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The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation and involves an individual's desire to experience a sense of worthiness to receive respect and love (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000). Although the need to belong is fundamental for all human beings, young adolescents in particular have a driving need to feel accepted and belong, with a desire to define themselves according to their groups and social contexts (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007; Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Noam, 1999). Considering adolescents spend more time in school than any other setting (Eccles & Roeser, 2011), sense of belonging in school is a critical concept to explore.

Although belonging in school is important across grade levels and various school contexts (e.g. Anderman, 2002; Osterman, 2000; Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005), sense of belonging may be particularly impactful for middle school students in urban settings. Middle school represents a period of vulnerability for all adolescents, but it may be especially challenging for students living in poverty, who are often situated in urban settings and face a myriad of challenges within the home, school, and community contexts (Berliner, 2006; Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Given that belonging can play out differently in various contexts (Nasir et al., 2011), it is imperative to better understand what constitutes belonging specifically for urban students. However, there is a lack of understanding regarding what comprises belonging for diverse student groups (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005), and there are a number of limitations in the current literature that has made conceptual clarity of belonging in school elusive.

The purpose of the current study was to clarify what constitutes belonging for urban middle school students through obtaining their subjective perspectives including affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging. The researcher implemented Q methodology, grounded in a bioecological framework, in order to explore the perspectives of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students in one urban middle school. Three factors emerged from the study representing distinct viewpoints on belonging in school. Perspectives included students who had a sense of belonging tied to the academic culture of the school, those who desired authenticity and affective connections with others, and those who viewed belonging as cultural respect and adult support. Findings from this study support that belonging is a complex and multidimensional construct that includes affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions. Implications for educators, school counselors, and researchers are discussed.

THE NEED TO BELONG: AN EXPLORATION OF BELONGING

AMONG URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Jaimie E. Stickl

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Approved by

_____
Committee Co-Chair

_____
Committee Co-Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Jaimie E. Stickl, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Member _____

Committee Member _____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are
> biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to
> belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to.
> –Brené Brown

Sense of belonging is a core human need related to both motivation and behavior

(Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The need for belonging involves the desire to feel

connected with others and experience a sense of worthiness to receive respect and love

(Osterman, 2000). Young adolescents in particular have an authentic need to define

themselves according to the groups and social contexts in which they belong, with a

driving desire to feel accepted and to belong in their immediate environments (Collins &

Steinberg, 2006; Newman et al., 2007; Noam, 1999). Given that adolescents spend more

time in school than any other setting (Eccles & Roeser, 2011), schools can play an

important role in fostering belonging among students. Unfortunately, sense of belonging

has received less attention in schools compared to specific and direct measures of

academic achievement and success (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Osterman, 2000). One

explanation of this lack of attention in promoting belonging among students may be the

difficulty of translating research into practice, as researchers have frequently used a

variety of broad, overlapping, or discrepant terminologies leading to a lack of clarity in

what constitutes belonging (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Libbey,

2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004). As a result, sense of belonging is a critical concept that needs further elucidation in educational research. Several different terms have been used in the literature to discuss the concept of belonging in a school setting including 'school membership', 'school attachment', 'sense of community', 'school connectedness', and 'school bonding,' and each term has been operationalized in different ways, including both affective and behavioral components (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Karcher & Lee, 2002; Libbey, 2004; Nasir, Jones, & McLaughlin, 2011; Osterman, 2000). For example, some researchers have focused on measuring student behaviors (i.e. school involvement, school engagement, tardiness) whereas others have measured affective components (i.e. feeling safe, accepted, commitment to school; see Libbey, 2004; Nasir et al., 2011). This lack of consistency in terminology and conceptualizations has made it difficult to compare empirical research findings, let alone translate them into practice as there is a vague understanding of what constitutes belonging and specifically how it relates to various groups of students (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Additionally, researchers have tended to over-rely on surveys and quantitative methods to explore the role and impact of belonging, which limits the ability to encapsulate and understand the contextual and multidimensional nature of the concept (Nasir et al., 2011; Nichols, 2008). Surveys, as well as current conceptualizations, lack the incorporation of student's perspectives, and there is a need to better understand student's perceptions of belonging (Nichols, 2008). Gaining a better understanding of student's perspectives may help clarify not only sense of belonging as a concept, but nuances that may emerge within

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specific school contexts. Thus, it is necessary to better understand aspects of belonging that are important to students in an attempt to refine the concept, which will provide clarity for educators regarding ways schools might promote belonging.

Despite the variety of terminologies and conceptualizations of belonging, there is empirical support that a student's sense of belonging to school is an essential component that is foundational to numerous positive educational outcomes and processes (Ma, 2005). For example, sense of belonging in schools is an important factor related to student behavior, motivation, and performance (Osterman, 2000). In a systematic review of the literature, Osterman (2000) found that belonging was connected with outcomes such as academic attitudes, motivation, and beliefs about self and others. Furthermore, Sanchez, Colon, and Esparza (2005) found that sense of belonging was positively associated with academic motivation as defined by student's intrinsic value for and expectations for success. Although there has been limited and mixed empirical evidence connecting belonging directly to academic achievement, there is considerable support that sense of belonging in school indirectly influences achievement through its significant effect on participation, engagement, and attendance (Osterman, 2000; Sanchez et al., 2005; Wingspread, 2004). In fact, behavioral and cognitive engagement influence whether or not a student drops out of school (Rumberger, 2011). For example, Christle, Jolviette, and Nelson (2007) conducted a mixed method study examining characteristics related to dropping out of high school and found that attendance rate was negatively associated with dropout rate. They concluded that students who are connected and have a

sense of belonging are less likely to drop out of school. Overall, researchers have revealed that sense of belonging to school is essential to the success and positive outcomes of individual students and public education as a whole (Ma, 2005). However, despite the consistent positive outcomes that are associated with belonging, researchers have frequently treated belonging as an independent variable exploring associations to motivational, academic, or behavioral outcomes (Osterman, 2000). Additionally, belonging has been inconsistently labeled and often narrowly defined as either behavioral engagement or affective in nature. What is less known is the breadth of what constitutes belonging from a student's perspectives, it's development, and key aspects of the school context that promote connection for students (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Osterman, 2000; Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009).

Although the importance of sense of belonging has been examined across grade levels, middle school is a key time in early adolescence where experiences of belonging, or lack thereof, may be particularly impactful. Students in middle school are especially vulnerable to feeling isolated or alienated as they are beginning to develop their own identity and look to others outside their family for sources of support (Anderman, 2003; Arhar & Kromley, 1993). As a result, the need to belong for early and mid-adolescents is so powerful that it may take priority over almost any other concern (Noam, 1999). Moreover, early adolescence, which is encompassed by both biological and physiological changes, can be particularly difficult for students as their social and learning environments significantly change during the transition from elementary to middle school

(Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Many students have difficulty adjusting during the middle school transition and students become increasingly disengaged as they transition from elementary to middle to high school, with 40-60% of students becoming persistently disengaged by high school (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Klem & Connell, 2004). Consequently, there is a critical need to better understand sense of belonging during early adolescence and the middle school years.

While early adolescence is a time brimming with developmental transitions and changes, especially in middle school, other contextual factors need to be considered. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the influence of multiple factors such as families, household income, culture, peers, and communities need to be considered. The influences and interactions between the student and their surrounding environments are different not only for each student individually, but also for geographical locations more broadly. For example, students situated in urban settings face a number of complex challenges that are part of the life and experience in cities and metropolitan areas (Lee, 2005). Thus, it is essential to consider contextual characteristics when examining belonging among urban middle school students.

Focusing on urban geographical locations specifically, there are a number of unique challenges that urban students face, both at home and in school. Many students situated in urban public schools live with an economic disadvantage in high-poverty communities, with an average of 64% of students in urban schools who receive free or reduced priced lunch, an indicator of the family's low-income status (Hudley, 2013).

Berliner (2006) highlights a myriad of challenges that students in poverty face including health and medical concerns, chronic hunger, and the negative impacts of neighborhood deprivation. Additionally, low-income students often are subjected to higher levels of violence, family turmoil, and less responsive parenting, which provides more risk factors related to child development (Esposito, 1999; Evans, 2004). Furthermore, students in poverty often have limited access to learning opportunities at home that are often readily available to more affluent students (Berliner, 2006). These challenges greatly impact students in school on a number of levels, as family resources are essential factors related to student's cognitive and socio-emotional development and success in school (Rumberger, 2011). In fact, the achievement or opportunity gap between students who live in poverty and those in higher socio-economic situations has been well documented (Noguera, 2009; Payne & Slocumb, 2011; Skyrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009; Traub, 2000;). These academic challenges extend to student's gradual disengagement with school. Anyon (2005) stated that relatively few students in urban poverty settings move beyond ninth grade, and researchers have found that students from lower socio economic backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school (Rumberger, 2011).

Beyond student's individual academic challenges, the schools that students attend in urban settings often have less resources and a number of distinct challenges compared to more affluent or suburban schools. There is a stark contrast between suburban and urban schools that serve high poverty youth in regards to many aspects of school life that matter for connection (Nasir et al., 2011), and urban schools often have fewer resources

and more school-related stressors that may contribute to differences in belonging (McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008). Some of these challenges that urban schools face include concentrated poverty, a climate characterized by physical conflicts, under-qualified teachers, lack of parental involvement, poor structural characteristics of the building, and a lack of funding and resources (Lee, 2005).

In addition to the contextual distinctions often prevalent in home and school contexts, urban settings are often rich with cultural diversity. As previously stated, urban schools often are situated in the social context of poverty (Berliner, 2006), and poverty is highly correlated with ethnicity. In fact, the highest poverty rates in the United States are among African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Hispanic or Latino individuals (Berliner, 2006; Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013). Consequently, urban settings often have high concentrations of immigrants and minorities (Lee, 2005), and many students in urban schools are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, family culture is a vital concept that should also be considered when examining belonging, as the cultural background of various ethnic groups may impact student's unique experiences of belonging (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). For example, Sanchez et al. (2005) found that sense of belonging did not differ between male and female Latino/a students, despite a previous body of literature suggesting consistent variance in belonging between genders. They concluded that the divergence from previous research trends may be a component of the Latino cultural value of collectivism, which may have lessened gender differences in students' sense of belonging. Therefore, although every individual

has a need to belong, it is expected that cultural and individual differences exist in how people communicate and gratify that need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As a result, urban students often represent a diverse and culturally rich population in which the family and community context cannot be ignored.

Given that the context of urban settings markedly differs from suburban counterparts in both the school, community, and family settings (Berliner, 2006; Nasir et al., 2011), it is important to consider the wide range of contextual aspects that may hinder or foster belonging specifically for urban students. Researchers examining belonging have often narrowly focused on suburban middle school students. This is problematic because although middle school represents a period of particular vulnerability for students in general, it may be especially challenging for low-income students and those living in poverty (Gutman & Midgley, 2000) who are often situated in urban settings. Thus, it is imperative to consider the contextual and familial aspects that may play a salient role in sense of belonging specifically among urban students.

Although researchers have rarely examined belonging among urban high poverty schools (Nasir et al., 2011), researchers who have examined belonging among urban youth have revealed an association with positive outcomes, as well as differences in both the experience and role of belonging for urban or low-income students as compared to their suburban or more affluent peers. For example, although sense of belonging among urban middle and high school students, as defined by the affective experience of students feeling accepted and respected in school, is associated with a number of positive

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outcomes, the overall sense of belonging and reports of personal and social connections are lower among urban students than their suburban counterparts (Anderman, 2002). In addition, sense of community in the school, or the affective experience of students feeling valued, cared for, and that they contribute to the group, is related to a number of attitudinal and motivational outcomes, but appears to show the strongest relationship for the most disadvantaged students (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). Thus, belonging may be especially important for urban or low-income students given the compounded risk factors and challenges that many of these students face.

Researchers have clearly shown that students in urban environments face a number of contextual challenges that impact students both at home and at school. Thus, middle school students in urban communities represent a particularly vulnerable and distinct population of students. Consequently, there is a need to better understand the unique perspectives of belonging in school from urban adolescents in order to refine the concept as it relates specifically to this population, and provide augmented clarity on aspects of belonging that are important for this group, which may enhance the connection between research and practice.

Statement of the Problem

Approximately 14 million students in the United States attend urban schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), yet students from urban settings are underrepresented in the belonging literature. Often, researchers have utilized inconsistent conceptualizations and measurements of belonging, as well as an over-reliance on closed

ended surveys. As a result, there is a lack of students' perspectives regarding belonging, and researchers have failed to capture the contextual nature of belonging, especially for urban students (Nasir et al., 2011; Nichols, 2008). This is problematic because researchers have found that both the experience of belonging as a whole and aspects of belonging may differ between urban or low-income students and their suburban or more affluent counterparts (e.g. Anderman, 2002; Cemalciar, 2010), suggesting that belonging plays out differently for different groups of students. However, there is a gap in empirical research examining the nuances of belonging for students from urban schools. While the current body of research has provided a valuable foundation regarding the importance of belonging for adolescents, less is known regarding the essence of what constitutes belonging for students in general. More specifically, very little is understood about the nuances of belonging particularly for students in urban settings who face a myriad of environmental and contextual challenges. As a result, there is a significant gap in understanding regarding how the current definitions and measures of belonging may play out for urban students (Nasir et al., 2011). It is imperative, therefore, to better understand the experiences and perspectives of urban middle school students, which would help educators understand how to increase belonging for this population.

Although the majority of researchers examining belonging have relied on quantitative measures, a few researchers have highlighted the value of taking a more open-ended approach. Nasir et al. (2011) and Nichols (2008) found important nuances in the dimensions of belonging by diverting methodology from a strict quantitative

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examination. Nasir et al. (2011) implemented a collective case study in order to gain a more in depth examination on school connection or belonging among low-income urban high school students. Researchers revealed distinctions in the ways students connect or belong with the school that were unveiled through more open-ended exploration, which speaks to the importance of gaining a better understanding of the nuances of belonging that may be missed in survey data. However, while Nasir et al. (2011) provided an important start to improve understanding on the ways in which belonging may differ for diverse student groups, they focused on urban high school African American students, situated in a high poverty area, and it remains to be seen if similar nuances would be found in different contexts, ethnicities, and age levels.

Another study conducted by Nichols (2008) used a mixed-methods approach to explore student's perceptions of belongingness beliefs with low-income Hispanic middle school students. The author used both open-ended interviews and a survey to create a model of belonging that distinguished four groups of students based on level of fit between their personal experience of belonging (or lack thereof) and how they viewed the school as a whole. Based on her findings, the researcher suggested that students have different belonging needs and additional studies should be implemented to understand more comprehensively the variety of ways students define and experience belonging in additional contexts (Nichols, 2008). For example, the author conducted her study in a small urban charter school during its first year of service, in which administrators defined 'community' as the central mission of the school. Therefore, while that school may have

provided an idealized setting to examine belonging, it would arguably be a very distinct

context from the reality of many public urban schools that are often faced with a myriad

of challenges including under-qualified teachers and inadequate funding (Lee, 2005).

In addition, while both Nichols (2008) and Nasir et al. (2011) found results that

highlight the importance of examining dimensions and nuances of belonging for diverse

student groups, they lack additional ecological exploration that may be important when

considering students perspectives. For example, they did not include examination

regarding parental involvement in the school, the school/home interactions, or cultural

considerations such as student's perceived cultural fit in the school. As a result, there is a

need to more comprehensively examine sense of belonging in order to identify additional

dimensions that have yet to be uncovered.

The bioecological model provides a theoretical foundation to comprehensively

explore the connections and interactions between the student and their environment over

time, with an emphasis on the processes that drive development (Bronfenbrenner, 1999).

The most evolved form of Bronfenbrenner's theory include four defining components

that are dynamically interrelated including: 1) Process 2) Person 3) Context 4) Time

(PPCT Model) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's bioecologcial model

not only provides a fitting framework to better understand sense of belonging among

urban students, but "it provides the most comprehensive theoretical construct to date with

which to investigate belonging in an organizational setting such as a school." (Allen &

Bowles, 2012, p. 110). Using the PPCT model to undergird the examination of sense of

belonging among urban students allows for the inclusion of salient contextual aspects of students' lives, enabling researchers to gain a broader understanding of students' perspectives and experiences of belonging.

Although a number of researchers have cited Bronfenbrenner's model as a means to conceptualize belonging, they have often narrowly chosen certain aspects of the framework by focusing on the school environment and student interaction, ignoring other important aspects of the model that may be important to explore (e.g. Cemalcilar, 2010; McMahon et al., 2008; Nasir et al., 2011). This is problematic because it may limit uncovering dimensions of belonging that students perceive as important. In fact, the purpose of using a theoretical framework is to explore connections and provide awareness that may lead to uncovering new connections (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to broaden the ecological exploration of belonging in order to include students' behavioral and affective experiences within school, along with additional aspects of the bioecological model that are often ignored, such as students' familial contexts.

There is a lack of clarity in research regarding what constitutes belonging, as well as the limitations that currently exists in research on belonging among urban students. These limitations include an over-reliance on quantitative measures, scant attention to student's perspectives, and a disregard for additional ecological factors that may influence students' perceptions. Thus, it is critical to broaden our understanding on how belonging may differ for diverse student groups. Gaining a better understanding of the

perceptions of urban students regarding the affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging provides the opportunity to expand our knowledge of the importance of belonging for this population. This will not only deepen our understanding of the ways in which belonging may be particularly important for this group, but take research on belonging a critical step forward.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study is to explore the perspectives of urban middle school students regarding sense of belonging in school. Although the impact of belonging on positive student outcomes has been well documented, there has been a significant research to practice gap, which may be due to the discrepant terminology and conceptualizations of belonging. This has made understanding of belonging difficult to translate. The purpose of this study is to examine students' subjective perspectives of the affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging. Gaining students perspectives will provide clarity on how belonging as a concept specifically relates to urban students, who represent a distinct population that face a number of challenges both at home and school.

The current study aims to fill several gaps in the literature by expanding beyond quantitative surveys to explore the subjective viewpoints of belonging through the implementation of Q methodology, which allows for a person's subjective responses. Secondly, using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model as a theoretical framework, this study will expand on previous examinations of belonging by providing a more

comprehensive exploration of student's perspectives, including affective, behavioral, and familial components in order to allow students to identify aspects that are most relevant to their experiences. The purpose is to provide enhanced clarity of the concept of belonging specifically for urban middle school students through obtaining student's points of view, which will help educators gain a better understanding regarding aspects of belonging that may be particularly important for this group of students.

Need for the Study

Urban middle school students represent a particularly large and vulnerable population of students in the United States that many public schools serve. These students face a number of complex challenges both in the home and school settings. Given that sense of belonging has been shown to be especially important for disadvantaged students, gaining a better understanding of belonging from the perspectives of urban students is particularly important as it may provide valuable insight into how student's experience and conceptualize belonging and the ways students feel connected to their schools. As a result, obtaining their subjective viewpoints might provide an increased understanding into the aspects of school life students perceive as particularly important in order to experience a sense of belonging.

Gaining insight and a better understanding of the nuances of belonging that are important for urban students will take a step forward in clarifying conceptualizations of belonging. This will allow school counselors and education leaders to strategically implement intervention strategies, which may help decrease the current divide between

research and practice. In order to promote belonging for urban students, it is necessary to first gain a deeper understanding of what belonging means to these students. This will ultimately allow school counselors and educators to target aspects of the school that are important to urban students, with the ultimate goal of augmenting belonging and improving educational outcomes.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine the subjective perspectives of low-income urban middle school student's sense of belonging. In order to explore student's perspectives, the following research question will be addressed:

Research Question 1: What are urban middle school students' perspectives of belonging in school?

Definition of Terms

Sense of Belonging is the "extent to which [students] feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others" in the school setting (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 61). This can include affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions.

> Affective dimension is the degree to which a student feels he/she 'fits in' to the school, is valued as an individual, respected, worthy, and cared for through social interactions and experiences of relatedness and connection with others.

> Behavioral dimension is a student's actions, and includes the degree to which a student is involved in school and participates in school activities (i.e. extracurricular activities, attendance, academic work).

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Familial dimension is the student's home context and includes aspects of a

student's culture, parental interest in school or school activities, family

interactions with the school, and parental support of the student and/or school.

Urban School is a school located in a city or metropolitan area.

Urban student is a student who attends a public urban school.

Middle school student is a student who attends a public urban school and is in grade six,

seven, or eight.

Low-income is determined by the eligibility of a student and their family to receive free

or reduced lunch prices in school as part of the National School Lunch Program.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Chapter I outlined the purpose of the current study and highlighted the lack of clarity in belonging as a concept and the need to better understand urban middle school student's perspectives on belonging in school. The purpose of the current chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and provide further detail regarding the gap in research on belonging. The chapter begins with a review of the research related to belonging and urban middle school students and outlines the theoretical framework that will be used to guide the current research study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the relevant literature.

The Need to Belong

The need to belong is a core human interpersonal motive, as fundamental as our need for food (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The need to belong, or the need to experience belongingness, involves the desire to feel connected with others and experience a sense of worthiness to receive respect and love (Osterman, 2000). A sense of belonging goes beyond the experience of having general positive relationships, and includes an individual's subjective experience of feeling as if one fits in and is accepted, which relates to the perception of a meaningful life (Lambert et al., 2013). Given the centrality of human beings need to create and sustain interpersonal attachments, sense of belonging may be one of the most encompassing constructs available to understand human

behavior, emotions, and cognitions, as we are centrally motivated by the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

A number of researchers have hypothesized that the need to belong is an essential requisite for human beings. For example, Maslow (1943) theorized in his hierarchy of needs that love and belonging are basic human motivational needs that prevail over self-esteem and self-actualization. Maslow theorized that once physiological and safety needs are met, then an individual "will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal" (Maslow, 1943, p. 381). Maslow went on to discuss how thwarting the basic need for connection and belonging can lead to maladjustment and psychopathology.

Beyond theoretical speculation, Baumeister and Leary (1995) wrote a groundbreaking and highly influential piece in an attempt to provide empirical evidence supporting the theory that belonging is a core human need. They wrote a widely cited review on the 'belongingness hypothesis'. Through examination of a wide range of empirical research, Baumeister and Leary (1995) confirmed that belonging is in fact a fundamental human *need* as opposed to simply a *desire*, and is a universal prevailing motivation related to emotional, cognitive, and behavioral processes. They provided a systematic empirical evaluation of the hypothesis that belonging met the criteria to be a fundamental human motivation. In order to do this, they provided empirical data in order to support seven specific criteria that they developed, which they argued must be met in order for belonging (or any other drive) to be a need and core human motivation (e.g. it

must lead to negative effects when prevented, affect a broad range of behaviors, have emotional consequences, impact cognitive processes). Specifically, they empirically supported that belonging has strong effects on emotional and cognitive processes and when the need to belong goes unmet, it results in negative health effects, maladjustment, deviant behaviors, pathological consequences (e.g., social and emotional pathologies, suicide, eating disorders), and distress. Thus, they proposed "much of what human beings do is done in the service of belongingness" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498).

Although Baumeister and Leary's (1995) pivotal review was done over 20 years ago, researchers continue to provide empirical evidence supporting various criteria of the belongingness hypothesis. For example, in more recent studies researchers confirmed that the need to belong impacts psychological well-being as levels of belonging are associated with variations in suicidal ideation (Orden et al., 2008) and home sickness (Watt & Badger, 2009). In addition, researchers have confirmed the negative effects of the deprivation of belonging. More specifically, researchers found that individuals who are lonely have unmet belongingness needs (Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi, & Cummins, 2008), rejection and exclusion can lead to negative consequences such as aggressive behavior (Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006), and when individuals experience social exclusion, the neurological response is analogous to physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Therefore, researchers continue to empirically reinforce the hypothesis that belonging is a core human need. This need is fundamental for all

humans, but may be even more important during crucial developmental periods of the life-span, such as adolescence.

Early Adolescence

Although belonging is a fundamental need for all human beings, it may be particularly important during adolescence, which is a time characterized by biological and developmental changes. Adolescence is often seen as the transition from childhood to adulthood (Hare et al., 2008), as the onset of puberty marks the beginning of maturation both physically and emotionally. Biological transitions result not only in physiological changes (including endocrine and somatic changes), but also impact changes in routines and behaviors including sleep and waking times and increased engagement in risky behavior (Arnett, 1999; Richardson & Tate, 2004; Colrain & Baker, 2011; Wolfson & Carskadon, 1998).

The biological changes associated with adolescence also impact emotions, which are often heightened during adolescence. Fluctuations in hormone levels often lead to mood disruptions that contribute to unpredictable emotions and mood swings, which can be particularly salient in early adolescence when hormonal changes are at a peak (Arnett, 1999). In addition, researchers have found increased incidences of depression and anxiety during the adolescent period (Hare et al., 2008). As a result, adolescence is a period of life that can be more difficult than other periods in some ways not only for youth, but also for those around them, leading some to view adolescence as a period of storm-and-stress (Arnett, 1999; Casey et al., 2010).

Coinciding with biological and emotional development, relational patterns change during adolescence as youth begin to separate from their family and increasingly engage in other social contexts, making belonging a particularly salient concept during adolescence. The biological changes that characterize puberty are important factors that can impact parent-child relationships, and adolescence is often a critical time in which the nature of family interactions and relationships change. Although parents remain important social and emotional resources for youth, there is often a transition in the patterns of interactions between parents and youth, including an increase in conflict and bickering (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Laursen & Collins, 2009). During this transition time, it is normative for adolescents to increasingly spend less time with their family and more time in outside social contexts (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996; Moretti & Peled, 2004).

As adolescents increasingly spend more time in social context outside of their immediate family, interpersonal relationships with others become particularly important. Adolescents begin to spend larger amounts of time with peers as they become increasingly comfortable with other adolescents due to shared interests and an increased desire to communicate with others who are going through similar developmental changes (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Given the increased likelihood that adolescents will spend more time with peers, they often put a larger emphasis on the expectations and opinions of other adolescents, making belonging to a peer group particularly important as it can provide adolescents with a sense of purpose, worth, and meaning (Brown & Larson,

2009; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). In addition, young adolescents may be especially vulnerable to feelings of alienation, as they increasingly look to individuals outside the family context, particularly peers and non-parental adults for support (Anderman, 2003; Arhar & Kromery, 1993). Therefore, as young adolescents begin to engage in new social roles and look outside of the family for relationships and additional support, belonging to their outside social contexts becomes particularly important.

Given the developmental complexity of beginning to separate from family, while simultaneously increasing connections to others, developmental psychologists describe the adolescent period as a tension between the development of autonomy or individuation, and simultaneous connections to others and conformity to the expectations of society (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). As adolescents begin to formulate their individual identity, they also have an increased interest and awareness of those around them (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006). As a result, developmental researchers have shifted focus to a more relational approach that identifies the prevalence of the adolescents' social word (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Given that young adolescents in particular have an authentic need to define themselves according to the groups and social contexts in which they belong, they have a driving need to feel accepted and to belong in their immediate environments (Newman et al., 2007; Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Noam, 1999). Therefore, considering the adolescent's development of his/her individual identity, concurrent with an increased importance of social contexts, belonging is a critical concept to explore specifically during adolescence where the yearning to belong is so

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powerful that it may take priority over almost any other concern (Noam, 1999). Since belonging is a particularly important concept during adolescence, it is important to consider belonging as it relates to the various settings in which adolescent's interact in social contexts outside of the family. One such setting is the school, which represents a prominent context to explore sense of belonging among adolescents.

Sense of Belonging in School Contexts

Given the crucial changes and growth that occurs during early adolescents, along with the importance of belonging, school represents an imperative context for adolescents to satiate their need to belong. Eccles and Roeser (2011) identified schools as prominent developmental contexts for adolescents and state that youth spend more time in schools than other settings. As such, sense of belonging in school is essential for adolescents' because it satisfies their developmental need for connection and relatedness (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005). Given that early adolescence is a time brimming with developmental changes, sense of belonging in school is a critical concept to consider in educational research, particularly among adolescents. Despite the importance and centrality of belonging as a fundamental human need, sense of belonging is often underestimated, and has received limited attention in school interventions and strategies (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000). This is problematic not only because of the centrality of belonging to motivation and behavior, but also because "learning, development, and education are so fundamentally embedded in a social matrix that they cannot be truly understood apart from that context" (Goodenow, 1992, p. 178).

Nevertheless, belonging continues to be underestimated and underappreciated in school settings, which may be due to inconsistencies in the terminology and conceptualizations of belonging in school.

Discrepant Terminology and Conceptualizations

The lack of attention on belonging in school may be due to the difficulty of translating research into practice, as educational researchers have used a variety of broad or discrepant terminology when examining belonging in the school setting, resulting in a lack of clarity in the meaning of the concept (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Libbey, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004). The range of terms that have been used to represent belonging in schools include 'school attachment,' 'school membership', 'sense of community', 'school connectedness', and 'school bonding' (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Karcher & Lee, 2002; Libbey, 2004; Nasir, Jones, & McLaughlin, 2011; Osterman, 2000). While some researchers have identified the terms as overlapping and similar, others have delineated them from each other. For example, Nasir et al. (2009) identified connection, attachment, engagement, and belonging as synonymous and referred to each term as the same construct. Similarly, but slightly deviating from synonymous terminology, Juvonen (2007) defined connectedness and belonging as interchangeable terms, however he differentiated engagement separately, referring to participatory behaviors. In contrast, Karcher and Lee (2002) argued that although connection and belonging are often used interchangeably, they are distinct concepts that must be delineated because connectedness is actually a response to belonging. As these examples

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show, the variety of terminologies that researchers utilize make it confusing and difficult to understand and examine belonging as a construct, let alone translate it into practice.

Beyond the variety of terminologies, belonging has specifically been conceptualized and operationalized in different ways. Some researchers conceptualized belonging utilizing affective components, while others operationalized belonging utilizing behavioral components, whereas other researchers examined a combination of affective and behavioral components (see Allen & Bowles, 2012; Booker, 2006; Libbey, 2004; Nasir et al., 2011). Affective components of belonging include facets such as feeling safe, respected, and accepted in the school setting (Brien & Bowles, 2013; Cemalcilar, 2010; Goodenow, 1993; Ma, 2003). Scales used to measure belonging from an affective perspective often evaluate the level of relationships, perceptions of acceptance, and student feelings associated with fitting in to the school and social system. A large number of authors have examined the affective component of belonging through representations of belonging as a feeling or perception (e.g., O'Brien & Bowles, 2013; Allen & Bowles, 2012; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Osterman, 2000).

Although many researchers have measured the affective components of belonging, other authors have focused on behavioral components included in student engagement such as involvement, classroom participation, attendance, and identification with school (e.g., Libbey, 2004; Nasir et al., 2009). Although student engagement is a term that is often used distinctly from school belonging, some researchers have overlapped these two concepts, increasing the lack of definitional clarity for belonging,

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and leading to the examination of behavioral measures. For example, Appleton, Christenson, and Furlong (2008) described that some authors have defined student engagement as a two-component construct of behavioral and affective components that includes belonging and identification with school. As a result, the conflation of terms and conceptualizations of belonging and engagement have led some authors to utilize behavioral engagement as a proxy for school connection (e.g. Nasir et al., 2009). Specifically, in an examination of the various terms and measures used to explore school connection and a student's relationship to school, Libbey (2004) cited measures of student engagement and involvement that focused on behavioral components such as assessment of grades, test score, completion of work, disruptive behavior, and attendance (e.g. Finn, 1993; Manlove, 1998). Therefore, some researchers have focused on behavioral measures of student engagement to explore students' connection and belonging to school.

While some researchers have focused on either affective or behavioral components when examining student belonging, additional researchers have examined a combination of both (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Karcher & Lee, 2002; Nasir et al., 2009). For example, Nasir et al. (2009) conducted a study that assessed both behavioral and affective aspects of connection, which they used synonymously with belonging, and found important distinctions between these two aspects of connection. They found that various aspects of behavioral and affective components of connection played out in different ways for different groups of students. For example, some students had high

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'institutional connection' as demonstrated by behavioral components of completing assignments, attending classes, and working hard in school, however, they simultaneously had low 'interpersonal connection' as demonstrated by feelings of isolation and not fitting in. In addition, they found that associations between different aspects of connection and academic outcomes varied. For example, students who had high interpersonal and institutional connection displayed the highest Grade Point Average (GPA), and in general, higher institutional connection specifically was related to higher achievement for students. As a result, Nasir et al. (2009) concluded that in the future, researchers need to more accurately capture the multilayered concept of belonging given the dynamic and contextual nature of the concept. This study provides a salient example of how both affective and behavioral aspects of connection may operate in different ways. As a result, measuring only affective or behavioral components may miss important nuances of how belonging plays out for students. Therefore, among other things, the current study will include aspects of both behavioral and affective aspects of belonging in school in order to better understand the nuanced nature of the concept.

Overall, the lack of consistency in terminology and conceptualizations has made definitional clarity elusive. The inconsistencies in terms, measures, and conceptions found throughout the literature has led to a vague understanding of belonging as a concept and provided challenges in translating research into practice (Allen & Bowles, 2012). As a result, there is a need to better understand the nuances of belonging, specifically for adolescents in school contexts. In order to more fully understand the

complexity of belonging in school, it will be important to obtain students' perspectives to provide enhanced clarity on what belonging means to students and to take a step toward conceptual clarity.

Need for Students' Perspectives

Beyond the discrepant and inconsistent terminology that is often used for belonging, current conceptualizations in large part also lack students' perspectives. Nichols (2008) critiqued the current literature on belonging for using closed ended surveys created from theoretically-driven adult conceptions of belonging, which do not consider students' perspectives or descriptions and may be different than students' subjective perceptions. This is problematic because sense of belonging is a subjective experience (Lambert et al., 2013). As a result, there is a gap in understanding of what belonging means to different groups of students. However, a limited number of authors have begun to use qualitative or mixed methods designs to explore student conceptualizations of belonging (e.g. Nichols, 2008; Sanders & Munford, 2016), and found unique viewpoints, which have increased our understanding of how belonging may play out for different groups. For example, Sanders and Munford (2016) utilized qualitative interviews to explore the concept of belonging in a mixed method study conducted with a group of high school students in New Zealand. They found themes that included the importance of affective aspects of belonging including interpersonal relationships, honesty, and perceptions of adult commitment (Sanders & Munford, 2016). However, given that belonging can play out differently in various contexts (Nasir et al.

2009), there are a number of limitations in regards to transferring results to younger adolescents in the United States, let alone with specific youth populations. In another mixed methodology study with a group of middle school urban students in the United States, Nichols (2008) found unique aspects of belonging that were important to students including affective components (e.g. interpersonal relationships) and behavioral components (e.g. academic achievement). She also found illuminating nuances in how belonging differs for different groups of students. However, this study was conducted in a newly opened charter school, which is very different than the reality of many public urban schools, leaving much to be uncovered for how belonging plays out in different student groups and contexts. Nevertheless, these researchers found nuanced data related to belonging and highlighted the importance of obtaining student perspectives in order to better understand the complexity of how belonging plays out for specific student groups.

In summary, current research on belonging includes inconsistent terminology and measures of belonging along with a lack of student's perspectives. It is necessary, therefore, to further refine the discrepant conceptualizations of belonging with attention to both affective and behavioral components that incorporate student's subjective perspectives in order to better understand the aspects of belonging that are important to students. This will provide clarity for educators that may enhance the ability to translate research findings into practice in order to implement strategies to enhance student's sense of belonging to school. Given that sense of belonging is associated with a variety of positive educational outcomes, it is a crucial concept to clarify in education research.

School Belonging and Positive Educational Outcomes

Despite the variety of terminologies and conceptualizations of belonging, belonging is a critical concept in education research and practice that is associated with positive educational outcomes. In fact, a number of researchers have called for educators to increase their focus of research and school reform on student belonging and connectedness (e.g. Allen & Bowles, 2012; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Juvonen, 2007; Tillery, Varjas, Raoch, Kuperminc, & Meyers, 2013). Moreover, regardless of how belonging has been conceptualized or measured (e.g., affective, behavioral), there is widespread empirical support that a student's sense of belonging to school is an essential component associated with numerous positive educational outcomes and processes (Ma, 2003; Osterman, 2000). Although researchers have found limited and mixed empirical evidence to support connecting sense of belonging directly to academic achievement, there is considerable support that sense of belonging indirectly influences achievement through its effect on other educational outcomes including motivation, perceptions, behaviors, and student engagement (e.g. Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Juvonen, 2007; Osterman, 2000). As a result, belonging in school has important implications for overall student success through influencing critical aspects related to student performance in school such as student motivation.

Student motivation. Sense of belonging is an important factor linked to student motivation. A number of researchers have examined the impact of belonging on a range

of student's motivational outcomes, and found that sense of belonging is positively associated with student's intrinsic academic motivations, task orientation toward learning, and overall motivation towards school (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000). Moreover, researchers have found empirical evidence to support the relationship between belonging and motivational outcomes, which is consistent across school types (i.e., urban and suburban) and ethnicities (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005). For example, in one of the first studies of its kind, Goodenow (1993) developed the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM) in an attempt to examine the affective components of belonging among middle and high school students in both suburban and urban settings. She used the PSSM in both Goodenow (1993), and a follow up study by Goodenow and Grady (1993), and found significant correlations between belonging and self-reports of school motivation across schools. Goodenow and Grady (1993) argued that the relationship between belonging and motivation may be because individuals will find school more worthwhile when they feel others value and enjoy them. More recent studies have confirmed the relationship between belonging and various aspects of student motivation, despite various conceptualizations. For example, Faircloth and Hamm (2005), who operationalized belonging with both affective and behavioral measures, examined belonging among high school students across four ethnic groups. They found that belonging was a significant mediating factor between motivation and academic

success across all four ethnic groups. In addition, Sanchez et al. (2005) found that belonging, measured affectively, was positively associated with academic motivation as defined by student's intrinsic value for and expectations for success. Thus, students who feel like they belong in school settings are more motivated, which has strong implications for positive school performance (Sanchez et al., 2005).

Positive perceptions of school. In addition to school-based motivation, researchers have linked belonging with students' positive perceptions of school (Battistich et al., 1995; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006; Osterman, 2000). Students who have a greater sense of belonging have more positive experiences in school and as such, enjoy school to a greater extent. In a comprehensive review of a wide range of studies, Osterman (2000) concluded that students' experiences of belonging are associated with more positive perceptions of school, academic work, and teachers, thereby increasing the likelihood that students would be interested in school and enjoy both school and their classes as a whole. Furthermore, Loukas et al. (2006) examined affective components of sense of connection to school in a sample of middle school students and found that connectedness mediated the relationships between students perceptions of the school climate (i.e. perceived cohesion, friction, and overall satisfaction) and early conduct problems. Belonging, therefore, is an important factor that shapes students' overall perceptions and enjoyment of school and the school environment. In addition to overall perceptions, sense of belonging is associated with student's internal beliefs and attitudes

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towards themselves and others, outcomes similar but distinct to student perceptions of the school.

Internal beliefs and attitudes. Belonging and connection in school have been found to impact student's intrinsic value and expectancy for success (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Sanchez et al., 2005), self-efficacy (Mcmahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008), attitude towards academics (Pittman & Richmond, 2007), and more positive attitudes and beliefs about self and others (Osterman, 2000). The longitudinal relationship of belonging with student's beliefs is highlighted by research findings from Pittman and Richmond (2007). Although they focused on belonging among college students, they found a small but significant association between students' affective experiences of belonging in high school and their belonging at the university level. As a result, students who have a strong sense of belonging during their high school years may be able to approach the critical transition to college with increased confidence and expectations of success, as compared to those who do not feel like they belonged during high school (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Therefore, sense of belonging has a potentially lasting positive relationship with student's internal expectations, attitudes, and beliefs. Given the positive impact that sense of belonging has on internal beliefs, it is not surprising that sense of belonging also influences other internal experiences including student's emotions and mental health.

