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Navigating Belonging in the Face of Exclusion: Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents' Perspective from the Suburban Midwest

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Navigating Belonging in the Face of Exclusion:

Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents' Perspectives from the Suburban Midwest

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Guadalupe López Hernández

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Navigating Belonging in the Face of Exclusion:

Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents' Perspective from the Suburban Midwest

by

Guadalupe López Hernández

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Carola E. Suárez-Orozco, Chair

Latinx immigrants are changing the landscape of the suburban Midwest (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Troche-Rodriguez, 2009). American society, however, has received these immigrants with racist and xenophobic attitudes (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). These responses are part of a long-standing history of oppression, excluding racial and ethnic minorities in the United States (Lee, 2019). Growing evidence suggests that exclusionary efforts signal messages to Latinx adolescents about who belongs (and who does not) in the United States (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2021). This 2-study dissertation qualitatively explored how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents from the suburban Midwest reacted and adapted to the national context of exclusion, including systematic national anti-immigrant exclusionary policies and toxic rhetoric and implication to their social belonging. Participants resided across fourteen different Midwestern suburban communities. Study 1

draws from a risk and resilience model and semi-structured interviews to understand the settings Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents ($N = 41$; $M_{age} = 18.85$) experience exclusion and the coping strategies they used to deal with (or defend) against exclusion. Findings reveal exclusive spaces in their distal and proximal contexts with some of the most hurtful experiences in their proximal context and the use of avoidant and active coping strategies. Grounded in intergroup relations and an integrative risk and resilience model, study 2 drew upon semi-structured interviews with Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents living in primarily White suburban neighborhoods ($N = 29$; $M_{age} = 18.65$) to examine spaces of belonging adolescents sought and the strategies they used to restore a sense of belonging in White-centered spaces. Results captured potential spaces of belonging, such as church and sports teams. This study also illustrated four profiles that highlighted the strategies adolescents developed to address thwarted belonging and navigate Whiteness in the White suburban Midwest. Overall, these two studies have implications for understanding how to address systems that need to be dismantled to foster a sense of belonging for these adolescents.

This dissertation of Guadalupe López Hernández is approved.

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2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the 41 adolescents that shared their stories with me; I will forever be grateful for trusting me with the intimate details of your lives. Your stories will shed light on the experiences of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents in the suburban Midwest. I hope you agree that I created a fair and honest story about your experience and community. Lastly, I hope that through your stories, I can inspire others to create spaces of belonging that are welcoming and inclusive and embrace who you are.

This work would be impossible without the encouragement, guidance, and support from mentors, colleagues, family, and friends. To my committee members Drs. Carola Suárez-Orozco, Rashmita Mistry, Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, and William Perez, thank you for the continuous feedback and for constantly reminding me to center on adolescents' voices. To my advisor Dr. Carola Suarez-Orozco- I cannot begin to express my gratitude for all you have done for me throughout these six years. You taught me the importance of addressing the needs of my community, being empathic with myself while navigating the long process of graduate school, and how to help others be as passionate as us about the needs of immigrant-origin adolescents. Thank you for helping me find my way as a scholar and young woman navigating a new city.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"One of the hardest days for me in high school was after the election." Paola, a 20-year-old, reported the various times she heard White peers chant "go back to your country" toward Latinx students in her suburban high school. I captured Paola's powerful quote in descriptive memos I wrote after each interview. But sadly, this quote from Paola was far from unique. While doing the research for this dissertation, memo after memo reflected exclusionary experiences of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents growing up in the suburban Midwest. For example:

Unexpectedly the participant started to cry. She needed a minute as she spoke about the injustice of staff members dressing as a "typical Mexican" and an ICE agent during Halloween. The school did nothing about it [memo about a 23- year old female]

You can feel the extreme pressure he feels to fit into American culture." He talks about the need to connect and be accepted by White peers at school. He feels his undocumented status is holding him back from being accepted in American culture. [memo about an 18-year-old male]

Talking about her experiences in her Catholic school triggered old emotions. Her tone, body, and demeanor changed as she spoke of the 'racist nuns' in her White suburban middle school. [memo about a 23-year-old female]

It was painful to hear the countless stories of exclusion his family endured. And still, he kept saying "at least they are respectful" because they said good morning, but earlier they had told his dad 'to go back to their country' [memo of a 15-year-old male]

Writing these memos was important for making sense of my data and understanding the lived experiences of these adolescents as they came of age under the effects of systematic oppressive immigration policies in the White suburban Midwest (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). But most importantly,

I was able to get to the heart of the 41 stories shared with me because I was once one of these adolescents growing up in the White suburban Midwest navigating Whiteness and an undocumented status.

Navigating my Sense of Belonging in the White Suburban Midwest

Growing up in a suburban school like these adolescents, I felt the need to wear the "White mask," defined as enforcing the culture of your oppressor (Fanon, 1952). I moved to the White suburban Midwest from Mexico when I was six years old. At the time, I was too young to understand that I was being taught to reject my culture and prioritize Whiteness to be included in American culture, *possibly*. During my first years in grammar school, I was signaled by White peers, teachers, and neighbors that my name was "too Mexican," to learn English and hide any traces of my culture during lunch. So as I got older, I was no longer Lupita; I was Lupe. My parents and I pushed myself and my teachers to get me out of ESL by the fourth grade. I begged my mother to make me peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch. These efforts, however, were not enough to feel accepted by White peers and teachers.

My journey for belonging continued during my adolescence. I finally understood what it meant to be undocumented when I was 14, as I entered an even more White and affluent high school. I finally realized that American society was not welcoming of ethnic and racial minorities, mainly those who are Latinx and undocumented people like me. I was constantly reminded of these exclusive messages at my suburban school. For example, Black and Latinx students were always placed in lower-level classes, rarely highlighted in the yearbook (unless you were the tokenized football player), and we were picked last in school projects and at gym.

But I knew I had to survive four years of this; I still had to see White peers in some classes, gym, and in the halls. So I observed what the popular kids (AKA White students) were doing and

wearing. I understood that I needed to act, behave and dress like White peers. I forced my mom to buy me clothes we clearly could not afford as a working-class family. Again, I was barely acknowledged by my White peers. I was excluded even with my overpriced Uggs and North Face jacket. My adolescence was filled with many rejections like this from White peers and from White teachers that had low expectations of my community and me.

It was not until I moved into higher education that I found a safe haven. The Latinx Resource Center housed an undocumented student group where I met Latinx peers and femtors that affirmed and accepted me. Upon reflection, I realized that my thwarted sense of belonging derived from growing up in the White suburban Midwest. In undergraduate and graduate school, I learned about anti-immigrant sentiment and practices fueled by systemic racism and xenophobia. I also realized I was not the only adolescent that endured these experiences as I worked with other undocumented and Latinx adolescents throughout my years of research. This was when I decided to dedicate my dissertation and career to improving the sense of belonging of those excluded by oppressive laws, practices, and racist attitudes.

Research Site

My dissertation data was collected across 18 suburban communities outside of a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. There is a diverse population in the larger metropolitan area close to where the data was collected, including 31.4% white, 29.9% Latino, 28.7% Black, and 6.9% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The Latino population has grown drastically in the city, as there has been an influx of new immigrants in the last decade. Various vibrant Latinx communities in the city have been maintained; however, many of these communities are experiencing increasing gentrification. Latinx residents, as a result, have started to move into suburban communities outside the city.

The suburban research sites were located 45 to 70 miles from the city center. Most participants live near commuter rail train stations, which provide access between the city and the surrounding suburbs across six counties. The racial, ethnic, and social composition varied across the research sites in the suburbs. The average income across the research sites was $79,233 ranging from $44,771 to $116,083. Most suburban communities were primarily White and Middle-class neighborhoods (*N*= 14). The remaining suburban communities were historically white communities that have seen a rapid growth of the Latinx population (*N*=2), and the rest have transitioned to a majority Latinx neighborhood (*N*=2). Participants lived across three counties, with many residing in LaSalle County, with an estimated 66.3 % White, 14.5 % Latinx, 12.6% Asian, and 5.3% African American residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021) and an average household income of $94,930. There were three types of neighborhood communities, including those with a (1) high percentage of White residents, (2) growing presence of Latinx families, and (3) majority Latinx presence.

Milford illustrates a suburban community with a high percentage of White residents, with 6.9% Latinx, 87.2% White, 2.6% Asian, and 1.3% African American residents and an average household income of $116,083. Dayton showcased a neighborhood profile with notable demographic shifts with 20.6% Latinx, 63.1% White, 11.2% Asian, 3.3% African American and an average household income of $83,495. Lastly, Fox point is a profile of a suburban neighborhood that has shifted to a majority Latinx community in recent years. They have about 77.6% Latinx, 17.1% White, 0.8% Asian, and 4.2 % African American residents, with an average household income of $53,596 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Please see Table 1.

Overview of Studies

As humans, we are continually asking ourselves, "Do I belong here?" (Walton & Brady 2007, p. 272), which derives from our human motivation to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The importance of belonging has been identified as an overall indicator of better health and life

satisfaction (e.g., Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009). Developing a sense of belonging during adolescence can be vital to supporting a positive transition from childhood to adulthood (Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983; Newman, Lohman & Newman, 2007). On the other hand, when humans experience profound alienation, isolation, and rejection, they are reminded they no longer belong in their context (Crisp, 2010). Threats to belonging can disrupt adolescents' development, negatively influencing their mental health and identity formation (e.g., Eisenberger, 2012; Gerber and Wheeler, 2009).

While adolescence is a time of increased vulnerability to peer rejection due to extensive biological changes (Platt et al., 2013), socially stigmatized adolescents are "systematically devalued and excluded" (Abrego, 2006; Major & Eccleston, 2004, p. 64). Research suggests that the national context of exclusion, which includes systematic national anti-immigrant exclusionary policies and toxic rhetoric, actively excludes Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents across their contexts (Abrego, 2006; Enriquez, 2016; Yoshikawa, Suárez-Orozco & Gonzales, 2017). These efforts undoubtedly question their social belonging (e.g., Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013; Crisp, 2010).

Latinx immigrant families are increasingly facing exclusionary efforts, especially in the aftermath of the 2016 elections (e.g., Nichols et al., 2017). Studies have found that Latinx immigrant-origin youth reacted negatively (e.g., with fear and anger) to President Trump's presidency (Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Limited studies, however, have explored how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents navigate their belonging under the effects of the national context of exclusion in the suburban Midwest, which tends to be majority White, affluent, and exclusionary (Pew Research Center, 2009; Rodriguez, 2020). Understanding how these adolescents articulate belonging in a suburban context can inform future studies about ways to intervene when belonging is disrupted to nurture a smooth

transition to adulthood. Given these limitations, my dissertation explored how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents adapt and react to exclusion and Whiteness in the suburban Midwest.

Study 1

In the last decade, there has been an influx of arrivals to the United States (U.S.) from Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Batalova et al., 2021); however, American society has received these immigrants with racist and xenophobic attitudes (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). These responses are part of a long-standing history of oppression, excluding ethnic and racial minorities in the U.S. (Lee, 2019). While we know that Latinx immigrants are exposed to oppressive immigration policies and laws, little is known about how immigrant-origin adolescents are faring in the national context of exclusion. Growing evidence suggests that exclusionary efforts signal messages about who belongs (and who does not) in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco, López Hernández & Cabral, 2021).

This study draws from a risk and resilience model (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) to understand how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents reacted and adapted to the national context of exclusion. A total of 41 adolescents between the ages of 13 to 24 (M_{age}= 18.85) completed an audio-recorded semi-structured interview. Growing up in a suburban context exposed adolescents to overwhelming incidents of xenophobia and racism. Findings highlighted the varied ways Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents were excluded from American society, with the most profound experiences of exclusion happening in their microsystems. Their suburban schools and neighbors were identified as crucial spaces of exclusion. Adolescents shared their experiences of exclusion in White-centered spaces, including being denied service at the local olive garden by a White woman, witnessing White neighbors carrying confederate flags, and hearing White peers chanting "go back to your country." Undoubtedly, these experiences threatened their sense of connection and belonging to their school, community, and American society.

Study 1 captured avoidant and active ways that participants used to cope with social exclusion. Coping strategies included (a) escaping the problem, (b) disengagement, (c) disapproval, (d) seeking spaces of belonging, and (e) resistance. The findings yielded a shift in coping responses across developmental stages. Recommendations for future research and practice are provided to address systems that need to be dismantled to foster a healthy sense of belonging for Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents.

This study was submitted and accepted for publication in the Journal of Adolescence-- López Hernández, G. "We Understand You Hate Us": Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents' Coping with Social Exclusion. *Journal of Research on Adolescence.* https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jora.12748

Study 2

Present demographic trends are changing the landscape of the White suburban Midwest (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Troche-Rodriguez, 2009). The Latinx population has increased drastically in the last decade (Flores, 2017; Vespa, Medina & Armstrong, 2020). Latinx enrollment in the suburban Midwest has shifted suburban schools' racial and ethnic composition (Pew Research Center, 2009). Few studies have captured how Latinx immigrant adolescents are navigating suburban contexts that continue to function as White spaces (Diamond, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017), focusing on their sense of belonging (but see López Hernández, 2022), mainly as emerging data has found that Latinx adolescents are aware of the racial borders of inequity in their White and well-resourced suburban school (Rodriguez, 2020). Study 2 builds on Study 1's results of the active ways participants dealt with social exclusion by focusing on the two-thirds of participants (from the overall study) who live in these predominantly White neighborhoods. This

second study intended to provide a deeper understanding of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents'

searching for inclusion in the face of exclusion.

Grounded in intergroup relations and an integrative risk and resilience model, study 2

investigated the spaces of belonging adolescents sought to stabilize their sense of belonging in

White-centered spaces. A total of 29 13 to 24-year-old (M_{age} = 18.65) Latinx immigrant-origin

adolescents who grew up in a predominantly White suburban community completed an audio-

recorded semi-structured interview. A hybrid approach of inductive-deductive and thematic analysis

identified potential spaces of belonging and the strategies adolescents developed to address thwarted

belonging and navigate Whiteness in their suburban contexts. For example, four profiles were

highlighted to capture adolescents' responses to growing up in a White suburban Midwest: (1)

Acting "White-washed" with rationalizing, (2) Acting "White-washed" and resisting, (3) Acting

"White-washed," and being excluded and those who instead 4) sought Latinx-centered spaces.

Together these studies contribute to the literature on social belonging and exclusion,

explicitly shedding light on the experience of Latinx youth growing up in White-centered suburbs in

the Midwest.

Table 1

Demographic Information for the 18 Suburban Communities

Pseudonym	% of Latinx Residents	% of White Residents	% of Asian Residents	% of Black Residents	Average Household Income	N
Arlington*	9.1	80.9	4	3.3	$102,414	1
Crestview*	35.3	44.8	5.9	11.6	$85,888	1
Dayton*	20.6	63.1	11.2	3.3	$83,495	6
Forest Falls*	18	63.5	13	3	$73,639	3
Fox point**	77.6	17.1	0.8	4.2	$53,596	6
Franklin*	40	47.1	7.8	5.4	$72,999	1
Glen Park*	17	79.3	1.8	0.7	$77,004	1
Grand Park*	18.3	52.8	3.6	22.3	$44,771	1
Lakeview*	10.4	55.9	24.9	5.8	$82,387	4
Lincoln*	34.9	42.7	9.3	10.5	$74,659	1
Milford*	6.9	87.2	2.6	1.3	$116,083	1
Oakwood**	51.7	34.9	8.3	4.5	$77,098	1
Rhodes Park**	41.3	50.6	2.6	4	$77, 207	1
Rockland*	15.2	54.6	2.6	7.2	$89,820	1
Stillwater*	26.3	39.9	12.1	18.2	$92,184	1
Valleyside**	62.3	30.8	2.8	3.6	$60,495	4
Williston*	18.4	48.3	26.6	4.2	$92,423	2
Wood Lane*	30.5	30.7	22.7	12.3	$70,034	5***

Note: * This denotes suburban communities that were classified primarily White. Please note that some predominantly of these White communities were racially and ethnically divided. ** This indicated suburban communities that were classified mainly Latinx. *** These participants attended a mostly White high school in the next town.

STUDY 1

"We Understand You Hate Us": Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents' Coping with Social

Exclusion

"We Understand that You Hate Us":

Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents' Coping with Social Exclusion

In the last decade, there has been an influx of arrivals to the United States from Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Batalova et al., 2021); however, American society has received these immigrants with racist and xenophobic attitudes (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). These responses are part of a long-standing history of oppression, excluding racial and ethnic minorities in the United States (Lee, 2019). The Trump administration marked a particularly turbulent era in U.S. history for Latinx immigrant families by implementing a series of exclusionary immigration policies and unleashing toxic rhetoric (e.g., "they are drug dealers, criminals, and rapists"; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Today, Latinx adolescents are coming of age under the effects of systematic oppressive immigration policies, including family separations, aggressive deportations, and a dramatic reduction of asylees (Pierce & Bolter, 2020).

While extant scholarship provides insights into how Latinx immigrants encounter immigration policies and laws (Abrego, 2006; Pierce & Bolter, 2020), less is known about how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents are faring with the national context of exclusion, which includes systematic national antiimmigrant exclusionary policies and toxic rhetoric. Growing evidence suggests that exclusionary efforts signal messages to Latinx adolescents about who belongs (and who does not) in the United States (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2021). The present study was designed to explore how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents from the Midwest reacted and adapted to the national context of exclusion, focusing on their sense of belonging across contexts. More specifically, this study sought to understand how these adolescents cope with exclusion and whether coping patterns vary between early and late adolescents. As Sawyer et al. (2018) recommended, this study identified adolescence as a period between 10 to 24 years old. This inclusive definition

captures modern patterns of biological and significant social role transitions of growth and understanding today's adolescent life phase (Sawyer et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws from an integrative model (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) that combines ecological (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and risk and resilience frameworks (Masten, 2014). The model uses a multilevel approach to account for immigrant-origin children and youths' adaptation across four contextual levels of influence, including (1) global; (2) political and social; (3) microsystems; and (4) the individual level (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), as immigrant families enter host societies, political, economic, and social factors within the contexts of reception (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The model contributes to understanding how these contextual levels shape immigrant-origin children and youths' developmental tasks and psychological adjustment. The current study considered how the context of reception in which immigrant-origin adolescents settle informs how they cope with the risks of xenophobia, racism, and social exclusion (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). For example, the model provides insight into contextual levels that should be studied to understand where adolescents are exposed to exclusion and what spaces and resources they seek to survive White supremacy and spaces.

Social Belonging and Exclusion

As humans, we are continually asking ourselves, "Do I belong here?" (Walton & Brady 2007, p. 272), which derives from our human motivation to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Fostering a sense of belonging can be especially important during adolescence to aid a smooth transition to adulthood (e.g., Thomas & Welters, 2018). At this stage, adolescents actively seek long-lasting, significant, warm relationships from family members, peers, and teachers (Newman et al., 2007). On the other hand, feelings of rejection are core to experiences of social exclusion (e.g., Twenge et al.,

2001). Rejected adolescents, for example, who experience "low status" at school and receive group hostility, peer isolation, and teasing, experience social exclusion (Crick et al., 2001, p. 300).

