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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

The Extent of Southern Hospitality: Hispanic Youths' Sense of Belonging in El Nuevo
South

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts

in

Sociology

by

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The Thesis of Maria Escobar is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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2019

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Abstract

In the late 1980s, northern meat packaging plants in the United States shut their doors and moved South in search of a lower paid workforce and deregulated labor laws. Hispanics throughout the United States and abroad migrated to work in these plants, most of which were in predominantly white communities that had not seen immigration in several generations. Until then, through racial cleansing practices and the use of sundown towns, parts of Arkansas and the majority of northwest Arkansas (NWA) remained overwhelmingly white. Considering this context of a predominately white geographic area with a history of racial discrimination against ethnic minorities, I adopt a lens of racialization to examine Hispanics' sense of belonging in the U.S. South. During May and August of 2018, I interviewed Hispanics in NWA aged 18 to 26 (n=35). Consistent with previous research, my results suggest that some Hispanic youths experience a contradictory sense of belonging as they feel a strong sense of belonging in some spaces, yet simultaneously experience exclusion in other spaces. Negative racialized experiences, racial discrimination, and anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric force Hispanics to constantly renegotiate their sense of belonging in NWA and draw boundaries between where they belong and where they do not belong. Insofar as previous research has focused primarily on newly arrived immigrants, this study is novel since it focuses on the experiences of their children.

Keywords: new immigrant destinations, Arkansas, belonging, exclusion, racialization

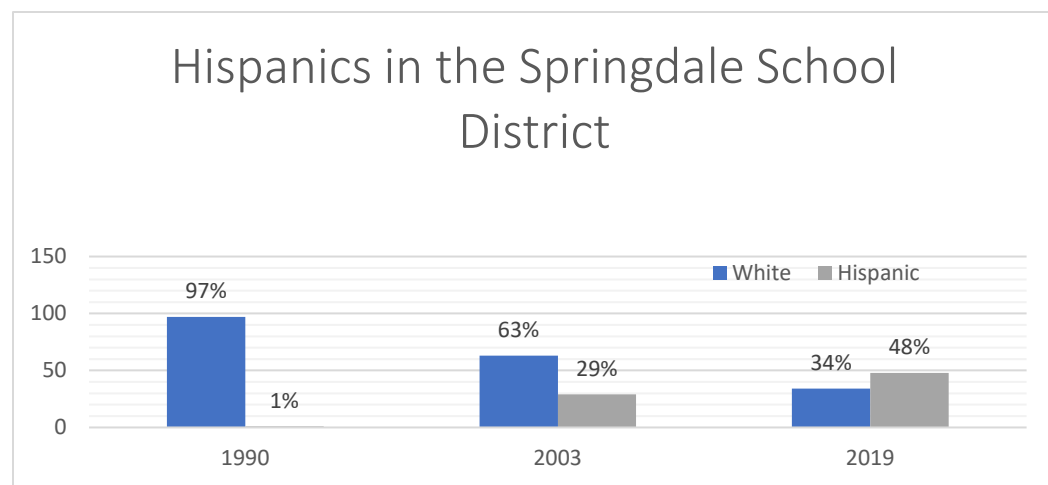
The Extent of Southern Hospitality: Hispanic¹ Youths' Sense of Belonging in El Nuevo South

Introduction

From the 1990s through the 2000s, the Southern region of the United States experienced a spike in its Hispanic immigrant population (Pew Research Center; Wainer 2006). This increase was so pronounced that by 2001, 59 percent of “New Ellis Islands,” or immigrant gateways, were in the South (Winders 2008). Whereas California only experienced a 37 percent growth in its foreign-born population during the 1990s and 2000s and the overall United States a 57 percent increase, Arkansas experienced a 196 percent growth in its foreign-born population (Wainer 2006).

During the 1990s, the type of immigrant also shifted from single male workers to entire families making the South their permanent home (Donato, Tolbert, Nucci, and Kawano 2008). As a result, the number of children in immigrant families in Arkansas grew by 259 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Urban Institute 2007). As such, school districts in northwest Arkansas enrolled unprecedented numbers of Hispanic students (Guerrero 2017; Schoenholtz 2005). The Springdale school district, the district many of my respondents graduated from, transformed from being 1% Hispanic in 1990 to 29% Hispanic in 2003 and, today in 2019, to 48% Hispanic (Wainer 2006; Arkansas Department of Education). As demonstrated in Figure 1, the Hispanic population in the Springdale School District went from being almost nonexistent (a mere 1% of the population, just a tiny sliver in the bar chart) to surpassing the total number of whites in the school district in 2019.

Figure 1: Percentage of Hispanic Population in Springdale School District



¹ I am using Hispanic instead of Latino/a or Latinx based on Julie Dowling’s *Mexican Americans and the Question of Race* in which she found that Mexican Americans in Texas prefer Hispanic to Latino. Similar to Dowling’s findings, my respondents most often use Hispanic to refer to themselves. Out of my 35 interviews, only two respondents used the term Latinx and most did not know what the term Latinx meant. To accurately portray my respondents, I am choosing to use the term Hispanic.

Roughly 30 years have passed since Hispanic families settled in and transformed Arkansas racially and culturally – becoming one of the first ethnoracial groups native whites were not able to expel from NWA (partly due to their role in the poultry economy; Guerrero 2017). Hispanic families settling in a predominately white geographic area with a history of racial discrimination against ethnic minorities (Loewen 2006; Guerrero 2017) raises several questions. What are the racial dynamics that Hispanic immigrants and their children experienced and continue to experience in Arkansas thirty years after first settling in the area? What are their children’s experiences growing up and living in the South? What is their sense of belonging or membership in the community? In this research paper, I am particularly interested in this latter question of belonging.

Considering the history of NWA, I adopt a lens of racialization to better understand Hispanic youths’ sense of belonging in the region. Racialization refers to the process by which individuals and institutions create, invoke, change, and reinforce racial meanings (Guerrero 2017; Feagin and Cobas 2014; Silver 2018; Omi and Winant 1994). Examples include racial discrimination, racial othering, and exclusion to varying degrees (Guerrero 2017). As such racialization literature suggests that Hispanics’ experiences in the South are largely shaped by their race, ethnicity, and presumed legality. Also recognizing that NWA is nested in larger governmental and societal structures at the state and federal level, I draw on Alexis M. Silver’s notion of tectonic incorporation, which considers how the interaction at various governmental levels affects Hispanic youths’ integration and belonging. It highlights contradictions in Hispanics’ integration and sense of belonging at different spheres of life, thus, making sense of belonging multi-layered.

How does racialization affect Hispanic youths’ sense of belonging and integration or exclusion in El Nuevo South²? Hispanics migrating and settling into the South can be conceptualized as a double-edged sword³. Because of the South’s relatively low crime and gang activity (Weisheit and Wells, 2004) and its high levels of social cohesion (Silver 2012; Crockett, Shanahan, Jackson-Newsom, 2000), new immigrant destinations in the U.S. South can pave a path toward incorporation for Hispanic immigrant youth (Silver 2012). However, the U.S. South is also composed of former sundown towns whose racist legacies live on (Loewen 2006). And, despite the stereotype of Southern hospitality, the South is an area high in interpersonal racial discrimination (Saenz, 2000; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Fennelly, 2008; Marrow, 2011).

Using in-depth interviews, I examine how Hispanic youths experience racialization in El Nuevo South and how racialization affects their sense of belonging in Arkansas. My results suggest that Hispanic youths experience contradictory sentiments of belonging. They express a strong sense of belonging in some spaces and exclusion (to varying degrees) in other spaces. To better explain Hispanic youths’ sense of belonging in NWA and the ways in which their sense of belonging is contradictory, I organize this

²El Nuevo South is a term used by some researchers to emphasize the demographic shift in the U.S. South to include Hispanic immigrants.

³ A double-edged sword is a figure of speech for something that comes with both pros and cons – something that has both favorable and unfavorable consequences.

paper along three themes that emerged from my analysis of interviews. The first theme highlights how sense of belonging is place-based – it is often bound and based on how many people of color are present. The second theme highlights how legal status prevents Hispanics especially those with a precarious legal status (those that are undocumented and/or on TPS) from feeling safe and from feeling a sense of belonging. The third theme highlights how racial discrimination and racial othering force Hispanic youths to reconsider their place in El Nuevo South.

Previous psychological research that uses scales to measure specific aspects of belonging, like integration and attachment (Maestas, Vaquera, and Muñoz Zehr 2007; Grobecker 2016) raises questions of how other aspects of belonging, such as race and place, matter. Similarly, research examining racialization among Hispanics in traditional immigrant destinations like California, New York, and Texas (Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015; Flores-González 2017; Dowling 2014) or burgeoning North Carolina (Silver 2018; Marrow 2011) raises questions of how racial dynamics play out in other nontraditional immigrant cities. Northwest Arkansas provides a unique site to study racialization among Hispanics. This study deepens our understanding of race, place, and belonging through a consideration of how racialization affects Hispanics’ sense of belonging in the U.S. South.