Emotions and mental health. Feeling connected to others and experiencing acceptance and inclusion leads to positive emotions, while the alternative (i.e., rejection,

exclusion) leads to negative experiences of grief, loneliness, and depression (Osterman, 2000). For example, Macmahon et al. (2008) found that an affective sense of belonging in school was related to lower rates of depression among other motivational and attitudinal outcomes for low-income students (between grades five and twelve) who had disabilities. Conversely, Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, and Neumark-Sztainer (2007) found that social isolation, or ultimately a sense of not belonging in a setting or with others, was related to low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and suicide attempts among adolescents, with school connection as one of the protective factors that influenced some of the relationship between isolation and negative psychological risks. Belonging, therefore, is not only important for school related motivations and perceptions, but can also impact student's emotional health and well-being. However, the positive impact on belonging does not stop with internal perceptions, experiences, and emotions, but extends to student behaviors.

Student behaviors. Students who experience school connection, a concept frequently used synonymously with school belonging, are less likely to demonstrate risky behavior such as substance and tobacco use, early sexual behavior, violence, gang membership, student conduct problems, and health compromising behaviors (Blum, 2005; Catalano, Haggerty, Osterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Loukas et al., 2006; Rovis, Bezinovic, & Basic, 2015; Wingspread, 2004). Catalano et al. (2004) summarized a large scale longitudinal study, the Seattle Social Development Project, that examined the impact of school connection on a number of student behavioral outcomes from

elementary to high school. They found that students who experienced school bonding or connection, defined in both affective and behavioral terms, were more likely to postpone drinking or smoking, less likely to become criminal offenders in later grades, and less likely to join a gang or engage in violent behavior. Additionally, they found that students' experiences of school bonding in elementary and middle school consistently related to particular patterns of behaviors through high school. Students who engage in problematic or risky behavior not only hurt their academic or school success, but also often experience long term negative effects on their life. Researchers have found that engaging in risky behaviors during adolescence is related to negative adult outcomes in a variety of domains such as alcohol abuse or dependence, drug use, poverty, and incarceration (see Pergamit, Huang, & Lane, 2001). Since early engagement in risky behaviors can have long-term negative effects on adolescent outcomes, it is important to help mitigate the likelihood youth will engage in such behaviors. As a result, the negative correlation between belonging and engagement in risky behaviors among students, highlights the critical importance of school belonging among adolescents.

Student participation and attendance. Sense of belonging not only decreases student's involvement in risky behaviors, but also increases their engagement and participation at school. Belonging is positively associated with participation, engagement, and attendance (Osterman, 2000; Sanchez et al., 2005; Wingspread, 2004). In a systematic review of the research on belonging in school (including research on students' experience of belonging, related educational outcomes, and a school's influence

on belonging), Osterman (2000) outlined the importance of belonging for student participation and engagement including classroom involvement and participation in extra-curricular activities. She indicated that the students who experience belonging and relatedness are more likely to be engaged, participate in school activities, and invest in the learning process. This can be seen in the relationship between student attendance and sense of belonging, as students who feel more connected to school will attend school more often, have fewer absences, and more opportunities to engage in learning. Affective sense of belonging is inversely related to absenteeism, as students who have a greater sense of belonging are more likely to attend school, and those who have lower levels of belonging are more likely to be absent and miss school (Sanchez et al., 2005). Therefore, educators that promote a sense of community in school, where students feel valued and supported, may simultaneously encourage students to commit to group norms, engage in learning, and attend school (Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Lewis, & Schaps, 1999; Sanchez et al., 2005).

Remaining in school. It also is noteworthy to describe the antithesis of participation and engagement, which is dropping out or the steady and gradual process of students disconnecting and disengaging from school (Appleton et al., 2008; Lee & Burkman, 2003). As an example, attendance rate is negatively associated with dropout rate for high school students, with students who are connected being less likely to drop out of school (Christle, Jolviette, & Nelson, 2007). In their study, Christle et al. used behavioral measures as a proxy for belonging and cited school attendance as an indicator

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of potential belonging and connection; paying very little to no attention to affective sense of belonging. Researchers also indicated that fostering a sense of belonging in school is an important intervention for students at risk of dropping out, as belonging may be one reason students persist to graduation (Knesting, 2008; Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Although Given that student dropout rates continue to be a national problem and dropping out is a culmination of a longer process of disengaging from school (Lee & Burkman, 2003; Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013), promoting student connection and engagement within school is critical.

Moreover, schools can actively promote environments that increase student engagement and decrease the likelihood students will drop out. Specifically, the social organization of the school is a critical factor related to student drop out rates. Students are less likely to drop out in schools where students have perceived positive relationships between teachers and students (Lee & Burkman, 2003). Similar findings were observed by Doll et al. (2013) who found that social factors such as getting along with teachers and getting along with students could be 'push factors' (negative circumstance within a school environment), which can impact a student's decision to drop out. These findings support the idea that the student's relationships and the social environment of the school can influence a student's engagement and decision to stay in school. Schools are organizations where the academic and social environments are innately interwoven (Anderman, 2003; Goodenow, 1992). Since the need to belong is connected to the need for approval, relationships, and the forming of social bonds (Baumesiter & Leary, 1995),

sense of belonging in school is a critical concept that can minimize students process of withdrawal and in contrast, foster their level of engagement and success.

Limitations in Research on Sense of Belonging in School

Despite the positive impact that researchers have shown regarding the role and impact of belonging on positive educational outcomes, researchers have tended to over-rely on surveys and quantitative methods to explore belonging with specific indicators of educational and psychological outcomes. In her extensive review of the belonging literature at the time, Osterman (2000) posited that the majority of researchers treated belonging as an independent variable, examining its relationship with various motivational and behavioral outcomes. This holds true with research studies that have been conducted since Osterman's critique (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Mcmahon et al., 2008; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Rovis et al., 2015; Sanchez et al., 2005). Specifically, a large number of studies are quantitative and cross-sectional in nature, limiting our understanding of the relationship between belonging and related outcomes in a cause and effect manner. Our understanding of belonging is particularly limited when researchers rely on predetermined indicators of belonging, especially those that are based on adult definitions and conceptions, because it restricts our ability to encapsulate students' subjective perspectives and interpretations of belonging (Nichols, 2008). In addition, quantitative approaches can be unidimensional, and researchers have often focused on either affective or behavioral indicators of belonging. However, since researchers have indicated the importance of both affective and behavioral aspects of

belonging, authors may miss the dynamic, multidimensional, and contextual nature of belonging when utilizing a unidimensional approach (Nasir et al., 2009). Consequently, what is less known is the breadth of what constitutes belonging from a student's perspective, including the development of school belonging and key aspects of the school context that promote connection for students (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Osterman, 2000; Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009).

Although not the norm, there have been a limited number of researchers that have begun to explore additional aspects of belonging, including ways to foster belonging (Centers for Disease Control, 2005; Blum, 2005), nuances of belonging (Nasir et al., 2011), and an incorporation of students' perspectives on belonging (e.g. Nichols, 2008; Sanders & Munford, 2016). These researchers laid a foundation that highlighted the need to further elucidate and explore the distinctions of belonging as evidenced by the emergent data. Overall, they found that belonging is a nuanced and multidimensional construct, which varies in different contexts and among different groups of students, as described more in depth below. As a result, given the initial findings from these studies, there is a need to utilize additional research methodologies and incorporate students' perspectives in order to further explore the dynamics of various aspects of belonging. Given both the lack of consistency in conceptualizations, as well as a narrow over-reliance on close-ended surveys, it is imperative to broaden the current research on belonging. This can include diverging from strict quantitative methodological studies on outcomes in order to explore the nuances of the concept of belonging itself, particularly

through incorporating the student perspective. This will allow us to further refine the concept and provide clarity for both researchers and educators. Consequently, in the current study, I will use Q Methodology to explore the subjective perspectives of students in an effort to help clarify not only sense of belonging as a concept, but also additional nuances that may emerge within specific school contexts. Although sense of belonging is important in a variety of school contexts and levels, it is particularly important for young adolescents during the middle school years.

Belonging in Middle School

Although researchers have found that sense of belonging in school is important across grade levels, middle school is a key time in early adolescence where experiences of belonging, or lack thereof, may be particularly impactful. Given the developmental changes and vulnerable period of early adolescence, researchers have increasingly gained interest in middle school as an important context to support young adolescent growth as the experiences that adolescents have in school impact every aspect of their development (Eccles & Roesner, 2011; Kim, Schwarts, Cappella, & Seidman, 2014).

Beyond the individual biological and developmental changes that young adolescents face, students in middle school particularly face drastic changes in their social and learning environments as they transition from elementary to middle school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Gutman & Midgley, 2000). In fact, many students have difficulty adjusting during middle school, and students become increasingly disengaged as they transition from elementary to middle to high school, with 40-60% of students

becoming persistently disengaged by high school (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Klem & Connell, 2004). This may be because many students attend middle schools that are separate from elementary school, and the transition to middle school is often difficult. Some researchers have described this transition as a disruptive and abrupt experience for youth; school often becomes larger in school and class size, and simultaneously more impersonal, which can often lead to increased feelings of alienation, especially among marginalized students (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Juvonen, 2007). In addition, students have more negative perceptions of school climate in middle school, which may be the result of the social context changes that are often in sharp contrast to elementary school (Kim et al., 2014).

The drastic social and environmental changes inherent in the middle school transition have led many youth to decline in school-related performance and perceptions. For example, in a longitudinal study, Barber and Olsen (2004) examined data from a cohort of students across grades 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. They found that across grade transitions, changes in the school environment (e.g. perceived teacher support) were associated with a decline in academic, personal, and interpersonal functioning, with the most dramatic decline occurring during the middle school years. Barber and Olsen (2004) posited that this decline may have been the result of the confluence of heightened developmental transitions with the abrupt changes in the school environment. Thus, the transition into middle school represents a particularly vulnerable time for adolescents characterized by a

number of changes in both the learning and social environment, making belonging particularly important during this crucial period.

Given the importance of school as a social context for early adolescents, middle school is a key time in early adolescence where experiences of belonging, or lack thereof, may be particularly impactful. Moreover, many adolescents begin to feel an increased sense of isolation and alienation across middle school and early high school grades (Anderman, 2003). A major education policy issue related to student alienation is the drop out rate. Drop out has been coined as a *process* of gradual disengagement from school and school life, and this process often begins long before the actual moment a student drops out, including experiences students have during the middle school years (Balfanz, Herzog, & Maciver, 2007; Lee & Burkman, 2003; Rumberger, 2011). In fact, Anderman (2003) posited that given adolescent's increasing sense of alienation across the middle school years, this may lead to a decreased sense of belonging. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of attention given to the magnitude of disengagement during the middle school grades, especially among high poverty schools (Balfanz et al., 2007).

Given that middle school represents a critical time for students to connect and belong to school, there is a crucial need to better understand sense of belonging during early adolescence and the middle school years. As a result, the current study focuses on middle school student's subjective perspectives of belonging to enhance our understanding of sense of belonging in school for this group of students. Although middle school represents a period of vulnerability and change for all students, it may be

particularly challenging for students in urban settings who face a number of complex

challenges both in the community and school settings.

<div align="center">**Urban Students**</div>

While the middle school years of early adolescence is a time replete with

developmental changes and transitions, additional contextual factors need to be

considered. The influence of multiple contextual factors including family, household

income, peers, culture, and communities are important aspects to consider in students'

development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These influences and reciprocal

interactions between students and their environments (both immediate and more remote)

are unique not only to students individually, but also for geographical locations more

broadly. It is, therefore, critical to consider contextual differences between students

situated in different school contexts such as those located in urban settings. Students

situated in urban settings face a number of complex challenges that are part of the

experience and daily life of residing in metropolitan areas (Lee, 2005), making it

essential to consider contextual characteristics, including challenges students face at

home and in their community, when examining belonging among urban middle school

students.

Home and Community Challenges

Neighborhood disadvantage and poverty. Urban students face a number of

unique and complex challenges at home and within the communities they reside. The

contextual realities in many urban settings can be characterized by chronic stressors

coined Neighborhood Disadvantage. Neighborhood Disadvantage (ND) is the existence

of community stressors such as poverty, crime, and limited resources, which impact those

who live in such settings (Attar, Guerra, & Tolan, 1994). In a report published by the

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2012), the United

States had the second highest rate of children living in poverty among industrialized

nations across the world. Poverty is an especially salient and concerning condition given

the financial crisis created during the Recession, which has impacted almost all families

in direct or indirect ways (Murry, Berkel, Gaylord-Harden, & Copeland-Linder, 2011).

Moreover, an average of 64% of students in urban schools receive free or reduced priced

lunch, an indicator of the family's low-income status, which is a cause for concern given

the negative effects of growing up in an economically disadvantaged setting (Noguera,

2009; Hudley, 2013). According to United States Census Bureau data, 38.4 million

people inside metropolitan areas lived in poverty in 2014 (DeNavas-Walt, & Proctor,

2015).

Poverty may be one of the most malicious conditions related to ND communities,

because it is often associated with a myriad of other factors such as crime, family

dysfunction, and a lack of resources (Bowen & Chapman, 1996). The conditions in

socioeconomically depressed neighborhoods can negatively influence both adolescent

behavior and mental health, impacting adolescents' development by shaping individual

values and fostering social disorganization (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Furthermore, the

stressors inherent in high poverty communities often influence families and parenting

styles (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). For example, low-income students are often subjected to heightened levels of family turmoil, harsh parenting, ineffective parental supervision, and less responsive parenting, which provide more risk factors related to child development (Bowen & Chapman, 1996; Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Esposito, 1999; Evans, 2004). Although students face a number of challenges associated with poverty in the home and family setting, stressors extend to the community level including increased levels of crime and violence.

Crime and violence. Children who live in poverty and urban settings are also subject to higher levels of crime and violence. According to national crime statistics from 2012, the rate of violent crime and violent victimization known to law enforcement was higher in urban metropolitan areas compared to other geographical areas (i.e. rural, suburban, non-metropolitan counties) (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2015). As a result, urban youth are often exposed to high rates of violence including community violence, family violence, and sexual assault (McCart et al., 2007). Thus, it is not surprising that urban areas often have higher rates of violence. A number of researchers have found that between 50% and 96% of youth in urban settings have witnessed some type of violence within the community such as seeing a shooting, witnessing an assault, or hearing a gunshot (see Zimmerman & Messner, 2013).

High exposure to violence can have detrimental effects on students in a number of ways both emotionally and behaviorally. Researchers have found that urban adolescents exposed to higher levels of violence showed increased levels of Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) symptoms among both boys and girls (McCart et al., 2007).

Furthermore, exposure to violence is linked to additional negative social and emotional

consequences such as depression, distress, and substance abuse (see Buka, Stichick,

Birdthistle, & Earls 2001).

Beyond emotional consequences, exposure to violence impacts youth behaviors.

Exposure to violence, along with experiencing additional stressors often faced in high-

ND communities, contributes to aggressive behavior (Attar et al., 1994). In fact, students

in poverty or urban settings often have increased participation in crime, antisocial

behavior, delinquent behavior, and aggression (Attar et al., 1994; Bowen & Chapman,

1996; Dubow & Ippolito, 1994; MCart et al., 2007). Overall, the presence of violence

makes the possibility of death a constant companion for many children in poor urban

neighborhoods (Payne & Slocumb, 2011). This creates a constant environment of danger

and disruption, with negative psychological and behavioral consequences on many youth.

Lack of resources. In addition to heightened levels of crime and violence,

economically disadvantaged communities also have fewer resources available to support

children and families. The lack of resources in high poverty environments extends

beyond the lack of financial resources inherent in lower socioeconomic communities, and

includes emotional resources, support systems, relationships with role models, language

resources, and knowledge of hidden rules of the school system and mainstream culture

(Payne & Slocumb, 2011). In addition, social capital is another resource to consider in

impoverished communities. Parcel and Durfur (2001) built off concepts first proposed

James Coleman, and posited that capital investment in children is an essential component related to youth development. Some authors have argued that disadvantaged communities have less social capital than their more affluent counterparts due to lower amounts of social ties, social resources, and lower levels of interpersonal trust (see Evans, 2004). However, other authors have argued that social capital in disadvantaged communities may not necessarily be lower, but individuals in those settings have greater barriers to overcome with the social assets they do have because they are not reinforced by other resources (Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001). No matter what side of the argument one falls, it is evident that children who live in economically disadvantaged communities have greater barriers and fewer resources, both financially and socially.

Impact on students' development. Given the lack of resources in impoverished urban communities, poverty has wide reaching effects on students' development physically, emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively. Since students in poverty have limited resources available, they often do not develop the same way as children in more stable settings (Payne & Slocumb, 2011). Students in poverty face a myriad of physical concerns given the negative impact of neighborhood deprivation including health and medical concerns and chronic hunger (Berliner, 2006). The negative consequences of neighborhood disadvantage impacts children as early as during the prenatal period. Pregnant mothers in poverty often face stressful events and have fewer resources increasing the risk for early birth and growth restrictions, resulting in subsequent negative effects on childhood developmental and health outcomes (Larson, 2007). Furthermore,

given the lack of resources, many students in poverty have inadequate diets that are often high in carbohydrates and fats, as parents have less access to nutrients that are found in vegetables and fruits (Payne & Slocumb, 2011). Additionally, environmental conditions that characterize impoverished environments are often subpar at best and dangerous at worse. For example, students in poverty are often exposed to higher levels of led and toxic waste due to conditions of older buildings, pollution, and fuel emissions (Evans, 2004; Berliner, 2006; Payne & Slocumb, 2011). These conditions can be damaging and cause serious health issues especially to children and youth who are in the process of development.

In addition to physical concerns, students in impoverished urban communities are also impacted on a socio-emotional level. Students who have experienced social and economic deprivation are more likely than others to be victimized and experience trauma such as child abuse, sexual exploitation, or witnessing domestic violence (Briere & Lanktree, 2008). Students who are constantly in unstable or negative environments will often internalize these events and struggle emotionally and/or socially. Furthermore, emotional concerns are often left unaddressed, compounding the problem. Despite the higher incidence of trauma and violence, as well as a disproportionate amount of mental illness for individuals in poverty, counseling may be either unaffordable or culturally considered taboo (Payne & Slocumb, 2011). As a result, children are often left with overlooked and unmet emotional needs.

Beyond emotional needs, children's cognitive development is another aspect that is highly impacted in impoverished communities. Students in poverty often have limited access to learning opportunities at home that are often readily available to children in more affluent communities (Berliner, 2006). Given the language deprivation, along with an absence of emotional connection and touch that is can be prevalent in impoverished families, children often have underdeveloped executive functioning (i.e. working memory, behavioral regulation, problem-solving) (Payne & Slocumb, 2011). In fact, Berliner (2006) when referring to IQ differences between social classes, stated that "environment accounts for almost all variation in intelligence that we see we see" (p. 970). Given the environmental conditions that many students in poverty face, they are often at a disadvantage in cognitive development. This greatly impacts students in school on a number of levels, as family resources are essential factors related to student's cognitive and socio-emotional development success in school (Rumberger, 2011).

Academic Challenges Experienced by Students in ND Communities

Student achievement. The factors associated with poverty are not isolated outside of the school context. In contrast, they influence students and schools in powerful ways (Berliner, 2006). The academic achievement or opportunity gap between students who live in poverty and those in higher socio-economic situations has been well documented (Berliner, 2006; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Traub, 2000; Skyrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009; Payne & Slocumb, 2011; Noguera, 2009). For example, Chen and Weikart (2008) examined 212 middle schools in New York City and found that lower

socio economic status (SES) was directly associated with decreased scores on student's standardized tests, lower attendance rates, and higher school disorder (i.e. disciplinary behavior). They also found that attendance and school disorder mediated the relationship between SES and academic achievement. Thus, poverty not only directly relates to test scores, but also influences a number of other school factors (i.e. attendance rates, student behaviors), which are ultimately associated with student success and achievement. While this is only one example, there are thousands of studies that have showed the relationship between poverty and student achievement (Berliner, 2006), thus supporting the role that poverty may play in the achievement gap.

Given that urban schools are often situated in the social context of poverty, and poverty is highly correlated with ethnicity (Berliner, 2006), researchers have examined educational inequalities and achievements gaps that reveal the disparity between white students and students of color. Many students in urban schools are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and unfortunately, as Berliner (2006) stated, "given the high inter-correlations between poverty, ethnicity, and school achievement in our country, it is (sadly) not inappropriate to use ethnicity as a proxy for poverty" (p. 963). The achievement gap that exists between students of color and their counterparts from the dominant culture have been a central topic in education research (e.g., Berliner, 2006; Noguera, 2009). Students of color, for example, are often over-represented in remedial classes or special education (Noguera, 2009). Beyond measures of direct achievement, students of color have lower perceptions of the school climate and perceptions of the

school environment than their white counterparts (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010; White, La Salle, Ashby, & Meyers, 2014). Unfortunately, it is evident students in urban settings face a number of challenges that contribute to the disparities that are often seen in school success. The culmination of these challenges can be seen in a student's decision to leave school, or drop out.

Drop out rates. The academic challenges urban students face may lead to a student's gradual disengagement with school and even their dropping out of school. Anyon (2005) stated that relatively few students in urban poverty settings move beyond ninth grade, and a number of researchers have found that students from lower socio economic backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school (e.g., Rumberger, 2011). Urban schools are often faced with multigenerational school disengagement (Zenkov, Harmon, & Lier, 2008), and students who attend urban schools are more likely to drop out of school compared to students who attend suburban or rural schools (Lee, 2005). Furthermore, Christle et al. (2007) conducted an examination of schools that had high drop out rates compared with those that had low drop out rates. They corroborated previous research by confirming a positive relationship between poverty and school failure; schools with higher drop out rates had higher percentages of minority students. More specifically, in a comprehensive discussion of the predictors of dropping out, Rumberger (2011) described that dropout rates are higher for Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans than for Asians and Whites. This is problematic as success in school can be considered a foundation to success later on in life, especially for students in urban

poverty settings who may have limited avenues or resources for success (Esposito, 1999).

Given the myriad of challenges urban students face both at home, within their

community, and academically, sense of belonging in school is a particularly relevant and

important concept for urban students. Considering the positive associations between

belonging and psychological and academic outcomes, sense of belonging in school is a

critical concept to explore for this unique population of students. Furthermore, sense of

belonging in school may also be particularly important given the challenges that are often

inherent in urban schools as a whole.

Urban Schools

Urban schools face a number of complex challenges, and the problems

confronting them can be seen as a manifestation of broader societal issues such as social

inequality and the deterioration of urban settings (Noguera, 2009). Schools are important

settings because they can serve as developmental contexts for students and can be either a

protection or risk factor contributing to students' individual development (Eccles &

Roeser, 2011; Esposito, 1999). Moreover, the school environment may be even more

important for urban students in impoverished communities, given the detrimental effects

that poverty can have on students and families (Esposito, 1999). Unfortunately, there is a

stark contrast between suburban and urban schools that serve high poverty youth in

regards to many aspects of school life that matter for connection (Nasir et al., 2011), and

urban schools often have fewer resources and more stressors that may contribute to

differences in belonging (McMahon et al., 2008). The challenges that urban schools face

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can include lower levels of resources, higher levels of violence in school, decreased

parental involvement, low expectations, potentially harmful disciplinary practices, and

chronic under-performance.

Limited Resources

Given that urban schools are often situated in concentrated poverty, they have

fewer resources and supports. Funding is typically a major barrier for urban schools, and

on a national average, urban school districts spend financially less per individual student

than districts in other settings (Lee, 2005). This is often the result of education policies in

which urban and high poverty districts receive less state and local funding. For example,

in a recent report published by the Education Trust, Ushomirsky and Williams (2015)

found that the highest poverty districts across the nation received about 10 percent less

per student in funding than the lowest poverty districts, and schools that served the

highest number of students of color received approximately 15 percent less funding per

student than schools that served the fewest minorities. This funding gap is problematic

because funding is an important resource to help support student success and is an

"essential precondition for the delivery of a high-quality education" (Baker, Sciarra, &

Farrie, 2010, p. 1). Although funding is just one portion of a school's ability to provide

high quality services to students, it can influence the amount of resources and supports

students receive. For example, many teachers in urban schools have to work with

outdated textbooks, old technology, and inadequate materials to support student learning

and achievement (Hudley, 2013).

Inadequate resources are not only a challenge for students and staff, but may also relate to difficulties that school personnel have fostering a sense of belonging within the school. For example, McMahon and colleagues (2008) stated that urban school's limited resources and school-related stressors may be one of the factors related to lower levels of perceived belonging often found in urban students. Limited material resources may also limit the amount of energy and support that teachers and staff can contribute to fostering belonging within the school.

Quality Teachers and High Teacher Turnover Rates

The lack of funding and resources often coincides with the ability of urban schools to recruit and retain quality teachers and support staff (Baker, Luhm, Farrie, & Sciarra, 2016). A district with more resources and funding has the ability to attract the highest qualified and strongest educators because it can pay employees more (Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). However, urban schools often have less qualified teachers, as teachers that are most qualified in subject matter expertise and teaching credentials, are less often found in high poverty urban schools (Hudley, 2013). Furthermore, states across the nation are dealing with declined enrollment in teacher education programs which may be due to budget cuts and shifts in education policies (i.e. high-stakes testing, teacher evaluations, decline in tenure protections) (Westervelt, 2015). Similarly, the enrollment has also declined in Teach for America, a program whose trainees are often placed as teachers in high-need urban classrooms (Rich, 2015). As a result, there not only has been, but continues to be challenges in recruiting and retaining

qualified teachers in urban settings. In addition, teacher turnover may also be a contributing factor to the shortage of qualified teachers in urban and high poverty settings.

Given the many challenges that students in urban settings face, there is often a disconnect between teachers' hopes and the reality of student success. This leads many teachers to leave their positions in order to work in 'better' schools or leave the profession altogether (Chenoweth, 2009). Consequently, low-income, minority, and low-achieving students in urban schools are often placed in classes with many of the least qualified and least skilled teachers (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002), as it is not uncommon for teachers to leave urban schools. The high turnover rate presents many barriers not only to helping students become academically successful, but also in fostering enduring relationships that may contribute to belonging. Students' relationships with adults in the school are important factors related to students' sense of belonging (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Sanders & Munford, 2016; Tillery et al., 2013). However, if teachers continually leave, it is less likely students will be able to create and maintain meaningful relationships with adults at school, thereby negatively influencing an important factor related to students' belonging in school. As teachers transition in and out of the school with staff turnover, it is likely to coincide with less consistency and an increase in more chaotic and disorderly environments, which are additional characteristics of many urban schools.

Violent and Disorderly School Environments

In addition to high teacher turnover and under-qualified teachers, urban schools often have higher levels of violence and disorderly environments. In findings from the school survey on crime and safety, Neiman, DeVoe, and Chandler (2009) found higher rates of reported gang crime and acts of disrespect toward teachers on a daily or weekly basis in city schools compared to suburban, town, or rural schools. They reported that city schools have a rate of 35.8 violent incidents per 1,000 students (designated as rape, sexual battery, physical attack or fight, threat of physical attack, and robbery) compared to 22.8 incidents per 1,000 students in suburban schools. Therefore, it is not uncommon for urban schools to be characterized by physical conflict and the presence of weapons (Lee, 2005). Given the increased level of disorder, violence, and often danger in urban schools, it can lead to a decline in a positive school climate. Eccles and Roesner (2011) described that as a school climate or environment deteriorates, the incidence of violence and bullying increases, which is often the case in schools that serve low-income students.

School connection and belonging may be especially important for environments that have increased levels of violence and disorder, as sense of belonging in school can mitigate the negative effects of exposure to violence. For example, a greater sense of belonging in school among students who have been exposed to violence is associated with increased levels of hope (i.e. goal directed thinking) and fewer psychological symptoms (Ludwig & Warren, 2009). Unfortunately, exposure to violence also decreases a student's sense of belonging. Going back to Maslow's hierarchy (1943), increased

levels of violence would decrease a sense of safety, which even comes before the ability

for a student or youth to seek belonging in a school setting.. Conversely, schools that

provide safe environments increase the likelihood a student feels like they belong.

Researchers confirm that a school environment that fosters safety and care among

students are important factors related to sense of belonging for students (Cemalciar,

2010; Ma, 2003). Therefore, although belonging may be particularly important in urban

schools that have increased violence and disorder, it is also more difficult to foster

belonging because a climate of safety and care are key aspects related to sense of

belonging.

Parental Involvement

A notable function of a deteriorating school climate is the lack of parental

involvement that usually coincides (Lee, 2005). Parental involvement is an important

aspect of a student's success in school, and researchers have linked parent engagement

with academic achievement and student motivational (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, &

Holbein, 2005; Jeynes, 2005). Furthermore, many of the nation's large urban schools are

calling for an increased focus on parent engagement, encouraging parents to take an

active role in their child's education to help increase student achievement (Horsford &

Holmes-Sutton, 2012). However, there are often a number of barriers that exist in

connecting low-income and minority families with schools. This can include perceptions

by educators that families do not value education, along with a lack of trust among

minority working class families towards public institutions (Horsford & Holmes-Sutton,

2012). In addition, parents from low-income settings specifically, may have limited knowledge, restricted opportunities for school access, and cultural differences between themselves and others at school (Jefferson, 2015; Moles, 1993).

These cultural differences can also extend to general social assumptions, as parents from diverse backgrounds may be accustomed to different rules or patterns of interactions. For example, Ramirez (2003) stated that some Latino immigrant parents may feel they need a personal invitation from a teacher in order to attend school. In addition, language can be a cultural divide that hinders communication between school and home. In his study on Latino immigrant parental involvement, Ramirez (2003) described the barrier and frustrations some parents had in attending school board meetings because the district did not provide translators. Thus, parents may be more likely to withdraw when they are unable to understand or communicate with staff members, providing a significant communication and cultural barrier.

In conjunction with cultural barriers between home and school, researchers have begun to argue for a redefinition of parental involvement especially among low-income and culturally diverse communities. Some authors argue that parents may be informally engaged at home with their child, but may be hesitant to engage with the school in formal ways, particularly if they view the district as a system that continually fails their children (Horsford & Holmes-Sutton, 2012; Luet, 2015). Traditional views of parental involvement focus on school-based definitions that emphasize a narrow and school-centric view where parents are asked to help the school and teachers, be involved in

school initiated activities, serve as teacher assistants, be a part of advisory groups or committees, and engage in school-related activities at home (Lawson, 2003; Lopez, Scriber, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

In contrast, many parents (particularly those who identify with a traditionally marginalized population) may view their involvement and contribution to school in informal ways such as talking to children, providing nurture, and attending to the financial needs of their children (Lopez et al., 2001). This is an important disconnect that may contribute to the divide between parents and schools, as they each have different expectations and perceptions of parental engagement and support. Consequently, there is a critical need for schools to obtain a more community-focused approach that enhances teachers' understanding of their students' home life, culture, and family (e.g. home visits, initiating contact with parents), and redefines traditional views of parental involvement (Lawson, 2003; Lopez et al., 2001; Ramirez, 2003).

Given that parents are important sources of support for students (Laursen & Collins, 2009), as schools improve communication and build relationships with parents, parents may have more positive views of the school and staff. As parental perceptions change, it may impact their students' own perceptions of school and feelings within it, thereby potentially influencing their sense of belonging.

Informal parental involvement may not only be related to cultural values or customs, but also may be the reality for parents in urban settings who are tasked with providing for their families in a context of Neighborhood Disadvantage (ND). Many

parents in urban and low-income settings work irregular and long hours to support their family. This reality can conflict with scheduled meetings or activities offered at the school, which parents are simply unable to attend (see Ramirez, 2003). Furthermore, in qualitative interviews with low-income, culturally diverse parents, Lawson (2003) identified a number of parents who had to work hard to provide for their family. He described how parents struggled to get by and worked long hours, often having to leave children alone. As a result, parents wrestled with the responsibility of providing for children, while worrying about their safety in urban communities that are often replete with drugs and violence. Given the immense time constraints and responsibilities tasked to parents of children in urban settings, traditional ideas of parental involvement at school can be difficult and unrealistic.

As a result, students and parents in urban settings often face significant challenges to parental involvement. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on the direct connection between parental involvement and sense of belonging in school. However, Ma (2003) found a positive relationship between school climate (defined as disciplinary climate, academic expectations, and parental involvement) and students' sense of belonging, suggesting that parental involvement may play a role in a student's belonging to school. Given the enduring importance of parents as sources of support for adolescents (Laursen & Collins, 2009), along with the strong relationship between parental involvement and other educational outcomes like academic achievement and student motivation (e.g., Gonzaelz-DeHass et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2005), the relationship between

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school and home is an important aspect to consider when exploring students' sense of belonging.

Low Expectations

In addition to the many barriers to traditional parental involvement in urban schools, many parents also feel that teachers have lower expectations of their children compared to children in higher SES schools (Ramirez, 2003). Unfortunately, these perceptions can be accurate as school staff, communities, and policy makers in urban settings often have low expectations for student success. Teachers in urban schools can often feel overwhelmed by the needs of the students they serve and as a result lower their expectations in the classrooms (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, n.d.). Researchers who have examined schools that have been effective in urban settings have shown that holding high expectations for students is an important factor related to student success (Chenoweth, 2009). However, given the perceived consistent failure of education reform (Traub, 2000), along with the many barriers that students in urban schools face, many people have low expectations of students who attend urban schools. Moreover, a teacher's implicit discrimination and/or stereotypes regarding certain ethnic and racial backgrounds may play a role in differential expectations, which can negatively impact student's motivation and achievement (Eccles & Roesner, 2011). As students perceive that teachers do not expect them to succeed, it could have a profound impact on their sense of belonging in school. One of the key characteristics of schools that help adolescents feel connected includes an environment of high standards coupled with

teacher support (Blum, 2005). Thus, as teachers lack expectations or lower their standards, they impact a key aspect of the school environment that could foster belonging for students, thereby relaying hidden messages regarding student worth and value.

Potentially Harmful Disciplinary Practices

In addition to low expectations, negative hidden message may also be sent by the disciplinary practices that many urban schools employ, potentially impacting students' success and overall school experience. In an examination of suspension rates, Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) found that schools that served a high percentage of students of color from low SES backgrounds were more likely to have higher incidents of out of school suspension than schools that served higher SES white students. More specifically, according to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2014), African American students are 3 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than white students, which documents the racial disparity that exists in disciplinary procedures. Although reasons for this disparity are complex and based on student behaviors, Weismann and NaPier (2015) argued that school staff members may interpret student behavior through the lens of race, culture, and class often leading to the suspension or expulsion of minorities for subjective behaviors (i.e. disrespect, attitude, or insubordination). Thus, the higher rates of minority students receiving the brunt of punitive discipline can send hidden messages regarding negative racial stereotypes (Noguera, 2009). Moreover, school disciplinary practices are directly related to students' sense of belonging in school (Ma, 2005). Given that belonging involves the desire to

experience a sense of worthiness to receive respect and love (Osterman, 2000), students who face unfair disciplinary practice may receive negative hidden messages related to their worth and value in the school, negatively impacting their sense of belonging.

In addition, both urban schools and schools that serve low SES and minority students are less likely to use restorative practices in disciplinary procedures. For example, in an examination of national data, Payne and Welch (2015) found that schools serving proportionally more Black students were less likely to use restorative philosophies, which have been found to be effective responses to misbehavior (i.e. peer mediation, restitution, community service). Additionally, the antithesis of restorative approaches might be considered zero-tolerance policies in which schools automatically suspend or expel students based on certain levels of student behavior. Such zero-tolerance policies lead to an increase in suspension and expulsion rates, which disproportionately impact minority students, potentially creating a school to prison pipeline (Thompson, 2016). Given the combination of deteriorating school climate and harsh disciplinary practices in urban schools, students who attend these settings are often at a disadvantage and are more likely to experience school-related stressors that may contribute to differences in belonging (Anderman, 2002). As a result, belonging is a particularly important concept to explore among urban students. Gaining a better understanding of the nuances of belonging may help educators implement strategies, including more restorative disciplinary practices, that may enhance rather than hinder

belonging for students, who are often at a disadvantage academically and consequently fail to meet academic standards.

Chronic Underperformance

A culmination of the many challenges previously described can often be seen in the manifestation of chronically under-performing or failing urban schools. Under-performing or failing schools are schools that have been unable to meet the minimum criteria for state and national academic standards. They have become a growing national problem, with disproportionate concentrations of failing schools in urban and low-income communities (Noguera, 2006; Reyes & Garcia, 2013). In other words, underperforming schools, which are often situated in urban settings, are disproportionally failing marginalized students, broadening the achievement gap. Given the right of all students to obtain quality education, chronically under-performing schools have become a focal point of research, education policy, and reform initiatives. Reform strategies can include turnaround (the process of implementing dramatic changes in a school such as restructuring the school's staff), turning failing schools over to non-public education providers, or school closures. However, these initiatives can arguably have widespread negative consequences on communities, which often disproportionately impact poor neighborhoods (Lytton, 2011).

Summary of Urban Schools

Overall, considering the numerous unique challenges that urban students face in both the home and school contexts, along with the positive associations between

belonging and educational outcomes, it is imperative to better understand belonging for this group of students. Furthermore, given the complexity and multilayered nature of belonging, researchers have found nuances in aspects of belonging (including both affective and behavioral components) that have played out differently for different groups of students (as previously described). Consequently, there is a need to obtain urban middle school students perspectives of sense of belonging in school in order to clarify the concept of belonging specifically among this diverse and culturally rich population of students.

Cultural Diversity

In addition to the contextual distinctions often prevalent in home and school contexts, urban settings are often rich with cultural diversity. As stated previously, urban schools are often situated in the social context of poverty, which is also highly correlated with ethnicity (Berliner, 2006). In fact, the highest poverty rates in the United States are among African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Hispanic or Latino individuals (Berliner, 2006; Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013). Consequently, urban settings often have high concentrations of immigrants and minorities (Lee, 2010), and many students in urban schools are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, family culture is a vital concept that cannot be ignored when examining belonging, as the cultural background of various ethnic groups may impact student's unique experiences of belonging (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). For example, Sanchez et al. (2005) found that sense of belonging did not differ between male and female Latino/a students, despite a

previous body of literature suggesting consistent variance in belonging between genders. They concluded that the divergence from previous research trends may be a component of the Latino cultural value of collectivism, which may have lessened gender differences in students' sense belonging. Additionally, Faircloth and Hamm (2005) examined belonging across four ethnic groups and found that although multiple dimensions of belonging were important and relevant for all students, they differed slightly across some ethnic groups. Although every individual has a need to belong, it is expected that cultural and individual differences exist in how people communicate and gratify that need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As such, there is a need to further explore aspects of belonging that may be particularly important for minority students with specific cultures, as some aspects may yet be unrecognized (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). As a result, urban students often represent a diverse and culturally rich population in which the family and community context cannot be ignored. Given the complexity and integration of urban student's home, community, school, and cultural contexts, it is necessary to ground the current study in a theoretical framework that considers the multilayered and contextual nature of urban students and settings.

Theoretical Framework

Given the unique cultural context inherent among urban students, along with the myriad of challenges students face both at home and in school, a theoretical framework is necessary in order to help conceptualize the intricacies of belonging among this multifaceted student group. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model has been used as a

theoretical framework in a number of studies to conceptualize student outcomes in the school setting (i.e., Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Grogan-Kaylor and Wooley 2010; Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, & Marcotte, 2014). The bioecological model is an evolving framework that lays the foundation for studying human development and provides both a means to conceptualize connections for a phenomenon of interest and new insights for additional connections (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). The bioecological model provides a system of exploring the connections and interactions between the person and their environment over time, with an emphasis on the proximal processes that drive development (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model provides a relevant framework to examine the complexity of belonging. Students living in impoverished inner cities face harsh realities that have wide reaching effects (Elias & Haynes, 2008). It is therefore negligent to examine belonging in school without considering the many contextual factors that impact student's development.

