural story, but the fact that she is from one country and lives in another seems to be the first thing that she thinks of when it comes to her own sense of biculturalism. Natalia still feels a sense of disconnect between herself and the people, culture, and language of the U.S. but she also understands that her ability to function and exist within the disconnect leads her closer towards her own bicultural identity.

Narrowing the scope of place, many of the participants I spoke with told me about how their bicultural identity fluctuates between different communities within the United States or

another country. When most people typically think about a bicultural or Latinx person, they associate them with their country of origin and then the country they reside in, which is usually the U.S. As discussed above, the country that a person is from plays a large role, but this is not a sufficient definition of “bicultural.” Even within a country, or within a state, great diversity exists when it comes to the places that people reside and the ways their biculturalism manifests.

Daniella grew up in multiple communities within Florida and in her adult life has lived in multiple communities in Colorado. Daniella described a stark contrast between the communities in Miami and Naples, Florida and the communities Boulder and Longmont, Colorado. In Miami, Daniella was immersed in more Afro-Caribbean Latinx culture, as the people living in that area are from places such as Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and other Central, South American, and Caribbean countries. As the daughter of a Colombian mother and the step-daughter of a Puerto Rican father, this specific type of Latinx culture is what Daniella knew and was used to. Moving to Colorado, Daniella was quickly introduced to Mexican culture, as the majority of Latinx people in the Boulder County area are Mexican. This transition presented an interesting challenge for Daniella, as she had already struggled in Florida to figure out how she fit into those communities, but now it was as if she had to start over with her bicultural identity.

Daniella also spoke to me about issues of transverse racism that take place within the larger Latinx community, and that she has felt and expressed herself. Prior to moving to Colorado she shared with me that she often pushed Mexican culture aside and did not see it as equal to the cultures of the Latinx people she had previously associated with, due to the “inherent colorism” felt the South Floridian Latinx community. In her current community in Boulder County, Daniella says that she feels more “Latina” than ever:

I feel more Latina here than in Florida because of the non-Latinx population, which is weird because you’d think in a place that has a variety of Latinx culture, I would feel more strongly rooted in my culture. On the contrary, though, because there is a huge

economic disparity and the microaggressions experienced on the daily and because Boulder loves hiding low income housing behind trees and expensive homes, I felt more tugged to my culture as a way of showing resistance to the dominant white culture.

Daniella was able to strengthen her own bicultural identity by immersing herself into a new place and a new Latinx culture different than anything she had ever experienced before in Florida. A difference in place and community will always continue to influence a person's identity and to expand the definition of what it means to be bicultural.

Narrowing the scope of place even more, I noticed throughout my data collection that a bicultural identity fluctuates even within the smallest of spaces within the community or location a person resides. Specifically, for the youth in this study it seems that their bicultural identities tend to vary the most between their school and the outside world. During the focus group one youth told me that in the classroom she feels that since she is Latinx she has to work harder to gain the teacher's attention and approval. At school, she works to rid herself of her Latinx identity and Spanish language in order to be thought of as a competent student worth a teacher's time and investment. This is oftentimes the case for youth of color, as many non-Latinx teachers have historically held negative stereotypes against Latinx students while showing preference to non-Latinx students and withholding praise and encouragement for Latinx students (Valencia 2011). Due to some of the negative consequences that can arise when Latinx youth exhibit qualities and behaviors typical of their Latinx culture, many of these youth find themselves exhibiting more qualities and behaviors typical of a non-Latinx individual while in school spaces in order to be more successful.

Beyond the school system, bicultural people still find themselves adjusting their identity and discourse to be able to succeed. During the focus group, Maya Sol provided the youth participants with some examples from her own life about dealing with a bicultural identity. She told us about the drastic difference between various professional spaces that she works in and how she must balance her different identities. As someone whose profession involves working

specifically within Latinx communities where her Mexican indigenous culture and language is known and understood, Maya Sol has also learned how to function in a government institution that is mainly represented by people who are non-Latinx, privileged, and uninformed of the community that she serves. Maya Sol's bicultural identity has been centered around the need to exist within each of these places and to learn how to be successful within each one by adjusting her talk, behavior, and appearance. When discussing the need to code switch within the work place, Maya Sol offered an analysis of this act:

And that right there is very different from me consciously knowing like I know how to play the game in white dominant culture versus leaving behind my identity and forgetting or being like ashamed of it to fit in. That would be like, for me it would be like selling out or going into this white-washing ... I know what we need to survive, to have more power and privilege for us to have money to do our outings, to get funding for pregnancy prevention work, all of that.

As that excerpt shows, a bicultural person does not have two different or separate identities, instead they possess one identity but are aware of when and how they need to reflect different aspects of it in different locations. From place to place, a bicultural person will shift and evolve to accomplish different goals and to fit into a picture that the dominant culture expects them to fit into. Here, Maya Sol explains the difference between what some may perceive as "selling out" and what she perceives as a strategy that she must enact in order to succeed in her work that centers around majority cultural spaces. Through this approach, Maya Sol is aware of her own positionality in relation to her surroundings and can adjust her discourse and identity accordingly in order to accomplish different goals.

As I have explained, these places can be thought of as something as large as a country or continent, or as small as a classroom or an office in a public health building. Either way a bicultural person is first and foremost aware of where they are physically and must make conscious judgements about how to exist within that space. These physical spaces that a

bicultural person finds themselves in are indeed a crucial part of understanding identity and how it fluctuates, but even within a physical space there are still more factors to consider.

Language

The next category of biculturalism that was most prevalent throughout my data collection is the Spanish language. In addition to having connections to another country besides the United States, one of the main differences between a bicultural person and someone who is not is the fact that they are also bilingual. As mentioned by some of the participants, it is not necessarily the case that a person *has* to be Spanish-speaking to be considered Latinx, but I argue that in order to possess a strong sense of biculturalism a person must have bilingual skills. As Richard Valencia notes in his work, “language is the vehicle of culture” (Valencia 2011, 10), which I found to be highly relevant to this study.

One GENESISTER staff member shared that she believes a bicultural person is someone who has *access* to multiple spaces, communities, and cultures. My data collection supports the claim that a large part of having access to different spaces means that you can speak both English and Spanish well enough to get along. If language is the vehicle of culture, then in order to access any culture you must speak the language. As mentioned, most people who identify as bicultural are first or second generation immigrants whose parents tend to speak very little English. Because of their lack of English-speaking skills these parents are cut-off or disconnected from their U.S. communities, because they simply cannot communicate in the dominant language and therefore cannot understand how the culture functions or identify as bicultural. Many of the participants I spoke with explained this disconnect between their parents and mainstream American society and how as a result they were forced to take on the responsibility of not only translating for their parents, but also having to use their bilingual skills

just to explain simple concepts or ideas to them. This use of language is a central component of a bicultural identity, and I will discuss it here and again below in the *cultural brokers* section of this chapter.

In Chapter One I discussed how being a bilingual Spanish-speaker can create a lot of problems for youth, specifically within the education system. The literature shows just how large of an impact language can have on a bicultural person's success and well-being, whether it be that they are fluent Spanish-speakers trying to learn better English, or that they are fluent in both English and Spanish but are impacted by the constant need to switch between languages. Either way, language plays a large role in identity formation and as we will see it can become difficult for a bicultural person to determine how to balance their language use, especially in relation to the context they are in.

Borrowing from the work of Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, I take a sociocultural approach to understanding the role of language and bilingualism in the formation of the identities of the participants in this study, meaning that language and discourse is relative to the context in which it exists in (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). As these authors point out, "identity is the social positioning of self and other" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 586) and this positioning is accomplished through a person's choice of language and discourse. In other words, a bicultural person's identity is formed largely throughout interactions that involve language choice, and for a person who speaks two languages this adds an additional layer of analysis to determine how and what it means for them to make decisions about how to talk in different situations. All of the participants that I interviewed exemplified this in one way or another, showing me that just because bilingual/bicultural people can speak the same languages it does not mean that they identify with them in the same way or make the same decisions about how to use their language skills in different contexts.

Lourdes laid out the role of language in the creation of bicultural identity in a very compelling way. As mentioned earlier, Lourdes spent the majority of her childhood in Compton, California, a place where most everyone was either Latinx or Black, and even many people in the Black communities also spoke Spanish. She explained to me that for her there was never as clear of a line drawn between the times and places where she should or should not speak Spanish, because most everyone did speak the language and there weren't specific expectations as to how she should use it. For the youth in Boulder County, due to the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity in the area, it is clearer where their Spanish must start and stop, meaning they know who is able to speak Spanish to them and who will judge them negatively for speaking this language. Because of this, code switching is a crucial skill for a bicultural person in Boulder County, due to the fact that there are higher risks associated with speaking Spanish in a context where it should not be spoken. The burden of having to figure out how and when to use one's native language versus the dominant language, as well as the constant need to determine how to express oneself through which language, is very impactful on a bicultural person's sense of identity.

Benjamin Bailey's work on code-switching is useful for understanding the ways in which the participants of this study code-switch and what that means for identity formation. As research studies show, there are many forms and functions of code-switching, but the forms used by participants in this study mirror what Bailey describes as *situational switching*. This means that "distinct codes are employed in particular settings and speech activities, and with different categories of interlocutors" (Bailey 1999, 242). Contrast to other forms of code-switching in which the context and setting of an interaction is itself shaped by the way speakers adjust their talk, situational switching means that a speaker has to adapt their language to fit into a specific environment. In other words, because the Latinx participants in this study spend a large portion of their time in communities dominated by non-Latinx, English-speaking people, the

responsibility is placed on them to adjust their talk and language use to accommodate those populations.