Background: Hispanics in Northwest Arkansas

In the late 1980s, northern meat packaging plants relocated South in search of a lower paid workforce. Through word of mouth and active recruitment by poultry factories, Hispanics throughout the United States and abroad came to work in these plants, most of which were in predominantly white communities that had not seen immigration in several generations (Guerrero 2017; Schoenholtz 2005)

Through racial cleansing practices and the use of sundown towns, parts of Arkansas and the majority of northwest Arkansas (NWA), the site of this research study, remained overwhelmingly white until the 1990s (Guerrero 2017; Lancaster 2014). Sundown towns, also known as sunset or gray towns, are towns that remained white through discriminatory local laws, intimidation, violence, and lynching (Loewen 2006; Lancaster 2014; Guerrero 2017). The term originated from warning signs posted throughout towns that stated that only whites could be present in the city after dark (Loewen 2006; Lancaster 2014; Guerrero 2017). Through her interviews with Hispanics in NWA between 2004 and 2012⁴, Perla M. Guerrero (2017) found that Hispanic high school students were met with similar signs posted in schools when they first arrived in NWA. Signs such as “hang the n***** and kill the Mexican” were occasionally seen.

Beginning in the 1990s, Arkansas experienced a substantial “browning” in its demographics. Between 1990 and 2000, the state reported experiencing the second highest rate of increase in its Hispanic population – a whopping 337 percent increase. (Pew Research Center 2005). Further illustrating this point, whereas California experienced a 37 percent growth in its foreign-born population during the 90s and 2000s

⁴ Guerrero (2017) interviewed Hispanics during the years 2004, 2005, 2008, and 2012

and the overall United States experienced a 57 percent increase, Arkansas experienced a 196 percent growth in its foreign-born population (Wainer 2006).

Between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population in Arkansas quadrupled, reaching nearly 90,000. Then, between 2000 and 2010, the state experienced another 114 percent increase in its Hispanic population (Pew Research Center 2011). Today, it is estimated that there are more than 205,000 Hispanics in Arkansas (Pew Research Center 2016). While this is not a numerically large number, especially compared to states like California and Texas, it is an enormous increase considering that large parts of the state, especially NWA, were predominantly white 30 years ago. The upper right-hand corner of the state, NWA, that is home to Tyson Foods Corporate Headquarters (poultry processing), Walmart Corporate Headquarters, and J.B. Hunt Transport (trucking-motor freight), is also now home to nearly half of all Hispanics in the state and has been since 1990 (Guerrero 2017; Schoenholtz 2005).

Figure 2: Map of the United States highlighting Arkansas' location (color-coded by region)

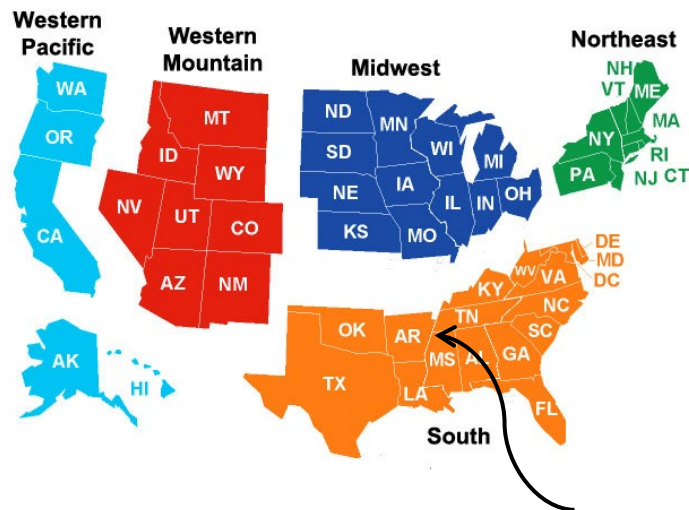
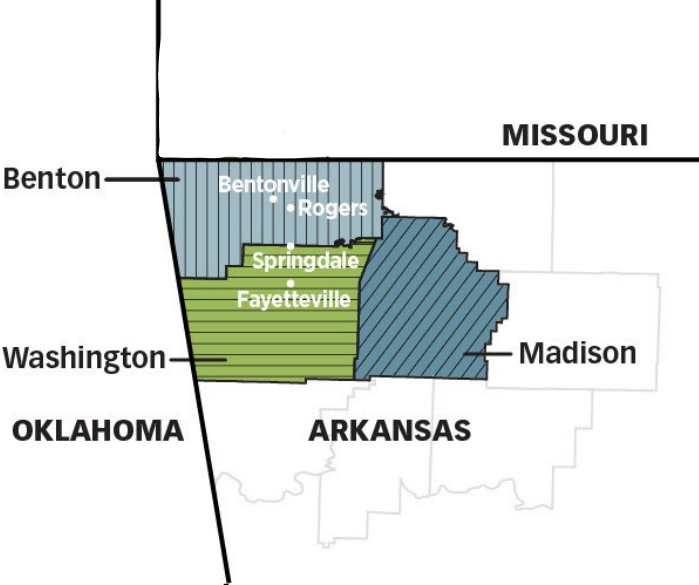


Figure 3: Map of Arkansas zoomed into surrounding Southern states



And below (Figure 4) is a map of northwest Arkansas (NWA). As pictured, NWA borders Southern Missouri and Eastern Oklahoma. The four pictured cities, Bentonville, Rogers, Springdale, and Fayetteville are the four largest cities in the region and are described as the linchpins of NWA.

Figure 4: Map of Northwest Arkansas (NWA)



Literature Review

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging, an important yet often overlooked marker of incorporation and exclusion, can be defined as how comfortable, wanted, and integrated someone feels (Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015; Silver 2012; Silver 2018; Garcia 2017; Flores-Gonzalez 2017). In this respect, it also measures exclusion – how out of place individuals feel (Marrow 2012; Silver 2018; Garcia 2017; Flores-Gonzalez 2017). Sense of belonging can be and, according to literature on racialization, is largely be shaped by race, ethnicity, and presumed legal status (Marrow 2011; Guerrero 2017; Feagin and Cobas 2014).

Belonging is multifaceted, multileveled, and, sometimes, contradictory (Silver 2018). Because of uneven political and social landscapes at the local, state, and federal levels (Golash-Boza and Valdez 2018), someone can have a strong sense of belonging in some spheres of life while simultaneously or sequentially experiencing exclusion in other spheres of life (Silver 2018). Imagine a situation in which a community is warm, welcoming, and tightly-knit - characteristics conducive to a strong sense of belonging - but in which the state or federal context is xenophobic. In this way, individuals can feel a disjointed and sometimes contradictory sense of belonging (Silver 2018).

Research discussing Hispanic immigrants' experiences, integration, and sense of belonging can be broken up into two camps – the first camp (Smith 2014; Weisheit and Wells, 2004; Silver 2012; Crockett, Shanahan, Jackson-Newsom, 2000) focuses on the positive aspects of new immigrant destinations and Southern hospitality and the second camp (Marrow 2011; Silver 2018; Guerrero 2017) highlights aspects of the South that disrupt Hispanics' sense of belonging and integration.

When explaining the positive sense of belonging and integration expressed by Hispanic newcomers in the South, some researchers emphasize the South's positive cultural attributes: its small-town feel that reminds some Hispanics of their *ranchos* (their farms at home) and makes them feel at home, its high levels of social cohesion, its strong Christian religiosity, and its legacy of the “good ol' boys” system (Crockett et al., 2000; Silver 2012). The “good ol' boys” system refers to the ability of powerful business leaders (who do not want to scare off their exploitable workforce), religious leaders, and social activists to metaphorically sit down at the table and negotiate with local politicians to not pass anti-immigrant legislation (Guerrero 2017).

Researchers also emphasize the new opportunities children of immigrants have in their new communities (Weisheit and Wells, 2004; Silver 2012). They point to the relatively low rates of crime and gang activity (Weisheit and Wells, 2004) and the high levels of social cohesion in small southern towns (Crockett, Shanahan, Jackson-Newsom, 2000; Silver 2012). In her study assessing the incorporation of Hispanic 1.5 generation immigrants in rural North Carolina, Alexis M. Silver (2012) finds that the densely connected social networks in small southern towns facilitate upward educational mobility and a sense of belonging among immigrant youth. Teachers, coaches, and community

members often feel inclined to help immigrant youth in ways their parents are not able to. They help students navigate high school and higher education (Silver 2012: 509).

However, the U.S. South is a double-edged sword⁵ for many Hispanic youths. Despite its relatively low crime and gang activity and its presumed high levels of social cohesion that should pave a path toward incorporation for Hispanic immigrant youth, the South is a region with a racist past and present. It is composed of former sundown towns and is a region high in interpersonal discrimination (Marrow 2011; Saenz, 2000; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Fennelly, 2008) which can prevent immigrant youth from feeling like they belong.