Researchers have found that social exclusion has been linked to depression (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002) and self-defeating and antisocial behaviors (e.g., Twenge & Baumeister, 2004; Twenge et al., 2001). While adolescence is a time of increased vulnerability to peer rejection due to extensive biological changes (Platt et al., 2013), socially stigmatized adolescents are "systematically devalued and excluded" across a variety of domains (Abrego, 2006; Major & Eccleston, 2004, p. 64). Extensive scholarship has shown that Latinx adolescents are exposed to discrimination at school, in their neighborhood, and in the larger society (e.g., Gonzales, 2011; Seaton et al., 2013), which can compromise their sense of belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2011). A long history of exclusionary practices and policies toward Latinx communities (e.g., Abrego, 2006, 2008; Dreby, 2015) can undoubtedly contribute to feelings of exclusion.

Immigration & Social Exclusion

Over the last decades, various forces have purposefully associated immigration from Latin America with crime and terror, focusing on immigrants with undocumented status (Abrego et al., 2017; Menjívar et al., 2018). Today, society links being Latinx with being undocumented, with a stronger association with those from Mexico and Central America (e.g., Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). Regardless of legal status, Mexicans and Central Americans, particularly men, have been connected to being "criminals," "rapists," and "illegals" (Cervantes & Menjívar, 2018; Washington Post Staff, 2015). Scholars argue that these long-standing messages are thinly veiled racist beliefs, with White supremacy at the core (e.g., Huber et al., 2008). In other words, these practices are meant to normalize disparaging stereotypes and inflame xenophobia and racism toward Latinx immigrants (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2021).

These racist and xenophobic politics have stalemated Congress from passing a comprehensive immigration reform (e.g., Johnson & Trujillo, 2007) and have contributed to highly politicized boundaries of belonging. Researchers argue that there is an intersectionality between legal status and race, in which "illegality" has been racialized (García, 2017; Menjívar, 2021). Scholars have uncovered the loopholes in laws that immigration enforcement use to criminalize immigrants with undocumented status and restrict them from regularizing their status, ultimately justifying significant deportation efforts (Aranda & Vaquera, 2015; Armenta, 2017; Provine & Doty, 2011). While Mexicans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans represent about 70% of immigrants with undocumented status, they are overrepresented among detained and deported immigrants (Menjívar, 2021). Deportations of Latinx immigrants drastically increased during the Obama administration and continued to rise during Trump's presidency (Gonzalez-Barrera & Krogstad, 2014; Gramlich, 2020).

President Trump ran on a campaign that intensified xenophobic and racist messages against Latinx families with undocumented status. Of particular concern is the generation of young people who have grown up with undocumented status and without a pathway to citizenship (Passel et al., 2014) and the 4.5 million children living with at least one family member with undocumented status (Taylor et al., 2011). Studies suggest that growing up in a household with undocumented status exposes children and adolescents to structural exclusion and symbolic violence (Yoshikawa et al., 2017). For example, the nation-state contributes to structural exclusion by impeding access to resources for families with undocumented status (Fagan & MacDonald, 2013); these resources can include limited access to jobs, housing, and health care educational opportunities. While we know that structural impediments have clear implications for social belonging, so do a variety of forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), such as using exclusionary messages to "marginalizing, silencing, rejecting" those oppressed (Taket et al., 2009, p. 3).

Coping with the National Context of Exclusion

It is well documented that racism is stressful for children and adolescents and can present significant developmental challenges until adulthood (e.g., Potochnick et al., 2012; Priest et al., 2013; Umaña -Taylor et al., 2008; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Coping strategies have been found to alleviate the link between race-related stress and adjustment (e.g., Clark et al., 1999; Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009; Hernández & Villodas, 2020). Some widely used coping approaches in the literature are active versus avoidance coping (Krohne, 1993; Roth & Cohen, 1986) and problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Those who use an active (or problem-focused) approach are "tackling problems versus avoiding or withdrawing from them" (Seiffge-Krenke & Pakalniskiene, 2011, p. 984) and use planning and support-seeking strategies, for example (ZimmerGembeck & Skinner, 2011). In contrast, those who employ avoidant (or emotion-focused) patterns are interested in feeling better rather than changing the source of the stress (Baqutayan, 2015), such as using distraction and escaping the problem (e.g., De Boo & Wicherts, 2009; Hampel & Petermann, 2005). A coherent body of literature suggests age differences in coping responses across development (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Transitioning from late childhood to adolescence elicits physical, social, and emotional changes that can impact coping patterns (Byrne et al., 2011; Eschenbeck et al., 2018). For instance, as adolescents grow older and can attend to and reflect on their emotions, they develop more active and valuable coping strategies, including positive self-talk, seeking support, and intentional self-regulation (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Younger adolescents have reported lower levels of support-seeking and instead demonstrated more avoidant strategies such as escape, rumination, and aggression than older adolescents (e.g., Eschenbeck et al., 2018; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Extant research has focused on how Latinx adolescents process and respond to racial-ethnic discrimination (Pachter & García Coll, 2009; Park et al., 2018; Umaña -Taylor et al., 2008). We know that Latinx adolescents use active and avoidant strategies to deal with racial-ethnic

discrimination (e.g., Brietzke & Perreira, 2017; Edwards & Romero, 2008; Martin Romero et al., 2021). Emerging data has found that Latinx immigrant-origin youth seek support from teachers, coaches, and peers but also distance their thoughts to cope with immigration-related stressors (Brietzke & Perreira, 2017). Although the field is beginning to explore how adolescents deal with immigration-related stress, much less is known about culturally relevant resources and support systems (e.g., church, community, and family) adolescents utilize to deal with exclusion during this highly stressful, xenophobic development context. Additionally, limited studies have explored age differences in coping patterns between early and older Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents. Understanding how adolescents deal with the national context of exclusion across development is crucial to intervene early and aid a healthy transition to adulthood.

Current Study

A sense of belonging can be a vital aspect of adolescence to support a positive transition from childhood to adulthood (Greenberg et al., 1983; Newman et al., 2007). The current study used qualitative methods to understand the lived experiences of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents from the suburban Midwest. Mainly, this study investigated how Latinx immigrant-origin reacted and adapted to the national context of exclusion, focusing on:

(1) In what ways do Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents take note of messages of exclusion? And across what settings do they note these messages?

(2) How do adolescents cope with (or defend against) messages of exclusion they encounter?

3) In what ways do coping strategies and responses to these messages vary between early and late adolescents?

Method

Participants

A total of 41 Latinx immigrant-origin participants were recruited for this study, which included those with both parents from Mexico (n = 33) and those whose parents' (at least one parent) country of origin included: United States (n = 4), El Salvador (n = 2), Guatemala (n = 1), or Cuba (n = 1). The interview sample was composed of adolescents between the ages of 13 to 24 (M_{age} = 18.85). Most were students in high school (n = 18), followed by those in a 4-year university (n = 11), middle school (n = 4), and community college (n = 3). One participant completed their graduate training, and three were not students.

The majority of participants were second (n = 34) generation with at least one immigrant parent. About half were part of a family with mixed-status (n = 19), in which they had at least one family member with undocumented status. The remaining were in households with documented status (n = 20), with both parents having legal status and a household with all family members having undocumented status. One participant did not disclose their parents' legal status. Only a few participants were first-generation (n = 7) with undocumented status (n = 5). Participants resided in suburbs that were majority Latinx (n = 12) or White (n = 29). These classifications were mainly determined by participants' perceptions of their suburban community's ethnic/racial composition. Census data confirmed that the sample had a similar ethnic/racial composition to the western suburban neighborhoods from where the sample was drawn (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). **Procedure**

Participants were recruited upon Institutional Review Board approval from the University of California, Los Angeles (IRB# 20-000199). Those who were (1) of Latinx-origin, (2) adolescents (13– 24 years of age), and (3) and grew up in the suburban Midwest were eligible. Participants were initially recruited through gatekeepers from local community centers and organizations. Amid recruitment, COVID-19 occurred, and a snowballing technique was mainly used for recruitment. Participants were compensated for completing one interview ($15 gift card) and an additional

incentive for referring another participant (another $5 was given). This type of recruitment has been helpful in previous studies with vulnerable populations (Enriquez, 2016).

Participants completed an audio-recorded semi-structured interview that typically lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English. In-person interviews were conducted at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 ($n = 4$). As the COVID-19 restrictions increased, interviews were concluded on Zoom ($n = 37$) between mid-March 2020 through the end of June 2020. Interviews were scheduled over the phone, and participants were sent a Zoom link and the verbal consent form to be reviewed. Before starting the interview and recording, questions were answered, and consent was obtained. Participants were paid after the interview. I then wrote a memo about themes that emerged in the interview, a critical process for data analysis.

Several safeguards were put in place to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Participants were asked to complete the interview in a private space; they were allowed to turn off the video camera during the interview session. Verbal consent was provided by participants instead of written consent to avoid leaving a paper trail with their names. This consent process is standard when working with immigrant-origin youth (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2013). To ensure that participants' identity was concealed, interviews were de-identified and given an individualized pseudonym. After every interview was transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose (Dedoose, 2014), the audio and videotapes were stored in a password-protected computer. Names used in this article are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities (See Table 1).

Interview Protocol

A series of questions were asked to understand how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents described and conceptualized social belonging (or exclusion) in their distal and proximal environments. Interviews were offered in the participant's preferred language, either English or Spanish (the author was a Spanish speaker); all interviews were in English, with a few participants

code-switching throughout the interview. The first section of the protocol centered around background information, daily activities, and proximal and distal spaces of belonging. These interview questions were carefully developed to identify where adolescents spent most of their time to acquire insight into how inclusive (or exclusive) they experienced these spaces. These questions asked about their experiences in the following spaces: (1) neighborhood, (2) peers, (3) family, (4) and at school. Questions in this section helped prompt queries of potential spaces of belonging (in the case they reported exclusion). The latter part of the interview protocol prompted participants to address their connection with their country of origin and the U.S. and messages of exclusion they might be receiving. Developmentally appropriate prompts were developed and asked to capture complex concepts (i.e., xenophobia, racism, social belonging, or exclusion); for example, questions were asked to understand participants' awareness of messages about Mexican people: "People have different opinions about different groups. What messages have you heard about Mexican people?" Please see Appendix A for interview protocol. This study mainly focused on the latter part of the protocol about how adolescents reacted and adapted to messages of exclusion.

Researcher Positionality

Growing up as a Latinx adolescent with undocumented status in a predominately White suburban neighborhood, I constantly received exclusionary messages from teachers, employees from grocery stores, and my neighbors. These experiences informed my insider perspective, which was helpful when working with my sample (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). While these experiences made me an insider, my perspective differed from other Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents. I connected less with participants who grew up in primarily Latinx neighborhoods and households with documented status. Nevertheless, I made an effort to listen and learn from their experiences. During the data collection process and analysis, I grappled with the trustworthiness of my data. I regularly

considered my bias after each interview and during data analysis to obtain credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability of analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

During analysis, I used triangulation (e.g., prolonged engagement and investigator triangulation) and provided thick descriptions in the findings section to obtain credibility and transferability. Lastly, I wrote reflective notes after each interview to capture the participants' sense of trust and rapport with me, their setting, and how my conceptual lens affected our discussions. This process helped me understand how comfortable and willing participants appeared in the interview and whether there may have been other reasons they disengaged from our conversation (e.g., there was a family member in the room).

Data Analysis

The first stage of analysis commenced during data collection. I wrote detailed memos after each interview to strive for consistency and transparency during the interpretation of the data. As noted above, each memo captured detailed information about the interview, possible themes, powerful quotes, and nonverbal cues. This stage was essential for the second stage of analysis. After interviews were transcribed, I began the second stage of analysis, where I used a hybrid approach of thematic and an inductive–deductive coding process to glean common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When exploring a phenomenon, thematic analysis can help search themes and patterns in the data—using an inductive-deductive approach in this study allowed theory-driven codes and data-driven codes to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used an iterative process to determine codes that emerged from the data. Saturation was obtained when the information from the interviews became repetitive without the emergence of novel experiences (Douglas, 1976; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I read and re-read responses and detailed memos multiple times to gain early impressions of the data. Initial codes were generated in English from patterns from the data and based on deductive coding. The initial inductive coding yielded approximately 30 codes. After completing this stage of

coding, I met regularly with an expert in the field to discuss initial codes and draft a codebook. We constantly revised, condensed, and redefined codes to reach validity and reliability. Codes were then generated and organized systematically into three prominent themes and nine subthemes guided by ecological and risk and resilience frameworks (e.g., Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). The codebook was finalized after constant revisions, and discrepancies were addressed between the expert in the field and me. Interviews were subsequently coded using Dedoose. Upon completing coding, I used the detailed memos again to help me describe and interpret the data. This process helped capture participants' awareness of exclusion, inclusive and exclusive settings, and coping patterns across development.

Results

A total of three overarching themes emerged in the course of the analysis (see Table 2). Results demonstrated that adolescents were generally aware of being exposed to racist, xenophobic and exclusionary practices and attitudes across their settings. The following section details these findings, centering on how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents note messages of exclusion and the impact on their sense of belonging. Responses about how they cope with (or defend against) incidents of exclusion will be discussed. Analyses seemed to reveal a shift of responses across developmental stages, which will also be covered throughout this section.

Awareness of Messages of Exclusion

Most participants became aware of xenophobic and racist practices and attitudes as they navigated the political and social contexts of reception, as well as their microsystems. They understood that people viewed their communities negatively and that anti-immigrant laws and policies excluded them from an array of opportunities. These participants understood that "illegality" has been racialized. In other words, they knew that Latinx people, particularly Mexicans, are labeled as being "dirty," "aggressive," and "bad." Mauricio, a 24-year-old Mexican adolescent,

noted that today being "Hispanic" in the United States is often associated with "you're here illegally." These and many other negative labels impacted how they viewed their ethnic identity. For example, Valentina, a 24-year-old Mexican adolescent, reported, "Growing up . . . [I] didn't really care for the fact that I was Hispanic. Only because I had a lot of things said . . . [of] how I looked."

These negative messages signaled to participants that "Hispanic" people are not appreciated and welcomed in American society. Participants with undocumented status were particularly aware of being structurally excluded from society. They acknowledged that Mexican and Central American immigrants with undocumented status are blocked access to essential resources and opportunities. Paola, a 20-year-old Mexican adolescent, for example, who is a participant with undocumented status, expressed feeling excluded during the pandemic: "We don't get unemployment . . . . and [the] stimulus check...that like definitely upsets me...like my dad has to go to work and risk himself with the virus." Many of the participants with undocumented status expressed a version of Paola's response: "I don't feel like . . . I'm 100% accepted by like policies and law stuff." Carla, a 23-year-old Mexican student, expressed feeling excluded in educational spaces. While she could initially enroll in a professional program, she had to drop out when admissions found out about her legal status. Sadly, the way people respond to these situations adds to their frustrations.

Carla detailed her experience with the program's coordinator: "She acted very uh, rude, [and] she said, 'Oh, you're taking someone else's space.'" These obstacles made participants with undocumented status feel less connected and accepted in their proximal settings, impacting their sense of belonging. An 18-year-old Mexican adolescent, Andrew, shared that he questions his belonging when his "documented status gets in the way of something." While most of these participants were first-generation adolescents with undocumented status, this sentiment was shared among those who had a family member with undocumented status. Lucy, a 20-year-old Mexican adolescent, shared how frustrating it was to see her loved ones being "disrespected" and exploited

for having an undocumented status. These participants knew their families were under attack, particularly after the 2016 elections. Lucy noted: "My family was kind of scared because they're like oh 'he's [former President Trump] gonna kick us out.'"

Analyses demonstrated a developmental shift in how early and late adolescents processed exclusion. Younger adolescents initially struggled to elaborate on topics related to xenophobia and racism and how it shaped their sense of belonging, as they often responded to the prompts on exclusion with "I don't really know how to answer this question" [Nicole, 13, Mexican female]. However, many of these early adolescents had reported instances of exclusion earlier in the interview, but when asked directly, they struggled to make sense of exclusion. I had to prompt these participants about their previous responses, and then they shared more details about their experiences. Late adolescents reflected more deeply and thoughtfully about the effects of xenophobia and racism on their daily experiences. These participants understood the protocol prompts quicker, were more willing to speak about exclusion, and provided more details than younger participants.

Spaces of Exclusion

Distal Spaces of Exclusion

Participants identified virtual and entertainment spaces as one of the most prominent sources of exclusion, including social media, video gaming platforms, and news outlets. They acknowledged that exclusionary attitudes toward Latinx communities often started and were spread on these platforms. For instance, they noted that news outlets commonly shared stories that enforced the narrative that "[Mexicans] are not part of the United States [and] they are here illegally [Alvaro, 16, Mexican male]." Franco, a 15-year-old Cuban and Mexican adolescent, shared this sentiment: "They assume they have like drugs or have like a dangerous background."

Participants reported numerous videos, posts, and memes they have seen on social media that spoke negatively about Mexicans. Estefania, a 14- year-old Mexican adolescent, noted this: "[I see] messages through social media like . . . people that say that just because they're undocumented means that they kind of like have no rights . . . or like they make fun of them." Participants also expressed feeling personally attacked in video game spaces. For example, Santiago, a 14-year-old Mexican student, was targeted by another player: "[This kid] . . . . we were playing, I was playing a video game . . . . and it was like telling me 'to go back to my country' . . . and go do stuff like that." These experiences made him realize that "Mexicans like not treated equally" and that "racist Americans" do not welcome Latinx people in American society.

Proximal Spaces of Exclusion

Numerous participants identified their suburban community, school, and peer groups as proximal spaces of exclusion. The people in these spaces made them feel unwelcome, uncomfortable and excluded from these settings in subtle and explicit ways. Instances of exclusion were manifested through blank stares and "dirty looks" at their local grocery store, the restaurant in the community plaza, and as they interacted with their neighbors. Elisa, a 16-year-old Mexican adolescent, shared how a White neighbor at their Costco "looked at my sisters the wrong way . . . . kinda like 'oh why are you in my way' cause my sisters, you know they're small they run around." For Ruby, a 20-year-old Mexican student, her incident went beyond a subtle form and felt more personal. Ruby and her boyfriend shared their experience at the local Olive Garden:

> There was [this] White lady standing there, and clearly, she was the one that was supposed to take our order, and we kept calling her, but she pretended like she didn't hear us . . . she [then] came up to us and said, she didn't even look at us in the eyes, but she was like "you guys can't sit in the bar if you are not going to drink anything so if you could please move."

Ruby continued to tell me that the "lady" kept being rude by taking other people's orders instead of theirs. Later, a Latinx worker validated their feelings of being discriminated against and excluded, who told them: "She tends to have a reputation for usually being like this towards minorities." Similarly, Santiago [14, Mexican male] spoke about a time an employee in his community was not "treating [my father] . . . right." He expressed:

We went to [their local fast-food restaurant] . . . . like to get some food . . . And then, the guy he's like, "can I see your I.D?" And then, my dad was like, "really?" We were just buying some things; he didn't need to see my dad's I.D . . . . And then, my dad gave it to him.