When talking in the focus group, one youth brought up that being bicultural means having to code switch. She said that especially while at school, she notices the need to change her language and discourse when she is speaking to a teacher versus when she is speaking to friends. When talking to a teacher this youth described her language use as more “formal” and when speaking with friends she uses slang, specifically Spanglish. It is probably true that all youth feel the need to code switch in one way or another when speaking to teachers versus speaking to their friends, but here the difference is that Latinx youth that are bilingual are unable to use Spanish when speaking with teachers, which oftentimes may be their preferred language. This same youth mentioned that she knows she must speak to her teacher in a specific way so that they will “take you seriously.” Many Latinx youth must be careful about when and where they use Spanish or Spanglish in order to avoid any negative connotations associated with the use of their language and so that teachers and staff view them as equally capable as their non-Latinx peers.

Maya Sol shared that while growing up and traveling back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. it was always important for her and her family to maintain their Spanish language. Spanish was the only language spoken in their home, making speech in the household a key way for Maya Sol to connect to her family and Mexican culture. It wasn't until Maya Sol entered into formal institutions in the U.S. like the public school system that she started to realize how differently she and her family were treated because of their bilingualism. Because of the ESL courses Maya Sol was enrolled in, it was instilled in her from a young age that her Spanish was a disability and a deficit to her learning, which impacted the ways she wanted to use it. Maya Sol went through many transitions and adjustments in the way she viewed and understood her Spanish. After her experiences in ESL classes she felt embarrassed speaking Spanish and would

go as far as to ask her mother not to speak Spanish in public because she wanted to keep that part of her hidden and private.

Language suppression and deficit narratives discussed here and in Chapter One are experienced by many Spanish-speakers and have a large impact on their identities. As previous literature shows and my own data confirms, language is one of the biggest aspects of a bicultural person's identity and also the one that brings about the most confusion and pain. For many Latinx individuals it is the Spanish language through which they understand who they are and what they want to be, so to be stripped of this quality within various settings can make identity development complicated.

Appearance

Throughout my data collection I was surprised by how often the topic of physical appearance came up during discussions about biculturalism and identity. When I use the term *appearance* I am referring to any elements of someone's persona that are distinguishable at first glance to any person that looks at or speaks to them. Skin color was the element of appearance that was brought up the most, but other elements include hair style, dress and voice or accent. The impact of a person's appearance depends on where they are and who they are surrounded by. As an ethnic minority in a community of mostly non-Latinx people, many of the Latinx participants in this study have found that their appearance influences the ways they are able to identify as bicultural people.

Daniella and Maya Sol both identified themselves in our interviews as light-skinned Latinx women, and explained how this brought them both feelings of privilege and confusion. For Daniella, while in the U.S. she found that her appearance allowed her to blend in and to be more accepted by the "White" majority population. When working in the restaurant industry in Naples, Florida, Daniella interacted with many older, non-Latinx, conservative people who

would often vocalize racist and bigoted beliefs about Latinx people. Daniella would often push the limits with these individuals in order to inform them that she herself is Latinx. The response she often got was that she is not the type of person these individuals are talking about due to her light-skinned appearance and her lack of a Spanish accent. In a sense, these qualities made her more acceptable to these individuals. Talking about her experience interacting with these people Daniella said:

You know it's as if like "you're accepted." You look white-passing enough where you will be accepted, we don't see you as a foreign other, but we do see this sort of exotic thing. And so I found that privilege in being right in the middle which was also very hard for me because when I go to Colombia I'm like this American but then I go here I'm like different, you know? I'm just living in the middle of not knowing where to belong.

In situations such as these, Daniella told me that she was able to get away with being viewed as an "exotic other" rather than a Latinx minority whom many people are wrongfully told to fear. While acknowledging how her appearance places her in a privileged position as a Latinx person, Daniella also found that even when in Colombia, the country where she was born and her family lives, she was not always accepted in this same way. The English accent and "white-passing" appearance that has helped bring her success in the U.S. also makes her seem as an outsider to the people in Colombia, thus increasing some of her confusion about who she is and how she identifies.

Maya Sol, who identifies as a light-skinned Xicana, has felt that her appearance has made her more successful at navigating both of her cultural communities. Different from Daniella, Maya Sol has found a way to use her physical appearance and her accent to her advantage, strengthening her bicultural identity due to the fact that she finds herself able to fit into non-Latinx and Latinx communities with more ease. It is possible that due to the additional time and resources that Maya Sol has been given to gain confidence in her Latinx identity she is now able to use her light-skinned appearance in a more advantageous way than Daniella feels she can.

This is not to say that Maya Sol has not still experienced cultural confusion throughout her life as a Mexican-American, but it is an example of how two people can share similar qualities yet experience those differently.

For a person with darker skin and a thicker Spanish accent it is more difficult to integrate into majority American culture, which makes it more confusing to determine how one identifies. Natalia, the GENESISTER staff member from Guatemala, is not as “white-passing” as Maya Sol and Daniella and she did not grow up speaking English, therefore she has a stronger Spanish accent. Going to school in the Netherlands for a few years, and then on the East coast of the United States, Natalia often has felt as though she is “tokenized” for her Latinx appearance. As a brown person with an accent in a community of Non-Latinx English-speaking people Natalia represents a marked category of being, making it more difficult for her to fit in and identify with U.S. culture. Physical appearance is one reason why Natalia has struggled more than others and does not have as strong of an identification with her own biculturalism.

Lourdes, who is also a darker-skinned Mexican, has had an interesting experience going from living in a community in Compton, California where she represented the ethnic majority to living in communities in Colorado where she is the ethnic minority. As mentioned before, Lourdes never had to think about her cultural identity or the way other people perceived her until she moved to Colorado and was introduced to a space that is very different from Compton. Lourdes’s experiences speak to how different it is to live in a community of people who are physically similar to one versus living in a community where there are few people who look like one. The contrast between being accepted or being pointed out because of the way one looks or sounds in comparison to others can have a large impact on understanding one’s own role within a community.

These examples demonstrate how Latinx people exhibit a range of physical qualities that have a unique influence on their experiences. For those who possess similar physical qualities

there is still variation in the ways that they cope with this identity factor and adjust to the space that they are in. Although there are differences between people, appearances, and identity it does seem that all people of color experience some sort of difficulty working to fit in or feel accepted within the communities they live in, specifically in Boulder County where they are minorities.

Kinship and Community

Within Latinx culture, there is a strong emphasis placed on the role of family in one's life and a Latinx person tends to hold a greater degree of obligation towards their family members than is common in majority US culture. Many of the GENESISTER youth and staff members are from large families and oftentimes live in homes with not only their immediate family members but also extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. It is through these family members that most of a person's Latinx cultural knowledge, language, and values are passed down, highlighting the importance of these relationships on cultural identity development. On the contrary, as I can also see from my own personal experiences, family members are also capable of inhibiting cultural development by choosing to not pass down these forms of knowledge. The individuals I spoke with demonstrated both sides of this dynamic, some feeling that their bicultural identity is strengthened because of their family relations and some feeling that it is weakened.

Maya Sol was able to find strength and understanding in her own identity because of her family members and the cultural knowledge they provided her. It is in her Mexican home with her family members that she feels the most connected to the Latinx side of her identity and where she develops the skills necessary to bring these beliefs and values back to the life she lives in the United States. As she told me:

A lot of my cultural teachings and upbringings were always in the household. Going back to Grandma's house and keeping that strong matriarchal connection. That was really important as well as keeping our language.

Maya Sol feels that she has always had a strong grip on her Latinx identity due to the work her parents did and the values they taught her. As individuals who are “radically oriented in social justice and community values” Maya Sol’s parents set her up to be able to hold onto her Latinx cultural identity and to have an easier time balancing that dimension of herself with the dimension that is oriented towards U.S. culture. Compared to other Latinx individuals that she knows, Maya Sol sees the role of her parents and family as a privilege that helps her be a more successful bicultural person. Maya Sol’s familial relationships have played one of the parts in her identity development, orienting her closer to her Latinx roots and giving her the tools to hold onto that side of her cultural identity despite the oppression and discrimination that she also faced because of this.

Quite differently, Daniella has a family member, her biological father, who she feels has diminished her Latinx cultural identity, making it more confusing and difficult for her to exist as a bicultural person. With parents who identified completely differently from each other with their cultural backgrounds, Daniella was forced to grow up in two different worlds, one where her father was focused on achieving “The American Dream” and one where her mother was fully devoted to her Colombian roots. At the age of two, Daniella’s father took her from her birth home in Colombia to the United States without her mother’s consent, his intent being that he wanted to leave behind that culture and gain a new found sense of belonging within the United States. To do so, he did not allow Daniella to speak Spanish and he taught her to see herself only as a “White” American living in Miami, Florida. Because of this Daniella was distanced from her Colombian culture and was unable to locate a sense of belonging for a long time. Despite these negative experiences with her father, Daniella shared that she has learned not to blame him but rather to understand that he simply “fell into the trap” of U.S. cultural beliefs regarding what it takes to belong and get by.

Once Daniella reached a certain age she was able to make more of her own decisions about how she would think of her Latinx heritage, even though it still brought up a lot of confusion and misunderstanding. Being around her mother Daniella was reconnected to her birth place, her language, and to Colombian culture. When describing her parents' divorce Daniella told me:

Growing up it was very fascinating especially like I said, having a very bigoted dad. It was a very abusive relationship between my mom and my bio-dad and so I always had this view that I knew there was this conflict of nature where I would always see my dad and how American he tried to be, and then my mom staying true to her roots and saying she is fully Colombian and is proud of being it. I think it helped a lot when they separated because then I was able to like go to one world and be like "okay, this is who you are" and go to another world to be like "okay, this is who you are." This all helped me form her own world within it all.