New immigrant destinations often lack the institutional infrastructure (such as established programs) that facilitates the civic, political, and educational integration of Hispanic newcomers (Marrow 2011; Saenz 2011). It is not uncommon for these communities to create reactive anti-immigrant policies in response to changes in their community demographics (Silver 2018). Many of these policies are explicitly or implicitly created to restrict the upward mobility and social integration of undocumented immigrants (Silver 2018). States like North Carolina, for example, have passed resolutions that prohibit undocumented students from attending community college in the state (Silver 2018). These sorts of policies bar undocumented immigrant youth from upward mobility and convey a message of you do not belong here. Policies explicitly intended to only affect undocumented immigrants often spillover (Menjívar and Abrego 2012) and ripple through households, families, and communities, affecting U.S. born children, their integration, and sense of membership/belonging in the community and country (Silver 2018; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2015; Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015). Several states and counties, including Benton and Washington counties (the counties where most of my respondents are from in NWA), have standing 287(g) partnerships⁶ with ICE. While this partnership is only an explicit threat to undocumented immigrants, families and loved ones live in extreme daily fear and uncertainty because of it (Dreby 2012). In this respect, many of these policies and laws are forms of legal violence (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Legal violence refers to the normalized but cumulatively harmful effects of laws (Menjívar and Abrego 2012).

Researchers highlighting exclusionary factors that make incorporation difficult in the South tend to emphasize the racial discrimination, exclusion, and racial othering newcomers face in new immigrant communities (Steusse 2016; Marrow 2011; Marrow 2012; Silver 2018). In her research about poultry workers in North Carolina, Helen B. Marrow (2012) finds that Hispanics feel most excluded “not as racial subordinates to whites but as undeserving outsiders” (503). Alexis M. Silver also calls attention to how national exclusion affects Hispanic youths’ sense of belonging. In one instance she recalls a group of high school students in North Carolina altering the lyrics from a popular country song, “God Bless America,” to “and I’m proud to be an American where at least I know I’m *not* free” (Silver 2018: 57) Though done semi-jokingly for Mexican

⁵ A double-edged sword is a figure of speech for something that comes with both pros and cons – something that has both favorable and unfavorable consequences.

⁶ 287(g) is a partnership between local police departments and ICE.

Independence Day, their adapted lyrics convey a sentiment of national exclusion and weak sense of belonging (Silver 2018).

Taken together this literature raises the following questions: in what ways do Hispanic youths in Arkansas experience belonging and exclusion? Do they benefit from the theorized social cohesion of smaller towns? Are they and, if so, how are they excluded? To better address the opposite side of the coin of belonging – exclusion – I outline literature on racialization.

Racialization and Sense of Belonging

Racialization is a useful tool for understanding the incorporation process for Hispanics (Guerrero 2017; Feagin and Cobas 2014; Silver 2018). It refers to the process by which individuals and institutions create, invoke, change, and reinforce racial meanings (Guerrero 2017; Feagin and Cobas 2014; Silver 2018; Omi and Winant 1994). In the South, in particular, this often means comparing Hispanics to whites, Blacks, and the immigrants that came before them. Notably, researchers examining how Hispanic newcomers are racialized and treated in new immigrant destinations find that Hispanics are treated relatively positive when they are perceived as a necessary and temporary workforce (Marrow 2011; Guerrero 2017; Fennelly 2008; Wainer 2006).

In her work, Perla M. Guerrero (2017) demonstrates how the racialization of Hispanics in northwest Arkansas (NWA) has shifted over time and contexts. When Hispanics first moved to NWA, they largely did so to work in the *polleras* (poultry factories). Because they were seen as a temporary workforce, they remained largely invisible and were racialized as a beneficial, albeit, “illegal” workforce. But once workers started putting their roots down, buying homes, and sending their children to public schools, they were more aggressively racialized through the lens of legality and criminality by both individuals and institutions (such as newspapers, police departments, state and city officials, and anti-immigrant organizations). These sentiments were corroborated through Guerrero’s 51 interviews with white, Hispanic, Asian, and African American NWA residents⁷. Unsurprisingly, Guerrero found that “the discourse of ‘illegal aliens’ racialized Hispanics in the community as undocumented, criminal, and Mexican” (Guerrero 2017: 152).

Guerrero (2017) also demonstrates the notion of “acts of spatial illegality.” Acts of spatial illegality refer to reconstructing everyday acts, such as going to the park or living with extended family members, as illicit and, thus, as objectionable (Guerrero 2017). This is presumably because “Hispanics themselves [rather than their actions] become illicit in these spaces” even if they do not break the law (Guerrero 2017: 153). As an example, Guerrero recounts an incident in which the police department received numerous complaints from residents about the “heavy Hispanic patronage at parks, lakes, and streams,” public places that are neither illicit nor objectionable (Guerrero 2017: 165).

⁷ Perla M. Guerrero conducted research during four different research periods in 2004, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Another example of how racialization shapes the Hispanics' experiences in the South and the U.S. in general is Luz, one of Alexis M. Silver (2018) research participants. Luz, a US-born citizen with Salvadoran parents, explains being "so tired of being assumed stupid and low-achieving because of the color of her skin" that she intentionally wears college T-shirts and buys her parents college T-shirts with the word "mom" or "dad" as an attempt to mark them as hardworking parents with high achieving students in college (2018: 49). Like Luz, immigrant youth often feel so pigeonholed by their ethnicity that they "implement strategies, like Luz's, to combat assumptions of illegality and low achievement" (Silver 2018: 49)

Some researchers explain these sorts of racialized experiences using the notion of a white frame (Feagin 2010; Feagin and Cobas 2014). A white frame is a dominant framework that informs people's perceptions and worldview of racial groups and race in general, all the while giving preference to whites (Feagin 2010; Feagin and Cobas 2014). It encompasses the following dimensions: racial stereotypes, racial narratives and interpretations, racialized images and language accents, racialized emotions, and recurring inclinations to discriminate (Feagin and Cobas 2014).

From a white-framed viewpoint, the lives, livelihood, and cultures of Hispanics, regardless of their socioeconomic status, are frequently seen as having less value than those of whites (Feagin and Cobas 2014). This affects the expectations, perceptions, and interactions whites and other racial groups have with Hispanics (Feagin and Cobas 2014). To illustrate this point, Feagin and Cobas (2014) give the example of a Latino lawyer. While in his backyard, a white female neighbor comes up to the Latino lawyer and asks, "Oh, are you the gardener?" In an interview, the lawyer later recounts this story and says, "For 50 years this has been my experience. As a Latino ... you're just another wetback or you're just another migrant worker or whatever" (Feagin and Cobas 2014: 24). This exchange demonstrates how these types of racialized interactions can affect individuals' sense of belonging and membership in both the community and country.

Feagin's notion of a white frame places race and racialization at the forefront of integration or exclusion and sense of belonging. However, by doing so and by seeing racialization and (perceived) legal status as permanently intertwined, Feagin and Cobas (2014) paint a very bleak picture of Hispanic youths' integration into mainstream society, ultimately arguing that as a result of everyday barriers whites create for Hispanics, it is near impossible for them to become fully integrated into the core culture and institutions of a "white-dominated society" (Feagin and Cobas 2014: 30).

Taken together racialization literature suggests that Hispanics' experiences in the South are largely shaped by their race, ethnicity, presumed legality, and by what institutions and powerful individuals vocalize (Alba, Jimenez, and Marrow 2014; Guerrero 2017; Silver 2018). Thus, this literature raises the question of how, not if, Hispanics experience racialization in Arkansas.

An Uncertain Future: Legal Status and Sense of Belonging

Building on and addressing shortcomings of classic assimilation and segmented assimilation theory, Alexis M. Silver (2018) develops a theory of tectonic incorporation.

Tectonic incorporation theory highlights the role of legal status and suggests that overlapping and sometimes contradicting shifts at the institutional, federal, state, and local levels influence the incorporation and sense of belonging of 1.5 and 2nd generation youth (Silver 2018). Akin to Earth's tectonic plates shifting, contradictions at the different government and community levels create shifts that thrust youth from one plate to another, forcing them to constantly reposition themselves (i.e. their plans, ambitions, and sense of belonging) to adapt to these changes. To illustrate this point, sociologist, Alexis M. Silver (2018) gives the example of Eduardo. Through his soccer skills, Eduardo was able to secure enough private scholarship money to attend a local community college (108). However, months after making plans to attend college, a "shift" at the local level, North Carolina Community College Systems (NCCCS)'s board passing a resolution to prohibit undocumented students from attending community college in the state, trust Eduardo from one plate to another and forced him to reposition himself and come up with new plans. Having "[lost] something he had already earned" because of his legal status, Eduardo became hesitant to plan for the future, later saying in an interview, "We can't even be certain about what's gonna happen in the next month! ... Like me going to [community college], that [policy] came up and we just had to deal with it. Look for alternatives" (108).