Other excerpts also demonstrated feelings of exclusion and discrimination as participants recall hearing "derogatory terms or names," such as "beaners" [Andrew, 18, Mexican male] or "wetback" [Mauricio, 24, Mexican male], that have been deemed dehumanizing and discriminatory. It should be noted that many of these participants resided in predominately White neighborhoods, where participants tended to be in the minority.

Many participants shared that the Trump administration intensified these messages. A 20-year-old Mexican adolescent, Renata indicated that her neighbors' "true colors" were shown after the 2016 elections. Elisa expressed a similar response stating that there has been a "change in my community . . . for sure [due to] racism." Signs of exclusion were represented by their neighbors' support of former President Trump and White supremacy. Excerpts indicated physical symbols that expressed their support, including campaign signs and confederate flags in their front yards and Make America Great Again (MAGA) gear their neighbors wore around town.

While school was a space of inclusion for some adolescents, it was more common to be a space that fueled racism and xenophobia toward Latinx students, particularly after the 2016 elections. Adolescents identified their White peers as the main perpetrators that spread exclusionary messages. For example, Anabel, a 20-year-old Mexican student, recalls a popular boy at school

"dress [ed] in all . . . "Make America Great," and a hat, he dyed his hair blond, he painted himself orange, but it wasn't to be funny, it was because he actually meant it." Anabel believed his actions drove others to spread racist and xenophobic messages in the halls, during classes, and at the lunch table, such as "all illegals should go back to their home." Others recall their peers wearing MAGA gear to demonstrate their support for Trump and what he stood for. Maria, a 15-year-old adolescent, stated: "Yesterday on social media there was this girl that's in my grade, and I guess she got like a Trump phone case, and she posted it on her story, and she said, 'So pretty.'"

College students reported similar examples. The most notable incident was among three participants who attended the same predominant rural institution. Alma, a 20-year-old Mexican adolescent, recalled the day two university staff wore offensive Halloween costumes:

> We had two employees or staff from [my university] dressed as ICE workers and a typical Mexican, and so they posted a picture on Facebook. While there was an uproar from Latinx students about the incident, the university could not do anything because, unfortunately, with the same thing, they got protected under freedom of speech. [Silvia, 21, Mexican female]

Various participants described their frustration, annoyance, and sadness from these experiences. Ultimately, these experiences made their families and themselves feel uncomfortable and less connected in their suburban community, school, and among peers.

Coping with Messages of Exclusion

Patterns emerged in participants' responses about how they coped with xenophobia and racism. Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents identified using active and avoidant coping strategies. While not mutually exclusive, participants were consistent in the coping strategy they used to deal with exclusion. This study defined an avoidant-focused approach as those who escaped the problem (i.e., used minimization, denial, avoidance of problem, and distancing) and disengaged from having

conversations about exclusion. On the contrary, participants who used proactive tactics (i.e., processed emotions, sought spaces of belonging, and resisted) adopted an active-focused approach.

Avoidant-Focused Coping Strategies

Escaping the Problem. Several participants, mostly early adolescents, used minimization, denial, and distancing and avoided any direct action to address exclusion. For example, a few early adolescents minimized the harmful effects of "racist" encounters, such as the one reported by Emmanuel [15, Mexican male]:

> My dad recently told us that there's one woman that is really racist, but she's like really nice
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> to my dad. But tells him he should go back to his country; he should not be here. But she
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> still respects him while like just saying, "Hi, good morning . . . whatever."

Emmanuel diminished the significance of these messages and instead focused on how the White woman was "at least respectful" and "nice." Other early adolescents blamed the "immaturity" of peers for the rise of exclusive actions at school. A clear example is showcased in Thalia's [17, Mexican, female] excerpt: "[Peers would say] Trump's gonna deport your family . . . and I feel like it didn't come from parents or people in the community itself . . . most of them I feel like it was mainly the immaturity of people my age."

Some participants denied and distanced themselves from issues related to exclusion. For instance, adolescents argued that occurrences of exclusion only happened in distal settings. Antonio, a Mexican 15-year-old adolescent, noted that xenophobic and exclusive comments only occur "on the news . . . not around here [in their community]." Others reported minimal experiences of exclusion. My conversation with Leslie, a 17-year-old Mexican adolescent with undocumented status, displayed a clear example of someone affected by the structural exclusion denied being excluded. When we talked about her undocumented status, she noted: "It's unfair that I don't have the same privileges [as legal Americans]." At the same time, when Leslie was directly asked about

exclusion, she responded: "Well, in my neighborhood, I have never seen anyone being excluded . . . I don't know if America itself if anyone is being excluded, but I know personally I have never seen anyone being excluded."

A few late adolescents shared that they avoided watching "negative" news outlets or unsubscribed to social media accounts that highlighted negative comments about Latinx immigrants. This was demonstrated by Ruby [20, Mexican female], who reported: "I stopped watching the news. . I don't wanna fill my life with negativity because literally, I can only change so much like in my life that I really cannot like just take out the president." Other adolescents denied being the target of exclusion. Given that messages of exclusion were not directed toward them, they believed they were not exposed to exclusion. Alvaro, a 17-year-old Mexican adolescent, frequently distanced himself from instances of xenophobia and exclusion. For example, he noted: "[My friends] don't mean them [exclusionary messages of Latinx immigrants] towards me because I grew up with them . . . [I've been] openly a part of them of their community and part of their culture and everything, so they don't really imply them towards me."

Disengagement. A few participants were not interested in having profound conversations about social exclusion. It was common for younger adolescents to adopt this tactic, as they often struggled to process xenophobia, racism, and exclusion. When early adolescents did talk about their experiences, they associated conversations of exclusion with "politics." Maria, a 15-year-old adolescent, stated that she gets "bored" when people talk about politics, and so she rarely has these conversations. They also steered clear of "politics" because it made them feel uncomfortable. For instance, Alonso, a 16-year-old Mexican student, said: "People who do talk about politics, it just creates arguments . . . and stuff like that, because of their different views on stances."

This was also prevalent with some late adolescents who did not engage in conversations related to immigration to avoid being attacked. For example, Renata [20, Mexican female] decided not to get involved in discussions among her conservative colleagues:

People are more outspoken [in the aftermath of 2016 elections] . . . and that kinda made me nervous cause if someone said something like I don't know if they're gonna attack me or they're not gonna attack me, which I don't wanna be attacked just because they don't like where I come from.

Early adolescents were more likely to avoid conversations about race and immigration-related issues with others and provided only brief responses about exclusion in our discussion. It was common for these participants to share examples of exclusion during the daily activities and proximal spaces of belonging interview section but then disengaged when prompted about messages of exclusion in the latter part of the interview.

Active-Focused Coping Strategies

Disapproval. More than half of the participants, primarily late adolescents, actively condemned instances of exclusion. These participants took the time to reflect and process their emotions after being exposed to exclusion, including feeling frustrated, angry, and sad. Jaime, for example, a 24-year-old Mexican male, expressed his "disgust" and disapproval of being followed around and monitored by an White employee at a grocery store. He stated:

It was the most insane experience of my life. To this day, I feel like there is nothing that would like . . . the amount of shock and the amount of . . . almost disgust I guess you can say that you had for an individual . . . you felt like a prisoner, you felt your every move was being watched constantly for just doing nothing.

Jaime continued to express his frustration of feeling excluded around his college town. This was his response of noticing confederate flags: "Dude, we understand that you hate us or whatever

the case may be but just . . . it's unnecessary." Similarly, Gael, a 22-year-old Guatemalan adolescent, recounted a time he was discriminated against as an early adolescent:

It was really hot, and I had super long hair at the time . . . I had it in a man bun, and I had a mustache. I looked more Hispanic than I usually do . . . [so] I got pulled over . . . he looked at me, and he's like, "Alright, be real with me, how much weed do you have in the car?" And I said, "No, none. I don't smoke weed" . . . I felt . . . targeted . . . It just made me feel awful.

Gael continued to explain how the police officer was rude throughout the whole encounter, and today, he can reflect and conclude that the incident "was [not] fair."

Seeking Spaces of Belonging. Participants, both early and late adolescents, actively sought spaces of belonging to cope with exclusion, and some ultimately felt included, welcomed, and celebrated. For example, several participants sought church and community centers to find belonging and connection within the Latinx community. Luna, a 13-year-old who grew up in a predominately White neighborhood, spent a significant time in a church near her neighborhood. It was in this church that she and her family felt "more connected, like a part of [the] community, more than we are over here [in their White suburb]." It is not surprising that Luna met her best friends in the Ballet Folklórico and the choir she was involved in at her church, a safe space that celebrated her culture. These spaces were vital for early adolescents; they acknowledged and celebrated their cultural background. They had a safe space with people that looked like them to process xenophobia, exclusion, and racism.

Late adolescents also identified spaces that helped them heal from exclusion and build community. These spaces were typically in higher education institutions, including critical race and ethnic courses, multicultural organizations, and academic mentors. For example, a 20-year-old female, Alma, expressed how difficult it was to feel connected to her mainly White college campus: "I guess it took me a while to feel like I was part of the community . . . because it is a White

institution." Later in the conversation, she recognized the significant role the "diversity center" had

in increasing her sense of belonging on campus:

> I also really like the diversity center on campus, I spend a lot of time over there, just doing
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> homework or being involved in the events . . . . [and so] I just really didn't feel a sense of
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> connection to them [her college campus] until I really started talking to the Latinas on
>
> campus and then doing different kinds of events with them.

Participants also identified Latinx peers as a safe space to process exclusion. For example,

Silvia [21, Mexican female] spoke about the importance of friends: "I felt very uncomfortable going

to school because . . . like that ratio between Caucasian students and Hispanic/Latinx students . . .

[so] I kind of just like stuck to um, my group of friends . . . That was my safe space."

Some late adolescents searched for belonging in White-centered spaces. They used a variety

of tactics to "fit in." For example, some adolescents joined high school sports to feel connected to

their White high school, such as Alejandra [19, Mexican female]. She noted:

> [My suburb and school] was all like Whites . . . I was like the only one of color . . . So, like
>
> there, I felt like it just hit me. I felt like not included until I started playing [soccer] . . . it
>
> made me connect with them, and it grew as . . . we played.

Similarly, Andrew spoke about joining sports to gain popularity and interact with White

peers in his high school: He noted:

> "If you play sports, it's a lot easier to be open . . . and make new friends . . . I was able to be
>
> social enough to become . . . popular because popular in my school they are the White
>
> people right. It's because majority of the people there are White, so majority of [my] friends .
>
> . . are White.

Adolescents reported changing how they dressed, acted, and behaved to feel included in

their predominately White school, work, and community. For instance, Paola [20, Mexican female]

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was taught by her parents to dress "well" to avoid being stereotyped as an immigrant with undocumented status. She expressed: "To be [seen] professional . . . I'm not allowed to wear sweats outside the house cause my dad's like, 'no, like dress nice all the time.'" Gael [22, Mexican male] noted that he had to act "White-washed" to feel connected in his White high school, which meant "dressing differently," enrolling in advanced courses and having White friends. However, acting "White-washed" was perceived negatively (e.g., being teased). Gael noted that seeking White spaces and "hanging out with White friends" was always "a point of contention" between his sister and himself.

Being perceived as "White-washed" did not always equate to participants being accepted and included in White-centered spaces. For instance, Paola [20, Mexican female] reported that her efforts to dress "professional" were not enough to belong with her White peers. She expressed: "people [see me] like a Whitewashed version...but I was never like White enough for the like the White students . . . they were only nice to me when they needed homework." Participants that did "fit in" were more likely to hear messages of exclusion from their White peers, which often made these messages "normal." Alejandra [19, Mexican female] reported this sentiment: "I think it's normal, and I feel like it doesn't really offend me." However, earlier in our conversation, she reported being bothered by negative attitudes about Mexican people after the 2016 elections, such as noting that "sending people, like deporting people . . . that's like sad to me."

Resistance. Another active way participants, both early and late adolescents, dealt with the national context of exclusion was through resistance. Adolescents demonstrated different forms of resistance and civic engagement, such as being part of rallies, embracing their ethnic identity, being part of advocacy organizations, and standing up to those excluding them. Alma [20, Mexican female], for example, combated a xenophobic incident when staff dressed in racist and xenophobic Halloween costumes at her university:

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[We] did feel enraged . . . and [we] wanted to go out instantly and do rallies and things like that . . . we had to come together as a community and say like, "we can't be that violent, we have to do this in a peaceful manner" . . . [to] be able to voice their concerns.

Excerpts also indicated that participants joined advocacy organizations to create positive changes in their community, which they shared being constantly excluded and marginalized. Alonso [16, Mexican male] was part of an after-school club that aimed to help students with undocumented status. He described his high school club's aims: "We trying to help undocumented students . . . so recently, we sold churros during lunch and then all that profit . . . we just donate or give as a scholarship to an undocumented student."

Others, like Gael [22, Guatemalan male], report "fight[ing] back" to exclusionary actions by embracing their culture and not letting these incidents negatively affect their life. Gael stated: "I like want to show off my Hispanic culture and show that . . . we're not all bad." Many of these participants noted that the support they received from spaces of belonging helped them find the strength to resist exclusion, xenophobia, and racism.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how a generation of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents processed growing up during a period of systematic national anti-immigrant exclusionary policies and rhetoric (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). Their stories revealed settings they identified as exclusive and highlighted the varied ways they coped with exclusion.

Findings revealed that participants were aware of being socially excluded from American society. Some adolescents understood that racism and xenophobia fueled toxic rhetoric (e.g., "they are drug dealers, criminals, rapists") and oppressive immigration policies. This is not surprising, as scholars have uncovered a series of exclusionary immigration policies targeting Latinx immigrants (e.g., Cervantes & Menjívar, 2018; Menjívar, 2021; Toomey et al., 2014). Participants with

undocumented status were particularly aware of these exclusionary efforts as they noted being

structurally excluded from economic and educational opportunities (e.g., Abrego, 2006; Gonzales,

2011; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). These impediments made them feel less connected and accepted

into American society, impacting their social belonging. This trend was also consistent with second-

generation participants in a mixed-status family (e.g., Abrego, 2019). These findings align with

previous studies that reveal that living in households with undocumented status contributes to a

sense of structural exclusion for U.S.-born children and adolescents with undocumented status

(Suárez-Orozco et al., 2021; Yoshikawa et al., 2017).

Adolescents identified key spaces they felt excluded based on their ethnic-racial and

immigrant-origin background. Most participants experienced exclusionary actions and attitudes on

social media and news outlets. These platforms constantly enforced negative stereotypes of Mexican

immigrants, including the typical associations of Mexicans being "illegal" and "dangerous." Similar

to other studies, these results demonstrate that adolescents understand that "illegality" has been

racialized, and today being Mexican is equated to being "undocumented" regardless of legal status

(e.g., García, 2017). However, Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents reported the most hurtful

instances of exclusion through proximal settings. For example, suburban schools were identified as a

space of exclusion for many adolescents (Gándara & Ee, 2018; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). Their

suburban school was often the first place they noticed exclusion beyond distal settings, such as social

media. Those who attended college in rural and White neighborhoods also reported having

difficulties connecting with their university and the community.

Given the overwhelming experiences of exclusion, it is not surprising that participants

employed avoidant coping strategies that made them feel better (Brietzke & Perreira, 2017). There

was a shift in coping responses across developmental stages, with early adolescents more likely to

avoid conversations about racism and xenophobia in the interview and beyond. These findings align

with Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner's (2011) integrative review on age differences in coping mechanisms. They found that compared to early adolescents, older adolescents can process and reflect their emotions when exposed to stress, leading them to use more sophisticated coping patterns (e.g., problem-solving; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011).

Older adolescents in this study reported using more active coping patterns, such as condemning and resisting anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric and seeking spaces of belonging. Participants attempted to acculturate into White-centered spaces to feel included and accepted at predominately White schools and communities. That said, adolescents made conscious efforts to integrate into these spaces through extracurricular activities, clothing styles, and inter-group friendships (e.g., Durkee et al., 2019; Rumbaut, 2015). Some adolescents were successfully welcomed in White-centered spaces. Those included had to deal with constant messages and incidents of exclusion, which eventually made them "normal." This can be alarming as President Trump normalized xenophobic messages and practices that continue to harm and target Latinx families.

Notably, adolescents seeking White-centered spaces, regardless of their success, had to deal with the burden of being "White-washed." These results align with the "acting White" literature (Brietzke & Perreira, 2017; Durkee et al., 2019; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), which has found that Black students are often bullied and teased by Black students for modeling White behaviors (e.g., taking advanced courses), which violates the perceived norms of their racial group (e.g., Durkee & Gómez, 2022; Tyson et al., 2005). This study addressed a limitation to the "acting White" literature that has limited studies on the burden of "acting White" among Latinx youth (Brietzke & Perreira, 2017; Durkee et al., 2019). It is important to note that the participants that were not welcomed in White-centered spaces not only struggled to improve their sense of belonging (Baumeister et al., 2007) but also had to cope with accusations of "acting White" from Latinx peers and family (Durkee et al., 2019). Scholarship has to emphasize research targeting White adolescents, for example, who

hold anti-immigrant sentiment and may not be welcoming to Latinx immigrant-origin youth, focusing on changing their attitudes and behaviors.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study had several limitations. First, the sample is limited to adolescents from the suburban Midwest of mostly Mexican origin, with limited representation from Central American countries (which have recently been targeted and excluded). Consequently, it may be premature to conclude that these findings are relevant to all Latinx immigration-origin adolescents, and results may differ across those who live in other states. Similarly, the interview protocol did not specifically assess classical forms of coping. This study aimed to elicit an understanding of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents' experiences of growing up during a period of exclusion and then were prompted on their perceived sense of belonging (or exclusion) across distal and proximal settings. However, this study highlighted the experiences of adolescents who reside in new immigrant destinations, such as suburban and rural settings dealing with demographic transitions. Some of the study's participants who recently moved to a predominantly White college campus reported difficulties finding a safe haven in rural contexts.

Future studies should continue to explore how suburban and rural settings treat and welcome immigrants across contexts. Future research should take into consideration developmental coping patterns. For example, it is imperative to understand the characteristics that make these spaces of belonging welcoming and inclusive across development, emphasizing the belonging of younger adolescents. I encourage key stakeholders to build inclusive spaces for Latinx adolescents to disrupt the consequences associated with social exclusion (e.g., Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). In conclusion, scholars need to focus on research emphasizing the structural systems that need to be dismantled to help Latinx immigrant-origin youth cope with the national contexts of exclusion.

Implications and Recommendations

While there has been a sharp growth of Latinx immigrant families living in new suburban destinations, like in the Midwest (Pew Research Center, 2009), a few studies have explored how these adolescents make sense of their belonging in a community that is typically White, affluent, and may be prone to exclusionary practices (Rodriguez, 2020). This study provides insight into how suburban neighborhoods' racial and ethnic composition may impact the exposure to exclusion among Latinx immigration-origin adolescents. Findings yielded our understanding of how adolescents living in predominantly White suburbs were more likely than those living in Latinx communities to struggle in finding welcoming and supportive spaces.