Hearing this statement from Daniella was interesting because it seemed that the strong dichotomy between the beliefs and values of her parents also represented the way that her own bicultural identity was formed. Throughout the different stages of her life Daniella was taught to exist and live in two different cultural worlds, an experience that balances out her identity now as an adult. These separate relationships with both of her parents were the biggest impact that Daniella brought up when asked to define her own biculturalism during our interview. For both Maya Sol and Daniella, parental relationships shaped them into the individuals they are today, but it is clear that this happened through very different means.

Expanding the definition of kin to include people who are not family or blood-related, many of my participants found that the people they surround themselves with on a day-to-day basis impact their ability to navigate the different places they are in. When talking to me about growing up in Compton, Lourdes explained that the significance of that place was that the people around her were either Black or Latinx, like her. There Lourdes was able to interact and develop relationships with people who shared similar experiences with her related to Latinx culture, immigration and language. Having these relationships meant that Lourdes wasn't thinking about

her bicultural identity because she wasn't being forced to exist in a non-Latinx community and maintain that balance. She told me:

My development as a bicultural person had been more once I left California when I was in high school because it felt like we were all the same where I grew up [in Compton]. We were all Latinx folks that were either born or just raised in the U.S. So, I didn't have a lot of consciousness of what it meant to be bicultural.

Once Lourdes moved to Colorado and was no longer in a community where she was surrounded by people who were all similar to her, she felt the pressure to choose who to spend time with. Specifically, in Colorado Lourdes was exposed to a greater separation between people who are Latinx and people who are non-Latinx which made it difficult for her to decide who she wanted to be around. Now, instead of living in a community where all of the people Lourdes would interact with shared her cultural identity, Lourdes found herself being forced to make conscious decisions each day about whether or not she would spend time with the other Latinx, Spanish-speaking youth or with the other non-Latinx youth she knew. This transition was one of Lourdes' first tastes of the sorts of decisions she would have to make as a bicultural person and the aspects of herself that she would choose to show the rest of the world.

Another example of how a bicultural identity fluctuates depending on the people one is surrounded by took place during the focus group with the youth. When explaining how she conceptualizes biculturalism specifically within her school, one youth said:

I kind of feel like it's different with different groups. Cause like there's a group of the Mexicans that are white-washed and there's a group of Mexicans that are Beaners and there's a group of Mexicans that are just there... Its all over the place.

What this youth meant by her comment is that there is a wide array of people in her community who all identify differently as Latinx individuals, which impacts the way she sees herself in relation to them. Just as Lourdes explained, many bicultural individuals are influenced by the identities of those around them and the communities that they exist in. Other youth in addition to this individual acknowledged how there is variation within the types of Latinx people that exist

within the Boulder County community, and they tend to socialize with each other in the same groups. This example demonstrates how a person's bicultural identity is partially dependent upon the people around them and on the impact of various forms of kinship relations that shape how they think about their own cultural identity.

Cultural Brokering

One of the most significant aspects of what it means to be a bicultural person is the act of cultural brokering. From the beginning of my research I sought to analyze the concepts of cultural brokerage and biculturalism as separate entities before I realized that cultural brokering is just a piece of what a bicultural person does and is. I even started my data collection by asking questions about each of these terms in separate sections of my interviews until I noticed that the participants' answers about each sounded very similar. After that point I began to think about cultural brokering as more of an innate quality of someone who identifies as bicultural. In other words, I found that a bicultural person *is* a cultural broker, and in order to be a cultural broker one must also be bicultural. The two concepts of cultural brokerage and biculturalism are inextricably linked, and to understand one you must understand the other.

In this section I will explain what a cultural broker is, the different ways that a bicultural person acts as a cultural broker, and how cultural brokering is perceived by those who do it. The two forms of cultural brokerage I identified throughout my discussions with GENESISTER staff and the youth were either natural, more innate acts of brokerage where participants had to engage in this form of discourse simply because of their own social positioning, or brokerage that took the form of more purposeful and intentional behavior to achieve a specific goal. The former type of cultural brokerage is what I found all of the GENESISTER youth to exhibit, as well as the GENESISTER staff while they were at the same age. Now as adult professionals with a stronger sense of self identity and cultural understanding, the staff members exhibit the latter form, where

they are able to consciously engage in acts of cultural brokerage that are highly effective and impactful for others.

A term originally brought into common use by Clifford Geertz and Eric Wolf³ in the 1950's and 60's, a cultural broker was first understood as a person who acted as a "middleman" between different populations, specifically those of the political elite and peasant populations (Geertz 1960; Wolf 1956). Today, cultural brokers are generally understood as any individual capable of functioning within one or more distinct areas and can bridge the gap between them (Weiss 1994; Jezewski 1990). Cultural brokers also tend to be those who are marginalized, meaning that they exist on the boundary of two different communities, which provides them with the ability to move between the two and contribute to each (Weiss 1994). No matter how well a person is able to navigate between these different communities, all bicultural individuals possess some form of these skills just as a fact of belonging to two or more cultural groups.

In his study of transnational Mexican youth and Chicano educators, Enrique Sepúlveda uses border epistemology to conceptualize the spaces that many bicultural individuals exist in and the forms of knowledge that are produced as a result of these spaces. Sepúlveda writes that these forms of "border knowledge" are "found at the intersection of cultural contact and mixing, where Mexico meets the United States, where English and Spanish rub against each other, and where multiple cultural formations and experiences exist or coexist side-by-side in tension, contradiction, and mixing" (Sepúlveda 2018, 56). Referencing scholars such as Anzaldúa, Keating, and Mignolo, Sepúlveda demonstrates how individuals who engage in "border thinking" develop practices and identities that center around the ability to see double, "first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another" where "seeing from two or

³ Maya Sol pointed out to me that the concept of cultural brokerage has been experienced and discussed by other individuals (specifically queer women of color) prior to being recognized in academia by these scholars. Due to various forms of sexism and racism many of these viewpoints have gone unacknowledged and unheard.

more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent” (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 549). This thought process and understanding shows exactly how a cultural broker functions and how they must exist in order to get by.

In other words, bicultural individuals who act as cultural brokers have the ability to see and understand from multiple cultural perspectives. As a result, these people are able to navigate between all of these cultural spaces, producing different forms of knowledge within each of them and then translating this back into the different communities they reside in. For the bicultural individuals I spoke with, this practice and understanding took shape in different ways, but it typically involved the act of translating (both literally and conceptually) and advocating for others. In addition to the work that cultural brokers must do for those around them, this practice also contributes a lot to a person’s own sense of identity, shaping the way they are perceived by others as well as the way they perceive themselves.

I was first introduced to the term *cultural broker* by the GENESISTER Program Coordinator herself, and it was this concept that initially drew me to this research and to the work that the program staff do. When describing this word to the youth participants during the focus group, Maya Sol compared a cultural broker to a real estate broker, saying that in the same way that a real estate broker has connections to the housing world and can relay that information back to regular people looking to buy a home, a cultural broker has connections to their cultural world and can communicate between that and outside cultural worlds. In her own words:

So there could be like a broker of any sort. A real estate broker is somebody that has connections to the housing market can then feedback that information to people looking for houses and get them a house. The same concept goes for somebody in regards to culture. A cultural broker is somebody who can easily navigate between two or more cultures and bridge together those cultures. So for example, I would consider myself to be a cultural broker in the sense that I come from more than one culture and identity and I can navigate those ones successfully. Sometimes one better than the other or whatever but I do it in a way that I have trust, I have credibility, and I have the code switching skills to be able to do that. So for me my two identities that are cultures that I go between is the Latinx Mexican culture and the white dominant culture.

As is true for all of the categories of biculturalism that I have discussed, cultural brokering looks different for every individual, but the description above provides a general understanding of what a cultural broker is as defined by a participant herself. However, it is important to note that Maya Sol represents a bicultural individual who has mastered the art of cultural brokering and therefore feels more comfortable in various cultural spaces and in her ability to exist within them. For many of the Latinx youth in this study, as well as the GENESISTER staff members when they were at a similar age, this is not always the case and their acts of cultural brokerage look different.

As noted earlier, many Latinx bicultural individuals in the United States are first- or second-generation immigrants whose parents or grandparents are immigrants from a Latin American country. Many of these individuals and their siblings are the first in their families to be fully submerged into U.S. culture and language, and develop a better understanding of it than their parents or other relatives. Existing on the borders of both Latinx and American cultural spaces, these individuals have found that they are burdened with the responsibility of making connections between these two cultures for those around them who cannot. Specifically, all of the participants shared with me their experiences of having to translate for family members, assist in explaining American concepts or ideas, and provide support in order to accomplish everyday tasks necessary for living in the U.S.

During the focus group, I came to realize that many of the youth understand their own acts of cultural brokerage to be a burden or an additional responsibility that they must maintain. As has been discussed, many Latinx youth have to translate for their parents during meetings at school, at doctor appointments, while filling out various forms or applications, and more. The examples I got from the youth about how they act as cultural brokers in their own lives all revolved around experiences such as these, where they must translate for parents who are unable to understand written or oral communication that is not in Spanish. For example, in a grocery

store a bicultural youth may have to be the one to ask the worker at a register for a receipt. When stuck in a situation where an employee at a store or office cannot understand a parent's English, youth often have to step up to either communicate with the person themselves or to advocate for their parent who maybe is being treated poorly by someone who possesses some level of racial bias or misunderstanding.

In addition to simply translating written or oral communication, cultural brokering for many young people involves going deeper and having to explain fundamental concepts or practices to parents and other family members. As Lourdes shared with me about her experiences with culture brokering growing up:

Yeah I mean growing up in school I feel like it was a default thing I did. I certainly didn't think about it, that was just something I did. My parents needed to understand what was happening and I was able to navigate that, and at the time I was very literally translating and interpreting for them. Then as I got a little older I feel like I started doing that in a very different way. So like college applications for example, even though my parents could literally physically read a paper that was in English or in Spanish, I still had to translate the idea of me applying to school out-of-state which means leaving home. And so it became a lot more of like conceptually explaining what this meant and why this was okay and why it was just something we did here in the U.S. and it was something I wanted to do.