Tectonic incorporation also encompasses experiencing incorporation and a strong sense of belonging in some spheres of life while simultaneously or sequentially experiencing exclusion in other spheres of life (Silver 2018). To illustrate this contradictory sense of belonging, Silver (2018) gives the example of Alfonso who feels at home at his local Latino Outreach Center but not at school where he feels he does not fit in because of his style of dressing and legal status (92). One can also imagine a situation in which a community is warm, welcoming, and tightly-knit, characteristics conducive to a strong sense of belonging but in which the state or federal context is xenophobic, characteristics undermining 1.5 generation and 2nd generation immigrant youths' sense of belonging. In this way, uneven political landscapes at the local, state, federal levels can make immigrant youth feel a disjointed and sometimes contradictory sense of belonging, incorporation, and exclusion (Silver 2018).

For these reasons, the concept of tectonic incorporation is especially relevant for sense of belonging, an important yet often overlooked marker of incorporation and exclusion (Silver 2018). Another important concept related to notions of legality is racialized illegality.

Research on racialized illegality suggests that because Hispanics are viewed as permanent "aliens" or forever foreigners, race and legal status are permanently intertwined (Romero 2018; Enriquez, Vazquez Vera, and Ramakrishnan 2019). In her study about immigration raids, Mary Romero (2008) argues that the very idea of a citizen or "illegal alien" is constructed through and enforced using the intersections of race, class, gender, and other categories. Because working-class Hispanic men are racialized as permanent foreigners, they are often the targets during raids. Meanwhile, others privileged by their intersections of race, class, and gender are often overlooked during raids because they are not seen as being out of place. To exemplify this point, Romero

(2008) quotes a blonde, blue-eyed, undocumented Irish immigrant woman in Arizona who in reference to ongoing immigration raids says “I don’t have to worry. I blend in well.” (141).

Further, because of the conflation of race and legal status, the notion of racialized illegality allows us to imagine “how Latino is made synonymous with undocumented and undocumented with Latino” (Enriquez, Vazquez Vera, and Ramakrishnan 2019: 37). Through a case study analysis of one of the largest baked goods companies, Embrick and Henricks (2013) find that the terms “Mexican,” “Latino,” and “wetback” are often used interchangeably. The term “wetback” elicits notions of “illegality” and inferiority (Embrick et al., 2013; Fujioka, 2011). Similarly, San Juanita Garcia (2017) finds that regardless of their legal status, Mexican American women in Austin, Texas are often treated like outsiders and foreigners. Further corroborating these findings, a 2012 national survey found that the majority of respondents believe Hispanics are “illegal immigrants” (Barreto, Manzano and Segura 2012).

The prevalence of racialized illegality is not surprising given the media’s tendency to portray Hispanics in a way that makes them synonymous with being undocumented. Broadcasting networks tend to frame immigration in a way that depicts Hispanic immigrants as lawless and as having opposing interests and norms from the general population (Embrick & Henricks, 2013; Chavez 2008; Flores, 2003; Fujioka, 2011). In this sense, the media acts as a medium for the Latino threat narrative (Chavez 2008) and the Mexican threat narrative (Aguirre, Rodriguez, & Simmers, 2011). The Mexican threat narrative characterizes Mexican immigrants as “illegal aliens feasting on free public services, carrying and selling drugs, and smuggling people” over the US-Mexico Border (Aguirre et al., 2011, p. 696). As such, this narrative perpetuates hostility, prejudice, and discrimination against all Mexicans, as the public cannot easily discern Mexican Americans or documented Mexicans from undocumented Mexicans (Aguirre et al., 2011; Chavez 2008). Adalberto Aguirre Jr., Edgar Rodriguez, and Jennifer K. Simmers (2011) found that the Mexican threat narrative fueled by the media arouses the public and encourages people to create and perceive the Mexican threat narrative as an accurate representation of Mexicans. For example, until 2010, SB1070 was fully enacted. SB1070 was a statewide bill passed by Governor Brewer that criminalized the act of being undocumented in Arizona and authorized the police to stop and question individuals that appeared “Mexican” (Aguirre et al., 2011). SB1070 was shortly passed after the media’s portrayal of Mexican drug dealers “invading Phoenix neighborhoods, and after the killing and kidnapping of defenseless citizens by Mexican drug cartels” (Aguirre et al., p.699). Not surprisingly, after the media’s coverage, there was a public outcry for “stricter controls over undocumented Mexican immigrants in Arizona” (Aguirre et al., 2011, p. 699).

As Aguirre et al. show with their example of SB1070, conflating race and (presumed) legal status has a number of consequences for Hispanics, documented and undocumented alike, including increased police surveillance (Armenta 2016; Aranda and Vaquera 2015), racialized deportations (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013), and racist nativism (Enriquez, Vazquez Vera, and Ramakrishnan 2019).

Hispanics being treated as permanent foreigners helps explain why some Hispanic millennials, regardless of their legal status, refuse to label themselves as American – one measure of national belonging (Flores-Gonzalez 2017). Hispanic millennials often expressed that were citizens but not Americans and that despite having the legal documents to claim their Americanness, they were hesitant to do so because they were treated as foreigners and undocumented (Flores-Gonzalez 2017). As such, the literature on racialized illegality suggests that Hispanics’ race and presumed legal status will be conflated, and hence Hispanics will be seen as foreigners regardless of their legal status.

In sum, the literature on racialized illegality and Feagin’s notion of a white frame inform our understanding of how Hispanics are racialized and why they experience exclusion, regardless of the positive southern cultural attributes that are conducive to a strong sense of belonging, comfort, and integration. Alexis M. Silver’s theory of tectonic incorporation highlights Hispanics’ incorporation or exclusion at different spheres of life. While Hispanics might be integrated and have a strong sense of belonging in some domains, they may feel excluded in other spheres.

Recent shifts at the institutional, federal, state, and local levels may affect Hispanics’ sense of belonging and integration or exclusion in El Nuevo South. When Hispanics experience acts of spatial illegality (i.e. neighbors complaining about Hispanics having parties in the backyard or for having too many cars in their front yard, as has been documented by Guerrero (2017)), their sense of belonging in the community may shift or become further solidified.

This literature on sense of belonging, racialization, and legal status in the U.S. South raises several questions. What are Hispanic youths’ experiences in Arkansas? How are they similar and different from other experiences outlined in the literature? How are Hispanic youth racialized and how does this racialization affect their sense of belonging in El Nuevo South?

Methods

Research site:

This study was conducted in northwest Arkansas (NWA). Northwest Arkansas is located at the upper right-hand corner of the state, bordering Oklahoma and Missouri and is often described as a pocket in Arkansas. Contrary to its history (its use of racial cleansing practices and sundown towns), it is often described by Hispanics as “that part of Arkansas no one can call the dirty South” (Antonio, personal communication, 2018). It is an economically booming area and is home to several poultry plants and packaging factories all of which attract Hispanic workers (Guerrero 2017; Schoenholtz 2005). Poultry factories are what attracted workers in the 1990s and what still employ older Hispanics (Guerrero 2017). Thus, not coincidentally, NWA is where a significant percentage of Hispanics in the state reside. Springdale and Rogers alone, two cities in NWA, account for nearly half of Hispanics in the state (Suburban Stats). Thus, NWA provides a unique sample of Hispanics, who live in an economically booming, ethn racially diverse region that was formerly composed of sundown towns roughly 30 years ago. Because Hispanics residing in NWA are confronted by a completely different

environment if they drive 2 hours in any direction, I am able to further explore the concepts of tectonic incorporation and boundaries of belonging in this research (Silver 2018).

Research Design:

Between May and August 2018, I conducted 35 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals living in northwest Arkansas who self-identified as Hispanic, were 18-26, had at least one immigrant parent (hence, are either 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrants), and attended school in Arkansas for at least 3 years. While in Arkansas, I also took 18 pages of field notes and noted aspects of towns in NWA (the amount and type of Hispanic owned businesses and some demographics of the cities). I attended events like elementary and high school graduations and pro-immigration rallies and noted whether speakers translated to Spanish and how they talked about Hispanics and immigration.

I decided to conduct interviews to allow my respondents to express their experiences living in Arkansas, their experiences with integration and exclusion, and their sense of belonging or membership without being confined to a Likert-type scale or a text box. Interviews also allowed me to directly ask my participants about their sense of belonging in the community – that way it came directly from their perspective and not from what I perceived to be instances of integration or exclusion and a strong or weak sense of belonging. Interviews also allowed me to note their emotionality and facial expressions. I focused on the age range 18 to 30 to capture children who moved to or were born in the South during the late '80s and early '90s. This age range also allowed me to interview individuals who recently graduated high school and individuals who have been in the workforce for ten or more years. I limited my population to individuals who have at least one immigrant parent to ensure that they were relatively close to the immigrant experience. I also limited my sample to individuals with at least three years of schooling in Arkansas. I chose 3 years to make sure my respondents were socialized in Arkansas schools without making high school completion a prerequisite.