At the minimum, I encourage vital stakeholders and leaders in suburban schools and communities to be well-versed in issues impacting Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents. School leaders should be aware of spaces of exclusion and inclusion and understand what makes each space welcoming and exclusionary. Potential spaces of belonging could help Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents think and talk about race and xenophobia with peers and caring adults. Previous studies have noted that children and adolescents can process race early, and these conversations should not be delayed until adulthood (Sullivan et al., 2021). Delaying these conversations may urge adolescents to use avoidant coping mechanisms. This can be problematic as we know that avoidant coping has been linked to psychological maladjustment (e.g., Seiffge-Krenke & Klessinger, 2000) and conceivably can thwart their need to belong (Baumeister et al., 2007). Most importantly, we need to hold national and state leaders accountable for their promises of abolishing anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric and have community leaders actively condemn anti-immigrant rhetoric in their suburban neighborhoods. These recommendations and practices are the beginning to disrupt the oppression of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents and signal that they belong to American society.

Table 1

Demographic Information for N = 41 Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Year in School
Alejandra	F	19	Sophomore
Alfredo	M	23	Senior
Alma	F	20	Junior
Alonso	M	16	10th
Alvaro	M	17	11th
Amy	F	23	2nd Year
Anabel	F	20	Sophomore
Andrew	M	18	12th
Antonio	M	15	10th
Carla	F	23	Junior
Elisa	F	16	10th
Emmanuel	M	15	9th
Esmeralda	F	18	12th
Estefania	F	14	8th
Fernando	M	15	9th
Franco	M	15	9th
Gael	M	22	Graduated
Giovanni	M	14	9th
Gloria	F	20	Junior
Gonzalo	M	23	N/A

Isabella	F	17	12th
Ivan	M	22	Graduated
Jaime	M	24	Senior
Leslie	F	17	11th
Lily	M	13	6th
Lucy	F	20	Sophomore
Luna	F	16	10th
Maria	F	15	9th
Mauricio	M	24	N/A
Nicole	F	13	6th
Paola	F	20	Sophomore
Renata	F	20	Sophomore
Ruby	F	20	Sophomore
Santiago	M	14	9th
Sergio	F	13	6th
Silvia	F	21	Senior
Sofia	F	18	12th
Sonia	F	17	11th
Thalia	F	17	11th
Valentina	F	23	N/A
Ximena	F	18	12th

Table 2

Thematic Components of Social Exclusion and Coping Patterns

Meta-theme	Subtheme	Sample Quote
Awareness of Messages of Exclusion:		
Being aware of harsh immigration policies and negative attitudes about Latinx immigrants.		*"I don't feel like… I'm 100% accepted…by like policies and law stuff" [female, 20]*
Spaces of Exclusion:		
Being aware that specific settings were exclusive, and unwelcoming, and they lacked a sense of belonging in these spaces.		*"Obviously I'm dark and fit the description of a Mexican, you know sometimes people look at me…they'll be a little snobby or rude" [female, 18]*
	Distal Spaces of Exclusion. Indicators of being exposed to exclusion on social media, video game platforms, and news outlets.	*"I've heard …messages through social media like the comments…people that say that just because they're undocumented means that they kind of like have no rights… Or like they make fun of them" [female, 14]*
	Proximal Spaces of Exclusion. Indicators of being exposed to exclusion in their microsystems, including their community, school, and peers.	*"When I got down here [rural college campus]…you see these enormous pickup trucks decked out with nothing but confederate flags" [male, 24]* *"I have seen a few people wear those [MAGA] hats [in school]" [male, 15]* *"I have a friend who is like a Trump supporter" [female, 18]*
Coping with Messages of Exclusion:		
Indicators of avoidant and active coping strategies used to deal with exclusion.		*"[We] did feel enraged… and [we] wanted to go out instantly and do rallies and things like that...we had to come together as a community" [female, 20]*

Avoidant-Focused Coping Strategies. Indicators that participants were using avoidant coping strategies.

"I stopped watching the news…I don't wanna fill my life with negativity because literally, I can only change so much like in my life that I really cannot like just take out the president" [female, 20]

Escaping the Problem. Indicators that participants used minimization, denial, distancing and avoided any direct action to address exclusion.

"Well, in my neighborhood, I have never seen anyone being excluded…I don't know if America itself if anyone is being excluded, but I know personally I have never seen anyone being excluded" [female, 17]

Disengagement. Indicators that participants demonstrated being uninterested when talking about exclusion.

"I really don't keep up with politics like that so it doesn't really affect me" [male, 16]

Active-Focused Coping Strategies. Indicators that participants used active coping strategies.

"I got pulled over...I felt…targeted…It just made me feel awful...was [not] fair." [male, 22]

Disapproval. Indicators that participants actively condemned instances of exclusion and reflected, processed, and named how they felt (e.g., frustration, anger, and sadness).

"Dude, we understand that you hate us or whatever the case may be, but just— it's unnecessary." [male, 24]

Seeking Spaces of Belonging. Indicators that participants sought potential spaces of belonging that made them feel included in their school, community, and American society.

"I felt like not included until like I started playing [soccer]…, it made me connect with them [White peers]" [female, 19]

Resistance. Indicators that participants used active forms of resistance and civic engagement (e.g., protesting, speaking up).

"There was a rally and a protest, and there were so many conversations with like the organizations that I'm a part of [in respond to college staff dressing as ICE agent]" [female, 21]

STUDY 2

Navigating the White Suburban Midwest: Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents Search for

Belonging

Navigating the White Suburban Midwest: Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents Search for

Belonging

Present demographic trends are changing the landscape of the White suburban Midwest

(Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Troche-Rodriguez, 2009). The Latinx

population has increased drastically in the last decade (Flores, 2017; Vespa, Medina & Armstrong,

2020). In fact, Latinx immigrants' migration patterns have shifted from major metropolitan cities in

the Southwest and Northeast to the suburban Midwest (e.g., Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020;

Frey, 2011). Latinx enrollment in the suburban Midwest has transformed suburban schools' racial

and ethnic composition (Pew Research Center, 2009). Few studies, however, have captured how

Latinx immigrant adolescents are navigating suburban contexts that continue to function as White

spaces (Diamond, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017), focusing on their sense of belonging (López

Hernández, 2022, for an exception), mainly as emerging data has found that Latinx adolescents are

aware of the racial borders of inequity in their White and well-resourced suburban schools

(Rodriguez, 2020).

Study 1 highlighted the overwhelming sense of exclusion Latinx immigrant-origin

adolescents faced in their suburban schools and communities, with about three-quarters of

adolescents living in majority White and affluent neighborhoods. Participants reported being

constantly reminded that they did not belong in their suburban context, including in local restaurants

and with their White neighbors and classmates.

It is well established that fostering a healthy sense of belonging during adolescence is critical

to aiding a smooth transition to adulthood (e.g., Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983; Thomas &

Welters, 2018). When adolescents experience social exclusion, they are at risk of developing physical

and mental health problems that negatively impact their educational trajectories (e.g., Baumesiter et

al., 2007; Saasa et al., 2021; Suárez-Orozco, López Hernández & Cabral, 2021). Yet, humans constantly search for belonging, especially at points of exclusion, to reach some level of belonging (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Crisp, 2010). Study 1 captured how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents deal with exclusion, highlighting their search for belonging in safe and welcoming spaces. Still, we need a more in-depth understanding of the spaces of belonging Latinx participants sought to restore their sense of belonging and the strategies they used to navigate white-centered spaces.

Emergent studies have found that Latinx adolescents are finding ways to create physical spaces of belonging (e.g., in the hall or cafeteria) outside the classroom as they navigate racialized boundaries in White and well-resourced suburban schools (Rodriguez, 2020). Scholars across fields have urged researchers to continue exploring how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents make sense of belonging in and beyond their suburban schools. The present study used an integrative model that uses guiding frameworks of risk and resilience and ecological theories (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) to investigate how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents are growing up in the White suburban Midwest. The present study will cover what makes these spaces inclusive and strategies these adolescents use to navigate potential exclusive spaces successfully. Lastly, this study will present profiles of participants to illustrate how these adolescents navigate Whiteness in and beyond their suburban schools.

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws from an integrative model (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) that combines ecological (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and risk and resilience frameworks (Masten, 2014). The model uses a multilevel approach to account for immigrant-origin children and youths' adaptation across four contextual levels of influence, including (1) global; (2) political and social; (3)

microsystems; and (4) the individual level (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), as immigrant families enter host societies, political, economic, and social factors within the contexts of reception (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This study focused on potential spaces of belonging Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents sought within their microsystems, including their suburban school and neighborhood. While suburban schools, for example, have been an exclusive space for Latinx adolescents (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; López Hernández; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012; Rodriguez, 2020), adolescents are creating safe havens in other spaces that celebrate their culture, values, and traditions (Marin & Gamba, 2003; López Hernández, 2022).

The model guided my understanding of the risk and resiliencies these adolescents may develop as they navigate White-centered spaces and the implications for their sense of belonging. We know that immigrant-origin adolescents must navigate new experiences in a host country, forcing them to actively consider their belonging (Crisp, 2010; López Hernández, 2022). Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents also have to learn how to navigate intra and inter-group friendships in suburban settings that are still majority White, affluent, and tend to be exclusionary (e.g., Titzmann, 2014). If a conflict arises, this can be alarming for these adolescents. We know peer conflict and rejection are linked to negative psychological and physical adjustments (e.g., Graham & Bellmore; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016). The present study draws from the model to understand the risk and resilience in adolescents' strategies and spaces to navigate White-centered spaces in the White suburban Midwest.

White Suburban Midwest and Latinx Immigrant-Origin Adolescents

Diamond and Posey-Maddox (2020) have urged scholars to conceptualize suburban spaces beyond just geography and explore what these spaces symbolize for racial and ethnic minorities. Researchers need to understand how the suburbs function as spaces promoting whiteness and

exclusion (Moore, 2008; Posey-Maddox, 2017). We know that White suburbia was built on oppression and White supremacy values through red-lining practices (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Omi & Winant, 1994). In fact, today, people have associated the suburbs with White and affluent residents (Lewis-McCoy, 2018). The creation of White suburbia peaked in the early-to-mid-twentieth century through redlining and exclusive and discriminatory practices that deterred non-White homeowners in the suburbs (Diamon & Posey-Maddox, 2020; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro, 2017). Scholars have argued this was a "White supremacist racial project" (Diamon & Posey-Maddox, 2020, p. 8). While in the last decades, racially and ethnically diverse communities have changed the demographics of American communities (Vásquez, Seales & Marquardt, 2008), old social attitudes may linger.

It is projected that 2050 will mark a demographic turning point in the United States, in which the majority of the population will be African American, Asian American, and Latinx (Parker, Morin & Menasce Horowitz, 2019). The Latinx population is expected to double within four decades (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Their growing presence and influx have spillover into suburban neighborhoods (Frey, 2011). While in the early 1900s, Latinx immigrants mainly resided in major metropolitan cities, including gateway cities such as Los Angeles and New York City (Flores, 2017). They have started to migrate to Midwestern and southern suburban communities (Vásquez, Seales & Marquardt, 2008). Indeed, Latinx enrollment in Midwestern suburban schools has increased drastically in the last few years (Pew Research Center, 2009).

While these demographic trends have been studied by demographers (W. Frey, 2011), educators (Rodriguez, 2020), and urban planners (Lung-Amam, 2017), few studies have used a psychological and developmental lens to investigate how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents are navigating their sense of belonging where they are still the minority in White and affluent suburbs.

Rodriguez (2020) recently captured how Latinx adolescents navigate racialized borders in a White and well-resourced suburban high school in the Midwest. Adolescents highlighted the segregation between White and Latinx students and how they carved safe spaces in their high school halls and the cafeteria surrounded by Latinx peers. As Rodriguez (2020) suggested, the present study used a racial lens to explore the social belonging of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents across the White suburban Midwest. This study examined spaces adolescents sought beyond their suburban school, including community spaces, and their strategies to navigate White-centered spaces.

The Search for Social Belonging

Humans have an inherent "need to belong," which derives from our motivation to develop positive interpersonal contact (e.g., Freud, 1930), affiliate with others (Bowlby, 1969), and be well-liked (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Baumeister et al. (2007) argue that interacting with others is an evolutionary drive for survival and reproduction. On the other hand, when humans experience profound alienation, isolation, and rejection, they are reminded they no longer belong in their context (Crisp, 2010). Fostering a sense of belonging can be especially important during adolescence (e.g., Thomas & Welters, 2018). At this stage, adolescents actively seek long-lasting, significant, warm relationships from family members, peers, and teachers (Newman et al., 2007). Adolescents can often experience peer rejection partly due to extensive biological changes (e.g., Twenge et al., 2001); however, prolonged feelings of rejection, ostracism, and loneliness can lead to social exclusion (Crsip, 2010; Baumeister et al., 2007). Those who experience social exclusion are at risk of physical and mental health problems and reduced life satisfaction and academic success (Ciarocco, Sommer, & Baumeister, 2001; Gonzales, 2009; 2011; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001).

While rejection may be part of the experience of adolescence, socially stigmatized adolescents are "systematically devalued and excluded" (Abrego, 2006; Major & Eccleston, 2004, p.

64). Scholarship has shown that Latinx adolescents experience acculturative stress, discrimination, and exclusionary practices at school, negatively impacting their school belonging (e.g., Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). School belonging can be improved as Latinx adolescents develop positive peer relationships (Delgado, Ettekal, Simpkins & Schaefer, 2016), and schools highlight familial and cultural values (Cupito, Stein & Gonzalez, 2015).

While promoting institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices can improve a sense of connection to school (e.g., Chang, 2001), there has been criticism that DEI practices do not necessarily enhance belonging for students, especially for Latinx students (Tienda, 2013; Lehman, 2003). Belonging experts would argue that these practices promote connectedness instead of belonging, reminding students they are merely part of school instead of developing an emotional attachment tied to belonging (e.g., validating their identities)(Crisp, 2010; Tienda, 2013). In other words, feeling connected may not be enough to feel a sense of belonging. This can be alarming as a lack of social belonging can affect Latinx students who reported loneliness and isolation from their schools and community (López Hernández, 2022; Crisp, 2010).

Nevertheless, when adolescents are reminded that they don't belong, they actively attempt to restore their sense of belonging (Callaghan, 1998; Crisp, 2010). Some studies have identified spaces of belonging Latinx adolescents seek to develop connections with people that validate and celebrate their identity (López Hernández, 2022; Suárez-Orozco, C., & López Hernández, 2020), which can help improve their sense of belonging. We know that Latinx immigrant-origin youth search for belonging in their immediate networks, family, and school (Enriquez, 2016; Cupito et al., 2015; Getrich, 2008), but we have little understanding of what space of belonging beyond their school (e.g., faith-based spaces, in sports teams) that adolescents seek for belonging in White-centered

spaces in the suburban Midwest. Nor is there much pre-existing literature on how these young people navigate these spaces.

Current Study

Considering the limited studies on Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents in the suburban Midwest, this study will contribute to our understanding of adolescents navigating Whiteness in their suburban schools and communities, which tend to be exclusionary (López Hernández, 2020). The current study used semi-structured interviews with Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents to explore what spaces of belonging adolescents sought to stabilize their sense of belonging in White-centered spaces. This study will capture the experiences of adolescents who resided in mainly White suburban neighborhoods (and not those in mostly Latinx suburban neighborhoods) to understand better how they navigated Whiteness and their sense of belonging. Specifically, this study sought to uncover:

1. In what ways do Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents growing up in a mid-western predominantly White suburb seek spaces of belonging?
2. In what ways do Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents navigate White-centered spaces?

Method

Neighborhood and School Context

Data were collected from adolescents living in primarily White and middle-class suburbs in the Midwest region (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Participants' perceptions mainly determined their suburban community's racial, ethnic, and social class composition. Census data confirmed that the sample had a similar ethnic/racial and social class composition to the suburban neighborhoods from where the sample was drawn (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Participants resided across fourteen suburbs with at least 51% White residents and had an average income of $82,700, ranging from $44,771 to $116,083. Various participants, for example,

lived in LaSalle County, which had an estimated 66.3 % White, 14.5 % Latinx, 12.6% Asian, and

5.3% African American residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021) with an average household income of

$94,930. Milford showcased the typical neighborhood profile with a high percentage of White

residents, with 87.2% White, 6.9% Latinx, 2.6% Asian, and 1.3% African American residents and an

average household income of $116,083. In contrast, Lakeview showcased a profile of a suburban

neighborhood with notable demographic shifts. They have about 55.9% White, 24.9% Asian, 10.4%

Latinx, and 5.8 % African American residents, with an average household income of $82, 387 (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2021).

While there is no information on the number of immigrant-origin families, a needs

assessment indicated that a growing number of Latinx Spanish-speaking residents in LaSalle County

asked for assistance with legal advice on immigration-related matters (Lasalle County Department of

Community Services, 2018). About half of the participants identified their suburban communities as

having precise racial, ethnic, and social class boundaries. On one side of town, it was White and

affluent. In contrast, on the other side, there was a large concentration of Latinx and Black residents,

mainly in apartment complexes. These sections are often called ethnoburubs; these areas have a

large portion of one ethnic minority but not necessarily the majority in the broader community (Li,

1998). It was also common for adolescents to reside in suburban communities like Lakeview, which

has witnessed a recent Latinx presence but attend a suburban high school in a neighborhood like

Milford, which is still predominantly White.

Participants

Participants were 29 13 to 24-year-old (M_{age} = 18.65) adolescents who grew up in a

predominantly White suburban community. More than half of the participants reported their gender

as female (n = 17), while the rest reported male (n =12). The majority of participants' parents' hailed

from Mexico (n = 22); others claimed parental origins (at least one parent) from: United States (n =

3), El Salvador ($n = 1$), Guatemala ($n = 1$), or Cuba ($n = 1$). Participants included students attending several suburban high schools ($n = 11$), 4-year universities ($n = 10$), community colleges ($n = 3$), as well suburban junior highs ($n = 2$); one participant completed their graduate training, and two were not students. Most participants were second-generation ($n = 24$) with at least one immigrant parent. About half of the participants were from documented households ($n= 15$), with both parents having legal status. The rest were part of a family with mixed-status ($n=13$), in which they had at least one family member with undocumented status. One participant was in a family with all members having an undocumented status. Only a few participants were first-generation ($n = 5$) with an undocumented status ($n = 4$).

Procedure

Procedures were approved by the University of California, Los Angeles' Institutional Review Board (IRB# 20-000199). Those who were (1) of Latinx origin, (2) adolescents (13– 24 years of age), (3) and grew up in a predominantly White suburban community in the Midwest were eligible. Participants were initially recruited through gatekeepers from local community centers and organizations. Amid recruitment, COVID-19 occurred, and a snowballing technique was mainly used for recruitment. Participants were compensated for completing one interview ($15 gift card) and an additional incentive for referring another participant (an additional $5 was given). This type of recruitment has been helpful in previous studies with vulnerable populations (Enriquez, 2016). Participants completed a semi-structured interview that was audio-recorded and typically lasted between 60 to 90 min.