Although a number of researchers have cited Bronfenbrenner's model as a means to conceptualize belonging, they have often narrowly chosen aspects of the framework by focusing on the school environment and student interactions ignoring other important aspects of the model that may be valuable to explore such as familial involvement (e.g. Cemalcilar, 2010; McMahon et al., 2008; Nasir et al., 2011). Although researchers have identified the importance of family involvement, it is in relation to other educational outcomes such as academic success and student motivation (e.g. Gonzalez-DeHass et al.,

2005; Jeynes, 2005), leaving much to be known about how the interplay between home and school may relate to student's sense of belonging. Thus, expanding the exploration of belonging to include aspects of the school-home interactions and a student's culture may provide valuable information in regards to aspects of belonging that may be important for students. The purpose of using a theoretical framework is to explore connections and provide awareness that may lead to uncovering new connections (Tudge et al., 2009). Therefore, there is a need to broaden the ecological exploration of belonging, which may uncover important aspects of belonging that are relevant for students.

The most evolved form of Bronfenbrenner's theory include four defining components that are dynamically interrelated including: 1) Process 2) Person 3) Context 4) Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner created the PPCT model as a research design to encourage the simultaneous empirical examination of each aspect of the theory (Tudge et al., 2009).

Process

The 'Process' component of PPCT are proximal processes which are the primary and driving forces of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Proximal processes refer to the increasingly complex interactions between the developing person and their surrounding environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) described process as the "engine of development" that varies according to the characteristics of the individual, the context (both immediate and remote), and a function of time (p. 798). Applying this to belonging and school-related outcomes, such processes

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could include engagement in activities, interactions, or relationships a student has with parents, teachers, administrators, and peers in the school or the home environment. Specifically, a number of processes are linked to fostering a student's sense of belonging in school. For example, a student's positive relationships with others are key aspects related to belonging including relationships with teachers (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Sanders & Munford, 2016; Tillery et al., 2013) and peers (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Newman et al., 2007). Additionally, a student's engagement in school activities is also related to that student's sense of connection and belonging in school (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

Furthermore, the interactions between an adolescent and his/her parents influence aspects of development that may play a role in a student's sense of belonging in school. For example, parent-child relationships that are characterized by interpersonal warmth, acceptance, high expectations, and mutual respect are related to adolescent outcomes including pro-social behavior, school success, empathic behavior, psychosocial maturity, and self-esteem (see Laursen & Collins, 2009). In turn, these outcomes may influence a student's experiences and relationships in school, which relate to their sense of belonging. For instance, researchers have found that self-esteem is related to belonging in school, as students who have higher self-esteem and a sense of worthiness, feel more comfortable and valued in school (Ma, 2005). Thus, given the many processes inherent in student environments, both at home and in school, this is a critical aspect of the bioecological theory to consider in research on belonging.

Person

The 'Person' component of PPCT is a more recent addition to the matured theory (Tudge, et al., 2009). 'Person' includes the biopsychological aspects and characteristics of the individual (student) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These personal characteristics influence the proximal processes that occur, and can be a factor for all parties involved in the interaction (Brofenbrenner, 1999). For example, a student's personal characteristics (e.g., African American, male) and his teacher's characteristics (e.g., Caucasian female) may both factor into the relationship and interactions that occur between the two in the classroom. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) further delineated various types of person characteristics including *force or dispositional characteristics* (behavioral dispositions such as engagement, curiosity, locus of control), *resource characteristics* (mental and emotional resources a student has such as past experiences, intelligence, material and social resources), and *demand characteristics* (personal innate characteristics that can act as a stimulus to another person in the surrounding environment such as age, gender, skin color, physical appearance). The Person component is used to explore the person level characteristics of both students and those in their immediate environment.

Person characteristics can be directly related to sense of belonging. Researchers have found that students who come from low SES backgrounds, students of color, and females often have lower sense of belonging than their counterparts (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016; Ma, 2003; Osterman, 2000). In

addition, innate characteristics can also influence belonging. For instance, self-esteem and self-concept are innate resource characteristics that are associated with belonging in school (Anderman, 2002; Ma, 2003). Person characteristics can also act as a stimulant to another person in the surrounding environment. This in turn, can impact the interaction and relationship between two individuals, which can influence belonging. For instance, a student's skin color may trigger a teacher's innate stereotypes thereby impacting perceptions of the student's behavior or potential to succeed (Eccles & Roesner, 2011; Weissman & NaPier, 2015). As a result, students may be less likely to feel like they belong in the school or feel a sense of connection with others as they are treated differently and feel devalued. Thus, numerous individual characteristics of both students and others in the school are important aspects of person characteristics related to belonging.

Context

'Context' is an additional feature of the bioecological model, that was included in Bronfenbrenner's earliest form of the theory. This refers to the environment as "nested systems" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796). Bronfenbrenner (1999) highlighted the importance of the environment in shaping development and posits that the environment has the power to set proximal processes in motion or hinder the initiation of such processes. Steinberg (1995) echoed this sentiment when he stated, "no process occurs outside of a context. And if we want to understand context, we need to take it into account, not pretend to control it away" (as cited in Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The

four interrelated systems include the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosytem (interrelations of systems), exosystem (contexts the individual is not actually situated but which has important influences on their development), and macrosystem (overarching culture or subculture that contains a set of values or beliefs). In relating this to the school experience, the microsystem includes the context in which a student spends time engaging in activities and relationships such as home or their school (Tudge et al. 2009). As education researchers know, school and home are not isolated contexts and often overlap, connect, and are interrelated in a number of positive or negative ways. The overlap of these contexts would be the student's mesosystem.

The mesosystem is particularly evident in regards to research on parent engagement. As previously stated, parent engagement is an important concept to consider when exploring belonging in school. Educators in urban schools specifically are calling for an increased focus on the school-home interaction, as parental involvement is related to student success (Jeynes, 2005; Horsford & Holmes-Sutton, 2012). Given that parents are important sources of support for youth (Laursen & Collins, 2009), and home and school are the primary developmental contexts for adolescents, the relationship between home and school is an essential aspect to consider in relation to belonging.

In addition, a number of processes between the school and home contexts can impact parent engagement. For example, positive communication, home visits, and school outreach to the community can positively influence parental engagement (Lawson, 2003; Lopez et al., 2001; Ramirez, 2003). This in turn can potentially enhance parental

involvement and may impact a student's sense of connection or belonging to the school environment. However, this familial aspect of belonging is rarely addressed in the current literature. Although researchers have found positive relationships between parental involvement and other academic outcomes such as student motivation and academic achievement (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005: Jeynes, 2005), there is a dearth of research examining parental involvement with student's sense of belonging in school. Ma (2005) found that school climate (defined as parental engagement, disciplinary climate, and academic expectations), was associated with belonging. However, parental engagement was conflated with additional aspects of the other school specific climate variables. She did not specifically discuss or explore the relationships between aspects of parental engagement and student's perceptions of belonging. Consequently, there is a need to expand the current exploration of belonging to consider processes that occur between student's home and school contexts.

In addition, the cultural dimensions of the home and school context are often disregarded in explorations of belonging. Although researchers have empirically studied the relationship between race/ethnicity and belonging (see Anderman, 2002; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Goodenow & Grady, 1993), there is a significant gap examining the cultural connection (or disconnection) between a student's familial heritage and cultural values with others in the school environment (e.g. teachers). Researchers have proposed that students' perceptions of respect for their cultural group and ethnicity may be associated with their sense of attachment or alienation to school (see Faircloth & Hamm,

2005). Since belonging relates to a student's desire to feel connected with others and experience a sense of worth and value (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Osterman, 2000), a student's perceived cultural fit or lack thereof may be an important dimension of sense of belonging in school. Considering that urban schools have a large number of culturally diverse students and families, aspects of student's culture may play a salient role in their experience of belonging.

Expanding beyond the mesosystem, the exosystem might include the broader school district in which decisions are made. Although students are not directly involved in those decisions or in that system, such decisions directly impact the student. For instance, grade configuration, school size, and ability grouping are school organizational variables related to students' perceptions of belonging (Anderman, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Although these decisions are often policies made by the larger school district, they have implications that impact not only schools but students on an individual level. Finally, the macrosystem could include the values/beliefs regarding education of the student's culture as a whole.

Time

'Time' is the last element of the PPCT model. Time is also conceptualized on a number of different levels including *microtime* (what is occurring over the time of a specific interaction) and *mesotime* (the consistency of the activities and interactions that occur in the environment) (Tudge et al., 2009). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner (1988) also emphasized a larger aspect of time, which he coined the *chronosystem*. The chronosytem

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can include specific historical events the student experiences (Tudge et al., 2009) as well as the normative experiences (puberty, entry of school, school transitions) and non-normative experiences (death, trauma, divorce) an individual may encounter throughout development. Tudge et al. (2009) stated that time, in conjunction with timing, is an essential aspect of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and should be taken into consideration when using the model as a guiding framework. Time is an important consideration when exploring belonging because a student's age and progression through school is a factor related to belonging. For example, in a longitudinal study, Anderman (2003) found that students reported declining levels of belonging from 6th to 7th grade. In addition, students in older grades have lower levels of belonging than those in younger grades (Anderman, 2002). Thus, belonging is an important variable to consider with time, as student's sense of belonging can change over time (Nichols, 2008).

Beyond the changes in belonging over time, normative experiences, such as the period of adolescence and school transitions, are important to consider, especially when examining belonging among adolescents. Adolescence itself is a crucial time period full of developmental, emotional, and social changes. These changes can significantly impact students' relationships and social roles, making belonging particularly important during this time. In addition, the transition to middle school is a critical time in a student's life full of environmental and social changes. Since many adolescents begin to feel an increased sense of isolation and alienation across middle school and early high school

grades, (Anderman, 2003), belonging is a particularly important concept during this time period.

This is especially true for urban middle school students who face a number of unique challenges in the home, community, and school settings. The multiplicative stressors of living in high poverty and Neighborhood Disadvantaged communities increase risk factors for students (Attar et al., 1994). These risk factors, when combined with the developmental changes of adolescence, create a unique combination of conditions that can lead to students' ultimate withdrawal from school, requiring proactive intervention during these critical years (Balfanz, Herzog, & Iver, 2007). Thus, although middle school represents a time period of vulnerability for all adolescents, it may be especially challenging for students living in poverty (Gutman & Midgley, 2000), who are often situated in urban settings. As a result, middle school represents a particularly critical time to better understand school belonging specifically for urban students.

Bioecological Model Summary

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model not only provides a fitting framework to better understand sense of belonging among urban students, but "it provides the most comprehensive theoretical construct to date with which to investigate belonging in an organizational setting such as a school" (Allen & Bowles, 2012, p. 110). Using the PPCT model to undergird the examination of sense of belonging among urban students allows for the inclusion of important aspects of urban students' lives that need further exploration, including the familial aspects of school-home interactions and the dynamics

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of a student's culture. Thus, broadening our ecological exploration of belonging will enable researchers to gain a better understanding of students' perspectives and experiences of belonging.

Sense of Belonging and Urban Students

Using the PPCT model as a framework to examine sense of belonging among urban students is particularly fitting given the multiple challenges and distinct environmental aspects that characterize urban contexts. Unfortunately, researchers examining belonging have often narrowly focused on suburban middle school students. Given the highly relevant nature of sense of belonging in school for urban students, it is not surprising that although limited, researchers have provided empirical data supporting the importance of belonging for this group of students.

Positive Educational Outcomes

Although there is limited data regarding belonging among urban high poverty schools (Nasir et al., 2011), researchers who have examined belonging among urban youth have revealed an association with positive outcomes. Among urban students, belonging is associated with positive educational outcomes such as expectancy of success, school motivation, effort, valuing of academic work, participation, social and personal attitudes, grade point average, attendance, and graduation rates among urban students (e.g. Battistich et al., 1995; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Nasir et al., 2011; Nichols, 2008). Furthermore, researchers have begun to uncover the unique role of belonging among diverse student groups located in urban settings. For example, in

a quantitative study conducted by Roche and Kuperminc (2012), researchers examined belonging, among other variables, with urban Latino middle school students. They found that the affective experience of belonging in school partially mediated the relationship between the stress of experiencing discrimination and academic achievement. They concluded that there is a need to increase belonging, especially among Latino youth who may experience discrimination in multiple ways. Overall, although there is limited data available, belonging plays an important and positive role among urban students. Nevertheless, additional studies are needed in order to further explore and better understand the various aspects and role of belonging among urban student groups. This is especially important because researchers have found a number of complexities and nuances related to sense of belonging in urban schools.

Complexity of Belonging in Urban Schools

Although the importance of belonging specifically among urban and diverse student groups has been documented, researchers have also found differences in both the experience and role of belonging between different student groups, suggesting that belonging truly is a complex and nuanced construct. A number of researchers have found that students in urban settings may experience lower levels of belonging or connection compared to students in other school contexts, despite the fact that belonging may be especially beneficial in regards to positive outcomes for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Battistich et al., 1995; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Nasir et al., 2011). However, beyond the distinction of the overall experience of

belonging, some researchers have also found differences in the role of belonging. For example, in one of the foundational studies on the affective experience of belonging, Goodenow and Grady (1993) found that belonging had positive impacts on student outcomes for all students, however, students from urban settings reported lower beliefs that others were on their team along with lower levels of connection to others in school. In addition, they also found differences in the role of belonging between ethnicities. Belonging was more highly related to expectancy of success among Hispanic students than African-American students. They concluded that Hispanic cultural values of community may have played a role in this differentiation. Such differences between racial groups speak to the critical role of context and cultural factors that are important to consider when examining belonging.

In addition, Faircloth and Hamm (2005) conducted a more recent study examining belonging among four ethnic groups. They found that although belonging was related to positive outcomes among all groups, it played out differently across some ethnicities. They found that student reports of social integration with peers (as determined by friendship nominations) were not associated with sense of belonging for African American and Asian students, although they were important indicators of belonging for European American and Latino students. Faircloth and Hamm (2005) posited that cultural perspectives and differences may have played a role in these differences. It is evident that belonging is a complex concept that varies according to contextual and diverse student groups. As such, there is a need to better understand the intricacies and meaning of

belonging specifically among urban middle school students, who represent a diverse group of students who face a number of unique challenges both at home and in school, as described above.

Limitations in Research

Although the importance of belonging for urban students has been documented, there is a lack of understanding of the meaning of belonging specifically among urban students. Given the discrepant terminology and often conflicting conceptualizations of belonging, as previously discussed, there is a lack of understanding of the concept of belonging in general, and for urban students in particular. A number of researchers have cited the lack of clarity regarding what comprises belonging or its impact for diverse groups of students (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; McMahon et al., 2008). The scant research on the nuances of belonging among low-income urban students is problematic because there is an increased disconnection that often pervades urban schools (Nasir et al., 2011). In addition, in considering the bioecological model, the experience of belonging cannot be isolated from the contextual challenges that students face, making urban student's experience of belonging unique. Additionally, previous measures of belonging with both urban and non-urban student groups have over-relied on closed ended surveys. As a result, researchers have failed to capture the contextual nature of belonging, especially for urban students (Nasir et al., 2011; Nichols, 2008). While the current body of research is a valuable foundation regarding the importance of belonging for adolescents, less is known regarding the essence of what constitutes belonging

particularly for students in urban settings who face a myriad of environmental and contextual challenges. Consequently, there is a need to better understand the unique perspectives of belonging in school from urban adolescents in order to refine the concept as it relates specifically to this population, and provide augmented clarity on aspects of belonging that are important for this group.

Although the majority of researchers examining belonging have relied on quantitative measures, both in general and with urban student populations, a few researchers have highlighted the value of taking a more open-ended approach. Nasir et al. (2011) and Nichols (2008) found important nuances in the dimensions of belonging by diverting methodology from a strict quantitative examination, providing an important foundation for future research. Nasir et al. (2011) implemented a multi-method collective case study in an urban, predominantly African American high school, in order to gain a more in depth examination on school connection among low-income urban high school students. Through focus groups, case studies, teacher interviews, and survey data they revealed important distinctions in the ways students connect or belong with the school. They found two dimensions of belonging (conceptualized both affectively and behaviorally) that operated differently for students. These dimensions include institutional connection (attitudes and behaviors related to being a student) and interpersonal connection (relationships with teachers and adults in school). For example, while some students felt they were connected institutionally (or academically) they may not have felt connected interpersonally (relationships with others). They concluded that

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global, static, and predetermined surveys on school connection could have easily misrepresented the multilayered and complex realities of the school that affect student connection. As a result, they called for future studies to consider contextual aspects of student's circumstances through using research methodology that may more accurately reflect the realities of urban students. Nasir et al. (2011) laid an important foundation that highlights the importance of gaining a better understanding of the intricacies of belonging that may be missed in survey data. However, while Nasir et al. (2011) provided an important start to improving our understanding on the ways in which belonging may differ for diverse student groups, researchers focused on urban African American high school students, situated in a high poverty area. It remains to be seen if similar nuances would be found in different contexts, ethnicities, and age levels.

Nichols (2008) is another researcher who used a more open-ended approach. The researcher explored students' perceptions of belongingness beliefs in response to the limitation of current conceptualizations of belonging and previous researchers over reliance on survey data using belonging as a predictor and criterion variable. Through using a mixed-methods approach with low-income Hispanic middle school students, the author used both open-ended interviews and a belonging survey, measuring affective components of belonging. She attempted to create a model of belonging that distinguished four groups of students based on level of fit between their personal experience of belonging (or lack thereof) and how they viewed the school as a whole. In other words, some students' perceptions of the school as a whole diverged from their

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personal place within it, suggesting that overall perceptions of the school did not necessarily equate with how much students felt they belonged. Based on her findings, Nichols (2008) suggested that students have different belonging needs and additional studies should be implemented in order to understand more comprehensively the variety of ways students define and experience belonging in additional contexts. Although Nichols (2008) also provided an important foundation that speaks to the multidimensional and complex concept of belonging that emerged from student's perspectives, she conducted her study in a small urban charter school during its first year of service, in which administrators defined 'community' as the central mission of the school. Therefore, while the charter school in her study may have provided an idealized setting to examine belonging, it would arguably be a very distinct context from the reality of many public urban schools that are often faced with a myriad of challenges including under-qualified teachers and inadequate funding (Lee, 2005). Additionally, since the charter school was in its first year of service, student transition was an important and emergent concept in the Nichols (2008) study that impacted students' perceptions since all students in the sample transitioned from other schools at the start of the year in which the study was conducted. Again, this may be different than students who have attended the same public school for a number of years.

In addition, while both Nichols (2008) and Nasir et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of examining dimensions and nuances of belonging for diverse student groups, they lacked additional ecological exploration that may be important when

considering students' perspectives. As demonstrated earlier, the complex challenges that urban students face both at home and at school are so entwined and interconnected with school related outcomes that they cannot be separated. Esposito (1999) stated that, "the broader issues of poverty in our urban communities negatively affect both students and schools; the direction of their influence (from community to school, school to student, student to school) is multidirectional" (p. 366). As such, previous explorations of belonging among urban students are lacking the inclusion of important contextual variables that may be critical factors related to student's subjective experience of belonging. For example, to the author's knowledge, the majority of studies have not included a thorough examination of belonging including parental involvement in the school, the school/home interactions, or cultural considerations such as students' perceived cultural fit in the school. Additionally, as previously noted, researchers have found differences in dimensional aspects of belonging among ethnic groups (e.g. Faircloth and Hamm, 2005). As a result, there is a need to more comprehensively examine sense of belonging, including cultural and familial considerations, in order to identify additional dimensions that may yet to be uncovered. As such, there is a need to broaden the ecological exploration of belonging in order to include not only students' behavioral and affective experiences, but also additional aspects of students' lives and contextual reality that are often ignored, such as a student's culture and home environment.

Given the need to more thoroughly examine belonging among urban middle school students, the current study will implement Q Methodology in order to obtain student's subjective perspectives of belonging. It is critical to broaden our understanding on how belonging may differ for diverse student groups. Gaining a better understanding of the perceptions of urban students regarding a combination of the affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging provides the opportunity to expand our knowledge of the importance of belonging for this population. This will not only deepen our understanding of the ways in which belonging may be particularly important for this group, but will fill an important gap in our understanding of sense of belonging in school among urban middle school students.

Summary

The centrality of belonging for urban middle school adolescents was discussed, including the relevance of examining belonging from a bioeocological perspective. Given discrepant terminologies and various conceptualizations of belonging, including both affective and behavioral components, the concept is difficult to understand let alone translate research findings into practice. What is unknown is how belonging relates to students in urban settings, especially considering the various contextual factors that impact students in these environments. In addition, the over-reliance on close-ended surveys leaves much to be known about the complexity and multidimensional nature of how belonging plays out for urban students. Gaining clarity regarding belonging is especially important to examine among urban middle school students given that young

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adolescence represents a period of particular vulnerability for youth in general, and more intensely for students situated in urban context. The current study aims to fill the gap in research through obtaining students' subjective perspectives of belonging, providing a deeper understanding of what belonging means to these students. Through utilizing a bioecological perspective, affective, behavioral, and familial aspects of belonging will be explored. This will not only provide clarity regarding the conceptualization of belonging for urban middle school students, but may make steps in reducing the research to practice gap.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter I, the researcher explored the lack of clarity in belonging as a concept, and outlined the need to provide a more comprehensive and contextual exploration of urban middle school student's subjective viewpoints of belonging, including affective, behavioral, and familial components. In Chapter II, the researcher explored the relevant literature and illustrated that sense of belonging is an essential concept that has been related to a number of positive educational outcomes, however, there is a need to add to the empirical research in order to better understand the nuances of this concept specifically for urban students. The purpose of the current chapter is to provide a detailed description of the research methods that will be implemented in this study including the research question, procedures, and data analysis.

Research Question

The following research question guides the current study:

Research Question 1: What are urban middle school students' perspectives of belonging in school?

Procedures

Q Methodology is a research technique focused on systematically exploring subjectivity, or personal viewpoints (Brown, 1993; McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts Stenner, 2012). Q methodology is based on abduction, which is a logic created for

discovery and new insight (Watts & Stenner, 2012). As such, researchers who implement

Q Methodology combine aspects of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order

to provide a structure for exploring various viewpoints regarding a particular topic

(Brown, 1996; Janson, Militello, & Kosine, 2008). The following section outlines the

steps of Q Methodology as implemented in the current research study including the

development of the Q set, the Q sort procedures, the post-sort interview, and data

analysis.

Q Set

The Q set, also known as the Q sample, is the research instrument, and includes a

sample set of items that are often statements, regarding the subject matter under

consideration (Janson et al., 2008; Mckeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The Q set includes a subset of items developed from the larger concourse, or common

shared knowledge regarding a specific content (Mckeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts &

Stenner, 2012). In other words, the concourse is the "the flow of communicability

surrounding any topic" (Brown, 1993, p. 94), and can be a potentially infinite body of

knowledge about the topic of interest (Mckeown & Thomas, 2013). A concourse is

considered the raw material for a Q set, and it can be obtained through a variety of ways

including academic or cultural texts, visual arts, commentaries, newspapers, magazines,

audio clips, or interviews (Brown, 1993; Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005; Watts & Stenner,

2012). In order to identify and access the concourse for the current study, the researcher

conducted an extensive review of the scholarly literature in the social sciences and

education fields. This included both empirical and conceptual writings related to belonging, education, urban schools, urban students, and poverty. The researcher also examined belonging and connectedness scales including the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM) (Goodenow, 1993) and The Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness (Karcher & Lee, 2002).

Once the concourse had been established, the researcher created the Q set, or a subset of statements that are representative of the broader concourse. The process of developing the Q set is also known as item-sampling. Although there are a number of approaches that can be used when item-sampling, for this study a structured deductive approach was used. This approach involved breaking down the subject matter into dimensions of belonging (discussed below). These dimensions were based on an a priori theory in order to ensure that the final Q set comprehensively covered the topic and included approximately equal number of statements related to the identified dimensions (Mckeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

After an extensive review of the literature, which is a common item-sampling process in many Q methodology studies (Watts & Stenner, 2012), the researcher identified two dimensions of student belonging that have been the basis of various conceptualizations. These two dimensions included affective and behavioral components. In addition, the researcher also was guided by the Bioecological Framework (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which provided another dimension of the family context that was an important aspect to consider. As a result, the researcher identified

statements from within the concourse that were representative of three dimensions of belonging including: Affective (A), Behavioral (B), and Familial (F) dimensions.

Through using a structured deductive approach, the researcher made every effort to ensure that the Q set provided adequate representation and coverage of the larger concourse by including statements that represented each dimension (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Through a comprehensive review of the literature, the researcher generated an initial list of 177 statements. This is consistent with previous researchers' suggestion that initial item sampling from the concourse will often generate a list of between 100-300 items (Webler, Danielson, & Tuler, 2009). Furthermore, the initial sampling of items or statements from the concourse will often be approximately 2 to 3 times as large as the final number of statements in the Q set (Cross, 2005); it will be reduced even further after preliminary examination by the researcher, as well as by expert reviewers in order to create a final Q sample that is clear, balanced, and appropriate.

Once the initial Q set was developed, the researcher began the process of preliminarily examining the statements in order to refine and reduce the initial Q set. First, the researcher imported the statements into an Excel sheet. In order to ensure the list was both balanced and unbiased toward any one viewpoint or opinion, which is an important consideration when developing the Q set (Watts & Stenner, 2012), the researcher cited the source(s) for each statement to help guide the refinement process and ensure a balanced set that was representative of a variety of research.

Next, the researcher began to reduce the list by removing any statements that were redundant. This included combining statements that conveyed similar meanings and removing any redundancies or statements that were unclear. This reduced the list from 177 statements to 145 statements. Next, the researcher carefully reviewed the operational definitions of each dimension, and removed statements that did not clearly fit into one of the three a priori dimensions (A, B, F). The statements removed were related to school organizational variables as whole (i.e. size of school) that did not overlap or fit into the A, B, or F dimensions. These statements included reference to additional school organizational or structural characteristics (i.e., size of school, school safety, block scheduling). While some of these statements overlapped onto the existing dimensions (i.e., feeling safe in school), other statements did not plainly fit into any of the dimensions and were eliminated (i.e., size of school). The researcher chose not to include school organizational or structural characteristics as a separate category because it represents a broader category that may impact the specific dimensions of A, B, and F (Osterman, 2000). As such, it embodies a category that is distinct from the focus of the other dimensions of belonging and is outside the scope of the current study. After removing these items, the list was reduced to approximately 137 statements.

Next, the researcher closely examined the list and combined statements through broadening phrasing or wording, as suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012), in order to reduce the list even further. Consistent with the structured deductive approach, the researcher then examined the number of statements within the three a priori categories

(A, B, F) and attempted to create a rough balance representative of each dimension. In order to do this, the researcher closely scrutinized statements in each dimension and further broadened, generalized, and combined statements within each section. This was accomplished with frequent reference to the concourse in order to ensure the statements and categories remained balanced, accurate, and comprehensive. This process reduced the Q set to 53 statements, including 17 statements in A, 17 statements in B, and 19 statements in F. Finally, the researcher closely examined the list of statements and re-worded items based on the following guidance by Watts and Stenner (2012): a) avoid technical terminology; b) avoid complex sentences that include multiple propositions; c) avoid negative expressions (e.g., I do not enjoy school).

The next step of the Q set development was accomplished by sending the 53 Q set statements to expert reviewers. In order to refine the initial Q set further, subject experts reviewed the reduced list of 53 statements and provided feedback regarding the accuracy, coverage, and wording of statements as suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012). The current study used a total of five expert reviewers. Three experts had education and subject matter expertise including the following: (a) a practicing professional school counselor who has primarily worked with urban middle and high school students; (b) a retired school principal who has approximately 33 years of experience in education and administration work with a diverse range of schools and students including inner-city and diverse populations; (c) an associate professor who has education and school counseling subject matter expertise. In addition, given the diversity of urban students, it was

important to validate the Q set culturally. In order to do this, the researcher accessed a wide range of diverse literature to obtain the initial statements (e.g., literature on diverse schools, diverse students, poverty), and also asked cultural experts to examine the list. The researcher solicited two cultural experts to ensure the statements in the Q set were culturally responsive and appropriate including the following: (a) a Latina bilingual scholar and doctoral candidate in Cultural Studies, who previously worked as an educator and parent liaison with Latino families; (b) a Latina bilingual school counselor who has primarily worked in urban settings with Latino students and families. These two expert reviewers were specifically asked to review the Q set through a cultural responsive and diverse lens. In order to obtain feedback, the researcher sent all five of the reviewers an electronic Qualtrics survey containing the 53 statements in the refined Q set (Appendix A) along with instructions (Appendix B). The researcher asked the experts to scrutinize the sample in order to refine the list and examine the accuracy, coverage, appropriateness, and wording of statements. The researcher also solicited feedback regarding redundancies and any additional items that should be removed or added.

After subject matter experts reviewed the initial Q sample, and provided feedback via the online survey, the final Q set was reduced to a list of 37 items. The statements on the Q set were then randomly numbered using a random number table (1 through 37; Appendix C), and placed on cards for use in the pilot study. Details regarding the pilot study procedures and results can be found in Appendix D. Following the initial Q set refinement by expert reviewers, the researcher engaged in the pilot study with three

middle school students to further refine and clarify the Q set, resulting in minor wording

adjustments and the addition of two statements, resulting in a final Q set of 39 items. The

researcher used the Flesch Kincaid reading test to assess the reading level of each

statement. Minor adjustments were made to vocabulary words or sentence structure so

that each statement fell within a 4th grade reading level, in order to make every effort to

ensure that statements were approachable for middle school students at various reading

levels. Once the 39 statements were finalized, they were randomly numbered using a

random number table (1 through 39; Table 1). This set is consistent with the

recommendations made by Cross (2005) that final Q sets can be between 10-100 items.

In addition, Watts and Stenner (2012) stated that it is sensible to include a number of

statements towards the smaller range when working with children in order to make the

sorting process less challenging, making the list of 39 items an appropriate amount. The

randomly numbered statements on the Q set were then transferred onto 39 individual

cards approximately 6 cm long by 3 cm wide (Appendix E), as recommended by Watts

and Stenner (2012). These cards became the material that participants were required to

physically sort during the Q sorting process, described below.

Table 1

Final Q Set by Number

No.	Statement	Dimension
1	Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home is like	F
2	Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school	A
3	My family being a part of my schooling. For example: ask me about school, make sure I do my homework, go to school events	F
4	Adults at school care about what is going on with me	A

Table 1 Continued

No.	Statement	Dimension
5	My family is able to connect with the school when they need or want to. For example: get into the school building, talk with a teacher	F
6	Having others in school who know my first language	F
7	Feeling like my race is respected at my school	F
8	Being treated with respect for who I am. For example: my race, how much money my family makes, things I like	A
9	Working hard in school	B
10	People at my school being nice to me	A
11	Getting good grades in school	B
12	Making my family proud by what I do in school	B
13	My parents having good contacts with adults in my school. For example: good meetings, good talks, good phone calls	F
14	Coming to class with what I need. For example: my pens, pencils, books, homework	B
15	People at my school respecting my beliefs	F
16	My family and adults in my school help each other	F
17	Being a part of the school's decisions that affect me as a student	B
18	Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have a problem	A
19	Being able to connect with other students who have the same culture as me. For example: the same background, home life, race	F
20	Having people at my school that really know me	A
21	Talking with my parents about things that are going on in school	F
22	Being involved in my classes. For example: raise my hand, answer questions	B
23	Adults at school believing in me	A
24	Feeling safe in school. For example: safe from fights, bullies, name calling, violence	A
25	Enjoying being at school	A
26	Feeling like I can bring my culture into school. For example: my beliefs, my background, my first language	F
27	Feeling good about myself when I'm in school	A
28	Following the rules in my school	B
29	Having friends at my school	A
30	Feeling like I 'fit in' at my school	A

Table 1 Continued

No.	Statement	Dimension
31	Being a part of school activities. For example: sports teams, clubs, school parties, dances, school plays	B
32	Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I have a problem	A
33	Working with a good attitude in school	B
34	People at my school and people from my family talking often. For example: emails, phone calls	F
35	Feeling like I can be myself in school	A
36	Doing the homework that teachers give me	B
37	Teachers knowing what my culture is like. For example: my beliefs, my background, my first language	F
38	Coming to school	B
39	Others at school praising me when I'm good at something	A

Note. A: Affective; B: Behavioral; F: Familial

Participants

The participant group in Q methodology is known as the P Set. The P Set is often

chosen using a strategic sampling approach, which includes a careful consideration of

finding participants who have an important viewpoint in relation to the subject of

consideration (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Given that the purpose of Q Methodology is to

explore subjective attitudes of specific individuals in a population, it is not necessary to

ensure participants are completely representative across population characteristics (e.g.,

gender, race/ethnicity, grade level), although researchers emphasize the importance of

making a concerted effort to ensure sufficient variability among participants in order to

capture relevant viewpoints (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Overall, it is important that the P-set is strategically chosen based on the pertinent

viewpoints that are appropriate for the specific research question (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The criteria for participant inclusion in the current study included: (a) urban middle school student (enrolled in grade 6-8), (b) student is minimally at an English Language Learner (ELL) Proficiency Level 3 as determined by testing data obtained from the school district. Students who are at level three English language proficiency can understand general and some specific language, and use expanded sentences with some errors but retain most of the meaning when presented with support and descriptions (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, 2007).

The number of participants that comprise the P-set in Q Methodology can vary, and smaller numbers often are emphasized (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Given the unique aim of Q methodology, to obtain the subjective viewpoints of participants, generalization to the larger population is not the goal, and thus large sample sizes are unnecessary and relatively unimportant (Brown, 1993; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Given the importance of establishing participant viewpoints, "the focus is on quality rather than quantity" (Brown, 1993, p. 94). As a result, there is no minimum number of participants required, and numbers can vary from a single case of one participant to extensive analysis of 50 participants, often determined by the purpose of the study at hand (McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

The current study had a final sample of 43 participants. Demographic information of participants can be found in Table 2. Although obtaining a representative sample is not a goal of Q Methodology, it is worth noting that the sample is mostly representative of

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the school as a whole and included participants from each ethnicity that comprised the school's student body. One exception is Black/African American students who are not represented in the current sample, but were .4% of the school's population as a whole. In addition, students who identified as multiracial were overrepresented in the current sample compared to the demographic information of the school as a whole. This may be due to the discrepancy between student's self-identification as multiracial, which may differ than their official designation by the school district.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants

	n	Percentage
Gender		
Male	23	54%
Female	20	47%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Mexican American	22	51%
White	12	28%
Multiracial	6	14%
Asian	2	5%
Native American	1	2%
Grade Level		
6th	14	33%
7th	13	30%
8th	16	37%
English Language Learner (ELL) status		
ELL proficiency level 3 or above	13	30%
Previous ELL (exited ELL services)	6	14%
Not ELL	24	55.8%

Table 2 Continued

	n	Percentage
Academics/Grades		
Exceeding standards (4)	5	12%
Meeting standards (3)	20	47%
Approaching standards (2)	9	21%
Below standards (1)	0	0%
Both 1's & 2's	3	7%
Both 3's & 4's	3	7%
Both 2's & 3's	2	5%
No Response	1	2%
Required to see a staff member for discipline reasons		
0 times	21	49%
1-2 times	15	35%
3-4 times	5	12%
5 or more times	2	5%
Met with a staff member to help resolve conflict with friends or peers		
0 times	19	44%
1-2 times	18	42%
3-4 times	2	5%
5 or more	4	9%
Met with a counselor during the current school year		
0 times	19	44%
1-2 times	15	35%
3-4 times	5	12%
5 or more times	2	5%
Involved in extracurricular activities		
yes	24	56%
no	29	44%
Frequency of communication between parents/guardians and adults in school		
A lot	8	19%
Sometimes but not a lot	31	72%
Never	2	5%
Do not know	2	5%

Table 2 Continued

	n	Percentage
Frequency of family member attending school for an event or another reasons		
0 time per year	6	14%
1-2 times per year	14	33%
3-4 times per year	11	26%
5 or more time per year	11	26%
No Response	1	2%

Recruitment Strategy

The P set was recruited from a public middle school located in a metro area in the Western United States. Convenience sampling was used to choose the middle school based on the researcher's ability to gain access to the school. The school site was a K-8 public magnet school with programming focused on science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and problem-based learning. However, there was no minimum achievement scores or academic requirements in order for students to attend the school. The school was in the 5th year of existence at the time of the study; it was designed to replace the previous middle school in that location which closed in 2011 due to low enrollment and chronic low academic performance. In addition, the school was located in a high poverty metro area and was categorized as Title I with 74.5% of students who receive free or reduced price lunches. Furthermore, many students walk to school from the mobile home park located across the street. Since the conception of the school five years prior, there have been a number of different administrators and a very high staff turnover rate, with only four staff members remaining since the first year of the school in 2012.

The demographics information of all students in the middle school for the 2016-2017 school year is as follows according to the state department of education: 500 students are enrolled in grades 6, 7, and 8; with 75% of students ($n=371$) identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 20% of students ($n=101$) are white, 3.6% of students ($n=18$) are Asian, 1% of students ($n=5$) are Black or African American, 0.4% of students ($n=2$) are American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1% of students ($n=3$) are multiracial.

Upon obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, along with the school district Research Review approval, the researcher engaged in a strategic sampling approach for recruitment of participants. In theory, every middle school student who met the inclusion criteria was eligible and would contribute a relevant and important viewpoint to the study. However, in order to make a concerted effort to ensure sufficient variability among participants, as suggested by McKeown and Thomas (2013) and Watts and Stenner (2012), the researcher attempted to include a mix of participants across grade level, gender, and ethnicity. In addition, the researcher attempted to gain variability across levels of belonging including students who felt like they belonged and those who had lower levels of belonging. In order to do this, the researcher engaged in a number of recruitment strategies including the following: 1) The researcher coordinated with school staff to attend classes at each grade level in an effort to invite every student to participate by giving a brief 3-5 minute overview of the study to students as a class (Appendix F). After the informational overview, the researcher explained that a parental consent form needed to be signed by a

parent/guardian and returned to the researcher should the student be interested in participating. The researcher asked any student who was interested in participating to take an envelope that included a copy of the parental consent form and an informational letter to parents available in both English and Spanish (Appendix G; Appendix H), and return to his/her teacher or school counselor by a specified date. The researcher left the room and allowed the teacher to pass around the envelopes in the manner they chose to minimize any possibility for coercion; 2) the researcher set up a table at parent teacher conferences in order to talk with parents/students, explain the study to any parent/student who was interested in participating, and answer any questions parents may have had (see Appendix I for parent recruitment oral script). The researcher provided consent forms for parents to sign if they chose to allow their child to participate; parents also had the option to take the form home and return to school at a later date should they choose to do so. This strategy allowed the researcher to come in contact with a variety of students, including those who may have had teacher-scheduled conference meetings to discuss issues the student was having in school (e.g. misbehavior, low grades); 3) the researcher utilized snowball sampling within the school through providing research information and consent forms to the staff (e.g. school counselors, teachers) and asked them to aid in recruiting students who they worked with who they thought may be interested in participating in the study and who may provide a unique viewpoint. The staff was asked to share information about the study to students and provide students with parental consent forms to return to school if they were interested in participating. Since belonging

enhances students' academic motivation and decreases behavioral problems, as outlined in chapter two, students who have behavioral problems or need individual support from teachers or the support staff may have a lower sense of belonging to school. Therefore, asking staff to pass along study information to students with whom they work may increase the range of participants to include those who have lower levels of belonging.