The sample includes 18 women and 17 men, ranging in age from 18 to 26. Respondents were diverse in terms of their occupations. Some were still students (at various stages of their higher education), others were employed in construction, manufacturing, and sales, and others were teachers, hair stylists, programmer analysts, and engineers. Respondents were also diverse in terms of their duration in Arkansas and in terms of where they moved from. Some were born and raised in Arkansas and have seen little outside of Arkansas, others moved to the South from California or Texas when they were kids, and others moved directly to Arkansas from other countries when they were 6 months old. Although most of my respondents were Mexican or Mexican American, some were also from Central America. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes to an hour and a half, averaging at approximately 42 minutes.

Having grown up in Springdale, the now fourth largest city in Arkansas, I used a snowball sampling method. I have familial connections and connections with local high schools, universities, and other organizations. This provided me with an entry point. I

reached out to former teachers, friends, family, and acquaintances, posted on social media (Facebook and Instagram), and asked for participant referrals.

I maintained contact with my participants through text messages during the duration of the study. All interviews were conducted in person at a location of the participant's choosing. Most interviews, however, were conducted at local public libraries in private study cubicles to ensure privacy. After respondents gave their informed consent, I asked respondents open-ended questions about their experiences in Arkansas; instances of discrimination; times that made them question their sense of belonging/membership in their community, state, or country; and their family/personal migration history (in the U.S. and abroad) in addition to basic demographic questions. The complete interview guide is included in Appendix A. Respondents were given the choice to be interviewed in English or Spanish. All participants chose to be interviewed in English, several however mixed in Spanish throughout the interview.

For transcription purposes, the interviews were audio recorded. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to all respondents and any identifying information was omitted. Prior research suggests that interviewers' background and outsider status can influence responses, as such I followed the example of prior scholars and identified myself as Hispanic and having grown up in Arkansas (Dowling 2016). I transcribed all interviews verbatim and hand-coded emerging themes using highlights to distinguish between concepts and categories. Because the coding categories were not mutually exclusive, passages could be coded under more than one theme. I coded the interviews myself, eliminating inter-coder reliability concerns. Furthermore, because the sample is not nationally representative, I do not try to generalize to the larger population. IRB approval for this project was granted by the institutional review board of the University of California, Merced⁸.

Findings

Sense of Belonging

My results suggest that Hispanic youth in northwest Arkansas experience a contradictory sense of belonging. They express a strong sense of belonging yet simultaneously express exclusion (to varying degrees) in different spheres of life (like work and school). This contradictory sense of belonging, in part, is due to belonging being multilayered, multidimensional, and fluid. Because of uneven political and social landscapes at the local, state, and federal levels (Golash-Boza and Valdez 2018; Silver 2018), individuals can feel a disjointed and sometimes contradictory sense of belonging (Silver 2018).

⁸ For any questions or concerns about IRB approval, you may address them to Ramesh Balasubramaniam, Chair of the IRB at (209) 383-8655.

This is my Home

Early in our interviews, most of respondents expressed sentiments of belonging. They often framed this positive sense of belonging around notions of homemaking and familism. Jesús, a 22-year old, born in Mexico illustrates this point:

“I can visit anywhere else, but I feel like this is my home. This is the first place that I saw when I first got here [from México]. And over the years I have traveled to different states and all I know is that when I'm in my state, Arkansas, I feel like this is where I belong [and] like no one can take me away from here for any purpose or reason.” – Jesús, 22 years old

Jesús moved to Arkansas when he was 5 years old from Guerrero, México. Since then he has gone through the Springdale school system, attended college, created a community of friends, and made countless memories in the state. Like Jesús, Joel, a 22-year-old TPS recipient, moved to Arkansas when he was about a year old from El Salvador. He has not been back since, and in his words, "El Salvador is a bit foreign if anything." Like Joel, Carmen describes feeling like an “imposter” if she says she is from California. While she was born there, she does not have the same attachment to and knowledge of California that she does of Arkansas. Like Jesús and Joel, most of my respondents were either born in Arkansas or moved to the state during grade school. Their memories, relationships, and experiences are tied to NWA. As a result, when they return to their place of birth, whether abroad or in the United States, they feel like outsiders.

Several of my respondents also explicitly tied their sense of belonging in northwest Arkansas to their community, family, and friends. During our interview, Jesús said, “This is where I feel that I belong. My people are here. My loved ones [are here].” Alma, who was born and raised in the state, shared similar sentiments. When I asked her if she felt she belonged, she stated, "I feel like I belong. This is the place I call home. I don't know anywhere else. For me, it's hard to leave. I've had opportunities to leave, but my family is here so I want to be here.”

These positive sentiments of belonging push back on literature of racialization that suggests that Hispanic youths will feel out of place and excluded. These sentiments of belonging also call attention to how family (both the family my respondents were born into and the one they created), friends, memories, and connection to land/region shape belonging. In my case, my respondents’ positive sense of belonging is not framed as much around community cohesion with neighbors, teachers, and coaches (Silver 2018) as it is around family and loved ones.

A Contradictory Sense of Belonging

As interviews continued, many of the same individuals who were expressing a positive sense of belonging in NWA or in the state were later expressing sentiments of exclusion and of not belonging. Consistent with previous research (Silver 2018), my findings suggest that sense of belonging is fluid, multi-layered, and often contradictory. Hispanic youths’ contradictory sense of belonging in the U.S. South can be examined in

three different ways: (1) in regard to place-based belonging, (2) legal status, and (3) racialization (in the form of racial discrimination and racial diversity/demographics).

Place-based Belonging:

When I asked my respondents if they felt they belonged in the state of Arkansas, I frequently received comments like Alejandra's, "I guess. I mean if I am in northwest Arkansas." Alejandra intentionally distinguished between Arkansas and NWA, her hometown where her family and friends are and where people look like her if she stops at Walmart. Like Alejandra, most Hispanic youths that I interviewed, expressed sentiments of bounded belonging or place-based belonging. They frequently expressed belonging in northwest Arkansas (NWA), but not in the state of Arkansas, and belonging in certain spaces but not in others. These spaces they felt they did not belong in were sometimes cities, other times they were racially hostile jobs or classrooms, and other times, in the words of Alma, they were places where "they [my respondents/Hispanics] stuck out like a sore thumb." In this upcoming section, I discuss place-based belonging in regard to imagined borders.

Imagined Borders.

"There's this part of Arkansas called Harrison and when we would go over there, I remember my dad saying, 'Lock the windows! Don't get out of the car!' And then ... in Jr. High I was on the dance team and they'd get extra parent volunteers and they would say, 'Don't leave the field, you don't get to take a bathroom break, you wait for us!' And I could see the fear in their eyes, but I didn't understand it. Harrison used to be an extremely racist part of town. You didn't go to Harrison if you aren't white." -Alma, 26-years old pre-school teacher

Most of my respondents in one fashion or another mentioned Harrison, Arkansas during their interview. Harrison, Arkansas, or as Oscar calls it "that racist town with all the Nazis," is located about an hour and a half from Springdale/Fayetteville area (two main cities in northwest Arkansas) and is home to Thomas Robb – the national director or head of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Hispanics in NWA, myself included, often talk about Harrison as that town we sometimes have to drive by but never want to stop at. Places like Harrison that are sometimes located in the same places we feel we belong add yet another contradiction and yet another "I belong in NWA but not here or here or here."

I call these imagined borders because although they are not physical borders, they are spaces that evoke fear and that are talked about as places to avoid. Sometimes individuals themselves draw these imagined borders to keep themselves safe, other times, well-intentioned parents, extended family, friends, co-workers, and clients draw these borders. Alejandra, a 25-year-old hairstylist from California, recounts her white boss's reaction when she told her she was meeting her cousin four hours away:

"She was like I need you to leave right now. I don't want you to drive out there at night. ... You're gonna be on dirt roads! There are crazy people out there! ... you need to know that some people are not that nice over there. And surely enough

when I go to pick up my cousin, that house had a big-o confederate flag outside and I had to call my cousin and be like are you sure you're inside this house!"

Because individuals, like Alma, Alejandra, and their family and friends (in Alejandra's case, her boss), realize they are no longer in the comforts of their community when they drive outside of northwest Arkansas, they draw boundaries around where they should and should not be and where they should not drive at night.

Alejandra's story also highlights some of my respondents' use of markers. Confederate flags, dirt roads, lack of diversity, are all used as markers to distinguish between spaces they are welcomed and spaces they are not. These markers are also used to decide if people are safe to approach. Before knocking on the front door of a friend's house with a Confederate flag on the front porch, Alejandra called her cousin to make sure he was inside the house because she was afraid she was at the wrong house and was going "to get shot at for being on this person's property." Jesús can help illuminate Alejandra's thought process upon arriving at a house with a Confederate flag: "if I would see them with a Confederate flag, I would be like oh it could be a racist ...". Perhaps this helps explain why several of my respondents, like Carmen, described trying to avoid stopping for gas at smaller towns where "people are proud to show the Confederate flag."