All interviews were conducted in English. As the COVID-19 restrictions increased, interviews were conducted on Zoom between mid-March 2020 and June 2020. Interviews were scheduled over the phone, and participants were sent a Zoom link and the verbal consent form to

be reviewed. Before starting the interview and recording, questions were answered, and consent was obtained. Participants were paid after the interview. I then wrote a memo about themes that emerged in the interview, a critical process for data analysis. Several safeguards were put in place to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Participants were asked to complete the interview in a private space; they were allowed to turn off the video camera during the interview session. Verbal consent was provided by participants instead of written consent to avoid leaving a paper trail with their names. This consent process is standard when working with immigrant-origin youth (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2013). To ensure that participants' identity was concealed, interviews were de-identified and given an individualized pseudonym. After every interview was transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose (Dedoose, 2014), the audio and videotapes were stored in a password-protected computer. Names used in this article are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities (See Table 1).

Interview Protocol

A series of questions were asked to understand the spaces of belonging Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents sought as they navigated the White suburban Midwest. Interviews were offered in the participant's preferred language, either English or Spanish (the author was a Spanish speaker); all interviews were in English, with a few participants code-switching throughout the interview. The first section of the protocol centered around background information, daily activities, and proximal and distal spaces of belonging. These interview questions were carefully developed to identify where adolescents spent most of their time to acquire what spaces they sought, and insight into how inclusive (or exclusive) these spaces were. These questions asked about their experiences in the following spaces: (1) neighborhood, (2) peers, (3) family, (4) and at school. Questions in this section helped prompt queries of potential spaces of belonging (in the case they reported exclusion). The

latter part of the interview protocol prompted participants to address their connection with their country of origin and the U.S. and messages of exclusion they might be receiving. Developmentally appropriate prompts were developed and asked to capture complex concepts (i.e., xenophobia, racism, social belonging, or exclusion); for example, questions were asked to understand participants' awareness of how racial and ethnic minorities are treated in their community: "How do people treat you there [neighborhood]? Why do you think this was??" Please see Appendix A for the interview protocol. This study mainly focused on the initial part of the protocol about their immediate contexts (e.g., neighborhood friends, school) and how they dealt with Whiteness in these spaces.

Researcher Positionality

Growing up as a Latinx adolescent with undocumented status in a predominately White suburban neighborhood, I received exclusionary messages from teachers, employees from grocery stores, and my neighbors. These experiences have informed my insider perspective, which was helpful when working with my sample (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). While these experiences made me an insider, my perspective differed from other Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents. I connected less with participants who grew up in primarily Latinx neighborhoods and households with documented status. Nevertheless, I made an effort to listen and learn from their experiences.

During the data collection process and analysis, I grappled with the trustworthiness of my data. I regularly considered my bias after each interview and during data analysis to obtain credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability of analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During analysis, I used triangulation (e.g., prolonged engagement, investigator triangulation) and provided thick descriptions in the findings section to obtain credibility and transferability. Lastly, I wrote reflective notes after each interview to capture the participants' sense of trust and rapport with me and their setting and how my conceptual lens affected our discussions. This process helped me understand how comfortable and willing participants appeared in the interview and whether there may have

been other reasons they disengaged from our conversation (e.g., there was a family member in the room).

Data Analysis

The first stage of analysis commenced during data collection. I wrote detailed memos after each interview to ensure consistency and transparency during the interpretation of the data. Each memo captured detailed information about the interview, possible themes, exemplar quotes, and nonverbal cues. This stage was essential for the second stage of analysis. After the interviews were transcribed, I began the second stage of analysis, where I used a hybrid thematic and inductive–deductive coding approach to glean common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When exploring a phenomenon, thematic analysis can help search for themes and patterns in the data—using an inductive-deductive approach in this study allowed theory-driven codes and data-driven codes to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used an iterative process to determine codes that emerged from the data. Saturation was obtained when the information from the interviews became repetitive without the emergence of novel experiences (Douglas, 1976; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I read and re-read responses and detailed memos multiple times to gain early impressions of the data. Initial codes were generated in English from patterns from the data and based on deductive coding. The initial inductive coding yielded approximately 60 codes. After completing this coding stage, I met regularly with an expert in the field to discuss initial codes and draft a codebook. We constantly revised, condensed, and redefined codes to reach validity and reliability. Codes were then generated and organized systematically into three prominent themes and fifteen subthemes guided by intergroup contact, ecological and risk, and resilience frameworks (e.g., Suarez-Orozco et al., 2018). The codebook was finalized after constant revisions, and discrepancies were addressed between the expert in the field and me. Interviews were subsequently coded using Dedoose. (see

Table 2). Upon completing the coding, I used the detailed memos again to help me describe and interpret the data. This process helped capture participants' potential spaces of belonging and identify profiles highlighting the strategies participants used to navigate White-centered spaces.

Results

The analyses of the interview yielded three major themes that captured how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents who resided in predominately White suburban communities searched for belonging in the face of exclusion (see table 2). The first section illustrates descriptive information about the realities of growing up in the White suburban Midwest. Second, I will present results from the following main themes (1) findings spaces of belonging and (2) dealing with White-centered spaces. This section will describe the spaces of belonging participants identified in their suburban high school and community and as they moved into higher education contexts. Finally, I will cover four profiles that showcase how adolescents navigated White-centered spaces, including (1) Acting "White-Washed[1]" and Rationalizing, (2) Acting "White-Washed" and Resisting, and (3) Acting "White-Washed" and Excluded, and those who instead (4) Sought out Latinx-Centered Spaces.

Growing up in the White Suburban Midwest

The majority of the 29 participants spoke about their neighborhood being a "White populated area" [Paola, 20, female] and "middle-class neighborhood" [Alvaro, 16, male], as well as being "safe" [Paola, 20, female], "quiet" [Carla, 23, female], and "being calm" [Maria, 15, female]. Understanding the racial and ethnic composition also triggered their awareness of how often they

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[1] Being "White-washed" was a common phrase that participants used to describe those who behaved, acted and dressed to align with White norms and culture. I will continue to use this phrase throughout the results section to capture their fidelity, but the current literature often labels it as "acting White" (e.g., Durkee et al., 2020; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

are the minority in their everyday experience in their suburban contexts. Alfredo, a 23-year-old, spoke about this experience: "[My neighborhood is] mainly Caucasian…. I feel like if I walk into a space, I mainly will be the only…minority, Latino…In my middle school experience, I was definitely the only Latino male."

Participants' responses also captured the growing presence of Latinx families in the White suburban Midwest. Sonia, a 17-year-old, shared this sentiment: "[My community] has highly expanded their population of Hispanic people." Many adolescents noticed the changing demographics at their suburban schools with the recent influx of Latinx immigrants and newcomers. Nicole, a 16-year-old, expressed this: "There's been a lot of like, um Latinos and Latinas and like them coming to the school... and they're like Mexican but don't know how to speak English yet, they're just learning." In Study 1, adolescents acknowledged intergroup tensions as they realized that their neighbors were not always open to the changing trends in their White suburban communities. Neighbors were resistant to the shift and intergroup contact, as pointed out by Sonia [17, female]:

> American people might have something against it…I think you can tell a lot, by just how they look and if it's disapproving or like choose not to be around them and stuff. So, I guess that makes me realize that there are people that just don't agree with it…like with a lot of Hispanics, or just anyone of any other race coming into their community.

Upon reflection, adolescents realized they were constantly questioned about their belonging in their white suburban community. Amy, a 23-year-old, shared the constant interrogations her family underwent every time a new neighbor moved into her mostly White street. Amy argues that living in a "nice house" in the "area...that is predominately upper-class like upper White class" made her neighbors question her family's belonging:

We had been there already for a few years... this family had just moved in and like my mom was...watering the plants or whatever, and they were just like, 'oh, you guys live here?'…like that idea, that you know, we don't belong there, or what are we doing, you know?

Notably, Amy told me that she lived on the mostly white side, and the other side of town housed more Black and Latinx residents. Many other participants described the clear division between residents by racial, ethnic, and social class. Participants spoke about this division as "one side of town is more impoverished…highly Latino populated…and the other side of town...[is] predominately White population [Jaime, 24, male]." A few participants, for example, grew up in a suburb with one of the most visible divisions from where the data was drawn, which was divided between railroads.

These participants explained the divide in detail, as seen in the two high schools in their community: "[One] is considered all Hispanic…and then [the other] is mostly considered White. {Anabel, 20, female]. Anabel continues to explain the difference between the two sides of town:

[On one side]..we can say the rich and middle class [live]…[and] 'oh you have a house, you live good, and are fine and wealthy... and the other side… you know we need help...which is kind of like the area where I live… they are living day to day.

Adolescents resided on both sides of the division. Regardless of where they lived, they were exposed to White-centered spaces at school and in the larger community and had to learn strategies to navigate Whiteness. Some adapted to these circumstances by searching for belonging and affirmation where there was Latinx presence, including ethnoburbs or at the local grocery store that served their community. Others searched for inclusion in White-centered spaces to avoid being targeted as a "wetback" [Andrew, 18, male] and "gang banger" [Franco, 15, male].

Finding Spaces of Belonging

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It was clear that adolescents longed for belonging in these spaces where they were often reminded that they did not belong. Most participants searched for inclusion in their suburban junior and high school community and as they moved into higher institution contexts. The section will also describe potential spaces of belonging (see table 3). Profiles of participants that showcase how they navigated White-centered spaces will be presented afterward (see table 4).

Suburban Community

About half of the participants searched for inclusion in ethnoburbs, churches, and community centers. These spaces provided them with a sense of protection from the hostility they endured outside these boundaries. The section below will detail how these spaces have become safe, affirming, and welcoming spaces that often stabilize their thwarted sense of belonging.

Neighborhood. A few adolescents spoke about ethnoburbs that have been developed in their White suburban community. These spaces are often apartment complexes that house Latinx and Black residents. Participants spoke about their apartment complex being their "little bubble" that protected them from the outside world fueled with exclusion.

For example, a 15-year-old Maria spoke about living in an ethnoburb: "My neighborhood…I have a lot of friends…[and] I communicate with a bunch of different people…so I feel like I already know everyone that's around this area…I feel protected [her]." Like Maria and many other participants, their suburban high school school was located in a neighboring suburb with limited Latinx presence. Maria spoke about the community within the borders of her high school: "I feel really comfortable…in my neighborhood…I feel like more going towards my schools neighborhood...sometimes [they] treat you differently."

The sense of community in ethnoburbs, with a congregation of Latinx community members, was crucial for adolescents within White suburban neighborhoods. Gloria, a 20-year-old, grew up in

a small section with a strong presence of Latinx residents in her White suburban community. She recently moved to another suburban neighborhood that had fewer Latinx residents. She recalls how much she misses the ethnoburbs she used to live at:

> I miss the apartment complexes…I miss us going to the laundry mat…the ice cream man outside. It's just not the same over here it's too quiet…I remember feeling comfortable walking around the apartment complex as a child because I would see my friends all around the apartment complexes…and I wouldn't feel scared. The (new town) makes me uneasy, not knowing everybody and just feeling really disconnected from the community.

Other adolescents shared the same sense of community with Latinx neighbors in ethnoburbs. Alvaro, a 17-year-old, described how his community made these efforts:

> We [Latinx neighbors] support each other pretty good…the way we are spreading information pretty fast around the area….we do have big churches around the city…[there are] small organization around the town that do help support when we are trying to accomplish a certain goal.

Church. Another vital space of belonging for many participants was the church. The church presented adolescents with an array of affirming, welcoming, and inclusive settings. First and foremost, adolescents were involved at church to practice their faith. A 17-year-old, Sonia, noted: "What I love about church, it's a religious thing, my faith, where I go…to talk to God." Several adolescents agreed with Sonia that the church is a space to pray and "talk to God." Especially when participants were having a difficult time, as Elisa [16, female] noted: "Times are kind of tough right now…I feel like church always motivates me."

The church was a gateway to building friendships and community with Latinx families for others and most participants. Being around Latinx neighbors helped them embrace and practice

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cultural traditions and values. As such, adolescents were involved in the choir, altar served and helped organize events at church. Luna, a 16-year-old, expressed: "[At church I am in the] dance group, youth group...[and] alter serving." Notably, adolescents rarely interacted with that many Latinx people outside the church. It was here that they celebrated cultural holidays, traditions, and values, such as the annual "kermes" [Santiago, 14, male], where adolescents performed traditional dances (e.g., Ballet Folklórico). Elisa [16, female] noted, "I take a lot of pride in my culture...so I am involved in my church…we have this dance group…called Ballet Folklórico… I've been part of that group since I was like six." Being part of these events was initially enforced by their parents, but adolescents sought these spaces as well as they got older. Elisa, for example, noted: "My mom was also part of that dance group, so we're all very connected to like our culture, and we take a lot of pride in that too, um just making sure where we come from."

The church was seen as a "family-based" [Elisa, 16, female] space, in which adolescents spent a significant amount of time at church with their families. Family members were involved together in the choir, dance group, or youth group. Lucy, a 20-year-old, spoke of how connected her family is at their local church and how she and her sister met their closest friends at church. Her response showcases the friendships built at church: "Me and my sister hang out with two [friends]…we really bond together and we get each other because we're like with them like basically the whole week because we go to church every other day."

Paola, a 20-year-old, also shared this sentiment. She stated how she met a close friend: "We decided to sing together at church...it was always fun...I also really enjoyed our dance group...we would do Ballet Folklórico." Like Paola other adolescents, the church seemed to host an array of spaces that built positive relations and connections. It is not surprising that many participants agreed with Paola, who mentioned that church was "a happy place for me."

Community Centers. A few adolescents reported spending a significant amount of time in community centers. They found a sense of inclusion in these centers, with many being part of local sports teams—adolescents frequently practice in the recreational park district facilities. Luna, a 16-year-old, has been going to the "sports center" since she was nine to practice gymnastics. She spoke of how much she enjoys the sport and the center, so much that she recently started working as a coach to younger kids.

Other adolescents went to "outreach" centers for academic resources and opportunities. Andrew, an 18-year-old, identified a center that helped him with homework and provided him with mentorship and college preparedness. He shared that the center was built "in an area, next to only apartments" that housed families that "need it more." The center served low-income Black and Latinx families in his ethnoburb. For Andrew, the resource center supported and helped him navigate his undocumented status:

> They're [people in the outreach center] all very very very sympathetic… I'm an undocumented kid like none of them are undocumented so they would never know how it feels, but like [mentor] for example, he tries his best, and he tries the most to do to like look into scholarships for me or like try to understand like how it is for me".

Some adolescents spoke about their community centers' efforts to improve intergroup relations, including providing support for the Latinx community. Some of these adolescents were grateful that their community offered English classes to Spanish speakers. Another participant shared a community initiative she was involved in to "bridge the gap" between "a divided neighborhood." [Ruby, 20, female]. The neighborhood where Ruby grew up was divided into two sections; she noted: "It's like two different towns.. the rich side. The houses around it are more rich, and they tend to be more White...and then on the end that I live, it tends to be more mixed." Ruby

was proud to be part of this initiative. She spoke about her time on the executive board: "This program...was for teenagers... I was one of the executive board members, and then our goal was to identify a problem within our community and then try to solve it." For instance, she helped organize a diaper drive, food pantries, and a daughter dance. While the initiative had barely started that year, she was optimistic that it could promote positive intergroup relations.

Suburban Schools

Nearly all participants identified spaces of belonging on their school grounds, such as after-school clubs, sports, and classrooms. Adolescents mainly joined extracurricular activities in suburban schools to meet friends with common goals, interests, and backgrounds. While academic spaces in school were reportedly experienced as exclusionary adolescents, they sought after-school and extracurricular activities where they felt more of a sense of inclusion (for example, in the school dance team and clubs highlighting ethnic appreciation). A little less than half ($n = 13$) of the participants were either in junior high or high school, but most of the experiences were about the 11 participants in a suburban high school.

Extracurricular Activities. About two-thirds of participants searched for inclusion in extracurricular activities, including after-school clubs and sports. Being heavily involved in after-school and extracurricular activities was seen as a strategy for having a "good experience" [Anabel, 20, female] at school. In fact, this strategy helped repair many adolescents thwarted belonging stemming from racism, xenophobia, and exclusion in their suburban contexts.

For instance, Anabel joined after-school clubs in high school "because she wanted to be someone." Her response was typical of undocumented students that wanted to feel connected and included. Their undocumented status added an extra layer of structural exclusion while growing up in the White suburban Midwest. Anabel continued to tell me, "I joined as many clubs as I was able

to…and it actually helped with high school." Jaime, a 24-year-old, also stated being involved in after-school clubs as a way to feel welcomed at his suburban high school: "I strived to make sure I was going to be successful, and so I participated in a lot of [clubs]…[and] the things I involved myself with made myself have an experience that was very welcoming."

Adolescents identified an array of clubs and sports that they joined to connect with their peers and school. A couple of students talked about being involved in the school band and choir. These students enjoyed their time here as they met peers who shared their love of music. Franco, a 15-year-old, shared the bond he built with high school peers: "When I am in band, I feel like a connection with other people because we all like the same thing. We're kind of having something in common." Other participants sought after-school programs highlighting ethnic appreciation, such as the Latinx club or the school dance team performing traditional Latinx music.

Ruby, a 20-year-old, showcases one of her spaces of belonging in high school: "I was even part of the Latinx dance crew...I don't think I've known any other high school [around here] that has like a Latino dance group...it was pretty cool." Notably, after-school clubs promoting their culture and traditions were not as common in these schools and often required advocacy from students to create them. Given the lack of space, they sought any extracurricular activities that had some level of diversity and non-White peers. Emmanuel, a 15-year-old, enjoys being in the high school marching band: "We are like a third family...everyone's really nice, people come from different races...[while] its mostly White people…there still bits of each kind of race."

Other spaces that many adolescents joined were sports, which was crucial, a gateway to being popular, and feeling included in White-centered spaces. In other words, sports were often the only way they could survive being a "White-dominated"[Gael, 22, male] high school, which improved their reported connection and belonging at school. Ivan, a 22-year-old, described how

being involved in soccer improved his connection with peers and his suburban high school: [school] was an awesome experience...like my senior year, I was just walking down the hallways but like I knew most everyone. It was an accomplishment."

The Role of Peers. Most participants sought peer groups to navigate adolescence, mainly growing up in a White suburban context. Friendships were essential for promoting a sense of belonging for adolescents at their White suburban school. Maria, a 15-year-old, showcased the importance of friendships at her high school: "I like the most [about sports] is being able to collaborate with more people that you probably wouldn't never thought started talking to... and just getting to know new people."