For each recruitment strategy, the researcher provided written consent forms that were available in both English and Spanish (Appendix J; Appendix K respectively), given the large Latino population of the student body. The students whose parents signed the consent form in person, or returned the consent form to the school, were eligible to participate in the study and they were given an assent form prior to data collection, available in both English and Spanish (Appendix L; Appendix M respectively). In addition, each recruitment strategy included offering an incentive of a free ice cream coupon for student participation. This incentive was given to the student upon completion of his/her participation in the study.

Q Sort Procedures

The Q sort procedures are outlined below including details regarding the following: the Q sort process and post-sort interview. In addition, an overview of the procedures that were used as a reference point for the researcher is provided in Appendix N.

Q Sort Process

The Q sort process is a data gathering technique that involves participants to physically rank order the Q set about the topic under consideration according to a continuum also known as the condition of instruction (e.g. most agree to most disagree) within a distribution (Brown, 1993; Mckeown & Thomas, 2013). A rating scale (e.g. -6 to +6, -3 to +3) is printed across the top of a distribution (akin to an upside down bell curve) (Appendix O), with the range of the scale depending on the number of statements in the Q set (Brown, 1993). Thus, Q sorting consists of participants rank ordering the Q set in order to create the Q sort, which is the final array of the Q set statements. The Q sort allows the researcher to obtain the subjective viewpoints of participants (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

In the current study, the researcher individually pulled participants, whose parents consented, during the school day into a separate and private location within the school. The students were verbally informed of the purpose of the study by the researcher, and asked to sign an assent form available in both English (Appendix L) and Spanish (Appendix M) if they chose to participate in the study. Students were also informed that they could leave the study at any point should they choose to without penalty.

Next, the researcher had the Q sorting materials available for the student including the following: a written copy of the condition of instruction (Appendix P), the Q sample with statements printed onto individual cards and randomly numbered, a cultural graphic for students to use as a reference if they needed a visual representation of

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what the word 'culture' meant (Appendix Q), a printed copy of the forced choice (or fixed) symmetrical distribution response grid, and an enlarged copy of the fixed distribution for the Q sorting process. A fixed symmetrical distribution was chosen because it is the standard choice for Q Methodology studies and is the most convenient and practical way of facilitating the sorting process (Cross, 2005; Watts and Stenner, 2012). Additionally, a rating scale of -4 to +4 was used as the ranking scale across the top of the distribution. This is consistent with the general rule that a nine-point rank order is appropriate for Q sets with 40 statements or less (Brown, 1980). The two poles of the distribution in which the participants were asked to rank order statements were (+4) *Most Important to what belonging in school means to me* to (-4) *Most unimportant to what belonging in school means to me.* Given that both poles represent strong feelings, the researcher qualified both ends with the word *Most* in order to capture the strength of participant's feelings, whether they were positive or negative (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Additionally, the researcher chose a platykurtic distribution allowing for more responses to be placed at the extreme ends of the distribution, since students were expected to be particularly knowledgeable about the topic of belonging as opposed to uninformed or unfamiliar (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Once the materials were distributed, the researcher verbally walked the participant through the Q sorting process in a number of steps, as suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012). It is important to note, however, researchers have found that some participants prefer to complete the Q sort with their own procedure or organizational style (Watts &

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Stenner, 2012). Therefore, the researcher continuously assessed for the participants'

comfort and ease during the process, and allowed participants to engage in the sort in an

alternative manner if they chose to do so.

First, the researcher asked the participant to read the written instructions, followed

by a verbal explanation by the researcher. The condition of instruction was:

> In this study I am interested in what you think it means to belong or feel
> connected to your school. So, think about your personal experiences in this
> school. Is your school a place where you feel like you belong? Sort the following
> cards in order to best describe what belonging to your school means to you. Every
> student will have different ideas and experiences and everybody will have a
> different response, so there are no right or wrong answers. I am simply interested
> in your personal view.

Then, the researcher presented the Q set cards to the participant, explaining that each card

represented a different response. The researcher verbally read through each card, one by

one, with the participant placing the cards in a single pile in front of the participant after

reading each statement out loud. During this process, when the researcher read a

statement that included the word 'culture', she identified the culture graphic. The

researcher explained to the student that if they are unsure about what 'culture' meant,

they could refer to the picture, which represented some of the aspects of the word in order

to help clarify the meaning.

Participants were asked to go through the cards a number of times. The first time,

as the researcher read each individual card out loud, participants were asked to divide and

place the cards into three categorical piles including: a) statements which they definitely

agreed with and felt were important into a single pile to the right, b) statements that participants definitely disagreed with and felt were unimportant into a single pile to the left, c) statements that participants are unsure about or felt indifferent about into a single pile in the middle. Then, the researcher asked participants to focus on the first pile of cards (statements they definitely agreed with) and spread them out so they could see all of the statements in that category. The researcher then pointed out the enlarged distribution and verbally explained a few key points to participants regarding the distribution and sorting process including: a) a negative ranking did not necessarily indicate disagreement, simply that they agreed with the statements slightly less than those with a higher ranking, b) the order within the columns of the distribution was not important (i.e. two statements placed in the +4 would be equal in ranking). Participants were then asked to begin rank ordering the first pile of cards onto the enlarged distribution.

Once participants filled in the sort with the first category, the researcher took note of where the first pile of cards was distributed for use in later analysis and factor interpretation. Participants were then asked to repeat the process with the last two piles of cards, starting with the pile of statements they definitely disagreed with and finally filled in the distribution with the neutral pile. The researcher took note of where each categorical pile initially fell on the distribution for use in later data analysis.

Once participants completed the distribution, the researcher encouraged them to look over the entire configuration and move statements around until they felt completely

satisfied with their final sort. Once participants felt satisfied with their completed sort, the researcher recorded the final configuration by writing down the numbers of each statement card onto the printed distribution response sheet for later data entry and analysis.

Post-Sort Interview

A post-sort interview is an important step in Q methodology, as it allows the researcher to obtain relevant information regarding the participant's broader understanding. This includes reasons for ranking and sorting the statements the way that they did, clarification regarding aspects of the sort that may confound the researcher, and elaboration on particularly salient statements in order to help researchers better understand the meaning or significance to participants (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012). The overall purpose of the post-sort interview is to obtain additional details and richer information that can contribute to factor interpretation as it may lead to a better understanding of the participant's Q sort; this increases the quality and rigor of the study (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Therefore, the researcher conducted a follow up semi-structured interview immediately after the Q sort process (Appendix R) to obtain additional details regarding the participants Q sort process and perspective. The interview included 15 questions asking the participant to reflect on his/her card sorting process and experiences in school related to belonging, and took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed for later data analysis. Unlike qualitative studies, the post-sort transcribed interview data was not coded or themed, but instead was

used holistically in order to contextualize, enrich, and improve understanding for interpretation of the final Q sorts. This enhances the accuracy of final factor interpretation through allowing the researcher to gain a better understanding of the final Q sorts as a whole.

<p align="center">**Collection of Additional Data**</p>

Demographic Questionnaire

Lastly, the researcher collected demographic information in the form of a paper and pencil demographic questionnaire (Appendix S), which took approximately 3-5 minutes to complete. The researcher developed the demographic questionnaire based on consideration of the personal characteristics or information that might influence the viewpoints of participants, as suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012). Demographic information can enrich the data and be important information to consider during the data analysis process. The following demographic data that was collected in the demographic questionnaire included: student's age, current grade level, student's race, student's gender, number of people living in the student's household, length of time the student has attended the current school, student's self reported average grade on last academic report card, how often the student was required to see a staff member for discipline reasons (approximate number of times since the beginning of the year), how often the student worked with a school staff member for conflict resolution (approximate number of times since the beginning of the year), how often the student saw a school mental health support staff on a one on one basis (approximate number of times since the beginning of

the year), student's involvement in the school's after school activities (number of activities and which ones), how often a family member comes to the school, and how often communication occurs between parents/guardians and adults at school. An additional two questions were asked specifically in regards to student's self-reported enjoyment of school and their overall sense of belonging or connection to school, where students responded on a 10 point likert-type scale.

Collection of English Language Learner Information

The researcher also requested participant's ACCESS testing data for participants who were designated as English Language Learner's in order to determine the student's English language proficiency level. As previously stated, the researcher used this data to ensure participants were able to understand English at a minimum of English Language Proficiency Level 3 and they were able to understand instructions and communicate accurate information. Due to timing of when the researcher was able to gain access to this data, ELL information was obtained following the completion of the initial Q sorts, and as a result, the researcher cross-checked participants' who completed the Q sort with their ACCESS testing data. This was used as a criterion for final sample selection and the data that was used in analysis. One student who initially completed the Q sort did not meet the minimum ELL proficiency level of a 3, and so his data was not included in the final sample of 43 participants.

Data Analysis

The overall data analysis and interpretation in Q Methodology includes initial

statistical procedures as well as the researcher's own exploration, impressions,

experience, theory, or cultural knowledge (Cross, 2005; Brown, 1993). Thus, in the

current study, the researcher utilized simultaneous statistical and theoretical approaches

throughout the data analysis process. Mckeown and Thomas (2013) caution researchers

from solely utilizing a statistical approach and urge Q methodologists to take into

consideration previous research, knowledge, and contextual information that may be

relevant during data analysis. Thus, while a number of statistical procedures are outlined

below, it is important to note that the researcher continuously compared statistical criteria

with contextual knowledge, theory obtained from the concourse and literature review,

and the demographic and interview data. This proved to be especially important when

determining the significance of factors and factor interpretation, described below.

A discussion of the initial statistical procedures is outlined below in order to

thoroughly describe the initial data analysis process for the current study. A description

of the successive statistical procedures includes: a) correlation, b) initial factor analysis,

c) factor rotation, and d) development of factor scores and factor arrays. This section

concludes with a discussion of the factor interpretation process.

Correlation

Using the PQMethod (Schmolck, 2014) software created specifically for Q

analysis, an initial correlation matrix was created with the computation of Pearson

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product-moment correlations, for each pair of Q sorts. This correlation matrix provided

an initial view of patterns from which factors were drawn and was "a measure of the

nature and extent of the relationship between any two Q sorts and hence a measure of

their similarity or otherwise" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 97).

Initial Factor Analysis

After the correlation matrix was created, the researcher began initial factor

analysis. Although different statistical methods can be employed for factor extraction, the

researcher performed a centroid factor analysis in the PQMethod software because it

allows for data exploration consistent with the abductive nature of Q Methodology (Watts

& Stenner, 2012). The centroid factor analysis created the un-rotated factor matrix that

included factor loadings for each Q sort. Next, in order to determine the number of

appropriate factors to extract, the researcher retained factors in the un-rotated factor

matrix that had two or more significant factor loadings (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner,

2012). In order to evaluate the level of significance for factor loading at the .01 level, the

researcher used the following equation as outlined by Brown (1980):

$2.58 \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{\text{\# of items in Q Set}}} \right)$. For the current study, factor loadings of .41 and above were

considered to be significant at the .01 level.

It is worthwhile to state that the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, which utilizes

Eigenvalues or factor extraction, is typically the most widely used and accepted method

of factor extraction when employing factor analysis procedures. However, researchers

argue that this method, when used in Q Methdology, can result in meaningless factor

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extractions as well as significant factors that may be discarded (Brown, 1980; McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Thus, the researcher deviated from this approach and determined the appropriate number of factors by retaining those that had two or more significant loadings at the .01 level (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q sorts that significantly loaded onto more than one factor were discarded, and not used in the development of factor estimates.

Factor Rotation

Next, the researcher employed the varimax method of orthogonal factor rotation, which is the most typical method of factor rotation utilized in Q studies (Mckeown & Thomas, 2013). Through the use of PQMethod software, varimax rotation was employed in order to ensure each extracted factor offered the most appropriate and informative perspective or viewpoint (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The subsequent rotated factor loadings allowed the researcher to identify how close an individual Q sort approximated into a particular factor, which aided in the decision for final factor extraction.

Factor Scores and Factor Arrays

Once the final factors were extracted, the researcher created factor estimates through *flagging factors* in PQ Method. This process entailed the calculation of factor weights for each Q sort that significantly loaded onto each factor. The resultant factor estimates (total weighted scores) for each statement were then converted into z scores, or normalized factor scores in the PQMethod software. Each individual factor score was then converted into a factor array, which is a composite Q sort or a "single Q sort

configured to represent a viewpoint of a particular factor" and represents the most

approximate estimate of the particular factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 140). The

researcher then examined the correlations between factor scores in order to identify the

relationships between factor arrays, and any particularly high or significant correlations,

which aided in the factor interpretation process. Factor scores, as opposed to factor

loadings, are the primary sources of data that the researcher uses during data

interpretation (Brown, 1993).

Factor Interpretation

Q Methodology is concerned with holism and as such, factor interpretation must

take into account the entire item configuration that is encapsulated in a particular factor

array (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Therefore, the researcher utilized the crib sheet system,

which provided a holistic, systemic, and rigorous approach to factor interpretation (Watts

& Stenner, 2012). In following the strategy suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012), the

researcher created a crib sheet (Appendix T) for each factor array that included four

categories: a) items ranked at +4, b) items ranked higher in factor *n* array than in other

factor arrays, c) items ranked lower in factor *n* array than in other factor arrays, d) items

ranked at -4. The crib sheet also included room to add additional items that may be

relevant in factor interpretation. The researcher then filled out a crib sheet for each factor

array and organized the relevant statements and rankings, according to the categories

listed above. This allowed the researcher to identify the important statements and issues

(specifically at the polarized ends) for each particular factor, how each array or viewpoint

was relative to other factors, and any potentially important statements that were ranked in the middle of a distribution, but may be relatively higher or lower than other factor arrays (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The researcher then systemically examined and interpreted each crib sheet (representing a factor array) a number of times. First, the researcher used the logic of abduction in order to initially examine the completed crib sheet and created a preliminary hypothesis related to how the individual ranking of statements related to the perspective of the factor as a whole. This method allowed the researcher to analyze individual statements, with an important emphasis on how they contributed to the entire factor array in order to interpret the holistic perspective or viewpoint of each individual factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Next, the researcher examined and integrated the specific demographic information and transcribed interview data relevant to each factor, and took notes on the crib sheet in order to aid in interpretation. Each participant's post-sort interview data was considered only in relation to the particular factor they loaded on and in relation to other participants who loaded onto that factor as well. This added to the holistic picture of each factor array and provided important additional information that enriched the initial interpretation. Then, each factor array was re-examined based on the established context of the viewpoint (factor) as a whole and added to the crib sheet any additional statements or items that had not originally been included. Finally, the researcher examined the completed crib sheet that included all of relevant data and information and developed a factor name that captured the holistic viewpoint of each factor. Once the factor name had

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been created, a narrative was constructed for each factor, using the relevant statements

and data obtained during the multiple examinations of the crib sheets, in order to

encapsulate the subjective viewpoint that each factor represented. The following chapter

outlines the findings from the current study, including data analysis and factor

interpretation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand urban middle school students'

perspectives of belonging in school. In Chapter I, the researcher introduced the study by

discussing the purpose, need, and significance of the research. In Chapter II, the

researcher provided an in depth review of the literature to describe the existing research

and outline the need for the current study. In Chapter III, the researcher described the

research design that was used to answer the research question: What are urban middle

school students' perspectives of belonging in school? The purpose of the current chapter

is to present the results of the data analysis from this Q Methodology study. A description

of each step of data analysis will be presented. The chapter concludes with a description

of factor characteristics and interpretations for each factor that emerged.

Participants' Self-Reported School Experiences

Participants ranged in their self-reported enjoyment and experiences of belonging

in school. On the likert-type scale, participants reported an average of 7.77 (SD = 2.3)

regarding how much they enjoyed going to school (range 0 to 10), with the majority of

students indicating they "really enjoy going to school" ((10); n = 9, 21%). Likewise,

students were asked to self-report how much they felt like they belonged, fit in, or were

connected to their school. Students reported an average of 7.72 (SD = 1.8), with a range

from 0 to 10, with the majority of students indicating they felt like they belonged in

school. Thus, viewpoints in the current study included students who enjoyed school and felt like they belonged, and those who did not, representing a wide range of perspectives and student experiences in school.

Factor Analysis

Inspection of the correlation matrix (Appendix U) revealed that Q sorts ranged to include positive, negative, and zero correlation among them, with the strongest positive correlation at .62. Seven factors were initially extracted for exploration based on the recommendations that one factor could be extracted for every six sorts (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Significant factor loadings of .41 were flagged within the seven factor un-rotated factor matrix (Table 3), resulting in the retention of three factors which contained two or more significant loadings of .41 or above.

Table 3

7 Factor Un-rotated Matrix

	1	**2**	**3**	4	5	6	7
1[a]	0.24	-0.20	0.09	0.16	-0.05	0.22	0.16
2	*0.74	0.07	-0.20	-0.15	0.16	0.14	0.07
3[a]	*0.73	-0.41	0.13	0.07	0.11	0.12	-0.14
4	0.31	0.18	*0.47	0.10	-0.14	0.19	-0.14
5	*0.44	0.22	-0.06	-0.12	*-0.43	0.04	0.18
6[a]	0.05	0.19	0.16	-0.26	-0.17	0.04	-0.08
7	*0.63	0.24	-0.20	0.20	0.08	0.00	-0.10
8	*0.75	0.03	-0.07	0.13	0.07	-0.04	-0.21
9	*0.52	-0.08	0.13	0.28	0.27	-0.25	0.39
10	*0.59	-0.21	-0.17	-0.30	0.27	-0.17	0.20
11	0.34	0.38	*-0.43	0.04	0.11	0.12	0.18
12	*0.62	0.06	-0.35	0.11	-0.14	0.37	0.22
13	*0.50	-0.17	0.24	0.32	0.18	0.11	-0.33

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Table 3 Continued

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14	-0.14	0.36	*0.55	0.04	0.23	0.08	0.26
15[a]	0.24	0.36	0.38	-0.33	0.08	0.02	0.16
16[a]	0.24	0.09	0.22	0.36	-0.27	0.09	0.03
17	*0.59	0.21	-0.04	0.22	-0.10	-0.22	0.11
18[a]	0.09	0.21	-0.22	0.08	0.26	0.15	0.19
19	-0.17	*0.73	0.33	0.04	-0.04	-0.10	-0.01
20[a]	0.38	0.39	0.18	0.20	0.16	-0.19	-0.17
21	*0.56	0.11	0.25	0.04	0.13	-0.30	-0.19
22[a]	*0.45	*-0.67	-0.09	-0.02	0.02	0.14	0.07
23	0.29	0.05	*0.41	*0.41	0.20	-0.14	0.24
24	*0.45	-0.26	0.32	-0.24	0.04	0.15	-0.08
25	*0.68	-0.26	0.06	0.21	-0.07	-0.02	0.25
26	*0.47	-0.17	-0.19	0.35	-0.05	0.11	-0.05
27	0.25	*0.48	0.13	-0.26	-0.10	0.37	0.09
28	*0.66	0.06	-0.17	0.09	-0.25	0.18	-0.34
29[a]	0.20	0.34	-0.04	0.05	0.08	0.12	-0.22
30	*0.60	0.00	-0.02	0.12	-0.24	-0.12	-0.04
31	*0.59	-0.39	0.02	0.02	-0.39	0.02	0.07
32	*0.62	0.20	-0.13	-0.10	-0.12	-0.31	0.20
33[a]	0.39	-0.24	-0.20	-0.37	0.01	*0.44	-0.16
34	*0.52	-0.18	-0.05	0.03	0.16	-0.18	0.07
35	*0.49	0.02	0.22	-0.22	0.08	0.24	-0.22
36	0.29	*0.44	-0.07	0.21	0.04	-0.15	0.12
37	*0.74	-0.05	0.03	-0.12	0.15	0.16	0.20
38[a]	0.30	-0.08	0.27	-0.28	0.12	0.06	-0.09
39	*0.41	0.37	0.05	-0.22	0.06	0.02	0.25
40[a]	-0.06	0.13	-0.12	0.23	0.21	0.37	0.20
41[a]	0.21	0.26	-0.24	-0.29	0.33	-0.28	-0.11
42	*0.49	0.23	-0.24	-0.30	0.09	-0.22	-0.09
43	-0.08	*0.67	-0.13	0.05	0.02	0.32	0.14
Eigenvalues	9.39	3.84	2.23	1.92	1.34	1.68	1.39
% expl. Var.	22	9	5	4	3	4	3

Note. (*) Indicates significantly loading sorts (p < .01). (**) Indicates sorts that were confounded in the final 3 factor solution. [a] These sorts were removed from further analysis.

Factor Rotation and Extraction

To ensure that each extracted factor offered the most appropriate and formative

perspective, the researcher employed a Varimax rotation within PQMethod (Schmolck,

2014) with the three extracted factors. However, upon inspection of both the un-rotated

and rotated solutions, along with Q sort and interview data, leaving the factors un-rotated

most accurately represented participants' viewpoints. In addition, when left un-rotated,

none of the factor scores were significantly correlated, suggesting they represented

distinct viewpoints (Table 4). The resulting three factor un-rotated solution accounted for

36% of the total explained variance, which falls within the recommended range of 35-

40% (Kline, 1994, as cited in Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Table 4

Correlation Between Un-rotated Factor Scores

Factor	1	2	3
1	1.000	-0.063	-0.027
2	-0.063	1.000	0.349
3	-0.027	0.349	1.000

Factor Scores and Factor Arrays

Next, the researcher removed any sorts that did not load onto a factor or were

confounded, meaning they significantly loaded onto more than one extracted factor

(Table 3). These sorts were excluded from final analysis because statistically they

represented individual viewpoints of participants that did not closely approximate others,

which included 13 participants (see Table 3). The 13 participants whose Q sorts were

excluded did not significantly differ on demographic characteristics or experiences of school from participants that were included in the remainder of the analysis (i.e., age: t (23)=.75, p=2.07, $p > .05$; self-reported levels of belonging: t (15) = -1.09, p = 2.13, $p > .05$).

This process created factor estimates (total weighted scores) for each statement, which were then converted into normalized factor scores (z scores) in the PQMethod software. Each individual factor score was then converted into a factor array. The factor scores are represented by the Q sort value (-4 to +4) in the factor array to exemplify an estimate of the particular factor. Factor arrays for each factor can be found in Table 5.

<div align="center">

Factor Interpretation

</div>

After thoroughly examining the factor arrays and participant interviews, the factors were titled: "Belonging is Finding My Place in Academics " (Factor One), "Belonging is Being Myself and Connecting with Others" (Factor Two), and "Belonging is Cultural Respect and Adult Support" (Factor Three). Factor characteristics and interpretations are described in further detail below.

Factor One: Belonging is Finding My Place in Academics

Factor characteristics. Factor One was labeled "Belonging is Finding My Place in Academics" and accounted for 22% of the explained variance of what contributed to students' perspectives of belonging in school. Factor One included 22 of the 30 participants included in the final factor solution, representing the most common perspective across the sample.

Table 5

Abbreviated Statements and Factor Arrays

No.		Factor Arrays		
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1	Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home is	-3	0	3
2	Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school	2	-1	2
3	My family being a part of my schooling	0	-4	0
4	Adults at school care about what is going on with me	0	2	1
5	My family is able to connect with the school when they need	-1	-2	1
6	Having others in school who know my first language	-4	-3	1
7	Feeling like my race is respected at my school	-1	3	4
8	Being treated with respect for who I am	0	1	2
9	Working hard in school	4	-2	-1
10	People at my school being nice to me	0	1	-4
11	Getting good grades in school	4	0	0
12	Making my family proud by what I do in school	3	-2	-2
13	My parents having good contacts with adults in my school.	-1	-4	-1
14	Coming to class with what I need	0	-2	-4
15	People at my school respecting my beliefs	-2	0	1
16	My family and adults in my school help each other	-1	-2	-2
17	Being a part of the school's decisions that affect me as a student	-1	-1	-3
18	Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have	-1	2	0
19	Being able to connect with other students who have the same	-3	2	1
20	Having people at my school that really know me	-2	0	-3
21	Talking with my parents about things that are going on in school	1	-1	-1
22	Being involved in my classes.	1	1	0
23	Adults at school believing in me	1	1	3

Table 5 Continued

No.		Factor Arrays		
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
24	Feeling safe in school	2	1	2
25	Enjoying being at school	2	-1	0
26	Feeling like I can bring my culture into school	-2	-1	2
27	Feeling good about myself when I'm in school	0	4	2
28	Following the rules in my school	2	0	0
29	Having friends at my school	1	2	-2
30	Feeling like I fit in at my school	0	3	-3
31	Being a part of school activities	-2	0	-1
32	Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I	1	2	4
33	Working with a good attitude in school	1	0	-2
34	People at my school and people from my family talking often	-3	-3	-2
35	Feeling like I can be myself in school	2	4	3
36	Doing the homework that teachers give me	3	-3	-1
37	Teachers knowing what my culture is like	-4	1	0
38	Coming to school	3	-1	1
39	Others at school praising me when I'm good at something	-2	3	-1

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The demographics information for participants who loaded onto this factor are included

in Table 6.

Table 6

Demographic Information for Participants in Factor One

	n	Percentage
Grade		
6th	8	36.3%
7th	9	40.9%
8th	5	22.7%
Ethnicity		
White	6	27.2%
Hispanic/Mexican American	8	36.3%
Native American	1	4.5%
Multiracial	5	22.7%
Asian	2	9.0%
Gender		
Male	13	59%
Female	9	41%
Total *N*	22	
Mean Age	12.23	
(SD)	(1.09)	

The normalized factor scores (*z* scores) for each statement in Factor One can be

found in Table 7, which allows for item comparison between factors. Statements are

listed in order from highest to lowest *z* scores. Table 7 also shows distinguishing

statements that are characteristic of Factor One at the $p < .01$ level. The distinguishing

statements indicate the items that Factor One has ranked significantly different than the

other two factors. This table also identifies the dimension of belonging (A, B, F) for each

item.

Table 7

Factor Scores for Factor One and Distinguishing Statements

No.	Statement (abbreviated)	Dimension	*z*-score
11	Getting good grades in school	B	*1.98
9	Working hard in school	B	*1.67
12	Making my family proud by what I do in school	F	*1.55
38	Coming to school	B	*1.28
36	Doing the homework that teachers give me	B	*1.24
28	Following the rules in my school	B	*1.19
25	Enjoying being at school	A	*1.09
24	Feeling safe in school	A	0.97
35	Feeling like I can be myself in school	A	0.80
2	Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school	A	0.78
29	Having friends at my school	A	0.73
23	Adults at school believing in me	A	0.69
33	Working with a good attitude in school	B	0.47
22	Being involved in my classes.	B	0.46
32	Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school	A	*0.45
21	Talking with my parents about things that are going on	F	0.25
3	My family being a part of my schooling	F	0.23
27	Feeling good about myself when I'm in school	A	0.21
8	Being treated with respect for who I am	A	0.03
30	Feeling like I fit in at my school	A	*0.00
4	Adults at school care about what is going on with me	A	*-0.10
10	People at my school being nice to me	A	*-0.10
14	Coming to class with what I need	B	*-0.14
18	Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I	A	-0.22
13	My parents having good contacts with adults at school	F	-0.23
16	My family and adults in my school help each other	F	-0.40
5	My family is able to connect with the school	F	-0.64
17	Being a part of the schools decisions that affect me	B	-0.71
7	Feeling like my race is respected at my school	F	*-0.75
20	Having people at my school that really know me	A	-0.79
26	Feeling like I can bring my culture into school	F	-0.87

Table 7 Continued

No.	Statement (abbreviated)	Dimension	*z-s*core
39	Others at school praising me when Im good at something	A	-0.99
31	Being a part of school activities	B	*-1.13
15	People at my school respecting my beliefs	F	*-1.19
34	People at my school and people from my family talking	F	-1.43
19	Being able to connect with other students w/ same cultur	F	*-1.47
1	Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home	F	*-1.52
37	Teachers knowing what my culture is like	F	*-1.53
6	Having others in school who know my first language	F	-1.87

Note. (*) Indicates significance at p < .01 for distinguishing statements.

The two statements ranked most important to belonging in school were 'getting good grades in school' and 'working hard in school' (item 11: +4; item 9: +4, respectively) and the items ranked as most unimportant to belonging were 'teachers knowing what my culture is like. For example, my beliefs, my background, my first language' and 'having others in school who know my first language' (item 37: -4; item 6: -4, respectively). In addition, Factor One is considered a bipolar factor because it has Q sorts that loaded both positively and negatively. Specifically, it has one sort that loaded negatively onto the factor (Sort #11, -.43). This indicated that one sort represented the "polar opposite" or "mirror image" of the viewpoints that represented this factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 133). Although it has only one negatively loading sort, it is important to note and consider during factor interpretation.

Factor description. This factor was characterized by a focus on academics and a futuristic mindset, as participants saw education as an important path to a good future. The most important item in this factor was 'getting good grades in school,' which was a distinguishing item in this factor. Several participants described school and education as a

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priority because "school is for you to learn, to have a better future" (Participant #126).

Getting good grades was important to belong in school for several reasons that were

fleshed out in additional items within the sort. For example, a number of participants

identified their middle school as a "good school...grades are important here" (Participant

#102). As one participant noted, "if you don't work hard enough and you get bad grades,

people say you don't belong here" (Participant #105). Thus, items related to school

behaviors were distinguishing statements in this factor as students ranked them as more

important to belonging than in other factors. These included items such as 'working hard

in school' (item 9: +4), 'coming to school' (item 38: +3), 'following the rules in my

school' (item 28: +2), and 'doing the homework that teachers give me' (item 36: +3),

which students felt were important avenues to doing well and fitting into the academic

culture. For example, when asked why coming to school was important to him, one

student recounted his frustration and disappointment when he missed a class during the

school day.

> I was taken out of school early for a stinkin dentist appointment, we coulda
> rescheduled but no...it had to be in my math test...um I think that that's most
> important cuz I wanted to have a perfect attendance...if you don't come [to
> school] you can't belong...I think so....missing my math test, I was *very* upset
> about that (Participant #109).

In addition to getting good grades, doing well in school also had internal benefits

for participants in this factor. Several participants described a sense of pride with how

good it felt to do well and work hard. They not only got rewarded and praised by

teachers, but often by their families as they felt like they were making their family proud

by what they accomplished in school. Specifically, 'making my family proud by what I do in school' (item 12: +3) was another distinguishing statement in this factor. As one participant described, "I make my family proud that I get good grades and that I don't let them down by like not going to college and stuff...because...um like if I get good grades, um, like they....all my family compliments me too" (Participant #135). Similarly, a number of participants talked about the support they received from their parents and how they could talk to parents about things going on in school if they needed something (item 21'talking with my parents about things that are going on in school': +1). Thus academic success, family support, and making their families proud were intertwined and important to feeling like they belonged in school.

Furthermore, participants in this factor had a sense of identity with doing well in school, as both teachers and peers gave them recognition and they fit in with the academic culture of the school. For instance when asked why obtaining good grades was important to belong in school, one participant stated, "most people recognize how smart I am" (Participant #126). Similarly, a number of participants in this factor described how they didn't want to be perceived by teachers as someone who isn't involved in their learning. For example, one participant stated that he didn't want to be "one of those kids that stands in the corner and doesn't do much...cuz it actually tells me that teachers do care about students participating " (Participant #133). This mentality was shared with several participants who were concerned with how teachers perceived them.

Factor One was characterized by students finding their place in the academic circle of the school, which also had some social benefits for these students; it allowed

them to feel like they contributed, were a part of school, and were able to be the ones that

could help their peers academically. It is noteworthy that although participants in this

factor ranged from 2's ('approaching standards' or C's) to 4's ('exceeding standards' or

A's) in the standards based grading on their last report card, maintaining a focus on

academics was important to them. For example, when asked about his experience with

working hard in school and why it was important to feel like he belonged, one participant

stated:

> Because if I, if I didn't, if I didn't feel wanted...[breath in] things would be
> different like um....I won't be getting that good grades and things like that...I just
> started to work more so I could understand...because I used to feel bad because I
> didn't know how to do it and others did (Participant #131).

Similarly, several participants described the positive feeling of peers recognizing their

hard work and doing well in school, because 'feeling like my ideas are respected in this

school' was important to them (item 2: +2).

Enjoying school was also an important aspect of belonging for participants in this

factor. 'Enjoying being at school' was ranked significantly higher by students in this

factor than in other factors (item 25: +2). Some participants described how enjoying

school helped them get away from problems at home (Participant #133), and several

participants described the positive emotions of feeling comfortable at school. When asked

why enjoying school was important to belonging, one participant stated:

> Enjoying school [is] like belonging to being a part of a community like...[pause]
> if you've ever seen like a movie, like a grouchy old neighborhood, like nobody,
> like...you don't want to be that person [chuckle] so it's just like you have....you

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belong in school when you like [sigh] you're like...*I'm home*!! (Participant # 109).

Overall, a characteristic of this factor was the value placed on teachers' praise and perspectives as opposed to peers. Beyond the recognition and academic support that many students described obtaining from teachers, 'adults at school believing in me' was important to students (item 23: +1). This support was often related to students' future and their desire to be successful in school and ultimately in their future endeavors. As one participant described, "if I get good grades [teachers] see me as someone who could really accomplish something when I'm older" (Participant #125). Another participant stated, "if the teachers say I don't believe in you or anything like that then that could like drag you down" (Participant #105).

Additionally, given this factor's heightened focus on academics, the social aspects of friends and peers were ranked more toward the middle and less important than aspects of school that contributed to students' academic success (e.g. item 18 'feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have a problem': -1). Although participants described 'having friends at my school' as somewhat important (item 29: +1), it was notable that during the post-sort interviews, many described the importance of having close friends or a small group of friends whom they could be supported by, as opposed to a desire for many friends or socialization with peers in general. Given their identity with the academic culture of the school, students were content with having close friends they could relate with, and who accepted them, while maintaining a sharp focus on their academic life. One participant shared how in the previous year her grades were low so

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she stepped away from the social scene and began to focus on grades, which made her feel smarter. She stated "school is about school, not friends" and "having friends or not feels the same because other people recognize like how hard you're working" (Participant #126). Additionally, several participants described a sense of mistrust toward peers as they felt friends could distract them from their school work and what was important. Participants in this factor ranked 'having people at my school that really know me' as unimportant (item 20: -2), and they seemed to mistrust opening up to peers, because rumors might be spread (Participant #105).

Beyond the importance of academic behaviors, it was interesting to note the separation between home life and school life that characterized this factor. Several participants described that their background and life at home was separate than the purpose of school and education. 'Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home is like' was a distinguishing item in this factor as participants ranked it as significantly less important than students in other factors (item 1: -3). One participant stated "I don't want them to know everything about me...my family has bad things in the past and I don't want that to stop me" (Participant #140). Participants described how student's don't often like to talk about home life in school, "I feel like it's at home, it doesn't really have to be brought into school, they are separate, learning and education" (Participant #125). Similarly, one student stated, "my teacher just wants me to learn not like what my back stories are and stuff" (Participant #105). Thus, the intense focus on academics and belonging to the academic culture of the school was separate from their personal or home life.

Additionally, students' ranked items relating to their culture and beliefs as less important to belonging. For example, the following items were distinguishing statements for Factor One as participants ranked them as significantly less important than students in other factors: 'teachers knowing what my culture is like. For example: my beliefs, my background, my first language' (item 37: -4), 'feeling like my race is respected at my school' (item 7: -1), and 'being able to connect with other students who have the same culture as me. For example: the same background, home life, race' (item19: -3). In addition, one of the lowest ranking items for participants in this factor was 'having others in school who know my first language' (item 6: -4). Again, this was often due to the emphasis on academics, as several participants felt that culture didn't matter and didn't change who you were or what you did. When asked why it was unimportant for teachers to know what her culture was like one participant stated, "I don't think it's important because [pause] I don't think that it matters, like what other people's culture is...like if you're White or you're Mexican like your race, I don't think it's important" (Participant #126). Another participant stated, "even if I did speak another language, I don't see how that would affect maybe any academic success." Later this participant stated, "like I said before, I just focused on most of the academic sides of school and, and, I usually don't talk about home or any of my cultures just because I wanna make sure that I get good grades and also improve" (Participant #110). Several participants were indifferent to culture and didn't see how it related to the focus of school or belonging, given that the purpose of school was to learn.

Interview data revealed that overall, Factor One was characterized by a heightened focus on academic behaviors and doing well in school that seemed to form part of students' identity and shaped their place in school. Their home life, culture, and emotional/personal selves were not often included in the important aspects of belonging as those parts of themselves were not seen to relate to the purpose of school or their role in the educational setting. Participants seemed to feel pride and obtain recognition both from their families and people at school for their hard work, which molded their sense of belonging and how they fit into their school.

Factor Two: Belonging is Being Myself and Connecting with Others

Factor characteristics. Factor Two was labeled "Belonging is Being Myself and Connecting with Others" and accounted for 9% of the explained variance on students' perspectives of belonging in school. Four of the 30 participants significantly loaded onto this factor. The demographic information of these students can be found in Table 8.

Table 8

Demographic Information for Participants in Factor Two

	n	Percentage
Grade		
6th	1	25%
7th	1	25%
8th	2	50%
Ethnicity		
White	2	50%
Hispanic	2	50%
Gender		
Male	3	75%
Female	1	25%
Total *N*	4	

Table 8 Continued

Age	
Mean	12.6
(SD)	(1.29)

The normalized factor scores (z scores) for each statement in Factor Two can be found in Table 8 where statements are listed in order from highest to lowest z scores, including the dimension of belonging (A, B, F) for each item. Table 8 also shows distinguishing statements that are characteristic of Factor Two ($p < .01$ significance level), indicating the items that Factor Two ranked significantly different than the other two factors. The statements ranked most important to belonging in school in this factor included 'feeling good about myself when I'm in school' (item 27: +4), and 'feeling like I can be myself in school' (item 35: +4). The statements ranked most unimportant to belonging included 'my family being a part of my schooling. For example: ask me about school, make sure I do my homework, go to school events' (item 3: -4), and 'my parents having good contacts with adults in my school. For example: good meetings, good talks, good phone calls' (item 13: -4).

Table 9

Factor Scores for Factor Two and Distinguishing Statements

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Dimension	z-score
35	Feeling like I can be myself in school	A	1.95
27	Feeling good about myself when I'm in school	A	1.53
7	Feeling like my race is respected at my school	F	1.29
30	Feeling like I fit in at my school	A	*1.22
39	Others at school praising me when I'm good at something	A	*1.18
32	Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school	A	*1.14

Table 9 Continued

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Dimension	z-score
4	Adults at school care about what is going on with me	A	1.09
19	Being able to connect w other students with same culture	F	1.07
18	Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have	A	*0.97
29	Having friends at my school	A	*0.94
10	People at my school being nice to me	A	*0.87
24	Feeling safe in school	A	0.84
37	Teachers knowing what my culture is like	F	0.59
8	Being treated with respect for who I am	A	0.57
23	Adults at school believing in me	A	0.54
22	Being involved in my classes.	B	0.40
1	Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home	F	*0.31
15	People at my school respecting my beliefs	F	0.25
20	Having people at my school that really know me	A	*0.22
33	Working with a good attitude in school	B	-0.08
11	Getting good grades in school	B	-0.17
31	Being a part of school activities	B	-0.31
28	Following the rules in my school	B	-0.43
21	Talking with my parents about things that are going on	F	-0.45
26	Feeling like I can bring my culture into school	F	-0.48
25	Enjoying being at school	A	-0.52
38	Coming to school	B	*-0.53
2	Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school	A	*-0.64
17	Being a part of the schools decisions that affect me	B	-0.71
12	Making my family proud by what I do in school	F	-0.74
14	Coming to class with what I need	B	-0.95
16	My family and adults in my school help each other	F	-1.02
5	My family is able to connect w the school when they need	F	-1.13
9	Working hard in school	B	-1.34
6	Having others in school who know my first language	F	-1.36
34	People at my school and people from my family talking	F	-1.37
36	Doing the homework that teachers give me	B	-1.40
13	My parents having good contacts with adults in my school.	F	*-1.55
3	My family being a part of my schooling	F	*-1.81

Note. (*) Indicates significance at p < .01 for distinguishing statements.