Similar to Lourdes' understanding of her initial work as a cultural broker being natural, Yanina shared with me that ever since arriving to the U.S. at the age of four, cultural brokering has been her "normal." Yanina said that she remembers doing cultural brokering as a kid by having to advocate for her parents in different situations. "Now there is this fancy beautiful name *cultural broker* associated with it but it's something that I've always done." Many bicultural individuals thus act as cultural brokers whether they see it or not. Typically, the act of doing this work is not something that a person learns but something that is instilled in them from the beginning and is a skill necessary for them—and their families—to navigate the world.

When asking youth how they feel about having to take on the duty of brokering for their parents or other family members, many expressed frustration and reluctance. One youth shared

with me that when translating for her parents she feels frustrated due to the fact that in certain situations her parents do not take her seriously because she is a child, yet they still expect her to be able to connect them into American culture. Another individual expressed feelings of envy towards her non-Latinx friends who did not have to translate and whose parents automatically understood things like college applications, FAFSA, etc. and how they have it much easier. A different individual told me that they do not enjoy the type of interactions they have with people when they are having to broker for their parents and that it even makes them not want to go out in public with that parent. It seemed to be a general consensus among the youth that cultural brokering for them was viewed as a negative rather than as a positive, and that oftentimes it resulted in them feeling “used as a tool.”

In a different light, many bicultural individuals act as cultural brokers in a more intentional and purposeful way. When asking staff members about their own conceptualization and use of cultural brokerage the responses I received were very different from those in the focus group with youth. In fact, many of them actually used the term “cultural brokering” to describe their job duties, acknowledging the fact that this skill is a requirement for them to successfully accomplish their jobs. Yet, these staff members had similar ideas about cultural brokerage as the GENESISTER youth when we they were the same age. Their transition from resentment and frustration to feelings of understanding and appreciation demonstrate that with time and practice a person can learn how to capitalize off of these skills. Even within the focus group, one youth discussed the difference between Maya Sol’s ability to act as a cultural broker and the youths’ ability, where Maya Sol is able to “show it off” and the youth feel “used” for their brokerage skills.

As cultural brokers for GENESISTER clients and their families, staff members quite literally make connections between their clients and the larger Boulder County community. The exact means through which staff act as brokers for youth and their families will be discussed in-

depth in the following chapter, but here it is important to note how through their personal and professional development these individuals were able to become “experts” in cultural brokering. What allows individuals such as the GENESISTER staff to capitalize off of their skills as brokers is the large amount of personal experiences they have in navigating multiple cultural worlds. Having gone through much of the struggles associated with discrimination, oppression, and cultural dislocation, these individuals possess lots of cultural knowledge that allows them to move between cultural spaces more fluidly.

Cultural brokers exist in all stages of life with all abilities to move in and out of various spaces, communities, and physical locations. Part of being a cultural broker involves knowledge and understanding of all of the previous categories of biculturalism that I discussed in this chapter. Connecting to theories of intersectionality, the bicultural individuals in this study are able to broker between different locations using their language and appearance while developing relationships and possessing an awareness of those around them. Throughout this process, bicultural individuals face struggles and hardships attempting to balance multiple identities and attempting to belong and feel accepted. As was explained in Chapter One, the social environment in the United States does not make this process simple for them, and it takes an extensive amount of identity work to be able to navigate this world. In the following chapter I point out the ways the GENESISTER program hones in on the social positioning of Latinx youth and their families in Boulder County and provides specialized services that support them along their journey of coming to be in a place where that may feel impossible.

Chapter Three - Tools in the Toolbox: GENESISTER's Programming

I'm just trying to foster an environment in which they [the youth] feel proud of who they are and can connect it to their roots and connect it to their family. And so that ties in to self-esteem and that also ties into sexual health. -Natalia

This final chapter focuses on the services that GENESISTER provides for their youth and how they produce impactful results. GENESISTER is a national award winning program with the Boulder County Public Health department that focuses primarily on unplanned and unintended pregnancies and school dropouts among individuals who are siblings or daughters of pregnant and parenting teens. This program came about as a partner to the GENESIS program that provides services for pregnant and parenting teens in the Boulder County area and promotes healthy parenting practices. After it was realized statistically that the siblings and even children of teen moms present higher rates of teen pregnancies themselves, GENESISTER was created to provide support for youth who are not teen parents but who are exposed to the experiences surrounding teen parenting.

Youth who are siblings of teen parents are two to six times more likely to become pregnant than the sibling of a non-parenting teen (“Boulder County GENESISTER Program” 2019). Simply put, being exposed to the experiences surrounding teen parenting can lead a person to engage in risky sexual behavior at a young age and to also have lower educational aspirations. GENESISTER sought to provide services for female youth between the ages of 12-17 years old in order to help youth navigate these experiences. Generally speaking, GENESISTER's services center around one-on-one mentorship between youth and staff as well as parents and staff, sexual health education, community service projects, social activities or events, and strategizing ways for youth to implement their own goals related to family and relationships, academics, and reproductive justice. GENESISTER takes a holistic approach: their work functions on multiple levels to understand and respond to the problems facing the youth

they serve. Specifically, the program focuses on individuals, families, communities, and larger systems such as schools, medical institutions and political structures. As one of the only youth development programs of its kind in the country, GENESISTER provides unique services beyond pregnancy prevention and sexual health education, helping youth and their families navigate any sort of situation where they may need assistance.

The GENESIS program for teen parents saw about 60% non-Latinx youth and 40% Latinx youth. Within about two years of the start of the program, GENESISTER saw something different, where approximately 90% of their clients are Latinx youth and 10% are Non-Latinx. It is true that Latinx youth are subject to higher risk of teen pregnancies than non-Latinx youth; however, it is unclear as to why there are higher rates of Latinx youth enrolled in the GENESISTER program versus the GENESIS program⁴. Although GENESISTER was never intended to serve mainly Latinx youth, this demographic is now the heart and soul of the program and is the reason for their culturally grounded framework. Unlike the GENESIS program, cultural identity and knowledge have become a main component underlying all of the services that GENESISTER provides. In fact, it is even a requirement for all staff members to be bilingual and bicultural in order to best serve their youth clients. GENESISTER has evolved into a program that goes well beyond pregnancy prevention and sexual health education and provides specific services and resources for Latinx youth that they are not able to receive elsewhere.

In general, Latinx youth are known to be at a greater risk of unplanned pregnancies than other non-Latinx youth. There are a variety of factors that could contribute to this, but one could

⁴ Based on information from the program staff, I hypothesize that due to the many factors leading Latinx youth to be at a greater risk for unplanned pregnancies, once some Latinx youth were enrolled in the program in the beginning this made it easier for them to continue enrolling at higher rates. Once the program was then informally established as a space where Latinx is the majority, this may have deterred any non-Latinx youth to want to enroll. This could also be due to the referrals that GENESISTER gets, meaning that since Latinx individuals tend to come from homes consisting of more than just immediate family members, referrals often consist of not just one individual, but also multiple cousins or sisters.

be a difference in cultural values surrounding family. Maya Sol shared with me that many of the youth in the program come from larger families, oftentimes living in homes with multiple siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc. Within these households there is additional value placed on the role of mothers and caretakers, leading to a sense of normality regarding young motherhood. Alemán specifically uses the term “gendered familism” to explain the Latinx cultural beliefs and values surrounding the importance of familial relations that tends to impact the choices of a Latinx youth (Alemán 2018), showing how these values could potentially lead to an increased risk of teen pregnancy among Latinx youth. In other words, Latinx cultural norms surrounding kinship relations place value on maternal responsibilities, meaning that if a person were to have a child as a teenager there would generally be less of a stigma against the pregnancy, removing some aspects of fear surrounding teen motherhood.

Additionally, Latinx youth are at-risk for greater odds of teen pregnancy due to other disparities such as lower socioeconomic status, which in turn lead to a lack of services that discourage risky sexual behavior and promote sexual education and understanding. Being subject to forms of racism and oppression impact a youth’s odds of becoming pregnant or dropping out of school at a young age, demonstrating just how important various factors of identity are on a person’s well-being. As time progressed after the start of GENESISTER, all of these elements came to focus for the staff members and the youth they were serving, and caused the program services to evolve into something much more than just pregnancy prevention and sexual health education. Now, the services that GENEISTER provides concentrate on treating racism, oppression, and inequality as a public health issue, and work to fill the gap that exists between the experiences of Latinx, bicultural, bilingual youth and the white majority population.

Thinking of race as a factor in public health issues is not an idea that is by any means new, but a pregnancy prevention program such as GENESISTER that takes this approach is unique, especially within the state of Colorado. GENESISTER’s services are oriented around

how social inequalities in health-related matters are influenced by societal conditions. Nancy Krieger effectively explains this approach to public health, stating that the issue at hand is how people “literally embody... the dynamic social, material, and ecological contexts into which we are born, develop, interact, and endeavor to live meaningful lives, thereby raising key questions about agency and accountability for health inequities” (Krieger 2006, 2–3). In other words, GENESISTER understands that being subject to greater odds of teenage pregnancies is related to a youth’s race, language, culture and socioeconomic status. They also acknowledge that preventing unintended pregnancies at a young age will allow Latinx, bicultural, and bilingual youth to live overall healthier and more successful lives.

Through their unique approach to serving Latinx youth, GENESISTER seeks not to solve the youth’s problems in isolation, but instead to produce a multidimensional understanding about why a client is experiencing a specific issue. The struggles this youth population faces are complex due to ethnicity and social positioning, and GENESISTER’s services revolve around promoting cultural understanding about these problems. Through the use of experienced staff members, a focus on empowerment, a multigenerational approach, and services that are culturally relevant, GENESISTER produces an experience for their clients that stays with them long after they leave the program and has proven successful on many different levels.