Many adolescents were the minority in their White suburban high school, so they had to seek primarily cross-group friendships. As noted above, they made these connections through extracurricular activities. Alejandra, a 19-year-old, expressed developing some of her best friends in high school sports teams: "I played tennis and soccer...and cross country…I had a ton of those friends. Everyone was super close. It was just fun." Like Alejandra, many friendships were developed and maintained because they shared similar interests and personal backgrounds.

Some adolescents actively sought intra-group friendships. Fernando, a 15-year-old, talks about why he felt most comfortable with Latinx peers at school: "My Hispanic friends we have similar viewpoints, and we don't ever judge each other...with my other [White[friends…I don't feel like they would understand the same experiences... about [me]." Lily [13, female] had a similar sentiment about seeking Latinx peers at her junior high because of their shared background: "My best friends, she plays volleyball with me on the school team...and my parents are really close [with her Latinx parents]."

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Ethnic peer intra-group friendships were significant for adolescents that reported profound loneliness and exclusion at their suburban school. Carla [23, female], for instance, a student with undocumented status, noted her "ESL friends" in her suburban White middle and high school was her only safe space, with all of her friends being immigrants and mostly Latinx peers:

> I was very aware of my accent and the fact that I was still learning a lot, so I didn't really interact with a lot of my [mostly White] classmates and teachers.. because of if... I felt like I didn't fit in…[so I was] just hanging out with my ESL friends, I guess because we were all in the same situation, we'd try to stay connected, and we would just try to hang out with each other.

Moving into Higher Education Contexts

About half of the 14 participants who moved into higher education reported finding spaces of belonging within their institutions. College participants identified organizations and cultural centers as key spaces that helped build community on campus—these spaces of belonging introduced them to new friends with shared interests and hobbies and those who helped embrace their ethnic identity.

Greek Organizations. Several of these participants identified their Greek organizations as a space of belonging. They joined Greek organizations to build a sense of "camaraderie inside one group" [Gael, 22, male]. It was common for adolescents to join fraternities and sororities geared toward Latinx students. This sentiment was highlighted by Ivan [22, male]:

> I really like started like just joining the fraternity and really embraced that and like and just being like surrounded by the same group of individuals that also had the same I guess like respect and understanding of like the roots, like the Latino roots. It really helped me, and really like it cause we focused on building on the Latino men and things like that.

This sentiment was important for adolescents that did not have many Latinx-centered spaces in their k-12 schooling. For instance, a 23-year-old Amy helped bring a Latinx sorority to campus. She stated:

I hold very close to my heart just, not just because I've put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to bring this organization to campus, but just because has um, it was really the first time in a long, long time probably since elementary school that I was able to be around you know quote in quote "my people," you know.

Indeed, adolescents joined these organizations to develop and maintain a support system that helped them thrive on campus. Alma [20, female] noted this: "[My sorority helped] support each other with our academics, with community service healthcare awareness, and just hanging with each other."

College Organizations and Centers. Some college students joined sports teams, dance groups, academic organizations, and social clubs. For example, Ruby [20, female] spoke of why she was involved in the foreign language program: "I would say the people that I'm closest with I met them through a foreign language program." Like other spaces of belonging, adolescents pursued these spaces to meet friends. This excerpt highlights this sentiment:

[Before I joined clubs] I would just go, and have class and leave... I didn't really talk to anybody. I was pretty much to myself, like I kept to myself, and um, after I joined the clubs…I would hang out with a lot of people, like I would see a lot of people meet different people, and it was just like I felt like I had a better experience [Carla, 23, female].

Other participants sought mainly Latinx-centered spaces on campus. For example, Jaime [24, male] was the president of a Latinx organization and helped create "La Familia." Jaime explains his organization: "It's an organization that incorporates all the Latino organizations on campus. So, it's

that larger cohort that we have now within each other and that larger leadership that we can communicate with." Many of these organizations were supported or were under the umbrella of Latinx and cultural centers that served Latinx students. Cultural centers provide students the physical space to host meetings for their organizations, work on their homework, interact with peers, and attend cultural events hosted by the center. For example, Alma, a 20-year-old, expressed how she spent her time in the Latinx center at her school:

> "I also really like the diversity center on campus. I spend a lot of time over there…being involved in the events that they often host… [before [I just really didn't feel a sense of connection to them until I really started talking to the Latinas on campus and then doing different kinds of events with them."

Other students agreed with Alma's sentiment about the importance of cultural centers' presence on campus. Jaime noted: "[That center is] amazing…just because the amount of help that they do and… events that they put on us and… them just trying to do makes a difference within all of our organizations.

These spaces gave adolescents some level of belonging, as they encountered positive relationships with people who shared common goals or interests. Through these relationships, they formed social connections with people in the face of exclusion. Notably, some of the predominantly White-centered spaces they sought came with a cost. These consequences made it challenging for adolescents to develop a healthy sense of belonging.

Dealing with White-Centered Spaces

Participants demonstrated a variety of strategies to navigate White-centered spaces. Here, four different profiles will be described to illustrate adolescents' strategies to navigate the White suburban Midwest. As noted, participants understood that most of their spaces were White.

Adolescents responded to this realization differently, with more than half of the adolescents attempting to navigate these spaces by acting "White-washed," and the remaining adolescents sought Latinx-centered spaces. These three profiles will highlight the acting "White-washed" strategy with varying degrees: those who (1) rationalized, (2) resisted, or (3) were excluded. The latter part will conclude with the last profile showcasing adolescents' strategy to seek Latinx-centered instead of White spaces. See Table 4 for profiles by gender, education, generation, and legal status.

Profiles in Seeking Out and Coping with White-Centered Spaces

Those classified in the acting "White-washed" profiles choose to acculturate into White norms to survive the Whiteness in their neighborhood. Adolescents defined those who were "White-washed" as those who acted, behaved, and engaged in interests and hobbies aligned with White culture. The profiles below show the variability to which adolescents attempted to fit into White-centered spaces and how the ingroup and outgroup received their efforts.

Rationalizing. Over one-quarter of participants were categorized in this profile, showcasing their attempt to fit into the White culture, justify racist comments from White peers, and disassociate from Latinx culture. About half of the adolescents were female, and most were second-generation.

Alejandra, a 19-year-old, typifies the many reasons adolescents pursued White-centered spaces and decided to stay in them, even though they were sometimes exclusive. Alejandra grew up in a predominantly White and affluent neighborhood and attended primarily White K-12 schools.

However, she played on a more diverse soccer team in the next town in middle school. There were Latinx residents in the next city, which allowed her to interact with more Latinas. As she got older and stopped playing on that soccer team, she realized that her spaces were mainly White-centered. She noted:

[As] I grew older…[and] went to high school…I had to be on a different team …like the team [in my community] was all like Whites. I was like the only one of color. So, like there, I felt like it just hit me. I felt like not included.

Throughout her responses, she expressed feeling different and excluded during that period of her life. Yet, Alejandra quickly understood that she could feel included by joining spaces that she enjoyed and were White-centered. Her way into these spaces was sports, as she noted that "being in athletics, it gave me leeway." Alejandra's involvement in her high school's soccer team aided her to feel "connect with them [White peers], and it grew like we played." Being in these spaces also meant she dressed, acted, and behaved like her White peers.

Other participants agreed that being in White-centered spaces helped them navigate and survive their White suburban neighborhood. While acting "White-washed" allowed them to fit in with White peers, it came with a cost. These participants were more likely to report hearing "racist" comments from their White peers and neighbors about the Latinx community. Alvaro, a 17-year-old, shared some of these comments: "Mexicans shouldn't be here, Mexicans, um, they don't belong here, this is why you are illegal." Adolescents classified in this profile responded to these messages with some disapproval.

Nevertheless, many of them distanced themselves from these messages. Alvaro noted: "They don't specifically mean them towards me because I grew up with them." Alejandra also rationalized her peer's racist comments about her community by saying they are "joking" and noting that it doesn't "offend [her]." In this profile, Alejandra's sentiment was similar to many others: "I've heard it so many times. So, I like to think it's normal, and I feel like it doesn't really offend me. Like, it's just like funny." Again, being in search of belonging in White-centered spaces come at a cost for these adolescents.

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Being in these spaces also caused tension with their Latinx peers. Adolescents in this profile were often teased and questioned for being "White-washed." This response was displayed by Franco's [15, male]: "[Latinx peers] keep saying uh like 'oh why don't you like speak Spanish?'… and they tell us 'be an actual like true beaner.'" Alejandra was told the same thing by her Latinx peers, which derived from her feelings of not being "Hispanic enough." They also questioned her for "[not]speaking Spanish...and [why she] didn't talk to many Hispanic people at school."

Adolescents rationalized their actions as being "White-washed." They explicitly expressed not wanting to act, behave, and seek out intragroup friendships. Franco described his reasons: "I don't want to be in that group with other Latinos, and Mexicans cause then um they get called.. gang bangers." Alejandra shared that she never got the opportunity to be friends with them because they were not in her circles, which tended to be in sports. Alejandra stated: "Mexicans weren't really athletic…[and] I felt like in my school Mexicans or Hispanics were very standoffish. "As a whole, these adolescents were exposed to more exclusive and racist messages, dealt with identity issues and conflict with ingroup peers.

Resisting. I distinguish adolescents in the Resisting profile from those in the Rationalizing profile. Four adolescents actively searched for White-centered spaces at some point but, throughout the years, started questioning their actions. Participants who fit the Resisting profile eventually sought out Latinx-centered spaces to feel welcomed and accepted. Two of the participants were women; all four were the second generation in their family and the first-generation to college. Notably, three of these participants went to a predominately White rural institution. Many of their reflections on acting "White-washed" happened as they found a safe space in higher education.

Ivan, a 22-year-old, grew up in a White suburban neighborhood divided between primarily White and affluent neighbors and working-class Latinx and Asian residents. He lived on the

predominantly White side in his early years, where he was involved in sports and mostly had White peers. When he joined volleyball in middle school, he understood this racial and ethnic divide and the differences between his White peers. He noted:

> [In volleyball] ...80% of those players were like White, and they would invite me over to their house and stuff…. I was like, 'I don't look the same like as all of you.' I always thought, 'Oh, what are they gonna say?' Or, 'What are they gonna say behind my back about me?'

He quickly realized he had to change how he acted and behaved to "fit in." Ivan stated: "I started dressing like them in a way ….and hanging out with them and listening to the same music as them [like White peers]." During his first year in high school, his family moved to the other side of town with a Latinx presence. Ivan spoke of how hesitant he was to move and transfer to the new high school. This was partly due to the negative attitudes he heard about that side of town from the White community. He expressed this sentiment: "I never wanted to go to East because like everything I was hearing and they were like, 'oh East is a bad school' or 'East is this.' And 'there's a lot of fights and stuff.'"

It was not until Ivan found spaces of belonging at the new high school that he enjoyed his time there. He found Latinx friends that embraced him and helped him join the soccer team. Ivan felt connected to his new neighborhood and school as he became involved with Latinx peers in after-school clubs and sports. When Ivan went to college in a primarily White setting, where he also encountered racist incidents, he had already learned how to search for safe spaces. He was involved in various Latinx organizations with the majority of Latinx members. Choosing to embrace his culture and ethnic identity was how Ivan resisted being in these White-centered spaces and tried to ignore people's negative attitudes toward his community. He noted:

I realized through college that doesn't matter like I shouldn't feel that way [need to act White] ...my parents called me out on it, and I had to really rethink what I was doing… [I asked myself] 'you really have to take the decision and say do I really want this for myself...do I really want to pursue this?"

Other participants shared a similar experience to Ivan, where they decided to resist the need to pursue only White-centered spaces. For example, a 23-year-old Amy spoke of how being a lighter-skinned Latina made it easier to be "White-washed." Indeed, people around her encouraged her to "hold on that ..it could get [you] further in life pretending to be White pretending." Nevertheless, Amy decided to pursue opportunities and activities that were more Latinx-centered, especially when she got to college. While her college was mainly White, in a rural setting, she was one of the leading advocates for establishing a multicultural sorority. She noted, " "I went through the whole process… to establish the sorority on campus. It has Latino roots. It is very deeply rooted in the Latino culture." For some participants in this profile, their experiences in Latinx-centered spaces were the first time they were around Latinx peers and their culture. Amy noted:

   I hold very close to my heart [sorority], not just because I've put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to bring this organization..[but] it was really the first time in a long, long time probably since elementary school that I was able to be around you know quote in quote "my people", …Because the majority of the women in my organization were Latina, you know, me growing up in this White community me going to a predominantly White school.

Excluded. Participants who attempted to fit into White-centered spaces but were denied access to White friend groups were categorized in the Excluded profile. Four participants described this experience of feeling excluded from their White neighborhood and school. Participants in this

profile were evenly divided between gender, and two were first-generation adolescents with undocumented status.

Andrew, an 18-year-old, embodied this profile that highlights exclusion. Like the other adolescents in the acting "White-washed" categories, Andrew realized that he had to be part of sports, make White friends and be popular to survive the Whiteness of his school. He noted this sentiment:

> If you play sports, it's a lot easier to be open and but I'm very very very sociable… I was able to be social enough to become, I guess this is the best way to describe it become, popular because popular in my school they are the White people, right. It's because majority of the people there are White, so majority of the friends that [I have are] White.

Yet, he spoke of how he rarely spent time with his White friends after school, "we're super close at school, but like we don't reach out to each other after school." Andrew was still searching for belonging in white-centered spaces, which he finally found at work. This sentiment was expressed in his response about what he liked the best about his job:

> It's a nicer fast-food restaurant…a lot of people from (neighboring White town) like my friend's um teammates whatever students at (high school) come to this place, uh to eat…. And so, I can see a little bit [of them]… what I mean by see is the two communities' kind of like coming together [White community and the small Latinx community].

Notably, the friends he identified as the closest to him were Latinx, but he seemed to prioritize seeking White-centered spaces. Other participants eagerly attempted to fit into White-centered spaces but were not accepted. Paola, a 20-year-old, noted:

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I was never like White enough for the like the White students… they were nice to

me, but also, they were only nice to me when they needed homework or like…but

then outside of that, it was like no conversation. And I still try to engage with

everybody as much as possible, but no one necessarily ever like reached out to me.

These adolescents struggled the most to find inclusion with their ingroup and the outgroup.

In other words, they were excluded from Latinx groups for acting "White-washed," but White peers

did not accept them. Andrew's response illustrated ingroup tension:

[Latinx peers] judge me, they're like, 'oh, Andrew is White-washed" … I take it as a

compliment…. I'm very mannered. I'm very intellectual. I try hard in school, right. I'm in a

couple of advanced some AP classes…. [Latinx peers say that] because they're just isolated in

their own kind, and they don't want to open up, so when they see someone who is opening

up, they don't consider them their kind".

It is alarming as many of these adolescents had undocumented status. They were most at risk

of being socially excluded with limited access to spaces of belonging.

Profile in Seeking out Latinx-Centered Spaces

The rest of the 13 participants were classified in the Seeking out Latinx-centered profile.

They actively conveyed their efforts to search out Latinx spaces instead of mostly White-centered

contexts. Over two-thirds of the adolescents were female and were second-generation. The

remaining were male and first-generation adolescents, with two having an undocumented status.

While Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents were aware that their suburban schools and

community were majority White, they were more interested in being in Latinx-centered spaces. They

wanted to learn and embrace their culture and interact with Latinx peers. They pursued these

connections through after-school clubs that highlighted ethnic appreciation (e.g., salsa dance team), their ESL courses with mostly Latinx and immigrant peers, and at their church, where they were in the choir and Ballet Folklórico. These spaces reminded them of people who looked like them, dressed like them, and had similar backgrounds. They reported that Latinx-centered spaces were calming and welcoming, and felt at home.

Luna, a 16-year-old who grew up in a predominantly White community, is involved in various activities at her mostly White high school. She is in the gymnastic teams and the school band during the off-season. Yet, she spends a significant amount of time in the community her parents grew up in, a community with a more Latinx presence. Their preferred church, family, and friends are in the next town. She expressed her involvement in the church:

> We go to church in like in [X neighboring city] …that's where we have a lot of the things we're really mostly into. Like I do Baile Folkloric…, especially because like our church was over there, we had a lot of friends, too.

While Luna feels welcomed at her school and has mostly White friends, she doesn't seem to have deep connections with them. She noted:

> In [my] high school [my friends are] … my gymnastic friends, I've known them since freshman year we're always together…but the thing is I never hang out with them out of school. It's mostly the friends from [neighboring] high school that I go out and see them in the weekends. Even on the weekdays, I'll go out to I see them more than I do my friends from my high school.

She continues throughout the interview to talk about how much she enjoys being in her church and the community in the next town. She met her best friends at church as they "really know who I am" and "they know my mom and dad." Many other adolescents enjoyed their time at church

because it was "family time." Families would go to mass together, make friends and enjoy events hosted by the church that celebrated their culture, like a "kermes [Santiago, 14, male]."

Adolescents also searched for Latinx-centered spaces that were "private zone[s]" [Anabel, 20, female]. As noted above, various participants' families sought to live in ethnoburbs within their White suburban communities. Families and participants felt more comfortable living in apartment complexes around Latinx families. Others, mainly first-generation adolescents, sought Latinx-centered spaces geared toward immigrants. Anabel, a 20-year-old, talked about an after-school club she advocated to be created for undocumented students:

> I reached out because I was very intimidated that because I didn't… at that time, I didn't have DACA and I was very intimidated that I wasn't gonna go anywhere in my life... [high school teachers] wanted me to start off looking already to scholarships, looking already into colleges … and luckily, they kind of decided to build an organization just for undocumented/DACA students

These spaces were especially crucial for many participants with undocumented status, like Anabel, because they found a safe space with other adolescents who shared their backgrounds. Anabel's reflected on the undocumented club: "[It was] a private comfort zone for just undocumented/DACA students." As older first-generation participants moved from their k-12 schooling, they found inclusion beyond school. Mauricio, a 24-year-old first-generation male, talked about his future goals and his connection to his home country:

> My dad he likes to train horses… I used to do that when I was in Mexico with the Charreria thing down there so we've been trying for the last two years to buy a farm … is right by a random border in [Midwestern state] and Illinois… I grew up in a farm when I was a kid and …I liked it, I knew how to feed animals, everything, and I really liked it.

Taken together, adolescents choose to pursue Latinx-centered spaces. For some, they searched for people that looked like them and would celebrate their culture. In contrast, others sought "private zones" to stabilize their belonging, such as adolescents with undocumented status. As a whole, Latinx-centered spaces aided adolescents with the support needed to navigate White-centered suburban contexts.

Discussion

Given the implications of maintaining a healthy sense of belonging during adolescence, understanding how Latinx immigration-origin adolescents searched for belonging in the face of exclusion was crucial (López Hernández, 2022). Grounded in an integrative risk and resilience model, this study contributed to our limited understanding of how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents navigate their sense of belonging in the White suburban Midwest. Data analysis yielded vital findings, including capturing potential spaces of belonging and the strategies adolescents developed to address thwarted belonging and Whiteness in their suburban contexts.