Factor description. A defining characteristic of this factor was the students'

desire to be themselves and connect with others. Feeling like they could be themselves in

school was ranked as the most important item in this factor. Participants described a

desire to be authentic and "act how *I* want to, like if I want to play something I can play

something, or if I wanna be funny, I can be funny, and people actually laugh rather then

like 'what...the heck'" (Participant #128). Being able to be true to who they were was a

central component of this factor. As one participant described, "coming to school

and...just...being yourself and expressing yourself to other people without other people

laughing at you...if you can be yourself in school then you're gonna be like, be more

motivated to come to school" (Participant #119). Similarly, participants wanted to feel

good about themselves in school, which was the other highest ranking item in this factor.

When participants felt good about who they were in school, they felt more like they

belonged. One participant described, "Feeling good about myself in school...that feels

like you're welcome everywhere...you need to feel good at school Miss, because if you're

not, then you're not gonna have a good day" (Participant #144).

An important aspect of this factor was participants' desire to feel connected with

others and have people they could rely on. Two distinguishing items in this factor were

'feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have a problem' (item 18: +2), and

'feeling like I 'fit in' at my school' (item 30: +3). One participant described fitting in as

"being with people you get along with...and help you out" (Participant #144). When

asked why it was important for her to feel like she can talk to friends, another participant

described, "I feel like my friends don't judge, for, uh, anyone by their appearance or they

believing in...and, like [pause] um, it's like someone else to relate with, um because they're literally going through the same thing as you are" (Participant #137).

Several participants described a desire to have other's understand what they were going through both at home and in school and who could be a source of support. Specifically, friends were particularly important to students in this factor and helped distinguish this factor from others. For example, two distinguishing statements in this factor that students ranked higher than participants in other factors included 'having friends at my school' (item 29: +2), and 'people at my school being nice to me' (item 10: +1). Several participants described the desire not to be judged by others and have friends that could support them and help them at school. Participants wanted to have friends they could connect with and be themselves with. One participant described, "whenever I hang around my friends [pause] they, we all just talk about whatever like outside of school or in school...what teachers we like or which teachers we don't" (Participant #137). When asked why she felt like she belonged in her school, the same participant stated, "just like having friends and stuff...that I can relate to." Similarly, when asked why having friends were important to belong another participant described, "it means that I have people to play with, people that are willing to...hang out with me who think, he's not...cuz like a lot of people when they first look at me, they think I'm scary...so when I, when I have friends that know he's not scary, he's actually really nice." When probed further on how that related to belonging he stated, "I have people that'll stick up for me when they...when people like...say are being mean...i...mean to other people, or...that'll stick up for me if it's happening to me" (Participant # 128).

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In addition to peers, adults at school were also an important source of connection in this factor, as participants described the desire to talk with adults who could understand their struggles, especially concerning challenges at home. Participants ranked 'feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I have a problem' as important to belonging (item 32: +2). When asked what it meant to them to have an adult at school they could talk to and why it was important to feel like they belonged, one participant stated, "it means that like I have someone there that if like, I'm having a rough time at home, or whatever I can, go and talk to them and they can help me get through it...because then I know that I have someone to talk to if I'm not feeling right" (Participant #128).

The desire to connect and be understood extended to student's race, background, and culture. Participants ranked 'being able to connect with other students who have the same culture as me. For example: the same background, home life, race' as important to belonging (item 19: +2). In explaining why it was important to be able to connect with other students who had the same culture, home life, or background, one participant stated, "because then I feel like you know what other people been through...you're not the only one that's going through something bad" (Participant #119). Interestingly, participants ranked being able to connect with others who had the same culture, background or home life as more important than simply being able to bring your culture into school (item 26 'feeling like I can bring my culture into school. For example: my beliefs, my background, my first language': -1). This highlights the underlying focus on relationships and connections that are important to participants in this factor. Participants wanted to be able

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to relate with others and not be judged for who they were. As one participant described, "when you're going through your teen years it can be a struggle for a lotta people and, it's good to know that you have someone to relate with, and if everyone's constantly judging you about what you look like, or your race or anything like that, um, then [sigh] it just makes...it worse" (Participant #137).

The desire for participants in this factor to connect and relate was also reflected by the statements that were ranked more toward the middle or not as important to belonging. School related behaviors were ranked on the less important side such as 'doing the homework that teachers give me' (item 36: -3), 'working hard in school' (item 9: -2), and 'coming to class with what I need. For example, my pens, pencils, books, homework' (14: -2). Several participants described how school behaviors were unrelated to their friendships. One participant explained, "friends don't care if I do my homework or not, it's not something that is needed for me to get friends, it's just something that I have to do" (Participant #128). In addition, participants ranked 'coming to school' (38: -1) as less important to belonging than students in other factors. One participant explained that attending school is, "not something that makes me feel welcome or anything, or more welcome" (Participant #137). Similarly, 'getting good grades in school' was ranked in the middle for participants in this factor (item 11: 0) because it helped participants feel good about themselves as they enjoyed being praised for doing well at school. Thus, in contrast to Factor One, getting good grades was not so much important because of an academic or futuristic mindset, but because it fostered connection and attention from others. As one participant described, "teachers will like, if I'm not getting good grades

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and I'm not really trying in class, teachers are gonna start ignoring me, and just kind of forgetting about me" (Participant #128). Specifically, 'Others at school praising me when I'm good at something' (item 39: +3) was a distinguishing statement as it was ranked significantly more important to belonging for students in this factor compared to other factors. This desire for praise was related to their need to connect and obtain acceptance with others as several participants talked about the joys of getting rewarded for doing well and being praised by others.

> If you do something right or if you try, you, you're still gonna like, you're gonna feel comfortable because others um [pause] others feel like that too, or something...I think it's important because if you don't feel that way then you're not gonna be like, you're not gonna feel welcomed (Participant #119).

Similar to Factor One, this factor was also characterized by less emphasis on family involvement for students to feel like they belonged. The lowest ranking items in this factor, that were both distinguished as ranking less important than in any other factors included, 'My family being a part of my schooling. For example: ask me about school, make sure I do my homework, go to school events (item 3: -4), and 'My parents having good contacts with adults in my school. For example: good meetings, good talks, good phone calls' (item 13: -4). As one participant described, "I just don't think people at my school....and...people...from my family need to really have a good relationships to...sustain a happy life and [chuckle] I don't know." Later she stated, "I'm just an independent person and...the only thing I really talk about uh, with my parents is like social stuff" (Participant #137). In addition, several participants explained that their

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family doesn't care as much about grades and wouldn't reward or punish them if they got good or bad grades. As one participant stated,

> Well like that my family is happy with what I do....but it's not as important because my family is not one of the families that's like 'hey, now that you since you didn't get good grades, we're not gonna...go out for...dinner where *you* wanted we're gonna go to a different place' type of thing or something like that. They're just say 'hey...good grades are good, bad grades are bad, but it's better to get good grades.' (Participant #128).

Participants felt that their family could know about some things related to their progress, but it was not that important to them to belong in school. In other words, participants did not need or want their families to be involved in their school life in order to feel like they belonged. As one participant described, "cuz my grades and how I'm doing they should know about, but they ain't got to know about *every...single...thing"* (Participant #144).

Overall, belonging in Factor Two was characterized by a social focus as participants desired to connect, be understood by others, and be themselves in school. The need for relatedness and connection was undergirded by the majority of items in this factor as items that were ranked as more important fostered connection and personal authenticity, while those ranked as unimportant did not help student's feel understood or connected to others in school.

Factor Three: Belonging is Cultural Respect and Adult Support

Factor characteristics. Factor Three was labeled "Belonging is Cultural Respect and Adult Support" and accounted for 5% of the explained variance on students' perspectives of belonging in school. Four participants of the 30 significantly loaded onto this factor. The demographic information of these students can be found in Table 10. It is

interesting to note that this is the only factor in which all participants identified as

Hispanic/Mexican American.

Table 10

Demographic Information of Participants in Factor Three

	n	Percentage
Grade		
6th	2	50%
7th	1	25%
8th	1	25%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Mexican American	4	100%
Gender		
Male	2	50%
Female	2	50%
Total *N*	4	
Mean Age	12.5	
(SD)	(1.29)	

The normalized factor scores (*z* scores) for each statement, along with the

distinguishing statements ($p < .01$ significance level) that are characteristic of Factor

Three, can be found in Table 11 where statements are listed in order from highest to

lowest *z* scores, and the dimension of belonging (A, B, F) for each item. Participants in

this factor ranked 'feeling like my race is respected at my school' (item 7: +4) and

'feeling like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I have a problem' (item 32: +4)

as the most important items related to belonging in school. In contrast, they ranked

'people at my school being nice to me' (item 10: -4) and 'coming to class with what I

need. For example: my pens, pencils, books, homework' (item 14: -4) as the most unimportant to belonging.

Factor description. A differentiating characteristic of this factor was students' desire for respect from others.

Table 11

Factor Scores for Factor Three and Distinguishing Statements

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Dimension	z-score
32	Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I	A	*2.09
7	Feeling like my race is respected at my school	F	1.54
35	Feeling like I can be myself in school	A	1.34
23	Adults at school believing in me	A	1.28
1	Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home	F	*1.28
2	Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school	A	1.00
8	Being treated with respect for who I am	A	0.96
24	Feeling safe in school	A	0.95
26	Feeling like I can bring my culture into school	F	*0.86
27	Feeling good about myself when IÆm in school	A	0.85
15	People at my school respecting my beliefs	F	0.83
6	Having others in school who know my first language	F	*0.76
4	Adults at school care about what is going on with me	A	0.65
19	Being able to connect w other students who have the same	F	0.60
38	Coming to school	B	*0.49
5	My family is able to connect with the school	F	*0.34
25	Enjoying being at school	A	0.18
28	Following the rules in my school	B	0.06
37	Teachers knowing what my culture is like	F	0.03
11	Getting good grades in school	B	-0.04
22	Being involved in my classes.	B	-0.05
18	Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have	A	-0.11
3	My family being a part of my schooling	F	-0.25
31	Being a part of school activities	B	-0.29
13	My parents having good contacts with adults in my school.	F	-0.30
21	Talking with my parents about things that are going on in	F	-0.32
39	Others at school praising me when I'm good at something	A	-0.32

Table 11 Continued

No.	Statement (Abbreviated)	Dimension	*z*-score
9	Working hard in school	B	-0.60
36	Doing the homework that teachers give me	B	-0.63
33	Working with a good attitude in school	B	-0.82
12	Making my family proud by what I do in school	F	-0.99
16	My family and adults in my school help each other	F	-1.04
29	Having friends at my school	A	*-1.16
34	People at my school and people from my family talking	F	-1.28
20	Having people at my school that really know me	A	-1.39
17	Being a part of the schools decisions that affect me	B	-1.43
30	Feeling like I fit in at my school	A	*-1.53
14	Coming to class with what I need	B	-1.75
10	People at my school being nice to me	A	*-1.78

Note. (*) Indicates significance at p < .01 for distinguishing statements.

Often this respect was in regards to their culture or home life. Several participants

described the negative experience of having other students make fun of their culture or

socioeconomic level. One participant stated,

> You're gonna have people that are gonna make stupid comments just try to get you down like, 'what are those wal-mart shoes' or something like that just to get on your nerves or something like that, and that can be from jealousy or just something that you did to them or just because they think that they're fun and cool when they do that (Participant #114).

A unique element of this factor was participants strong desire to be respected for who

they were, which undergirded many of the aspects of belonging that were important to

them. For instance, students ranked 'feeling like I can be myself in school' (item 35: +3)

as important to belonging, not as much for the purpose of connection, in contrast to

Factor Two, but in order to be respected and not have to change who they were to be

accepted. Participants in this factor wanted to be able to bring their culture and their

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identity into school and be respected for that. Specifically, a distinguishing statement for this factor that was ranked as more important to belonging than in any other factor was 'feeling like I can bring my culture into school. For example: my beliefs, my background, my first language' (item 26: +2). One student stated,

> What we celebrate at home and how we, how we do stuff at home and my color skin and stuff like that, I can come to school and not be ashamed of it, because if you can't even go to school without having to change like as soon as you get out the car...woah (Participant #114).

This extended to student's strong emphasis on having their race respected at school, which was one of the most important aspects of belonging for this factor. One student described,

> Nobody wants to feel, feel disrespected because of like your race, like if you're Latino you don't want like people telling you stuff like 'they shouldn't speak Spanish here'...it's just like something really important that like you don't wanna be disrespected because of where you're from, cuz some of us like didn't get to choose that (Participant #124).

This participant went on to describe an adverse experience where a peer wouldn't let her sit next to him. "I couldn't even sit next to him because I was Mexican and he started saying that 'this is why we need to build the wall' and stuff like that." The foundational importance of respect for students in this factor can be found throughout the items that were ranked as important such as 'feeling like my ideas are respected in this school' (item 2: +2) and 'being treated with respect for who I am. For example: my race, how much money my family makes, things I like' (item 8: +2). Additionally, participants ranked 'having others in school who know my first language' (item 6: +1) as more

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important than in any other factor. As one participant described, "like nobody wants to feel, feel disrespected because of like your race like if you're Latino you don't want like people telling you stuff like 'they shouldn't speak Spanish here' like stuff like that no body wants that" (Participant #124).

Respect was tied into participants emphasis on safety as well (item 24 'feeling safe in school. For example: safe from fights, bullies, name calling, violence': +2). Participants in this factor described a desire to feel safe from bullies and others who might disrespect them. For example one participant stated, "you don't feel very belonging if someone's always picking on you and making you feel down" (Participant #114).

Additionally, students emphasis on respect can be seen in one of the items ranked as least important to belonging by participants in this factor. 'People at my school being nice to me' (item 10: -4) was a distinguishing statement that was ranked less important in this factor than in any other factor. Students did not care as much whether or not people at school were nice to them as long as they were respected. Being nice and being respected were two distinct concepts. One participant explained that he ranked others being nice as one of the least important because, "people could talk about me even if its good or bad, I mean I don't really care as long as it's not personal....like if...uhhh....they tell me something about my culture, or...what I look like, or what my family is, or how much....or stuff like that" (Participant #104). In other words, as long as peers did not disrespect the aspects of their lives that were personal (e.g., family, home, culture), they didn't care if others were nice to them or not.

Overall, participants in this factor highly valued adult support and did not feel that peers or friends were as important. One of the other most important aspects of belonging for participants in this group was 'feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I have a problem' (item 32: +4), which was ranked more important than in any other factor. In contrast, participants ranked 'feeling like I 'fit in' at my school' (item 30: -3) and 'having friends at my school' (item 29: -2) as less important to belonging than in any other factor. In general, participants felt more indifferent to peers and did not see friends as being very important. Another participant shared, "having friends at my school well, I don't care if I don't have friends, I can be my own friends, but, yah, I meant if I don't have friends, I always have myself." When probed further as to why this was not as important to belonging he stated, "if teachers and other adults care about me, then I don't need friends" (Participant #104). Participants in this factor would rather talk to adults than friends, as they saw adults as more understanding and supportive. When describing why friends were less important in school to belonging than adults, one participant stated,

> Because...um, [pause] like teachers, they like mostly like all want like the best for you, like they'll try to like get you to succeed, and like some kids won't like do, feel the same way, like they'll like try to get you in trouble and stuff like that (Participant #124).

Overall, having adults as a source of support was a distinguishing characteristic of this factor. For example, when asked if he felt like he belonged at his previous school one participant described it was because of the support of an adult at his school. "I had teachers that were always there for me, like, whenever I needed something I had, like in 5th grade there was a really good, he was the custodian but he, me and him like...he was

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basically like, what is it called like uh [pause] like those people that help you, I don't

know what they're called" (Participant #114).

In addition, participants in this factor ranked 'feeling like my teachers understand

what my life at home is like' (item 1: +3) more important to belonging than participants

in the other two factors. Participants wanted teachers to know about their circumstances

in order to be a source of support for them and understand if they faced challenges

outside of school. One participant described,

> If you think like a teacher cares about you, or like...mmm....let's say you have like
> your parents are like, aren't the best...then you might like a teacher to like
> understand what its like at home so like they know like if you might like if you
> talk back or something it might be because you're like upset or something or mad
> about what's happening at home (Participant #124).

Later this same participant described,

> Like not every day could be like your best like something could happen at home
> that could make you like really sad and then like if you can't talk to anyone then
> you just keep it all to yourself and like...that's not good...and um if you have like
> someone you can trust like an adult or something you can talk to them and it
> would probably make you feel better.

In contrast to Factor One, participants in this group wanted adults to understand more

personal details about their challenges at home so they could better understand what they

were going through and be a source of support.

Overall, school related behaviors were less important to participants in this group

(e.g. item 33 'working with a good attitude in school': -2; item 14 'coming to class with

what I need. For example: my pens, pencils, books, homework: -4). Participants

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described how they viewed those behaviors as somewhat important to school, but unrelated to how they felt like they belonged. Similar to other factors, participants in this group were indifferent to family involvement or connection with school (item 16 'my family and adults in my school help each other': -2; item 34 'people at my school and people from my family talking often. For example: emails, phone calls': -2). Some participants' families were not very involved in school and several participants did not see how parental involvement or a positive connection between their family and school would change how they felt like they belonged in school or not.

Bipolar sort interpretation. As previously described, bipolar factors have both positive and negatively loading Q sorts. In Factor Three, one sort loaded negatively onto the factor and represented a mirror image or negative viewpoint that aided in interpretation (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In reviewing interview transcript data on the negatively loading sort (Participant #111), the participant ranked items oppositely as many other of the sorts in this factor. Friendships and being able to talk with friends were some of the most important aspects of belonging for this participant (item 18 'feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have a problem: +3; item 29 'having friends at my school: +3). Friends were the most important sources of support for this participant. In addition, cultural aspects were also less important to this participant (item 6 'having others in school who know my first language': -4; item 19 'being able to connect with other students who have the same culture as me. For example: the same background, home life, race': -3). This participant also ranked 'getting good grades in school' as one of the most important aspects of belonging (item 11: +4). Although the participant ranked

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'being treated with respect for who I am. For example: my race, how much money my family makes, things I like' (item 8: -3), a close inspection of his interview data revealed some underlying threads of the desire to be respected by others, which can be found in his responses and interpretation of the items. For instance, in contrast to Factor Three, Participant #111 ranked 'people at my school being nice to me' as important (item 10: +3). He stated, "usually I get judgmental and I like, I don't like getting called names and stuff." (Participant #111). In other words, the participant's interpretation of 'people at my school being nice to me' revealed his desire to be respected by others. Additionally, when describing why having friends to talk to was important, the participant shared, "once I was getting called names cuz um I brought something from my house and then they just thought I was like poor, so then I, I told them and then we all told the teacher and um, the kids knew their lesson and they got, they didn't call me names anymore." It appeared that the participant viewed friends as a source of support and buffer from others who disrespected or bullied him. While this participant had a 'negative' or alternative viewpoint of the factor as a whole, he also had similar threads of desiring to be respected, which were revealed in his alternative interpretations of the items.

Overall, belonging in this factor was characterized by a strong desire to be respected, particularly related to who participants were and their cultural identity. Skin color, race, and cultural practices were important to these students. In order to feel comfortable in the school setting, respect was an essential component. In addition, participants saw adults as more important than peers or friends, as adults were a source of support and safety for students.

Consensus Statements

Consensus statements are items in each factor which have been ranked approximately the same way, or the rankings do not distinguish between the three factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Five statements out of the 39 available in the Q set, did not distinguish between any pair of factors (non-significant at $p > .01$) and 3 were non-significant at the $p > .05$. The list of consensus statements can be found in Table 12. Consensus statements should not be disregarded simply because they did not distinguish between one factor or another. In contrast, it may highlight relevant information (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Upon examination of the consensus statement, it is interesting to note that statement 24 'Feeling safe in school. For example: safe from fights, bullies, name calling, violence' had a relatively high factor score among all three factors, with a Q sort value of +2, +1, and +2 among Factors One, Two, and Three respectively. Overall, several participants described the importance of feeling safe in school, with the meaning of safety ranging from feeling safe in school in general to peer bullying and aggression. Thus, despite each factor's distinguishing characteristics, participants' across all factors ranked feeling safe as more important to belonging, which suggests that feeling safe, an affective dimension of belonging, was an important commonality to conceptualizations of belonging.

In contrast, statement 34 'People at my school and people from my family talking often. For example: emails, phone calls', had relatively low z score rankings across all three factors with a Q score of -3, -3, and -2 for Factors One, Two, and Three respectively. This was also true of statement 16, 'My family and adults in my school help

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each other' (Factor One: -1; Factor Two: -2; Factor 3: -2). Both of these statements were in the familial dimension of belonging. This indicated that students across all three factors ranked these statement on the unimportant side. Interview data revealed that many participants felt that parents talking to teachers was not an important component to feeling like they belonged in school in a general sense. Overall, parents talking to teachers or parents and teachers helping each other really didn't matter much to them and/or they felt that it didn't personally affect them. Nevertheless, some factors outlined other specific aspects of the family/school interaction that participants ranked as important to belong in school (as described in factor descriptions above). Therefore, examining the commonalities among the factors, as well as the distinguishing features, helped to highlight the unique viewpoints that emerged in this study.

In addition, it is important to note that during the Q sort process, the researcher initially asked participants to separate the items in the Q set into three piles to indicate those they agree with, those they are unsure about, and those they disagree with. The researcher noted that the majority of participants across all three factors initially sorted a large number of items from the Q set in the 'important' pile, with less in the 'unsure' pile and relatively few in the 'disagree' pile. A number of participants expressed the difficulty in identifying the most important aspects of belonging for them by having to fit cards onto the fixed distribution. Thus, many of the items were initially thought to be important to participants before they were required to choose those that were most and least important to them.

Table 12

Consensus Statements

No. Statement (Abbreviated)	Factors		
	1	2	3
	z score	*z* score	*z* score
16 My family and adults in my school help each other	-0.40	-1.02	-1.04
22*Being involved in my classes	0.46	0.40	-0.05
23 Adults at school believing in me	0.69	0.54	1.28
24* Feeling safe in school	0.97	0.84	0.95
34* People at my school and people from my family talking often	-1.43	-1.37	-1.28

Note. All listed statements are non-significant at *P* > .01, and those flagged with an asterisks (*) are also Non-Significant at *P* > .05.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present results from data collection and analysis to answer the research question: What are urban middle school student's perspectives of belonging in school? Through factor analysis, three factors were determined to be the most fitting solution, which accounted for 35% of the explained variance in urban students' perspectives of belonging in school. In the next and final chapter, these results will be discussed in relation to the current literature on belonging along with implications for school counselors, educators, and researchers. Limitations from the current study will be also be addressed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results of data analysis and factor interpretation were described in Chapter IV. The current Chapter provides a detailed discussion of the findings in relation to the current literature and conceptualizations of belonging. Limitations of the current study are also discussed along with practical implications for school counselors, counselor educators, and future research.

Perspectives of Belonging

The purpose of the current study was to explore what constitutes belonging for urban middle school students through obtaining their subjective perspectives on the affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging. 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students in one urban middle school participated. Data analysis revealed three factors or viewpoints of belonging that emerged and represented 35% of the explained variance of perspectives on belonging in school. Each factor included a range of affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging that were important to participants. Additionally, factors were also distinguished by an overall emphasis on one (or more) particular dimension. Factor One, labeled "Belonging is Finding My Place in Academics," explained 22% of the variance and was characterized by a heightened emphasis on the behavioral dimensions of belonging; working hard towards academic

success helped define participants' place in the school setting. Factor Two, labeled "Belonging is Being Myself and Connecting with Others," explained 9% of the variance and was characterized by an emphasis on the affective or social/emotional aspects of school, and the need for relatedness and connection was a defining component of belonging. The last factor that emerged was "Belonging is Cultural Respect and Adult Support," which explained 5% of the variance. Both familial and affective dimensions of belonging were emphasized in this factor. Participants had a strong desire for respect, particularly in relation to their race and cultural identity, along with a need for adult support.

Data analysis, along with researcher observations during the data collection process, supports the idea that belonging is a complex and multidimensional construct. The majority of participants across each factor initially felt that many of the items were important to belonging, and several expressed difficulty in having to prioritize the items they felt were most and least important during the Q sort process. Although each factor was primarily defined by distinguishing characteristics, the range of behavioral, affective, and familial components that were intertwined across all three factors suggests that belonging truly is a multidimensional concept for urban students with many facets that are important. This finding confirms what some researchers have reported that there is a need to broaden our current conceptualizations of belonging; the over-reliance on surveys and quantitative methods limits our ability to encapsulate and understand the contextual and multidimensional nature of the concept (Nasir et al, 2011; Nichols, 2008). For example, in her mixed method study on belonging among urban students, Nichols (2008)

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found inconsistencies between the composite score of the belonging survey and participants interview data. Nichols (2008) concluded that existing measures of belonging, which are often one dimensional, may fall short of representing what belonging truly means to students. Given the complexity of belonging, it is therefore important for researchers to think about assessing this construct in more multidimensional ways, particularly when implementing quantitative designs. Incorporating mixed methods approaches, or developing measures that are multidimensional and encompass a range of dimensions are important steps in moving forward. This will help further our understanding not only of how belonging plays out for students, but also in it's relationship with positive outcomes. Since the majority of measures that currently exist lack this complexity, we may be missing relevant associations and understandings of dimensions of belonging that may be important to student outcomes.

Factor One represented the largest explained variance in this study (22%). Factor One emphasized academic behaviors and success, with social aspects of friends and peers as less important. Some participants even described a mistrust towards peers, fearing that friends would distract them from their academic focus. The focus on education supports the notion that academic behaviors may be an important component of students' sense of belonging in school, as a number of researchers have examined such behavioral components of belonging, student connection, and student engagement (see Libbey,

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2009). However, a unique contribution and distinction within this factor extends beyond simply engaging in academic behaviors, but reveals more about why these behaviors may be important to students' sense of belonging. The intersection between students' futuristic focus and desire to make their families proud, suggests that some urban students and their families view education as important and an avenue to a better future. In one study conducted by Shoffner, Newsome, Barrio Minton, and Wachter Morris (2014), researchers explored the outcome expectations of middle and high school students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities. Students identified that taking higher level science, math, or computer courses would contribute to positive outcomes in their lives such as increased finances, scholarship, and post-secondary education. Additionally, students also discussed generativity outcome expectations in which participants envisioned a future where they could help others and contribute to their community. Thus, academics have been found to relate to positive outcome expectations and hope for the future among some adolescents, which may be a particularly important aspect for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Although socio-economic data was unavailable for individual participants in this study, students situated in urban public schools often live in high-poverty communities (Hudley, 2013). More specifically, the school site utilized in this study received Title I funding, indicating that a high percentage of students were from low-income families. In addition, urban students face a number of additional challenges in their homes and communities (see Berliner, 2006; Bowen & Chapman, 1996). Thus, it may be that some urban students and their families view education as a path out of difficult circumstances,

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making academics and academic behaviors important to them. As a result, students find a sense of belonging when they integrate into the academic culture of the school as they get praised by teachers and are viewed as individuals who have the potential to accomplish goals and have a successful future. This may explain why the majority of participants in the current study were included in this factor and it represented the largest explained variance. Interestingly, the demographic questionnaires for participants in this factor revealed that not all participants obtained 3's or 4's on their last reports card, and grades ranged from 2's to 4's. Thus, despite students' actual grades, their desire to work hard and work towards academic success helped them feel like they belonged to the academic culture of the school.

In addition, although there was an intersection between participants' desire to make their families proud and doing well in school, there was also a need to have a distinct separation between their life at home and life at school. Participants did not want teachers to know about their background or home life. Interview data revealed that participants did not want their home life to hold them back from a promising future. Given that many students in urban settings face a variety of challenges including lack of resources and exposure to violence (Berliner, 2006; McCart et al., 2007; Payne & Slocumb, 2011), it may be that urban students who are focused on education and their future are determined to overcome challenges they may face in the community setting. Further research would benefit from exploring the empirical relationship between hope for the future and student's academic belonging to school. In addition, student's desire to separate their home and school life may also be related to their identity development. In

one study examining identity development among African American adolescents in urban

high-poverty contexts, Gullan, Hoffman, and Leff (2011) described the challenge for

urban students to identify and connect with both their neighborhood and mainstream

school cultures, often receiving different messages about how they should behave, act,

and feel in order to be successful. Gullen et al. (2011) described that students' self-

perceptions included an intersection between their race and the negative characteristics of

low-socioeconomic status (e.g. violence, lack of interest in school, dropping out of

school). As a result, some adolescents in the study described the need to act differently

depending on the context they were in. Bennett (2007) described this type of approach to

interacting with the world as bicultural competence, as children must actively resist

negative messages and perceptions from the mainstream society and navigate in and

across different cultural settings (Bennett, 2007). Although not all students in Factor One

were students of color, their neighborhood setting and socioeconomic status may

influence their cultural identity. Therefore, given students emerging identity

development, participants in Factor One may have wanted to maintain a separation

between home and school in order to identify with the achievement related behaviors that

were expected in their school setting and promote success.

In contrast, Factor Two was characterized by a social and relational focus, with a

desire for authenticity and connection. Students' had a strong desire to be authentic to

who they were and feel good about themselves in school, which lends support to

researcher reports that self-esteem is positively associated with student's sense of

belonging in school (Ma, 2003). In addition, participants in this factor wanted to be able

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to connect with others, including both peers and adults. This viewpoint is consistent with a number of researchers who conceptualize belonging as more of an affective construct that relates to students' feelings of connectedness and relationships with others (e.g., Anderman, 2002; Cemalciar, 2010; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Ma, 2003). Participants' desire to connect with both peers and adults is consistent with the increasing importance of social contexts outside of the home for early adolescents (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Larson et al.,1996; Moretti & Peled, 2004).

However, a unique nuance of this relational focus of belonging was participants desire to connect with others who had similar backgrounds and/or who could understand who they were and what they were going through, which is an important contribution of this study. While participants wanted to connect with others in general, they also had a desire to authentically connect with others who had similar backgrounds and could understand who they were and what they were going through. This reveals the depth and multidimensional nature of belonging, especially for urban students in poverty who often come from diverse backgrounds and cultures (Berliner, 2006). Additionally, academic behaviors were significantly less important for participants in this factor. Although getting good grades was ranked toward the middle, the underlying focus was not so much based on the desire to be successful for their future, but more because it fostered attention and connection with others because of the praise they would receive at school for getting good grades.

The contrast between Factor One and Factor Two is noteworthy. The distinct viewpoints represented by Factor Two and Factor One are consistent with findings from

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more open-ended explorations of belonging, particularly among urban students. Based on a longitudinal multi-method study with predominately African American high school students, Nasir et al. (2009) conceptualized school connection into two categories of interpersonal connections (relationships with others) and institutional connection (student's attitudes and behaviors related to school). They found that these two conceptualizations of connection played out differently for different students. The viewpoints of Factor One and Two in the current study support that students have different experiences of how they connect to school (academically or relationally). Therefore, students' experience of belonging varies for different groups of students. As Factor One represents, some students view belonging as a connection to the academic culture of the school, while others view belonging in terms of their relationships and connection to others. However, it is also important to recognize that each viewpoint is not one-dimensional and should not be interpreted as simply an 'academic' or 'relational' focus. Affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging interacted in important ways throughout both factors as well. Despite the overarching academic or relational characteristics that were emphasized, participants in each viewpoint provided unique interpretations of other dimensions of belonging as well. For example, although the emphasis of Factor Two was overall affective and relational in nature, the behavioral dimension of getting good grades was ranked as a mid-level of importance because it served to promote other sources of affective connections and relationships within the school.

Additional support for the unique viewpoints of urban students was found in Factor Three. Factor Three labeled "Cultural Respect and Adult Support" emerged as a unique contribution to the current literature and conceptions of belonging. This factor was characterized by an emphasis on being respected, particularly in relation to student's culture and race. The familial dimension of belonging was a distinguishing characteristic for this factor, specifically in relation to the intersection between student's culture with sense of belonging in school. All participants in Factor Three were Hispanic or Mexican American. In contrast to Factor One and Factor Two, less emphasis was placed on academic behaviors or socialization, because participants mostly wanted to be respected. Analysis of interview data revealed that several participants had negative experiences with others disrespecting their socioeconomic status, race, or culture. These experiences seemed to play a central role in their need to be respected in order to feel like they belonged in school.

This finding highlights the importance of better understanding urban students' perspectives that are often missed in current instruments and explorations of belonging. Given that urban settings often have high concentrations of immigrants and minorities (Lee, 2010), urban schools are often rich with cultural diversity, as students represent a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Researchers have begun to explore and discuss the differences in the experience of belonging among various ethnic groups (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Sanchez et al., 2005). Moreover, researchers have proposed that students' perceptions of respect for their cultural group and ethnicity may be associated with their sense of attachment or alienation to school (see Faircloth & Hamm,

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2005). The findings from the current study support that students' perceptions of respect are an important aspect related to belonging in school. Thus, culture can play an essential role in students' experience of belonging. These findings begin to flesh out the ways that culture and race may be important for some students' sense of belonging, namely in their perceptions of cultural respect from others.

One noteworthy aspect of students' perceived cultural respect should be considered within the larger societal context, especially given Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework that emphasizes the importance of considering contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In considering the current state of our society, the United States is currently under a great deal of political tension and unrest. Analysis of interview data, along with observations and anecdotal comments from adults in the school, described the heightened racial tensions that were felt among students within the school given the current shift in presidential power and the fear of the president-elects stance on immigration and diversity. For example, one participant described her peers negative comments regarding 'building a wall' in order to keep people from Hispanic backgrounds out of the country. This is consistent with a recent study conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) (2016) that explored the impact of the 2016 election on schools across the nation. Researchers found that 80% of respondents reported an increase in anxiety among marginalized students since the November 2016 election, with 40% who have heard derogatory language aimed at immigrants, students of color, and other marginalized populations (SPLC, 2016). In addition, teachers who participated in the survey and worked in diverse schools reported that the rise in tension

among students have led to a decrease in trust and a sense of community among students within the school. Researchers concluded that the election is having a crucial impact on schools across the nation, as harassment has greatly increased. In fact, 476 respondents from the survey referenced the intended derogatory phrase "build the wall" (SPLC, 2016), which is consistent with reports from at least one participant in the current study. It is evident that national issues have filtered into the schools and are affecting students and potentially their sense of belonging in school. The connection between student's desire to be respected for their race and culture, particularly in light of national political unrest in the new presidential era, has important implications for research and practice as described below.

In addition, participants in Factor Three placed a strong emphasis on their relationship with adults as they saw adults as a source of support. This is consistent with other researcher reports that students' relationships with adults in the school are important factors related to sense of belonging (e.g. Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Sanders & Munford, 2016; Tillery et al., 2013). The current findings not only support the importance of adults in the school setting, but provides enhanced clarity into the aspects of adult relationships that are important specifically for urban students sense of belonging. For instance, in contrast to Factor One, participants in this factor wanted adults to understand their home lives and the challenges they faced. Several participants described how they knew that adults at school wanted the best for them. Therefore, adults knowing more about their personal circumstances provided them with a source of support. It may be that given the challenging circumstances that many urban students

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encounter at home or in their communities, adults at school provide a source of safety, consistency, and comfort that is an important aspect to feeling like they belonging in school.

In addition to the unique viewpoints of each factor, it is important to note the commonality across all three factors, specifically in relation to student safety, which is an affective dimension of belonging. Each factor ranked safety as an important characteristic of belonging, despite the other distinguishing features. This confirms reports from previous researchers that found school environments that foster safety and care among students are important components related to student belonging (Cemalciar, 2010; Ma, 2003). In the current study, participants' descriptions of safety ranged from bullying and violence to school wide perceptions of safety. Some participants described the desire to feel safe from bullying and peer aggression, as several different participants shared experiences where they were bullied or witnessed fights or violence. Other participants described the unrest in school during 'lock downs', an occurrence where everyone in the school is required to get inside the nearest classroom. Teachers are required to lock their doors, keep students away from any line of sight of the door, and turn off the lights in the room, which is not an uncommon occurrence within schools in today's society. Moreover, a number of researchers have found that between 50% and 96% of youth in urban settings have witnessed some type of violence within the community such as seeing a shooting, witnessing an assault, or hearing a gunshot (see Zimmerman & Messner, 2013). Thus, urban students' desire to feel safe in school is particularly striking given the community chaos that many urban students face. This suggests that providing a

safe environment in school is particularly important for students who live in urban settings.

It is evident that urban students provide unique and important perspectives of belonging that are dynamically interrelated with contextual factors, both within and outside of the school setting. Therefore, the current findings support the conceptual framework that was a foundational component of this study. Specifically, the inclusion of familial dimensions of belonging was an important aspect of this research that was guided by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Although the interplay between home life and school was found to play an important role across all three factors, albeit in different ways, it was interesting to note that family communication with the school and parents/school staff helping each other were less important across all three factors. Considering the bioecological model of Person, Process, Context, Time, it may be that this was influenced by students' age (Time) as early adolescents, as they are becoming more independent and beginning to develop their own identity (Anderman, 2003; Arhar & Kromley, 1993). As a result, having parents communicate with school staff or be directly involved in the school setting, may be less important for students sense of belonging in the middle school years. Although a number of participants described their desire to talk to their parents about school issues or have parents help them when needed, they seemed to feel that direct communication was not necessary for them to feel like they are a part of the school setting. This is consistent with researchers' findings that indirect forms of parental involvement may be more influential than direct forms of parent engagement for students during the middle school years given

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their developmental level. Hill and Tyson (2009) conducted a meta-analytic analysis that explored the relationships between parental involvement and academic achievement among middle school students. Authors found differences in the strength of relationship between subcategories of parental involvement and students' achievement. For example, they found that academic socialization (a more indirect form of parental involvement in which the parent conveys a value for education, links academics to current events, and plans for the future with children) had the strongest positive relationship with achievement compared to school-based involvement (e.g., communication between parents and teachers, volunteering at school) and home-based involvement (e.g., engaging in educational activities at home, monitoring homework). Hill and Tyson (2009) concluded that this type of parental influence in education is consistent with the developmental level of middle school students, as it fosters their internal motivation and allows them to make somewhat autonomous decisions about their educational pursuits. Similarly, it may be that direct parental involvement in the form of communication and support between parents and teachers in the school setting is not as important to students' sense of belonging given their developmental level as early adolescents. It would be interesting to consider if this may be different at an earlier age and if parent communication specifically is more important for belonging at the elementary age when students are at an earlier developmental stage and are less independent.

In addition, some students reported that they felt communication was unimportant because it didn't directly affect them or their experience was in regards to negative communication about their poor behavior or low grades. Thus, specifically examining

consistent positive communication between home and school (i.e. positive phone calls about students success) may be an important aspect to consider in future studies to see if supportive connections by school staff makes a difference in student's experience of belonging in school, as opposed to communication in a general sense.