As illustrated by the examples of boundary-making, imagined borders, and the use of markers, sense of belonging is often place-based. It is often bound to northwest Arkansas and involves carving out spaces to avoid (imagined borders). This notion of imagined borders helps exemplify how the legacy of Southern racism, racial cleansing practices, and racial expulsion continue to shape the life experiences of racial minorities in NWA. Even though some claim that Harrison, Arkansas has changed and is now more welcoming, it still evokes fear and makes people operate in high alert while in these spaces. As Antonio describes, many individuals have "preconceived notions that everyone there [in Harrison] is going to be [overtly] racist."

These examples of boundary-making, imagined borders, and markers also lend support to research on racialization that suggests race will heavily shape Hispanics' experiences and sense of belonging. In this next section, I focus more deeply on how racialization shapes Hispanic youths' sense of belonging.

Racialization and Belonging

On Being Brown and Sticking Out

Sense of belonging is also shaped by demographics – the number of Hispanic or non-white folks present. When I asked Alma what it was like growing up Hispanic in NWA, she said, "it depends on what side of town [you live on]." Springdale, the town where most of my respondents are from, like most cities in the United States, is segregated. Depending on the part you are in, you are either surrounded by Hispanic and Marshallese people, taquerias, ethnic restaurants and businesses or by more affluent

whites. Marshallese⁹, descendants or natives of the Marshall¹⁰ Islands, are the second largest racial minority group in Springdale. They tend to live in the same neighborhoods and, hence, attend the same schools as Hispanics in Springdale.

During our interview, Alma like other respondents took the time to explain how Springdale is segregated. Until high school, Alma attended predominantly white schools in which she “stuck out like a sore thumb.” Until she attended Springdale High School (SHS), one of the two high schools in Springdale that in the words of Adalia “is for all the brown kids,” Alma described not “*realiz[ing] there was a way to fit in or feel like [she] belonged...*” Despite not knowing anyone at SHS, Alma found a sense of belonging and “comfort in knowing [she] was not the weird person” anymore.

Adalia, a 22-year-old originally from California, also struggled to belong until she attended SHS:

“... I struggled a lot, especially when we lived on the west side of town where there were less Hispanics. But when we moved to the east side of town and I started going to junior high on this side of town, there were so many more Hispanics. There were so many more people that I could relate to, a lot of people that were from California, a lot of people that were from Texas, or Chicago ... So, I feel like once I moved to the east side that really shaped me into belonging, like feeling more of a sense of belonging.”

Both Adalia and Alma describe finding a sense of belonging at Springdale High School, a school where they were surrounded by people who looked like them and shared similar lived experiences to them. On the other hand, Oscar and Julio express feelings of exclusion when they are in predominantly white spaces. Julio describes how his personality changes when he is working in his predominantly white office:

There are times in the workplace where I am not as talkative because of the cultural differences because there are different things that they are into, that I’m into. I’m more quiet, more reserved.

Similarly, Oscar, a 23-year old originally from California, explains why he does not belong in NWA. He frames his response around the prevalence of white spaces within NWA:

“No, I don’t belong. Honestly everywhere I go, I tell my wife we shouldn’t be here. I feel weird... We stand out! We are not supposed to be here. They stare. Ever been to downtown Fayetteville with these little farmers markets? How many Hispanics do you see there?”

⁹ Due to health hazards from the United States testing nuclear bombs on their island, Marshallese have been migrating to the United States, mainly Arkansas and Hawaii, since the 1980s (McElfish 2016; The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture).

¹⁰ The Marshall Islands are located on the North Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and the Philippines.

Like Oscar explains, sense of belonging is often shaped by seemingly mundane characteristics, like a region's demographics and diversity. While at first glance, the racial demographics and racial composition of a space might not seem like a significant factor for explaining Hispanics' sense of belonging, it makes more sense after considering NWA's history of racial discrimination, racial expulsion, and fear tactics.

Racial Discrimination

Racialization also encompasses racial discrimination. Although some of my respondents reported never having been racially discriminated against, many reported the opposite. My findings suggest that despite their continued desire to make NWA their home, through both experienced and perceived discrimination, in the form of stereotypes, racial othering, and profiling, Hispanics are constantly forced to renegotiate their sense of belonging in the area.

Despite not having personally attended Rogers High School (RHS), several of my respondents mentioned a video at RHS in which the principal asked students with Mexican flags on their vehicles to either remove the flags or park elsewhere. Still upset and hurt, Luna, an 18-year-old born and raised in Arkansas expressed sentiments of exclusion and of not being wanted:

Recently or right now there's a lot of conflict going on at a high school nearby, at Rogers High School. One of their principles removed Mexican flags from vehicles ... he said it wasn't the location to have a Mexican flag, but he left the American flags like the U.S. flags and stuff. He asked the students who had the Mexican flags and who were refusing to take them off to park their vehicles somewhere else. So, whenever I heard that I really did feel like I wasn't wanted in Arkansas. Like I was just here but I was not wanted or anything.

After the video (<https://www.4029tv.com/article/rogers-hs-releases-statement-on-mexican-flag-controversy/20666372>) of RHS's principal asking students to remove the Mexican flags from their vehicles went (NWA) viral and sparked controversy on social media, RHS's principal, Lewis Villines, released a statement saying that the students were driving recklessly and causing a safety concern, but as Jesús, one of my participants points out, if the students were truly driving recklessly, "He should have said 'Hey, don't be driving crazy! Because what does [driving recklessly] have to do with the Mexican flag?'" This incident showed Jesús among others that "some places are more welcoming than others and that some people are still not okay with us [Hispanics] being here [in northwest Arkansas] after all of these years."

Carmen, a 21-year-old originally from California, also illustrates how instances of racial discrimination can disrupt Hispanic youths' sense of belonging. After being blatantly stared at and talked about by a white couple at Crystal Bridges, a museum in northwest Arkansas, Carmen, felt out of place and ashamed of being different:

In that moment I felt, this is the place that I call home even though I wasn't necessarily born here, I was raised here. I've seen so many people grow up. I've seen the city grow up and, in that moment, I felt so ashamed. I really did. I'm not

going to lie. I felt so ashamed of my own skin color. I just kept thinking wow it must be nice to be white. I didn't belong in that instance...

Despite wanting to call the place where they have grown up home, instances like this one make Carmen and others second guess where they belong and, at times, second guess their own beloved culture. Fortunately, Carmen has a good support system. After having been made to feel ashamed of her own skin, Carmen and her friends reminded each other that they needed to be proud of themselves and who they represent (“our ancestors, parents, ourselves, and our future generations”). Carmen describes reminding herself not to let “them” [racist whites] “get a hold of [her] thoughts.” While Carmen’s story lends support to how racialization shapes Hispanics’ lived experiences and sense of belonging, it also pushes back on simplistic explanations of racialization and shows how in spite of negative racialized experiences, racial minorities can foster belonging.

Another example of how racialization shapes sense of belonging is Oscar, a 23-year-old who works at a local dairy farm with men from Harrison, Arkansas. At first glance, Oscar looks white. He has light skin and colored eyes. He does not have an accent when he speaks English. It is no wonder that he was initially mistaken as white by his coworkers: “They thought I was white and then after I started talking, after I started discussing with them, they found out. At first, it was tough, they were like oh you're Mexican. They wouldn't even talk to me.” Eventually, Oscar's coworkers started talking to him, but at the expense of racist comments and “jokes.” Comments and “jokes” like, “We don't go to Springdale, that's your town” and “When is Trump gonna finish that border wall.” Oscar describes initially staying quiet: “They treated me like s***. They stepped on me. I stayed quiet. You know \$20 bucks an hour, I’m good. Hell yeah, Ima stay quiet. I’m a Mexican, whatever, I’m getting paid good” but eventually Oscar started defending himself. He describes how the arguments tended to play out: “Every time someone gets mad at me, they’re like, ‘f***ing Mexican.’ I always tell them, ‘Damn dude why you always gotta come at me with my culture and not at the person that I am’... Every time we get in a fight or argue, I’ll shoot at them, at the way THEY are. But anytime they get mad at me, they always shoot at my culture: ‘F***ing Mexicans always starting s*** you pieces of s***.’ I tell them, ‘Dude you’re f***ing with me, not my culture.’ But that’s the way they are.”

After describing his toxic workplace environment, I was not surprised that Oscar did not feel that he belonged in the state or in NWA. Oscar gave several reasons for not belonging, including “standing out” and the history of Arkansas and the U.S. South:

I don't belong. Honestly everywhere I go, I tell my wife we shouldn't be here. I feel weird ... We stand out! We are not supposed to be here. ... I mean it [NWA/AR] is a nice place. I'm a friendly person I don't like fighting or anything. It just sucks because you feel like you don't belong. Because Arkansas, it's all white people. Have you ever looked up the history of Arkansas? Have you seen how the signs say no Black people or Hispanic people? It's here, Oklahoma, Missouri. Racist towns. They still are! They still are [racist towns].