This study adds to the research literature on adolescents' racialized experiences of belonging. A large body of literature has found that Latinx immigrant adolescents are systematically excluded from their contexts, mainly due to their undocumented status (e.g., Abrego, 2019; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2021). It is important to note that most participants in this study were born and raised in American society. While adolescents felt American, they were often questioned about their belonging in the White suburban Midwest and American culture. Of particular concern is the current political backlash from White suburban communities about the growing presence of Latinx second-generation families (Enos, 2019).

Adolescents understood the realities of growing up in the White suburban Midwest at an early age, including everyday experiences of discrimination, xenophobia, and exclusion. Like other

studies, participants understood that their suburban school and community had racial borders that separated White, ethnically, and racially diverse residents (e.g., Rodriguez, 2020). These boundaries were visible in highly divisive suburban communities that forced Latinx, Asian and Black residents to congregate in ethnoburbs. Adolescents actively considered belonging as they were constantly reminded they did not belong in a White suburban neighborhood (Crisp, 2010).

Our findings reveal that adolescents sought various spaces of belonging across their community and school. While a small body of scholarship has explored Latinx adolescents' experiences in the White suburban Midwest, it lacks attention to their belonging inside and beyond suburban schools. This study highlighted how essential ethnoburbs were for Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents and their families. Literature on ethnic enclaves suggests that these spaces develop as a need for survival and protection from hostile attitudes and societal efforts (Liu & Geron, 2008). Scholars have found that ethnic enclaves have evolved into ethnoburbs as more racial and ethnic communities change the demographics of White suburbia (Liu & Geron, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). While there was a presence of a Latinx population in the ethnoburbs of this study, they were still the minority in the larger community (Lui & Geron, 2008, Li, 1998).

Adolescents carved out spaces of belonging in their suburban community and high school. For example, many adolescents sought churches in the neighboring communities with more Latinx presence. Caring adults were critical in introducing a few adolescents to these spaces of belonging. For example, parents commonly initiated connections to their Latinx community through church, encouraging them to be in the church's choir and youth group and attend the annual "kermes" to learn more about their culture. Although parents were not interviewed as part of this study, research on parent ethnic-racial socialization provides some insight into parents' intentionality behind their actions. Specifically, introducing youth to these spaces may be a form of cultural socialization, a

practice meant to enhance their children's ethnic pride and maintain their culture's traditions (Hughes, 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Spaces of belonging were also carved in suburban school grounds, such as after-school clubs highlighting ethnic appreciation and clubs with peers that shared common interests (e.g., school band and sports teams). Recent literature on documentation status socialization among Latinx immigrant parents highlights the need for schools, in particular, to provide adolescents spaces to make sense of their documentation status as they experience legalized violence (Cross et al., 2021). Indeed, some participants, mainly those who were undocumented, talked about some teachers and community mentors helping them with a safe space they could process the challenges of their undocumented status (e.g., Brietzke & Perreira, 2017).

The most striking findings of this study were the strategies Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents adapted to navigate White-centered spaces. Four profiles were highlighted to capture adolescents' responses to growing up in a White suburban Midwest: (1) Acting "White-washed" with Rationalizing, (2) Acting "White-washed" and Resisting, (3) Acting "White-washed" and being Excluded and those who instead 4) Sought Latinx-Centered Spaces. About two-quarter of participants decided to act "White-washed," which meant they acculturated into White culture and norms, aligning with the "acting White" literature (Durkee et al., 2019; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). For instance, adolescents saw athletics as a gateway to developing cross-group connections that could ultimately develop into long-term inter-group friendships. These connections were seen as a precursor to belonging to their White suburban school (Crisp, 2010).

Notably, their attempt to search for inclusion came at a cost for adolescents. Their attempts to fit into White-centered spaces caused conflict with Latinx peers. Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents in these profiles were teased for not being "a true beaner," or what the "acting White"

literature says, for "demonstrating atypical behaviors for their racial group." (Durkee et al., 2022). Those acting "White-washed" with a rationalization profile felt the need to distance themselves from their Latinx peers as they were associated with negative stereotypes (e.g., crime). They often questioned why their Latinx peers did not proactively attempt to fit into American culture.

On the other hand, several adolescents in the acting "White-washed" but resisting profiled at some point attempted to "act White," but after years, they shifted their focus on seeking more Latinx-centered spaces. Many participants had this shift in focus as they found spaces of belonging that highlighted ethnic appreciation, mainly in higher education contexts. Latinx-centered spaces were crucial in exploring and validating adolescents' ethnic identity, which helped them resist the need to "act White." Previous literature has suggested that, for example, cross-cultural centers are a safe haven for Latinx students in predominately White institutions (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Remaly, 2019).

Of concern were the adolescents in the "White-washed" but excluded category. These adolescents were denied access to these spaces, with many having an undocumented status. Research has found that a sense of social belonging is routinely compromised and at-risk for immigrant-origin adolescents (Suárez-Orozco & López Hernández, 2021) and is linked to its converse—social exclusion (Crisp, 2010; Fangen, 2010). In other words, there was an added layer of desire for these adolescents to seek inclusion as they constantly faced structural exclusion. Overall, adolescents who developed deep connections with the people of safe spaces and were affirmed about their unique individuality and group membership shared a healthier sense of belonging (Kenworthy et al., 2005).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study had several limitations. First, the sample is limited to adolescents from the Midwest of mostly Mexican origin, with limited representation from Central American countries

(which have recently been targeted and excluded). Consequently, it may be premature to conclude that these findings are relevant to all Latinx immigration-origin adolescents in a White suburban context. Results may differ across those who live in other suburban contexts with different racial and ethnic compositions across states.

Similarly, the interview protocol did not explicitly probe what their suburban context symbolized and meant to them, focusing on Whiteness and exclusion. This study aimed to understand Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents' experiences growing up during a period of exclusion. Participants were then prompted about their perceived sense of belonging (or exclusion) across their distal and suburban proximal settings. However, this study highlighted the experiences of adolescents who reside in new immigrant destinations, such as suburban and rural settings dealing with demographic transitions. Some of the study's participants who recently moved to a rural and predominantly White college campus reported difficulties connecting to the community and university.

A few participants talked about how their parents used socialization practices to promote social belonging, including introducing them to cultural practices through their church. Nevertheless, the interview protocol did not explicitly ask about parents' socialization practices to help adolescents navigate exclusion in the White suburban Midwest. Participants were asked about the spaces they spent a significant amount in and what made them feel included in these spaces. As their stories unfolded, they shared who introduced them to these spaces and what they enjoyed the most in these spaces of belonging.

Future studies should focus on the parents' intentionality of seeking community spaces for their children and whether they were facilitating potential spaces of belonging to instill pride in their culture and provide a space to protect them from racism and xenophobia. A large body of literature

has highlighted Latinx parents' strategies to prepare their children to navigate systems of oppression, such as promoting ethnic and racial pride (Cross et al., 2021; Pinetta et al., 2020). Additionally, parents use various ethnic-racial socialization strategies to promote adolescents' well-being (Ayón, Nieri & Ruano, 2020). Future work on this topic should explore how other socialization strategies such as promoting mistrust or preparation for bias may inform Latinx adolescents' sense of belonging in different spaces.

An underlying mechanism that should further be explored between exposure to parental ethnic-racial socialization practices and youths' sense of belonging is youths' ethnic-racial identity. Adolescents' ethnic-racial identity, or the feelings and beliefs individuals attach to their ethnic-racial group memberships, and the process by which they get to those meanings (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) may help understand why some Latinx youth may find solace in non-Latinx spaces. Conversely, some participants in this study spoke of the ways the acting "White-washed" strategy impacted their identity, in which they made sense of who they were in their contexts. Future studies must explore how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents seek places of belonging and how these spaces shape their ethnic-racial identity.

Recommendations

Schools need to actively respond to the changing demographics of the White suburban Midwest, which has seen an influx of Latinx students. Research has demonstrated that schools are an especially vital space for belonging for adolescents (e.g., Allen & Bowles, 2012).

This study and emerging data have found that adolescents struggle to find spaces in their suburban context that affirm their ethnic-racial identities (Crane & Millard, 2021; López Hernández, 2022; Rodriguez, 2020). Findings from this study illustrate the need adolescents feel to adapt to White culture and norms to survive schools that continue to enforce Whiteness, White supremacy,

and exclusion (Diamond, 2018; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Ray, 2019). Suburban schools should recognize the racial borders that exclude Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents (e.g., López Hernández, 2022; Rodriguez, 2020) and create spaces of belonging that affirm and welcome them. Notably, these spaces should go beyond after-school clubs that highlight ethnic appreciation, with policies and practices that disrupt systems of oppression linked to White supremacy.

Additionally, Whiteness and exclusion should be addressed outside suburban schools and communities. Community leaders must explore how to create welcoming spaces for their new residents beyond ethnoburbs, mainly because we know ethnic and racial minorities make these spaces to protect themselves from hostility in the broader community. All residents, primarily the minority, should feel safe and affirmed throughout their suburban neighborhood. These efforts could lessen the need to "act White," which has been critiqued by scholars as encouraging Black students to adopt a "White mask" (Fanon, 1952), in which they "assimilate to the colonizer's culture" (Durkee et al., 2022, p. 193). Future research should continue to explore how "acting White" unfolds with Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents in the White suburban contexts, especially exploring cross-group friendships.

This study highlighted that adolescents had superficial cross-group friendships or intergroup avoidance from White peers. Additionally, adolescents in White-centered spaces experienced exceptionalism from their White peers, who were perceived as being different from their outgroup (Citrin & Sears, 2013). In other words, they were not like those "gang bangers" on the "bad" side of town. They were "well-manned" kids like them, White people. Intergroup theory has cautioned against ignoring or overlooking the salience of one's group membership, which may not result in better intergroup attitudes and reduce prejudice and negative attitudes of the outgroup (Kenworthy et al., 2005). Lastly, being accepted in these spaces normalized messages of exclusion. This can be

alarming as President Trump normalized xenophobic messages and practices that continue to harm and target Latinx families (Hubert, 2016; Suárez-Orozco, López Hernández & Cabral, 2021).

Future research should explore inclusive practices and efforts in suburban schools and communities that will promote inclusivity and better intergroup relations between White and Latinx neighbors. More research should be done to explore White students' responses to the changing landscape of their White suburban schools (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2022), focusing on their opposition to immigrant-origin adolescents. That said, we need to continue exploring ways to disrupt how suburban neighborhoods function as White spaces built on Whiteness and White supremacy and exclusion (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020).

This work cannot be conducted without centering on Whiteness and White supremacy and the long history of oppression of ethnic and racial minorities in suburban contexts. Attempting to disrupt these systems of oppression may allow educators and community leaders to grapple with effective ways to create inclusion for Latinx immigrant adolescents and their families.

Table 1

Demographic Information for N = 29 Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Year in School
Alejandra	F	19	Sophomore
Alfredo	M	23	Senior
Alma	F	20	Junior
Alvaro	M	17	11th
Amy	F	23	2nd Year
Anabel	F	20	Sophomore
Andrew	M	18	12th
Carla	F	23	Junior
Elisa	F	16	10th
Emmanuel	M	15	9th
Fernando	M	15	9th
Franco	M	15	9th
Gael	M	22	Graduated
Giovanni	M	14	9th
Gloria	F	20	Junior
Ivan	M	22	Graduated
Jaime	M	24	Senior
Lily	F	13	6th
Lucy	F	20	Sophomore
Luna	F	16	10th

Maria	F	15	9th
Mauricio	M	24	N/A
Nicole	F	13	6th
Paola	F	20	Sophomore
Renata	F	20	Sophomore
Ruby	F	20	Sophomore
Santiago	M	14	9th
Sonia	F	17	11th
Valentina	F	23	N/A

Table 2

Thematic Components of Spaces of Belonging and Navigating White-Centered Spaces in the White Suburban Midwest

Meta-theme	Subtheme	Sample Quote
Awareness of Growing up in the White Suburban Midwest:		
Being aware of the realities of growing up in a White and affluent suburban community (i.e., racial, social, and ethnic division and negative attitudes from neighbors of the changing demographics)		*"Well my neighborhood it's pretty middle class neighborhood...there are obviously different section you have parts of the town where...its more upper class...and there's sections where there's lower class...there are [some] Hispanics but there a lot [more] White" [Male, 17]*
Finding Spaces of Belonging:		
Participants indicated searching for spaces that made them feel welcomed, supported, or included in their White suburban school and community.		*"We [Latinx peers] really bond together, and we get each other because we're like with them like basically the whole week because we go to church every other day." [Female, 20]*
	Suburban Community. Participants indicated searching for belonging in their ethnoburbs, church, and community centers.	*"We go to church in like in [X neighboring city] …that's where we have a lot of the things we're really mostly into. Like I do Baile Folkloric…, especially… we had a lot of [Latinx] friends[there], too" [Female, 16]*
	Neighborhood. Participants sought to belong in ethnoburbs with a Latinx presence, such as apartment complexes.	*"I remember feeling comfortable walking around my apartment complexes...everybody who I knew [lived there]..a lot of Hispanic friends that went to my school.. I had family there…I had babysitters that were there" [Female, 20]*
	Church. Participants sought their church, where they were part of activities that promoted ethnic appreciation (e.g., Ballet	*"So, what I like about [church] it is like everyone's just really kind to each other. You include everyone. We don't only sing, but like we bring food sometimes…. We talk to each other about stuff, about*

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Folklorico), to feel included.

school[mostly Latinx peers]." *[Male, 15]*

Community Centers.
Indicators participants sought out community resources and opportunities, such as sports teams, outreach, and community centers, to feel included.

"[I am on a community] traveling team or league...[because] soccer is like the only thing like that I love, I do anything right, I'm working hard, I'm trying to focus myself really hard in it"[Male, 14]

Suburban Schools.
Participants indicated searching for belonging in their suburban school, including extracurricular activities, and with peers, to feel included.

"I joined the theatre my sophomore year of high school…I liked it. The directors like talked to me. And so, I ended up joining that, and that was mostly how I made my friends [mostly White] in high school."[Male, 22]

Extracurricular Activities.
Indicators participants sought out after-school clubs, such as an ethnic appreciation dance group and the choir, and sports, to feel included.

"[I joined](Latinx club)…my senior year, I definitely felt included because we all wanted to dance and we wanted to be like okay …[it was the] first time that our school is gonna have a Mexican dance and a Colombian dance, and that's what I liked about that." [Female, 20]

"[Clubs]it gave me like a different group of friends [mostly White], and it gave me like…new ideas and perspectives. Like my newspaper club, like we would have like meetings and just hearing like what people thought of the school and like for like different topics." [Female, 19]

The Role of Peers.
Indicators participants sought out peers to feel included, both intra- and inter-group friendships, to feel included.

Moving into Higher Education Contexts.
Participants indicated searching for belonging in higher education spaces, including Greek and college organizations and cultural centers.

"I also really like the diversity center on campus. I spend a lot of time over there...being involved in the events that they often host… [before] I just really didn't feel a sense of connection to them until I really started talking to the Latinas on campus and then doing different kinds of events with them." [Female, 20]

Greek Organizations.
Indicators participants sought out fraternities and sororities to feel included on campus.

"I've become more vulnerable and so a lot …[Latinx] the friends that I have, are like very very personal [from] Greek organizations… just because we just understood and went through a similar educational process within our organizations and so it was an understanding."[Male,24]

College Organizations and Centers. Indicators participants sought out college organizations and cultural centers to feel included on campus.

"I'm also part of …an organization for Latin-American students. That one's more of a fun thing where we have events like Loteria Night or game nights and different types of things just to have fun within the people in our community."[Female, 20]

Profiles in Seeking Out and Coping with White-Centered Spaces

Participants were classified into four different profiles that illustrated the strategies adolescents used to navigate the White suburban Midwest.

Seeking White-Centered Spaces. Participants demonstrated acting, behaving, and dressing to White norms and culture, resulting in being labeled "White-washed" by Latinx peers.

"[In volleyball] ...80% of those players were like White…I was like, 'I don't look the same.' I always thought, 'Oh, what are they gonna say?'....[So I started]..dressing up like them and having out with them and listening to them same music as them [like White peers]" [Male, 22]

Rationalizing. Participants indicated their attempt to fit into White culture and disassociate from Latinx culture. When their White peers said racist comments, they justified them.

"[Latinx peers] keep saying uh like 'oh why don't you like speak Spanish?'… and they tell us "be an actual like true beaner….I don't want to be in that group with other Latinos, and Mexicans cause then um they get called.. gang bangers." [Male,15]

Resisted. Participants actively searched for White-centered spaces at some point but, throughout the years, started to question their actions. They eventually sought out Latinx-centered spaces.

"I realized through college that doesn't matter like I shouldn't feel that way [need to act White] ...my parents called me out on it, and I had to really rethink what I was doing… [I asked myself] 'you really have to take the decision and say do I really want this for myself...do I really want to pursue this?" [Male, 22]

Excluded. Participants attempted to fit into White-centered spaces but were denied access to White friend groups.

I was never like White enough for the like the White students… they were nice to me, but also, they were only nice to me when they needed homework or like...but then outside of that, it was like no conversation. And I still try to engage with everybody as much as possible, but no one necessarily ever like reached out to me. [Female, 20]

Seeking out Latinx-Centered Spaces. Participants actively conveyed their efforts to search out Latinx spaces instead of mostly White-centered contexts

"I take a lot of pride in my culture...so I am involved in my church…we have this dance group…called Ballet Folklórico... I've been part of that group since I was like six."[Female, 16]

Table 3

Spaces of Belonging Across Participants' Suburban Context

Pseudonym	Year in School	Junior High	High School	Higher Education	Community
Alejandra	Sophomore in college		Sports, inter-group friendships, after-school clubs**	Sports, inter-group friendships*	
Alfredo	Senior in college		Sports, intra- and inter-group friendships**	Classes, inter-group friendships*	Girlfriend
Alma	Sophomore in college		School band**	Greek organizations, college organizations*	
Alvaro	Senior in high school		Sports, intra- and inter-group friendships*		Sports teams, work*
Amy	Second-year in Master's program			Greek organizations*	
Anabel	Sophomore in college		Ethnic appreciation clubs**	Classes*	Work*
Andrew	Senior in high school				Work, community center*
Carla	Junior in college		Inter-group friendships**	College organizations*	
Elisa	Sophomore in high school		Sports, school band, intra-, and inter-group friendships*		Church*
Emmanuel	Freshman in high school		School band, sports, intra-, and inter-group		Church*

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Fernando	Freshman in high school				Intra-group friendships from old school
Franco	Freshman in high school		School band, sports, intra-, and inter-group friendships*		
Gael	Senior in college		After-school clubs, inter-group friendships**	College organizations, Greek organizations*	
Giovanni	Freshman in college		Intra-group friendships*		Music*
Gloria	Sophomore in college		After-school clubs, classes**	Courses*	Work*
Ivan	Graduated from college		Sports, intra- and inter-group friendships**	Intra-group friendships, Greek organization*	
Jaime	Senior in college		After-school clubs**	Intra-group friendships, Greek organization, Cultural center*	
Lily	6th grade in middle school	Sports, intra- and inter-group friendships*			Sports team*
Lucy	Sophomore in college				Church and intra-group friendships, work*
Luna	Sophomore in high school		Sports, school band*		Church*
Maria	Freshman in		Sports*		Church and

	high school			intra-group friendships*
Mauricio	Graduated from high school	Intra-group friendships, ethnic appreciation clubs, girlfriend**		Business, work, and inter-group friendships*
Nicole	6th grade in middle school			Church*
Paola	Sophomore in college	Intra-group friendships, ethnic appreciation clubs**	Intra-group friendships*	Church, work*
Renata	Sophomore in college			Work and intra-group friendships
Ruby	Sophomore in college	Intra-group friendships, ethnic appreciation clubs, boyfriend**	Classes, college organizations*	
Santiago	Freshman in high school			Church, sports teams*
Sonia	Junior in high school	Intra- and inter-group friendships*		Church*
Valentina	Graduated from a technical school	The school choir, intra-, and inter-group friendships**		Career, boyfriend*

Note: Please note that this is not a mutually exclusive list. These are spaces of belonging adolescents spent most of their time and where they felt most included. * This denotes present experiences. In other words, these are their current spaces of belonging participant identified. ** This denotes retrospective experiences and spaces of belonging they pursued in high school.