Tudge et al. (2009) stated that the purpose of using a theoretical framework is to explore connections and provide awareness that may lead to uncovering new connections. Indeed, findings from this study have enhanced our understanding of the importance of including cultural aspects of belonging, specifically those related to student's race and culture among urban students. In addition, the interplay of affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions of belonging that were revealed within each individual factor speaks to the importance of conceptualizing belonging as a multidimensional construct, especially among urban students who face a myriad of contextual challenges. Furthermore, consideration of context should be not only in relation to geographic area (i.e. metro location), but also in the larger context of society and culture. As previously described, it is important to consider the larger culture and political events or societal beliefs that may be influencing student's experience of belonging in school.

Characteristics that were found to be important across all three factors confirmed the complexity of belonging and the need to consider the dynamic inter-relations between Process, Person, Context, and Time that define urban students' unique viewpoints. For example, this included process components of various peer and adult relationships that were important to some viewpoints, person characteristics of race and self esteem (feeling good about themselves), and contextual characteristics that not only included the

influence of the home and school (mesosystem), but also the macrosystem of the nations political tensions. These aspects all interrelate during the critical time period of student's development during the early adolescent years. It is therefore important to utilize conceptual frameworks that expand our exploration of the complex and multidimensional factors that influence student's perspectives of belonging in school.

Implications

The findings from the current study have important implications for research, practice, and counselor education. Implications for each are discussed below.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from the current study support the nature of belonging as a multidimensional and complex construct (Nichols, 2010). This is especially true of urban students who face a variety of challenges in the home and community contexts (e.g., Berliner, 2006; Lee, 2010). Given the importance of the interplay between Process, Person, Context, and Time, researchers should utilize conceptual frameworks that lend to expanded exploration of the various dimensions of belonging in order to enhance our understanding of the constructs' complexity. The current study took a small step forward in clarifying our understanding of what belonging means to urban middle school students, especially the importance of considering contextual and cultural dimensions of belonging that may be important for students of color and students of low socioeconomic backgrounds in urban settings. Unfortunately, there are significantly fewer studies that take a more open-ended approach and flesh out the complexities of belonging among this group of students. Future research could benefit from taking a step back from one-

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dimensional approaches and surveys of belonging that are characteristic of many deductive studies, and take an inductive approach to enhance our foundation and understanding of what belonging means to students. This could include qualitative exploration among different levels of urban students (including elementary students) in different types of schools (e.g. alternative programs) in order to identify school organizational variables that may be important components of urban students' conceptualizations of belonging in school. The current study focused on aspects of the school that school staff could directly influence, however, it did not include school organizational variables that may have been important for students and their experience of belonging. Given that organizational factors have been found to relate to belonging (see Osterman, 2000; Nichols, 2010), better understanding of how these variables fit into urban students' unique conceptualizations is an important direction for future research.

In addition, studies that include not only students' perspectives but integrate perspectives of school staff, peers, and family members would provide a more thorough and complete picture of how belonging plays out for students and the nuances that may be involved in their individual circumstances, experiences, and relationships with others. As we continue to better understand the nuances of belonging, additional deductive research could build off of that foundation as researchers begin to develop more multidimensional measures of belonging as Nichols et al. (2009) suggested. These multidimensional instruments could then improve our understanding of the connections between various dimensions of belonging and school related outcomes, providing a more complete and accurate picture of possible linkages.

Additionally, future research should delve into the cultural dimensions of belonging that are rarely discussed in the current literature in order to explore how various elements of diversity may influence students' perceptions of belonging (e.g., ethnicities, immigration status, sexual orientation). Taking a culturally responsive lens to the concept of belonging in school, along with conceptual frameworks that encourage a multidimensional and contextual approach, will enhance our understanding of how belonging plays out for different groups of students. For example, in considering Latino families it would be beneficial to explore the cultural values of *familismo* or *respeto* (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013) in relation to students' sense of belonging in school.

Finally, given the unique time period of political unrest that is currently shaping our society, this is an opportune and crucial time for researchers to better understand the connection between macro-culture and student's experiences in school. This is particularly salient in relation to students' perceptions of cultural respect, sense of belonging, and experiences in the school setting that may be influenced by the political changes in our nation. Since schools are experiencing an increase in tensions, racial harassment, division, and targeting among students (SPLC, 2016), it is essential to better understand how these factors influence students' experience of belonging. Therefore, future research can explore the ways in which student's perceptions of national events and political unrest influence their interactions with others and perceptions of belonging in school.

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors play a critical role in fostering belonging for students as they are key adults in young adolescents lives that can shape their positive experiences and provide a unique source of support. Given the importance of safety that was found across all three factors, school counselors can actively promote safety awareness as part of their school counseling program. Interventions such as anti-bullying programs, mindfulness techniques, interpersonal violence prevention, teaching prevention skills, and safety planning can be important leadership roles for school counselors to foster a sense of safety among students and staff. In many schools across the country, lock downs, lock-ins, the use of drug-sniffing dogs, and other events may cause fear among students, which may impact their sense of belonging in school. School counselors can take a proactive role in providing resources and support for students.

In addition, given the current state of political unrest and heightened racial tensions, school counselors should take an active role in social advocacy and promoting respect among both students and staff. One step might be to incorporate diversity training and awareness into the counseling core curriculum. School counselors can also actively review school data and implement small group action plans to identify students who may have a history of aggression, violence, or bullying and provide them with counseling and skill training. Counselors also have the opportunity to provide students with a safe space to share their frustrations, concerns, or fears given the current political changes. By opening the dialogue and allowing students a safe space to have such conversations, it may provide them an avenue to discuss their fears and hurts, while

simultaneously validating their desire for respect. School counselors can also provide school staff with training and resources on how to address these topics and conversations with students in order to influence change at a system level.

The current findings also have significant implications for school counselors who work in urban schools. Given the unique perspectives on belonging that each factor represents, it is important for counselors to consider the contextual factors that may play a role in students' viewpoints of belonging in school. Given that students have different perspectives and experiences, it is important to consider the contextual factors that may play a significant role in whether or not they experience school as a place where they feel like they belong. The findings from the current study support that students experience belonging in different ways, particularly across the Affective, Behavioral, and Familial dimensions. Therefore, interventions need to be strategic in order to address various student needs. In other words, one size does not fit all in regards to promoting belonging for students. For example, students who feel more connected to the academic culture may benefit from interventions that meet their academic needs and support them on an academic level. For example, the implementation of academic groups, study groups, tutoring programs, or opportunities that foster academic interests and skills, may be beneficial for these students. In contrast, students who experience belonging by connection with others may benefit from interventions that foster social connection with others in the school community. This might include mentoring programs (peer-peer or teacher-student), social skills groups, school-wide social events (e.g. festivals, celebrations), or grade level assemblies that emphasize students' membership as part of

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their grade level 'family'. Finally, students who experience belonging based on cultural respect and adult support may benefit from the interventions described previously that are proactive in promoting cultural respect among students and staff. This might include training staff on diversity, equity, and culturally responsive teaching strategies, developing school-wide prevention programs that teach students respect and inclusion (e.g., classroom guidance lessons, school-wide assemblies), and shifting the school culture to celebrate, as opposed to tolerate, diversity. In order to work towards shifting a school culture to celebrate diversity, the school counselor might advocate to allow space and time for students to share aspects of their culture, invite families to share with students about their backgrounds, develop school-wide festivals that celebrate cultural diversity, or identify and celebrate various holidays or influential people from diverse backgrounds (e.g., César E. Chávez).

In addition, interventions that foster supportive relationships between students and staff will be beneficial for these students such as teacher-student mentoring programs, teacher training on relationship building skills with students, and leadership groups that allow students to work alongside adults on various program activities or school processes. Overall, counselors should be proactive in identifying strengths and challenges that students face both in school and at home in order to determine what may be the most beneficial interventions to enhance students belonging to school. Connecting with students' families, conducting home visits, and getting into students communities can enhance counselors understanding of the resiliency, strengths, and unique perspectives that students in their schools hold. This can enhance rapport and provide greater insight

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into ways counselors can best support students and their connection to school. However, it is also important to evaluate existing culturally responsive practices that encourage educators to connect with student's home life and contexts, particularly in light of students who may desire separation between home and school. Home visits and other such attempts to bridge the two worlds may not be universal and should be considered with an awareness that some students may desire to maintain a separation between home and school, such as students in Factor One.

Finally, teaching school staff about the importance and various viewpoints of belonging that student's hold can be an importance step of impacting the school on a systemic level. Through training teachers and staff about the need for some students to fit into the academic culture, those who need relationships and connections, and those who desire cultural respect can help teachers better understand how to foster belonging for students. Given that adults can play an important role in students lives and their perceptions of belonging, teaching school staff the importance of building relationships and getting to know their students on an individual level can enhance their understanding of what each student needs in order to feel like they are a part of the school and belong.

Implications for Counselor Educators

Given the critical role that school counselors can play in fostering belonging among students in the school setting, counselor educators have a unique opportunity to adequately prepare and train effective school counselors. First, counselor educators can teach school counselors about the concept of belonging and the importance of belonging specifically for students. Given that sense of belonging has received less attention in

schools compared to specific and direct measures of academic achievement and success (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Osterman, 2000), teaching school counselors to understand the concept and actively promote student's belonging in school can be an important role for counselor educators. Considering the perspectives of belonging that emerged from this study, counselor educators can also teach school counseling students about the importance of taking a culturally responsive and contextual lens as they implement interventions to foster belonging among students. Teaching school counselors about the importance of considering home and community contexts, particularly among students in urban settings is critical. As school counseling students learn to take a multidimensional perspective, they can be prepared to implement more effective counseling programs that include families and communities. Additionally, teaching school counselors about their critical role as sources of safety and support for students is important. Participants in the current study mentioned various adults throughout the school that were important to them including administrators, teachers, and a number of school counselors. Thus, school counselors need to be positioned and prepared to proactively take on that role for their students.

In addition, comprehensive counseling programs are an important component of current data driven school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012). Thus, school counselors need to have the foundation and training of how to implement counseling programs that are data driven and proactive. Therefore, counselor educators can train school counselors about how to create effective interventions, action plans, and results reports, specifically that target students' sense of belonging in school. For example, providing graduate

students with a case study of a school that includes information about not only the students but contextual information about the community and school as a whole, can allow school counseling students to practice conceptualizing on a holistic level and planning belonging interventions and strategies that are evidenced based and data driven. Since belonging is often underutilized in school settings, teaching school counselors the importance of the concept and how to tie it in with the school's mission, vision, and academic objectives would be important so school counselors can gain administrator support in their belongingness interventions. In addition, raising awareness of theories and conceptual frameworks that consider contextual factors is an important component in training school counselors, especially those that will be working in urban settings. For instance, teaching students about Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework and the PPCT model can be a tool to help school counseling students take a contextual lens in conceptualizing students and schools and promote a more systemic and holistic perspective.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, results cannot be generalized to the larger population. Given the nature of Q Methodology, the goal is not to represent a population as a whole, but simply to establish the existence of particular points of view. As such, the viewpoints that will be established in the results of the current study may not be representative of urban middle school students as a whole. However, this is also an advantage of Q methodology, as it allows the researcher to identify the existing viewpoints of urban middle school

students. This may contradict potentially false preconceptions that have been established by existing aggregate statistical data or illuminate differences among population subgroups that may have been ignored by standardization (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In other words, through identifying a number of shared viewpoints among urban middle school students in the current study, insight was gained that helps us re-define current conceptualizations of belonging, taking research a critical step forward.

Secondly, participants from the current study were drawn from one school district in the Western United States. There are a number of contextual political and school organizational factors that are specific to this group of students that may have impacted their viewpoint and perspectives of belonging. While this is not problematic since generalization is not the goal of Q methodology, it should be kept in mind when interpreting results. For example, Factor One represented the largest explained variance in the current study, in which students found their sense of belonging in the academic culture of the school. A number of students reported that they viewed the school as a place were academics were important. The school site was a public magnet school located in a metro area that focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and seemed to have an academic culture that emphasized the importance of scholarship and education. This type of culture may be different in different schools. Specifically, students, particularly representing Factor One, may have a different viewpoint in schools that do not actively promote an academic or college going culture. It is therefore important to expand the current study and explore what belonging means to students in different school settings (e.g., charter schools, alternative schools). Third,

although effort was made to recruit a variety of participants in order to represent a broad range of student perspectives, there may be some viewpoints that were missed. This might include students who were unable to participate due to a lack of parental consent or student assent. Specifically, students whose parents are not actively involved, may have been less likely to sign a consent form to allow students to participate in the study. Furthermore, certain groups of students may have been less likely to assent to participate (e.g., students who are not actively involved in school or who have a lower sense of belonging). In addition, students who did not meet the inclusion criteria of having a minimum level of English language ability were also unable to participate, due to the limited resources of the researcher to accurately obtain these viewpoints. This may be a subgroup of students who have unique perspectives. Therefore, future studies would benefit from including the voices of ELL students with lower English language skills, especially considering the diversity of urban contexts where students are often English Language Learners (ELL).

Additionally, the three factors that emerged from the current study represented 35% of the explained variance. While this is considered a sound solution (Watts & Stenner, 2012), it also suggests that some viewpoints may be missing. This is especially true considering that the data from 13 students were removed from further analysis because they were individually on a separate factor, loaded onto more than one factor, or did not load onto any factor at all. This suggests that additional viewpoints exist that were unique (individual as opposed to similar to the viewpoints in the current study) or more students may be needed in the sample in order to identify others who hold a shared

viewpoints. Beyond missing viewpoints, another explanation and limitation of the current study was the exclusion of school organizational variables. The researcher focused on items that schools could actively change. Since many organizational variables (i.e., size of school, extra-curricular activities offered) are often determined by school districts and the availability of funding, these were excluded from the current study if they did not overlap with existing affective, behavioral, or familial dimensions. However, during the semi-structured interview when asked if any cards were missing some students mentioned organizational variables. For example, one student described specific aspects of the classroom that he would like to see more of in his school such as bright colors and rugs (Participant #137). This response indicates that school organizational variables may be potential aspects of belonging that are important to students.

In addition, it is important to note that the Q set items were drawn from the current concourse on belonging. This included literature and research in the social sciences and education fields, which are often adult driven. Although some Q set items were drawn from more open-ended qualitative studies that included students' understanding of belonging, the majority of the current literature is based on adult conceptions of belonging. This may have led to missing items or components of belonging that may be important to students and are yet unidentified.

Finally, factor interpretation, although structured and carefully guided, is somewhat subjective and based on the researchers unique insights and understanding. While this may be seen as a limitation, it is also argued that subjectivity is inevitable in all research studies and can never fully be removed (Peshkin, 1988; Peshkin, 2001). In

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addition, the empirical data is presented in the findings section, with corresponding factor loadings and factor arrays, for others to compare and assess their personal understanding and interpretation of the findings with that of the researcher.

Although there are a number of limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results of the current study, it is believed that the findings provide relevant and useful results for educators and researchers. Results from the proposed study have the potential to significantly contribute to the current gap in research on belonging and help elucidate urban students' perspectives of belonging. As a result, educators have a better understanding of how to implement strategies in order to increase students' sense of belonging in school.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify urban middle school students' perspectives of belonging in school. Results indicated three viewpoints that emerged from the study including: 1) Factor One: Belonging is Finding My Place in Academics, 2) Belonging is Connecting with Others 3) Belonging is Cultural Respect and Adult Support. The findings from this study help to clarify the conceptualization of belonging among urban middle school students. This can help bridge the research to practice gap by allowing school counselors to proactively structure school counseling programs to foster belonging among students, including students of color. In addition, counselor educators have the opportunity to train school counseling students in taking a contextual lens and understanding the role of promoting belonging in school. Finally, future research should build upon the current findings to continue to unpack what belonging means among

diverse student groups, particularly in light of the enhanced racial and political tensions

across the nation.

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EXPERT REVIEWER FEEDBACK SURVEY

Please read the following set of statements and provide feedback by answering the given questions. During the full research study, students will be asked to sort the final compilation of statements in order to best describe what belonging to school means to them.   As a reminder, sense of belonging is the degree of acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support students experience in the school setting. This can include three dimensions: affective, behavioral, and familial. Students will be asked to sort the final set of statements from 'most important to what belonging means to me' to 'most unimportant to what belonging means to me.'   The list currently includes 53 total statements. However, researchers recommend that a smaller set of items may be helpful when working with children in order to make the sorting task less overwhelming. Therefore, I will be asking for your feedback on areas that I might be able to reduce the list to make it more concise. Additionally, I will also be asking you if you feel I am missing an item or area that you think should be included in order to make the list as representative and thorough as possible. Please keep in mind that statements are numbered for reference, but are in no particular order.   Thank you so much for your valuable feedback!

Q1 Affective Dimension is the degree to which a student feels he/she 'fits in' to the school, is valued, respected, and cared for through connection and relations with others.   Please rank the following statements for how relevant you feel they are to the affective dimension

	Not at all relevant (1)	Somewhat irrelevant (2)	Somewhat relevant (3)	Relevant (4)
1. Feeling like I 'fit in' at school (1)	○	○	○	○
2. Teachers believing in my potential (2)	○	○	○	○
3. Others at school praising me when I'm good at something (3)	○	○	○	○
4. Teachers being interested in me (4)	○	○	○	○
5. Having at	○	○	○	○

least one teacher or other adult in this school that I feel comfortable talking to if I have a problem (5)				
6. People at this school being friendly to me (6)	○	○	○	○
7. Being treated with as much respect as other students (7)	○	○	○	○
8. Able to be myself at school (8)	○	○	○	○
9. Enjoying being at school (9)	○	○	○	○
10. Feeling proud of going to this school (10)	○	○	○	○
11. Having friends at school (11)	○	○	○	○
12. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend in school (12)	○	○	○	○
13. My ideas being valued in this school (13)	○	○	○	○
14. Feeling safe in school (14)	○	○	○	○
15. Feeling good about myself when I'm in school (15)	○	○	○	○
16. Having	○	○	○	○

	Not at all relevant (1)	Somewhat irrelevant (2)	Somewhat relevant (3)	Relevant (4)
people at my school that really know me (16)				
17. Being popular at school (17)	○	○	○	○

Q2 Do you see any overlap or redundancies in the statements in this section? If so, please indicate the numbers and provide a brief explanation.

Q3 Are there any other statements you would expect to see in this section and did not? If so, what would you add to this section that is not currently included?

Q4 Are the statements clear and understandable? If not, please indicate which statements might need to be re-worded and how you would do so.

Q5 Behavioral Dimension includes a student's actions, and is the degree to which a student is involved in school and participates in school activities. Please rank the following statements for how relevant you feel they are to the behavioral dimension.

	Not at all relevant (1)	Somewhat irrelevant (2)	Somewhat relevant (3)	Relevant (4)
1. Being included in activities at school (1)	○	○	○	○
2. Attending school (2)	○	○	○	○
3. Being a good student (3)	○	○	○	○
4. Being involved in extracurricular activities after school (for example: sports teams, clubs, neighborhood center) (4)	○	○	○	○
5. Participating in classes (5)	○	○	○	○
6. Coming to class prepared (6)	○	○	○	○
7. Working hard in school (7)	○	○	○	○
8. Fundraising to	○	○	○	○

help my school make money (8)				
9. Attending school activities (9)	○	○	○	○
10. Following the rules in school (10)	○	○	○	○
11. Being included in the school's decisions that affect me as a student (11)	○	○	○	○
12. Being involved at the center of school activities (12)	○	○	○	○
13. Having the ability to make my own decisions at my school (13)	○	○	○	○
14. Going to all of my classes during the school day (14)	○	○	○	○
15. Getting good grades in school (15)	○	○	○	○
16. Being able to work in groups in the classroom (16)	○	○	○	○
17. Being engaged in my teachers lessons (17)	○	○	○	○

Q6 Do you see any overlap or redundancies in the statements in this section? If so, please indicate the numbers and provide a brief explanation.

Q7 Are there any other statements you would expect to see in this section and did not? If so, what would you add to this section that is not currently included?

Q8 Are the statements clear and understandable? If not, please indicate which statements might need to be re-worded and how you would do so.

Q9 Familial Dimension is the student's home context and includes aspects of student's culture, parental interest in school, family interactions with the school, or parental support of the student/school.   Please rank the following statements for how relevant you feel they are to the familial dimension.

	Not at all relevant (1)	Somewhat irrelevant (2)	Somewhat relevant (3)	Relevant (4)
1. People at school respecting my religion (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍
2. Making my family proud by what I do in school (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍
3. Talking with my parents about things that are going on in school (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍
4. My race/ethnicity being respected at my school (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍
5. Having others in school who understand my first language (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍
6. Teachers including my heritage/culture during my classes (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍
7. Teachers understanding my culture (7)	❍	❍	❍	❍
8. Feeling comfortable bringing my cultural values into school (8)	❍	❍	❍	❍
9. Being in a	❍	❍	❍	❍

school that is racially diverse (9)				
10. Teachers understanding what my home life is like (10)	○	○	○	○
11. My parents being involved in my education (11)	○	○	○	○
12. My parents helping me with my homework (12)	○	○	○	○
13. Parents attending school activities (for example, social events, field trips, parent teacher conferences) (13)	○	○	○	○
14. Having a feeling that my family and adults in the school are on the same team (14)	○	○	○	○
15. My family being able to easily access the school (15)	○	○	○	○
16. The school regularly communicating with my parent/guardian (16)	○	○	○	○
17. Adults at school visiting my family at home (home	○	○	○	○

visit) (17)				
18. Adults at my school providing resources to my family (18)	○	○	○	○
19. My family having positive interactions with adults at my school (19)	○	○	○	○

Q10 Do you see any overlap or redundancies in the statements in this section? If so, please indicate the numbers and provide a brief explanation.

Q11 Are there any other statements you would expect to see in this section and did not? If so, what would you add to this section that is not currently included?

Q12 Are the statements clear and understandable? If not, please indicate which statements might need to be re-worded and how you would do so.

Q13 Do you have any additional thoughts, comments, or suggestions overall, or on any specific set of statements (Affective, Behavioral, or Familial)?

FEEDBACK INSTRUCTIONS TO EXPERT REVIEWERS

Dear _____,

Thank you so much again for agreeing to be one of my subject matter experts! Below you will find a link to an electronic survey that should take between 15-30 minutes to complete. If you are able and willing to complete the survey, my goal is to receive expert feedback by **Monday, July 11th.**

As you will see, the survey includes my initial list of 53 statements regarding belonging that were compiled from an extensive review of the research. You will see three dimensions of belonging, with a number of statements listed within each dimension. These statements represent aspects of belonging that may be important to students. **The research question for the full study will be: What are urban middle school student's perspectives of belonging in school?**

Sense of belonging is the degree of acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support students experience in the school setting. This can include three categories including affective, behavioral, and familial dimensions.
·   **Affective dimension** is the degree to which a student feels he/she 'fits in' to the school, is valued, respected, and cared for through connection and relations with others.
·   **Behavioral dimension** includes a student's actions, and is the degree to which a student is involved in school and participates in school activities.
·   **Familial dimension** is the student's home context and includes aspects of student's culture, parental interest in school, family interactions with the school, or parental support of the student/school.

I will ask you to provide feedback by completing the survey to obtain your insight on the clarity of wording, thoroughness of statements, and any redundancies you see in each section. Your feedback will inform the selection of the final set of statements. These statements will then be placed on cards and students will be asked to rank order the cards according to their perspective of what belonging means to them.

If you have any questions, or need further clarity, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you so much again for your valuable input and time! Below is the link to the survey.
https://uncg.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6KBwkE0F7KqspMN

Sincerely,

Jaimie Stickl, MA, ACS, NCC, LPC
Third-Year Doctoral Student
Counseling and Educational Development
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

APPENDIX C

INITIAL REFINED Q SET AFTER EXPERT REVIEW

No.	Statement	Dimension
1	Participating in classes	B
2	My family having positive interactions with adults at my school	F
3	Teachers understanding my culture	F
4	Feeling comfortable bringing my cultural values into school	F
5	Feeling like I am able to be myself at school	A
6	Being involved in extracurricular school activities (for example: sports teams, clubs, neighborhood center)	B
7	Feeling safe in school	A
8	Getting good grades in school	B
9	Being included in the school's decisions that affect me as a student	B
10	People at school respecting my religion	F
11	Attending school activities (for example: School dances, festivals, school plays)	B
12	Parents/guardians attending school activities (for example: social events, fieldtrips, parent teacher conferences)	F
13	Having people at my school that really know me	A
14	Feeling good about myself when I'm in school	A
15	Following the rules in school	B
16	Attending school	B
17	Having a feeling that my family and adults in the school are on the same team	F
18	People at this school being friendly to me	A
19	Enjoying being at school	A
20	Regular communication between people at my school and my parents/guardians	F
21	Working hard in school	B
22	Feeling like my ideas are valued in this school	A
23	Feeling like I 'fit in' at school	A
24	Teachers believing in my potential	A
25	Making my family proud by what I do in school	F
26	Feeling like my teachers understand what my home life is like	F
27	Working with a positive attitude in school	B
28	Talking with my parents/guardians about things that are going on in school	F
29	Being treated with as much respect as other students	A
30	Others at school praising me when I'm good at something	A
31	Feeling like my race/ethnicity is being respected at my school	F
32	Having the ability to make my own decisions at my school	B
33	Having friends at school	A
34	Feeling comfortable talking to at least one teacher or other adult in this school if I have a problem	A
35	My family being able to easily access the school	F
36	Coming to class prepared	B
37	Teachers being interested in me	A

Note. A: Affective; B: Behavioral; F: Familial

APPENDIX D

PILOT STUDY

The researcher conducted a pilot study in order to test the research materials and procedures of the proposed study to make any necessary modifications or alterations before implementing the full study. The purpose of the pilot study was: a) to refine and finalize the Q set, b) to examine the clarity of the instructions and procedures for participants during the Q sort process, c) to assess the amount of time needed to collect the data.

The pilot phase of the study was guided by a structure suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012). After subject experts review the initial Q sample in order to help refine the initial list, the researcher can then pilot the Q sample and Q-Sort procedures with a lay-person in order to obtain additional feedback and solidify the final Q set and process. As a result, the pilot phase for the current study included testing the refined Q set and Q sort procedures with middle school students in order to obtain their feedback regarding the Q set and Q sort process.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed by the current pilot study:

Research Question 1: Are participants able to express their perspective of sense of belonging in school with the Q sample?

Research Question 1a: Are there any additional statements that should be included to represent student's point of view in the final Q sample?

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Research Question 2: How long does the data collection process take including collection of the pre-sort information, Q sort process, and post-sort interview?

Research Question 3: Are instructions and directions for the Q sort process clear and understandable for participants?

Participants

The researcher obtained IRB approval from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro for the pilot study. The researcher used convenience sampling using the researcher's network in order to recruit middle school students to participate in the pilot study. Three participants were recruited from the Western and North Eastern United States including: a) 10 year old male entering sixth grade, b) 12 year old female entering seventh grade, c) 11 year old female entering seventh grade. The researcher initially contacted the participant's parent/guardian via phone in order to obtain consent for their child to participate in the pilot study, which can be found at the end of this appendix. Once verbal parental consent was obtained, the researcher asked for student's verbal assent by asking to speak with the student directly or if the student was more comfortable, to talk with his/her parent/guardian about his/her willingness to participate. This oral script can be found at the end of this appendix. Verbal parental consent and student assent were initially obtained for all three participants and written consent was obtained once the researcher met with the participant and parents (as described below). The researcher then set up a date and time with each individual participant to engage in the piloting of the Q sort process.

Procedures

  The researcher individually met with the participant on the agreed upon date and time, and obtained written consent from the participant's parent and written assent from the participant, which can be found at the end of this appendix. Upon obtaining written consent and assent, the researcher set a timer before data collection in order to find out the required length of time for the process. The researcher began by asking the participant to complete the pre-sort information including the demographic questionnaire, which can be found at the end of this appendix. Next, the researcher provided the student with the Q sort materials including: a written copy of the condition of instruction, the refined Q sample developed obtaining feedback from subject matter experts, with 37 statements randomly numbered and printed onto individual cards, and an enlarged copy of the forced choice (or fixed) symmetrical distribution. These materials can be found at the end of this appendix.

  Once the materials were distributed, the researcher read the written instructions to the student and then verbally guided the participant through the Q sort process. This included instructions for separating the Q sample into three categorical piles and subsequently rank ordering the piles (and corresponding individual statements) onto the distribution. Once participants filled out the distribution, the researcher encouraged them to look over the entire configuration and move statements around until they felt completely satisfied with their final sort.

  The researcher then conducted the semi-structured post-sort interview, which can be found at the end of this appendix, in order to ask the participant further details about

his/her personal Q sort process and additional details regarding his/her viewpoints on belonging. After completion of the post-sort interview, the researcher stopped the timer and recorded the approximate length of the process for later analysis.

After the participant engaged in each step of the Q sort process, the researcher solicited feedback from the participant using a brief semi-structured interview, including seven questions regarding the participants experience of the process, their perspective on the Q sample, and any suggestions the participant had regarding either the Q sample or instructions for the Q sort process. The interview protocol can be found at the end of this appendix.

Data Analysis

The mean length of time for data collection including completing the pre-sort information, Q sort, and semi-structured interview process was 37 minutes, with a range from 28 minutes to 46 minutes (RQ 2). Participants varied in their process time, as some seemed to need more time to process cards and questions than others. Although this was shorter than expected, all participants were engaged throughout the card sort process and provided thorough responses to the post-sort interview. In regards to the clarity of directions (RQ 3), all participants reported that the directions were clear or mostly clear. Two participants stated that they found it most helpful when the researcher specifically discussed and explained the distribution, including the numbers on the top of the distribution (i.e. -4 to +4), when describing the card sort process. However, one participant stated that starting the sort at first was a little bit 'cloudy' because it didn't make sense in terms of what the distribution meant and what it means if you place the

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cards in the middle, left, top, or bottom. This individual suggested that it would be helpful to explain the distribution a little bit more clearly. It appears that the distribution grid at first glance can be slightly confusing to students, but after a thorough explanation, students are able to understand and complete the sort.

Additional feedback regarding clarity of instructions included participants who mentioned that the arrows at the top of the distribution were helpful when they were completing the sort and the researchers reassurance that cards can be changed or moved at any time. Additionally, two out of the three participants stated that the post-sort questions were clear and made sense. One participant reported that it was sometimes hard to think of an answer to some of the post-sort interview questions because he felt that there were a lot of meanings to each card statement so it was difficult to narrow his answers to one response. As a result, the participant suggested that the researcher validate that there may be many meanings or responses to the questions so that the participant is aware that he/she can try to summarize his/her answer rather than struggle to find one answer with all the thoughts coming to mind.

In regards to the clarity of statements, two participants reported that statement #3 "Feeling like my race/ethnicity is being respected at my school" was confusing because of the word 'ethnicity'. Although both participants expressed that they understood the card based on contextual clues, they reported that it was confusing at first. As a result, the researcher re-worded this card and took out the word ethnicity to avoid any confusion or lack of understanding. There were no other statements that multiple participants found confusing, although there were individual statements that each participant initially

struggled with. One participant reported that statement #22 "feeling like my ideas are valued in this school' was a bit confusing as they were unsure about what 'valued' meant. This participant suggested that using the word 'respected' or 'important' would be more helpful. In addition, another participant struggled with card #17 'having a feeling that my family and adults in school are on the same team.' She had trouble with the word 'team' and initially thought of a sports team. She seemed to struggle with the overall meaning of the statement. Thus, the researcher re-worded this statement to avoid any confusion surrounding 'team'. One participant also suggested that re-wording statement #2 "my family having positive interactions with adults at my school" would be helpful. She suggested re-wording 'positive' to 'good' as the word positive confused her a bit at first.

Additionally, two participants suggested that adding some examples to specific cards may help improve the clarity. One participant suggested the researcher provide examples for card #35 "my family being able to easily access the school," stating that she wasn't sure what type of access the researcher meant (i.e., website access, transportation, physical access to the building). Another participant suggested adding examples on card #3 "teachers understanding my culture" would be helpful in order to further clarify the word culture.

All participants appeared to feel that the card set adequately covered a broad range of potential topics (RQ1, RQ1a), and when asked what card they would create if they could create their own, only two participants were able to come up with an additional statement. One participant stated he would add a card that stated 'feeling comfortable talking to my friends about problems.' Another participant stated she might

add something that is related to homework assignments. She recalled an incident where she did not complete her homework and stated she would not do that again, so suggested a statement relating to doing well on homework or feeling comfortable with how much homework was assigned. Therefore, the researcher added two additional statements related to these suggestions to the final Q set in order to adequately represent student's potential viewpoints.

Additional observations made by the researcher included one participant who was unsure what was meant by the word 'discipline' on the demographic questionnaire. The researcher re-worded this question to include the explanation 'getting in trouble' in order to provide clarity and enhance student understanding. In addition, one participant struggled with the word 'extracurricular activity' so the researcher reworded this to 'school activities' on both the card statement and the demographic questionnaire.

Finally, the researcher also noted that some of the students may have started to get away from the focus on belonging as some of the post-sort interview answers seemed to initially describe things they felt are important in school in general. For example, when explaining one of the statements she ranked, one participant reported that 'attending school is important because it helps you get good grades.' Although the researcher asked clarifying questions in which the participants ultimately related their answer to belonging, it was important in the verbal explanation during the full study to clearly emphasize and delineate that the statement rankings during the card sort were in relation to the students' perceptions of belonging in school and not simply to what was important in school in general.

Results

Given the feedback from participants, along with researcher observations, a number of minor changes were made to the full study. These included slightly rewording or adding examples to statements # 2, 3, 6, 17, 22, and 35 of the pilot study Q set in accordance with participant feedback. Additionally, the researcher added two statements to the final Q set including 'feeling comfortable talking to friends in this school if I have a problem' and 'completing homework assignments,' resulting in a final Q set of 39 statements. The researcher also added a brief introduction script to the post-sort interview including a clarifying statement that validated that there may be many answers and meanings to each statement as students reflected on their process. Finally, the researcher slightly re-worded some of the statements on the demographic questionnaire in order to enhance clarity.

Overall, minor changes were made from the pilot phase to the full study. The Q sample appeared to provide an adequate breadth of statements for participants to express their views of belonging, and minor changes to the wording helped enhance clarity given student's developmental reading and vocabulary level. The time required to complete the data collection was slightly less than expected, and adding two more statements to the final Q set did not make any significant alterations to the overall time required for data collection. The time required was appropriate and attainable for a school-based setting, which often presents time constraints for student access given the need to limit disruptions to academic learning.

PILOT STUDY: PARENT RECRUITMENT ORAL SCRIPT

Hello _____,

I would like to see if you would be willing to allow your child to participate in a pilot study I am conducting as part of my counseling doctoral program at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am proposing a research study in order to explore urban middle school student's sense of belonging to school.

The research method I will be using examines the subjective perspectives of students in order to better understand what belonging means to them. In order to do this, I will be giving students a number of statements that will be printed on a set of cards. They will be asked to rank order the statements to indicate what belonging in school means to them.

The reason I am calling you is because you have a child who is, or is going to be, in grade 6, 7, or 8. Before I conduct my full study, I am doing a smaller pilot study in order to help me improve the materials I will use in the larger study. In order to do this, I would like to ask a couple of students to take part in the research process to help me determine how much time it will take to collect the data, and also to get students feedback on my research materials and the clarity of my instructions.

If you consent to this, I will set up a time with you at a location that is convenient, and walk through the steps with your student in one meeting. This would include asking them to fill out a demographic questionnaire, a belonging scale, completing a card sort, and participating in an interview regarding the process. Finally, I would conduct a follow up interview with your child to get their feedback on the process. This should take between 30-70 minutes to complete. You are welcome to observe the process if you wish, or I can work with your student individually, whatever you feel most comfortable with.

Do you have any questions for me regarding the process or what I am asking?

If you give your consent, I will also ask for your child's assent as well to make sure they are interested and willing to participate. Are they available to talk now?

Thank you for you consideration and time!

PILOT STUDY: STUDENT RECRUITMENT ORAL SCRIPT

Hello _____,

My name is Jaimie and I wanted to see if you would be interested in taking part in a research study I am doing. I am interested in learning more about what belonging (fitting in, or connecting) means to middle school students. In order to do this, I will be giving middle school students a set of cards that include a number of statements on them about different aspects of school life. I will ask students to rank order the statements to share what belonging in school means to them.

But before I start asking other students about what belonging means to them, I would like to get your feedback about the questions I ask and directions I give in order to help me make the process better when I ask other students in the future. The reason I am calling you is because you are a student who is, or is going to be, in grade 6, 7, or 8.

If you agree to do this I will set up a time and place to meet with you. During our meeting, I will ask you to fill out a short survey, complete a card sort, and ask you some questions about the process. Finally, I will ask for your advice on how to make the process easier or clearer for other students in the future. This should take about 30-70 minutes to complete, depending on how long you need.

I have just spoken with your parent/guardian who has given his/her permission for you to participate, but I also wanted to make sure you were interested in doing this as well. There is no pressure, and if you are not interested that is completely ok and I will not be upset. You can also change your mind at any time.

Do you have any questions for me about what I am asking?

Are you interested in participating?

If you do agree, we can set up a time and place that works for you and your parent/guardian.

Thank you!

PILOT STUDY: PARENT CONSENT FORM

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Pilot Study: The Need to Belong. An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Pilot Study: The Need to Belong. An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Jaimie Stickl (Doctoral Student)
Faculty Advisors: Dr. Kelly Wester

Purpose of the Study: What is this study about? This is a research project. Your child's participation is voluntary. The purpose of this pilot research study is to obtain feedback from participants about the research process that will be used in a larger study. I am interested in obtaining participant's feedback regarding the clarity of instructions and thoroughness of materials that I give them, which will then be used in a larger study.

Why are you asking my child to participate? You child is being asked to participate in this study because he/she is currently, or will be, a middle school student, in grade 6, 7, or 8.

What will you ask my child to do if I agree to let him/her be in this study? If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will be asked to meet with me during the school day. *Before participating, your child will also be given the opportunity to agree to participate in the research study, and there will be no consequences of any kind should he/she decline.* If your child assents, he/she will be asked to participate in the following steps. Given it is during the summer months, this will not take place during the school day, and will take place at a date, time, and place of your choosing. 1) Your child will be asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire providing information about his/her background (i.e. age, gender, race, academic history etc.), and complete a belonging scale in which he/she will be asked to rank how much he/she feels like he/she belongs at school. 2) Your child will be asked to complete a card sort. In order to do this, he/she will rank order a set of cards with statements on them to show what belonging means to him/her. 3) I will verbally ask him/her some questions about his/her process during a semi-structured interview. 4) I will verbally ask him/her questions about the procedures, clarity of instructions, and statements on the cards to obtain his/her feedback. I will take notes about your child's feedback for my reference to help me improve the research materials. The process should take between 30-70 minutes. You are also welcome to join your child at any point during this process if you choose to do so.

Is there any audio/video recording of my child? There will not be any audio or video recording of your child.

What are the dangers to my child? The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There is a risk that students may feel slightly uncomfortable when thinking about this topic because it may bring up negative experiences they may have had at school. Should he/she feel uncomfortable, it is his/her right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, below are some available references for counseling should your child's discomfort cause him/her to want to talk with someone about his/her experience.

Denver Child Counseling: 720-295-7766
The Child and Family Therapy Center of Denver: 720-442-2720
Compass Family Counseling: 303-295-3326

If you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact Jaimie Stickl (716-597-5920, jestickl@uncg.edu) or Dr. Kelly Wester (336-223-5312, klwester@uncg.edu). If you have any concerns about your child's rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll free at (855) 251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research? Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. By participating, your child will have the opportunity to provide information and feedback that may help improve the process and quality of a larger research study. This larger study may provide valuable benefits to educators, and the results may have implications for improving education strategies and interventions to increase student's sense of belonging in school.