GENESISTER Staff

The GENESISTER program consists of 5 full-time staff members including a Program Coordinator, two Youth Specialists, and two Parent Specialists in addition to some volunteers. The staff for this program have specialized job duties, however they all work together to care for the same clients and their families. All GENESISTER staff define as bicultural, bilingual, and have their own unique experiences related to immigration and Latinx identity. The

GENESISTER staff hold this program together and create a powerful and lasting impact on the youth clients and their families. The GENESISTER staff go above and beyond every day to empower their youth and provide positive experiences.

Both Youth and Parent Specialists work together to support their clients. Although youth are the primary clients of this program, GENESISTER understands that in order to fully support them they must also support their parents and family members, and that is why the Parent Specialists exist. Among Youth Specialists, one staff member works with youth in Longmont and surrounding areas, and one works with youth in Boulder. These staff members are primarily responsible to the youth, with their largest role being to act as a mentor. At least once a month the Youth Specialists have a one-on-one meeting with each youth client to check in and discuss topics like events in the youth's life and where they are at with their personal goals. In addition to these scheduled meetings the Youth Specialists communicate with youth through texts, phone calls, Facebook messages, and even Snapchat messages whenever the youth feel they need support. As pregnancy prevention is a main goal of this program, Youth Specialists also often accompany clients to doctor appointments for check-ups and birth control consultations.

In addition to these modes of communication, Youth Specialists host weekly GENESISTER group meetings to help put on whatever activity or lesson is planned for that day. At group meetings they also assist the youth with their homework and work with them on their community service learning (CSL) projects. All around, Youth Specialists serve as mentors, teachers, and a support system for the youth. When they aren't meeting with the youth, Youth Specialists spend the rest of their time planning and preparing for future programming, including lesson plans, group activities, and CSL projects.

The Parent Specialists are similar to the Youth Specialists in that their everyday job duties are not limited and everything they do is to serve the parents of the youth in any way they may need. Specifically, one of the main duties of a Parent Specialist is to communicate any

necessary information that Youth Specialists obtain about their youth to the parents themselves in a way that is safe and constructive. Oftentimes a youth will experience a problem that they are unsure of how to bring up with their parent in conversation, so they are given the opportunity to share this information with their mentor and ask that the mentor tell their Parent Specialist who then informs the parent. Conflict management between youth and their parents is a large part of what GENESISTER seeks to do, and so Parent Specialists are able to work with parents and educate them to have a better understanding of their children and their needs. When Lourdes summarizes her job duties to anyone who has never heard of GENESISTER she tells them:

I'm here to support the parents of our youth in providing the best environment they're able to for their families to thrive. So I'm a tool for them to use to allow their children to have the life that they want and that they want to choose for themselves rather than a life that just happens to them.

Parent Specialists take on endless responsibilities, because to provide “the best environment” there are countless other factors that parents have to deal with besides childcare. Many GENESISTER youth come from families of low socioeconomic status, adding an additional layer to the problems that parents face when providing for their children. Many of these parents are also monolingual Spanish-speakers. There are multiple intersecting layers of disparity facing families of the GENESISTER youth, which makes it more difficult for them to access the services and support that they need.

GENESISTER Parent Specialists work to connect parents to the systems that they have been shut out of due to language, economic status, and social positioning. As Yanina told me, she considers herself a “one-stop-shop” for the parents she serves: she is able to assist them with essentially anything they need. She provides support for court hearings, medical appointments, mental health support, family support, assistance in navigating school systems, help with social service needs, and filling out various forms or applications. Not only does Yanina translate for

parents for needs such as these, but she also works to ensure that parents truly understand the concepts and how the systems work.

Specifically related to school systems, which is one of the biggest ways Yanina and Lourdes assist, the Parent Specialists are highly involved in the youth's academic endeavors and work to hold them accountable and keep parents informed. As discussed in Chapter One, many youth lack bicultural and bilingual school staff who are able to communicate with their parents. According to the GENESISTER staff, almost all of their youth have been responsible for translating for their parents at school meetings and events. Parent Specialists are able to take on this role and remove the children from conversations that they should not have to be a part of, filling a gap in services that school systems don't provide for Spanish-speaking students.

Parent Specialists frequently meet with attendance clerks, teachers, and guidance counselors to get information about the youth's grades, attendance, and behavior. In order for a youth to be enrolled in the program, the youth and their parent must sign a Release of Information form that is specific to the school year and school district that allows GENESISTER staff members to access this information. Oftentimes when a Parent Specialist provides this information to the parents of the youth it is their first time hearing about any issues that may exist. Parent Specialists will even help facilitate conversations between parents and children to address problems at school and to guide youth in adjusting their behavior. For Lourdes and Yanina, it is important that they make parents feel involved in their child's schooling and help them to not feel afraid of developing relationships with staff at schools in order to stay updated and informed. Parent Specialists fill in for the lack of bicultural and bilingual staff within the school systems, providing a service that families would not receive otherwise.

The staff requirement of being bicultural and bilingual is crucial for the services that GENESISTER provides, and as one staff member pointed out, it avoids "white savior" narratives characteristic of many services that work to promote well-being and equal opportunity for

minority populations. Daniella specifically shared with me that white savior narratives are a common theme in American culture, where “White” privileged people enter into minority communities and attempt to solve their problems. Instead of having a group of outsiders looking in at the lives of the youth and imposing their perspectives on the situation, GENESISTER hires staff who are able to speak to their clients from experience and build relationships centered around trust and understanding. When describing her interactions with youth and families during home-visits, Lourdes told me:

I think about [myself] as someone that is able to sit down, eat what they’re eating, speak what they’re speaking, understand cultural references, understand the music that is playing or the TV show that is in the background and have these conversations. It’s different than me coming in and them looking at me like, “Who are you? What are you doing here? What are you going to tell me? What are you gonna tell me I’m doing wrong?” and “I don’t know you enough yet to trust you.”

A study by Gonzalez et al. found that when school teachers engaged in at-home visits with families of their Latinx students they were able to bridge the gap between their school and the community in a similar way to that of GENESISTER Parent Specialists. In this study, teachers acted as qualitative researchers, conducting participant-observation when visiting the homes of Latinx students in order to gain a deeper understanding of students’ lives at home and to learn to think of these homes as “being rich in funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al. 1995, 443). Gonzalez et al. identified funds of knowledge as “historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household’s functioning and well-being” (Gonzalez et al. 1995, 446). Through this understanding, these school teachers were able to redirect their previous ways of conceptualizing Latinx students and their families to end their deficit thinking and to promote a sense of *confianza*, or mutual trust, between teachers and parents. The teaching methods and school services that this study found to have a positive impact on student-teacher relations are essentially what GENESISTER staff do on a daily basis. While only half of the teachers in the

study were actually Latinx themselves, all of them were bilingual and had some sort of experience working with Latinx communities, which allowed them to treat home-visits as a collaborative experience, just as the GENESISTER staff do.

Empowerment

As quoted in the beginning of this chapter, Maya Sol shared with me that despite being a sexual health education program, one of the main forces of GENESISTER's services is to empower the youth and families they serve. For this program, empowerment takes shape in a variety of ways but it ultimately means taking an approach that focuses on the strengths and assets a person already possesses and teaching them how to utilize them. When asking Maya Sol what she believes to be one of the biggest impacts that the program has, she explained:

I would say that because our communities, our families, the parents and the young people have all of this wisdom and power within them. It's already there. And I think our programming helps to unlock and release that into a modern day structure ... I think that what we are tapping into more and more through our programming is that they've got everything that they need to prepare themselves for beautiful, healthy, happier lives. And we are just a portal to unleash that within the political, social, and racial location that they're in through cultural healing.

Through this model, GENESISTER works to combat the forms of deficit-thinking that many Latinx youth face in other aspects of their lives, as discussed in Chapter One. GENESISTER focuses not on what their clients are missing, but rather what they already have and can use to be successful. Empowerment is an approach that is understood to promote personal and societal improvement by providing individuals with the necessary means to take control over their own lives in a successful way. Elvira Souza Lima and Marineusa Gazzetta point out that empowerment is "a social and an individual process" through which a person's own life is transformed, creating a larger impact on the community and other individuals within it (Lima and Gazzetta 1994, 237). The empowerment GENESISTER provides can take a variety of forms, but they focus on education, providing hope, building up resources available for youth, and

community engagement. Ultimately, GENESISTER’s services provide youth and their families with “tools in their toolbox” to be able to live happy lives.

Educationally, GENESISTER first and foremost teaches their youth about sexual health and reproductive justice. All participants are taught about different types of birth control, how to access it, and how to care for their bodies when it comes to having sexual relations. When educating youth about these topics, GENESISTER staff hold to the realization that sex and intimacy are a fact of life for many young people, meaning that it does not matter whether parents “allow” their children to engage in these types of activities. Therefore, it is important that youth have all of the necessary information to make safe, healthy, and informed decisions when it comes to sex and intimacy so that they are not engaging in risky behaviors that can result in unintended consequences such as pregnancy, STIs, or emotional trauma.

The program provides lessons and activities at weekly group meetings that focus on sexual health and reproductive justice education. Through group discussions and meeting with their mentors, youth are taught to be comfortable talking about their sexuality. Youth Specialists are able to transport youth to doctor appointments where they can learn more about birth control options. Every year each participant in this program is also responsible for identifying one reproductive justice goal for themselves, and from there they work with the Youth Specialists to achieve that goal. Finally, sexual health education is achieved through parent involvement, where GENESISTER Parent Specialists communicate the information and knowledge that youth learn to their parents, so that they can also be accustomed to the content and practices.