Table 4

Profiles in Seeking Out and Coping with White-Centered Spaces by Gender, Education Level, Generation, Legal Status for the 29 Participants

	Acting "White-Washed" Profile (n= 16)			Seeking Latinx-Centered Spaces Profile (n= 13)
	Rationalizing (n= 8)	Resisted (n= 4)	Excluded (n= 4)	
Gender				
Female	4	2	2	9
Male	4	2	2	4
Education				
In junior high	-	-	-	2
In high school	3	-	2	6
In community college	-	-	1	2
In 4-year college	4	2	1	2
In graduate school	-	1	-	-
Graduated from high school	-	-	-	1
Graduated from technical school	1	-	-	-
Graduated from 4-year college	-	1	-	-
Generation				
First	-	-	2	4
Second	8	4	2	9
Legal Status				
Documented	8	4	2	11
Undocumented	-	-	2	2

General Discussion

Immigration from Latin America has contributed to the ever-evolving demographic shifts in the United States (Vespa et al., 2020). Latinx immigrants have changed the face of American communities (Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020); however, American society responded with racist, xenophobic, and exclusive attitudes (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). In fact, for decades, policymakers have created systematic national anti-immigrant laws and policies intended to exclude Latinx immigrants from American society (Aranda & Vaquera, 2015; Armenta, 2017; Provine & Doty, 2011). The aftermath of the 2016 elections exacerbated these exclusionary efforts by unleashing a series of immigration policies and toxic rhetoric (Rogers, 2019; Wray-Lake et al., 2018).

This dissertation captured the experiences of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents growing up in what I call the national context of exclusion in the suburban Midwest. The sample consisted primarily of second-generation Latinx adolescents born and raised in American society. Extant studies have captured the everyday experiences of discrimination against Latinx first-generation immigrants, especially those who are undocumented (e.g., Stein et al., 2019). This 2-study dissertation uncovered how second-generation mostly Mexican origin adolescents, regardless of legal status, are constantly reminded about their belonging in American society. While Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents feel American, that frequently hear messages including "to go back to your country," "you are all gangbangers," and "you are going to have to learn to climb the wall." Findings from the dissertation illustrated how boundaries of belonging were racialized, which impacted how adolescents negotiated their belonging, mainly in the suburban Midwest that has seen increased growth in the Latinx population.

Suburban spaces created to be White and affluent neighborhoods are evolving into more diverse settings (e.g., Diamond & Posey-Maddox, 2020). Latinx families have migrated to the suburban Midwestern, changing these communities' racial, ethnic, and social class landscape (Pew Research Center, 2009). Amid these changes, Latinx adolescents have to navigate the national context of exclusion at the macro level while navigating their suburban neighborhood, which frequently was White, affluent, and exclusionary (see López Hernández, 2022). The present dissertation aimed to contribute to the literature on the social belonging (or exclusion) of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents in the Suburban Midwest, focusing on the political backlash from White residents. Other scholars have found that White residents have resisted the recent growth of Latinx residents with xenophobic attitudes (Enos, 2019).

In study 1, I investigated how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents reacted and adapted to the national context of exclusion in their suburban context. The results from study 1 illustrated how adolescents take note of messages of exclusion and across what settings they experience them. Adolescents also reported the coping strategies they adopted to cope with exclusion. Study 2 explored Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents who resided in primarily White and affluent neighborhoods and their search for belonging as they navigated Whiteness in their suburban context. These two studies highlight how growing up under the effects of systematic oppressive immigration policies and toxic rhetoric of Latin immigrants (Pierce & Bolter, 2020) spill over to impact their experience in the suburban Midwest, focusing on the implications of social belonging.

Coping with the National Context of Exclusion

Extant research has uncovered a series of oppressive immigration efforts fueled by racist and xenophobic politics (e.g., Abrego, 2006; Cervantes & Menjívar, 2018; Menjívar, 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2021). This national context of exclusion was intensified during the Trump era with

increased anti-immigrant sentiment, immigration policing, violence against immigrants, and the ending of policies favoring immigrants (Patler et al., 2019; Pierce et al., 2018). These oppressive efforts have seeped into the everyday lives of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents. This dissertation showed how these adolescents reacted and adapted to the national context of exclusion in the suburban Midwest. Study 1 highlighted how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents became aware and dealt with being "systematically devalued and excluded" across contexts.

Exclusive spaces were identified across their contexts, such as social media platforms, local restaurants in their community, and the halls at school. For example, Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents were harassed online for having a Latinx name, denied service at their local restaurant, and signaled they did not belong at their schools as White peers chanted, "go back to your country.". There was a developmental shift in how adolescents processed and spoke about exclusion. Early adolescents had difficulties naming their experiences of exclusion. These adolescents would share clear examples of discrimination and racism, but they had trouble connecting to these instances, in which they would talk about instances of exclusion.

On the contrary, older adolescents could name examples of racism, xenophobia, and exclusion on a deeper level. As these adolescents moved into higher education, they found safe spaces with supportive mentors and Latinx peers that allowed for healing. Additionally, these adolescents had the developmental maturity to reflect on their experiences and the emotions they felt growing up in exclusive spaces in their suburban community.

The Search for Belonging in the White Suburban Midwest

"Belonging is not necessarily something people actively consider except at points of crisis" (Crisp, 2010, p. 124). Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents growing up in the White suburban Midwest are constantly reminded they do not belong in their community and American society

(López Hernández, 2022; Rodriguez, 2020). In Study 2, I identified the spaces of belonging adolescents seek to stabilize their belonging and the strategies used to survive White-centered spaces in their proximal settings. Adolescents sought spaces of belonging on the grounds of their suburban school, such as after-school and sports, churches, and community centers. They pursued organizations that promoted ethnic appreciation as they moved into higher education. The type of spaces of belonging participants sought depended on their strategies to endure the racial boundaries of belonging created and maintained in their White suburban communities.

Four profiles were presented to show the variability to which adolescents attempted to fit into White-centered spaces and how the ingroup and outgroup received their efforts. Three of the profiles (i.e., rationalized, resisted, or were excluded) highlighted participants' attempts to act, behave and dress "White-washed" to fit into their White suburban school and community. Participants in this study explained that using this strategy was a way to survive the Whiteness in their contexts. Notably, not all participants were successfully accepted into these White-centered spaces; if they were, they were tokenized as the ideal Latinx peer. Some resisted the need to act "White-washed" and instead sought other spaces that highlighted their ethnic identity, including churches, Latinx peer groups, and the Latinx after-school club.   These adolescents found a space of healing and inclusion as they navigated exclusion in the White suburban Midwest.

Implications

My dissertation studies have several implications. The present research captured how these adolescents make sense of growing up under the effects of the national context of exclusion, focusing on their social belonging (or exclusion). We know Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents and their families are exposed to oppressive and exclusive practices and efforts (Abrego, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2020), but we know less about these messages signaled to them about who belongs to

American society. According to studies, social exclusion during adolescence can have long-term effects on adulthood (Baumeister et al., 2007). Suárez-Orozco and colleagues (2020) argue that everyday hostile racial and ethnic social encounters have troubling implications for social belonging. My 2-study dissertation illustrated how Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents conceptualize their sense of belonging as they navigate exclusive spaces fueled by racism and xenophobia.

This study also contributed to our understanding of what processes, settings, and coping strategies to target in interventions that may enhance their social belonging. These studies informed scholars of the strategies these adolescents adopted to deal with social exclusion, including active and avoidant strategies. Adolescents noted how parents encouraged adolescents' strategies to deal with exclusion. Parents with an undocumented status were more likely to suggest strategies that helped adolescents "blend" in and avoid being targeted, such as acting "White-washed." Further exploration must be done on how parents socialize their children to deal with exclusion. This is important as studies have noted that adolescents who have parents that encouraged proactive ways to deal with discrimination (e.g., asserting the person, getting help from a caring adult) were less likely to use strategies that illustrated internalized racism (Johnson, 1994; Hughes et al., 2006).

Study 2 highlighted how seeking spaces of belonging, an active coping mechanism, can improve a thwarted sense of belonging. For example, developing safe havens for undocumented students in white suburban schools can be critical to addressing structural exclusion. The settings I illustrated are possible spaces of belonging that can be explored as potential sites of intervention to promote the social belonging of Latinx adolescents at school, in the community, and in American society. This study highlighted how some adolescents had access to White-centered spaces but did not necessarily belong. Future studies need to explore how this realization impacts how they view

themselves and whether there are people that are helping them process and heal from these exclusionary efforts and practices.

Several participants felt they needed to search for White-centered spaces to feel included in their everyday lives. However, this caused tensions with their Latinx peers, who accused them of "acting White" to fit into their White suburban school and community. These results align with the "acting White" literature (Brietzke & Perreira, 2017; Durkee et al., 2019; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), which has found that Black students are often bullied and teased by Black students for modeling White behaviors (e.g., taking advanced courses), which violates the perceived norms of their racial group (e.g., Durkee & Gomez, 2022; Tyson et al., 2005). Nevertheless, this study contributes to the small body of literature that has explored how Latinx adolescents experience the "acting White" accusation, especially concerning social belonging. Most of the literature on "acting White" initially explored the relationship between "acting White" and academic performance and achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This study contributed to our understanding of what the suburban context symbolizes for Latinx immigrant-origin families, maintaining Whiteness and exclusion. Adolescents' voices were centered on understanding how they reacted to social exclusion and their strategies to resist xenophobia, racism, and exclusion in the White suburban Midwest.

Limitations and Future Directions

While few studies have explored the social belonging of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescent in the suburban Midwest (Rodriguez & González Ybarra, 2020), there are several limitations. First, semi-structured interviews captured the most salient responses during our one-time interview. Future studies should embed an ethnographic component to studies exploring social exclusion to capture the nuances of their everyday experiences.

Second, the interview protocol did not explicitly ask what coping strategies they used to navigate Whiteness in their community. Instead, participants were asked about their experiences in their suburban school and community and were prompted about Whiteness when they shared their experiences organically. Lastly, there was a lack of diversity among the Latinx participants, with a majority being of Mexican origins and a few from Central America. More research is needed to explore the lived experiences of those from Central and South America, especially as there has been an influx of these immigrants in the U.S.

Future research should continue to use a racial lens to explore how suburban contexts have been exclusive spaces for Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents. Scholars have argued, for example, that inclusion can be promoted by using an integrative pride and prejudice approach, which recommends that schools encourage the culture and the strengths of racial and ethnic minorities and address the threat and stigma associated with racial and ethnic minorities (Brannon & Lin, 2020). Research should explore how this integrative approach can enhance the belonging of Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents in a suburban context.

More research must be done to understand the developmental differences in how early and late adolescents process exclusion. This dissertation capture how early adolescents talked about their experiences of exclusion. Those who had a safe space of belonging and caring adults were the ones that were able to process and reflect on these experiences on a deeper level. Furthermore, more studies have to explore how parents prepare their children to negotiate their sense of belonging in the White suburban Midwest. This study captured some experiences of parents socializing their children with undocumented status to acculturate White culture and norms to avoid being targeted. Further exploration must be conducted to understand whether this preparation for bias is prominent across generations in the White suburban Midwest. Lastly, future research should continue

investigating how adults, including teachers, community mentors, and coaches, socialize Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents to negotiate their sense of belonging.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, there has been a growing political divide over Trump's immigration agenda. In its wake, there has been a heightened increase in anti-immigrant efforts that affect Latinx immigrant families, such as immigration policing, violence against immigrants, and ending policies favoring immigrants (Patler et al., 2019; Pierce et al., 2018). These efforts have contributed to politicizing boundaries of belonging for Latinx immigrant-origin adolescents (Gonzales et al., 2020). As Padden (2019) has argued, Trump's attacks have contributed to the debate of who is a "real" American. Cumulatively, these are deeply unsettling times for Latinx immigrant families. We must address the long-standing history of trauma and exclusion against Latinx families, as exclusion has been linked to troubling implications for social belonging (Baumeister et al., 2007).

APPENDIX A
Interview Protocol

I.   BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. **Can you tell me a little about your neighborhood? What it is like there?**
   a. *What brought you/your family to that particular neighborhood?*
   b. *Have you always lived in that neighborhood? If not, how many times did your family move? Where did you move to? Why? Where else did you live?*
   c. *Can you describe the people who live in your neighborhood? (probe for family, SES/racial diversity)?*
   d. *How do people treat you there? Why do you think this was?*
   e. *In what ways do people in your neighborhood support you?*
   f. *If you could, do you see yourself here in 10 years?*

2. **Do your friends live in the same neighborhood as you?**
   a. *What are your friends like?*
   b. *Where do your friends live? Or where did they grow up? Were they born in the U.S.?*
   c. *How do you generally communicate with your best friend(s)?*

3. **Can you tell me a little about your school? What is it like there?**
   a. **Is your school (1) a private school (2) a public school (3) a charter school?**
      a. *What do you like best about school and what do you like least?*
      b. *Tell me a little about your best friends, here.*
      c. *What is your teacher like?*
      d. *What are your classmates like? What do you like about them? And what do you not like so much?*
      e. *Do you feel welcome at your school? Why or why not?*
      f. *Do you look forward to going to school? Why or why not?*

4. **[Complete a family tree with blank notecards to fill out] Now, I will give you some note cards for us to draw out who lives with you. [after completed]. Okay, let's talk about it.**
   a. *Can you tell me about who lives with you? Who are they? Where does each of these family members live?*
   b. *Have there been changes in who you lived with (and under what circumstances?)*
   c. *Where were they born? (prompt for roles (mom/step-mon. aunt, mom's boyfriend, etc)*
   d. *Who from these people do you get along with? Who can you talk to when you have a problem? Are they in your family?*

5. **There is a story behind every family's immigration story. Can you tell me a little about your family's immigration journey?**
   a. *Did your family all come together at the same time?*
   b. *What are some reasons your family decided to come to the U.S.?*
   c. *What do you know about what life was like for them to come here?*
   d. *What is like for them now? Where do they work?*

6. **In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people**

come from [country of origin]. In terms of your ethnic group, how do you consider yourself to be ___.'

    a. *Can you tell me why you selected these?*

    b. *If I was to ask your mother this, how do you think she would answer? How about your dad? Brother? Sister? Best friend?*

II. DAILY ACTIVITIES AND PROXIMAL SPACES OF BELONGING

7. **Tell me what a typical week is like for you. When you are not in school [or work for older participants], what activities do you typically devote most of your time and effort?** (probe about spaces of belonging)

    a. *Are you a student? If you are still a student, what year are you in school?*

    b. *Do you send any time online, such as the internet, social media etc..? What are your favorite things to do online? How often are you online each week and for how long?[May prompt this later if they suggest to be a big part of their everyday routine]*

8. **WHERE do you tend to spend the most time on weekdays after school? What about weekends?**

9. **[Ask *all* questions below for each setting/space of belonging identified] Can you tell me a little about what it's like [in space]?** (insert three-space of belonging most talked about in question #2)?

    a. ***How*** *do you spend your time [in space]?*

        i. *How much time do they spend a day [or week]?*

    b. ***Who*** *do you spend time with?*

        i. *Tell me about the kids there.*

        ii. *What about the adults?*

    c. *What do you like most about the time you spend there?*

    d. *What do you like least?*

    e. *Do you look forward to going to [space]? Why or why not?*

    f. *Is there anything folks [in space] that make you feel welcome and included?*

    g. *Is there anything folks [in space] that make you feel like you don't belong?*

        i. *Probe for who and what!*

        ii. *Are there any people who are not welcomed [in space]? What are some examples?*

10. **Are there any spaces in which you do not feel comfortable or connected?**

    a. *What about these spaces make you feel this way? (insert each space of belonging)?*

    b. *Can you give an example…*

III. CONNECTIONS WITH COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND THE U.S.

11. **[if they haven't addressed it]** **How connected do you feel with [country of origin]?**

    a. *Do you often travel to [country of origin]? If not, why not?*

    b. *Do you keep in touch with folks from [country of origin] in other ways?*

    c. *How do you maintain relationships with family in [country of origin]?*

    d. *Do you keep up with current events in [country of origin]? With politics?*

e.   Do you consider [country of origin] as home?

12.   Are there ways in which you feel you do you feel like you do not belong to [country of origin]?
   a.   Ask for examples
   b.   How about your parents—how do you think they would respond to this question of belonging to [country of origin]?
   c.   What about your siblings?

13. In what ways do you consider yourself to be American?
   a.   In what ways are you different from most Americans?
   b.   In what ways do you feel like you belong to the US?
   c.   Are there ways you don't feel you belong?

14.   Do you feel that most Americans accept you?
   a.   Can you give me some examples
   b.   If I were to ask your mother this, how do you think she would answer? How about your dad? Brother? Sister? Best friend?

IV.   SOCIAL MESSAGES AND EXCLUSION

15. **People have different opinions about different groups. What messages have you heard about [insert most prominent identity for them]:**
   a.   Where have you heard these messages? Social media? Employers? Peers? News?
   b.   How do those messages make you feel?
   c.   What is it about these messages that made you feel this way?

16. What messages have you heard about being a member of an immigrant family:
   a.   Where have you heard these messages? Social media? Employers? Peers? News?
   b.   How do those messages make you feel?
   c.   What is it about these messages that made you feel this way?

17. What messages have you encountered about those that are undocumented:
   a.   Where have you heard these messages? Social media? Employers? Peers? News?
   b.   How do those messages make you feel?
   c.   What is it about these messages that made you feel this way?
   d.   Do you know anyone that has been deported?

18. [Only ask if it has not been addressed] When you hear things said about Latinos in the news, what are some of the things that you hear?
   a.   What about social media? What are some of the things kids at school say about Latinos? How do you react to these messages?

19. Some folks have been affected by the policies imposed during the Trump administration. Has anyone you know been affected? In what ways?

V.   FINAL THOUGHTS

VI.   **Is there anything else about your experience that we have not covered in this interview that you feel is important for me (others) to know?**

Date: _____   Gender Identity: _____   Age: _____

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