Are there any benefits to *my child* as a result of participation in this research study? There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

Will we get paid for being in the study? Will it cost us anything? There are no costs to you or payments to you or your child as a result of participation in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential? All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Your student's name will only appear on the master participant list. The master participant list will be in an individual electronic file stored on a password-protected computer. This list will be permanently deleted at the completion of the pilot study, once all data has been collected. In addition, the demographic questionnaires and recorded responses from student's individual card sorts will not include student's names and hardy copy data will be kept in a locked file cabinet owned by the researcher. This data will be shredded upon completion of the pilot study. In addition, no personal identifying information will be collected or connected to your child's responses.

In addition, I will use pseudonyms in place of student's name for all electronic notes that I take regarding the feedback your child provides. No identifiable information will be included in these notes. The electronic notes will be kept in UNCG Box, a double lock system, on a password protected computer. The electronic notes are the only data from this study that may be kept for seven years, in keeping with the requirements of academic journals, after which time the data may be destroyed. In any presentations, written reports, or publications, no student will be identifiable and only overall results will be presented. After seven years, the researcher will shred all data associated with this research project. In addition, no personal identifying information will be collected or connected to your child's responses.

What if my child wants to leave the study or I want my child to leave the study? You have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate or to withdraw him or her at any time, without penalty. If your child does withdraw, it will not affect you or your child in any way. If you or your child chooses to withdraw, you may request that any data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your child's participation at any time. This could be because your child has had an unexpected reaction, has failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study? If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to allow your child to participate, this information will be provided to you.

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it or it has been read to you, you fully understand the contents of this document and consent to your child taking part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child who wishes to participate in this study described to you by Jaimie Stickl.

Name of Student: _____

Consent for child to participate, please check one:

_____Yes, I agree to have my child participate _____ No, I do not give consent for my child to participate

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____Date: _____

Printed Name of Parent Providing Consent: _____

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Pilot Study: The Need to Belong. An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
Assent for Minors 7-11 to Act as a Human Participant

Study Title: Pilot Study: The Need to Belong. An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students

My name is: Jaimie Stickl

What is this about?
I am going to be looking at connection and belonging in school with middle school students. Before I start asking other students about what belonging means to them, I would like to get your feedback about the questions I ask and directions I give in order to help me make the process better when I ask other students in the future.

Did my parents say it was ok?
Your parent(s)/guardian said it was ok for you to be in this study and have signed a form like this one. You may choose if you would like your parent or guardian to be with you during this study.

Why me?
I would like you to take part because you are, or are going to be, a middle school student in grades 6, 7, or 8.

What if I want to stop?
You do not have to say "yes", if you do not want to take part. I will not punish you if you say "no". Even if you say "yes" now and change your mind after you start doing this study, you can stop and no one will be mad at you. If you decide to stop being a part of the study at any time, you may ask that any information that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What will I have to do?
You will be asked to do four things during one visit with me. 1) Fill out a short survey giving me some information about you and your background, and rank how much you feel like you belong at school on a scale from 1 to 10. 2) Complete a card sort. In order to do this, you will be given a set of cards that have statements on them. You will order the cards from *most important* to *most unimportant* to show what belonging means to you. I will help walk you through this process and there are no right or wrong answers. 3) After sorting the cards, I will verbally ask you a couple of questions about the process and potentially any experiences that may relate to belonging in school. 4) I will ask for your feedback about the directions and statements I gave you on the cards. I will take notes about the feedback you give me. The process should take between 30-70 minutes.

Will anything bad happen to me?
Sometimes thinking about the statements on the cards or the questions I ask you after you sort the cards, might seem strange and make you feel uncomfortable/sad. If anything hurts, you are uncomfortable thinking about some of the statements on the cards, or it brings up uncomfortable thoughts about some of your experiences in school, please let me know and I will stop or do whatever I can to make you feel better. Please let me know if you would like to talk with someone at any point and we can help you connect with a counselor. Below are some numbers to call for counselors if you want to talk with someone:

Denver Child Counseling: 720-295-7766

The Child and Family Therapy Center of Denver: 720-442-2720

Compass Family Counseling: 303-295-3326

Will anything good happen to me?
There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Do I get anything for being in this study?
You do not get anything for being in this study.

What if I have questions?
You are free to ask questions at any time.

If you understand this study and want to be in it, please write your name below.

_____   _____
Signature of child   Date

Check which applies below:

☐ The child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

☐ The child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent   Date

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Pilot Study: The Need to Belong. An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
Assent for Minors 12-16 to Act as a Human Participant

Project Title: Pilot Study: The Need to Belong. An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Jaimie Stickl

WHY AM I HERE? We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. Research studies are done to find better ways of helping and understanding people or to get information about how things work. I want to learn more about connection and belonging in school with middle school students. Before I start asking other students about what belonging means to them, I would like to get your feedback about the questions I ask and directions I give in order to help me make the process better when I ask other students in the future. You are being asked to be in the study because you are, or are going to be, a middle school student in grade 6, 7, or 8. In a research study, only people who want to take part are allowed to do so.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY? If it is okay with you and you agree to join this study, you will be asked to do four things during one visit with me. 1) Fill out a short survey giving me some information about you and your background, and rank how much you feel like you belong at school on a scale from 1 to 10. 2) Complete a card sort. In order to do this, you will be given a set of cards that have statements on them. You will order the cards from *most important* to *most unimportant* to show what school belonging means to you. I will help walk you through this process and there are no right or wrong answers because I am interested in getting your thoughts. 3) After sorting the cards, I will verbally ask you a couple of questions about the process and any potentially relevant experiences related to belonging. 4) I will ask for your feedback about the directions and statements I gave you on the cards. I will take notes about your feedback to help me improve the materials I gave you.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY? You will be in this study for about 30-70 minutes, depending on how long you need. Once you are finished filling out the survey, completing the card sort, and verbally answering a few questions about the process, you will no longer be a part of this research study.

CAN ANYTHING BAD HAPPEN TO ME? Sometimes thinking about the statements on the cards or the questions I ask you after you sort the cards, might seem strange and make you feel uncomfortable/sad. If anything hurts, you are uncomfortable thinking about some of the statements on the cards, or it brings up uncomfortable thoughts about some of your experiences in school, please let me know and I will stop or do whatever I can to make you feel better. Please let me know if you would like to talk with someone at any point and we can help you connect with the person who is available. Below are some numbers you can call if you would like to talk with a counselor:

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Denver Child Counseling: 720-295-7766
The Child and Family Therapy Center of Denver: 720-442-2720
Compass Family Counseling: 303-295-3326

CAN ANYTHING GOOD HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY? There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

DO I HAVE OTHER CHOICES? You do not have to be in this study. If at any point during the study you decide that you no longer wish to participate, you will be allowed to stop without any negative consequences.

WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT TO BE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY? You do not have to be part of this project. It is up to you. You can even say okay now, but change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me. No one will be mad at you if you change your mind. If you decide to stop being a part of the study at any time, you may ask that any information that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

WHAT ABOUT MY CONFIDENTIALITY? I will do everything possible to make sure that your data and or records are kept confidential, unless disclosure is required by law. Your name will only appear on the master participant list. This list will be kept in an individual electronic file stored on a password-protected computer. This list will be permanently deleted at the completion of the pilot study, once all data has been collected. No other personal or identifying information will be collected during the pilot study (including on the survey, card sort, or interviews), and I will shred your information from the survey and card sort at the completion of the pilot study. If needed, I will use a pseudonym in place of your real name for all notes I take from the feedback you provide me. I will keep the notes I take on my computer confidential in a double lock system in the computer.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY? You will not be paid for participating in this study.

DO MY PARENTS KNOW ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY? This study has been explained to your parent/parents/guardian and they have given permission for you to be in it.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Please feel free to ask any questions that you have now, and if you have questions after you leave the room, do not hesitate to contact Jaimie Stickl (716-597-5920, jestickl@uncg.edu) or Dr. Kelly Wester (klwester@uncg.edu). You can also call the Director in the Office Research Integrity at 336-256-1482 or 855-251-2351.

ASSENT

This study has been explained to me and I am willing to be in it.

_____	_____
Student's Name (printed) and Signature	Date

Check which applies below:

☐ The child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

☐ The child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____	_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent	Date

PILOT STUDY: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill in the following questions. If you don't understand something, just let me know and I can help you.

1. Age: _____

2. Current Grade: _____

3. Race (Circle all that apply):
   • Black or African American
   • Asian American
   • White
   • Hispanic
   • American Indian
   • Alaskan Native
   • Other:_____

4. Gender (Circle):   Male   Female

5. How many people currently live in your house (including you): _____

6. How long have you attended this middle school? (circle one):
   • This is my first year
   • This is my second year
   • This is my third year
   • Other:_____

7. On your last report card, what grade did you mostly get? (circle one):
   • I mostly got 1's (A's)
   • I mostly got 2's (B's)
   • I mostly got 3's (C's)
   • I mostly got 4's (D's)

8. How often during this school year have you been asked to see a school staff member for discipline reasons (for example: dean, principal, assistant principal, advisor)? (Circle one):
   • 0 times
   • 1-2 times
   • 3-4 times
   • 5 or more times

9. How often during this school year have you met with a school staff member to help with conflict you have with friends or peers (for example: Restorative Justice Coordinator, Counselor, Social Worker)? (Circle one):
   • 0 times
   • 1-2 times
   • 3-4 times
   • 5 or more times

10. How often during this school year have you met with the social worker or counselor in your school one on one? (Circle one):
- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-4 times
- 5 or more times

11. Are you involved in any extracurricular school activities (for example: school sports team, clubs, or school based community center)? (circle one):
- Yes
- No

If you circled yes please list what activities you are involved in: _____

_____

12. How often does a member of your family usually come to school to attend an event or for another reason (for example: parent teacher conferences, meet with a teacher, fieldtrips etc.)?

- 0 times per year
- 1-2 times per year
- 3-4 times per year
- 5 or more times per year

13. How often does communication happen between your parents/guardians and adults at your school (for example: teachers, principal, counselor etc.)? (circle one):

- Never
- Sometimes, but not a lot
- A lot
- I don't know

14. Circle a number between 0-10 to show how much you enjoy going to your school:

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

I don't enjoy going to my school at all   *I really enjoy going to my school*

15. Circle a number between 0-10 to show how much you feel like you belong (fit in or are connected) to your school:

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

I don't feel like I belong at all in this school   *I really feel like I belong in this school*

PILOT STUDY: CONDITION OF INSTRUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study! I am interested in what it means to you to belong or feel connected to your school. Please feel free to ask me questions at any time if you don't understand something or are unsure about what to do.

I will help walk you through the steps of how to complete the card sort, but here is a quick overview of what you will be doing. I will give you a set of cards with statements on them. You will be asked to read each card, and rank order the statements from "*Most important to what belonging in school means to me*" to "*Most unimportant to what belonging in school means to me.*"

In this study I am interested in your point of view for what it means to belong or feel connected to your school. When completing the sort, think about your personal experience in school. Sort the following cards in order to best describe what belonging to your school means to you. There are no right or wrong answers. I am simply interested in your personal view.

PILOT STUDY: Q SET

Feeling like I 'fit in' at school 23	Having people at my school that really know me 13

Teachers believing in my potential 24	Others at school praising me when I'm good at something 30	Teachers being interested in me 37
Feeling comfortable talking to at least one teacher or other adult in this school if I have a problem 34	People at this school being friendly to me 18	Being treated with as much respect as other students 29
Attending school 16	Enjoying being at school 19	Having friends at school 33
Feeling like my ideas are valued in this school 22	Feeling safe in school 7	Feeling good about myself when I'm in school 14
Feeling like I am able to be myself at school 5	Being involved in extracurricular school activities (For example: sports teams, clubs, neighborhood center) 6	

Participating in classes 1	Working with a positive attitude in school 27	Coming to class prepared 36
Attending school activities (for example: school dances, festivals, school plays) 11	Following the rules in school 15	Being included in the school's decisions that affect me as a student 9
Having the ability to make my own decisions at my school 32	Working hard in school 21	Getting good grades in school 8
People at school respecting my religion 10	Making my family proud by what I do in school 25	Talking with my parents/guardians about things that are going on in school 28
Feeling like my race/ethnicity is being respected at my school 31	Feeling comfortable bringing my cultural values into school 4	Feeling like my teachers understand what my home life is like 26
Parents/guardians attending school activities (for example: social events, fieldtrips, parent teacher conferences) 12	Having a feeling that my family and adults in the school are on the same team 17	My family being able to easily access the school 35
My family having positive interactions with adults at my school 2	Regular communication between people at my school and my parents/guardians 20	Teachers understanding my culture 3

PILOT STUDY: FIXED DISTRIBUTION

Q Sort Worksheet

ID #_____

Most unimportant to what belonging in school means to me   **Most important to what belonging in school means to me**

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

PILOT STUDY: POST-SORT SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

I am now going to ask you a few questions about the card sort process and your experiences in school. Each statement on a card that you sorted may represent a number of meanings or experiences for you. Please feel free to take your time in answering the questions as thoroughly as possible, and feel free to explain as many thoughts, meanings, or experiences as you wish.

1. What was it like doing this activity?
　　　　a. Did anything surprise you?
　　　　b. Did anything frustrate you?
　　　　c. Do you feel good about the final sort? Why or Why not?

2. Were there any statements that you didn't understand?

3. Tell me about the card you placed in the +4 column.
　　　　a. What does that statement mean to you?
　　　　b. What is it about the statement that makes it most important to you?
　　　　c. Can you recall a specific time or event when this happened or occurred to you?

4. Tell me about the cards you placed in the +3 column.
　　　　a. What does each statement mean to you?
　　　　b. What is it about each statement that make them important to you?

5. Tell me about the card you placed in the -4 column.
　　　　a. What does that statement mean to you?
　　　　b. What is it about the statement that make it most unimportant to you?
　　　　c. Can you recall a specific time or event when this happened or occurred to you?

6. Tell me about the cards you placed in the -3 column.
　　　　a. What does each statement mean to you?
　　　　b. What is it about each statement that make them unimportant to you?

7. Can you tell me more about the cards you placed in the middle?
　　　　a. What do those statements mean to you?

8. Was there anything missing that you wish would have been on a card?
　　　　a. If you had to create your own card, what would it say and where would you have placed it in the card sort?

9. As you were sorting the cards, did any specific memory or experience that you have had in school come to mind? If so, what was it and why do you think it came to mind?

10. I see on the form you completed at the beginning you placed yourself at a *(number student circled)* to describe how much you feel like you belong in school. Can you tell me more about the experiences you have had that may have influenced you to circle this number?

11. Did you feel like you belonged at the last school you attended? Why or why not?

12. Do you think your answers would be different if you went to a different school? If so, how? If not, why not?

13. What would your advice be to the adults in the school who want to help students feel more like they belong? What could they do to help students belong?

14. Is belonging in school important to you? Why or why not?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience, or belonging in school in general that you are thinking about?

PILOT STUDY: STUDENT FEEDBACK SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. Were the directions I gave you clear?
      a. What was most helpful when I gave you instructions?
      b. What was least helpful when I gave you instructions?

2. Is there anything I could have done to make the process a little easier for you?

3. Was there anything you didn't understand?
      a. Were any directions confusing at first?
      b. Were any statements on the cards confusing? How might I re-word it to make it easier to understand?

4. Was there anything missing that you wish would have been on a card in the card sort?
      a. If you had to create your own card(s), what would it say?

5. Were there any questions I asked you after the card sort that were confusing?
      a. Was there any question you wish I would have asked you during that time?

6. I am going to be doing this process with other middle school students. Do you have any advice for me on how to make this better, easier, or more clear for them?

7. Is there anything else you are left thinking about?

APPENDIX E

Q SET CARDS

Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home is like 1	Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school 2	My family being a part of my schooling. For example: ask me about school, make sure I do my homework, go to school events 3
Adults at school care about what is going on with me 4	My family is able to connect with the school when they need or want to. For example: get into the school building, talk with a teacher 5	Having others in school who know my first language 6
Feeling like my race is respected at my school 7	Being treated with respect for who I am. For example: my race, how much money my family makes, things I like 8	Working hard in school 9
People at my school being nice to me 10	Getting good grades in school 11	Making my family proud by what I do in school 12
My parents having good contacts with adults in my school. For example: good meetings, good talks, good phone calls 13	Coming to class with what I need. For example: my pens, pencils, books, homework 14	People at my school respecting my beliefs 15
My family and adults in my school help each other 16	Being a part of the school's decisions that affect me as a student 17	Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have a problem 18

Being able to connect with other students who have the same culture as me. For example: the same background, home life, race 19	Having people at my school that really know me 20	Talking with my parents about things that are going on in school 21
Being involved in my classes. For example: raise my hand, answer questions 22	Adults at school believing in me 23	Feeling safe in school. For example: safe from fights, bullies, name calling, violence 24
Enjoying being at school 25	Feeling like I can bring my culture into school. For example: my beliefs, my background, my first language 26	Feeling good about myself when I'm in school 27
Following the rules in my school 28	Having friends at my school 29	Feeling like I 'fit in' at my school 30
Being a part of school activities. For example: sports teams, clubs, school parties, dances, school plays 31	Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I have a problem 32	Working with a good attitude in school 33
People at my school and people from my family talking often. For example: emails, phone calls 34	Feeling like I can be myself in school 35	Doing the homework that teachers give me 36
Teachers knowing what my culture is like. For example: my beliefs, my background, my first language 37	Coming to school 38	Others at school praising me when I'm good at something 39

APPENDIX F

STUDENT RECRUITMENT ORAL SCRIPT

Good Morning!

My name is Jaimie and I am a doctoral student at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am here today to see if you would be interested in taking part in a research study I am doing. I am interested in learning more about what belonging (fitting in, connecting, feeling like you are a part of school) means to YOU, as a middle school student. I am excited to get your feedback because I think belonging and feeling like you fit in at your school is so important for everyone, and especially during middle school, which is time that often has a lot going on, as I'm sure you all know! I want to get YOUR thoughts about what it means to feel like you belong in school.

The reason I am talking with your class is because you are students who are in grade 6, 7, or 8, in a school located in the city. I live here in [City Name] and I actually used to work as a school counselor with [Counselor Name]! So I am really interested in how our schools can help middle school students be successful. If you agree to talk to me, I will schedule a time during the school day to meet with you. I will ask you to complete a card sort. The card sort process looks like this: I will give you a set of cards that include a number of statements on them about different aspects of school life [hold up cards to show students]. I will ask you to rank order the statements to share what belonging in school means to them. For example, [pick a card from the deck and read the statement, explain to students that they will then decide how important that statement is to them]. Next, I will ask you some questions about the card sort process and your experiences, while voice recording your answers. Finally, I will ask you to fill out a short survey (including questions about your background and a question about how much you currently feel like you belong in school). Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential, and de-identified, so your name will not be on any of the information collected from you.

There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to get your thoughts on what belonging in school means to you as a middle school student to learn more about how teachers and school counselors can help students feel like they belong in school. I think that students may have a lot of different ideas about this, and I want to know them all! It will take about 30-45 minutes for you to complete, depending on how long you need. If you agree to participate and complete the process I just described, you will be given a coupon for free ice cream from McDonald's.

Does anyone have any questions for me? If you have any questions about my study or if you think of a question later on, you can contact me at 716-597-5920 or Jestickl@uncg.edu [write information on board]. And my information will also be on the form I will give you in a minute.

If you are interested in talking to me about belonging in your school, (and you can change your mind at any time!), I am going to pass around a form for you to take and give to your parents or guardians. In order to be a part of my study, you must have a parent or guardian read and sign the form, and return it to [name of school contact person], by Friday of this week. If you do not return the form, you will not be able to participate. I am also going to send around a sheet of paper for you to write your name, address, and parent's phone number on it, so I can follow up with them as well and answer any questions they might have. I will get this from your teacher later today.

Any other questions? Thank you so much for your time and I hope to see all of you again soon!

APPENDIX G

PARENT RECRUITMENT LETTER: ENGLISH

School of Education
Department of Counseling and Educational Development

228 Curry Building
PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336-334-3423 *Phone*   336-334-3433 *Fax*
http://www.uncg.edu/ced

All counseling degree programs are CACREP accredited

Dear _____,

My name is Jaimie Stickl and I am a doctoral student at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I wanted to talk with you about a research study that I am doing to see if you would be interested in having your child participate. The purpose of this research study is to investigate student's perspectives of belonging in order to better understand what belonging to school means to them. Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he/she is currently a middle school student, in grade 6, 7, or 8 attending [School Name].

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will be asked to meet with me during the school day at [School Name]. *Before participating, your child will also be given the opportunity to agree to participate in the research study, and there will be no consequences of any kind should they decline.* If your child assents, he/she will be asked to participate in the following steps. 1) Your child will be asked to complete a card sort. In order to do this, he/she will rank order a set of cards with statements on them to show what belonging means to him/her. 2) I will verbally ask him/her some questions about his/her process during a semi-structured interview. (Your child will be audio recorded only during the semi-structured interview portion of the study). 3) Your child will be asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire providing information about his/her background (i.e. age, gender, race, academic history etc.) and level of belonging in school. The process should take between 30-45 minutes. If your child agrees to participate, he/she will be given a coupon for a free ice cream from McDonald's for his/her cooperation.

Your child's participation is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate or to withdraw him or her at any time, without penalty. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

If you agree to your child participating, please read and sign the consent form I have left with this note and return it to school. If you have questions or want more information please contact Jaimie Stickl: 716-597-5920 (jestickl@uncg.edu).

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,
Jaimie Stickl
Doctoral Student, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

APPENDIX H

PARENT RECRUITMENT LETTER: SPANISH

THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

School of Education
Department of Counseling and Educational Development

228 Curry Building
PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336-334-3423 *Phone*   336-334-3433 *Fax*
http://www.uncg.edu/ced

All counseling degree programs are CACREP accredited

[Name]_____,

Me llamo Jaimie Stickl. Soy la candidata al doctorado en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Greensboro.

Me gustaría compartir con ustedes información acerca de un estudio de investigación que estoy realizando para saber si usted estaría interesado en que su hijo participe. El propósito de este estudio es investigar las perspectivas de estudiantes sobre la pertenencia para mejor entender el significado de la pertenencia en la escuela para ellos. Pido que su hijo/hija participe porque es estudiante en el sexto, séptimo u octavo grado que asiste [School Name].

Si usted accede que su hijo/hija participe en este estudio, pediré que se reúna conmigo durante el día escolar [School Name]. *Antes de participar, su hijo/hija tendrá la oportunidad de aceptar participar en el estudio, y no habrá consecuencias ni positivas ni negativas si declina.* Si su hijo/hija acepta, pediré que participe en los pasos siguientes: 1) Ordenar unas tarjetas. Para hacer eso, ordenará en orden de rango tarjetas con afirmaciones para mostrar qué significa "pertenecer" para él/ella. 2) Le preguntaré oralmente un par de preguntas sobre su proceso durante una entrevista semi-estructurada. (Su hijo/hija será grabado por audio sólo durante la entrevista semi-estructurada). 3) Rellenar una encuesta corta con información sobre él/ella y su vida (es decir, edad, sexo, raza, historia académica, etc.) y el nivel de la pertenencia en la escuela. El proceso debe durar 30-45 minutos. Si su hijo está de acuerdo en participar en este estudio, en compensación él/ella recibirá un cupón para obtener un helado gratis de McDonalds.

La participación de su hijo/hija es voluntaria. Usted tiene el derecho a negar que su hijo/hija participe o a sacar a su hijo/hija en cualquier momento, sin consecuencia. Toda información obtenida en este estudio es estrictamente confidencial a menos que la ley exija la revelación.

Si usted accede que su hijo/hija participe, por favor, lea y firme el formulario de consentimiento que esta adjunto y devuélvalo a la escuela. Si usted tiene preguntas o quiere más información, por favor contacte Jaimie Stickl: 716-597-5920 (jestickl@uncg.edu).

Muchas Gracias!

Jaimie Stickl
candidata al doctorado
La Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Greensboro

PARENT RECRUITMENT ORAL SCRIPT

Parent Recruitment
Oral Script

Hello _____,

My name is Jaimie Stickl and I am a doctoral student at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I would like to see if you would be willing to allow your child to participate in a research study I am doing. The reason I am contacting you is because I shared some information about my study to your child's class at school and your student indicated that they may be interested in participating. I wanted to introduce myself and give you some more information about the study as well, so you have any questions you may have answered. I am interested in learning more about what belonging (fitting in or feeling connected) means to your child, as a middle school student. I am interested in learning more about your child's viewpoints, because researchers have found that belonging to school is related to positive outcomes in school, especially for middle school students. Therefore, obtaining your child's view on what belonging means to them may help educators better understand how to help students belong in school.

Your child is eligible to participate because they are a student who is currently in grade 6, 7, or 8, in a school that is located in an urban area. I understand that the term 'urban' can be a loaded term, however, I would like you to know that I am not coming in with any pre-formed stereotypes or ideas about what 'urban' means, I am simply defining urban to mean the specific location of the school, which is in a large city. If you agree to allow your child to talk to me, and they agree to talk to me as well, I will schedule a time during the school day to meet with your child. I will work with the teachers and staff to find a time that does not significantly interrupt his/her learning. I will ask your child to complete a card sort in which they rank order a set of statements related to belonging, to show what belonging in school means to them. Next, I will ask him/her some questions about the card sort process and his/her experiences about belonging in school, while voice recording the answers. Finally, I will ask your child to fill out a short survey (including a demographic form asking questions about his/her background and current level of belonging in school). This should take about 30-45 minutes to complete, depending on how long your child needs. Every effort will be made to keep your child's information confidential, and de-identified. In other words, his/her name will not be on any of the information collected from him/her to protect his/her identity. If your child agrees to talk with me and complete the process I just described, he/she will be given a coupon for a free ice cream from McDonald's.

Please know that you or your child will have the right to change his/her mind about agreeing to participate, or can choose to stop talking to me at any time. Your child was given a consent form to take home with them, that includes more detailed information as well. If you give your permission, I will also ask for your child's permission as well to make sure they are still interested and willing to participate.

Do you have any questions for me regarding the process or what I am asking?
If you agree to allow your child to participate and talk with me, you can sign the form and get it back to me directly, or return it to the school to [school contact]. I am also available to conduct a home visit to provide you with additional details regarding the study, if you are interested, and to make sure that any questions you may have are answered. If you would feel more comfortable talking with me in person, I can stop by and answer any other questions you may have.

If you have any further questions or concerns, my contact information as well as my faculty advisors information is on the consent form. Please feel free to contact me at any point. Thank you for you consideration and time!

APPENDIX J

PARENT CONSENT FORM: ENGLISH

School of Education
Department of Counseling and Educational Development

CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: The Need to Belong: An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Jaimie Stickl (Doctoral Candidate)
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kelly Wester

Purpose of the Study: What is this study about? This is a research project. Your child's participation is voluntary. The purpose of this research study is to investigate student's perspectives of belonging in order to better understand what belonging to school means to them.

Why are you asking my child to participate? You child is being asked to participate in this study because he/she is currently a middle school student, in grade 6, 7, or 8 attending [School Name] (a middle school in a large city).

What will you ask my child to do if I agree to let him/her be in this study? If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will be asked to meet with me during the school day. *Before participating, your child will also be given the opportunity to agree to participate in the research study, and there will be no consequences of any kind should they decline.* If your child assents, he/she will be asked to participate in the following steps. 1) Your child will be asked to complete a card sort. In order to do this, he/she will rank order a set of cards with statements on them to show what belonging means to him/her. 2) I will verbally ask him/her some questions about his/her process during a semi-structured interview. 3) Your child will be asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire providing information about his/her background (i.e., age, gender, race, academic history etc.) and level of belonging to school. The process should take between 30-45 minutes. In addition, if you consent to allow your child to participate, I will request the following information from the district about your child: the student's level of English proficiency, if applicable.

Is there any audio/video recording of my child? Your child will be audio recorded only during the semi-structured interview portion of the study. During this semi-structured interview, I will verbally ask your child about his/her thought process during the card sort. I

will transcribe the interview later on, and use it during data analysis to better understand what belonging means to your child. Because your child's voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, confidentiality for things said on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the dangers to my child? The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There is a risk that students may feel slightly uncomfortable when thinking about this topic because it may bring up negative experiences they may have had at school. Should he/she feel uncomfortable, it is his/her right to withdraw from the study at any time. There is also a risk that your child may miss part of a class to be in this study. The researcher will work with your child's school to attempt to administer the study during a time that will not interfere with your child's Math, Science, or English class to minimize time away from core academic classes. In addition, the researcher will work with the school social worker to have someone available should your child's discomfort cause him/her to want to talk with someone about his/her experience.

If you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact Jaimie Stickl (716-597-5920, jestickl@uncg.edu), or Dr. Kelly Wester (336-223-5312, klwester@uncg.edu). If you have any concerns about your child's rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll free at (855) 251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research? Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. By participating, your child will have the opportunity to provide information that may provide valuable benefits to educators. The results of this study may have implications for improving education strategies and interventions to increase student's sense of belonging in school.

Are there any benefits to *my child* as a result of participation in this research study? There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. Indirect benefits may come from how the information from this project may be used to impact education services at your school.

Will we get paid for being in the study? Will it cost us anything? There are no costs to you or your child as a result of participation in this study. Your child will be given a coupon for a free ice cream at McDonald's for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential? All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Overall the findings of this study as a whole will be shared with the school and the [School District Name], but individual student answers will not be disclosed and the researcher will make every effort to protect your child's privacy. Your student's name will only appear on the master participant list. The master participant list will be in an individual electronic file stored on a password-protected computer. This list will be kept in a separate facility from other research study data in order

to increase confidentiality. In addition, the demographic questionnaires and recorded responses from student's individual card sorts will not include student's names and will be imported into an electronic data file. These files will be stored in The University of North Carolina (UNCG) Box. This is a double lock system. Hard copy data will be kept in a locked file cabinet owned by the researcher. Data from this study may be kept for seven years, in keeping with the requirements of academic journals, after which time the identifiable data may be destroyed. In any presentations, written reports, or publications, no student will be identifiable and only group results will be presented. After seven years, the researcher will destroy all identifiable data associated with this research project. In addition, no personal identifying information will be collected or connected to your child's responses. In addition, I will use pseudonyms in place of student's name for all transcriptions of the semi-structured interview. Audio files and transcriptions will be uploaded and stored in the UNCG Box, and original audio files will then be deleted from the recorder.

What if my child wants to leave the study or I want my child to leave the study? You have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate or to withdraw him or her at any time, without penalty. Choosing not to participate or withdraw from the study will not effect your relationship or your child's relationship with the school. If you or your child chooses to withdraw, you may request that any data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your child's participation at any time. This could be because your child has had an unexpected reaction, has failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study? If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to allow your child to participate, this information will be provided to you.

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it or it has been read to you, you fully understand the contents of this document and consent to your child taking part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child who wishes to participate in this study described to you by Jaimie Stickl.

Name of Student: _____   **Consent for child to participate, please check one:**

_____Yes, I agree to have my child participate _____ No, I do not give consent for my child to participate

Consent to obtain the following information about your child: level of English proficiency, if applicable.

_____Yes, I agree   _____ No, I do not give consent

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____Date: _____

Printed Name of Parent Providing Consent:_____

APPENDIX K

PARENT CONSENT FORM: SPANISH

THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

School of Education
Department of Counseling and Educational Development

EL CONSENTIMIENTO PARA LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE MENORES COMO PARTICIPANTE
HUMANO

Título del proyecto: La necesidad de pertenecer: un análisis de pertenencia entre estudiantes en escuelas secundarias urbanas.

Investigadora principal: Jaimie Stickl (candidata al doctorado)

Consejeras de la facultad: Dra. Kelly Wester.

El propósito del estudio: ¿De qué trata el estudio? Éste es un proyecto de investigación. La participación de su hijo/hija es voluntaria. El propósito de este estudio es investigar las perspectivas de estudiantes sobre la pertenencia para mejor entender el significado de la pertenencia en la escuela para ellos.

¿Por qué pide usted que mi hijo/hija participe? Pido que su hijo/hija participe porque es estudiante en el sexto, séptimo u octavo grado que asiste a STEM Launch (una escuela secundaria en una ciudad grande).

¿Qué pedirá que mi hijo/hija haga si dejo que participe en este estudio? Si usted accede que su hijo/hija participe en este estudio, pediré que se reúna conmigo durante el día escolar. *Antes de participar, su hijo/hija tendrá la oportunidad de aceptar participar en el estudio, y no habrá consecuencias ni positivas ni negativas si declina.* Si su hijo/hija acepta, pediré que participe en los pasos siguientes: 1) Ordenar unas tarjetas. Para hacer eso, ordenará en orden de rango tarjetas con afirmaciones para mostrar qué significa "pertenecer" para él/ella. 2) Le preguntaré oralmente un par de preguntas sobre su proceso durante una entrevista semi-estructurada. 3) Rellenar una encuesta corta con información sobre él/ella y su vida (es decir, edad, sexo, raza, historia académica, etc.) y el nivel de la pertenencia en la escuela. El proceso debe durar 30-45 minutos. Además, si usted da su consentimiento en la participación de su hijo, solicitare la siguiente información al distrito sobre su hijo, esos datos son: el nivel de conocimientos de inglés del alumno, si es pertinente.

¿Habrá grabación de audio o vídeo de mi hijo/hija? Su hijo/hija será grabado por audio sólo durante la entrevista semi-estructurada. Durante la entrevista, le preguntaré oralmente a su hijo/hija sobre su proceso de ordenar las tarjetas. Transcribiré la entrevista después y la utilizaré en análisis para mejor entender qué significa "pertenencia" para su hijo/hija. Es posible que la voz de su hijo/hija sea identificado por los que escuchen a la grabación. Por lo tanto, no se puede garantizar la confidencialidad de la grabación, aunque la investigadora intentará limitar acceso a la grabación según las medidas descritas más abajo.

¿Qué peligros representa para mi hijo/hija? La Junta de Revisión Institucional en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Greensboro ha determinado que participar en este estudio representa riesgo mínimo para participantes. Hay un riesgo que los estudiantes pueden sentir un poco incómodos pensando del tema porque puede sacar a relucir experiencias negativas que han tenido en la escuela. Si su hijo/hija siente incómodo/a, es su derecho retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento. También hay un riesgo que su hijo/hija faltará parte de una clase por participar en este estudio. La investigadora trabajará con la escuela para administrar este estudio durante una hora que no interfiera con sus clases de matemáticas, ciencia ni

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inglés para minimizar tiempo fuera de las clases centrales. Además, la investigadora trabajará con el trabajador social de la escuela para tener alguien disponible si su inquietud causa que quiere hablar con alguien sobre su experiencia.

Si usted tiene preguntas, quiere más información o tiene sugerencias, por favor contacte Jaimie Stickle (716-597-5920, jestickl@uncg.edu), o Dra. Kelly Wester (336-223-5312, klwester@uncg.edu). Si tiene alguna preocupación sobre los derechos de su hijo/hija, cómo es tratado/a, preocupaciones o quejas sobre este proyecto o beneficios o riesgos asociados con participar en este estudio, por favor contacte el Oficio de Integridad de Investigación sin costa en (855) 251-2351.

¿Hay beneficios a la sociedad como resultado de la participación de mi hijo/hija en esta investigación? Investigación es diseñada para beneficiar la sociedad a través de ganar conocimientos nuevos. En participar, su hijo/hija tendrá la oportunidad de proveer información que puede dar beneficios valiosos a educadores. Los resultados del estudio pueden tener implicaciones para mejorar estrategias de educación y intervenciones para aumentar el sentido de pertenencia para estudiantes en escuelas.

¿Hay beneficios para *mi hijo/hija* como resultado de participar en esta investigación? No hay beneficios directos a los participantes en este estudio. Beneficios indirectos pueden resultar del uso de la información de este proyecto y su impacto en las servicios de educación en su escuela.

¿Seremos pagado por participar en el estudio? ¿Nos costará algo? No hay costos para usted ni a su hijo/hija por participar en este estudio. Si su hijo está de acuerdo en participar en este estudio, en compensación él/ella recibirá un cupón para obtener un helado gratis de McDonalds.

¿Cómo mantendrá que mi información sea confidencial? Toda información obtenida en este estudio es estrictamente confidencial a menos que la ley exija la revelación. Los datos del estudio como un todo serán compartidos con la escuela y el distrito "Adams 12 Five Star Schools". Las respuestas de estudiantes individuales no serán reveladas, y la investigadora hará cualquier esfuerzo para proteger la privacidad de su hijo/hija. El nombre de su estudiante sólo aparecerá en la lista maestra de participantes. La lista maestra de participantes estará en un archivo electrónico individual almacenado en una computadora protegida por contraseña. La lista estará en un lugar separada de los otros datos del estudio para aumentar la confidencialidad. Además, el cuestionario demográfico y las respuestas de ordenar las tarjetas no incluirán los nombres de los estudiantes y serán importados a un archivo electrónico. Estos archivos serán guardados en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte (UNCG) Box. Es un sistema de cierre doble. La copia impresa de los datas será guardado en un archivador cerrado de la investigadora. Los datos de este estudio pueden ser guardados por siete años, según los requisitos de revistas académicas, después de que se puede destruir los datos identificable. En todos presentaciones, informes escritos o publicaciones, los estudiantes no serán identificables y sólo los resultados del grupo serán presentados. Después de siente años, la investigadora triturará todos los datos identificable asociados con esta investigación. Además, información identificativa personal no será ni colectada ni conectada con las respuestas de su hijo/hija.También utilizaré seudónimos en lugar de los nombres de los estudiantes para todas las transcripciones de la entrevista semi-estructurada. Los archivos de audio y los las transcripciones serán subidos a y guardados en UNCG Box. Los archivos de audio originales serán borrados de la grabadora.

¿Qué pasa si mi hijo/hija quiere dejar el estudio o quiero que mi hijo/hija deje el estudio? Usted tiene el derecho a negar que su hijo/hija participe o a sacar a su hijo/hija en cualquier momento, sin consecuencia. Elegir a no participar o salir de el estudio no va afectar tu relación o la relación de tu hijo/hija con la escuela. Si usted o su hijo/hija decide dejar el estudio, usted puede pedir que los datos que hayan sido colectado sean destruidos a menos que esté en un estado sin identificación. Los investigadores también tienen el derecho de poner fin a la participación de su hijo/hija en cualquier momento. Puede ser porque su hijo/hija ha tenido una reacción inesperada, ha dejado de seguir instrucciones, o porque el estudio entero ha sido dejado.

¿Qué pasa si hay información nueva o cambios en el estudio? Si aparece nueva información importante relacionada al estudio y que puede relacionar a su decisión de dejar que su hijo/hija participe, le será provista a usted.

En firmar este formulario de consentimiento, usted acuerda que lo ha leído o que le ha sido leído, que usted entiende plenamente el contenido de este documento y que usted accede que su hijo/hija participe en este estudio. Todos sus preguntas sobre el estudio han sido contestadas. En firmar este formulario, acuerda que es el/la padre/madre/tutor legal del estudiante que quiere participar en este estudio le descrito a usted por Jaimie Stickl.

Nombre de estudiante: _____Consentimiento para que estudiante participe, por favor marque uno:

_____Sí, asiento que mi hijo/hija participe   _____ No, no asiento que mi hijo/hija participe

Consentimiento de obtener la siguiente información del distrito sobre su hijo, esos datos son: el nivel de conocimientos de inglés

_____ Sí, estoy acuerdo para liberar la información _____ No, estoy acuerdo para liberar la información

Firma de padre, madre o tutor legal: _____Fecha: _____

Nombre de padre/madre/tutor legal en letra de molde:_____

STUDENT ASSENT FORMS (AGES 7-11 & 12-16): ENGLISH

The Need to Belong: An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students

Assent for Minors 7-11 to Act as a Human Participant

Study Title: The Need to Belong: An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students

My name is: Jaimie Stickl

What is this about?
I would like to talk to you about connection and belonging in your school. I want to learn about your thoughts and feelings about what belonging in school means to you.