Oscar's story demonstrates how the legacy of NWA and the U.S. South continue to shape where he feels comfortable and where he feels that he "should" or should not be. Given Oscar's personal lived experiences working side by side with racist men from Harrison, Arkansas and the oral histories about the racial dynamics of the South and NWA, it is not surprising that Oscar feels out of place in NWA and in the state of Arkansas. Oscar's story also provides support for research on racialization that suggests that race ultimately shapes Hispanics' lived experiences, belonging, integration, and exclusion.

It is Not That Bad – Racial Discrimination and Coping Mechanisms

The story, however, is incomplete without also mentioning different coping mechanisms my respondents use to deal with racial discrimination, racial othering, imagined borders, and contradictions. There is a tension in calling a place that treats you as less than because of the color of your skin, home. To diffuse this tension and to be able to comfortably say, "This is my home, this is where I want to be," some respondents adopt coping mechanisms. These include downplaying racist encounters, making negative experiences something positive, and trying to understand and accommodate the other side.

Joel, whose voice grew solemn when he told me about the looks people would give his parents because they could not communicate in English and when he recounted having his name constantly switched up with the only other Hispanic worker in his office, ended his interview with:

Those kinds of [negative] feelings disrupt a lot. They don't make you feel like you belong. But I guess what makes it all worth it is whenever you find someone that does or find something that does.

Here, Joel tries to look past instances of racial discrimination and look forward to finding someone that makes all his difficult lived experiences "worth it." Like Joel, Jesús tries to make a negative experience something positive. After telling me about a white female clerk assuming he was at the courthouse for arraignment instead of a job interview he earned, Jesús said, "*there are moments that I feel like I'm not wanted. But it's beautiful proving them wrong.*" Here, Jesús also makes a negative experience, in which he was automatically seen as an offender instead of enforcer of the law, into something positive – being given the opportunity to prove the clerk wrong.

Several respondents would also try to see things from the other side. Josie, a 21-year-old who works at a local bank, tries to see things from the perspective of her white co-workers: "*At work, I have a compañera that talks Spanish too and sometimes we want to talk in Spanish, and I guess they [white coworkers] assume we are talking bad about them, but we are not. And they just look at us like stop talking Spanish. I get it, in a way. Like if I get in their shoes, like if I only speak English and I hear someone speaking another language, I might not think they are speaking bad about me, but I would want to know what is going on.*" Here, Josie "gets in their [her white monolingual coworkers'] shoes" and sympathizes with them to the point that she becomes uncomfortable speaking Spanish at work because she "[does] not want to make someone else feel uncomfortable."

Manuel provides another example of a self-defense mechanism. When I first asked him if he had ever been discriminated against, he told me about people not letting him or his girlfriend through the crowd but letting other whites right through at a predominantly white music festival and someone muttering under his breathe, “seriously why are you guys even here?” Later, Manuel brought up the instance at the music festival again but this time to tell me his alternative explanation:

"So, the next thing you know that music festival it could've never been racism to begin with. It could've been something else. I could have been wearing a wrong shirt or something. Who knows? It all changes perspective once you see it from different people's perspective"

Some Hispanic youth avoid labeling racist encounters with others as racial discrimination altogether. When I explicitly asked about instances of racial discrimination, some would pause for a minute and say “hmm I can’t think of a time” or, almost automatically, say they had never been racially discriminated against. However, later during the interview, these same individuals would recount instances in which others would make racist comments, racial slurs, or would treat them differently than their white peers. As Manuel puts it, perhaps individuals would do this because sometimes it is best for your well-being to “*not see everything [racial discrimination] for what it is... because then you have no idea what it would feel like.*”

It is not surprising that Hispanics use coping mechanisms or self-defense mechanisms like these. Many feel a contradictory sense of belonging. In the words of Jesús, “[their] people are here.” Their roots are here. They feel they belong and do not belong all at once. To make it easier to call Arkansas or NWA home, some look to the future to remain hopeful. Joel looks forward to meeting someone that will make it all worth it. Jesús looks forward to the day that he can walk into a courthouse for a job interview and not be profiled as the perpetrator.

These coping mechanisms complicate straight arrow explanations that race and instances of racial discrimination will automatically determine Hispanics’ sense of belonging. While negative racialized experiences definitely disrupt Hispanics’ sense of belonging and make them question and, at times, renegotiate their sense of belonging, this is sometimes only temporary. As outlined, some of my respondents utilize coping mechanisms to foster a sense of belonging and offset feelings of exclusion. As was the case with Carmen and her friends, others pick themselves back up and remind themselves to be proud of who they are and to not let negative racialized experiences get to them and diminish their love for themselves, their race, culture, and home.

Legal Status: A Barrier to Feeling Secure and a Sense of Belonging

Hispanics’ sense of belonging in the South is also affected by state-imposed legal categories, like undocumented and legal permanent resident (LPR). This is especially the case for individuals with a precarious legal status. Consistent with previous research (Silver 2018), individuals I spoke with who have a precarious legal status (are undocumented, have temporary protective status (TPS), or are currently in the process of attaining their residency) expressed feelings of exclusion on a national level. When I

asked Joel, a 20-year-old TPS recipient from El Salvador, if he felt he belonged in Arkansas, he responded “it’s very hard to feel like you are needed or belong when all you hear is how you don’t have papers or you don’t have this, or you weren’t actually born here or you weren’t this, or you weren’t that. Um, it is very hard to feel like you belong when there’s a constant threat that you might just not be here tomorrow.” As was the case with undocumented 1.5 generation Hispanic immigrant youth in North Carolina (Silver 2018), youths in Arkansas with an uncertain legal status noted how their legal status prevented them from comfortably settling in and making future plans. Estrella, who was undocumented until after high school, had to rearrange her plans to attend college because even though she completed the required steps to become a legal permanent resident (LPR) by what would have been the fall semester of her freshman year of college, she still was not eligible for FASFA (federal grants and subsidized loans) until the following academic year.

Estrella, who I described above, was born and lived in México for one year. For the majority of her life, she has lived in the United States. Estrella illustrates how exclusion on a national level keeps 1.5 generation immigrant youth from feeling a sense of belonging. Estrella describes wanting to but not feeling like a part of this country, despite all her memories being of the United States, until she became a legal permanent resident (LPR):

I feel like once I got my residency, I felt like I was part of the country. Before, I would feel like I was going to get kicked out. Even when I had DACA, I was still like well that’s going to end. It’s not going to be forever and then what? Go back to the same thing? But once I got the green card, I was like okay. I belong now. I don’t feel like I’m going to be kicked out.

During our interviews, Hispanics who are documented frequently mentioned their privilege and discussed the additional challenges of their undocumented relatives, friends, and classmates. Alma who was born and raised in Arkansas paints a painful image of her undocumented aunt’s everyday struggles:

"Do you wake up, go through your day, come home and think I survived the day? I don't. I don't feel like I survived my day because I don't have anything to survive. I went through and got through my day and it was a good day. But she [my undocumented aunt] goes home every night feeling like she survived, feeling like she had to work to stay here. I'm lucky enough to say that I haven't struggled, and I've taken all the benefits of being a citizen, but I know a lot of people who struggle. It's hard for them. They go home and ask themselves if they survived today. I go home and go to sleep.

Legal Status and A Contradictory Sense of Belonging

While some individuals, like Joel, express feelings of exclusion on a national, state, and local level, some individuals express a contradictory sense of belonging.

Consistent with Alexis M. Silver's (2018) theory of tectonic incorporation¹¹, some individuals express feelings of exclusion on a national level but a sense of belonging on a local level. Antonio, a 22-year old art instructor and DACA recipient who moved to Arkansas when he was an infant, exemplifies this point:

“Whenever Javier [my brother] got arrested and detained by immigration, I definitely felt like the U.S. as a whole wasn't with me. And I definitely felt that feeling of I am an immigrant...but it's definitely back and forth because whenever Javier got detained that whole year so many people were there from white, Black, Hispanic, they were just there to be there...So even though I felt like the U.S. had turned its back on our family, I felt like the community here hadn't.”

Here, Antonio describes feeling a sense of exclusion on a national level but a sense of belonging on a local/community level. Given the contradictory legislation and policies at the federal, state, and local levels, it is no wonder that youths with a precarious legal status express feeling a contradictory sense of belonging. However, as Antonio points out in his narrative, sometimes it is not policies or legislation that create the contradiction. Sometimes it is people and our interactions with them that can make us feel included in the community despite federal level policies creating sentiments of exclusion.