The other segment of GENESISTER’s educational curricula is grounded in information culturally relevant to Latinx, bicultural, and bilingual individuals. This education focuses on promoting a strong sense of cultural identity in the youth by teaching them about their heritage and how to develop the necessary skills for being successful in the non-Latinx-majority communities that they live in. For example, in the past year GENESISTER held a workshop for

youth participants about mastering the art of code-switching. As having experienced different forms of language suppression, it is important for these bicultural youth to know when to use their Spanish language skills and when to use their English language skills. Besides the language itself, the code-switching skills that GENESISTER teaches include learning how to alter one's discourse and behavior in different settings with the understanding that as a non-majority person their actions, words, and conduct are going to be more heavily scrutinized.

Cultural education also happens through dialogue and conversation between all of the youth and the staff members. Part of empowerment through education involves providing youth with a safe space to discuss common experiences with others who can share understanding with them. GENESISTER successfully engages in what Sepúlveda calls *Acompañamiento* (accompaniment), a pedagogy based on an understanding that wellness comes from developing relationships with others who share similar experiences and who can provide support in one's discovery of identity and positioning. Sepúlveda writes that *acompañamiento* is about “forging relationships, providing support, and building community. It's an organic, hybrid cultural form and practice of mobility, settlement and adaptation borne out of a deep sense of empathy, a place where people [come] together to dialogue about their most pressing concerns related to displacement and exclusion, to support each other” (Sepúlveda 2011, 568).

In Sepúlveda's study, *acompañamiento* was achieved when educators in a public school acted as “border brokers” and created spaces for struggling Latinx youth to get together to talk about the realities of their own lives. In this process “they engaged youth in the pursuit of answers to questions of daily struggle and survival, and co-constructed knowledge useful to people in everyday conduct of their lives” (Sepúlveda 2018, 66). This strategy focused on dialogue and community mirrors the environment that GENESISTER creates to educate their youth. At group meetings, GENESISTER staff and youth come together to voice their

experiences and learn from one another, simultaneously giving and receiving knowledge based in a shared reality of struggle, belonging, and identity.

This process of producing cultural knowledge and helping youth find their way can be healing for the staff members as well. Maya Sol shared with me that through her conversations with the youth she has been able to identify the trauma she has experienced due to racism and oppression while growing up as a Latinx person in the U.S. and has found peace in being able to share her experiences and learn from them while also teaching others how she managed. Information exchange and education within the GENESISTER program possesses an element of reciprocity, where staff teach youth about their own personal experiences and at the same time youth are able to teach the staff. These forms of culturally relevant education ultimately work to promote cultural identity within youth and staff as well, contributing toward the ways staff conceptualize their own biculturalism. Through these practices, GENESISTER focuses on applying a healing centered engagement approach to their program and the youth and families they serve (Ginwright 2019).

Along these lines, Sonya Alemán also points that “as members of families who endure the convergence of racism, classism, nativism, linguicism, and xenophobia in their daily lives, a close-knit support system is a survival mechanism to navigate these conditions” (Alemán 2018, 187). Here Alemán is talking about Latinx students who are considering higher education and how oftentimes they choose colleges that are closer to familial support. For many Latinx individuals who face these problems, it is essential that they have a support system full of individuals who have shared similar experiences and are able to sympathize and offer guidance. Although not actually a family system, GENESISTER does create a space where this type of support is possible through group discussion and mutual understanding, providing an additional network of allies that Latinx youth can use to learn more about how to handle their own life circumstances.

The cultural education that GENESISTER provides also teaches youth about the social and political realities of being a Latinx person in the United States. Youth in this program have a heightened sense of awareness of the additional hardships they face as minorities, meaning they are able to recognize when and how they are being treated unfairly compared to those around them. During the focus group, when asking the youth to come up with words they use to describe the term bicultural, some of the words that came up were oppression, racism, discrimination, and microaggressions. Going into deeper conversations with the youth about these terms, I realized that they are more aware of their own social positionings than I expected, likely due to the knowledge they have gained through GENESISTER's programming.

The culturally relevant education that youth gain from their participation in this program allows them to start to make sense of the issues they face and to understand that it is not always their fault that certain things happen to them, but rather they can point to the larger systems that may have put them there. To avoid producing a victim mentality with this type of information, GENESISTER teaches their youth to possess this awareness but not allow it to negatively impact the way they view or interact with other people in their community who have different experiences than them as non-Latinx individuals. Beyond just awareness, GENESISTER youth are taught effective ways to take action when experiencing any of these issues in order to remedy the situation. For example, one staff member shared with me that when her youth feel that they are being treated unfairly or differently than non-Latinx student by their teachers she advises them to avoid talking back to the teachers, which might produce additional misunderstanding and conflict. Instead, Daniella tells the youth to record specific experiences and to share them with school administrators with the hope that they will be able to take further action. Daniella told me:

Any time they [the youth] do the "me versus you" mentality I'm like we can't push away white people. In order for racism to not be we need white people. Same thing with like homophobia, we can't push away straight people. We need each other, everyone needs each other. So how do we have these conversations where we can get on the same page?

Maya Sol also expressed the need for “white allies” in the fight for racial equality. The GENESISTER staff see the need to teach the youth to understand that everybody must take part in this change, not just Latinx people. Overall, this approach helps youth to be able to understand and conceptualize their social positioning and point to the ways it is impacted by larger systemic forces, but at the same time they do not allow their youth to distance themselves from the greater community. GENESISTER’s cultural education helps participants to learn how to work alongside people and systems within their community to promote positive change for all.

Similar to the explicit education that GENESISTER provides through lesson plans, discussions, and activities, this program empowers youth by providing them with the skills needed to have more understanding about other people and their life circumstances. When speaking with youth about troubles in their lives, staff members focus on working with the youth to break down and analyze all aspects of the problem. Both Youth and Parent Specialists are able to offer their clients an additional perspective that youth may not receive from their family, friends, or teachers, and this is effective in teaching youth how to possess compassion and understanding for others and to react in a proactive way. Daniella shared that one youth she worked with was experiencing some relationship struggles with her mother and to help this frustrated youth she tried her best to point out all of the different angles of the story. As she told me:

I think my approach has always been helping them to see their situation. Even metaphorically like looking at what they’re going through in this one sphere and saying okay, your mom has a lot of depression, she is going through a lot right now. Maybe she isn’t seeking help because in the Latinx culture we think mental health is only for the crazy people. So I bring a lot of the cultural aspects as to maybe why the parent is acting that way whether it be economic, immigration status, or whatever it is ... I think the best way is helping them see it in front of them so when they get back into it they feel a little bit more relaxed like “OK, maybe it isn’t me its them” and also like “this sucks, but its also temporary.”

As this example shows, the goal of GENESISTER staff members is not to take a side when it comes to relational problems that youth experience, but rather to provide the youth with an

outside perspective. With this information and understanding in mind, youth feel empowered to make decisions themselves about how they want to view and react to a situation of conflict.

One of the most inspiring forms of empowerment that I found GENESISTER to provide for their youth is hope. Many of the youth in this program often do not feel capable of achieving certain standards because of how they see the past and the means that they have been given. Many of these Latinx youth have parents who work in low-paying jobs, siblings who are struggling to care for their own children, grandparents who cannot afford healthcare, and other friends and acquaintances who share the same problems. For a young person who may feel discriminated against, has too many additional responsibilities to be able to even focus on school or college, or maybe doesn't feel they have the same opportunities as other youth around them, it can be difficult to set goals and aspirations that go above anything else they have already known. At GENESISTER staff show their youth that they are capable of achieving the things they dream of, it may just take extra work, determination, and community support.

In a piece by Kathryn Goldfarb, her research demonstrates how “experience [is] a guide for action” (Goldfarb 2016, 187) meaning an individual's present or future are impacted by their past experiences, but in unique ways. Goldfarb also demonstrates the importance of various social ties and systems of support in the life a marginalized individual and how people can be impacted negatively by a disconnect from these resources. GENESISTER works to navigate the past and present experiences of their youth participants in order to provide a support system that allows them to move past these restraints and still live a life full of opportunity. By recognizing the role of lived experience in the future development of an individual, GENESISTER seeks to provide hope of the possibility of overcoming hardship through support and community.

One way the GENESISTER staff can provide hope to their youth is through telling of their own experiences of overcoming hardship. As Lourdes told me:

I think a huge reason that this program makes an impacting impression is the reflection of the mentors, you know I'm the parents' mentor and the Youth Specialist is the youths' mentor, showing them who we are and that we look like them. I say look, like my parents were undocumented, I grew up in poverty throughout young adulthood and nobody paid for my college. Yet let me show you how real that could be for you, for your kids. How real that can be for your community.

It can be empowering for youth to see a person who is like them and shares similar experiences, but who has achieved success in life. Understanding that you are capable of more than you limit yourself to is a crucial step towards achieving success. Maya Sol told me:

How we have structured our program to create that identity formation they [youth] need to be able to see it and experience it. And so when they're able to witness somebody who looks like them, speaks like them, and has a similar immigrant experience we get on a real level with them and they can begin to see that in themselves.

With knowledge and hope instilled in them, GENESISTER then provides youth and their families with the resources to be able to put their goals into action. One resource GENESISTER provides is that of after-school tutoring and assistance with college applications. The first half of most of GENESISTER's weekly group meetings is spent doing homework, studying for exams, and filling out college or scholarship applications. This form of academic support is something that Latinx youth may not feel they are able to receive at school or are too afraid to ask for, which is why it is important that they receive this resource in an environment that they are comfortable in.

Another way that GENESISTER successfully empowers youth and connects them to useful resources is by promoting higher levels of engagement with the community.

GENESISTER staff recognize that as ethnic and cultural minorities within Boulder County, a relatively wealthy and privileged community, their Latinx youth are oftentimes shut out of their community and do not get to reap the benefits that it has to offer. When discussing the Boulder County community and the Latinx community's relationship to that Lourdes described it as "living and working in the perimeters."