Did my parents say it was ok?
Your parent(s)/guardian said it was ok for you to be in this study and have signed a form like this one. However, your parent(s)/guardian will not be present during the study.

Why me?
I would like you to take part because you are a middle school student in grades 6, 7, or 8 who attends a middle school in a large city.

What if I want to stop?
You do not have to say "yes", if you do not want to take part. I will not punish you if you say "no". Even if you say "yes" now and change your mind after you start doing this study, you can stop and no one will be mad at you. If you decide to stop being a part of the study at any time, you may ask that any information that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study, it will not effect your relationship with the school.

What will I have to do?
You will be asked to do three things during one visit with me during the school day. 1) Complete a card sort. In order to do this, you will be given a set of cards that have statements on them. You will order the cards from *most important* to *most unimportant* to show what belonging means to you. I will help walk you through this process and there are no right or wrong answers because I am interested in getting your thoughts. 2) After sorting the cards, I will verbally ask you a couple of questions about the process and potentially any experiences that may relate to belonging in school. I will audio record your answers to help me better understand your view on belonging in school. 3) Fill out a short survey giving me some information about you, your background, and level of belonging in school. The process should take between 30-45 minutes.

Will anything bad happen to me?
Sometimes thinking about the statements on the cards or the questions I ask you after you sort the cards, might seem strange and make you feel uncomfortable/sad. If anything hurts, you are uncomfortable thinking about some of the statements on the cards, or it brings up uncomfortable thoughts about some of your experiences in school, please let me know and I will stop or do whatever I can to make you feel better. I also have your school social worker available if you need to talk to someone. Please let me know if you would like to talk with someone at any point and we can help you connect with the person who is available. Also, it is also possible that other students or staff in your school will find out about your participation in this study. I will do what I can to protect your privacy.

Will anything good happen to me?
There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. We do not know if you will be helped by being in this project. However, we may learn something that will help other students in the future.

Do I get anything for being in this study?
You will get a coupon for a free ice cream from McDonald's for participating in this study.

What if I have questions?
You are free to ask questions at any time.

If you understand this study and want to be in it, please write your name below.

_____   _____
Signature of child   Date

The Need to Belong: An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
Assent for Minors 12-16 to Act as a Human Participant

Project Title: The Need to Belong: An Exploration of Belonging Among Urban Middle School Students
Principal Investigator: Jaimie Stickl
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kelly Wester, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

WHY AM I HERE?

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. Research studies are done to find better ways of helping and understanding people or to get information about how things work. In this study we want to learn about what belonging or connection in school means to you, as a middle school student. You are being asked to be in the study because you are a middle school student in grade 6, 7, or 8 who attends a middle school in a large city. In a research study, only people who want to take part are allowed to do so.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

If it is okay with you and you agree to join this study, you will be asked to do three things during one visit with me during the school day. 1) Complete a card sort. In order to do this, you will be given a set of cards that have statements on them. You will order the cards from *most important* to *most unimportant* to show what school belonging means to you. I will help walk you through this process and there are no right or wrong answers because I am interested in getting your thoughts. 2) After sorting the cards, I will verbally ask you a couple of questions about the process and any potentially relevant experiences related to belonging. I will audio record your answers to help me better understand your view on belonging in school. 3) Fill out a short survey giving me some information about you, your background, and level of belonging in school.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY?

You will be in this study for about 30-45 minutes, depending on how long you need. Once you are finished filling out the survey, completing the card sort, and verbally answering a few questions about the process, you will no longer be a part of this research study.

CAN ANYTHING BAD HAPPEN TO ME?

Sometimes thinking about the statements on the cards or the questions I ask you after you sort the cards, might seem strange and make you feel uncomfortable/sad. If anything hurts, you are uncomfortable thinking about some of the statements on the cards, or it brings up uncomfortable thoughts about some of your experiences in school, please let me know and I will stop or do whatever I can to make you feel better. I also have your school social worker available if you need to talk to someone. Please let me know if you would like to talk with someone at any point and we can help you connect with the person who is available. Also, it is also possible that other students or staff in your school will find out about your participation in this study. I will do what I can to protect your privacy (confidentiality).

CAN ANYTHING GOOD HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. We do not know if you will be helped by being in this project. However, we may learn something that will help other students with feeling like they belong in school in the future. It could also help teachers and school staff learn how to better help students feel like they belong in school.

DO I HAVE OTHER CHOICES?

You do not have to be in this study. If at any point during the study you decide that you no longer wish to participate, you will be allowed to stop without any negative consequences.

WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT TO BE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

You do not have to be part of this project. It is up to you. You can even say okay now, but change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me. No one will be mad at you if you change your mind. If you decide to stop being a part of the study at any time, you may ask that any information that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study, it will not effect your relationship with the school.

WHAT ABOUT MY CONFIDENTIALITY?

We will do everything possible to make sure that your data and or records are kept confidential. No personal or identifying information will be collected on the survey. Unless required by law the following people can review your study records: Jaimie Stickl or Dr. Kelly Wester. They are required to keep your personal information confidential.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

You will get a coupon for a free ice cream from McDonald's for participating in this study.

DO MY PARENTS KNOW ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

This study has been explained to your parent/parents/guardian and they have given permission for you to be in it.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Please feel free to ask any questions that you have now, and if you have questions after you leave the room, do not hesitate to contact Jaimie Stickl (716-597-5920, jestickl@uncg.edu) or Dr. Kelly Wester (klwester@uncg.edu). You can also call the Director in the Office Research Integrity at 336-256-1482 or 855-251-2351.

ASSENT

This study has been explained to me and I am willing to be in it.

_____   _____

Student's Name (printed) and Signature   Date

Check which applies below:

☐ The child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

☐ The child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent   Date

STUDENT ASSENT FORMS (AGES 7-11 & AGES 12-16): SPANISH

La necesidad de pertenecer: un análisis de pertenencia entre estudiantes en escuelas secundarias urbanas.
El consentimiento de participar como participante humano para menores entre 7 y 11 años

Título del estudio: La necesidad de pertenecer: un análisis de pertenencia entre estudiantes en escuelas secundarias urbanas.

Mi nombre es: Jaimie Stickl

¿Por qué estoy aquí?
Me gustaría hablar contigo sobre conexiones y la sensación de pertenencia en tu escuela. Quiero aprender de tus pensamientos y sentimientos sobre el significado de la pertenencia en la escuela para ti.

¿Qué han dicho mis padres?
Tu padre/madre/tutor legal ha dicho que está bien que participes en este estudio y ha firmado un formulario como éste. Sin embargo, tu padre/madre/tutor legal no estará contigo durante el estudio.

¿Por qué yo?
Quiero que participes porque eres estudiante en el sexto, séptimo u octavo grado que asiste a una escuela secundaria en una ciudad grande.

¿Qué pasa si quiero parar de participar?
No tienes que decir "sí" si no quieres participar. No te castigaré si dices "no." Aunque dices "sí" ahora, si cambias de opinión después de empezar, puedes parar y nadie se enfadará de ti. Si decides parar de participar en el estudio, puedes pedir que cualquiera información recogida sobre ti sea destruida a menos que esté en un estado sin identificación. Elegir a no participar o salir de el estudio no va afectar tu relación con la escuela.

¿Qué tendré que hacer?
Pediré que hagas tres cosas en una visita conmigo durante un día escolar: 1) Ordenar unas tarjetas. Para hacer eso, te daré unas tarjetas con afirmaciones. Ordenarás las tarjetas según su importancia para mostrar qué significa "pertenecer" para ti. Te ayudaré en este proceso. No hay respuestas ni correctas ni incorrectas porque me interesa ver tus pensamientos. 2) Después de ordenar las tarjetas, te preguntaré oralmente un par de preguntas sobre el proceso y posiblemente algunas experiencias que pueden relacionar a la sensación de pertenencia en la escuela. Grabaré audio de tus respuestas para ayudarme entender mejor tu perspectiva de pertenencia en la escuela. 3) Rellenar una encuesta corta con información sobre ti y tu vida, y el nivel de la pertenencia en la escuela. El proceso debe durar 30-45 minutos.

¿Me pasará algo malo?
A veces, pensar en las afirmaciones en las tarjetas o en las preguntas que te pondré después, puede parecer extraño o hacerte sentir incómodo o triste. Si algo te duele, estás incómodo hablando de algunas de las afirmaciones o las afirmaciones sacan pensamientos incómodos sobre algunas de tus experiencias en la escuela, por favor dime y pararé o haré lo que puedo para hacerte sentir mejor. También tendré disponible el trabajador social de tu escuela si necesitas hablar con alguien. Por favor infórmame si te gustarías hablar

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con alguien en cualquier momento y podemos ayudarte conectar con la persona disponible. También, es posible que otros estudiantes o los empleados se enteren de tu participación en este estudio. Yo voy aser todo lo que puedo para proteger tu privacidad (confidencialidad).

¿Me pasará algo bueno?
Participar en este estudio no da ventajas directas. No sabemos si participar en este proyecto pueda ayudarte. Sin embargo, es posible que aprendiéremos algo que ayudará a otros estudiantes en el futuro.

¿Recibiré algo por participar en este estudio?
Si usted acepta participar , se le dará un cupón para obtener un helado gratis de McDonalds

¿Qué debo hacer si tengo preguntas?
Me puedes preguntar en cualquier momento.

Si entiendes este estudio y quieres participar, por favor escribe tu nombre más abajo.

_____   _____

Firma de estudiante   Fecha

La necesidad de pertenecer: un análisis de pertenencia entre estudiantes en escuelas secundarias urbanas
El consentimiento de participar como participante humano para menores entre 12 y 16 años.

Título del proyecto: La necesidad de pertenecer: un análisis de pertenencia entre estudiantes en escuelas secundarias urbanas
Investigadora principal: Jaimie Stickl
Consejeras de la facultad: Dra. Kelly Wester, La Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Greensboro.

¿POR QUÉ ESTOY AQUÍ?

Queremos decirte de una investigación que estamos haciendo. Se hace investigaciones para encontrar métodos mejores para ayudar y entender gente o para obtener información de las funciones de cosas. En este estudio queremos aprender del significado de pertenencia para ti, un estudiante en una escuela secundaria. Te pedimos participar en este estudio porque eres un estudiante en el sexto, séptimo u octavo grado que asiste a una escuela secundaria en una ciudad grande. En una investigación, sólo dejamos participar las personas que quieren participar.

¿QUÉ ME PASARÁ EN ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN?

Si decides participar en este estudio, pediré que hagas tres cosas en una visita conmigo durante un día escolar: 1) Ordenar unas tarjetas. Para hacer eso, te daré unas tarjetas con afirmaciones. Ordenarás las tarjetas según su importancia para mostrar qué significa "pertenecer" para ti. Te ayudaré en este proceso. No hay respuestas ni correctas ni incorrectas porque me interesa ver tus pensamientos. 2) Después de ordenar las tarjetas, te preguntaré oralmente un par de preguntas sobre el proceso y posiblemente algunas experiencias que pueden relacionar a la sensación de pertenencia en la escuela. Grabaré audio de tus respuestas para ayudarme entender mejor tu perspectiva de pertenencia en la escuela. 3) Rellenar una encuesta corta con información sobre ti y tu vida, y el nivel de la pertenencia en la escuela.

¿CUÁNTO TIEMPO PARTICIPARÉ EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN?

Participarás en este estudio por 30-45 minutos, dependiendo de cuánto tiempo necesitas. Cuando hayas terminado de rellenar la encuesta, ordenar las tarjetas, y responder a las preguntas, pararás de ser parte de esta investigación.

¿ME PASARÁ ALGO MALO?

A veces, pensar en las afirmaciones en las tarjetas, o en las preguntas que te pondré después, puede parecer extraño o hacerte sentir incómodo o triste. Si algo te duele, estás incómodo hablando de algunas de las afirmaciones o las afirmaciones sacan pensamientos incómodos sobre algunas de tus experiencias en la escuela, por favor infórmame y pararé o haré lo que puedo para hacerte sentir mejor. También tendré disponible el trabajador social de tu escuela si necesitas hablar con alguien. Por favor infórmame si te gustarías hablar con alguien en cualquier momento y podemos ayudarte conectar con la persona disponible. También, es posible que otros estudiantes o los empleados se enteren de tu participación en este estudio. Yo voy aser todo lo que puedo para proteger tu privacidad (confidencialidad).

¿ME PASARÁ ALGO BUENO EN ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN?

Participar en este estudio no da ventajas directos. No sabemos si participar en este proyecto pueda ayudarte. Sin embargo, es posible que aprendiéremos algo que ayudará otros estudiantes con la sensación de pertenencia en el futuro. También puede ayudar a los maestros y empleos de la escuela aprender ayudar mejor a los estudiantes con la sensación de pertinencia en la escuela.

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¿TENGO OTRAS OPCIONES?No tienes que participar en este estudio. Si en cualquier momento decides que ya no quieres participar, te dejaremos parar sin consecuencias negativas.

¿QUÉ PASA SI NO QUIERO PARTICIPAR EN ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN?No tienes que participar en este proyecto. Es tu decisión. Incluso puedes decir "sí" ahora y cambiar de opinión después. Sólo hay que decirme. Nadie se enfadará si cambias de opinión. Si decides parar de participar en el estudio, puedes pedir que cualquiera información recogida sobre ti sea destruida a menos que esté en un estado sin identificación. Elegir a no participar o salir de el estudio no va afectar tu relación con la escuela.

¿CÓMO FUNCIONA MI CONFIDENCIALIDAD? Haremos todo lo posible para asegurarse de que tus datos y/o notas sean mantenidas confidenciales. No recopilaremos información ni personal ni identificativa en la investigación. A menos que exija la ley, sólo las siguientes personas pueden revisar tus notas: Jaimie Stickl y Dra. Kelly Wester. Se requiere que mantengan tu información personal confidencial.

¿SERÉ PAGADO/A POR PARTICIPAR EN ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN? Si usted acepta participar , se le dará un cupón para obtener un helado gratis de McDonalds.

¿SABEN MIS PADRES DE ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN? Este estudio ha sido explicado a tu padre/madre/tutor legal y ha /han dado permiso que participes.

¿QUÉ HAGO SI TENGO PREGUNTAS? Eres libre de poner cualquiera pregunta que tienes ahora, y, si tienes preguntas después de salir, no dudas en contactarte con Jaimie Stickl (716-597-5920, jestickl@uncg.edu) o Dra. Kelly Wester (klwester@uncg.edu). También puedes llamar el Director en la Oficina de Integridad de Investigación al 336-256-1482 ó 855-251-2351.

CONSENTIMIENTO

Este estudio me ha sido explicado y estoy dispuesto a participar.

_____   _____

Nombre de estudiante (con letra de molde) y firma   Fecha

Marca lo que aplica:

☐ El/la estudiante es capaz de leer y entender el formulario de consentimiento y ha firmado arriba para documentar su consentimiento de participar en este estudio.

☐ El/la estudiante no es capaz de leer el formulario de consentimiento, pero se le explicó la información verbalmente. El estudiante ha firmado arriba para documentar su consentimiento de participar en este estudio

_____   _____

Firma de la persona obteniendo el consentimiento   Fecha

APPENDIX N

Q SORT PROCEDURES

1. Have research materials ready for participants including demographic and belonging survey form, the printed instructions, Q set cards, the cultural graphic, and blank sorting distribution. Ensure there is sufficient room for the participant to work and spread out cards.
2. Verbally review IRB student assent form. Ask participant to sign if they agree.
3. Provide participant with his/her ID number.
4. Read the research question: "What are urban middle school students' perspectives of belonging in school?"
5. Give the student the printed instructions and verbal read out loud with the student the condition of instruction as follows:
    > "In this study I am interested in what you think it means to belong or feel connected to your school. So, think about your personal experiences in this school. Is your school a place where you feel like you belong? Sort the following cards in order to best describe what belonging to your school means to you. Every student will have different ideas and experiences and everybody will have a different response, so there are no right or wrong answers. I am simply interested in your personal view."
6. Provide an overview of steps to be taken and ask for any clarifying questions.
7. Identify the Q set cards, explaining that each card represents a different response.
8. Verbally read through each card, one by one, with the participant placing the cards in a single pile in front of the participant after reading each statement. [When reading a statement that includes the word culture, identify the culture graphic. Explain to students that if they are unsure about what 'culture' means, this picture represents some of the aspects of the word 'culture'. Tell the participant they can reference this picture if they would like to, if they are unsure about what 'culture' means when they hear or read the word in the statements.]
9. Ask the participant to divide and place the cards into three piles including: a) statements he/she definitely agree with and feel are important to a single pile to the right, b) statements he/she definitely disagree with and feel are unimportant into a single pile to the left, c) statements he/she is unsure about or feel indifferent about into a single pile in the middle.
10. Ask the participant to focus on the pile they definitely agree with and set aside the other piles. Instruct participant to spread out the pile so they can see all of the statements they placed in that category.
11. Once participants have read through the statements in that pile, instruct them to begin to place the cards on the blank distribution reminding him/her of the following: a) a negative ranking does not necessarily indicate disagreement, but simply that he/she agrees with the statements slightly less than those with higher ranking, b) the order within the columns of the distribution are not important (i.e. two statements placed in the +4 would be equal in ranking).
12. Once participant has placed the first pile of cards, take informal note on the back of the response sheet of where the first pile was distributed.
13. Ask the participant to repeat the process with the last two piles of cards, starting with the pile of statements they definitely disagree with and finally filling in the distribution with the neutral pile. Allow them time and space to complete the process and encourage them to ask any questions that may come up. (Take informal notes on the back of the response sheet for where each category initially fell on the distribution).
14. Once they sort all the cards, ask participants to review the final configuration and encourage them to move anything around or change anything they wish.
15. Begin post-sort interview. Turn on audio-recorder.
16. Once the interview is complete, ask student to complete the demographic and belonging survey form.
17. Thank participant for their time.
18. Record the number of each statement onto the blank response sheet and record student's ID number.

APPENDIX O

FIXED DISTRIBUTION RESPONSE GRID

Q Sort Worksheet

ID #_____

Most unimportant to what belonging in school means to me   **Most important to what belonging in school means to me**

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

APPENDIX P

CONDITION OF INSTRUCTION

Q Sort Student Instruction Sheet

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study! I am interested in what it means to you to belong or feel connected to your school. Please feel free to ask me questions at any time if you don't understand something or are unsure about what to do.

I will help walk you through the steps of how to complete the card sort, but here is a quick overview of what you will be doing. I will give you a set of cards with statements on them. You will be asked to read each card, and rank order the statements from "*Most important to what belonging in school means to me*" to "*Most unimportant to what belonging in school means to me.*"

In this study I am interested in what you think it means to belong or feel connected to your school. So, think about your personal experiences in this school. Is your school a place where you feel like you belong? Sort the following cards in order to best describe what belonging to your school means to you. Every student will have different ideas and experiences and everybody will have a different response, so there are no right or wrong answers. I am simply interested in your personal view.

CULTURE GRAPHIC

POST-SORT SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

I am now going to ask you a few questions about the card sort process and your experiences in school. Each statement on a card that you sorted may represent a number of meanings or experiences for you. Please feel free to take your time in answering the questions as thoroughly as possible, and feel free to explain as many thoughts, meanings, or experiences as you wish.

1. What was it like doing this activity?
    a. Did anything surprise you?
    b. Did anything frustrate you?
    c. Do you feel good about the final sort? Why or Why not?

2. Were there any statements that you didn't understand?

3. Tell me about the card you placed in the +4 column.
    a. What does that statement mean to you?
    b. What is it about the statement that makes it most important to you?
    c. Can you recall a specific time or event when this happened or occurred to you?

4. Tell me about the cards you placed in the +3 column.
    a. What does each statement mean to you?
    b. What is it about each statement that make them important to you?

5. Tell me about the card you placed in the -4 column.
    a. What does that statement mean to you?
    b. What is it about the statement that make it most unimportant to you?
    c. Can you recall a specific time or event when this happened or occurred to you?

6. Tell me about the cards you placed in the -3 column.
    a. What does each statement mean to you?
    b. What is it about each statement that make them unimportant to you?

7. Can you tell me more about the cards you placed in the middle?
    a. What do those statements mean to you?

8. Was there anything missing that you wish would have been on a card?
    a. If you had to create your own card, what would it say and where would you have placed it in the card sort?

9. As you were sorting the cards, did any specific memory or experience that you have had in school come to mind? If so, what was it and why do you think it came to mind?

10. I see on the form you completed at the beginning you placed yourself at a *(number student circled)* to describe how much you feel like you belong in school. Can you tell me more about the experiences you have had that may have influenced you to circle this number?

11. Did you feel like you belonged at the last school you attended? Why or why not?

12. Do you think your answers would be different if you went to a different school? If so, how? If not, why not?

13. What would your advice be to the adults in the school who want to help students feel more like they belong? What could they do to help students belong?

14. Is belonging in school important to you? Why or why not?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience, or belonging in school in general that you are thinking about?

16. Do you have any questions for me that you would like to ask?

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill in the following questions. If you don't understand something, just let me know and I can help you.

1. Current Age: _____

2. Current Grade: _____

3. Race (Circle all that apply):
   • Black or African American
   • Asian American
   • White
   • Hispanic
   • American Indian
   • Alaskan Native
   • Other:_____

4. Gender (Circle):   Male   Female

5. How many people currently live in your house (including you): _____

6. How long have you attended this middle school? (circle one):
   • This is my first year
   • This is my second year
   • This is my third year
   • Other:_____

7. On your last report card, what grade did you mostly get? (circle one):
   • I mostly got 1's (A's)
   • I mostly got 2's (B's)
   • I mostly got 3's (C's)
   • I mostly got 4's (D's)

8. How often during this school year have you been asked to see a school staff member for discipline reasons or 'getting in trouble' (for example: dean, principal, assistant principal, advisor)? (Circle one):
   • 0 times
   • 1-2 times
   • 3-4 times
   • 5 or more times

9. How often during this school year have you met with a school staff member to help with conflict you have with friends or peers (for example: Restorative Justice Coordinator, Counselor, Social Worker)? (Circle one):
   • 0 times
   • 1-2 times
   • 3-4 times

- 5 or more times

10. How often during this school year have you met with the social worker or counselor in your school one on one? (Circle one):
- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-4 times
- 5 or more times

11. Are you involved in any of your school's after school activities (for example: school sports team, clubs, or school based community center)? (circle one):
- Yes
- No

If you circled yes please list what activities you are involved in: _____

_____

12. How often does a member of your family usually come to school to attend an event or for another reason (for example: parent teacher conferences, meet with a teacher, fieldtrips etc.)?

- 0 times per year
- 1-2 times per year
- 3-4 times per year
- 5 or more times per year

13. How often does communication happen between your parents/guardians and adults at your school (for example: teachers, principal, counselor etc.)? (circle one):

- Never
- Sometimes, but not a lot
- A lot
- I don't know

14. Circle a number between 0-10 to show how much you enjoy going to your school:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I don't enjoy going to my school at all

I really enjoy going to my school

15. Circle a number between 0-10 to show how much you feel like you belong (fit in or are connected) to your school:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I don't feel like I belong at all in this school

I really feel like I belong in this school

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CRIB SHEETS

Crib Sheet
Factor 1

Items Ranked at +4
11: Getting good grades in school
9: Working hard in school

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
2: Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school (tied with 3) +2
3: My family being a part of my schooling (tied w/ 3) 0
12: Making my family proud by what I do in school +3
13: My parents having good contacts with adults in my school (tied w/ 3) -1
14: Coming to class with what I need 0
16: My family and adults in my school help each other -1
17: being a part of the schools decisions that affect me as a student (tied w/ 2) -1
21: Talking with my parents about things that are going on in school +1
22: Being involved in my classes (tied w/ 2) +1
24: Feeling safe in school (tied w/3) +2
25: Enjoying being at school +2
28: following the rules in my school +2
33: working with a good attitude in school +1
36: Doing the homework that teachers give me +3
38: coming to school +3

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
1: Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home is like -3
4: Adults at school care about what is going on with me 0
7: Feeling like my race is respected at my school -1
8: Being treated with respect for who I am 0
15: People at my school respecting my beliefs -2
18: Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have a problem -1
19: Being able to connect with other students who have the same culture -3
23: Adults at school believing in me (tied w/ 2) +1
26: Feeling like I can bring my culture into school -2
27: Feeling good about myself when I'm in school 0
31: Being a part of the school activities -2
32: Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I have a problem +1
34: People at my school and people from my family talking often (tied w/2) -3
35: Feeling like I can be myself at school +2
39: Others at school praising me when I'm good at something -2

Items Ranked at -4
37: teachers knowing what my culture is like -4
6: Having others in school who know my first language -4

Other Possible Items?
4 Adults at school care about what is going on with me 0 (Middle ranking)
8: Being treated with respect for who I am 0
(middle ranking: many students had more they agreed with than less)
10: People at school being nice to me 0
(Middle ranking)
20: having people at my school that really know me -2
(middle ranking)
29: having friends at my school +1 (middle)
32: feeling like I fit in at my school 0
(middle ranking)
5: family is able to connect to school when they need to -1
20: Having people that really know me -2
29: Having friends in school +1

Crib Sheet
Factor 2

Items Ranked at +4
27: Feeling good about myself when I'm in school +4
35: Feeling like I can be myself in school +4

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
4: Adults at school care about what is going on with me +2
10: People at my school being nice to me +1
17: Being a part of the schools decisions that affect me as a student (tied w/1) -1
18: Feeling like I can talk to friends in this school if I have a problem +2
19: Being able to connect with other students who have the same culture as me +2
20: Having people at my school that really know me 0
22: Being involved in my classes (tied w/1) +1
29: Having friends at my school +2
30: Feeling like I fit in at my school +3
31: Being a part of school activities 0
37: Teachers knowing what my culture is like +1
39: Others at school praising me when I'm good at something +3

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
2: Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school -1
5: My family is able to connect with the school when they need -2
9: working hard in school -2
11: Getting good grades in school (tied w/3) 0
12: Making my family proud by what I do in school (tied w/ 3) -2
16: my family and adults in my school help each other (tied w/3) -2
21: Talking with my parents about things that are going on in school (tied w/3) -1
23: Adults at school believing in me (tied 1) +1
24: Feeling safe in school +1
25: Enjoying being at school -1
28: Following the rules in my school (tied w/ 3) 0

34: People at my school and people from my family talking often (tied w/ 1) -3
36: Doing the homework that teachers give me -3
38: Coming to school -1

Items Ranked at -4
3: My family being a part of my schooling -4
13: My parents having good contacts with adults in my school -4

Other Possible Items?
1: feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home is like 0
Middle ranking
6: having others in school who know my first language -3
7: feeling like my race is respected at my school +3
(culture)
8: being treated with respect for who I am 1
15: people at school respecting my beliefs 0
(middle ranking)
14: coming to class with what I need -2
26: feeling like I can bring my culture into school -1
32: feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school +2
33: working with a good attitude in school 0

Crib Sheet
Factor 3

Items Ranked at +4
7: Feeling like my race is respected at my school +4
32: Feel like I can talk to at least one adult in my school if I have a problem +4

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
1: Feeling like my teachers understand what my life at home is like +3
2: Feeling like my ideas are respected in this school (tied w/1) +2
3: My family being a part of my schooling (tied w/1) 0
5: My family is able to connect with the school when they need +1
6: Having others in school who know my first language +1
8: Being treated with respect for who I am +2
13: My parents having good contacts with adults In my school (Tied w/1) -1
15: People at my school respecting my beliefs +1
23: Adults at school believing in me +3
24: Feeling safe in school (tied w/1) +2
26: Feeling like I can bring my culture into school +2
34: People at my school and people from my family talking often -2

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays
11: Getting good grades in school (tied w/ 2) 0
12: Making my family proud by what I do in school (tied w/ 2) -2
16: My family and adults in ym school help each other (tied w/2) -2

17: being a part of the schools decisions that affect me as a student
20: Having people at my school that really know me -3
21: Talking with my parents about things going on in school (tied w/ 2) -1
22: Being involved in my classes 0
28: Following the rules in my school (tied w/ 2) 0
29: Having friends at my school -2
30: Feeling like I fit in at my school -3
33: Working with a good attitude in school -2

Items Ranked at -4
10: People at my school being nice to me -4
14: Coming to class with what I need -4

Other Possible Items?
39: others praising me -1
38: coming to school 1
37: teachers knowing what my culture is like 0
35: feeling like I can be myself in school 3
31: being a part of school's activities -1
36: doing the hw teachers give me -1
27: feeling good about myself when I'm in school 2
25: enjoying being at school 0
(middle)
20: being able to connect w/ other students with the same culture 1
18: feeling like I can talk to friends if I have a problem 0
4: adults at school care about what is going on with me 1
9: working hard in school -1
1: being able to connect with other students who have the same culture 1
31: being a part of school activities -1

APPENDIX U

CORRELATION MATRIX

Sort	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
1	100	14	18	18	15	-9	4	22	20	4	-11	22	34	-1	19	9	6	10	-28	9	-1	34	20	29	29
2	14	100	46	1	31	17	47	59	33	50	36	52	30	-23	20	16	28	18	-22	28	24	42	24	33	49
3	18	46	100	15	9	1	44	46	48	47	12	33	51	-20	5	18	42	14	-38	18	48	57	14	41	65
4	18	1	15	100	30	6	10	23	-7	-16	-8	18	37	32	23	31	18	-6	31	41	31	4	24	28	18
5	15	31	9	30	100	5	26	28	-2	16	14	58	-4	-3	36	15	25	11	7	17	12	-2	-6	19	35
6	-9	17	1	6	5	100	-2	-1	-10	4	-5	-4	1	1	19	4	7	-14	15	8	22	-14	-5	8	-13
7	4	47	44	10	26	-2	100	45	33	36	37	56	36	-12	11	16	55	17	2	33	35	11	23	14	29
8	22	59	46	23	28	-1	45	100	38	38	24	46	59	-15	6	12	35	2	-10	38	57	38	26	38	40
9	20	33	48	-7	-2	-10	33	38	100	36	21	20	34	2	17	24	49	8	-20	26	42	29	55	16	52
10	4	50	47	-16	16	4	36	38	36	100	28	35	14	-18	6	-12	26	15	-31	-1	34	48	14	33	49
11	-11	36	12	-8	14	-5	37	24	21	28	100	48	-8	5	12	25	45	35	-4	11	11	-1	4	-13	12
12	22	52	33	18	58	-4	56	46	20	35	48	100	31	-18	-2	16	36	25	-16	4	12	28	3	19	42
13	34	30	51	37	-4	1	36	59	34	14	-8	31	100	0	-8	6	20	-9	-15	24	44	31	31	57	39
14	-1	-23	-20	32	-3	1	-12	-15	2	-18	5	-18	0	100	42	14	-11	7	45	19	16	-39	22	-1	-18
15	19	20	5	23	36	19	11	6	17	6	12	-2	-8	42	100	-2	9	11	34	38	17	-16	19	8	-1
16	9	16	18	31	15	4	16	12	24	-12	25	16	6	14	-2	100	21	-7	0	25	10	-2	38	6	36
17	6	28	42	18	25	7	55	35	49	26	45	36	20	-11	9	21	100	6	5	37	44	18	19	10	44
18	10	18	14	-6	11	-14	17	2	8	15	35	25	-9	7	11	-7	6	100	18	4	2	-11	1	-27	14
19	-28	-22	-38	31	7	15	2	-10	-20	-31	-4	-16	-15	45	34	0	5	18	100	29	0	-55	22	-26	-32
20	9	28	18	41	17	8	33	38	26	-1	11	4	24	19	38	25	37	4	29	100	48	-9	31	5	25
21	-1	24	48	31	12	22	35	57	42	34	11	12	44	16	17	10	44	2	0	48	100	6	22	24	41
22	34	42	57	4	-2	-14	11	38	29	48	-1	28	31	-39	-16	-2	18	-11	-55	-9	6	100	-1	42	49
23	20	24	14	24	-6	-5	23	26	55	14	4	3	31	22	19	38	19	1	22	31	22	-1	100	13	38
24	29	33	41	28	19	8	14	38	16	33	-13	19	57	-1	8	6	10	-27	-26	5	24	42	13	100	32
25	29	49	65	18	35	-13	29	40	52	49	12	42	39	-18	-1	36	44	14	-32	25	41	49	38	32	100

CORRELATION MATRIX (CONTINUED)

Sort	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	21	32	43	2	24	-11	44	38	36	15	30	46	26	-30	-4	33	27	2	-43	15	21	29	13	2	40
27	1	21	2	33	30	31	25	11	-6	4	35	32	0	25	38	13	36	-13	27	4	11	1	8	21	-6
28	22	57	45	23	33	14	42	62	11	16	22	45	44	-40	-5	34	39	5	-16	25	28	30	-2	32	44
29	-13	26	14	21	5	16	39	24	-11	5	12	5	11	1	21	-8	20	5	33	20	12	-1	11	-2	-7
30	8	25	52	24	28	-6	37	46	32	34	29	41	22	-18	6	32	45	5	-3	21	25	22	21	6	44
31	35	35	52	16	31	4	24	42	32	35	-3	49	45	-34	-12	16	30	-16	-32	-16	18	51	21	45	51
32	-2	48	32	11	48	19	36	50	36	44	27	34	5	-11	22	6	57	18	-3	29	49	16	7	1	45
33	16	36	42	16	21	9	4	29	-14	39	16	41	25	-27	-1	-14	-5	18	-43	-9	2	46	-27	35	16
34	11	38	39	8	31	-14	43	36	48	41	1	25	26	-9	8	1	26	-3	-23	26	29	42	23	27	39
35	0	34	42	22	24	4	38	36	19	24	10	26	31	-4	25	29	-1	4	-12	8	31	8	19	45	23
36	1	24	-13	25	19	-4	22	37	23	11	30	35	18	9	12	8	37	20	28	38	26	-24	25	-6	10
37	18	56	51	32	41	-2	38	42	41	52	24	52	38	8	29	18	32	11	-29	20	38	32	24	44	51
38	-17	22	53	24	-5	11	2	4	8	25	9	-4	5	-1	27	-1	11	11	2	22	25	28	1	14	17
39	-4	33	23	16	26	15	24	21	29	36	22	32	2	12	45	-5	34	35	36	16	20	6	9	9	19
40	1	9	-2	-11	-17	-15	5	-6	11	-18	18	16	7	14	-26	3	5	28	-6	-11	-12	1	-1	-12	3
41	-14	28	-1	-11	11	-9	28	15	4	24	29	-11	-7	-6	22	-8	22	16	-2	29	21	-9	-5	11	-1
42	-2	42	10	9	35	3	39	42	18	40	44	39	17	-15	20	-15	30	-1	-10	24	34	-3	5	23	9
43	-8	6	-34	9	16	11	8	-7	-18	-19	39	23	-18	29	21	3	6	23	35	26	-14	-42	5	-24	-25

CORRELATION MATRIX (CONTINUED)

Sort	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43
1	21	1	22	-13	8	35	-2	16	11	0	1	18	-17	-4	1	-14	-2	-8
2	32	21	57	26	25	35	48	36	38	34	24	56	22	33	9	28	42	6
3	43	2	45	14	52	52	32	42	39	42	-13	51	53	23	-2	-1	10	-34
4	2	33	23	21	24	16	11	16	8	22	25	32	24	16	-11	-11	9	9
5	24	30	33	5	28	31	48	21	31	24	19	41	-5	26	-17	11	35	16
6	-11	31	14	16	-6	4	19	9	-14	4	-4	-2	11	15	-15	-9	3	11
7	44	25	42	39	37	24	36	4	43	38	22	38	2	24	5	28	39	8
8	38	11	62	24	46	42	50	29	36	36	37	42	4	21	-6	15	42	-7
9	36	-6	11	-11	32	32	36	-14	48	19	23	41	8	29	11	4	18	-18
10	15	4	16	5	34	35	44	39	41	24	11	52	25	36	-18	24	40	-19
11	30	35	22	12	29	-3	27	16	1	10	30	24	9	22	18	29	44	39
12	46	32	45	5	41	49	34	41	25	26	35	52	-4	32	16	-11	39	23
13	26	0	44	11	22	45	5	25	26	31	18	38	5	2	7	-7	17	-18
14	-30	25	-40	1	-18	-34	-11	-27	-9	-4	9	8	-1	12	14	-6	-15	29
15	-4	38	-5	21	6	-12	22	-1	8	25	12	29	27	45	-26	22	20	21
16	33	13	34	-8	32	16	6	-14	1	29	8	18	-1	-5	3	-8	-15	3
17	27	36	39	20	45	30	57	-5	26	-1	37	32	11	34	5	22	30	6
18	2	-13	5	5	5	-16	18	18	-3	4	20	11	11	35	28	16	-1	23
19	-43	27	-16	33	-3	-32	-3	-43	-23	-12	28	-29	2	36	-6	-2	-10	35
20	15	4	25	20	21	-16	29	-9	26	8	38	20	22	16	-11	29	24	26
21	21	11	28	12	25	18	49	2	29	31	26	38	25	20	-12	21	34	-14
22	29	1	30	-1	22	51	16	46	42	8	-24	32	28	6	1	-9	-3	-42
23	13	8	-2	11	21	21	7	-27	23	19	25	24	1	9	-1	-5	5	5
24	2	21	32	-2	6	45	1	35	27	45	-6	44	14	9	-12	11	23	-24
25	40	-6	44	-7	44	51	45	16	39	23	10	51	17	19	3	-1	9	-25

CORRELATION MATRIX (CONTINUED)

Sort	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43
26	100	-16	44	6	38	27	16	14	31	28	2	44	4	-18	-6	-10	13	-1
27	-16	100	11	31	11	16	16	15	-9	28	9	17	16	40	10	3	29	38
28	44	11	100	39	44	46	38	27	21	38	19	32	1	26	9	23	25	-8
29	6	31	39	100	11	8	8	1	26	13	18	4	12	22	14	9	1	22
30	38	11	44	11	100	38	42	28	21	21	24	34	22	32	-24	0	32	-15
31	27	16	46	8	38	100	35	28	38	24	6	32	16	12	-12	-15	14	-41
32	16	16	38	8	42	35	100	12	36	13	35	43	18	45	-8	29	33	-9
33	14	15	27	1	28	28	12	100	7	28	0	44	30	8	-2	12	28	-1
34	31	-9	21	26	21	38	36	7	100	12	7	46	11	10	-5	19	19	-28
35	28	28	38	13	21	24	13	28	12	100	-10	42	29	32	5	21	29	-12
36	2	9	19	18	24	6	35	0	7	-10	100	37	-9	31	-4	11	31	29
37	44	17	32	4	34	32	43	44	46	42	37	100	29	38	-3	14	32	-2
38	4	16	1	12	22	16	18	30	11	29	-9	29	100	28	-21	-1	3	-18
39	-18	40	26	22	32	12	45	8	10	32	31	38	28	100	14	14	24	12
40	-6	10	9	14	-24	-12	-8	-2	-5	5	-4	-3	-21	14	100	2	-21	29
41	-10	3	23	9	0	-15	29	12	19	21	11	14	-1	14	2	100	53	-6
42	13	29	25	1	32	14	33	28	19	29	31	32	3	24	-21	53	100	12
43	-1	38	-8	22	-15	-41	-9	-1	-28	-12	29	-2	-18	12	29	-6	12	100