Spillover: Anti-Immigrant Policies and Documented Hispanic Youth:

Consistent with prior research (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2015; Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015), my findings suggest that anti-immigrant policies ripple throughout entire households, families, and communities. Regardless of their own legal status, many of my respondents expressed how legality affects their integration and sense of membership/belonging. When I asked Adalia, a U.S. citizen, how comfortable she felt in northwest Arkansas, she told me about her parents and her constant fear:

I think it [legal status] affects a lot, like my family, because my parents are not legal here... I think for the rest of my life, I am always going to have that fear that something could happen to them, that they could be taken, that someone can find out who they are... that shaped my whole life and will continue to until something happens and they are able to receive some sort of yea [documents] ... Growing up that has always been something that has influenced us and I think it does for many people ... A lot of people live in fear, a lot of people can't even drive to Walmart without feeling scared. And I think that passes on to the children and I think that will pass on the children's children when they let them know that their

¹¹ Highlighting the role of unauthorized status on incorporation, tectonic incorporation suggests that overlapping and sometimes contradicting shifts at the institutional, federal, state, and local levels influence the incorporation of the 1.5 and 2nd generation youth (Silver 2018). Akin to tectonic plates shifting, contradictions at the different government and community levels create shifts that thrust youth from one plate to another, forcing them to constantly reposition themselves (i.e. their plans, ambitions, and sense of belonging) to adapt to these changes.

grandparents are [living] that way. So, I think it's a generational thing – living in fear and never being comfortable.

Adalia, like several of my respondents, took the time during our interview to discuss her daily uneasiness and fear of waking up one morning to discover her parents or loved ones had been detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). It is not a far stretch considering Benton County and Washington County's standing 287(g)¹² partnership with ICE and that in 2016 Donald Trump was inducted as the 45th U.S. President with promises to increase the numbers of deportations in the U.S.

Hispanic youth I interviewed in northwest Arkansas, like Adalia, illustrate Menjivar and Abrego (2012)'s concept of legal violence. Legal violence refers to the normalized but cumulatively harmful effects of laws. As Adalia shows, exclusionary federal level laws, policies, and practices, like widely broadcasting deportations, President Trump's promises to increase the number of deportations, and ICE's fear-inducing tactics, create extreme daily fear and insecurity for immigrants and their loved ones. These laws, in the words of Alma, leave immigrants with a precarious legal status feeling like they "survived" the day.

Discussion/Conclusion

How do racialization and anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric affect Hispanic youths' sense of belonging in El Nuevo South? To better our understanding of Hispanic youth's sense of belonging in El Nuevo South, I interviewed 35 Hispanic youths living in northwest Arkansas (NWA). I examined Hispanics' sense of belonging in 3 different ways: in regard to place-based belonging, legal status, and racial discrimination. My results suggest that Hispanic youth experience a contradictory sense of belonging as they feel they belong in some spaces, yet simultaneously experience exclusion in other spaces. Sometimes this contradictory sense of belonging is due to contradictory laws and policies at the local, state, and federal levels. Other times, it is interpersonal relationships with family members or people in the community that shape belongingness.

In accordance with the literature on racialization, my findings suggest that instances of racial discrimination and racial othering disrupt Hispanic youths' sense of belonging in the area. Despite their continued desire to make NWA their home, instances of racial discrimination, both experienced and perceived, in the form of stereotypes, racial othering, and profiling, force Hispanic youth to constantly renegotiate their sense of belonging in the area and draw boundaries between where they belong and where they do not belong. To strengthen their sense of belonging in the area, some Hispanic youths adopt several coping mechanisms, including minimizing racial discrimination, "not letting it [racial discrimination] faze" them, and making negative experiences something positive (i.e. into a teachable moment/proving someone wrong).

My findings also suggest that it is not only present-day racial discrimination that shapes belonging. When living in a region that was almost entirely white 30 years ago because of its use of racial cleansing practices and sundown towns, history and

¹² 287(g) is a partnership between local police departments and ICE.

storytelling become all the more important. The legacy of Southern racism, racial cleansing practices, and racial expulsion continue to shape comfort, belonging, and sentiments of exclusion and fear among racial minorities in NWA. My respondents often actively created boundaries around places they felt safe and places they did not. They often drew what I interpreted as imagined borders – borders around places that evoke fear and uncertainty and are, thus, seen as places to avoid. Harrison, Arkansas, where the national director of the KKK lives, is one example of this. As such, my research shows how racialized stories of the past continue to shape Hispanic youths' comfort and sense of belonging 30 years after settling in NWA and transforming it racially. As such, scholars should continue to take the time to learn about the racial history of their research site, especially when studying belonging and exclusion, to get the full story.

While my findings lend support to research on racialization, they also push back on simplistic and pessimistic views of racialization – those that see race as always and indefinitely determining Hispanics' sense of belonging. While instances of racial discrimination disrupted some of my respondents' sense of belonging and at times forced them to question and renegotiate their sense of belonging, this is only half of the story. The other powerful half is Hispanic youths in spite of these negative racialized experiences actively making the South, the place where their family, loved one, and memories are, their home. As such, this study deepens our understanding of race, place, history, and belonging through a consideration of how racialization affects Hispanics' sense of belonging in the U.S. South. I hope future studies on belonging continue to center race and legal status.

I end with a quote from Margarita, a 1.5 generation immigrant from México, who in a couple of sentences captures how many of us Hispanic youths in new immigrant destinations feel:

“Even though we have established 30 years here, they are still not open to that. I guess it [racial discrimination and racial othering] just brings me back to reality that although I do feel included most of the time and around the people that are similar to me, some people won't change their mind about us.”

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Interview Guide

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to improve our understanding of Hispanics growing up in Arkansas. By focusing on Hispanic individuals aged 18 to 30, I can examine the different forms of integration or exclusion of the children of immigrants who moved to the South during the 1980s and onward. Participants will be asked to give their informed consent. Then, they will be asked a series of questions regarding their experiences in Arkansas, their (and/or their parents') migration to the U.S. and Arkansas, in addition to a series of demographic questions (such as their sex and age). The length of the interview will vary, but it is estimated to take between one and two hours. Some of the questions in this interview may be used for future research and not just the current research project.

Introduction/General Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. Where are you from?

Migration History (to AR and U.S.)

1. Tell me a little bit about how your family ended up in Arkansas?
 - a. **What attracted** your family to Arkansas?
 - b. **How long** have you (your family) lived in Arkansas/U.S.?
 - c. **When** did you or your family move to Arkansas/United States?
 - d. **Where** is your family originally from?
 - e. Did your family have (familial) **ties** in AR when you moved here?
2. Can you see yourself raising a family here (Arkansas)?

Experiences in the South:

1. Can you tell me a little bit more about your experiences growing up in Arkansas?
 - a. How would you compare it to where you used to live?
 - b. How do you think being Hispanic/Latinx shaped your experiences in Arkansas?
2. If you had to describe your relationship with whites, how would you describe it?
 - a. African Americans/Blacks
 - b. Marshallese
 - c. Other racial/ethnic groups?
 - d. Your own racial/ethnic group?
 - e. Have you dated anyone of a different race?
3. How would you describe your experiences in school (with teachers, coaches, students)?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about your neighborhood growing up?
 - a. Was it mostly Hispanic/white/mixed?

Integration/Exclusion

1. Do you feel like you belong in [name of town]?

- a. What about Arkansas?
 - b. Has there been a time when you felt out of place?
 - c. Are there places in Springdale, AR, or the South that you avoid?
2. What does being “American” mean to you?
 - a. Who is “American?”
 - b. Are you American?
 - c. How do you think a typical person in Arkansas would define “American”?
3. If you could change one thing about Arkansas/growing up in AR what would it be?
4. How would you say Arkansas treats/accommodates/excludes Hispanics?
 - a. What about African Americans/Marshallese/and other racial groups?
5. In a perfect world, what job would you have when you are 35? What would it take for you achieve that?
 - a. Do you think there were/are programs in school/the community to help you achieve this?
6. Can you think of a time when you were discriminated against because of your race/ethnicity?
 - a. What about other family members/significant others/friends?
 - b. How would you compare the discrimination Hispanics experience here (in Arkansas) to areas like Los Angeles or New York City?
7. When you think of where you are in life economically/educationally, are you satisfied/happy with where you are?
 - a. When you think of where you are in life, do you find yourself comparing it to a specific person or group of people?
 - i. Does it tend to be in terms of how far you’ve come or in terms of how far you have to go?
8. How did you feel after the 2016 presidential election knowing that the majority of Arkansas voted for Trump, who ran on a heavily divisive and anti-immigrant platform?
 - a. Did it change your perception of AR at all?
 - b. Did your sense of belonging shift at all?
9. Have there been any instances in which your sense of belonging in your community (NWA) has changed/shifted? Any instances in which you thought “I don’t really feel like I belong here …?”

Additional/Demographic Questions:

1. How would you describe yourself racially/ethnically?
 - a. Can you think of an instance where you didn’t describe yourself as [race/ethnicity]?
2. How do you think others describe you?
3. Did you vote in the last presidential election?
 - a. Did you vote in the last local/state election?
4. Are you a part of any community organizations (including a sports league)?
5. How old are you?
6. How would you identify your gender?