Working here in Boulder with my community and the families that I work with I hear it even more the way they're treated and the way that they've learned to navigate just the perimeters of Boulder and that's how I can most accurately present it. They're not accessing community centers, Pearl Street, or other spaces, they're literally living on the edges. Where some of our clients live in the trailer homes you could drive down the street and never see a trailer home here in Boulder because they're so hidden by trees and literally physically hidden behind these huge expensive condos. So every time I drive to a family's home I think that's literally how it must feel to live in Boulder and be a person of color, a bicultural person, a Latinx person. You're just shielded. You're here but you're not really there, you're not really welcome.

The GENESISTER program sees how being disconnected from the greater Boulder County community, quite literally through language and physical location, has an impact on the well-being on Latinx individuals and their success. This understanding is similar to Setha Low's concept of *spatialized culture*, an approach to researching communities that focuses on how inequality can be seen within the everyday spaces and places that individuals reside in (Low 2011). More specifically, Low writes that "space and spatial relations yield insight into unacknowledged biases, prejudice, and inequalities that frequently go unexamined" (Low 2011, 391). The spatial relations outlined by Lourdes in this example demonstrate how in the same way that these trailer homes are hidden away by large expensive condos, so too are individuals from the Latinx community hidden behind those who represent the affluent majority population. In this sense, the physical space where Latinx people reside in Boulder County effectively disempowers them and creates distance between them and the greater community.

To combat this, GENESISTER youth engage in what is called a Community Service Learning (CSL) project, where they are given the opportunity to work together to come up with an idea for a project and execute it. To describe the CSL projects, Maya Sol said:

They are all with a culturally grounded positive youth development model, so our youth identify an issue or where they see a disparity, they will research it, and then they create a plan to disrupt or tackle that issue with a timeline and then also a celebration at the end.

CSL projects have taken a variety of forms throughout the years of GENESISTER's existence, but they ultimately function to show youth that they are capable of connecting themselves to

various spaces in the community and that they have something to give back, demonstrating the value that they hold for those around them. Some CSL projects involve volunteering at different organizations throughout Boulder County, meeting with local government representatives to learn more about relevant policies, participating in youth workshops, and more. In 2018 the youth teamed up with a local radio station to write and record their own personal stories of immigration and identity, sharing their experiences with the community in hopes of creating mutual understanding.

By giving youth the means and opportunities to engage with various organizations and groups of people in their community, they are taught that they do not need to be afraid of getting involved and can actually play a larger role than they imagined. The CSL projects empower youth to think about issues in the community that matter to them and then they must imagine ways to work towards alleviating social problems in a creative way.

Multigenerational Approach

GENESISTER takes a multigenerational approach to helping youth. In Chapter Two I discussed the role of family members in the development of a bicultural identity and more specifically a Latinx cultural identity. The family members in a Latinx youth's life are significant, especially when one takes into consideration the fact that many Latinx youth are living in the United States due to the decisions of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. For GENESISTER, a multigenerational approach involves an understanding that the problems of youth participants exist within the context of life at home and within a kinship network, rather than viewing the youth as isolated individuals. GENESISTER provides direct services for the parents and family members of their youth clients to facilitate communication

between the two groups. By focusing on relational development, GENESISTER creates results that last with their clients long after they finish the program.

This understanding is similar to that of Kathryn Goldfarb's in another piece of hers where she argues that "social relationships *literally* matter in shaping subjectivity and well-being" (Goldfarb 2019, 3). This research demonstrates how oftentimes young people will embody their past experiences and interpersonal relationships, showing how an individual's well-being is inherently dependent upon kinship relations. In line with this argument, GENESISTER pays close attention to the relationships in a youth's life, whether that be with a parent, grandparent, sibling, or other caretaker, understanding that those relationships will hold a large impact on the well-being of a youth individual.

In my interview with Maya Sol she pointed out the significance of having an intergenerational understanding in the work that she does. Specifically, she spoke to the fact that we know scientifically that trauma exists within the DNA, and she believes that so too can resiliency. In other words, GENESISTER's services are oriented around the understanding that the lived experiences of a youth's parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and even ancestors are written into their own experiences and that it is important to know and understand this when trying to conceptualize one's own identity. Acknowledging peoples' past experiences in making an individual who they are today is just one way that GENESISTER takes a multigenerational approach, and it is this understanding that much of their mission is based on.

When discussing the CSL project where youth got to write and read a personal story of theirs on a radio show, Maya Sol said:

[I have seen] a big switch in empowerment whenever we connect back to roots. So like the example of story telling. Story telling is actually a traditional practice where we come from. We learned our history from our ancestors from the stories that they told which is very different from how stories are now either believed in or shared. A lot of it is through academic writing or by whoever has the power to write things down and then either kill off or burn other forms of history telling. So, to reclaim a lot of things that are culturally

relevant to us as Latinas I see one of the key pieces for empowerment is to retake what has been taken and utilize it now.

This CSL project is just one example of the ways that the education and activities GENESISTER provide encourage youth to connect back to their “roots” and talk about their family’s past. The youth in this program are given the opportunity to learn from the experiences and stories of past family members and then think about how it applies to their own lives.

GENESISTER staff understand that in order for youth to experience positive change in their lives, their families must also be involved: an example of the holistic methodologies of the program. Youth Specialists’ engagement in helping navigate family conflict, discussed above, is one key example. There are many ways conflict is managed, but ultimately GENESISTER staff offer a form of mitigation that fosters a safe and healthy environment in which everyone involved feels comfortable and empowered to make decisions. In their multigenerational approach, Parent Specialists also work with parents and grandparents. When describing this component, Maya Sol told me:

When we work with a young person the expectation is that we’re giving them and arming them with the skills and tools to negotiate and navigate their generational relationships too. So we have our Parent Specialists who work with a parent or grandparent. So as we’re working with the young people we’re also prepping our adults to be able to navigate and continue to engage in these conversations which is promoting that sustainability beyond us being there.

In this sense, equal effort is placed on supporting the parents or grandparents of youth participants with an understanding that this support will then translate back into the youth themselves. By providing parents with additional support they will be given tools and skills that will be useful to them long after their child has left the program. The support parents receive from this program can impact other children or family members besides only the GENESISTER participant, increasing the effect that this program has on the community.

Parent Specialists offer tools that focus on helping parents have positive relationships with their children and also to be able to navigate various systems within their communities.

These “tools” can include knowledge about how to schedule an appointment with a school liaison, how to enroll a child in preschool, how to obtain information about one’s rights and privileges on the internet, or available public services. As youth who tend to be more exposed to mainstream U.S. culture and values than their parents, there are oftentimes tensions between the needs and desires of the youth versus the needs and desires of the parents for their youth. GENESISTER’s multigenerational approach hones in on those types of tensions and works to promote understanding among all parties involved.

In 2018, no GENESISTER participants became pregnant, 99% of them remained enrolled in school, and over 50% of them participated in a service learning/volunteer opportunity where they contributed 400+ volunteer hours (“Boulder County GENESISTER Program” 2019). Quantitative statistics such as these are an easy way to measure the success of this program, but what is impossible to uncover is the impact that this program has had on a multitude of program graduates as well as their friends, families, and the community. Each staff member I interviewed shared at least one personal experience of feeling that they were able to make a difference in a youth’s life, whether it meant the individual got accepted into college, experienced a life transformation, was able to navigate a difficult conversation with a family member, or received a big scholarship that would allow them to attend college.

GENESISTER has evolved into a program that encapsulates much more than just pregnancy prevention and sexual health awareness. The space that they have created through their staff members and services provided is a place where youth can find comfort in their cultural identity as well as the tools and opportunities to do more with their lives than might have been previously available.

Conclusion - Where Do We Go from Here?

I just want to give a shout out to our youth and our families, they're amazing. And to the staff who are in it full heartedly and that give it all that they've got. They put themselves into their work! Through their experiences and through our team we continue to resonate in that hope and that sustainability. We incorporate all of those pieces of wellness that we expect from our young people and with our staff as well. We walk the talk, we have difficult conversations, we have moments of grief, of sadness, of anger, of rage and of love and all of that is what we need to do this work.

-Maya Sol

The findings of this study make it clear that the future of the GENESISTER program is bright and the impact they have on Latinx youth within Boulder County is significant. Already throughout the duration of this research the GENESISTER staff and youth have been working together to determine where the program will expand and alter its services and changes are approaching that I will discuss below.

Limitations and Further Research

During my research, one of my biggest struggles came from feeling that the scope of this study needed to be larger than the time and resources I had available. I had approximately one year from the start of this research to the end to receive IRB approval, collect my data, analyze it, write my thesis, and complete a thesis defense. My data collection plan initially involved conducting participant-observation at five to ten GENESISTER group meetings, a focus group with youth participants, individual interviews with youth participants, interviews with GENESISTER staff, and also group interviews with the parents of the GENESISTER youth participants. I quickly realized that my data collection methods would need to be altered in order for me to complete my research on time, and also in order to accommodate the IRB's requests.

Working to stick to the principles surrounding community-based research, when it came to my IRB proposal it was essential that I collaborated with the GENESISTER Program Coordinator as well as various other Health Planners with Boulder County Public Health to

ensure my research plan aligned with their policies and procedures to protect participants. Although this cooperation was important for the ethics behind my research, involving other parties ended up adding onto the time it took for my study to receive IRB approval, which pushed back the timeline of my research. As a result, I was unable to conduct as much participant-observation at group meetings and events as I would have liked to, which diminished my capacity to develop deeper relationships with my participants and to gather data that would be from a more informal setting. In addition, my time constraints also made it more difficult to schedule individual interviews with the youth participants, and I ended up only getting to conduct one focus group with the youth.

I also had intended to conduct participant-observation at group meetings as well as analyze certain portions of the GENESISTER case-files that they maintain for each of their clients. Again, due to the above time constraints I was not able to receive IRB approval until early spring, a time for the GENESISTER program that is very busy due to graduation and the end of the school year. As soon as school ends the program then takes on a very different structure where there are not as many regularly scheduled group meetings and much of their programming involves more social activities for the youth. Since I was not able to collect any data until this time, my ability to conduct participant-observation at weekly group meetings was greatly constrained, and my main interaction with the youth ended up just being at the focus group.

Another constraint that limited my data collection was due to my inability to speak Spanish. I had hoped to speak to parents of the GENESISTER youth to learn how they understand the program and its impact. I also would have been able to ask questions about their own bicultural stories, providing me with additional context into the lives of the youth and the reasoning behind their cultural identification. However, since many of them are Spanish-speaking and know little to no English this became difficult. I had hoped to recruit

GENESISTER staff members or other translators to help facilitate group interviews with these parents, but again I was limited by the time I had available to recruit this assistance, get IRB approval for it, and schedule the interviews. In the end I made the decision to cut out this portion of data collection.

Another specific problem I ran into that constrained my data collection methods had to do with the informed consent process. Specifically, since part of my subject population for this study includes youth between the ages of 12-17 there was a need for me to also obtain parental permission prior to their participation in the study. Again, since I do not speak Spanish and am unable to communicate with many of the parents of the youth I needed to depend on the GENESISTER staff to assist me with this. Initially my plan was to have the staff members do the recruitment for this study by reading a description of my research to parents during home-visits and then obtaining a signature from them granting permission for their child to participate. Due to IRB concerns, any person obtaining consent for a study on human subjects must also complete the IRB's CITI training. To not inconvenience the GENESISTER staff I decided that I needed to figure out a different method of collecting parental permission.

In the end I decided to create a packet of information that was given to each youth participant to take home to their parents so that they could read about the study and then decide themselves if they wanted to sign the provided permission form. I then attended a GENESISTER group meeting to give the youth an explanation of my research, hand out the informational packets, and ask the youth that they take them home for their parents to look over and sign if they are okay with the youth participating in the study. This method of informed consent turned out to work fine, but due to time constraints and canceled meetings I was only able to attend one GENESISTER meeting prior to the focus group to talk about my research and recruit participants. I still ended up with 17 youth at the focus group, but it is possible that this number was limited due to these complications.

Overall, throughout this process I found that working collaboratively with another organization to conduct research had its limitations, specifically because I was not always able to stick to my own personal timeline and I had to work with the means I was given. What was important for me was to understand these constraints and learn when I needed to move forward and focus on the next piece of my research. I had to get over my feelings of discontent about what I was able to do and realize that even if this study only touches the surface of this topic, it is still useful. After collecting all of my data I came to recognize that the information I obtained was rich and powerful and would be purposeful. With this understanding, I still have thought about the ways in which future research on this program and this topic could be conducted.

The parents and family members of the GENESISTER youth play a crucial role in this program's services and so to interview them would add a new important angle to this study. Learning about how parents of GENESISTER youth feel that the program's services have helped them, their child, and their family as a whole would be very informing as to the impact that GENESISTER holds. In the larger interest of studying bicultural identity, speaking to the parents of the youth participants also would have allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how the youth conceptualize their own biculturalism in relation to the experiences of their parents. In a sense, the parents' own cultural stories of immigration and identity would act as a historical reference for the youth participants, situating their own experiences within a larger framework of understanding. As I have come to see throughout this research, Latinx individuals all have varying experiences with their own cultural identity in the United States, so by interviewing these parents I would have been able to expand my understanding of what it means to be bicultural for a larger number of individuals. Knowing more about the Latinx community than I did before, I realize now that to do research with these parents one would need to possess Spanish-speaking skills to gain the trust that is needed to gather quality data. Previous discussions in this paper demonstrate how valuable kinship networks are for bicultural Latinx

individuals, so I feel that turning to the parents of these youth would be the next most important step if one were to continue this research.

More time spent with the GENESISTER youth in general would have greatly benefitted my research. By spending additional time with GENESISTER youth at meetings and events, I might have been able to develop deeper relationships with them that would have provided me with more information about their lives that wasn't just collected from a formal interview setting. I also feel that if I had been able to conduct individual interviews with some of the youth I would have been able to get more specific details about their lives and experiences rather than just information that the youth as a whole generally believe to be true. The individual interviews that I conducted with staff members ended up being highly informative and I believe that the one-on-one setting allowed them the time and space to be able to open up with me and share about the details of their experiences. In the future, I would love to be able to have this type of time with the GENESISTER youth to hear more about their individual experiences.

Finally, I have also considered that it would be equally important to spend more time researching the school systems that are in question to gain an additional perspective on the experiences of Latinx youth in Boulder County. Specifically, given additional time and resources I would like to look into the actual policies and curricula within Boulder County school districts to see what their approach is for the education of Latinx youth and then compare that to what the literature says about school systems. It would also be useful to conduct additional interviews with the teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators who have worked with GENESISTER Parent Specialists and interact with Latinx youth on a daily basis.

The Future of GENESISTER

As a program that is ever-evolving, GENESISTER's staff members are constantly brainstorming ways to improve their services and to create a bigger impact for the youth and the

community that they serve. One question that I asked staff members near the end of our interviews was to share with me how, in an ideal world, the GENESISTER program could support Latinx youth in the fullest possible capacity. The answers that I received varied, but ultimately the message that I got from the staff was simply that they need to be providing “more.” One of GENESISTER’s ultimate goals is to expand the reach of their services to provide support for more Latinx youth and their families.

Daniella shared that she thinks there specifically needs to be more Youth Specialists on their team so that they can provide more support for their youth and also so that they can take on additional youth clients. She explained to me that at times she feels spread thin, serving up to 35 clients at once. Ideally the Youth Specialists will see each youth once a month whether that be at a group meeting or a one-on-one meeting. Many of their youth have expressed that they wish to meet with Youth Specialists more often, sometimes requesting to meet and talk 2-3 times a week because they need the additional support. Having additional Youth Specialists will ultimately strengthen the impact that they are able to make on each individual participant while also expanding the number of participants they are able to serve.

Near the end of August, Maya Sol emailed me to let me know that starting in January of 2020 the program will be transitioning its name from GENESISTER to GENERATIONS. With this new name, the program will be expanding its eligibility requirements to allow any Latinx identified youth who can become pregnant to participate in the program whether or not they are the sibling or child of a teen mother. This name change was a collaborative effort on behalf of the program staff and the youth themselves to create a program that is more inclusive, removing the gender binary, and welcoming to a wider population of Latinx youth in Boulder County. Demonstrating the importance of their multigenerational approach, the name GENERATIONS shows that the impact of this program extends past individual improvement and successfully impacts the community and those involved in it.

GENERATIONS will also include a new and culturally grounded curricula known as *Xinachtli* (“Xinachtli” 2017). The adoption of this new curricula will be the first time that this program can officially label itself as development program for bicultural youth and take on educational practices that are intended for that population. *Xinachtli* is “a comprehensive and culturally-competent bicultural youth character development process designed to provide teen girls the guidance for a healthy development into adulthood. Based on indigenous principles of the individual’s interconnectedness to the family, the community, and the nation...” (“Xinachtli” 2017). Going off of this model, GENERATIONS will be able to rebrand themselves as a program that focuses on pregnancy prevention and sexual health education with an equal focus on developing cultural identity and well-being within bicultural Latinx youth.

Throughout the previous three chapters I often use the term “success” to describe the impact that GENESISTER seeks to have on their youth clients and their families. I make connections between the services that GENESISTER provides and the intended effect on the lives of their participants, that effect being that they are successful and happy. As I outlined in the Introduction of this thesis, the language that GENESISTER staff use to describe their services and the impact of them can sound as though it is in line with common neoliberal discourses. Even a term such as “success” can sound inherently neoliberal when one thinks about the self-maximization and individualistic motives that may be necessary to achieve well-being in one’s own life, but the success I talk about here is not of that variety.

Many common conceptions of “success” involve things such as wealth, popularity, or achieving the highest of standards in whatever it is one does. In contrast, GENESISTER’s definition of success does not center around the need to achieve superiority or material goods in order to live a happy life and it does not mean that there is one single standard of achievement they strive to reach for each of their participants. Rather, success for GENESISTER means that they are able to provide youth and their families with something that they did not possess before

that they can use now to better themselves, their health, their relationships, their community, and more. Here, success involves a broader, more holistic understanding of what well-being means in the life of an individual person and how this fluctuates greatly from person to person.

Success in GENESISTER's terms means that an individual does not have to be limited by circumstances they may have once felt limited by, because they possess the means necessary to be able to accomplish their goals, big or small. For one GENESISTER youth success might mean that they graduate high school or stop arguing as much with a family member, while for a different youth it might mean they attend college and get hired into their dream job. No matter what it is that a youth wants or desires, the achievement of this is understood as successful as long as that life is a choice and not just a life that is handed to them because of outside circumstances. Despite experiences related to discrimination, suppression, economic hardship, relationships full of conflict, or loss of hope, GENESISTER shows their youth and families that those circumstances don't have to be limiting, and offers them the support for challenges to be revitalizing.

GENESISTER provides a program and a community that is radically oriented towards producing better opportunities for its Latinx youth and families through a holistic perspective and a focus on community development. Coming out of this research experience, I see how strongly the Latinx participants in this study are united in difference. Their stories of coming to be in a place and time that is not always supportive of their journeys are inspiring yet disconcerting. For a bicultural individual life can consist of a constant battle for balance, working to maintain one's true sense of identity among a multitude of factors that work to strip them of that identity in order to succeed. For a county public health program, GENESISTER's services are incredibly unique and impactful, demonstrating the importance of supporting Latinx, bicultural, and bilingual youth in their growth and development.

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